

**IMMIGRATION AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION WITHIN
THE BANGLADESHI IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY IN
TORONTO, CANADA**

by

RUMEL HALDER

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**Department of Anthropology
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

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***Dedicated to my dearest mother and father who showed me dreams
and walked with me to face challenges to fulfill them.***

ABSTRACT

IMMIGRATION AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION WITHIN THE BANGLADESHI IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY IN TORONTO, CANADA

Bangladeshi Bengali migration to Canada is a response to globalization processes, and a strategy to face the post-independent social, political and economic insecurities in the homeland. Canadian immigration policy and the Multicultural Act that were adjusted to meet labour demands in local job markets encouraged the building of a new and growing Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant community in Canada. The general objective of this research is to explore how Bangladeshi immigrants' national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, and class identities that were shaped within historical and political contexts in Bangladesh are negotiated in new immigrant and multicultural contexts in Toronto. By looking at various identity negotiation processes, this research aims to critically examine globalization theories in social science, and multicultural policies in Canada. More specifically, the objective is to determine whether transnational migration to Canada as a global process creates homogeneity, disjuncture, hybridity, or inequality in Bangladeshi immigrants' lives in Toronto, and how Bangladeshi Bengalis as an ethnic and cultural group relocate their identity within Canadian multiculturalism.

In order to address these objectives and issues, one year of in-depth anthropological research was conducted among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto between 2007 and 2008. The core research location was the Danforth and Victoria Park area, but in order to address class diversity, respondents from Dufferin and Bloor Streets, Regent Park, and Mississauga areas were incorporated. Applying snowball and purposive sampling techniques, and identifying key informants, 75 Bangladeshi immigrant families were selected from three religious groups – Muslim, Hindu, and Christian. In-depth personal interviews, case studies and focus group discussions were conducted among these Bangladeshi immigrants.

This research underscores that, on one hand, Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants negotiate and re-define their “proper” ethnic, cultural, nationalist, and religious identities by imagining, memorizing, simulating, and celebrating local traditions. On the other hand, immigrants define “authentic” identity by creating “separations” and “differences” based on colonial and nationalist histories. Religious differences, the ideology of “majority and minority”, and social classes play major roles in shaping identity. This study finds that multicultural diasporic immigrant space is neither a disjointed, nor an in-between space, nor a place where ethnic cultures are only “consumed”, but it is a battleground to resist and challenge religious and gender inequalities in a globalized location. Bangladeshi Bengali identity is both fixed and contextually variable; identity is shaped in response to political contexts of both global and local.

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Sincerely,

Rumel Halder

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

Anthropological research subjects and contexts are not isolated from wider global political economic contexts, or disjoined from an anthropologist's own lived experience within the wider national and global systems. Many years ago as an undergraduate anthropology student, I came to know that Eric Wolf (the son of an Austrian soldier and a Russian woman) clearly understood the real meaning of ethnicity, class, race and structural power through his stay in an "internment camp" near Liverpool, England during the Second World War. The journey and processes of conducting this research on the identity negotiation processes among the Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Canada are also connected to my own personal ethnic, religious and cultural identity negotiation processes, and political and economic contexts of migrating to Canada. My ongoing experiences, several personal encounters, and observations as an international graduate student in Canada have been significant factors in shaping my research. This is a reflexive research project, and in this chapter I provide the context of formulating research questions and problems of this research.

During the fall of 2001, I first came to Canada as a graduate student at Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, a place that has never been a popular destination for South Asian immigrants to Canada. At the beginning of my graduate program, I lived in the university dormitory with three other graduate students from Middle Eastern countries. Even though I grew up in a predominately Muslim society in Bangladesh, I learned from my roommates the differences and otherness of religious practices, rituals, and worldviews that I had never experienced in Bangladesh. As I was raised in a Christian family in Bangladesh, and did not eat "halal meat" (sacrificed animal according

to Islamic religious laws), my roommates would only share my food if I cooked vegetables or eggs, and my Muslim friends never bothered to have meals with me. I never encountered this experience in Bangladesh because it was assumed that in a country of a Muslim majority population the meat we bought from stores was must be “halal” meat. However, when my fellow Bangladeshi friends started talking about “halal” food, and tried to avoid eating food with me by making excuses, and when having authentic food became a key issue in our everyday conversations, I started thinking this to be an important issue to explore and asked myself why they were trying to have “halal” food? Is it because it is part of their religion, or is it something different that needs to be addressed? Furthermore, why is this issue more prominent in our immigrant life in Canada, whereas in Bangladesh we never think of it? *Halal* food was important even when, for several reasons, we were obliged to eat dated and even rotten food.

My first anthropology class was scheduled on September 11, 2001, so I went to attend the first day of class. I did not have a TV or radio in my room, so I had no clue as to what was happening in the USA. In class, my classmates and professor told me that the Twin Towers in New York had been attacked and had collapsed. That day my only concerns were to concentrate on my new academic journey, learn the English language, think of my two-year-old daughter I left in Bangladesh, adjust to the weather, the financial situation, and deal with other cultural shocks in Canada as a new international student. Several hundred or a thousand air passengers who were not allowed to fly due to the 9/11 incidents took emergency shelter at my university, but that event did not distract me from my personal life agenda. I did not even think about how that incident would change my views of my life with the new roommates at the university dormitory. I could still see the fear, distrust, and discomfort of my Arab roommates who stopped going outside. Other students in the dormitory also started giving them different looks because they came from Arab countries. Sometimes they looked at me with a question and became confused upon hearing of my ethnic background and country of origin. I could see the question in their eyes: Who is this guy? What is he doing here with us? He does not look like an Arab guy, but more like an “Indian”. Just after 9/11, and living with my friends in the same apartment, I received a new lesson about religion, ethnicity, and religious identity in multicultural Canada.

My personal religious, social, political, and occupational identities that I was carrying from my homeland had a significant impact on the way I dealt with my day-to-day life, and the way in which I communicated with the small group of Bangladeshi students and immigrants in St. Johns. My personal experiences in staying in a foreign land with Bangladeshi immigrants gave me an opportunity to look at my identity, culture, and communities more critically. One day, one of my Bangladeshi Muslim friends said to me, “As you are a Christian, you did not have to face any interviews in the Canadian High Commission office in Bangladesh, and did not have to produce financial statements before coming to Canada; it is very easy for you guys to come to Canada, but we (Muslims) had to face an interrogation and had to produce tons of papers”. I started thinking more deeply about my friend’s comments to me, reflecting on my own religious identity, and on the visa processes to come to Canada. I reinvented my ethnic, religious and political identity in Canada, and was surprised to know a PhD student and a faculty member in a public university supported Islamist political parties – *Jamaat e Islami*, Bangladesh, the party that never supported or recognized the Independence of Bangladesh – and won the 2001 election. He and many other Bangladeshi Muslim students were not even bothered to know about the post-election killings or rape incidents against minority Hindus in Bangladesh. The whole experience forced me to question my own subjective political, religious and cultural ideology as a Bangladeshi Bengali national and a member of a religious minority. I had been convinced in my preconceived notions that highly educated Bangladeshi immigrants will not support religious-based political parties and communalism, at least among people I socialize and communicate with in Canada. This was the first I myself felt that I am a political and religious minority among other Bangladeshi students and immigrants outside of Bangladesh. I could see that after 9/11, and the *Islamitization* processes in my homeland, that religion became a key marker of defining individual identity, especially for the Muslim immigrants. From that experience, later during my research in Toronto I came to consciously question my subjective positions as a researcher in addressing ideological differences among research respondents.

Even though there were not more than 100 Bangladeshi immigrants living in St. John’s, when I was there I noticed that Bangladeshi Hindus and Muslims in St. Johns had

separated and maintained two different social groups. In my day-to-day conversations, I was exposed to different perspectives on practicing religion, meanings of religion, and social interactions based on religious identities. As a Christian Bangladeshi, I had never reflected consciously on how religion and religious identity could be a significant marker of defining social interactions and discourse of life within immigrant communities in Canada. I was questioning why people were consciously talking about religious identity, religious purity, and religious rituals. Is it just that people are becoming more religious outside of their homeland, or is it something more complicated that needs to be addressed theoretically and empirically?

In 2002, after finishing my Masters degree in Anthropology, I went to visit my relatives in Toronto before going back to Bangladesh. There were two main reasons for visiting Toronto. One was to meet my relatives who migrated to Canada in the early 1980s. They gave me imaginary nostalgia about all the wonders of Canada by sending gifts, post cards, and photographs of this country, a country where you can enjoy a better living socially and economically. Back home, within our extended family members, their economic success as immigrants had been a pressure to migrate to Canada. The second reason was to see Niagara Falls. It is considered a pilgrimage for tourists to see Niagara Falls in Canada. It has become a tradition for Bangladeshi people to visit Niagara Falls while they are visiting Toronto. I also wanted to take some photographs of the Falls to Bangladesh to show my friends and relatives that I had consumed the beauty of the falls in Canada. After arriving at Pearson International Airport in Toronto, first I noticed that thousands of workers who looked like me phenotypically were working in different corners of the airport. As I lived in Newfoundland, a predominantly white European province in Canada, I was shocked to see so many South Asian people on my first day in Toronto. I jokingly thought to myself, “probably by mistake my plane has landed somewhere in India”. Thus, it can be said that dominant discourses of Canadian nationalism, media, and my lived experiences shaped my thought processes as an immigrant to see other immigrants in the same settings. It is a reflective, critical and powerful question to me as a social science student.

Even though I was familiar with the academic literature on Canadian multiculturalism, I received a real life test when I visited different ethnic towns like Little

Italy on College Street, China Town on Spadina Street, the Indian market on Gerrard Street, and “Bangla Town” on Danforth Avenue in Toronto. I was so impressed to go to “Bangla Town” where all the signs and billboards of different stores were written in the Bengali language, where Bangladeshi stores were filled with different goods from Bangladesh, and where I was able to see many Bangladeshi immigrants shopping for groceries – an invented “little Bangladesh” outside of Bangladesh. I thought “Bangla Town” provided great support to immigrants where they can get similar types of foods and goods that they were accustomed to in Bangladesh. Therefore, the roles of Bangla Town in the Canadian multicultural system are also included in my research inquiry.

During my three-week stay in Toronto in 2002, I visited different Bangladeshi immigrant families and friends; some of them I knew from Bangladesh, and some of them were my cousins’ friends. I had never experienced knowing that many Bangladeshi people outside of Bangladesh. My anthropological eyes observed different perspectives and practices of Bangladeshi immigrants. Bangladeshi immigrants were speaking Bengali (mother tongue) among themselves, producing Bangladeshi vegetables in their back-yard gardens, eating rice and fish, discussing politics of Bangladesh, their current jobs and the jobs they had back home, and showing how much material goods they have accumulated as successful immigrants. These are some common characteristics of Bangladeshi people, but they are doing the same things differently in Canada, and these are interesting components that need to be addressed. I was questioning myself: Who are these people? Are they Bangladeshi, Canadian, or something different yet? I had a feeling – or made the assumption – that even though they had to come to Canada for various reasons, they are still missing Bangladesh; their hearts are still traveling to many places in Bangladesh. Therefore, transnationalism would be one of the key areas to explore in understanding the complexity of Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Canada.

However, I noticed that many Bangladeshi people were acting more like Western people – drinking alcohol and proudly declaring, “we do not eat spicy foods or cook Bangladeshi foods at home”. They mentioned many negative things about Bangladesh, such as politics, corruption, mismanagement, traffic jams, dishonesty, pollution, and communal tension. They were thanking God / Allah that they were able to come to Canada to make their living in a safer place. These small and still rather disconnected bits

of experiences and issues forced me to think about why Bangladeshi immigrants are sharing their perceptions of their homeland differently in Canada? Why are people not feeling connected to Bangladesh?

In attending several dinner parties and actively involving myself in many chat sessions (*adda*), I was getting the clear understanding that Bangladeshi immigrants have developed many clusters and groupings according to religion, region, class, occupation, and political values; talking about, and arguing against, different religious groups are common chatting topics amongst immigrants. One day during my stay in Toronto, my cousin was driving me through a neighbourhood and told me, “there are six Christian families living in this community”. I did not respond to him but his statement struck heavily; I was asking myself what he meant by saying “six Christian families”. How could he identify and differentiate these six families? What were the indicators? Who were the other people in this neighbourhood? How did he know that other inhabitants of that neighbourhood were not Christian? What did Christianity mean to him? In addition, why did he convey that information to me? In the back of my mind, I was thinking of the stereotypical image of North America and Europe being Christian nations. Commonly, Christian missionaries taught native Christians that Canada is one of the Christian countries in the world. That day I decided I must study Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Canada and understand more about the inner mechanisms of the Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Canada.

I should mention that I was born and raised in a Christian family (Baptist) in Bangladesh, a microscopic minority religious group within a majority Muslim population in Bangladesh. My father was the only person among his family who converted to Christianity from Hinduism in order to marry my Baptist mother who was raised with a missionary education, social, religious, and ideological system. Therefore, I was exposed to, and observed, multiple religious traditions and cultural practices by participating in Hindu religious rituals with my relatives from my father’s side, and voluntarily attended Arabic classes in my school. Out of approximately 750 students, I was the only Christian student in my school and religion was a mandatory subject in our school curriculum. As there was no Christian teacher in my school therefore, no separate religious class was arranged for a single student. I used to sit in Islamic classes with my Muslim classmates

while the Hindu students went to separate classes learn Hinduism taught by a Hindu teacher. However, I studied Christianity in our Church Sunday School, and my religious exams were conducted by the Church members, and later my marks were sent to school. Since my childhood, during many occasions my Christian identity was considered and contested as “other” by my Hindu relatives from my father’s side, and by my common Muslim and Hindu friends at school. With my upbringing among majority Muslim groups and minority Hindu and Christian contexts, in many ways I was injected and socialized with the constructed ideas of religious “minority and majority” within colonial and post-colonial Bengal; it really shaped my ideology and ways of seeing things. However, I did not see the dark side of minority status in Bangladesh because of my upper middle class status in an urban setting. In many ways, it is one of the key identities that I am carrying as a Bangladeshi, i.e., I self-identify as a Christian. Therefore, from my lifelong negotiation with my minority religious identity, I was pondering how these issues are being shaped in transnational and multi-religious settings in Canada within the Bangladeshi immigrant community. How do different religious groups communicate with each other?

After visiting for three weeks in Toronto, in October 2002 I returned to Bangladesh. In Toronto, I had not only visited the city, met relatives, attended social gatherings, and consumed the beauty of Niagara Falls, but I also envisioned my future research agenda as an anthropologist. I had thought deeply about Bangladeshi immigrant communities and their day-to-day activities in a transnational setting. After living two years in Bangladesh, in 2004 I started my PhD studies at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada. From September 2007 to August 2008, I conducted a one-year field research study among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto to explore their identity negotiation processes according to class, gender and religious identities within the context of globalization, transnational migration, and multiculturalism.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The starting point of my research is to explore various forms of identity negotiation among the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants residing in Canada – a multicultural country in connection to globalization and transnational migration processes. Even though another major group of Bengali immigrants came to Canada from

West Bengal, a state of India bordering Bangladesh, my research is based on the Bengali population that has migrated from Bangladesh. Generally, Bangladeshi identity as a nationality and a citizenship right separates Bengali peoples (ethnic and language categories) of India from those of Bangladesh. Bangladeshi Bengali identities as a ethnic, cultural, religious and political subjects have been shaped in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial political and economic contexts.

In response to colonial and post-colonial economic and political changes in Bengal few working classes but mostly elite class Bengali Hindus and Muslims migrated transnationally. Global economic and technological interactions, faster communication technologies – especially mass use of personal computers and the internet – opened up the floodgates, and this is when Bangladeshi professional middle classes first decided to migrate transnationally. Transnational migration for Bangladeshi educated professionals also strongly connected to demand in global job markets as well as impact of unequal connection with global economy. Therefore, in order to explore key components of Bengali identity negotiation processes among Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada, in the first phase I will begin with four schools of thought in social science literatures that define globalization as a homogenization process of culture, a mechanism of disjuncture of cultural and social structures, a new mode of inequality, social control and reimposition of dominancy, and a reflection of hybridity (e.g., Harvey 1989; Giddens 1990; Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Kearney 1995; Appadurai 1991, 1996; , Bourdieu 1963; 1997, Gilroy 1993; Bhabha 1994; Gardner 1995, 2002; Wiest 1983, 2000, 2004; Kabeer 1991, 2000; Ong 1996, 1999; Sassen 2000). In considering these dominant thoughts of globalization my study explores the principal pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial markers of Bangladeshi Bengali identity in immigrant contexts in Canada. By taking these arguments as the key theoretical basis of my study, I will explore Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Toronto as a case to re-conceptualize globalization, transnational migration, and multiculturalism. I will also attempt to provide a critical review of all key dimensions of globalization theories and bring forward new perspectives on globalization theory in relation to colonialism and post-colonialism.

In the second phase, I will explore the dynamism of Bangladeshi immigrant communities in relation to transnationalism that refers to “life in two societies” (Kearney

1995). Because of faster and cheaper communication technologies in this current global world, Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada are strongly connected to homeland and many other locations of this world. I aim to address the various processes and mechanisms of transnational communications among the Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Canada to test existing theories of transnationalism. Is transnational communication between Canada and Bangladesh creating “a hybrid”, “in-between society”, “third space”, “one or other” space, or is it relocating distinct forms of local cultural, social and political structures in transnational spaces? Or are whole transnational communication processes creating simultaneous and fluid spaces in response to local and global forces?

In the final phase, by looking at popular objectives of Canadian multiculturalism as a new form of nationalism, a strategic move of attracting immigrants to fill local jobs and an essential outcome of globalization processes, this study will address how colonial and key post-colonial markers of Bengali identity are contested and negotiated within a multicultural nation like Canada.

Re-Rooting and Reinventing Pre-Colonial “Local” Cultural and Ethnic Markers of Identity

The pre-colonial and the pre-Islamic Bengali societies were stratified according to caste (*varna*), class (*shrynee*), *jati* (which refers to an identity according to birth, geographic origin, religion, and occupation), gender (*lingo*), society (*samaj*, i.e., profession and employment context), lineage group (*bangsha*), and *gosti* (kin group) (see, e.g., Jahangir 1979; Khan 1985; Gardner 1986; Bertocci 2002; Sen 2002; Uddin 2006). Individual association with any of these categories sharply distinguishes identity in Bangladeshi Bengali social, cultural and political settings. This research will explore whether globalization forces and transnational immigration as processes are homogenizing, disjointing, hybridizing, re-rooting, and reinventing these key pre-colonial and cultural markers of Bengali identities in Canada.

Colonial and Post-Colonial Markers of Identity in Transnational and Diasporic Contexts

Transnational immigrant and diaspora communities are visible markers of globalization. Scholars have also argued that diaspora structure and diaspora identities develop in response to “opposition forces” and “contexts” of living in various locations; for

example, the Tamil diaspora against the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, or the Sikh diaspora against the Indian state (see Bhatt 2000; Gledhill 2000; Axel 2001; Shukla 2001, 2003).

Even though ethnic violence has not been as intense in Bangladesh as it is among other diaspora groups in South Asia where migration has been forced, e.g., the Tamils in Sri Lanka, politics of religion, ideology of minority and majority, forced migration based on religious identity, caste ideologies, and perceptions of *atraf* and *ashraf* play significant roles in shaping Bangladeshi diasporas outside the homeland (Sarker 1972: 412; Panday 1990; Aloysius 1998). Pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial political and economic contexts, and religion (*dhormo*) have become key markers of shaping fragmented individual and national identity, and in shaping separated Bangladeshi and Bengali nationalisms. One of the major concerns of this research is to uncover how historically constructed religious identities, divisions, norms, and religious notions of majority and minority identities are being restated or re-rooted within transnational immigrant settings in Canada. In addition, this research has incorporated the attack of September 11, 2001 on the Twin Towers in New York that is identified by Western media” as a “terrorist attack by Islamic fundamentalist groups”. Whoever the perpetrators, the incident has been a significant force to shape and negotiate religious identities among the Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Toronto.

Another major cultural and ideological shift took place and a new social class had emerged under the British colonial Bengal. Both elite Bengali Hindu and Muslim gentleman classes (*bhadralok and bhadramahila, babu class*) were ideologically incorporated into the English education system, enlightenment philosophy, and secular nostalgia (Ahmed 1989, 2000; Chakrabarty 1989, 2000; Bannerji 1994). One of the key thrusts of this research is to explore how the colonial-constructed social and occupational classes form identities that are being negotiated in immigrant contexts in Canada. Were the class identities and ideologies that were constructed within the colonial and post-colonial policies up-rooted, re-rooted, or disjointed in response to globalization forces in diasporic settings in Canada?

Does Canadian Multiculturalism Create a Flexible Space to Negotiate Identities?

In 1988, Canada introduced the Multiculturalism Act as a law that encouraged immigrant groups to celebrate their diversified linguistic, cultural, and religious traditions in Canada (Miller & Van Esterik 2009).

By connecting existing scholarship of multiculturalism, this research will explore various forms of cultural practices in immigrant contexts as identity negotiation processes in Canada. By looking at Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants' understanding of Canadian multiculturalism and their perceptions of sharing cultural traditions and incorporating cultures from other ethnic groups, this research is aiming to test Canadian multiculturalism policies. By addressing these issues, this thesis can bring forth critical discussions for assessing our understanding of culture, ethnicity and multiculturalism. I believe that this research will contribute to Canadian national policies for looking at immigrant communities based on ethnic backgrounds, for making new immigration laws, and for developing effective communication between immigrant communities and the state.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH

General Objectives

The general objective of this research is to attain a deeper understanding of Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants' key markers of identities that were shaped in local, colonial, nationalist politics and cultural settings that are being negotiated, re-rooted, and reinforced in global, transnational, and multicultural immigrant settings in Canada.

The objective of the research is to explore, connect, analyze, and document the sociopolitical dynamism of transnational migration, gender roles and identity, dynamism of social interactions, regionalism, divisions and factions within the communities according to caste, social class, nationalism, and religion, and multiple strategies to negotiate, resist, and protect “proper”¹ markers of identities among Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada. The active presence and practices of local and colonial

¹ “Proper” refers to emic interpretations of Bangladeshi Bengali identity. The term commonly interprets how closely a Bangladeshi immigrant connects to Bengali cultural traditions, politic history of emerging Bangladeshi nation state, Bengali ethnic and linguistic practices, and religious purity in immigrant context. Someone is considered “not proper” if s/he has started speaking English all the time, use knives and forks to eat meals, married/lived together with a white person and live like a “Canadian”, and has not maintained close relationship with Bengali immigrant communities.

categorization of identities in transnational settings requires an in-depth and critical understanding about “melting pot” versus “disjuncture” arguments of globalization, transnationalism as “in between”, and multiculturalism as “communication between many cultures and many ethnic communities”.

A wider objective of this research is to define and document the division, separation, simultaneousness, complexity, and multiple boundaries of Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants’ culture, social organizations, and community structures in Canada. The wider objective of this research is to examine how Canadian multiculturalism explains and defines these factions, division, and diversities within Bengali culture as opposed to culture viewed as an organic whole with shared meaning, “rooted in soil” or as an “integrated whole”.

Specific Research Themes

Impacts of globalization and transnational migration on pre-colonial markers of Bengali identity

Globalization literature often claims and indicates that ‘local’ cultures, social patterns, and practices have been reshaped, changed, and re-rooted in the processes of global migration and in transnational contexts. My research has given attention to the significance of the pre-colonial, colonial, local, and cultural markers of identities within the Bangladeshi immigrant communities in shaping and negotiating their identities in transnational global contexts.

Creation and invention of ‘local’ and ‘regional’ identities within a multicultural immigrant setting

The idea of ‘local’, ‘location of culture’, and construction of nation within a particular geographic location, language, and ethnic group, are contested subjects in the global and transnational world (Appadurai 1996). My research is an effort to understand complexities of reinventing processes of “local” and “regional” in defining core ethnic, cultural and religious identities among the Bangladeshi immigrants in relation to globalization and transnational migration.

Negotiations of religious identity within an immigrant context

Scholars also have argued that religious globalization has created transnational religious structures and transnational civil societies, has challenged nation states (Beyer

1994; Rudolph and Piscatori 1997 in Levitt 1998: 75), is homogenizing social class, racial differences and offering a uniform access over the globe (Robbins 2004: 118). Bourdieu noticed immigrants' religious practices as 'structural nostalgia' of re-rooting 'home' in a foreign land (Bourdieu 1977). In contrast to these scholars, Gardner (2003) argued that in the post-9/11 global world, religion has become a dominant categorization of identification and a mechanism of power of the western states (Gardner & Osella 2003: 8). Comaroff (1985) explained that transnational religious culture is "part of a second global culture – lying in the shadow of the first" (Comaroff 1985: 254). Asad (1983) defined religion as a mechanism of power to produce social inequality, and Marx analyzed religion as "false consciousness" (Marx in Asad 1983: 247). By connecting literature on globalization, transnational migration and religion, my study gives major attention to exploration of local forms of religious practices, symbols, rituals, and ideologies that are practiced in new locations as key markers of inventing "authentic and proper" identities among the Bangladeshi Muslim, Hindu, and Christian immigrants in Canada. My research also aims to bring forward some scholarly contributions in analyzing micro-perspectives of religious practices in the context of globalization and transnational migration.

Ideologies of religious "minority" and "majority" within the multiculturalism project in Canada

The British colonial administration invented the political and religious ideology and identity of 'majority' and 'minority' and established a communal and antagonistic relationship between Hindus and Muslims in colonial India. Religious identity and ideology of 'majority' and 'minority' have been reemployed in post-Independence Bangladeshi national politics, and by inventing Bangladeshi nationalism in opposition to Bengali nationalism. By connecting colonial and post-colonial contexts of shaping divided and separated religious identities among the Bangladeshi Muslims, Hindus, and Christians, significant attention is given to explore 'minority' and 'majority' ideologies and identities in the context of globalization and transnational migration to Canada.

Globalization and transnational migration, and formation of class identity and ideology of social class

On one hand, globalization processes have removed ‘old hegemonic local classes’ and has re-established them in multiple locations as “global elites”, or “transnational bourgeoisies”, and invented a new professional class with fetish consciousness (Rata 2002 in Friedman 2004: 74). On the other hand, scholars have also argued that globalization has created an “under class”, “redundant” labour force, a “de-unionized global proletariat”, “racialized subjects”, “flexible bodies” and “ethnic subjects” in multiple locations (Ong 1987: 8, 1991, 1999; Kabeer 1990; Gardner 1995; Robinson 2001: 159-170; Friedman 2004; Parreñas 2005). These studies give major emphasis to understanding Bangladeshi immigrants’ class identities and ideologies of class by connecting both globalization processes and colonial and post-colonial constructions in Bangladesh.

Immigrants’ gender identities, roles, and patriarchy in the context of globalization and transnational migration

Women’s active involvements in the global capitalist economy have essentialized gender inequality, patriarchal and religious norms, and male dominance (see Collins 1986; Kibria 1986, 1990; Mies 1986; Kabeer 1991, 2000; Wiest 2000; Gardner 2002). In contrast to these arguments, it is also commonly argued that immigrant women’s involvement in the wage-labour market has given them economic power, agency, and freedom, and they are able to go ‘out of place’ (Pessar 1987: 123; Siddique 2003; Constable 2003). My research gives significant attention to understanding gender dynamisms and division of labour within Bangladeshi immigrant households, and attention to patriarchy by connecting scholarly arguments of globalization and capitalist labour market opportunities in the context of transnational migration to Canada.

Factionalism, division, and separation of ethnic culture within multiculturalism

The popular perceptions of multiculturalism is that immigrants from all over the world will bring diversified cultures and traditions, and that they practice, celebrate and share their cultures within the multicultural neutral spaces in Canada (Berry 1990; Wilson 1993). The key question I will address in this research is how the complexity, multiplicity and flexibility of Bengali culture are addressed in the context of globalization and

multiculturalism. The question arises whether the common goals and objectives of establishing multiculturalism, such as celebration of ethnic culture and sharing cultures with other ethnic groups, are being achieved by focusing on practices of Bengali cultural traditions in Canada.

Multiculturalism creates “contested spaces” for challenging identity

Transnational scholars suggest that transnationalism threatens existing cultural and ideological structures of the society (Parreñas 2005), has created “unfiltered communication (Abusharaf 2002), “areas of argument” (Werbner 1998), and everyday forms of resistance (Scott 1985). In opposition to this argument, Judith Butler (1990) maintains that by “repetitive performances” of existing unequal gender, social, cultural, and political norms are restored (Butler 1990). Scholars also have argued that social and economic spaces are controlled by traditional patriarchal ideologies, and local religious norms (Wiest 1973, 1983, 1998; Gardner 1995; Kabeer 2000). In looking at ethnic, religious, class, and gender identities brought from Bangladesh, my study explores whether multicultural diasporic space in Canada has created a ‘contested space’ to challenge and resist cultural and local markers of Bangladeshi Bengali identity., or whether immigrants are creating local markers of identity and structures of society by practicing and performing traditional norms.

Bangla Town – an iconic image of diaspora identity, or a space of multiple factions?

Transnational immigrants and diaspora groups all over the world simulate an ethnic, cultural, religious, and bound space outside of their homelands that is based on their ‘local’ (homeland) imaginaries (Appadurai 2001: 61). These are iconic images of their imagined homeland, and a mechanism of defining and claiming their “authentic” identity. Little Italy, China Town, and Indian markets are examples of diasporic icons in this world. In explaining South Asian diasporas, scholars have argued that colonial and post-colonial political histories, along with local class, caste, religion and ethnic conflicts, have offered fragmented and disjointed perceptions of nation and nationhood in South Asia which is different from Jewish (religion based) and Black (slave trade) diasporas in the world (see Gledhill 2000; Axel 2001; Shukla 2001; Cheran 2003). My study has paid attention to understanding the complex images of “Bangla Town” established by the

Bangladeshi immigrants in Danforth and Victoria Park areas in Toronto as a diasporic, ethnic, iconic, image of Bangladesh outside of their homeland.

RATIONALE OF THIS RESEARCH

Benefits of an Anthropological Exploration of Bangladeshi Bengali Immigrants' Identities in Canada

There is no – or very little – in-depth anthropological research that has been conducted among the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant communities in Canada. Even though it is a very new immigrant community, every day the number of Bangladeshi immigrants is increasing. In general, Bangladeshi immigrants are identified under the broader South Asian or Indian immigrant banner, even though the post-colonial language movement of 1952, the different political and economic struggles, and the Independence War against Pakistan in 1971 have shaped a distinct ethnic, linguistic, and nationalist identity. One of the key rationales of this research is to introduce Bangladeshi immigrants by addressing the following questions: 1) who these Bangladeshi immigrants are in terms of their ethnic, national, cultural, occupational, and religious identities; 2) how they are interacting with each other, and with other ethnic groups in new locations; 3) how they are proceeding in building ethnic, immigrant, and diaspora communities in Canada, 4) what the key problems are that they are facing in the processes of settling down in Canada; and 5) how transnational migration has changed, reshaped and challenged key markers of Bengali identities among the immigrants. Through analysis of the complexity of identity negotiating processes among the Bangladeshi immigrants in relation to transnational migration, globalization, and multiculturalism, my research focuses on major policy issues for immigrants in Canada, and bridges gaps in the literature to understand the complexities within an immigrant community.

A Critical Review of Globalization, Transnationalism, and Multicultural Theories in Looking at Local and Post-Colonial Markers of Bengali Identities

Globalization and multiculturalism scholarship explains that immigrants' ethnic identities and their cultures are homogeneous, bounded, whole, and united arguments of ethnic groups, nationalities, and cultures, and give less attention to the divisions and factions within ethnic and cultural groups in defining their fragmented identities in transnational settings. My argument is that post-colonial ethnic spaces, groups, cultures,

and traditions are divided, partitioned, and separated by colonial histories. Along with that there are some local phenomena that immigrants have carried to new locations, and also have re-established old factions. Thus, my research problem of understanding Bangladeshi immigrant identities is grounded in local, colonial, and post-colonial categorizations in relation to global migration. The key rationale of this study is to explore how divided, contested and fragmented markers of Bangladeshi Bengali identities are negotiated in transnational global settings. Bangladeshi immigrants' class, religious, and gender identities will be highlighted in my study to bring to bear a critical review of theories of globalization, transnationalism, and multiculturalism.

Key Issues and Questions

Based on the conceptual and theoretical discussion I have presented in the above sections, the following key issues are explored in my research:

- a) Perceptions of self-identity among Bangladeshi immigrants in a transnational multicultural location in Toronto;
- b) Immigrants' understanding of transnational migration, globalization processes and multicultural spaces in Toronto;
- c) Key indicators and mechanisms in defining and maintaining authentic Bengali identities among Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto;
- d) Significance of class, gender, and religious identities in creating Bangladeshi immigrants' social networks and to developing social organizations in immigrant lives in Toronto;
- e) Mechanisms and processes of negotiating Bangladeshi immigrants' ethnic, cultural and religious identity in response to various forms of global identity construction politics in Toronto;
- f) Initiatives being taken individually as well as within an organized ethnic group to establish their identity as part of the process of forming a diaspora community in Toronto;
- g) Immigrants' attempts to re-invent, challenge, and resist their homeland's class, gender and religious identities and status in a new multicultural diaspora setting in Toronto.

These issues are dealt with in this research by the following questions:

- 1) What is the global political economic context of Bangladeshi Bengali migration to Canada?
- 2) What are the key markers of shaping the Bangladeshi Bengali identity in immigrant contexts in Toronto?
- 3) What are the cultural, political and religious events that Bangladeshi immigrants practice and celebrate to maintain their authentic ethnic, nationalist and religious identities in Canada?
- 4) Is globalization a major force of homogenizing, disjointing, and hybridizing perceptions and constructions of *Jati*, caste, regional, gender, and lineage-oriented pre-colonial markers of Bengali identity in an immigrant context in Toronto?
- 5) Are globalization and transnationalism key forces shaping ideologies and practices of “religious minority and majority” as one of the key markers of colonial identity politics in Bangladesh?
- 6) How does the colonial “*Bhadralok* class” in Bengal negotiate in response to globalization processes?
- 7) How do Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto negotiate their Bengali (ethnic, cultural, and secular) and Bangladeshi (nationalist and Islamist) identities as immigrants and citizens in Canada?
- 8) What types of techniques and mechanisms do Bangladeshi immigrants incorporate to challenge their religious, class and gender identities in multicultural diasporic space in Toronto?
- 9) Is globalization a sophisticated form of colonialism?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In Chapter Two, I conceptualize globalization from four different schools of thought, and explain gender, class and religion as major aspects of Bengali identities. I also develop a critical reading of transnationalism, and multiculturalism that will provide a context to understand Bangladeshi Bengali identity in Toronto. I will explore the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial political economic contexts that shaped as well as differentiated Bengali class and religious identity. In Chapter Three, I discuss various research techniques and methods that I have utilized in my fieldwork. I also explain some

of my active roles within the research community, as well as experiences I have gained as an ethnographer. In Chapter Four, I present a brief historical and political economy context of Bangladeshi Bengali migration to Canada. Along with this historical sketch, I explore socio-economic conditions of Bangladeshi immigrants and introduce my research respondents in Toronto. In Chapter Five, I address pre-colonial key markers of Bengali identity such as *jati*-based occupational identity, gender, and perceptions of caste in relation to globalization and transnationalism. In Chapter Six, I analyze religious practices among the Bangladeshi immigrants, their perceptions of “religious minority and majority” and the *bhadralok* class as colonial and post-colonial ideological constructions of Bengali identity in relation to globalization, transnationalism and multiculturalism. In Chapter Seven, I address major components of Bangladeshi nationalism and national identity in the context of transnational migration and multiculturalism. In Chapter Eight, I explore Canadian multiculturalism by focusing on Bangladeshi immigrants’ class, gender and religious identity negotiation processes in Toronto. Finally, in Chapter Nine, I summarize various identity construction and negotiation mechanisms of Bangladeshi immigrants by connecting to key colonial and post-colonial markers of Bengali identity, and by bringing the analysis back to critical readings of globalization and multiculturalism ideas in social science. I also offer several policy recommendations that might shed light on South Asian immigrants’ settlement program as well as Canadian multicultural program.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

ANTHROPOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF GLOBALIZATION

The world is currently organized in accordance with the pace of accelerating globalization. Globalization is perceived as a process of massive and more rapid flows of people, finance, technology and media to various locations of our current world (Appadurai 1990, 1996, 2001; Trouillot 2001: 128). Friedman (2004) defined globalization in economic terms as a process of “decentralization of capital accumulation” and argues that sociologically this process has transformed local social structure (Friedman 2004: 67). Faster communication technologies, e.g., the Internet, cell phone, email and texting are connecting people and places faster than at any other time in history (Kottak 2012: 35). Scholars in social science have commonly defined globalization as a new system of “trade liberalization” and “regionalization of trading blocks” that happens with free flow of information, capital, finance, communication technology and human labour (Harvey 1989; Bhalla 1998; Robbins 1999, 2002; Chernomas & Sepehri 2004; Wiest 2004).

Scholars describe globalization as a “new age” of “posts”, for example, “postmodern, post-national, and hybrid” (Friedman 2004: 63), and a new “wave”; (Giovanni Arrighi 1997: 1 in Wiest 2004: 282). The question is whether globalization is totally a new or “post” phenomenon? By focusing on the histories of colonial trade, imperialism, and colonialism, World Systems theorists, political economists and scholars of the Dependency school argued that people, cultures, and trade were connected long before the current era of globalization (Baran 1952; Frank 1967; Wallerstein 1974; Wolf 1982; Isbister 2006: 68). Harvey (1989) explained the difference between historical colonial and imperialist economic networks and current globalization process. He said

that globalization is a flexible production and accumulation system that was achieved by making flexible connections among technologies, resources, labour, and finances in various locations, and by decentralizing whole production and consumption systems. It is a new production system that compresses time and space (Harvey 1989) and it is no longer “time is money but rather time costs money” (Inda & Rosaldo 2002: 5-7). Giddens (1990: 64) defined globalization as “reorganization of time and space”. Globalization scholars explain current global economic interactions between multiple cores and peripheries as far more complex, with discontinuous “sub spaces”, or even being “indefinable” spaces (Kearney 1995: 549; Grewal and Kaplan 1994 in Kearney 1995: 550).

According to Wiest (2004), global movements of finance, labour and raw materials are not only connecting locations and compressing time and space, but also these flows are linked with global “icons, symbols and cultural values” that has led to “cultural homogenization” with introduction of ideas and values of a consumption culture (Wiest 2004: 243-4). Wiest argued that “trade liberalization and cultural homogenization” are brought together in the current wave of globalization (Wiest 2004: 243). As Wiest (2004) argued, anthropology as a discipline studies globalization not just a faster financial and economic interactions, but how these movements are shaping and re-shaping social, cultural, and political structures of various localities. Global forces in one way are creating dominant influences on local cultures and economy, and in another way are creating a space for resistance to challenge the exploitative and dominant traditions both in micro and macro contexts of this current world (see Ghorayshi 2004:160-169; Kottak 2012).

By exploring social science literature on globalization, transnationalism, multiculturalism, and colonial and post-colonial contexts of Bengali identity, in this section of my thesis I will provide a brief overview of my theoretical framework for the research. I begin by discussing five different groups of scholars who have analyzed globalization as a force and as a process within five different conceptual themes.

Globalization Creates Connectedness

One group of scholars explains globalization as the connectedness of human labour, media, technology, and capital as a result of the dominance of a capitalist economy and rapid technological innovation (see, e.g., Harvey 1989; Featherstone 1990; Giddens 1990; Jameson 1991; Lash and Urry 1994; Kearney 1995; Inda & Rosaldo 2002; Wiest 1999, 2000, 2004; Kellner 2002). For example, Bangladeshi women work for Calvin Klein; “Barbadian women work for American Airline; Nigerian people watch Indian films; Americans use Japanese electronics; Somalians eat Canadian wheat” (Inda & Rosaldo 2002). Best & Kellner (2001) argued that global capitalist intervention and technological development connect humans, societies, and nations with a positive perspective of freedom (Best & Kellner 2001 in Kellner 2002: 286.). Globalization as connectedness of culture and people in many ways supports the concept of the “global village”, “cultural homogenization”, Americanization, Westernization, and arguments for a cultural melting pot. Globalization is also viewed as “cultural homogenization”, which refers to people in different corners of the world consuming similar products (e.g., Hollywood movies, iPhones, Google, Coke, KFC), following common icons (movie stars, football players, Gucci) and sharing universal norms, beliefs and attitudes (Wiest 2000: 29, 2004: 243-4). Robin’s (1999) views also support the arguments of cultural universalization and a capitalist philosophy of ‘purchase is power’ and consumption as culture (see Gardner & Osella 2003: xxv).

Globalization Creates a Disjuncture

In contrast to the connectedness approach to globalization as a force, another group of scholars has argued that the process of globalization creates a disjuncture instead of connectedness within a heterogeneous world (see Bourdieu 1963, 1977; Appadurai 1991, 1996, 2002; Silverstein 2004; Wacquant 2004). Appadurai (2002: 50) argued that the global economic system is a form of “disorganized capitalism” that does not connect local economies but rather breaks down small towns into disassociated global centres in many localities. In opposition to Anderson’s (1983) argument of “imagined communities” as a key perspective of shaping modern nationhood and nationalism, Appadurai (1996) argued that in the current globalization process print capitalism, media and technologies do not bring common imaginaries to global citizens but instead have

disjoined modernist perspectives of nationhood and national identity. He also argued that globalization forces “transformed the world into a kind of ‘no place’, where ‘ethnic’, ‘rhizomic’ ‘uncertainty’, ‘schizophrenic’, ‘rootlessness’, and ‘alienation’ lead to psychological distances between individuals and groups” (Appadurai 1996: 29). Bourdieu (1979) argued that Algerian peasant agricultural traditions and their traditional Kabyle cultural practices were uprooted by “the conditions of post-colonial modernity, migration, and Arabo-Islamic nationalism” (Bourdieu in Silverstein 2004: 554). However they tried to re-root their pure Kabyle cultural and Kabyle house (*akham*) through memories and “structural nostalgia” (Herzfeld 1997:109). Appadurai (1996, 2002) perceived Bourdieu’s explanation of “uprootedness” as disjuncture, but he also argued that imaginary connection to the global world does not create sameness, but rather a flexible and disjointed structure that is larger than localized concepts of modernity (see Appadurai 1996, 2002). Appadurai (1996: 31) also said that film; media; sports, fashion; and other global institutions (e.g., British Council) have provided new imaginaries to post-colonial nations, which he described as a “new social fact” that influences people to cross various modernized national boundaries. Rosenau agrees with the idea of disjuncture of globalization, but refers to “fragmentation” and “integration” at the national, local, and individual levels (Rosenau 2004: 24).

In opposition to connectedness, ‘Americanization’, and melting pot ideas, Appadurai (1996, 2002) argued that globalization forces are not providing similar messages to different cultures and population groups but have disjoined the modernized boundaries of this world by producing a new “imaginary” (Appadurai 1996: 30). Even a Hollywood movie, e.g., “Mission Impossible”, does not provide the same imaginaries to all consumers of this word. In looking at the global movement of people (“ethnoscapes”) and diaspora populations in the current global world, Appadurai (2002) argued that global migrants simulate their cultures and locations in global settings, disjointed from their localized imaginaries; this is a form of “deterritorialization” that reshapes global locations in the values of locals.

Globalization Creates Hybridization

Another perspective on globalization is its relation to transnational or global migration. Scholars of this school do not look at global versus local dichotomies or macro structures of global communication. Instead, they are interested in understanding how transnational migration as a dimension of globalization shapes ethnic identities in various diaspora settings. The dominant categorizations of human identities, such as race, culture, nationality, and community, are a more fluid hybrid, renegotiated and deterritorialized in relation to the historical context and global settings (see Hall 1992; Bhabha 1994; Gilroy 1993; Gardner 1995; Young 1995; Osella and Gardner 2003). These scholars question essential constructions of race, culture, and ethnicity as classification categories of identities, and they are more concerned with transnational cultural identity politics in relation to historical patterns of migration. For example, Stoller (2002) did not notice much “assimilation” but a more social hybridity of negotiation between state laws and popular culture among the African Americans in New York. Elsewhere, Bakhtin (1981) explained that:

Hybridity is a mixture of two social languages within a single utterance that can take place consciously and unconsciously and the main political effect of the former language is that by demonstrating the possibility of an alternative voice, the authoritative discourse is unmasked and undone (Bakhtin 1981 in Gardner and Osella 2003: 10).

By following this line of argument, Bhabha (1994) proposed that migrants occupy space in transnational settings that is neither ‘one’ nor ‘other’ but something else that he referred to as a ‘third space’ (Bhabha 1994 in Gardner & Osella 2003: 10). Gardner and Osella said:

Migration is a concrete experience which breaks down oppositions between different geographical locations, and migrants, people who are located simultaneously inside and outside a culture and society, have been embodying a wider, contemporary postmodern condition in which binarisms and essentialisms – the hallmarks of modernity – are replaced by an appreciation of the hybridity, dislocation and multiplicity characteristic of a new, deterritorialized or global world (Gardner & Osella 2003: preface).

From the experience of the Afro-Caribbean population in England, Stuart Hall (1992) argued that “cultural racism” as ‘essential of black subjects’ that bounded the ‘black’ as a racial and cultural category are fluid, shifting and contextually dependent

(Hall 1992: 254). Following the same vein, Gilroy (1993) described a compound culture of black settlers in England in what he termed 'black Atlantic' that was not a static racial and cultural category, but settlers define their identity by making a relationship with the history of slave trade, and the colonial exploration within an Atlantic micro-cultural political system (Gilroy 1993: 15). Thus, diaspora identity and culture in the global setting are not fixed, nor dependent upon a given or absolute culture, race, or ethnicity, but are the outcome of shifting positions, contexts and history. Gardner (1995: 102) said that migrants do not move between two bounded and separate worlds, but, according to Bangladeshi migrants in England, homeland (*desh*) and foreign land (*bidesh*) are different locations of the same society.

By introducing the concept "Islamophobia" in post-9/11 global context, Gardner and Osella (2003: 8) argued that racial and ethnic identities as dominant categories are not creating an inferior status. But as religious and belief systems become dominant categorizations of identification, there will continue to be global clashes of civilization. Thus, the construction processes of racial, ethnic, cultural and religious identities are contextual, situational and political in transnational and global settings. People move, shift and are being challenged.

Globalization Creates Inequality

Trade liberalization and economic globalization induced transnational migration has been perceived as a positive force that encourages the success of the free market, remittances in local economies, democracy and individual freedoms, and empowerment, and it has been heralded to create micro-level rural development and reduce class differences (see, e.g., Friedman 1999; Siddiqui 2003; Ratha 2005). In opposition to these arguments, a significant number of scholars assert that globalization is a new mode of social control with capitalist ideologies (Kellnery 2002: 290), a paradigm that creates structural dependency and enhances existing social inequalities (see Wiest 1984, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2004; Ong 1996, 1999; Sassan 1998, 2000; Wiest and Mohiuddin 2003; Chowdhury 2005; Binford 2003; Parreñas 2005), and a new form of imperialism (Hussain 2003). Global economic forces have transformed local class structures as transnational classes that are controlled by transnational capitalism (Robinson 2001), recreated a new professional class with global capitalist ideology (Elizabeth Rata 2002),

invented a “deunioned, ad hoc and just-in-time labor force” (Friedman 2004), produced a new global ‘under class’ (Robinson 2001), and created an ideology of mass consumption (Robbins 1999). Globalization as a force is perceived as fragmentation of identity, crises of community and religious resurgence (e.g., Featherstone 1990; Robertson & Grent 1999). Pessar (1982) explained that people from the periphery countries are forced to migrate to core countries as a result of unequal systems of exchange of commodities, capital, debt relationships between local states and multinational organizations (Pessar 1982: 344; Ong 1999; Parreñas 2005). Robinson (2001) argued that global economic communication has created a single mode of production and a single global system that is highly unequal for the poor partners (Robinson 2001: 159).

As opposed to Anderson’s “imagined community” and Appadurai’s arguments of global imaginaries and nostalgia, Chowdhury (2005) argued that globalization processes do not offer the same opportunities to communicate with global cultural and economic flows, therefore, individual’s imaginaries also vary based on individual’s gender, class, and caste identity (Chowdhury 2005: 18). From the above discussion of different scholars, it is clear that globalization connects but also disjoins and/or produces a hybrid occurrence that creates various unequal relationships.

Understanding Gender within Globalization Processes

The term “gender” refers to the relationship between men and women within social, cultural, economic and political settings. Roles of men and women in societies are understood with general dichotomous categorizations such as public/private, nature/culture, production/reproduction (see Ortner 1974). The concept of gender is defined within “socially constructed relationships” (Potuchek 1997: 27-29). According to Gerson & Peiss (1995), the term “gender boundary” refers to the “complex structure – physical, social, ideological and psychological – which establishes differences and commonalities between women and men, among women and among men” (Gerson & Peiss 1995 in Parreñas 2005: 59). Globalization as process and as a new economic and social order has had a significant impact on household structure, gender ideologies, roles, and the gendered division of labour both in local and global settings. Globalization as an economic process and cultural flows of globalization such as “*ethnoscape*, *technoscape*, *ideoscape* and *mediascape*” (Appadurai 1996) either bring common nostalgia and

imaginaries to women as a gendered, ethnic and national subject or disjointed gender inequality. As a locally subjugated category, women are forced to enter into transnational global informal and formal markets as victims of neo-liberal structural policies, and their key roles are to pay back national debts to the West by working as cheap, unskilled and domestic labour forces in the global market (Parreñas 2005). Within pre-capitalist and capitalist structures, gender identities and gender roles had been unequal, exploitative, and distinct between men and women in exercising power to make decisions, to have access in public arenas, and to gain entitlement to existing resources in households (see Sen 1982; Kibria 1990; Kabeer 1991; Gardner 1996, 2002; Wiest 2000). However, scholars argue that global economic and technological flows, in their responses to transnational migration, intensify and re-impose unequal gender roles and norms (Cholen 1991; Gardner 1995; Parreñas 2005; Stiell & England 2005), patriarchy (Kabeer 2000), dependency and vulnerability (Wiest 1983), more dominance and male ideology (Ashworth and May 1990), control subjects both in domestic and public spheres (Ong 1987; Appaduari 2002), and support processes of “marginalization and pauperization” (Kalpagam 1994).

Neo-liberal understanding of globalization conveys that global economic networks and global demand for labour forces have opened up economic opportunities for Third World men and women and enhanced transnational migration. In response to global economic demands, male migration forced Bangladeshi married women to follow dominant religious, patriarchal, social, cultural and gendered norms as virtuous wives in their in-laws’ homes (Gardner 1995: 119). In a similar vein, Wiest (1973) explained that husbands’ migration forced Mexican women to maintain existing unequal gender relationships by sending regular remittance and the threat of gossip (Wiest 1973: 206). Women who migrate to various global locations also fail to be freed from unequal gendered relationships due to their constant connection to local cultural traditions, and by maintaining marriage relationships (Cholen 1991; Gardner 1995; Cameron 1998; Stiell and England 2005). Kibria (1994) argued that Vietnamese immigrant women face inequality within the household structure because of age and sex differences (Kibria 1984: 82). Parreñas (2005) said that transnational families of migrant mothers tend to receive far less support than do the families of male migrants (Parreñas 2005: 31). Even

though women as migrant workers, caregivers, and housewives are actively involved in the global market, local, cultural, and gender norms and gender inequality are still practiced and are dominantly present in their lives.

Maria Mies (1986) argued that within capitalist households, women are exploited, controlled and ignored as “housewives”, “good women”, and “good mothers” (Mies 1986: 1003). The involvement of West Indian women in the global market as domestic workers, caregivers, mothers, and wives has re-established them as “colonial, racial and lower class slave subjects” (Cholen 1991: 189). Scholars also argued that transnational migration has recreated new forms of “transnational motherhood” where women must carry out “normative gender behavior” even though they are living in foreign lands in such forms as sending children text messages before bed and calling them in the morning before they go to school (Parreñas 2005). Women’s involvement in the market may offer them economic independence but they are not freed from the socially expected gender roles that Sarah Fenstermaker and Candace West (2002) described as “doing gender”² (Parreñas 2005: 95). Judith Butler (1990) notes that “repetitive performance” of immigrants in global settings has been unable to change the dominant systems that immigrants have carried from their home areas (Butler in Parreñas 2005: 5). Following the same line, Kabeer argues that, while Bangladeshi immigrant women’s economic, social, and cultural spaces are expanded in the global and transnational settings, their individual identities and movements are controlled and dominated by local religious norms and patriarchal ideology – *purdah* (Kabeer 2000 in Gardner 2003: 113; also see Wiest 1973, 1983).

In looking at women’s images and identity in the global market context, Ong (1987) introduced the expression “flexible bodies”, which means that women are easy to manage, control and exploit, and by entering in the global market women are caught between social discipline of the family, the village, and the capitalist discipline in the industry (1987: 8). Women’s mobility and resources are controlled by dominant patriarchal ideologies, and by using cultural perceptions of “honour and shame” as means of behavioural subjugation (Ashar and Agarwal 1989 in Pettman 1996: 192, Gardner and

² The concept of “doing gender” posits that gender practices are socially situated and reproduce social structure.

Osella 2003: xxv). Appadurai (1984) defined immigrant women's cultural, economic and social situations as "disenfranchisement", suggesting that women have lost their entitlements of rights, economy, recourses, and movements either in local or in global contexts as part of households or outside of households (Sen, 1981; Kabeer 1991: 244; Wiest 1998).

In the context of economic globalization, women's opportunities to work in public spaces and their entrance into job markets can be studied as freedom of movement and control over resources (Khatun 1998), liberalization and empowerment (Naved 1994; Siddiqui 2001), and as being 'out of place' (Pessar, 1987: 123). In opposition to this argument, Pettman (1996) said that women are seen in the global market as sexualized bodies who are bearers of sex in the international as well as domestic labour markets (Pettman 1996: 191). They have entered into racialized domestic service, sex tourism and militarized prostitution (Pettman 1996: 191). Constable (2003) said that, on one hand, Third World women have achieved the access and agency to protect local inequalities though the expansion of global communication technologies, but on the other hand, within the structure of global consumption women (e.g., as mail-order brides) are imagined and consumed as feminine and sexist products (Constable 2003: 89). Pettman (1996) also argued "women are vulnerable to body policing and to violence if they transgress the public/private boundary or appear unruly or out of men's control" (Pettman 1996: 192).

In this context, it is worth noting that gender in the global arena is not disjointed from class constructions in global and local contexts. Regardless of gender and age, Robinson (2001) explained that the new economic global order has transformed nationalist bourgeoisies to transnational bourgeoisies (Robinson 2001:163). In a different context, Gardner argued that Bangladeshi immigrants' access to global markets has helped them to utilize their economic and symbolic capital (Gardner 1995:129), but she did not pay much attention to the gender, age and class dynamisms of Bangladeshi transnational migration. The Indian immigrant women as professional computer engineers, the Chinese elite women as global investors, and the Western white upper and upper middle class women as CEOs in the global markets do not face the same gendered norms and inequalities as working class women face in the sweat shops and in global

domestic homes. The upper class women can pass down their care responsibilities to less privileged women as a result of the global market. Parreñas (2005) argued that migrant women work in domestic spheres of upper middle class households in what she called an “international division of reproductive labour”, consequently re-establishing class, ethnic and racial differences in global contexts.

When women work in the global economy as cheap labour, women are able to connect to the public arena and enter into production processes. But women become more subjugated in relation to the global market as sexual and class subjects rather than as labour in the production systems. Transnational labour migration, movements of capital, finance and labour have brought women from private space to public space. At the same time, globalization has essentialized traditional roles of women as mother and caregiver, and has controlled labour in household structures and public spaces. Women’s age, education, and class are also negotiated in relation to global forces.

Transnationalism, Transnational Migration and Diaspora

Political and economic restructuring in nation states, the emergence of transnational capital and flexible economies, the development of service sectors, the rapid development of communication technologies and media, and ethnic and religious conflicts have all been preconditions for transnational migration and the production of large numbers of transnational and diaspora communities in the world (see, e.g., Collins 1988; Noivo 1999; Miles 2004; Parreñas 2005). Featherstone (1990) argued that globalization connected previously isolated cultures, producing a new transnational culture that transcended national boundaries (Featherstone 1990: 6). Robinson (2001) explored that economic globalization created new political communication by inventing transnational states and a transnational global ruling class (Robinson 2001: 157). Transnational states work as a collective authority for a global ruling class. The nation state will not vanish but rather be absorbed and transformed into a larger institutionalized structure with a new class relation between global capital and global labour (Robinson 2001: 158).

‘Transnational’ is the term used to describe sustained movements and interconnectedness of people across national borders for long periods of time (Roger 1986; Basch, Glick Schiller, and Blanc-Szanton 1994). Parreñas (2005: 5) argues that

transnationalism threatens existing cultural parameters, institutional norms and the ideology of society. Kearney (1995: 559) notes that transnational communities commonly refer to migrant communities spanning between two nations. According to Basch (1995: 48), transnational migrants live in two societies by cutting across national boundaries, bringing two societies into a single social field. Transnational migration is perceived as having created various spaces in host locations which are diasporic, distinct, and bounded, connected to, and rooted in, local cultures, yet expressing homogeneous global market symbols (Clifford 1997). By examining the Kabila diaspora, French nationalist discourse, and transnational Berber cultural movements, Bourdieu (1977) argued that people, nation, and place are connected to a mental root through nostalgia and that these social memories are transnational.

It is difficult to distinguish between diasporas³ and transnational communities in this present world. Diaspora groups and transnational migrants follow similar strategies and ways of maintaining communications between ‘homeland’ and ‘host land’. However, transnational migration occurs more ‘voluntarily’ than is normally associated with diaspora populations. In studying Shikhs, Brian Axel (2001: 156) explains, “violence is the thread by which the diaspora is constituted as a community”. For political and economic reasons, a transmigrant group does not always carry the same nostalgia as diaspora communities in the sense of wishing to return to a homeland (Braziel and Mannur 2003, Cheran 2003). Sheffer argues that historical contexts of migration, and collective political action of immigrants (as identified members in the host locations) against unequal opportunities, allows them to move from immigrant to diaspora communities (see Sheffer 2003: 17). However, in current global contexts, diasporas and

³ The term “diaspora” refers to a broader sense of human dispersal than does ‘transnationalism’. Generally, diaspora has been used to refer to forced migration and exile from a homeland to other countries due to ethnic and religious conflicts (e.g., Jewish diaspora, Tamil diaspora), political tensions (e.g., Biharis in Bangladesh), colonialism (e.g., Black African diasporas), and holy wars (e.g., Palestinians). Docker (2001: vii) defines diaspora as “a sense of belonging to more than one history, to more than one time and place, to more than one past and future”. Shukla argues that the perception of diaspora is always connected to the basic question of origins and locations, asking “where do they pause, rest, live?” (Shukla 2001: 551). Nostalgia is common to all diaspora populations – that one day they will return to their homeland (see Cheran 2004; Braziel and Mannur 2003). The perspective of diaspora groups is generally to maintain their ethno-national identity and their connections to their homeland folk by sending money, establishing organizations, and visiting frequently (Clifford 1994; Gledhill 1994; Shukla 2001; Sheffer 2003).

transnational communities are both understood to include expatriates, expellees, refugees, alien residents, immigrants, displaced communities and ethnic minorities (Cheran 2003: 2).

In contrast, Clifford's (1994: 8) interpretation of the term "diaspora" does not support application to cases simply of transnationality and movement but rather only to cases of political struggle to define the local as a distinctive community in a historical context of displacement. Ahmed (2005) does not sharply distinguish concepts of transnationalism and diaspora on the basis of historical roots and operational definitions. To her, both terms emphasize various forms of movement, connections, and fluidity between multiple locations which "offer a wide range of conceptual tools that allow us to understand self and collective identities by questioning static and state-defined culture and multiculturalism" (Ahmed 2005: 99). Cheran (2003: 6) underscores the need to study diaspora and transnational communities as a single "social field" rather than host and homeland dichotomies, because both communities are connected as a single socio-economic and political field.

In exploring diaspora formations in the post-colonial world, scholars have focused on multiple and overlapping factors that give rise to diaspora formations, not only on historical, ethnic, religious, cultural and national roots and causes. Shukla (2001) argues that a basic building block of South Asian diasporas is an 'imagined' and 'real' sense of nation. The ideas of 'subcontinents' and 'Indianness' refer to the nostalgia of a single historical nation until 1947, but the emergence of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh presented fragmented and disjointed perceptions of nation and nationality connected to religious, class, and ethnic differences. Therefore, colonial and postcolonial contexts have offered fragmented histories, nations, and nationalities to the South Asian diaspora communities that are different from conventional perceptions of diasporas (Shukla 2001: 553; see also Gandhi 1998), and focus only on religious significance, for example, the Jewish diaspora and colonial slave trade in the Black African diaspora (Brazier & Mannur 2003).

Shukla (2003) also argues that formation of diaspora structures and diaspora identities develop in relation to "opposition" forces and "contexts" of living in various locations. For example, Sikh diasporas emerged in opposition to the Indian nation state,

and Pakistani immigrant communities welcomed pan-Islamic discourses in order to confront Hindu dominancy of India (Axel 2001; Shukla 2001). The Tamil diaspora has emerged through the processes of civil wars, factions, violence, and struggles against the Sinhalese ethnic, class, and religious groups in Sri Lanka (see Gledhill 2000: 177-183; Cheran 2003). Considering broader local-global dimensions such as *Hindutva* movements in India (Bhatt 2000), the Muslim immigrant response to *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie (Shukla 2001), the Gulf crisis (Werbner 1996), and the current “war against terrorism” all are dealing with significant forces that are determining the formation of “enclaved” communities and diasporic forms of citizenship. Emphasizing the importance of migration contexts, Fuglerud (1999) argues that the formation of Tamil diasporas depend on a highly internalized logic about the social experiences of refugees in relation to the living contexts of various locations in the world (Fuglerud 1999 in Shukla 2003: 562).

With respect to identity among different diasporas and transnational communities, Glick (1992) argues that transmigrants generate multiple identities due to their simultaneous positionality in various locations. She also argues that immigrants’ fluidity and simultaneousness are also connected to their processes of accommodation with, and resistance against, various dominant forces in new locations. Following those lines, Gilroy (1993) and Hall (1992) argue that transnational identity is neither fixed nor dependent upon a given culture, but is the outcome of shifting positions (see Gilroy and Hall in Gardner 2002: 9). In his discussion of Black settlers, Gilroy argues, “Black settlers continuously connect and circulate their ideas, activities, culture and cultural artifacts with the history of slave trade, and colonial exploration within an “Atlantic micro-cultural political system” (Gilroy 1993: 15). Hall explains that “identity is a process that constitutes and continuously reforms the subject in social and cultural settings” (Hall 1995: 65). Gardner and Osella (2003) argue, “. . . in the post-colonial age of diasporas, migrants are not represented as members of bounded communities”. By focusing on transnational communications and movements of Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants in England, Gardner (1995: 102) argues that Bangladeshi Bengali migrants do not move between two bounded and separate worlds, but that homeland (*desh*) and foreign land (*bidesh*) are different locations of the same society. She notes that people are

simultaneously ‘the same’, ‘different’ and ‘other’ in their everyday lives. In order to explore these issues it is essential to explore the theoretical arguments of multiculturalism in Canada.

MULTICULTURALISM IN CANADIAN CONTEXTS

Canada is the pioneer country that invented and celebrated ‘multiculturalism’ as a law. The world and immigration seekers commonly view Canada as a multicultural, tolerant society that accepts difference. The Prime Minister, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, announced “multicultural assumption” in 1971 as a policy that would protect the individual identities of people in Canada and allow them to enjoy their own place in Canadian society (Berry 1977 in Wilson 1993: 655; Brotz 1980: 41). The policy also proclaimed that “there are two dominant languages but no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other” (Brotz 1980; Wilson 1993: 655). Wilson studied Canadian multiculturalism as a “smelting pot” in contrast to the American “melting pot” theory by focusing on dominance of the English and the French culture in Canada (Wilson 1993: 648). In 1988, Canada introduced the Multicultural Act as a law that encouraged immigrant groups to celebrate their diversified linguistic, cultural, and religious traditions in Canada (Miller & Esterik 2009). Abu-Laban and Stasiulis (1992) argued that Canadian multiculturalism is used as a device that serves for immigrant integration (Abu-Laban and Stasiulis 1992: 370). The key objectives of multiculturalism policies in Canada are: 1) the promotion of inter-group contact and sharing; 2) the promotion of the maintenance and development of cultural heritage; and 3) the promotion of other groups’ acceptance and tolerance (Berry 1990: 201-34). The concept of multiculturalism describes cultural pluralism as a poly-ethnic and poly-racial mosaic (Wilson 1993: 651).

The policy of multiculturalism in Canada was not accepted without criticism and contest. In response to the recent move to multiculturalism, Brotz (1980) argued that multiculturalism replaced a bi-lingual and bicultural Canada. By introducing multiculturalism as state policy, the dominant English power has been able to control the French nationalist demands in Canada (Brotz 1980: 41). Still, within this multicultural mosaic, both cultures have already occupied two huge spots that obviously ignore the rest of the minority ethnic and cultural groups in Canada. In contrast to the popular idea of

multiculturalism and Canada's image of tolerance, van Dijk said that 'tolerance' is a society's self-evoked notion (van Dijk 2001: 307-323). Similarly, Essed (1996) has argued that 'tolerance' is an expression and it presupposes the power of those who tolerate (also see Dhamoon 2009: 3). Following the same vein, Sara Ahmed said that immigrants as others ('they') bring all differences, but the dominant ethnic and cultural group ('we') can accept differences (Ahmed in Dhamoon 2009: 6). Eva Mackey (1999) argued that multiculturalism is an emblem of Canadian nationhood, a new form of nationalism that reinforces racial exclusion and hierarchies of difference. Canadian multiculturalism is also viewed as a "multicultural zoo" that can only create professional ethnics but not Canadians (Brotz 1980). Brotz (1980) argued that the role of the state as a zookeeper is "to collect as many varieties as possible and exhibit them once a year in some carnival where one can go from booth to booth sampling pizzas, wonton soup and kosher pastrami" (Brotz 1980: 44). Tussman (1985) argued that multiculturalism is a state policy that gives power to redefine, shape, and manage Canada's racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity (Tussman 1985: 207). According to Seymour (1993), multiculturalism is a new controlling and regulating mechanism (see Wilson 1993; Seymour 1993).

However, Howard-Hassmann (1999) brought out two different practices and schools of thought in defining multiculturalism in Canada. One group is identified as liberal multiculturalism, which promotes individual choices of identity and emphasizes Canadian citizenship as opposed to ethnic identities. According to this group, multiculturalism as a policy will not make a sharing space for different cultures but rather it will promote opportunities to create an ethnic space. In contrast, non-liberal multiculturalism argues for the strengthened identification of ethnic groups' language and cultural traditions (Howard-Hassmann 1999: 524; Dhamoon 2009).

From the above discussion, Canadian multiculturalism as a policy was introduced in order to build a new form of Canadian nationalism with the idea of management, harmony, celebration, and control over different ethnic groups and cultures. At the same time, multiculturalism as a law has given opportunities and freedoms to many ethnic groups to practice their ethnic and cultural traditions in Canada.

PRE-COLONIAL, COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF BENGALI IDENTITY

‘Bengali’ as ethnic, linguistic, cultural, national identity, and ‘Bangladeshi’ as a form of national and “religious” identity have been shaped, reshaped, and contested within the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial social, political, and economic settings. Identities of class, caste, and religion have been key markers of Bengali identity from pre-Islamic state times to Bangladesh as an independent nation. However, as Bengalis have been associated with agriculture for centuries, ownership of land, control over agricultural surplus, social and cultural practices associated with agriculture, and peasant ideologies and norms are key aspects of shaping common social, cultural, and class identities among the Bengali population (see Bertocci 1970; Jahangir 1979, 1982; Van-Schendel 1981; Jansen 1987). As a result, based on agricultural production systems, the celebration of the last day of the Bengali Year (*chato songcranti*) when peasant groups used to repay last year debts to *zaminders*⁴ or local moneylenders The Bengali New Year, the day Bengali people restart their lives with a new spirit and new business accounts (*nobo borsha*) and the celebration of the new harvest (*nobbano Ushab*) have all become common cultural festivities for the whole Bengali population and have become key markers of Bengali ethnic and cultural identity.

Economic class, social class, life style, social roles and status, caste, and social and cultural stratification of individuals have been key aspects of constructing Bengali identity (see Thompson 1982: 9; Weber in Edgell 1993: 11). For example, according to Jahangir (1979), membership in, and network connections with, *attiyo* (kin group), *gousti* (lineage), *bangsha* (paternal ancestral lineage), *samaj* (society), status according to age differences in the social and cultural settings, *murrubbi* (aged person) and *polapan* (young people), and gender – *may* (girl) and *chalay* (boy) – define the identity of Bangladeshi Bengali societies.

Along with these general categories, ideology of caste and occupational patterns also are key aspects of identity of the Bengali population (see, e.g., Bertocci 1970, 2002; Jahangir 1982; Khan 1985; Gardner 1995; Sen 2002; Uddin 2006). The pre-Islamic,

⁴ Under the act of Permanent Settlement of Bengal in 1793 (*Chirosthayi Bondoboasto*), the British appointed landlords (*zamindars*) were given authority to collect taxes from the local peasants in a particular territory. Most of them were appointed from elite Hindu caste backgrounds.

Bengali societies were stratified and Bengali identity was constructed according to caste (*varnas*), class (*shrani*), and *jati* (which refers to an identity according to birth, geographic origin, religion, and occupation-oriented social stratification), society (*samaj* – commonly referring to society but also to profession and employment groups), lineage (*bangsha*), and kin group (*gosti*) (see e.g., Jahangir 1981; Khan 1985; Gardner 1995; Bertocci 2002; Sen 2002; Uddin 2006).

Religion and religious-based caste and class identities has been key markers of defining Bengali identity for a long period of time. Religious conversion as a form of “social up-casting and social mobility” or religious conversion as a form of resistance against caste dominancy brought separate religious identities among Bengali ethnic groups based on religion. First, from the 13th to 17th century Muslim rule, conversion from lower caste Hindu to folk Bengali Muslim, and second, several centuries later, mostly during the British colonial rule (1757-1947), conversion from lower class and caste Hindus and Muslims to Christianity, were historical contexts in emerging Bengali identities according to three different religions (see Eaton 1993, Ahmed 2001). Eaton (1993) argued that against the oppression of Hindu caste hierarchy, lower caste poor peasants in Bengal converted to Islam in the early twelfth century. Religious conversion to Christianity, Buddhism and Islam was not to address sin or seek religious peace, but rather to challenge caste and class inequalities (Aloysius 1998). Beaglehole (1967) said that even in the first century a Christian community existed in India but a large scale conversion started in the 18th and 19th centuries by preaching the social gospel of emancipation among the *namasudras* (lower class and caste Hindu population) and depressed classes (“tribal” communities, ethnic minorities) in India (Beaglehole 1967: 62). According to van der Veer, Christianity was introduced as a modern, international, rational, and global religion in colonial India that would oppose the local Hindu and Islamic traditions (van der Veer 2002: 173). However, religious conversion failed to free agricultural labourers, tenants, sharecroppers, artisan groups and other lower caste groups from dominant caste and class identities and ideologies (Aloysius 1998).

Bengali Muslims' lower status *atraf*⁵ identities were also contested by the noble Muslim *ashraf*⁶ who migrated from the West (Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and central Asia) to Bengal (Hardy 1972; Eaton 1993; Aloysius 1998; Ahmed 2001). Sarker (1973) described the Hindu caste view about converted Muslims: "we see similarly lower caste Hindus, all Muslims, and our livestock" (Sarker 1973: 412). Conversion from Hinduism to Christianity failed to overcome caste ideologies and caste differences and, as a result, newly converted Christians in India established the "Hindu Church" (Church for converted Hindus from lower caste and class), and "Brahmin Church" to determine their pre-conversion caste identity (Aloysius 1998: 71). Therefore, the idea of caste ideologies had been significantly active within all major religious groups in Bengal as a commonly accepted marker of defining identity in Indian societies. Religious conversion had little to do with that part.

Furthermore, under the British colonial state, the permanent land settlement of Bengal in 1793 (*Chirosthayi Bondoboasto*), the two-tiered education system, the Bengal partition (1904), and the partition between India and Pakistan (1947) constructed two separate and antagonistic religious and political identities between Hindus and Muslims. In 1793, the British changed land ownership patterns, the land tenure system and the taxation structure in Bengal through the Permanent Settlement Act in Bengal. Land ownership was taken from farmers (*raiyats*), artisans and other occupational groups and transferred to *zamindars* (Rahim 1992: 310). The control of land was transferred from the pre-colonial state to individual *zamindars* who were mostly Hindu believers/elite caste Brahmins, and a few elite class Muslims. Through this change British colonialism broke down the existing land-based class structures, established a sharper caste-based class hierarchy, and raised religious and communal tensions in Bengal (Khan 1985: Rahim 1992: 310). Mukherjee (1973) argued that the British colonial education commission in 1871 made clearly distinct and separate religious groups based on religious orthodoxy between Hindus and Muslims by enforcing the laws of the holy "Quran" for the

⁵ Native Bengali Muslims who converted from lower class and caste Hindu backgrounds, spoke the Bengali language, and ate rice and fish.

⁶ The Muslim preachers, *suffies* (religious saints), and businessmen who migrated from central Asia, and Middle Eastern parts, to Bengal and maintained separate class, ethnic, cultural, ideological, and linguistic identities are commonly defined as the *Ashraf* class.

Mohammedans and the laws of the “*Shastra*” for the Hindus in regards to inheritance, marriage, caste, and other religious activities (Mukharjee 1973: 317; Rahim 1992).

The Arabic, Persian, and Urdu language-based *Madrasha* education offered a new Muslim enlightenment and resultant nostalgia in order to develop separate Muslim religious and cultural identities (Rahim 1992; Ahmed 1989; Aloysious 1998). The introduction of two different streams of education for two different religious communities substantiated the two different ideological and religious identities under British colonial rule (Ahmed 1989; Rahim 1992; Aloysious 1998). It also separated Muslims from other religious and power blocks of colonial Bengal. In addition, the *Faraizi* movement (18th to 19th centuries) that preached core Islamic religious doctrines as opposed to cultural and social unity between Hindus and Muslims, and the immergence of print media in the late 19th century supported the development of a separate Muslim consciousness and identity by publishing and distributing religious books to remote corners in India (Khan 1985; Saberwal 2005).

In the late 19th century, the rapid spread of English education to mostly upper and middle class Hindus as well as upper class Muslims helped to produce a new economic and cultural class in Bengal referred to as Bengali *bhadralok* (gentleman, *babu*) and *bhadromohila* (lady) classes (see Hardy 1972; Ahmed 1989, 2000; Chakrabarty 1989, 2000). The identity of *bhadraloks* and *bhadramahila* were different from the previous land-based elite classes with their British education, European enlightenment ideologies, and secular nostalgia. Politics of language of the British colony can be clearly viewed by looking at the following two statements:

It is the wish and admitted policy of the British Government to render its own language gradually and eventually the language of the public business throughout the century” (The first Governor General of India, Lord William Bentinck wrote to the committee of Public Instruction); and:

The Chairman of the Education Committee, Lord Macaulay himself defined his government position in 1835 by saying “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be the interpreters between us and the millions of whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinions, morality, and intellect” (Quoted by Bottomore 1964: 247- 248).

Alavi defined the colonial *bhadralok* class as ‘salarial’ who served the colonial administration by mediating between the colonial rule and the local population (Alavi 1989: 17). Hunter (1969) argued that not accepting English as the medium of education, Muslims faced huge disadvantages compared to Hindus in having jobs under the colonial administration (Hunter 1969: 144-153; Rahim 1992). African post-colonial scholar Frantz Fanon defined these *Bhadralok* classes in Bengal as “colonial black bodies who want to wear white masks” and the colonial classes were created in the process of cultural alienation (Fanon 1996: 54). Thus, under the British educational systems, two different religious and ideological groups that had been antagonistic to each other were merged.

In 1905, the partition of Bengal by British colonial powers was one of the most significant historical and political events in Bengal, dividing the state according to religion, class, and geography. According to Ahmed (1998), Bengal’s partition was the first step of emerging Bengali Muslim identities in opposition to an identity of Bengali Hindu (Ahmed 1998: 86). Even though in 1911, as a result of various movements by the upper and middle class Hindus, British efforts toward partition were cancelled, class struggle between Hindu and Muslim religious groups, and the control of land and power within society, separated Bengali communities into Hindu and Muslim areas (Khan 1985; Aloysius 1998). The revocation of 1905 Bengal partition was also identified as a Hindu/British conspiracy against Muslims’ economic opportunities and political freedom (Islam 1981). During the final phases of anti-British political contexts in India, the incorporation of Hindu symbols and traditions by the Congress Party, the radical views of Islamic scholars and poets, the communal killings between Hindus and Muslims, and the dominance of class and caste interests among elite Muslims and Hindu leaders provided the major political and economic context of shaping separate Bengali Muslim and Hindu identities (see Islam 1981; Khan 1985; Aloysius 1998). In the end, claiming separate lands for Hindu and Muslims in India was the political base of partition in India, and resulted in the emergence of two nations based on the ideology of religious majority and minority. In this context the following two statements are important to read to understand the political context of Bengal separation, and the emergence of Muslim nationalism in East Bengal as opposed to Bengal as a united ethnic and linguistic nation state:

1. In 1930, a famous Muslim thinker and poet who also was a pioneer of imagining separate lands for Muslims in India said, “Islam is a building force which integrates various ethnic and linguistic origins” (Islam 1981: 54).

2. In 1940, All India Muslim League Conference, Jinnah (Father of Pakistani nation) said, “The Hindus and Muslims belong to different religious philosophies, social customs, and literatures. They neither intermarry nor dine together. They belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions (Islam 1981: 55).

In 1947, India and Pakistan emerged as two separate nation states free from the British Empire and were divided according to two major religious groups, Hindus and Muslims. Aijaj Ahmed (2000) said, “Bengal partition [was] identified as [a] prelude of [the] partition of 1947 that was [a] successful mission of [the] British to distinguish communal groups and apply divide and rule policy” (Ahmed 2000: 5). East Bengal (now Bangladesh) was connected as East Pakistan to West Pakistan as part of the Muslim Pakistani state, with its Muslim majority. However, in 1941 54.7% of the people in East Bengal were Muslims, 29.3% were Hindus and 16% belonged to other religious groups (Chowdhury 1984: 72). Therefore, almost 45% of East Bengal belonged to religious minority groups even when East Bengal was tagged with Pakistan on the basis of a Muslim religious majority. Panday (1999) argued that colonial history created the powerful ideological discourse of “majority” and “minority”, but had no relationship to numerical differences (Panday 1999: 610).

The Pan Islamic unity and brotherhood (*ummah*), Muslim identity, and lands required for the Muslim populations have been the ideological basis of Pakistani Islamic nationalism, and the emergence of the nation of Pakistan. Bengali Muslims in East Bengal, who were socially and politically excluded under the British colonial state and who also commonly worked under Hindu *zamindars*, wanted freedom from caste and class dominancy. Bengali Muslims expected Islamic justice and equal opportunities under the Pakistani state. Within a few years the Bengali population in East Bengal realized they were colonized again in the name of Islamic nationalism in Pakistan. The language, culture, regionalism, ethnicity, caste, religion, and culture of East Pakistani Bengali Muslim populations became the key political issues in the Pakistani state (see Nicholas 1973; Khan 1985; Uddin 2006). Ethnic Bengali Muslims’ identity and their

national bureaucratic class interests within the post-colonial Pakistani state were subjugated by the West Pakistani civil and military ruling blocks, which were predominantly Urdu-speaking ethnic Punjabis. In the first national assembly meeting of Pakistan in February 1948, it was proposed that members must speak either Urdu or English language at the assembly meeting. The decision was protested in East Pakistan by a Bengali Parliament member as well as Dhaka University students and the general public. Later, in March 19, 1948, Mr. Jinnah (founder and father of the nation in Pakistan) came to visit Bangladesh and proposed Urdu to be the official language of Pakistan. After his death in 1952 Mr. Khawaja Nazimuddin as the prime minister of Pakistan came to Dhaka (capital of East Pakistan) and declared “only Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan” (www.banglapedia.org). This was followed shortly afterwards by student protests on February 21, 1952, in which students at Dhaka University protested against the language decision. Several students and people on the streets were shot to death by Pakistani state police during the protest movement for the mother tongue (Uddin 2006), and Bengali was recognized as a state language of Bengal.

Again, East Pakistan experienced a new form of economic, cultural, and political colonialization under Muslim nationalism in Pakistan. The language movement challenged the false consciousness of the Islamic state and Islamic unity in the post-colonial Pakistani state, and opened up a space of resistance for economic, cultural and political freedom (see Omar 1969, 1980; Khan 1985). Dominant Pakistani power viewed Bengali culture, language, music, traditions, and Islam in East Pakistan more connected to “Hindu” traditions and cultures in India. Bengali Muslims (*atraf*) were identified as “not pure” Muslims in contrast with Urdu speaking noble (*ashraf*) Muslims in Pakistan. Under Pakistani oppressive rule, Bengali Muslims could uphold their linguistic, cultural and ethnic identities in opposition to Muslim identity, and they organized as a united ethnic and cultural group against Pakistani dominancy. People of East Pakistan raised political demands for regional autonomy (reflected in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s 1966 six-point program), a 1970 election result in which *Awami League* (a major political party in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh) won a vast majority, capturing 167 seats out of 313 in the Assembly, and 298 seats out of a total 310 in the East Pakistan Provincial Assembly (Government of India 1971, vol.1: 130). This led to the independence of Bangladesh in

1971 when West Pakistan did not transfer power to the victorious political party in East Pakistan. After a nine-month battle against the West Pakistani Army, the sacrifice of two million lives, and the rape of thirty thousand women, in 1971, a new nation, Bangladesh, emerged.

BENGALI VERSUS BANGLADESHI IDENTITY

Bangladesh would have a Bengali language, ethnicity, and cultural identity connected to their land. This emerges as a triumph over the Bengali Muslim identity that had evolved during the colonial and post-colonial rule by Pakistanis (see Nicholas 1973: 77; Khan 1985; Ghosh 1993). The initial constitution establishing Bangladesh in 1972 ignored Islamic principals and instead emphasized secularism, nationalism, socialism and democracy (see Khan 1985: 845). In 1972, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first democratically elected Prime Minister in Bangladesh and the leader of Awami League (AL), a political party that lead the Independence War in 1971, argued that secularism does not represent the absence of religion. All religious groups would practice their own religious traditions and religious rites, and no communal politics would be allowed in this country to avoid any rise of fascist organizations like *al-Badar*, or *Razakaars* who had been local collaborators of Pakistan (Connell 2001: 188). The father of the nation, Sheikh Mujib, announced Bengali nationalism with a pre-colonial homogeneous ideology and “imagination” of Bengali culture – “*Sonar Bangla*” (golden Bengal) that all enlightened Bengal poets imagined (see Jahingir 1986; Chakrabarty 2000). In this process, Sheikh Mujib wanted to unite the entire Bengali population in Bangladesh as an ethnic and cultural group despite their different religious identities, but he also excluded a good number of small ethnic minority populations who had been living in this land for centuries.

After the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman [*jatir pita* (father of Bangladesh), *Bonga Bondu* (friend of Bengal)] on August 15, 1975, Major Ziaur Rahman (Zia) seized power in 1977. He brought forward a constitutional amendment in 1977, removed the secular ideology of the state, and imposed Islamic symbols in the country, adding *Bismillahir-Raham-ir Rahim* (this is an Arabic verse from Quran which means “in the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful”) at the beginning of the constitution of the nation. His rule again emphasized the Muslim traditions by emphasizing the national

Muslim 'Bangladeshi' identity as a mere differentiation from the Hindu Bengalis of West Bengal (see Nicholas 1973; Khan 1985; Ahmed 1989; Ghosh 1993). Furthermore, he declared *Joy Bengla* (victory to Bengal), which was the key slogan during the Independence War and united the entire Bengali population regardless of their religious identity in Bangladesh) as an un-Islamic term of nationalism which was closely connected to the Hindu nationalist slogan *joy Hind*. He popularized *Bangladesh Zindabath* (long live Bangladesh) that echoed the Pakistani Islamic nationalist slogan *Pakistan Zindabath* (long live Pakistan). All civil servants were ordered to start all public speeches with the words *Bismillahir Rahmani Rahim* (Ghosh 1983: 700). Zia also declared Friday as an alternative holy day to Sunday, as Friday is the traditional Muslim holy day. All electronic media started broadcasting the Islamic/Arabic greeting *Khoda Hafaz* (good bye in Arabic) instead of the Bengali forms of greeting, and *Azan* (call for prayer following Muslim tradition) five times a day. Policewomen were forced from their traffic duties to private desk jobs in keeping with Islamic traditions that removed women from roles of public responsibility in order to demonstrate to Arab nations that Bangladesh was becoming a true Islamic country (Khan 1985: 849). In cold war politics, Zia switched diplomatic relations of Bangladesh from left wing Russia and India (the power blocks supporting the war against West Pakistan) to right wing Arab countries and capitalist America, even though they were not in favour of emerging Bangladesh as an independent nation. By decorating Bangladesh with Islamic symbols and norms, Bangladesh was able to enter into Middle Eastern labour markets, and gained a good deal of aid from Muslim nations. In the mid 1980s, many Bangladeshi young professionals (e.g., engineers, doctors) and unskilled workers migrated to Arab nations. Later, in 1978, Major Zia formed the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and imposed Bangladeshi national identity to be more Muslim in religion, and to be less ethnic and secular. Thus, the regime of Major Zia was a time when Bengali secular ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identities were politically replaced by Bangladeshi Islamic nationalism, and Muslim national, cultural, and social identity as an aggregate nation.

Later in 1982, General Ershad seized power with his nine years of rule in Bangladesh as an army-backed civil government; again Bangladesh was declared an Islamic state by imposing Islamic norms and traditions by the state media in order to

make his political position safer. In 1988, the Parliament passed Section 2A of the constitution and declared Islam as the state religion of Bangladesh, although noting that “other religions will be practiced in peace and harmony” (see Khan 1985; Feldman 1999). Army-backed civil bureaucracy and military regimes in Bangladesh imposed religious norms, ideologies and symbols as a form of national identity, and used religion as a means of protecting their illegal power (Khan 1985; Jahangir 1986; Kabeer 1991a). Both military rulers negotiated for Muslim religious-based political parties, established pro-Pakistani radical religious political leaders who carried mostly anti-Bangladesh, anti-India, and anti-Hindu ideologies, and supported expansion of “*madrasah*”⁷ education in Bangladesh.

After long political, social and cultural movements in 1990, General Ershad was removed from power, and in the 1991 general election the BNP gained a majority and formed government with the leadership of Khalada Zia (widow of Major Zia). In the post-independent political discourse and practices in Bangladesh, religion became a key component in national politics. All the time AL was criticized by the BNP as a party of anti-Islam, pro-Hindu India and a broker of India (*Indier dalal*). Within the political propaganda, it was said, “if Bangladeshi citizens vote for the AL, Bangladesh would be transformed into a province of India; even within Mosques in Bangladesh, *Ulu Dhoni* (a unique style of sound made by Hindu women with their tongues when they pay homage to their goddess) would be performed. Even the Awami League as a political party always argued for *Dharmo Niropako Bangladesh* (neutrality to all religious groups, a concept which is different than Western perceptions of secularism), but before the 1996 election, the leader of the party carried Islamic symbols, covered her head with a white cloth, and asked for votes in the national media. After winning the 1996 election, Bengali ethnic, cultural and linguistic traditions were practiced widely, but nothing changed significantly legally or constitutionally in providing secular religious identity among all Bangladeshi nationals. In the year 2001, BN *Jammat e-Islami*⁸, and two other pro-

⁷ *Madrasah* generally refers to a school where Islamic theology, laws and rules are taught. In the post-9/11 global contexts these Islamic theology schools are represented as spaces where religious orthodoxy and terrorism are taught.

⁸ The party that supported Pakistan as an Islamic nation in opposition to ethnic and cultural secular Bengali states, and during the liberation war in 1971, many members of that party were actively involved in the killing of Bengali intellectuals, the killing and raping of Hindus and pro Bangladesh Muslim families, and

Islamist political parties (commonly called a four-party alliance) formed government. Between 2001 and 2008, Bangladesh was transformed from a “moderate Islamic nation” (the term Western nations gave after ‘9/11’ as a less fundamentalist Muslim country compared to others) to a radical Islamic state, and various radical Islamic groups were financed by state power and mushroomed in growth. During this period, a new and more radical Islamic greeting term was introduced in the electronic media – *Allah Hafiz* (May Allah be your Guardian, good bye) – replaying the old Islamic term *Khuda Hafiz* (May God be your Guardian, also good bye). According to radical Islamic scholars, *khuda* does not represent the Muslim *Allah*; many other religious groups also use the term *khuda* (Christian God, Hindu God, Persian God) in worshipping their gods. In the post-election contexts in 2001, a large number of minority Hindu women were raped by the members of the government party members, and many Hindu families were forced to leave the country. Their land, businesses, women, and homes were grasped by the Islamist radical power blocks in Bangladesh. There was a saying in Bangladesh that “all minorities vote for AL, so it’s better to vanish them all.” It is not always that Awami League protected the minority groups, but this was a better alternative for religious minority groups. As most of the Bangladeshi populations are Muslim believers, both parties use religious issues in varying degrees in order to get attention from the religious voters, and they start their election campaigning to pay homage to a saint (*pir*) known as *Hajarat Shah Jalal*, who was one of the key missionaries of Islam in Bengal. In 2009, the Awami League won the election and formed government. One of the election mandates was to go back to the 1972 Constitution (four state principals: democracy, nationalism, socialism and secularism) to transform the country into a secular state. The Bangladesh High Court also supported the change but Awami League was reluctant to announce Bangladesh as a secular state, to ban religion-based political parties, and to remove the Arabic *Bismillahir Rahmani Rahim* from the Constitution. The party is confused because the party chairperson and Prime Minister of Bangladesh already declared that the Islamic word *Bismilla* will not be removed from the constitution, but they want to reform Bangladesh as a *Dhormo Niropekhho* country (i.e., a country where all religious groups equally enjoy

in supporting the Pakistani Army as collaborators. Members of the party never accepted Independence of Bangladesh or Bengali cultural and ethnic traditions.

the freedom to practice their religious rituals in Bangladesh). At the end of the day votes matter to any political party.

After Independence, within the last forty years Islamic political traditions, norms, and symbols have been imposed and practiced in Bangladesh. As a result, the majority Bangladeshi citizens are forced to believe that Islam is part of their culture and their identity in relation to their ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities. Under the oppressive state structure and antagonistic religious norms, the religious minority groups (e.g., Bangladeshi Hindus and Christians, Buddhists, and other small ethnic and religious groups) have shaped their identity on the basis of their own religious traditions. In order to protect their rights as citizens, Bangladeshi religious minority groups have formed a common platform – *Bangladesh Hindu Christian and Buddhist Oykko Porishad*. As a result, the Bengali population in Bangladesh is ideologically segregated into different streams of nationalism, political partitions, and cultural traditions.

After Independence, along with local national political religious events, there are several other external factors that also shaped cultural and social aspects of Bangladesh. For example, many developmental charity organizations, International NGOs, and multinational corporations (World Bank, United Nation Development Program, International Monetary Fund, and others) entered into Bangladesh with foreign aid in order to rescue cyclone and war-devastated Bangladesh. New messages of modernization, foreign aid, agricultural technologies, and later debt crisis and structural adjustment policies guided by the World Bank, closely connected Bangladesh to neoliberal global systems (see Khan 1998; Rahman 1998; Buckland 2004: 145). These global processes have created new Western imaginaries and class differences in Bangladesh.

Migrations to Arab nations, beginning mainly after the 1973 oil boom, were another important aspect of the formation of Bangladeshi identity. Those Bangladeshi skilled workers, doctors, engineers, and unskilled workers who migrated to Arab nations brought petrodollars and new religious norms to Bangladesh. These two components replaced traditional class and gender roles in rural Bangladesh. A small number of Bangladeshis also migrated to Europe and North American countries and they brought economic success stories of transnational migration to urban communities in Bangladesh.

As a former colony of England, Bangladeshis were successful in building a strong diaspora community in England (Gardner 1996).

Later, in the early 1990s, improvements in communication technology, media, satellite television, Hollywood movies, the incorporation of English schools into the Bengali education system, the influence of the British Council, American Cultural Centre, and many other global organizations, provided global ‘imaginaries’ and ‘nostalgias’ (see Appadurai 1996) to Bangladeshis. These initiatives helped Bangladeshis make closer connections to global financial institutions and cultural flows. In response to globalization forces in Bangladesh, most of the upper and upper middle class families now are sending their children to English medium schools for education. There are as many as 100 private universities, and all public universities are reproducing new social class ideologies that do not contest global discourses and dominant ideologies of the global world. After graduation, due to the lack of opportunities and political unrest, and imagery of *bidesh* (foreign land), an increasing number of university graduates sit for English language tests (TOEFL, IELTS, GRE, SAT, and others) to go abroad for higher studies and for transnational migration. New generations are watching 100 Hindi and English satellite channels, and the impact of communication technologies such as cell phones and the Internet have made huge cultural changes and have transformed social and cultural norms in that society. On the one hand, with the post-Independence *Islamitization* process, politically close interactions with Islamic nations, and migrations to Arab nations have brought core Islamic religious norms to Bangladesh, as well as more antagonistic reactions towards minority religious groups. On the other hand, closer interaction with global institutions and financial capital, the emergence of the garment and fashion industries, faster communication, and the dominance of Indian soap operas in Bengali households have changed Bengali cultural and social norms in Bangladesh. In response to globalization processes and forces, local cultures have been shaped in various locations. Therefore, the idea of local is not a static phenomenon, and authentic cultural, ethnic and national identities are not connected to any bounded location that Appadurai (1996, 2002) argued. Globalization as a process in Bangladesh is not just a homogenization of cultures, Westernization and McDonaldization; in many contexts it is also *Indianization* and *Arabization*.

The body of literature reviewed in this chapter provides important and critical conceptual lenses to locate pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial key markers of Bengali identity, as well as the debate between Bengali and Bangladeshi nationalism and national identity in the context of globalization, transnational migration, and multiculturalism in Canada. A critical and contextual analysis of Bangladeshi immigrants' identity negotiation processes will be described in the coming chapters based on the theoretical and conceptual issues of colonialism and post-colonialism, globalization, transnational migration, and multiculturalism. My field experiences among the Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Toronto will be the topic of the following chapters and will highlight the aforementioned issues.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN RELATION TO TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

Human population has been mobile since the early stages of civilization (Miller and Van Esterik 2010). But early anthropological research, and especially the colonial empiricist, evolutionist, and diffusionist anthropologists created isolated and exotic “others”, and disjointed “noble savage” images of many non-European cultural and ethnic groups (e.g., Radcliffe-Brown’s 1922 research in the Andaman Islands). European anthropologists came to India to study a “tribal group” or village, and primarily the caste system in Indian as a bounded and isolated subject. This tradition in anthropological research is called “village studies” (see Adrian Mayer’s 1960 book *Caste and Kinship in Central India*). The concept of culture, which is the cornerstone in anthropology, commonly was studied in relation to an isolated location and defined as “local culture” (Geertz 1973). Anthropologists used to gain status and prestige if the research site was more “foreign” and “exotic” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Appadurai said that “place is the landscape of anthropology and location of ethnographers” (Appadurai 1988b: 16). Anthropologists created place through their enlightened imaginations of ‘field’, ‘arena’ and ‘location’ of cultures where local people were born, had an identifiable culture, practiced rituals and eventually would die in that locality (Appadurai 1988: 40-46). Anthropologists used to lead their readers from “common place to proper place” by making core relationships between location and authentic cultural tradition, which implies a caste system exists only in India (Appadurai 1996: 57). Increased global movements of peoples as transnational migrants has widely distributed what Appadurai called “ethnoscapes”, together with movement of cultures through “mediascapes and

imaginations” that have deterritorialized cultures and intensified their practices; therefore, caste systems are visible in various global cities outside from India (Appadurai 1996: 35-57; see also Appadurai 1988b). Appadurai is suggesting that we practice “cosmopolitan ethnography” in understanding cultures and traditions (Appadurai 1991: 196). Long before globalization scholars like Appadurai, anthropologists have questioned images of noble savages, exotic cultures, and isolated “others” long before globalization processes became prominent. In contrast to bounded ideas of anthropological research and cultures, Eric Wolf (1982: 7) argued that, since the 14th century, through overseas voyages, the slave trades, colonialism and pre-capitalist dependent trade relationships connected cultures, goods and people of various corners of the world, and that these interconnected histories were subsumed in an invented history of Europe. The World Systems scholars and Dependency theorists have also critically analyzed how peripheral economies are controlled and exploited by core countries due to unequal exchange systems (Baran 1952; Frank 1967; Wallerstein 1974). Therefore, cultures, goods, and populations have been mobile as well as interconnected in opposition to ideas of isolated, disconnected “noble savages” of early anthropology.

Current globalization forces have intensified the degree of connectivity of cultures and economies, and humans’ transnational movements all over the world. On the one hand, the rapid growth of communication technologies and media have provided new cultural and social imaginaries as a driving force in the move of people from their homelands to enter global locations as migrants, refugees, and cheap wage labour (Ong 1987; Gardner 1995; Appadurai 1996). On the other hand, post-Second World War neoliberal economic, financial and trade agreements between the West and poor nations, strong multinational corporations’ interventions in local economies that led to aid dependency upon the global financial institutions, and later structural adjustment policies in the homelands of transnational migrants had been key macro forces to displace local populations that converted them into transnational immigrants (Binford 2003; Miles 2004: 21; Parreñas 2005). The amount of transnational migration is greater than any time in history. It is estimated that almost 3.1% (214 million) of the world’s total population lives outside their home countries (International Organization for Migration 2012 Report). The Colonial mode of production under British India was a proletarianization

and marginalization process that forced small peasants, lower castes, and artisans in Bengal to migrate internally to Indian cities as jute mill workers (see Chakrabarty 1989). Later in the post-independent agricultural reform (green revolution), natural disasters, political and economic insecurities, opportunities for jobs in expanding markets internationally, and current globalization processes have forced Bangladeshi skilled and unskilled workers to migrate transnationally. In order to address the huge numbers of people that have migrated from their homelands and have moved from one place to another as exiles, refugees, guest workers, and transnational immigrants, anthropological research methodologies and locations of research have been changed and reorganized.

Globalization-led transnational migration and transnational communication are now continuously reshaping boundaries of cultures, locations of cultures, images of field, and anthropological field research methods. In looking at various global flows and movements of human population, Appadurai (1986, 1988a, 1988b, 1996) criticized the “positivist”, “empiricist”, “melanesianist” and “metropolis” ideas of people and culture, and in relation to specific places, but movements of people and technologies disjointed cultural and ethnic boundaries and created different ‘scapes’. Furthermore, he criticized ‘area study’ as a notion in anthropology, and warned against the “tendency for places to become showcases for specific issues” (Appadurai 1986: 57). Transnational migration reinvented exotic locations and cultures in global places, therefore, anthropologists do not need to conduct “fieldwork” in India to study the caste system because it can be studied anywhere in this global world. Thus, some argue that globalization-led transnational migration disowns the idea that culture should have a root, a stability and a territorialized existence (see Clifford 1988: 338). This argument has led anthropologists to think about the move from single-sited to multi-sited field research. Faster movements of cultures, humans, and technologies and their organized simulations and re-rootedness in various locations as a global process also are guiding current anthropologists to understand place “polythetically”, which will offer several configurations of sameness and contrasting images of place (Appadurai 1988: 40-46).

Global communications and interactions in this current world reduces hegemonic and powerful presence of Western anthropologists in various “other” locales. In this global world, not all anthropologists are White, Westerners, or representatives of

dominant European cultures; the traditional “we” anthropologists are in many “they” societies and cultures. Anthropologists are no longer carrying a single national, cultural, and ethnic identity. Native anthropologists are also mobile phenomena in many global locations as professionals, university teachers, researchers, activists, aid workers and international students in Western and North American universities. They have become new powerful academics and experts of diasporic cultures who define their anthropological status in relation to their ‘authentic cultural roots’ as well as to global and diasporic locations. Abu-Lughod (1993) called them “*halfies*”. In response to global forces, anthropologists are also from among transnational migrants, and are many are conducting research among their own ethnic and cultural communities in various global locations, as well as in other cultural and national contexts. Therefore, in this global world the conventional images of white middle class anthropologists in exotic non-white and non-European locations have been changed. At the same time, native anthropologists are also becoming “global”, borderless, and transnational with their training in Western universities and their theoretical orientations and academic communications. Thus, both anthropologists and anthropological research subjects, and locations of research, have been shaped and reshaped in the contexts of globalization and transnational global migration.

As a Bangladeshi Bengali and immigrant graduate student in a Canadian university who is conducting research among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada, my involvement in this research is an example of ‘dislocation’ of the anthropological field and culture, and an engagement of a native anthropologist in multiple cultural locations. Being a researcher, my migration to Canada, my imaginaries of conducting research within my ‘own’ ethnic and cultural groups in Toronto, and my own revising Bengali identity are all shaped within the contexts of globalization and transnationalism. Therefore, my researcher self is very much engaged in the research project as a subject as well as object. Reflexivity, hybridity, and continuous communication between anthropologists as ‘self’ and ‘other’ in the research process have brought flexibility and reflexivity into exploring complexities of my research topics.

FIELD RESEARCH LOCATION

Bangladeshi immigrants have spread all over the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Social networks, job locations, marital status, kinship networks, social groupings, regional groupings, class, occupations, and religious identities are all major factors among Bangladeshi immigrants in choosing locations to settle down in Canada. Sutuma Ghosh (2007) said that Bangladeshi immigrants' social network, kinship, friendship, brotherhood (*desi*), cultural and religious obligations, homeland connections, and transnational communication between families play significant roles in finding a residence for new immigrants in Canada (Ghosh 2007: 238). I conducted my research in four different locations of Toronto to explore diversified Bangladeshi immigrant groups according to their years of migration, patterns of migration, age, occupational status, and class. The primary location of field research was "Bangla Town" in East York, Toronto – a stretch of Danforth Avenue between Dawes Road and Victoria Park Avenue, and around Danforth Avenue and the Victoria Park area (Keung 2008). A major portion (70%) of Bangladeshi immigrants lives in several high-rise apartments – Crescent Town and Teesdale Place – close to Victoria Park subway station (see Ghosh 2007). Bangladeshi immigrants also live in personally-owned houses, side by side houses, and rental houses owned by Bangladeshi immigrants close to and around Victoria Park subway station. This residential area surrounded by Victoria Park subway station is commonly identified as "Bengali Para" among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto. The "Bengali Para" and all Bangladeshi stores on Danforth Avenue all together are identified as "Bangla Town" in Toronto. The subway connection to "Bengali Para" and walking distance to "Bangla Town" has been the key reasons for new Bangladeshi immigrants to locate in Crescent Town areas. Most of the immigrants who are living in this area are young professionals, married with one or two children, and working hard to be "successful" as immigrants in Canada. They are upper and middle class Bangladeshi educated and skilled workers who have migrated to Canada in response to the new immigration policy of 1988 and to meet the demand of skilled workers in Canadian job markets. I incorporated respondents from this group from "Bengali Para" to understand their social and economic class negotiation processes in their immigrant lives in Canada. "Bengali Para" in "Bangla Town" commonly represents an image of lower and lower

middle class Bangladeshi immigrant population in Toronto. I have spent the majority of my field research time in the Danforth and Victoria Park intersection area and Danforth and Dawes Road intersection, where a “little Bangladesh” has been shaped with many ethnic grocery stores, music and video stores, garment and clothing stores, food stores, medical centres, political offices, computer stores, local newspaper offices, restaurants, cultural institutes, book stores, and remittance transferring banks. I conducted many interviews, attended chat sessions (*adda*)⁹ with artists, cultural workers, singers, business personnel and community leaders in Bangla Town. It has become a heart of all social, cultural, economic, political and religious activities of Bangladeshi immigrants. I selected “Bangla Town” as my principle research site to observe day-to-day interactions with fellow Bangladeshis and to explore more deeply my understanding of young and professional immigrants’ class and occupational identity and gender dynamisms within immigrant families.

Another major location of my field research was in the western part of downtown Toronto between Dufferin and Dundas West subway stations. Many Bangladeshi immigrants live mainly on Bloor Street West and Dufferin Street areas surrounded by Dufferin Mall, Bloor Street West and Lansdowne Avenue, and Jamison Avenue area in downtown Toronto. I lived on Bloor Street and Symington Avenue during my field research in Toronto. It is the oldest Bangladeshi immigrant settlement in Toronto, where many Bangladeshi immigrants used to live years ago but now many of them have moved to the Eastern part of the city because downtown has become too expensive to live. Immigrants who are living in these areas are somewhat settled, having come to Canada almost a decade ago. Most of them own houses. However, many new immigrants who have started living here in rental houses and apartments are mostly connected to the older immigrants as friends, in-laws, and relatives. At first, a Bangladeshi grocery store opened on Bloor Street West. A sizeable number of Bangladeshi immigrants live on Jameson Avenue and the majority of them have come from Sylhet District in Bangladesh.

⁹ *Adda* refers to an informal chat session in the Bengali language. It is organized among Bengalis according to their similar class, age, political and gender identity. It is a means of exchanging ideas, knowledge, and thoughts among those gathered. Generally, college and university student groups, or educated middle class Bengali professionals (artists, doctors, writers, poets, social activists, actors, singers) meet in a specific place once or twice a week, for example, at a tea or coffee shop, club, or a street corner and talk about politics, art, culture, and literature, or any other local and global issues. It is one of the key markers of Bengali class, cultural, and ethnic identity.

European immigrants, for example, Italian, Greek, and Portuguese immigrants, have been living in these areas for many decades. I selected this location in my research to understand perspectives from earlier settlers of Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants to Canada. Immigrants' age, length of stay in Canada and the economic positions they have gained as immigrants have contributed distinct and important insights to my research. It is also a key location in Toronto where many Bangladeshi Christian immigrants have concentrated in their settlement and where they have established a "Bangla Church". I incorporated Bangladeshi immigrant families from this location to focus on middle and lower middle class Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto.

I also conducted fieldwork in the Regent Park area (bounded by Parliament Street, Dundas Street East, and Gerrard Street East) – an area that was known as Cabbage Town – where many Bangladeshi immigrants live in government-supported social housing facilities. According to the Toronto Social Development Plan 2007 report, about 15% of the total population at Regent Park community are Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants, and Bengali is the dominant language in this neighbourhood (see Toronto Social Development Plan 2007 report). It is one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Canada. Comparatively, lower economic classes of Bangladeshi immigrants live in this area, along with economically less solvent, less educated, relatively older immigrants who had come to Canada as refugees but later gained Canadian citizenship status, and who now are working mostly in small businesses, and restaurants. Many of them live in housing provided by the government. In order to incorporate in my research different classes, ages, educational backgrounds and patterns of migration, I included Bangladeshi immigrant families of this Regent Park area. In order to visualize my research locations, to connect with research populations, and to contextualize research findings, I use two folk maps (Figure 1: Folk Map for "Bangla Town" and Figure 2: Folk Map for Regent Park location). These two folk maps were drawn by a male research respondent (age 47) who had lived in Regent Park in the first two years of his immigrant life in Canada, and who later moved to "Bangla Town". These two "folk maps" acknowledge "emic" perspectives of Bangladeshi Bengali ethnic and cultural boundaries in the multicultural immigrant city of Toronto.

Immigrants who migrated to Canada at least fifteen years ago, and who gained economic stability, prefer to live in the suburban areas of Toronto, for example, Brampton, Mississauga, and Eglington West areas. I had to expand my area of research to suburban areas in order to grasp the professional, economically solvent, and elite Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto. In this regard, my research area was expanded to Brampton and Mississauga in Toronto. Therefore, I conducted multi-sited research (see Hannerz 1998; Fischer 1999) that, according to Bourdieu (1966 and 2002: 9-4), offered me methodological options to grasp empirical concepts and result in multiple places.

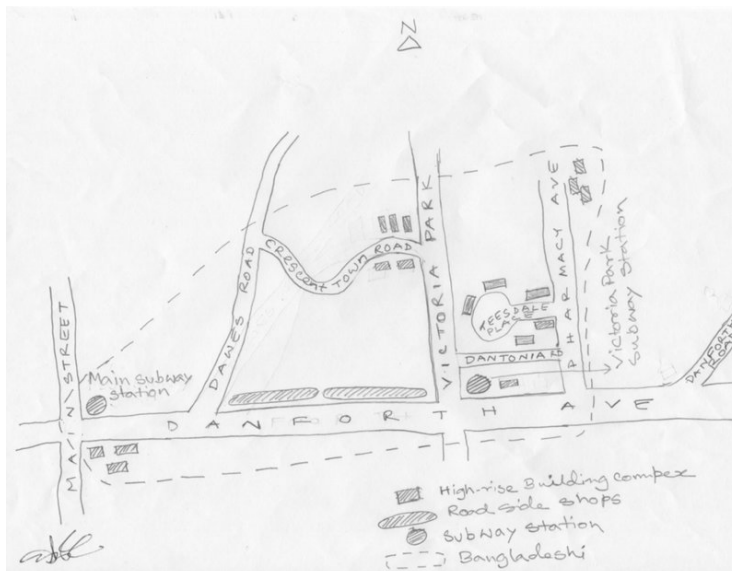


FIGURE 1: FOLK MAP OF BANGLADESHI AREA, "BANGLA TOWN", TORONTO

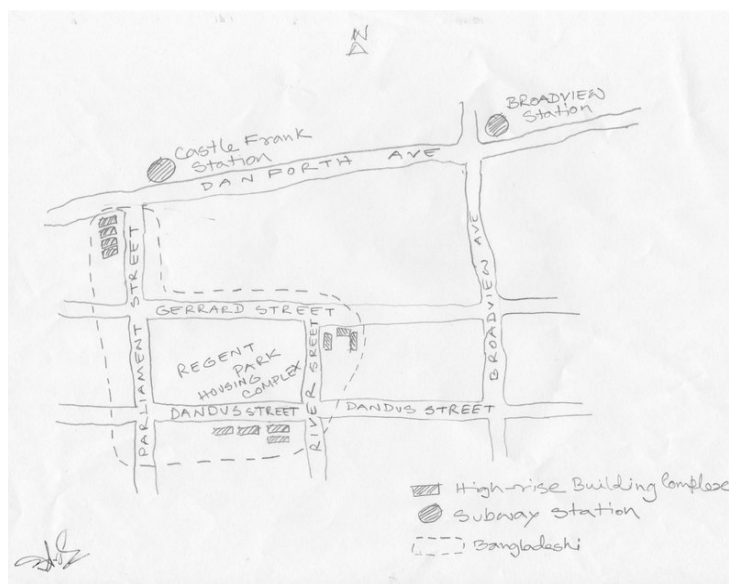


FIGURE 2: FOLK MAP OF BANGLADESHI AREA, REGENT PARK, TORONTO

FIELDWORK PHASES

The research was conducted in two different phases. One was very informal; a pre-fieldwork communication with the community members to get some basic information about the community and introduce myself and my research objectives to the research population. I did that part of the research in Toronto in the summer of 2005. The second phase was formal field research that I conducted in 2007 and in 2008. It is somewhat problematic for me as an anthropologist to distinguish between a formal and an informal stage of fieldwork because I also am a transnational immigrant like my research subjects. The anthropologists' mindset, imagination, on-going communication, personal observation, and day-to-day activities as an immigrant sometimes crossed the boundary between formal and informal phases of fieldwork, between field and home, and between insider and outsider, subject and object, and "emic" (native's perspectives of culture, or "native authority") and "etic" (outsider's criteria and explanations of a culture) models of field research (Goodenough 1956). In opposition to Goodenough, Harris (1976) argued that it is difficult to distinguish between a person who has proper authority of her/his culture but who does not live in a community, and a native speaker who is not equivalent to an anthropologist in terms of cultural and institutional power. As a Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant, while I was conducting research among "my own ethnic immigrant community", it was very difficult for me to separate and maintain strict boundaries between "emic" and "etic" perspectives of my research. In order to deal with the dilemma of subjectivity and objectivity, I took two paths: 1) as an "etic" researcher, I explained Bangladeshi immigrants' identity negotiation processes in relation to colonialism and post-colonialism, globalization, and multicultural perspectives (see Headland, Pick and Harris 1990); and 2) I incorporated a post-modern reflexive path that offered the research population the power to speak in their own voices about their cultural, ethnic, and religious communications, tensions and re-positions in Canada. However, I think that my connection to an academic institution, various screening processes of approving the research proposal, academic guidance from my supervisory committee, and having ethics in research approval by the university, gradually took me from informal visits to a formal phase of my research.

Phase One of the Study (May 2005 – August 2005)

The informal and pre-fieldwork communication with the potential research participants was conducted in the summer of 2005, which eventually prepared me for finalizing my objectives and topics of my research. I spent four months in Toronto living with my maternal cousin's family. The main reason for my visit was to work and to make some money to pay my university tuition fees as a graduate student. I did two jobs with a good number of Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto who were mostly involved in the food industry. First, I found two Bangladeshi immigrants working in an Italian restaurant as "Italian Chef", and I was hired as a dishwasher because my relatives in Toronto knew one of the chefs. That was the first time I clearly observed how Bengali ethnic and cultural identity was negotiated in an immigrant setting in Canada. I also came to know that networks among members of the same ethnic groups, kinship relationship and national identity play significant roles in the settlement process. During that time I learned to know many Bangladeshi immigrant families through my kinship networks, and was able to visit many families together with my relatives. Through my various social visits, I was able to introduce myself to immigrant communities, mostly Bangladeshi Hindu and Christian families in Canada. My skills in making people laugh, cracking jokes with different Bengali and English accents in several chat sessions (*adda*) mostly after meals, and my little knowledge of playing the *tabla* (an Indian/Bangladeshi musical instrument consisting of two pieces of drums that are generally played with Bengali songs) also helped me to make my presence known to the immigrant communities. I was also able to share my potential future research topics and goals among the Bangladeshi immigrants. I was given assurance that I would be supported in my proposed research by connecting to potential informants who could provide me with a clear understanding of Bangladeshi immigrant communities and their contact information. I was also assured that they would arrange time from their busy lives in Canada and share their stories of migration to Canada, their lived experience, as well as personal and community struggles as Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto. This pre-fieldwork four-month visit in Toronto helped me to formulate the objectives of my research, research questions, the focus of my research topics, and potential research locations and several potential research participants for my formal field research in Toronto.

From the experience of my pre-fieldwork connections and experiences, I started the second phase and the “formal” one-year period of fieldwork (September 2007 to August 2008) among the Bangladeshi immigrant communities. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I did not feel like a total stranger among my research population. First of all, I had a clear idea about the city and about the Bangladeshi immigrant communities. Second, I could communicate with immigrants in my mother tongue Bengali, as well as in English. And third, my pre-fieldwork connections and prior informal networks reduced my cultural shock in the field. I was able to begin my field research by arranging for basic physical accommodation in Toronto. Detailed steps of my field research follow.

Phase Two of the Study (September 2007 – October 2007)

In the first stage of my formal field research, I had to find a place to stay for a year in Toronto and I was thinking of staying in “Bengali Para” close to “Bangla Town”, which is the heart of the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Canada. Initially my wife, our eight-year-old daughter and I were welcomed to my cousin’s house with whom I had lived for four months in the year 2005. I was looking for an apartment in the Victoria Park area, but it was rather difficult to find one because I could not provide assurance of steady income in Toronto as an international student researcher in Canada. Then I realized how difficult it is to rent an apartment if someone does not have enough credit history, job security, authentic income, and two guarantors in Canada. I started thinking about how new immigrants from Bangladesh manage to find their first house in this city. Then my second option was to stay in another Bengali-concentrated area in Toronto, on Bloor Street West (Bloor and Dufferin, Bloor and Lansdowne) where all my relatives live in Toronto. Finally, I asked whether my cousin and his family (his wife and three children) might accommodate us and they happily agreed to share a room with us in their three-bedroom house in downtown Toronto. It was a great help and support on my cousin’s part. I then arranged for a phone and Internet connection to start communicating with people I was introduced to before.

In the second stage, I began phoning various Bangladeshi immigrant families based on my pre-fieldwork communication – friends of my cousins, and immigrants with whom I had worked in 2005. I also started communicating with Bangladeshi settlement workers, social and cultural workers, community leaders, and religious workers. I also

started attending social and cultural gatherings, church services, and made appointments for getting potential research participants.

In the third stage, I made appointments with immigrant families for research work. I met with immigrant families, and explained my research issues, their roles in the research, and the participation processes. I gave them a copy of my informed consent forms, and explained to them the various areas in which I needed help in order to meet the standards of ethical research. When they agreed to participate, I had the informed consent forms signed. After that I did a small household survey with them to understand immigrants' basic household information, ages of participants, occupation, basic history of migration, their residence addresses, household patterns, economic class, and whether there were other immigrant families in his/her neighborhood.

In the fourth stage, I found that many Bangladeshi immigrants with less English proficiency, together with women participants, were less likely to sign any consent form without their husbands' guidance or were not comfortable signing the informed consent forms. Therefore, I translated the informed consent forms from English to Bengali to give them a better understanding of my research and the role of participants.

In the fifth stage, I arranged for supports (table, chair, notebooks, and phone book), digital recorders, a file cabinet, a copy of a city map, and a computer for conducting research.

In the sixth stage, I reviewed all household surveys, and organized the survey data. Based on preliminary face-to-face conversations, the survey information and pre-fieldwork communication I selected potential immigrant families for my research and classified respondents from selected immigrant families for semi-structured interviews.

After sixth stage, I got a clear guideline for identifying potential respondents for the in-depth interviews, case studies and life histories.

Phase Three of the Study (November 2007 to August 2008)

In the seventh stage, I selected three key informants from three religious groups (two female and one male) among the Bangladeshi immigrant communities who were well connected with fellow immigrants and actively involved in community events. They guided me through every stage of my research by introducing me to immigrant families

and by providing information about community events, cultural programs, and overall socioeconomic conditions of Bangladeshi immigrants in four locations of my research.

In the eighth stage, I became actively involved with Bangladeshi Christian immigrants from different denominational groups in Canada in the process of building a Bangla church in Toronto.

In the ninth stage I became actively involved within the immigrant communities and this stage was the period of rigorous anthropological “field research”.

TAKING RESEARCH SAMPLES

Considering time and financial limitations, initial contacts, and the spatial distribution of potential subjects in the research setting, sixty Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant households were selected from three major religious groups (Muslim, Hindu, and Christian) by employing *purposive sampling* to begin the research project, and *snowball sampling* and social *networking* to expand the base for a survey questionnaire. By incorporating two sampling techniques, on one hand, I was able to ensure involvements of research participants in the selection processes. On the other hand, I was able to minimize duplication of similar data sources, negotiate time and money constrains in a multi-sited research setting, incorporate enthusiastic research participants, and manage drop-out research respondents. At the beginning of the research, both sampling techniques offered me flexibility and structure in order to move from a surface stage to a deeper stage of this research.

A structured interview schedule (see Appendix C; also see Appendices D, E, and F) was designed to gather demographic information about members in each household – names, identification of the household head, age, gender and relation of each person to the household head, each of these units was then classified on the basis of household composition. Even though the traditional characteristic of Bangladeshi immigrant households are nuclear family households (see Table 4.3 in Chapter Four), I found that some households consist of both kin and non-kin, or kin and non-kin married couples with or without children, or members from different age clusters religions and are living in same households. Each individual connected his/her family differently. I also made inquiries about linkages to other domestic groups in Toronto. Sometimes non-kin household members (cost-sharing households) are considered as ‘family’ in the lives of

immigrants who refer to each other by using Bengali kinship terminologies, for example, brother, sister, sister-in-law, uncle, and aunt. These are new forms of functional and fictive transnational kinship terminologies that Bangladeshi immigrants practice to manage emotional stresses and economic risks of living in a foreign land. Sometimes non-kin members and persons from the same lineage group who formed a common household would say, “I am alone here, my family lives in Bangladesh”. Even though I started my field research by conducting household surveys, by looking at complexities and dynamisms within transnational Bangladeshi households, I realized it would be complicated to identify my research respondents as members of households. In order to locate each respondent in my research, I moved from “household” to “family” as the basic unit of my research. Based on respondents’ definitions and affiliations within families, and also looking at religious- based distinct kinship terminologies within households, I was able to clearly distinguish each individual respondent from diverse residential arrangements in Toronto. This adjustment of strategy is a great strength of conducting anthropological field research. By accommodating diversity of family formations and religious and class dynamisms within Bangladeshi immigrants’ residential accommodations, I selected seventy-five Bangladeshi immigrant families from the initially selected and surveyed sixty households. Among these seventy-five families I purposefully selected twenty-five families from each religious group (Muslim, Hindu and Christian), and these units were distributed over four research locations in Toronto (see Table 3.1). Following religious conversion histories in Bengal and recognizing separate and distinct religious identities, Bangladeshi Bengali Muslims, Hindus and Christians use distinct first names as well as surnames. However, there are several class, caste, and *jati*-oriented surnames, for example, Chowdhury, Halder, Munshi, Sarker, Majumdar, and Tagor, that are common in all three religious groups. In that case first names of Bangladeshi immigrants helped me to clearly identify individual religious identity. Thus, I intentionally used both surname and first name as an indication of respondents’ religious identity. Among these seventy-five families, 136 (69 male and 67 females) members agreed to participate in a face-to-face semi-structured tape-recorded interview. I thus collected primary research data from these 136 respondents, asking about their history of migration to Canada, the year and character of migration, their occupations

before and after migration, their general understanding of Bangladeshi immigrant communities, roles of social, cultural and religious institutions, communication among different religious groups, understanding of ‘minority’ and ‘majority’, and their understanding of “9/11”.

Table 3.1 Distribution of research respondents in four locations, Toronto, 2007-2008

Field Research Locations	Number of Households	Number of Families	Total Number of Respondents		Number of In-depth Interviews		Number of Respondents beyond In-depth Interview Families		Number of Case Study Respondents		Number of Life History Respondents	
			M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
East York/ “Bangla Town”	40	50	45	43	9	9	5	4	2	2	2	2
Down Town/ Bloor St.	7	12	11	11	5	5	1	0	1	1		1
Regent Park	8	8	8	8	4	4	0	0	0	0		
Brampton and Mississauga	5	5	5	5	2	2	1	0	0	0	1	
Total	60	75	69	67	20	20	7	4	3	3	3	3

Note: **Notes:** M = Male and F = Female.

See Appendix B for a more detailed table of demographic information on research respondents.

However, during my face-to-face family surveys among the seventy-five families, six individuals were identified whose names and surnames resembled the dominant religious categorizations of Bangladeshi persons, but when I met with them in person they identified and proclaimed themselves as “atheist” or humanists (see Table 3.2).

From 136 respondents, thirty-five major research participants were selected for in-depth ethnographic interviews of representatives of the three major religious groups. I also conducted research with five persons who identified themselves as “atheist” and would not put themselves in any religious category. These forty research participants were also selected based on length of migration, pattern of migration, gender identity, marital status, educational qualification, social class, age, and professional differences. During my fieldwork in Toronto, my respondents that, along with my key informants,

that I incorporate individuals who play key roles in the Bangladeshi immigrant community. I also selected another ten research participants outside of these families who were actively involved in political parties in Canada, religious activities, community organizations, homeland-based political parties, immigrant professional organizations, and ethnic and cultural organizations. I conducted open-ended in-depth ethnographic tape-recorded interviews among these fifty research respondents. Out of these fifty research participants, three men and three women participants were selected for *case studies*, and three men and three women participants were identified to tell their *life history*. Through the sampling process, I did receive clear guidelines for an appropriate sample size in relation to my time, research objectives and available resources. However, in-depth anthropological research techniques also were incorporated to achieve a fuller understanding of complex relationships between globalization, transnational migration, post-colonial politics and Bangladeshi immigrants' cultural, ethnic and religious identities.

Table 3.2 Religious and class distribution of researched families among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto, based on household survey, 2007

Location	Number of Families	Families From Different Religions					Class Background of Respondents' Families				
		M	H	C	NB	MR	Up	Mid	Lo M	Lo	No Response/ Do not believe
East York/ "Bangla Town"	50	12	17	14	4	3	4	3	18	15	10
Down Town/ Bloor St.	12	2	2	8	0	0	0	9	2	1	0
Regent Park	8	6	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
Brampton and Mississauga	5	2	2	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	0
Total	75	22	22	24	4	3	8	13	20	24	10

Notes: 1) M = Muslim, H = Hindu, C = Christian, NB = Non-believer, and MR = mixed religious families; 2) UP = Upper class, Mid = middle class, Lo M = lower middle class, LO = lower class immigrant families.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Reflecting on my research objectives, and focusing on key research topics, I conducted in-depth anthropological *ethnographic field research* among the Bangladeshi

immigrants in Toronto for one year. The principal techniques of collecting data were qualitative – use of a survey questionnaire, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus group discussion, *adda* (chat sessions), photography, and collection of narratives, memories, stories, and life histories. However, to estimate the total number of Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada, their general migration patterns, and major locations of Bangladeshi settlements I examined the Canadian Government’s statistical information about Bangladeshi immigrants, as well as other *secondary source* information (e.g., media reports). During my fieldwork, I collected news articles published in local Bengali newspapers, collected poems and short stories published in community magazines, and collected respondents’ own poetry or other writings about their lives in Canada.

My *key informants* were most helpful throughout my fieldwork by introducing me to families from among old and new immigrants, and by guiding me to select research participants. They were my references within the community – like a ‘credit check’ to enter into the field – allowing me to gain access to many immigrants, especially the women respondents. They also guided me in selecting respondents who are cultural workers, settlement workers, community leaders, and other key personnel.

One of the key techniques of my research was *participant observation*, which allowed me to “get close to people” without making them uncomfortable with my presence (Bernard 2005), participate in “the lives of the people” (Fetterman 1989 in Fife 2005: 71), and engage and observe activities, people and physical conditions of my research population (Spradley 1980). The *participant observation* technique was incorporated to understand Bangladeshi immigrants’ ongoing everyday events, celebration of important Bangladeshi national days and religious festivals, gain first-hand information about gender roles, communication patterns based on class, occupation, gender, and religious differences among immigrants, and become familiar with their communications regarding different global cultural and economic flows. It provided me with “intuitive understanding” (Bernard 2005: 141), a “native point of view” and “thick description” (Geertz 1976) of Bangladeshi immigrants’ social and cultural practices in Toronto. During my field research, some of my research respondents would suggest that I attend particular cultural and social events organized by immigrant communities, events

they thought were important to observe as a researcher. I also communicated with Bangladeshi cultural groups on several occasions – Hindu Temple organizers, Bangladeshi University Alumni associations, regional associations’ annual meetings (annual general meetings of different *somitees*¹⁰ and picnics), and observed and participated in cultural and social events in Toronto. During my daily trips by subway from “my home” to “my research field”, I listened to conversations in Bengali on the subway trains, and observed Bangladeshi immigrants wearing their cultural dress and wondering where to get off the subway while holding a city map in their hands. I walked through “Bangla Town”, and through Bengali communities/neighbourhoods (which Bengali immigrants call *para*¹¹). And I observed Bangladeshi immigrants who were bargaining prices to purchase their groceries, fish, vegetables, and *halal* meat in Bengali ethnic stores. Ethnographic research can go beyond visual observation through careful listening to people, smelling food, and even feeling the silence within a community (see Fife 2005). Whenever I met with my research participants in any of the high-rise apartments at “Bengali Para”, as I walked in the hallways I smelled Bangladeshi spices, food, and curry while people cooked in their homes. Smelling food, listening to Bengali music and to conversations within the high-rise apartments in Crescent Town area granted me use of “non-visual senses of ethnography” (Stoller and Olkes 1989, in Fife 2005: 74). By staying within the community and entering into the lives of Bangladeshi immigrants both directly and indirectly, I unveiled the day-to-day activities of immigrants’ lives and the patterns that helped me analyze research data within differing specific contexts.

The research began with informal communication among the Bangladeshi immigrants at coffee shops, bakery shops, restaurants, bookstores, and grocery stores in Bangla Town, in subway stations of Main Street, Victoria Park, and Scarborough areas, and in several family social and community gatherings. A very informal communication and exchange of contact information had been done at a Bangla church, South Asian

¹⁰ A *Somite* refers to an informal social and cultural association/union based on common interests. It could be a co-operative association (*somobay somite*). In Toronto, Bangladeshi immigrants have organized several social associations (*somite*) based on their regional connections (*thana*, sub-division and district) to Bangladesh. A person who was born in – or whose family came from – Nokhali district in Bangladesh can be a member of the *Nokhali Somite* in Toronto. It is a micro-dynamism in shaping immigrants’ identity.

¹¹ A *Para* in Bangladesh refers to a strong sense of neighborhood, and a social and geographical boundary based on caste, class, and occupational identity. For example, Brahmin *para*, and *jalay* (fishers) *para*.

women's group meeting, Hindu temple, and places of community and family gatherings. Initially, I approached the Bangladeshi immigrants, introduced myself, explained my research interests, and exchanged contact information. Later I called them and set up meeting times to discuss my research issues. I explained and tried to help them understand various issues that were written in the *informed consent* forms before getting their formal consent and signing on as research participants. If research parties agreed to participate, I asked for a meeting to conduct a *household survey*. I prepared two structured surveys that asked basic questions about the immigrants' names, addresses, contact information, members in the household, and their ages. On many occasions, due to time constraints in our first meeting, research participants wanted only to focus on the household survey and provide their basic family information, economic status, and contact information. Another appointment was scheduled later for the *semi-structured interview* among members of the family who were eighteen years and above and first generation Bangladeshi immigrants to Canada. Most of the semi-structured interviews were conducted at immigrant homes, but on many occasions I was asked to meet at coffee shops, subway stations, and offices. Commonly, married female research participants gave their consent on the basis of their husbands' permission and approval. On the occasions that I was introduced to Bengali immigrant women in a social gathering, upon asking for the possibility to involve them in this research project, the Bangladeshi married women in Toronto asked me to leave my phone number with them so that they could consult with their husband and let me know later on. Sometimes they left their husbands' phone number so that I could call their husbands first, and then meet them and arrange an interview date when both husband and wife would be at home.

Upon reviewing information from the household survey and semi-structured interviews, and depending on respondents' availability, enthusiasm, immigration history and my research objectives, I conducted an in-depth unstructured interview with selected informants from three major religious groups (Muslim, Hindu, and Christian) among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto. Most of the interviews were unstructured, casual conversations generally conducted in the research participants' homes in Toronto. The environment of home also gave informants an authority and comfort in engaging the research process. Conducting interviews in homes allowed me to clearly observe material

culture features consciously kept in homes to reproduce the authenticity of their national, cultural and religious identity. It also helped me to understand gender roles, in particular, and helped me contextualize the information gathered. In these interviews I was also able to identify other potential research participants within the household as well as among neighbours. Sometimes during the household survey, both husband and wife together agreed upon personal interviews. On many occasions, though, I first met a male member of a household in a public place and set a household survey and semi-structured personal interview schedule at his home. In that context I would ask in front of the man whether women members would agree to a further interview on a later occasion. I conducted four in-depth personal interviews at the respondent's workplace, one in an art gallery, one in a bookshop, one at a printing press, and two during lunch breaks in workplace cafeterias and coffee shops. I preferred to honour the respondents' decision to select the interviewing places. Personal in-depth, unstructured interviews had been the key source of my information based on: 1) immigrants' own explanations of various causes and reasons for migrating to Canada, 2) key markers of Bangladeshi Bengali identity, 3) inter-religion interactions among Muslims, Christians and Hindus, 4) religious, class, and gender identities in the contexts of transnational migration in Canada, 5) their own understanding of religious "minority and majority" and its significance in their immigrant lives in Canada, and 6) Impact of the "9/11" in their immigrant lives in Canada. Through this process, a respondent could easily express his/her own personal opinions and distinguish between general perspectives of defining an issue versus an individual's own analysis of a particular topic.

I also conducted *structured*, *semi-structured* as well as *in-depth* interviews with Bangladeshi immigrant settlement workers, leaders of regional associations; professional associations; South Asian immigrant women's association, University alumni associations of Bangladesh; Bangladeshi political-party wings in Canada, and art and cultural practitioners. By communicating with active community workers, I was able to understand the roles of political and religious associations and institutions in shaping immigrant identity, key reasons for forming these associations, as well as conflicts and separations within cultural and social organizations. As activists within the immigrant

communities, their views about Bengali immigrant communities and patterns of community leadership were significant.

Based on informal unstructured in-depth face-to-face interviews, I selected informants for *case studies*, recorded *life histories*, and *focus group discussion* sessions (FGD). Case studies and life histories were utilized to achieve a deeper understanding of immigrants' lives, reasons for migration, pains and pleasures of individual immigrants based on their age, class, gender, personal journey to Canada, and the general history of Bangladeshi immigrants to Canada.

I conducted three focus group discussion sessions with male respondents from each religious group to understand the importance of religion in their immigrant lives as a key marker of their identity, significant components of Bengali identities, who they define as religious minority and majority identities in Canada. They also shared their perceptions about class norms, immigrants' academic and professional credentials, gender relationships, and struggles of Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada. One focus group discussion session was conducted with Bangladeshi immigrant women groups (Muslim women only) actively involved in the South Asian Women's Association. In focus group discussions, I was able to crosscheck information that I received in household surveys, and in in-depth personal interviews.

With written consent and permission, I *tape-recorded* all interviews and focus group discussion sessions with a digital audio recorder. Through this process, I could easily capture and store detailed information that I was unable to write down during the interview. Since interviews were digitally recorded, I could easily transfer interview files to my personal computer. I saved all audio interview files with coded names and security passwords. I was able to record up to six hours, which gave me huge flexibility to record long interviews without interruption. On several occasions, research participants asked me not to record certain parts of their conversation (i.e., they requested information to be off the record), especially while they were talking about their personal immigration procedures to Canada, Canadian Government's immigrant policy, roles of Bangladesh Government, tensions between Islamic countries and Western Christian countries, sexuality, swearing, and religious tensions within the community. I turned off the recorder and did not record those conversations. At times respondents were confused

about particular topics and issues in the interview processes as to whether these should be recorded or not, especially when married women were talking against their in-laws, or against fellow Bangladeshi immigrant families and friends. They were afraid that others would find out about these conversations. Sometimes they requested me to delete certain parts of their conversation after an interview, and I honoured their request. In many occasions I informed them that if they did not want to have particular information recorded, I could erase that part; most of the time the response was “it is okay, I trust you, you will not disclose to anyone, you are an educated person, you are a university teacher”. Research participants enjoyed full freedom to stop the interviewing, and to change time, date, and location of the interview in accordance with their convenience. During the interview process, I took few detailed notes because I noticed it to disrupt the flow of the conversation and communication between respondents and myself. I did write brief notes of the key points, and about the context, of the interview. After finishing an interview, I would write briefly about the interview on returning to my home. From each interview experience, I tried to find out some important question, which I usually tried to ask during the next interview. On several occasions, I called back to my research participants and discussed more about particular topics; sometimes they expressed their views in telephone conversations. But I always carried a journal with me during my field research to write down observations or thoughts, jot notes, and record my feelings on the way to my home.

Following the same path, with proper consent and permission, I took *photographs* of Bangladeshi immigrants’ houses, interview settings, material culture carried from the homeland, religious spaces, family photographs, summer gardens, and their social and family events. I also took photographs of Canada Day cultural events, celebrations of Bangladeshi national days, religious festivals celebrated by Bangladeshi immigrant communities, and Bangla church services and picnics. Images of “Bangla Town” were taken. However, I was denied permission to photograph a Money Exchange store in “Bangla Town”. These photographs helped me to visualize social and cultural organizations of the Bangladeshi immigrant communities, and offered a context of research information. They are being treated as historical documents of the Bangladeshi immigrant communities for future research, and key components to understand changes

within Bangladeshi immigrants over the years. I was always especially careful when taking photographs of women, unmarried young girls, and children; I never took portrait photographs of any individual for my research purposes.

My *active involvement* with the Bangladeshi Christian immigrant community was established on the basis of being a fellow Christian from Bangladesh. My close interaction with the Bangla church groups, and with relatives, helped me to gain a clear view of the complexities of Christian religious immigrants, the tensions and conflicts among Bangla church members, basic principles of that association, and roles of the Bangla church in their immigrant lives in Canada. I did not have equal opportunity to actively involve myself in other religious institutions, but I attended multi-ethnic and multi-religious fast-breaking parties (*Iftar*¹²) arranged by Bangladeshi Muslim communities during the month of Ramadan, and annual general meeting of Hindu Temple in Toronto. During my fieldwork, I was invited by Muslim respondents to celebrate *Eid*¹³ and invited by Hindu respondents to celebrate *Durga*¹⁴ *Puja*¹⁵ with them, arranged by the Hindu Temple in Toronto. I kept close connection with the South Asian Women's Association, Immigrant Settlement Services, and other cultural and social organizations run by the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto. I was actively involved with many of my respondent families in arranging birthday parties, marriage anniversaries, and preparing their summer gardens. These activities – a form of *participant observation* – allowed me to go beyond the formal settings of data collection and become a friend to them. My involvements and participation both in the Bangla Church and in family events provided me with opportunities to get feedback, suggestions and opinions on my research from immigrant communities. After a few months of conducting fieldwork, I became known as a person within the immigrant communities and people started asking me about my research findings, and my general understanding

¹² *Iftar* refers to the evening meal that Muslims eat to break their fast in the holy month of Ramadan.

¹³ *Eid* means “festivity” in Arabic. Muslims observe two *Eid* festivals each year.

¹⁴ *Durga* (“invincible”) is a Hindu goddess who has power to bring justice in this world. It is the most celebrated of religious festivals among the Bengali Hindus and also a marker of Bengali Hindu identity.

¹⁵ *Puja*: A Sanskrit term that refers to honor, adoration and worship. Hindus perform *puja*, including a series of rituals to adore and worship the goddess, and offer gifts to the deity in order to receive blessings (*Ashirvad*).

of the communities, so it gave good opportunity to share my findings and interpretations, and incorporate their feedback.

My active participation in different social chat sessions (*adda*) in familial, social and religious gatherings had been a major tool in my research. The *adda* is a very distinct cultural behaviour of Bengali ethnic groups, as well as a social group based on age, gender and class who generally get together in a certain place over a cup of tea, and discuss issues informally and freely in their day-to-day lives. By attending and actively participating in *adda* sessions – mostly before or after huge dinners arranged by immigrant families – I was able to enter the immigrants’ social, cultural and contested spaces and play the role of an insider. This enabled me to cross check my research data. In most cases, *adda* sessions are constituted according to gender, age, religion, and class, which allowed me to enter into distinct and classified spaces among the Bangladeshi immigrants. By attending *adda* sessions among the Hindu and Christian religious groups, I had a clear understanding of the religious minority and majority identities, and by attending purely Muslim group *adda*, I discovered their understanding of American policies toward the Arab countries, the importance of religion in immigrant lives, and the crisis of having Islamic names in “post-9/11” contexts in North America. *Adda* sessions were very informal settings where I was provided with open access to Bangladeshi immigrant social, political, religious and economic lives, and an effective mechanism to get research feedback.

After finishing my one-year fieldwork in Toronto, I returned to Winnipeg and *transcribed* all recorded audio interviews to text. As most of the interviews were conducted in the Bengali language, I had to translate all interviews into English. I saved all transcribed text data by using pseudonyms and code numbers in order to protect informants’ personal identities and to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality. Coded numbers were saved separately from the transcribed data with protective passwords that would enable me to go back to specific informants for further investigation. Only the researcher had access to that information. During the transcription process, I also identified several key issues that I was unable to underscore during my fieldwork, so I telephoned some of my respondents and got their opinions about those issues over the telephone. I made two small trips to Toronto in the year 2010 to get back to my research

participants, to attend a multi-ethnic and multi-religion wedding to which I was invited as a member of the extended kin group and as a participant observer. These two opportunities helped me to brush up on my research questions and get substantial feedback on my research findings at the end stages of writing this dissertation. Both during the fieldwork, and after returning to my own town, follow-up study and continued feedback took place through phone conversations and two brief trips back to the research field in Toronto.

METHODOLOGY: FIELDWORK EXPERIENCES

Problems of Locating Informants

It was quite a challenge for me to locate, communicate and make appointments with research informants even when they had given consent to participate in the research processes. Difficulties arose out of common conditions that sometimes were barriers, e.g., gender, economic class, work schedules, respondent residence location, and weather were significant factors that sometimes limited my ethnographic field research in a North American city. Clearly, conducting research in a global city is different than doing research in a Bangladeshi village where an anthropologist could easily get access to village people with educational, institutional, and social class power. In Toronto, my student status, together with being a temporary resident of Toronto, made me feel relatively powerless and vulnerable, especially among the self-proclaimed higher-class immigrants. Immigrants could easily say “no” to me, whereas in a Bangladeshi context it would have been difficult.

However, Bangladeshi immigrants were typically very willing to participate in this research because, according to them, I would be conveying their pains, pleasures and their struggle in Canada, essentially acting as their spokesperson. At least they hoped that my thesis would stimulate some policy changes for Bangladeshi immigrants. But time was a key issue for them. On many occasions I felt uncomfortable asking them to take time from their personal lives for my interviews and discussions. Even though they would tell me to come in the evening, I knew that the participant had just come home after a long shift, so preferred to let them take some time to rest. The general trend that I observed among the new Bangladeshi immigrants was that both husband and wife worked fulltime from Monday to Friday, unless they were taking courses in community

colleges, universities, or were at home with infants. As a male researcher, I was not always accepted into the home for an interview while male members are away. A good number of my respondent families' male members worked a part-time job along with their fulltime jobs to earn extra money, either in the evening or on the weekends. People who worked as security guards, in restaurants, drove taxis, or worked in half-way houses or shelters mostly worked at night and slept in the daytime. In general, immigrants saved a day of their weekends to do their grocery shopping, laundry, and cooking meals in order to last them at least half of the week, as well as half days to attend social, cultural and religious events. Many immigrant parents were busy taking their children to music schools, religious training classes (Sunday school, Arabic classes, and Hindu temple), and extra coaching to improve their English and math skills, and take Bengali classes and art classes. A couple of times I went to sit with them and waited with them to pick up children from schools. I myself, as a researcher with a wife and a daughter, found it difficult to make sufficient time for research in the morning and evenings. Sending children to school or day care in the morning and picking them up after work is a fulltime job for immigrant families, especially in the wintertime. A 52 year old married male respondent with two children, who works one full-time job and a part-time job on weekends to maintain his household expenditures in Toronto told me:

Our immigrant lives in Toronto are like traffic lights; we have to follow a system like green, yellow and red. We have to follow a cycle; there is no way we can make it different. We notice that today is Monday morning and next day we realize that it is Friday afternoon; we do not have any account of where all the other days of the week have gone (*Toronto tay amader jibon traffic light er moto, green, yellow, and red, system manay choltay hoy, thamar kono babosta nai, ei deki Monday porar din deki Firday, majer somoer kono hisab nai.*).

Due to time constraints and long travelling times by public transport from downtown Toronto, it was somewhat challenging to locate affluent class Bangladeshi immigrants who were residing mostly in suburban areas like Oakville, Brampton, and Mississauga. In order to overcome these issues, we had to negotiate and find a common place and time to conduct research. For respondents' conveniences, I was invited to research participants' homes for dinner and to conduct interviews. I was often given rides to subway stations after finishing interviews. I conducted most of my in-depth interviews

on Friday nights just before the weekends. Several interviews were taken during lunch breaks at their office locations, just after office at a coffee shop, at immigrants' business places, restaurants or coffee shops in subway stations, and before a social gathering. On several occasions I was picked up from a convenient subway station in a brand new Lexus or Mercedes Benz car. These cars are their class identities, social prestige, and success stories as Bangladeshi immigrants. Sometimes I was not mentally ready to have a ride in a luxury car, but we would nonetheless start the research conversation in the car on the way home.

In the winter, I was welcomed to visit immigrants' homes to conduct interviews, but in the summer time it was very difficult to find some people at their home. The wealthier Bangladeshi immigrants have become very busy with their social and cultural events, going on vacation and travelling. Sometimes I was called to meet participants in a park where a group of Bangladeshis had arranged a BBQ party. Through this process, I was able to get to know people, observe seasonal variations of immigrants' social and cultural events, and participate in social activities. I also received a clear understanding that season matters in anthropological field research, but it also brings different perspectives to observing everyday lives.

Time, business, pace, needs, and challenges in North American city life all limited my mobility within the research communities. It was an ethical challenge to ask again and again for their time for my academic investigation, especially of persons who worked six days a week to support their family, cooked food just after returning home, did shift jobs, and who did not have time to rest and maintain a social life. It was doubly difficult among those anxiously waiting for family reunion in Canada for the last many odd years and ,or individuals who were unable to go back to Bangladesh to visit elderly parents, due to limited income. At times it was a huge dilemma and challenge for me whether to call them when I could, or let them do their jobs.

Problems in Gaining Consent for the Research

As a researcher, I was polite and cordial with my research participants, and always tried to build rapport before entering into the deeper inquiries of my research. Prior to launching research questions, I explained in detail about my research project: the issues to be addressed, their degree of involvement, possible risks of participation in the

research, how the information would be recorded and used, my own identity and reasons for conducting the study. Inasmuch as a goodly number of Bangladeshi immigrants are educated and have fluency in the English language, after reading the statement of giving consent, they would say, “It is not a problem, fine with me”. However, there were several issues raised in gaining consent from Bangladeshi immigrants (see Appendix A).

After describing all issues that one needs to explain as a researcher, when I asked my research participants to sign the consent forms as an agreement between them and me, and told them they would get a copy to keep as a record, I often was told: “It is too formal a process and too bureaucratic; you do not have to do it with us”. To consider my similar ethnic and national identity, and my social status as a faculty member in a public university in Bangladesh many respondents said to me:

You are one of us, a person from our homeland; you came to do research on our immigrant lives and issues; it is our responsibility to help you out. You do not have to worry about signing stuff; we trust you, you will not do any harm to us (*Ampni amerder ek jon, amader des her lok, amader bishoy nia gobashona kortay eshachen, amra apnakay shahajo korbo, eta amader daioto, aper ehi sob document nia chinata korar kichu nai, amra apnakay bishiaus kori, ampni amader kono khoti korben na.*)

Research participants trusted me as a Bengali person, Bangladeshi citizen, and a fellow countryman. I was part of them as an insider. Therefore, they did not expect any formal and official relationship with me. Sometimes I felt that preoccupation with the formalities of recording consent from my research participants pushed me from an informal setting to an institutional formal arrangement or from an inside to outside researcher. It hampered participants’ informality and spontaneous involvement in research. I tried to neutralize this discomfort by saying that “it is a document that my university requires to have signed for their legal protection as well as mine and yours; it is nothing more than that, nothing to interfere between you and me”. I told them that it conveys my contact information, so any time they needed to contact me they could easily find me. Respondents who were highly educated and familiar with North American university education systems said, “We know it is a North American system, you have to strictly follow rules in conducting social surveys; nobody cares anything about this in Bangladesh, but here you have to follow all rules”. As a researcher I was uncomfortable to ask my research participants to sign papers in order to make me an “ethical

researcher”. It is the formality imposed on such people that can interfere, not the ethical standards that we embrace. I maintained ethical standards in our everyday communication, building a long-term friendship and mutual trust relationship, which is beyond following set rules and agendas.

In conducting field research among Bangladeshi immigrants, I encountered difficulties in gaining informed consent from married women (mostly homemakers), single women, immigrants who are living under social assistance, religious and political leaders, and persons who came as refugees who asked for asylum to get immigration papers in Canada. As a researcher I never asked any of my respondents whether they came to Canada as a refugee because it is a very sensitive issue among the Bangladeshi immigrants. During my in-depth interviews six of my respondents said that they filed a case as religious and political refugees in Canada. Because they became immigrants by the time of my research, I did not put them in a separate category.

With the influence of patriarchal norms, even women who were professionals, working in the Canadian job market for few years and actively involved in community organizations, did feel obliged to ask their husbands before signing the consent form, but not all of them (implications of issues like this are examined further in this dissertation). However, immigrant women who were employed, had recently arrived in Canada, or were staying mostly at home were hesitant to sign the consent form. Still today the majority of the population in Bangladesh is illiterate, and Bangladeshi people are culturally fearful to sign any paper documents because they think that someone may grab their property by producing false documents. In order to deal with this crisis, in many cases I left the consent form with them so that they could discuss with their husbands and then make the final decision. I also offered them the names of some of my key respondents and/or the names of some other families in their apartments with whom I conducted research as references who might help explain my research objectives. In general, both husband and wife would together sign the consent form if both agreed to participate. Or sometimes women members said “I did not have much to say differently from my husband, so it is okay if you just interview him”. I encountered two cases where the women wished not to sign any paper, although they agreed to discuss my research issues. A Hindu married women (age 52) said, “I do not keep any records of anything in

my family, do not know how to use a bank card in ATM machine, do not pay any bills myself, and all important documents are managed by my husband, so please ask him to sign the forms; I will not do it". This was her response even though she runs a big store by herself in downtown Toronto. One of the women respondents (age 45) who worked in a large box store had been living in Toronto with her two children, without her husband, and agreed to participate in my research; she later responded in the negative just after she had a conversation with her husband who remained in Bangladesh. I could understand that she became afraid to discuss their immigration issues with me in case they might face any difficulties. A couple of my respondents who had come to Canada as refugees asking for political asylum, and who later received their citizenship in Canada, did participate in the research, but I did not ask much about their personal history; they were still cautious in giving information. They made sure that I understood I must not use their personal information, would protect their identity and real names. I did inform them that in my research I would not reveal personal information, and that no information would be published that would reveal their identity. In the end, my personal communication and involvements with research populations, references from other community leaders, my own kin groups, the Bengali Church members, and my connection to Jahangirnagar University all worked together to gain respondents' trust and consent to become involved in this research project.

Researcher's Identity in the Field

In conducting field research among the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant communities in Toronto, in one hand, my regional identity (a person from the Barisal district town in Bangladesh), *deshi*¹⁶ (common location and home town in Bangladesh), my gender, class, occupational, religious, ethnic and national identity all supported access within the community as an insider. On the other hand, these same criteria in many ways also turned into "gate keepers" in the field setting and turned me in my researcher position into an outsider. As a granted "insider", I attended several meetings with the members of a Barisal *somite* in Toronto because I was born in, and my family came from,

¹⁶ In immigrant settings in Toronto, the term *deshi* has multiple and simultaneous meanings. A person who has come from a South Asian home country (Bangladesh, Indian and Pakistan) is commonly identified as *deshi* among all South Asian immigrants. Among the Bangladeshi immigrants, a person who migrated from Bangladesh, or from the same region (division) and district town, they are also identified as *deshi*.

that particular district in Bangladesh. With my *desi* (regional) as well as insider identity, I met with Bangladeshi immigrants who came from the Barisal district in Toronto, and spoke with them in the local dialect/accents (*Borisalia Bangla* in Bengali), and was accepted as one of them. Therefore, I was totally welcome as their *deshi* brother. Within this group, I found three immigrants who knew my father, my families in Bangladesh, and saw me when I was a small boy visiting my native village, although I had never met them in Bangladesh. I was considered as one of their family members right away. I incorporated two respondent families in my research (one Hindu and one Muslim) who came to Toronto from the same native village I came from in Bangladesh.

However, my faculty position in a public university in Bangladesh, and a PhD student in a Canadian university upheld my class and social status in the immigrant setting in Toronto, and created distance among immigrants who were facing challenges in defining their social, economic and political status that they had enjoyed in Bangladesh. Due to my homeland occupational identity as a university professor, in several interview sessions I encountered “observer paradox”, because people spoke very formally using appropriate words, and conveyed modernized, secular, ideal, and apolitical perceptions in explaining about Bangladeshi immigrant communities, inter-religious interactions and multiculturalism in Canada. On many occasions, respondents also replied to my questions by saying, “You are an educated person doing higher studies here [in Canada] and also have lived longer in Canada than we have, so you know way more better than us about immigrant issues. Therefore, my academic and researcher positions in both Bangladesh and Canada became one of the key limitations to my research.

At the same time, I was also addressed as “our *deshi Bhai*” (a brother from my home country), “part of our own people”, a “county man”, and “like their own son from Bangladesh” (*tumi to armar chalay er moto*) among many Bangladeshi immigrant families. I was welcome to enter into their kitchens, living rooms and use their own washrooms at their homes. Therefore, they did not have to maintain norms of *purdha* and formal courtesies as if I were an outsider. I was treated like a son visiting them.

My male identity in research also forced me to be an outsider among the young married Bangladeshi immigrant women’s groups. In order to overcome that cultural and social distance, and segregation as a single male researcher in a foreign land, I informed

them of my married identity and told stories about my daughter to help gain their confidence. In conducting in-depth interviews, I visited my respondents' homes with my wife and daughter, which gave me extra acceptance within the immigrant family as a responsible "family person" and allowed me to talk more with female members within households (see also Wiest 2010).

As a Bangladeshi Bengali researcher in Toronto, my ethnic and national identity offered me an insider researcher status and all religious groups in Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Toronto welcomed me. My religious identity as a Protestant Christian, and a part of broader "minority" religious groups among a Muslim majority in Bangladesh, provided me more insider-status both among Bangladeshi Christians as well as Hindu immigrant families. I always tried to separate my researcher self from any particular religious affiliation, and I never was involved in any antagonistic discussions against other religious populations. However, stories of my father's conversion from Hinduism to Christianity, and my upbringing within a multi-religious family background provided some 'insider' as well as 'outcaste' status among the Hindu immigrants. A couple of my Muslim respondents also were curious to know about my religious identity as a Christian, because my name clearly does not represent my distinct religious identity; I could be a Hindu or Muslim Bangladeshi, but they never thought I was a Christian. My surname (*Halder or howlader*) came from occupational groups who were mostly big farmers in the southern part of Bangladesh, and my first or given name is a common name in any Bangladeshi religious group. Whenever religious issues came into our discussion, I always made my position clear to them before going further. In several occasions I observed that Muslim respondents mostly changed their boldness and anger of their tone and turned to a secular, humanistic, and equality perspective on religious issues in immigrant lives in Canada. Several of my Muslim research respondents were careful and took an apolitical stand to discuss issues of the "9/11" incident and Muslim dominance in Bangladesh. They might have thought that I was representing dominant religious ideologies in Canada as a part of a majority group. Similarly, some Hindu and Christian respondents felt more bold in arguing against "Muslim religious groups in Bangladesh" and "global terrorism" when they confirmed my religious identity not to be Muslim.

My status in Canada also raised questions among my respondents. I was asked whether I was a Canadian citizen, a permanent resident, or an international student? Had I applied for permanent resident status in Canada? What is my future plan? Where did I reside? My status was an international student when I started my research but during my fieldwork in Toronto, my family and I were granted permanent residence status in Canada. It was a new identity for me and my family, but I was not that excited because still I was not sure where I was going to reside, and what my career path would be as an anthropologist. What would my national identity be? I have learned from my own life about the fluidity and hybridity status that transnational immigrants carry all of their lives. To me, it is a crisis, an “immigrants’ dilemma”, where we want to belong to both locations, want to hold both places in our day-to-day lives and in our memory at the same time. When my respondents were informed that my family and I were offered permanent resident status in Canada, they expressed happiness, and I had to host a party for them. It was a big event within my research community and for my relatives who had to go through so many gates to get legal papers in Canada. One Sunday, fellow Christian immigrants expressed “praise to God” at the Bangla Church as my family was blessed with permanent residency in Canada. Again, when my respondents asked a follow-up question, “Now what is your plan? Are you going to stay here in Toronto, or move back to Winnipeg, or will you return to Bangladesh?” I did not have any clear answer for them. The same question was asked by my colleagues in Bangladesh “Are you returning to Bangladesh and resuming your job?” When I replied ‘yes’, they expressed approval, but I knew they were not sure... No one goes back to Bangladesh after having Permanent Residence status (commonly known as PR among the Bangladeshis) in Canada or an advanced degree in North America. Once I told my respondents that I would probably go back to Bangladesh for family reasons, and the reply was “Then what is the point to conducting research with Bangladeshi immigrants; we will not find you when we need you to speak on our behalf”. Perhaps the hardest question I have ever been asked in my fieldwork is “Why did I conduct my research with my fellow immigrant community in Canada? Is it just for academic scholarship, prestige, getting a PhD degree, a new identity as ‘Dr’ (Doctor) or do you have some more responsibility to your research participants?” Many of my respondents also said, “You should do the same kind of research again after

five to ten years so that we can see the change and progress”. I also knew that, as an anthropologist, I was not only a researcher of the Bangladeshi diaspora, and that at the end I would want to be a professional person in this current specialized capitalist market. In order to a successful professional person I might have to change my career path. In addition, being an immigrant researcher from Bangladesh (one of the poorest countries in the world), I could not ignore the opportunity to be a Canadian citizen (a passport to the global market) and to live a secure and comfortable life with my family in Canada. Similar to earlier anthropological research, the “field” and “research population” in Toronto was not an ‘exotic’ location for me, or an ‘other’ culture; rather, doing research in Canada has been presented to me a secure (even if temporary) living space that is considered to be a lifetime opportunity to many Bangladeshis – a future career and lifetime opportunity, or a ‘potential job opportunity’. Therefore, with a Bangladeshi patriotic heart, my moral attachment to a public university, my ethical responsibilities to my research population, and an “imagined success and career” in the global market has presented me with some dilemma as a researcher.

Pros and Cons of Having Kin Groups in My Field Research Site

My kin groups in Toronto were great supports in dealing with my day-to-day life, social activities, economic needs, space for sharing my stress, a safe shelter for my daughter and wife, a source of guidance, and a strong reference point to introduce myself as a researcher within the immigrant communities. My cousins, who came to Canada in the early and mid 1990s, and who were actively involved in both Bengali Christian and Hindu immigrant families in Toronto, were the key reference for me to enter into the lives of many immigrant families. Some of the research respondents with whom I conducted in-depth interview, and visited on several occasions in their homes, treated me as their own brother because I was their “friends’ brother”. My relationship with my kin groups rooted me as a researcher within the communities, and obviously it was a positive move to start my field research.

However, in conducting in-depth anthropological research and collecting information about immigrants’ religious and cultural identities, *thick description* of immigrants’ social and personal lives, and various conflicts and tensions within immigrant groups, I had to go beyond kin-based “first layer” cordial relationships to deep

layer complex and reflexive interactions. I had to create a space between researcher and respondents that was more contested, conflicting, and critical, as well as sharing. In the journey of an anthropologist from kin-based relationship to researcher, I identified that my identity with my kin and in-laws might limit my access primarily to Bangladeshi Christian and Hindu immigrant families. I realized that several of my research participants were careful in opening up their personal issues, family crises, and ‘gray areas’ of their lives, and did not enter into any issues in which he/she had to take a position. They wanted to be polite, authentic, and neutral because I was seen as a young brother of their friends. As a researcher, it was quite a challenge for me to get critical views of various conflicts and tensions in the Bangla church from a couple of my respondents because on political issues some of my respondents belonged to opposite blocks from my kin. Consequently, they were rather protective to share their personal views about a conflict situation within the Bangla church. They did not trust me as a researcher; instead they took me as member of an opponent group like my own kin. It was difficult to substantiate my separate identity to the people with whom my cousins are not maintaining a good relationship. I do not know how much I overcame that gap, but I tried to be objective in talking, relating and explaining issues during my fieldwork with a Bangla church group. In sum, it can be said that my connections to kin groups in the research locations provided me a worthwhile access to get to know people, build rapport, and start my research; as well, my connection to my kin groups was a gate-keeper in my research, including negative interference. Personal interactions among kin groups were also obviously pleasant as well as stressful. As a researcher, in dealing with those dichotomous issues provided me significant insider perspective of immigrant families as well as the complexities of reflexive anthropological research. My identity with my kin groups provided me both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ identities, and made it clear to me that both are important to address and deal with methodologically in the field.

Sharing Food and Information: “Both Ways” Journey

My ethnographic research among Bangladeshi immigrants could not have been fulfilled if I had failed to share food with my research participants. Eating Bangladeshi food, talking about various fish and vegetables of Bangladesh, different fish and meat recipes, and using different and specific types of spices in a particular curry became a key

component of my ethnographic research among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto. Cooking different Bengali food items with specific style and spice is also connected to Bengali immigrants' religious, class, ethnic, national, and regional identities in Bangladesh that they have cherished in their immigrant lives. There is a significant difference between Hindu and Muslim cooking styles, recipes, and spices used.

A Bangladeshi Muslim woman respondent (age 38) in "Bangla Town" told me:

Hindu people cook different than we do; we cannot cook mixed vegetables like they do; they are the champions in cooking vegetables and sweets, but our style of cooking is different than theirs (*Hindu der ranna onnorakom, o der moto amra niramish ranna kortay pari na, misti er shobjee rannay o ra cahampian, amader style vinno*).

I asked her, "How about Christians", and she replied, "I never tasted food in Christian homes, so I do not know". Almost all interviews ended up either with having dinner or supper. During the interview, tea with cookies was served. Generally, I was asked to visit for an interview by immigrant families in Toronto either on the weekends or weekday afternoons. After hours of conversation, I was requested mostly by women members of the households to have dinner or supper with them, which was also cordially supported by male members. After a three-hour long in-depth interview with a 53-year old male Muslim respondent, he asked me:

Please join us with dinner. [The] culturally modest way of requesting someone to invite for a dinner in Bangladesh is to say 'please try little rice and lintel soup with us' (*Charta dal vat kahay jaben*), it is dinnertime, now you cannot go without eating rice with us (*na khay ekon jatay parben na*). I have already organized table, please come, if you do not share food with us, it will be a curse to my family (*na khay galay gihoster omongal hoy*). I cook all Bangladeshi food (*ami so deshi kabar ranna korachi*), for example, *Hilsha* fish (national fish in Bangladesh) with mustard seed paste (*jamon shorshay bata deya Elish mach*), smashed eggplant with red chilies and green onion (*bagun vorta*), shrimp and squash (*chingry and lou*) and lintel soup (*dal*).

As an insider, member of Bengali culture, and as a Bangladeshi, I could not say 'no' to them because it is an insult to the host. I know that offering food to others is a major component of sharing Bengali culture and re-establishing Bengaliness in Canada. Hospitality is a major part of Bengali culture that my research participants showed abundantly during my field research. After turning off my voice recorder, and washing

my hands, I joined my research participants with proper Bengali food. I never used utensils to eat rice, always eating with my right hand, the culturally correct way Bengali people eat.

Whenever I started eating with my respondent families, and having conversation, I got the feeling that probably now the proper information sharing has begun – what we can call in-depth anthropological “fieldwork”. As a researcher, I was able to enter into a very cordial and open sharing space where I could bring respondents to discuss things like the importance of eating food with hands and eating Bengali food, eating *halal* food, teaching our children how to eat fish, and differences between Canadian and Bangladeshi fish. These are all important cultural indicators of defining Bengali identities in their immigrant lives in Canada. Eating at the table with my research participants, I could observe gender roles between husbands and wives, because cooking is considered to be women’s work in Bangladesh. I used to ask who generally cooks food, who cleans the dishes, where they buy groceries, and what types of food they prefer. Do you eat any other ethnic foods? And why do you eat Bengali food in Canada? By asking these questions, I tried to understand their cultural consciousness, cultural indicators of Bengali identity, gender division of labour, religious identity and cultural practices in multicultural Canada.

This was the time when I generally asked women members of immigrant families whether they would like to participate in the research. On many occasions I got an initial ‘yes’. Sometimes, both husband and wife communicated with me while we were having food and discussed certain topics about Bangladeshi immigrant communities. With food, we were able to visit about their homeland, childhood time, taste of foods and unhealthy foods in Bangladesh, tastes of food that their mothers used to cook, and memories of their homeland, relatives, and crises of food availability. The whole research became transnational in our discussions and food talk. By eating with the right hand without using any utensils, and taking a bite of a green chili, we could discover and create a Bengali space in Canada. A married woman respondent (age 38) in the Bloor Street area, who was hosting me as the researcher, said the following culturally appropriate words:

Brother, please take more, do not feel shy; how could you survive just eating so little? Please eat like you are in your home. I was not able to cook many items; I know my cooking is not that good; it is painful, but try

*(bahi aruku nan, lojja paien na, eto knom khalay ki hoy? nijar bari money
koray khan, tamon kichui ranna kori ni, kosto koray khaben)*

Culturally it is the very modest way of requesting a guest to eat more, and to express modesty about the variety of dishes despite there being many items on the table.

Research participants welcomed an outsider to their home, opened up their doors and hearts, and removed the formal boundaries between stranger and family members, converting him to an insider. For me, through these many short and piecemeal conversations at dining tables, it took me to a deep layer of in-depth research; it built new relationships, and bound me to an ethical commitment with my respondents.

I would bring topics to the table, that I wanted to know much more about but could not properly discuss during our formal interview time. In this setting I was able to go back to earlier discussion again. I found participants brought forward different understandings of topics at the dinner table and sometimes even different perspectives. On many occasions, participants' spouses entered into the conversations and brought contested aspects of their personal lives as immigrants. I was common for them to say:

We do not eat Canadian fishes; they do not test well. We cook Bangladeshi food all the time; we eat Bangladeshi food, prefer *halal* food, and our kids love rice and fish. We do not take them much to McDonalds or KFC; if they go there we eat fish or *halal* chicken.

From these types of conversations, I tried to understand Bangladeshi immigrants' inner religious and cultural dynamisms of eating food, and their food-related struggles in a multicultural global city like Toronto. At the eating table, research participants had chances to ask questions of me about my personal life, reasons for migration, my political and religious identity, family information, why I had chosen this topic, how long I would be in Toronto, who are the other immigrants with whom I conducted interviews; and sometimes they also recommended someone I must talk with. I tried to answer all questions to my best ability. At the end of my fieldwork, I tried to cook for a few of my research participants and their families, trying to reciprocate with something, but it was just a small gesture compared to the ocean of love, trust, and interest they showed to their Bengali *deshi* researcher brother.

Therefore, eating food, appreciating every dish they prepared, sharing recipes, and talking about food provided me considerable access to the deeper sides of the lives of

Bangladeshi immigrants; it also demonstrated the benefits of methodological flexibility in conducting research in the field. I could go back and forth to various research topics, crosscheck my data, break down social barriers and welcome more participants into my research. Sharing food just once with respondents would easily open up doors for multiple opportunities to interview and discuss, and though this process both researcher and research participants had a chance to share their information more personally. Eating food together can be a key ethnographic research strategy for anthropologists.

Dealing with Emotion in the Field Research

Migration to Canada for many Bangladeshi immigrants has not been a pleasant journey, even though they came to fulfill many hopes in their lives. My involvement as a researcher enabled me to build relationships with respondents that could connect with their deeper pains, losses, and emptiness of their immigrant lives in Canada. Bangladeshi immigrants' lives and their identity cannot be studied by looking only at their day-to-day visible and observable activities in their immigrant lives in Canadian locations. As a researcher, I had to make many transnational nostalgic mental trips with my research participants back and forth between the events of their lives in many locations over time. For me as a researcher, my communication about their lived experiences, and their personal stories about various hardships, struggles and betrayals in Bangladesh were touchy and emotional. Immigrants sometimes wept and expressed their anger and disappointment about Bangladesh when they reminisced about their lives and remembered their struggles based on gender, class, political, and religious identities. It is a real disjuncture to define their identity in relation to Bangladesh. On one hand, they love their homeland due to all their memories, but on the other hand, various inequalities within the Bangladeshi state presented the totality of contexts that forced them to make the decision for migration to Canada, and this is what often made them sad and emotional. During our conversations, immigrants remembered their loved ones, elderly parents, sick family members, memories of childhood and homes, friends, and all relationships and networks they left behind in Bangladesh. My respondents become emotional, wiped their tears, and cried when they remembered their family members who passed away, homes that they had to sell, and all good and bad memories as economic, religious, political, and ideological minorities in Bangladesh. A 48 year old male

respondent told me that the life they lived in their village with their family, mother, father, siblings and neighbours never came back. In a focus group discussion with Bangladeshi Hindu male immigrants (ranging in age from 46 to 65) at *Hindu Modir* on Danforth Ave., I asked them as members of a minority religious group how they connect themselves to Bangladesh and to Canada. They replied:

We sold everything that we had in Bangladesh; we had lost our old homes where we grew up in villages, cultivable land, ponds, our family graveyard, the family *mondir* (temple), traditions and memories of our fourteen generations, our address, our identity. There is no way we can go back. There are none to remember us, brother. We do not know how you feel in Canada, but sometimes we do not feel our existence; we lost everything, we are empty.

Some of them cried upon recalling their struggles in Canada as new immigrants. One 55 year old Muslim woman respondent who led her family in Toronto by herself and whose husband took a job in the USA and lives there, told me:

My father was a doctor in Bangladesh; I did my Masters in Economics at Dhaka University, and got married to an Engineer. I never worked outside of our home, and never even thought about manual labour. We had a good life in Bangladesh. My husband went to the Middle East for a job; we lived there 15 years and everything was fine. After coming to Canada, my husband did not find a job. In order to run the family and support my husband, I worked five years in a garment industry, sometimes working 13 to 14 hours in a row. I had to wake up at four o'clock in the morning; in the winter I started [from home] in dark, and when I returned to home it was also dark; even when I was pregnant I worked, I never mentioned to my family back home that I was working in a factory. I used to watch garment workers in the streets in Dhaka City, but I never imagined that one day I will be one of them in Canada. Look at my hands... (she began to weep).

During my fieldwork, I also attended a prayer meeting at a Christian respondent's home whose father had passed way in Bangladesh. It was a memorial service where other immigrants shared various stories about her father and also about the pains of staying in foreign lands. By doing so, Bangladeshi immigrants expressed their deep connection to Bangladesh as a culturally authentic space, and also mentioned everyone's final and spiritual destiny to another nation (i.e., 'heaven'). In transnational immigrants' context immigrants communicate across various spaces, not just between home and host nations. The sense of a 'Spiritual home' is a totally different place from their ideas of their

cultural home. A *Milad* and *doa* (prayer meeting according to Muslim tradition) was arranged by a respondent who lost his father in Bangladesh. I observed that people prayed for the departed soul's peaceful journey to heaven. Reflecting on the loss of his father (Protestant Christian male, age 52), he condemned himself as an immoral and bad person by saying:

Due to our personal economic and professional well-being, we came to Canada. But we forgot our parents who raised us, who provided us their best to live in this world, but we have not been able to stay with them in their old age when they needed us most. I do not know what is the meaning of life. Why did we migrate to a foreign land?

These two incidents were very emotional for me as a researcher. As an immigrant and a researcher, sometimes I could not hold back my tears. I cried with them and shared their pain as a quiet listener. At the same time, I also remembered my elderly parents who have been living in Bangladesh. All the time during my higher studies I remembered their health issues, and their struggle in Bangladesh. I shared my stories with my respondents, and tried to make them comfortable. Sometimes I just became very quiet, paused the recorder, and held their hands. I did not find any words to say or ask any further questions for my "research". I could not think of any question to ask. As a researcher, I could not separate my own emotions, my personal pain, and my common immigrant identity from the experiences of my research participants. Thus, sharing pain also provided me access to a deeper level of immigrants' lives. Those are some good touching moments when people share who they are, what their identity really is, and how they locate themselves in Canada. I do not claim that I was an "objective anthropologist" in the sense of being able to keep distant from the lived lives of my research participants all the time. I crossed that 'scientific' boundary by being an emotional anthropologist acknowledging respondents' pains and frustrations. Thus, I was an emotional ethnographer rather than a tearless objective scientist.

Special Roles of the Researcher in the Field

Along with my research activities, I have performed many roles during my field research in Toronto. I performed as a comedian, a marriage councillor, educational advisor, and family conflict negotiator, a quiet listener of person's pain and stress, and surplus labour for respondent families and for arranging community events. By

performing these roles, I could be able to actively engage in among the Bangladeshi immigrant community, establish a good network, and share my care and support to my respondents.

The Anthropologist as Stand-Up Comedian

Before starting my formal fieldwork, during my several visits in Toronto I performed comedy and cracked jokes about immigrant lives in several family gatherings. I was identified beforehand as a “funny guy” to the Bangladeshi immigrant communities. During my fieldwork, I was asked to perform comedy in social and family gatherings. As a researcher I did not say no. The key topics of my comedy had been cultural shock, gender relationships, ethnicity, racism, regionalism, immigrants’ new roles and practices in Canada, local and regional dialects of Bengali language, English accents, and so on. A few jokes were about self-criticism as Bangladeshi immigrants, about cultural dilemmas, about new terminologies between husband and wife, and about new consumption patterns that immigrants adopted in their immigrant lives.

As a researcher, I was very conscious not to make any jokes about sexuality, political views, or religious issues. These are very private matters and culturally sensitive issues to the Bangladeshi immigrants. I had to select topics and change presentation style in considering the age of the audience, educational and class status, and regional and religious identities. On one occasion an immigrant told me that some of the content of my jokes were not culturally appropriate for that audience, and I conveyed my personal apologies to him and explained my positions. A young male (38-40 years old) who came from Nokhali district in Bangladesh told me that my jokes are funny but these are not common issues and habits of all people of his native district town in Bangladesh. As a member of that particular district he was a bit offended. One day an immigrant said to me that he would remember my jokes and make some fun of his friends who came from the region that I joked about. After my performance, a middle-aged (between age 46 and 50) Bangladeshi immigrant man came to me and said:

I came to Canada nearly nine years ago. After coming to Canada my life was so stressful; I had to work two jobs, I even worked on the weekends. I did not have any life, I did not have any time to entertain myself. The last nine years I never laughed the way I did tonight. Thank you so much for bringing some fun in my life. As immigrants our life is like a machine

here in Canada, work six or seven days a week, make money and pay bills, that's it.

As a researcher, by performing comedy in this research setting I was able to cross-check and challenge my research data about ethnicity, racism, gender roles, religious interactions, cultural boundaries, and gender roles within Bangladeshi immigrant communities. It was a vehicle to connect immigrants' inner structures of personal, social and community lives and offer a juxtaposed image of Bangladeshi immigrants' identities and their dilemmas as immigrants. I think that through my comedy I was able to entertain my research populations as a payback for their time and involvement as research participants.

From a researcher standpoint, my role and performance as a comedian was a small attempt to 'pay back' my research communities. I was, though, lightly challenged by a person in a family gathering for making some jokes about his own regional people. According to him, my jokes were funny but my characterizations are not common among people who came from that particular region. I noted to him that if I make some jokes about a particular regional people to other regional groups, they enjoy it very much.

Other Unique Roles of the Researcher in the Field

During my fieldwork in Toronto, I played active roles as a marriage counsellor, conflict solver, negotiator of family disputes, and educational consultant within the Bangladeshi immigrant communities. I listened to disputes and family problems from many immigrant families and from my own kin. My main role was to listen, and if they asked, I tried to give some advice or suggestions to overcome those situations. I tried to remain an impartial and neutral listener, but I was not all the time. I wanted to be accepted by both families, but still I offered my own understandings to them. At times upon suggesting certain steps to take, I became personally involved in the process of crisis negotiation. There were some unpleasant situations for me as a researcher because my taking a position was judged as partial by one party or the other. I sometimes listened to phone conversations that continued a couple of hours, of unpleasant conversation, hate and blame games between husbands and wives, mental, physical and sexual crises among families, alcoholism, transnational family crises with in-laws, and so forth. These roles did not hamper my research in Toronto. In other words, I did not separate my research

from these issues of immigrant lives. Respondent families only sought my suggestions when they considered me to be a trustworthy person. Sometimes they also thought that as a university teacher in Bangladesh (a symbol of morality, honesty, and good judgment) I would provide them a good answer.

These different roles as an anthropologist/researcher allowed me to enter into the communities, to understand complexities of immigrant community structures, and to gain deeper images of immigrants' personal lives. All these roles situated me within the research community as an insider, but also lead me to appreciate why I could not always be an insider as a researcher. My various roles connected me very well within the community both as an active researcher and also a fellow human being with my own judgment. Striking a balance was important, but through genuine engagement I was able to pay something back to my research community with my labour and time. On balance, I gained access to a rich source of data, and learned much about the communities through my personal involvement.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Through use of a variety of anthropological field research techniques, most of the data collected are qualitative. A descriptive analysis of gathered data about the Bangladeshi immigrants' cultural, social, and religious identities has been done by analysing the data through key theoretical lenses of constructs and processes, pre-colonialism, colonialism, post-colonialism, globalization and transnational migration.

In presenting research findings in this dissertation, I use limited quantitative data (e.g., descriptive statistics, percentages, and summary tables). My analyses and discussion are based primarily on qualitative data, personal statements, discourses and narratives of various informants. In order to explain issues of Bengali identities, I incorporate Bangladeshi immigrants' different expressions, statements and narratives both in Bengali and English. I present Bengali statements in *italic* font and have translated into English. In many cases, it was difficult to find the exact words in English, so I left the Bengali versions along with my English translations for the benefit of both Bengali readers and English readers. I also use various Bengali terms, words, and phrases that I put in "quotes". On occasion, italics are used also for special emphasis. I have used

pseudonyms for names of persons to protect respondents' personal identity and respect anonymous.

Being a Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant as well as a researcher of same, it was sometimes difficult to separate myself out from my writing. This text is produced with the combination and collaboration of my own theoretical, personal, and methodological – or *etic* – understanding, as well as *emic* perspectives based on research participants' explanation of their cultural, religious, and class identities. I would characterize my work as a reflexive ethnography by a researcher whose religious, national, and ethnic identities are questioned, negotiated and associated in this research.

In light of the foregoing description and discussion, I am part of the production of anthropological text with my own analysis, understanding and political views. I have not excluded these from my observation, data analysis, nor my written text on Bangladeshi immigrants. At the same time, I have tried to maintain objectivity and also address my subjectivities in presenting research information.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIO- ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF BANGLADESHI IMMIGRANTS IN CANADA

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF BANGLADESHI IMMIGRATION TO CANADA

For centuries, the Bengali population has been settled in fertile lands of the Bengal delta, maintaining their livelihood by producing rice, oil, jute, cotton, and lentils and by catching fish in nearby rivers and canals. As a sedentary agricultural group, the key settlements were established along three major rivers *Padma*, *Meghna* and *Jamuna* and many other small rivers in Bengal. Feudal kings of pre-colonial Bengal controlled a pre-capitalist mode of production through *jati* and caste-based rigid social and religious systems that were part of self-sufficient village communities. These conditions did not support much inner dynamism or opportunity for crossing local and national boundaries (see Gardner 1995: 38). In the early 18th through 19th centuries, intensified economic and political exploitation by the British colonial administration produced lack of employment opportunities and economic mobility in rural Bengal. As a result, lowland Bengali agricultural groups to migrate internally to highland Burma, the city of Rangoon, Assam, Tripura, Calcutta, and many other major cities in British India. A small number of poor Bengali men migrated to England as servants in homes of British administrators, and several of them took jobs as seaman (*lascars*), and cooks, cook mates and cleaners (*khalashi*) in the British merchant ships (Gardner 1995:40-41; Siddiqui 2003; Rahim 1999). Several of those workers escaped from the ships in major port cities like London and New York and tried to settle down, but in most of the cases they had to go back home after working a few years in different locations (see Gardner 1995; Rahim 1999). Between 1920 and 1930, a small number of Bangladeshi immigrants came to Detroit and Michigan port cities, jumped from the ships and settled down in the United States of

America (Siddiqui 2003: 15). At that time Canada was not considered a destination country among Bengali immigrants from the British India.

However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for the first time in Bengali history the English educated middle and upper class (*Bhadralok shraanee*) Bengalis left their homes for England for higher studies. The elite parents commonly said that their sons went to *Belat* (London) to be barristers and doctors. However, after finishing their education, those elite sons generally returned to cities like Calcutta and Dhaka in Bengal and very few of them settled down in England. Until 1947, a small number of Bengali men were able to migrate to England as dock workers, sailors, and foremen (*sarongs*) and most of them migrated from three districts in Bangladesh: Sylhet, Noakhali, and Chittagong (Gardner 1995: 41). Since the 1950s, nearly 12 to 17 million Bangladeshis migrated to West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura in India in response to 1947 post-partition riots between Hindus and Muslims, shortage of land, and ecological disasters (Reuveny 2007: 658). Under the 1948 Nationality Act, by 1958, many Bangladeshi Bengalis (former Pakistanis) received British citizenship as members of the former British colony (Fryer 1994 in Gardner 1995: 44). After WWII, in order to fulfill cheap labour demands in the formal colonial economy in England, many Bengali male workers were issued a “labour voucher” to work in the British industries (Gardner 1995: 44). In the 1970s they brought their families and built a big Bengali diaspora community in England.

Due to economic turmoil and racial tensions in the early 1970s, migration to England was restricted, but in 1973 the oil boom in the Middle Eastern countries opened up a flood gate for Bangladeshi unskilled construction workers, as well as skilled doctors, engineers, nurses, and accountants to work as migrant workers. Furthermore, “internal colonialism” (Casanova 1969 in Rahman 2003:82) of Bangladesh (former East Pakistan) within the post-colonial Pakistan regime, the historic cyclone in 1970, the Independence War in 1971, the post-war divested political and economic crisis, and finally ‘invented’ Bengal feminine in 1974 had been the local political economic contexts of Bangladeshi Bengali transnational migration. Even though the nationalist-educated middle class of Bengalis hoped to be freed from colonial and post-colonial bourgeoisie classes in Independent Bangladesh, middle and lower class interests were controlled again by the

lumpen bourgeoisie (civil and military classes) classes who exploited national wealth though all forms of plunder in Bangladesh (see Rahman 2003: 83-87; Umar 1985). As a result, in response to the local economic, political and social crisis, to maintain their class identity, and respond to the global demand for cheap labour, middle class young and educated Bangladeshi men migrated to several European countries such as Germany, Italy, and France. It is worth mentioning that from post-independent Bangladesh, a small group of Bangladeshi left-wing young scholars also went to Soviet Russia (the political supporter of Bangladesh independence in 1971) for higher education too, but many of them returned to Bangladesh. In the mid-1980s and onwards, many Bangladeshi workers also migrated to economically booming Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand.

Migration to North America became popular in the 1960s and onwards, when Bangladeshi students started attending American schools, and afterwards settled down there as professionals, mostly university teachers, doctors and engineers. After 1971, every year Bangladeshi young educated male immigrants came to the US due to economic and political crisis in the homeland. But the direct visa (DV) and OP-1 programs that were started in the 1990s brought many Bangladeshis to the US. According to a community leader in the US, about 300,000 to 500,000 live in America, and about 20% of them are struggling to get their legal papers (Siddiqui 2003). Some who were Bangladeshi Muslims moved to Canada after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre due to religious and political extremism in the US. In comparison to the US, there were few Bangladeshis who came to Canada in the early 1960 as students. Canada was not considered a popular destination for many Bangladeshi immigrants until the early 1990s. Essentially, Bengali transnational migration happened to respond to the homeland economic and political crises under colonial domination, to meet the scarcity of cheap labour in the post-WW II England economy, and then a rapidly growing labour market in Gulf countries. In sum, the post independence political and economic crises and growing religious discrimination in the homeland, together with possible job opportunities in open markets, and easier communication, are significant components that have forced educated, skilled, and young Bangladeshi men to migrate transnationally.

Even though it was common belief that Bangladeshi immigrants first came to Canada in the early 1960s, there are no precise dates since two national identities were used before and after the 1947 India partition. Before 1947, Bangladeshi Bengalis used to migrate transnationally with an Indian passport, and they commonly claimed their ethnic and cultural identities as Bengalis from East Bengal. After partition and before Independence, between 1947 and 1971, Bangladeshi Bengali (part of the East Pakistan) used a Pakistani national identity. Consequently, before 1971 it was difficult to find any statistical data on Bengalis from Bangladesh migrating to Canada because they carried different national identities (Rahim 1999). According to Rahim, even after the India partition in 1947 the Canadian government made an agreement with Pakistan and allowed 100 Pakistani immigrants each year. But because East Pakistani Bengalis were exploited and controlled by West Pakistanis, it is hard to believe that any East Pakistani Bengali would have been able to enter to Canada under that agreement. Thus, it is assumed that before 1971 no more than 150 Bangladeshi Bengalis migrated to Canada (Rahim 1999).

Based on the oral histories from early Bengali settlers in Canada, and also from immigrant community organizations' online published documents, I learned that, in response to the immigration regulations of 1967, a few professional Bengalis (engineers, doctors, and university professors) came to Canada to settle down (also see Rahim 1999). In the 1960s, a few Bengali graduate students came to Canada with commonwealth and other scholarships, largely for training in medical and engineering departments in Canadian universities (Rahim 1999). Many of them did not return to Bangladesh and later the "family reunification" provision in Canada allowed them to bring their family members to Canada (Rahman 1999: 8). Even though the Bangladeshi Bengali population in Canada was small in number in the late 1960s, as a politically conscious immigrant group they raised voices against the West Pakistani army deployments in 1971, and attracted world media to support the country's independence (O'Connell 2011; Rahman 1990). After independence in 1971, Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants in Canada upheld their ethnic, linguistic, cultural and national identities as Bengalis and citizens of Bangladesh as opposed to Indian, or Pakistani-Bengali. However, a small group of the Bengali immigrants who did not support freedom of Bangladesh from the Pakistani state upheld their East Pakistani identity as a key symbol of Muslim identity as well as their

Bengali ethnic identity. They are commonly identified as ‘pro-Pakistani’ groups within the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Canada. Since 1971, a cultural and political tension was developed between the pro-Pakistanis and rest of the Bangladeshi immigrants who politically supported Bangladesh as a land of the Bengali population. Thus, ‘Bengali’ as cultural, ethnic, linguistic and national identities and predominant Bengali Muslim identities, have been contested since the early phase of Bangladeshi Bengali settlement in Canada.

Oral histories from the early Bengali settlers in Toronto suggest that just after 1971 independence two distinct immigrant groups came to Canada. One group of immigrants who were highly educated and professional Bengalis came to Canada for political reasons. This elite educated class of professional Muslim Bengali immigrants lived mostly in major cities in West Pakistan and always carried Pakistani nationalist Muslim religious ideologies as well as anti-Bengali cultural identities. They spoke either Urdu or English but hardly spoke Bengali. Some of them were directly involved against the Bangladeshi Independence war. Another group who were graduate students came to Canada from independent Bangladesh, and tried to uphold Bengali ethnic, national and cultural identities in Canada (Rahman 1990). A 57 year old male immigrant who was a freedom fighter and a left-wing cultural worker in Bangladesh expressed his views about the pro-Pakistani Muslim elite and professional Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada:

In general, you can say that they are the pioneers of Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Canada. Almost all of them have Ph.D. degrees, and have worked in Canada as university professors, doctors, and engineers. They are successful with their professional careers, have big houses in suburban areas in Toronto, and used to make six digit salaries. But many of them are pro-Pakistani, pro-Muslim League, and neither have they recognized Bangladesh as a nation, nor leadership of Sheikh Mujib. They mostly carry anti-Bangladesh, anti-Mujib, anti-Awami League, and anti-India political and cultural position in their social and personal lives. I had a huge fight in a social gathering with one of the persons of that group. As a freedom fighter, I could not take his anti-Independence stands anymore. These people hardly come to attend any cultural events arranged by any Bangladeshi cultural groups. They think that they are the elites (*ashraf*) among the Bangladeshi immigrants, and they carry on more like the West Pakistani dominant classes’ mentality. According to these elite pro-Pakistani Bengali immigrants, other Bangladeshi immigrants who came to Canada in the later part of the 1990s as skilled workers, refugees, and any other ways are like *Miskin* (the term used in Arab countries

referring the ultra poor and immigrant workers from poor countries). These educated immigrants came to Canada long before we did, but they have not built the Bangladeshi communities, the Bengali town, and today's 'little Bangladesh' in Toronto. It is we everyday people and working class groups that have been working hard to build a Bengali community in Canada.

In discussing the political and economic contexts of Bangladeshi Bengali migration just after the Independence war in 1971, a 60 year old male respondent who migrated to Germany just after Bangladeshi independence told me that many young university graduates who entered into the war as freedom fighters and helped to bring independence had to find alternative ways to make a living in post-war contexts in Bangladesh. The 1970 cyclone, and later the war-devastated economy, had been major reasons to consider migration from Bangladesh. In addition, many-left wing political activists (e.g., pro China communist group) who politically did not support Bangladeshi independence or emergence of bourgeois national classes, (e.g., members of Nationalist Socialist Parity *Jatio Somajtrantric Dal* who raised their voices against the Awami League as a pro-bourgeois political party) were considered political enemies of the ruling party. They had to seek exile to other countries. These young freedom fighters, and left wing political activists, did not know where to go from Bangladesh, but Canada was not their first choice. Moreover, in 1974 the Bengal famine, and political assassination on 15 August 1975 of the first Bangladeshi Prime-Minister (Bongo Bondhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman), led to the military regime of General Zia-Ur-Rahman in 1976, and the killing of many army officers in army court. This drastic change was the key political context that forced many young university graduates, political activists, freedom fighters, and skilled workers to leave the country to save their own lives. A 58 year old male Bangladeshi Hindu respondent who migrated to Europe in the mid 1980s said to me:

As a freedom fighter and a central committee member of the student wing of Awami League (*chatro league*) at Dhaka University, I was not safe in Bangladesh just after *Bongo Bhanu's* assassination in 1975. Everything changed in Bangladesh; we were not able to say anything against the murder lead by a group of young army officers and state power. I went underground and exiled to one of the Eastern provinces in India for several months. Later I returned to Bangladesh as I had my family and they needed me to support them. One day officers of national and army intelligence branches in Bangladesh called me, and I was told to join in a new political party (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) and lead the student wing of that party;

otherwise, I would be sent to trial and face punishment. I became frightened, as it was a life threatening call. I said to myself that I fought against the Pakistani army, brought independence to my country, and served my country; now it is time to think about my family. I would not be successful to fight against our Bangladeshi state army who are still carrying the Pakistani spirit. Without telling anyone, I called my friends in Germany, and they arranged everything to come to Germany in 1978. After staying two years there, I moved to Canada in 1980. I was not alone; there were hundreds of young Bangladeshi graduates, freedom fighters, and young professionals like me who had to leave the country for security reasons and who exiled in foreign lands.

In the changing political and economic contexts of General Zia's regime in Bangladesh between 1976 and 1981, many young educated Bangladeshis had to migrate from Bangladesh. According to a research respondent who migrated to Canada in the early 1970s, many Bangladeshis came as refugees to Canada, settling in Montreal, Quebec City, and many other port cities between 1980 and 1990. Many of them jumped ships like in old times; these Bangladeshi immigrants are identified as the ship-jumper group (*fal deoa party*) by local immigrants. In the early phase, the Bangladeshi immigrants who entered Canada through major Canadian airports to seek asylum in Canada, they are identified as *hal tola party* (people who raised their hands up and surrendered their papers and passports at airports) by other Bangladeshi immigrants who entered Canada later in skilled workers categories. Many Bangladeshi immigrants came to Montreal before the 1986 Canada referendum in order to get easy citizenship in Canada. I was told that Bangladeshi Bengalis came to Canada any way possible, as members of a world bicyclist tourist group, volunteers for the Pope's religious convention in Canada, with short term student visas, or as general tourists. A 64 year old male immigrant who came to Canada from Europe in the early 1980s told me:

We did not have any idea about Canada when we thought to move out from Bangladesh in the late 1970s due to political, legal, and economic uncertainties. The funny thing is that in the year 1982 or 1983, the Canadian government introduced a law to require visas for Bangladeshi nationals to enter into Canada; before, as a citizen of a member of Commonwealth nations, any Bangladeshi person could come to Canada just with an air ticket. If we had known, many of us could have come to Canada. I had to leave the country because as a young professional I did not see any hope in Bangladesh. After Independence the law and order situation had collapsed, and corruption was everywhere, especially when the army took power in 1976. I realized that I could not survive as an honest young banker in

Bangladesh; I was ordered to make any financial decisions in my bank by obeying corrupt army officers and new political leaders. I thought I should leave the country then. At that time, I heard from my other friends that, being a Bangladeshi, I could go to Germany easily. I and another two friends collected German visas, arranged 500 dollars and left the country. You know, we did not have any idea about Canadian immigration opportunities; we got the information when we were in Germany. I could not become a German in my life; there was much racism and we faced a language barrier; all our friends who were in Germany at that time migrated to Canada; we came all together between 1979 and 1981. Not only did we come by ourselves but we also called people in many other European countries – England and America – who had been struggling to have “papers” (legal status as immigrants) in those countries, and advised them to just come with an air ticket, because the gate to enter into Canada will not be opened for a long time. We were the people who came first to this country, got our papers and brought our families from Bangladesh. People who came earlier just got their education, built their career, but did not do anything to build a Bengali town, a Bengali community outside of Bangladesh. Some of them even do not think that they are from Bangladesh; they think they are someone elite from other spaces. Class defence, you know; they think we are the uneducated immigrants and all problems.

By the same token, in the year 1982 when Major General Ershad captured state power, he banned all political activities, and sanctioned marshal law in Bangladesh. Many workers and leaders of different political parties – poets, social activists, and civil and military bureaucrats – had to leave Bangladesh and ended up in Canada as immigrants. During this time, a visa was not required for Bangladeshi people to come to Canada; therefore, many Bangladeshis came to Canada to seek political asylum. Similarly, in the years 1991, 1996, 2001, and 2009, when the state power shifted from one political group to another after national elections in Bangladesh and new democratic governments came to power, a good number of Bangladeshi people came to Canada as political and religious refugees.

Political and economic reasons have not always triggered Bangladeshi Bengalis to migrate transnationally. Limited social, political and economic access and rights based on their minority religious status, and politically motivated religious processions are one of the major causes for transnational migration among the religious minority groups. Over the years, many Bangladeshi Hindu, Christians, and Buddhists, and other religious and ethnic minority groups have migrated to Canada and other countries as they face potential threats and are victims of religious persecution by majority Muslims and the Bangladeshi

Islamic state. I was told that many Muslim Bangladeshis also came to Canada with fake religious identities and names. A Hindu male (65 years old) respondent shared his reason for migrating to Canada as a religious minority in Bangladesh.

Brother, I was a freedom fighter, I fought for the country but I could not stay in Bangladesh with my pride and honour because I am Hindu. An unhealthy environment surrounded me in the post-independence Bangladeshi fanatical Islamist state. I was not able to fight against Islamic religious-based ideologies that had emerged in Bangladeshi since 1976. I did not want to live in Bangladesh as a second-class Hindu citizen; I wanted to live as a proud citizen of secular golden Bengal (*sonar Bangla*). On several occasions, my religious minority identity came out that I could not take it. During the Independence war my family lost everything. Local collaborators and the Pakistani Army together burned our houses to ashes, stole our household things and cattle, and cut down our trees and sold them as timber. My family had to exile to India during the Independence war, and after Independence members of my family returned to our village with lots of hope and trust. Like my family, I also thought after Independence everything will be changed, we would be able to live in a free country as Bengalis, not as Hindu or Muslim, but nothing happened. I fought against the Pakistani army without thinking who was Hindu and who was Muslim. Over time, Bangladesh turned into a country only for Muslims, and secular ideologies were replaced by Islamic ideologies, and Hindus were identified as enemies of the state and pro-Indian. People's ideologies and perceptions have been changed, Bangladeshi people turned to more religious fanaticism. I tell you a story why I am saying like this. You can easily understand I am trying today. Listen, one day one of my close friends filed a police case against my elder brother in the context of a local dispute in our village; my brother was sent to jail for a week. The crime my brother committed was in that local fight he supported a person who was right and that guy was a Hindu. The whole village was divided into two groups, Hindu and Muslim. Police did not listen to us; we got the clear message that as Hindu we do not have equal rights in this country. I got so upset; he was even my friend at school but he did it intentionally because we were Hindu and he wanted to harass us. My mother, who used to live in our native village, often was asked by local political leaders, "sister, when are you going to India; any plan? Please let us know before your departure, and do not sell your land to others outside of our village; we will buy all of your land and houses" (*O par kobay jaban didi, kono porikolpona korachen? Jower agay amader janaben, jomi er ghor onno gramer logder kacahy bickree korben na, amra sob kina nibo*). I was a good student, and did my masters degree in sociology, and got a job with Indian Airlines. One of my close friends once told me "as you are a Hindu you got the job with Indian Airlines". I got very upset and replied, "how come you say like that, you are my friend, you know I deserve the job". That evening I decided that I cannot live in Bangladesh and raise my sons and daughters where we will be only judged according to our religious identities. I must

move; culture has changed, people have changed, there is no respect for other religious groups, but I will move to India like many other Bengali Hindus from Bangladesh. I will go to either Europe or America.

Migration to Canada is not only totally confined to the working class Bengalis, religious minorities, and political minorities, but also includes heads of state and political and economic elites in Bangladesh. In the year 2008, when I was conducting fieldwork in Toronto, a former prime minister, an opposition leader and a president of a major political party (AL) in Bangladesh were forced to leave the country by the army-backed civil bureaucrat caretaker government. She took shelter in Canada for several months. Research participants also told me that between 2008 and 2009, when the army-backed caretaker government took action against corruption, and announced war against black-market money, many political leaders, parliament members, businessmen, civil bureaucrats and ex-army officers migrated to Canada. Some of them obtained “business class” immigration visas and settled in Canada. These are economic and political elites who came to Canada to have temporary shelters. As soon as political situations have changed and become more controlled in Bangladesh, they will go back to Bangladesh. I have found that many of these elite groups’ family members are living permanently in Canada, their children are going to schools and universities, and they frequently commute back and forth in response to political and legal situations in the homeland. Therefore, this is a totally different perspective and context of Bangladeshi Bengali migration to Canada, and these immigrants are obviously in a separate category according to their class, motive, reasons and purpose for their temporary migration to Canada. When general immigrants have seen that their former heads of the state – key Bangladeshi political leaders, bureaucrats, and popular cultural workers – are living in the same communities, and also communicating back and forth frequently, Canada as a foreign land (*bidesh*) has been transformed to a homeland (*desh*) for them (see Gardner 1995). My research incorporated two families from these political elite groups and conducted household survey. One individual from these two families agreed to participate for an hour-long semi-structured interview, but I was unable to do an in-depth interview with any of the elite political immigrant families from Bangladesh.

Mass Bangladeshi migration to Canada started in the early 1990s in response to a more globalized economic order, job opportunities, and new Canadian immigration law. Still, Bangladeshi Bengalis are coming to join their families as skilled workers, asylum seekers, businessmen, and students who generally have not returned to Bangladesh. According to my respondents, political and economic unrest, lack of social, economic, environmental security, cost of higher education, poor healthcare and medical facilities, and lack of job markets are key reasons to migrate to Canada from Bangladesh. According to the 2001 census, 35,000 Bangladeshi immigrants live in Canada and 18,470 live in Toronto, but the 2006 census shows the rapid growth of immigrants, which is nearly 52,430 Bengali speaking persons who live in Toronto. 87% of them have come from Bangladesh. According to local residents and my respondents, between 60,000 and 70,000 Bangladeshis (both legal and illegal immigrants) are in Toronto. Therefore, it is clearly viewed that Bangladeshi immigrants have become one of the major immigrant groups of South Asians, and the number is growing each day.

Migration History of Research Participants

Considering the general trends of Bangladeshi immigration to Canada, I draw upon interviews with 75 immigrant families who came to Canada between the early 1960s and 2007 in order to flesh out the patterns of Bangladeshi immigration to Canada. Because there are no written records that reflect the causes and contexts of Bangladeshi immigration to Canada, I have collected family histories from my respondents that will provide a micro picture of historical, social, political and economic contexts of Bangladeshi immigration along with both a global and local perspective (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Migration histories of the 75 Bangladeshi immigrant families in Toronto, based on family survey in 2007.

Years of Migration to Canada	Countries from which Bangladeshis Migrate to Canada					Total Number of Families	%
	East Pakistan or India	USA	Europe or Australia	Middle Eastern Countries	Bangladesh		
1960-65	1					1	1.3%
1965-70					1	1	1.3%
1971-75					1	1	1.3%
1976-80			1 (Ger)			1	1.3%
1981-85			3 (UK, Ger)		2	5	6.7%
1985-90		1	3		3	7	9.3%
1991-95			1	2	6	9	12.0%
1996-2000		4	1 (Aus)	3	14	22	29.0%
2001-05		6		3	12	21	28.0%
2005-08				1	6	7	9.3%
Totals	1	11	9	9	45	75	100.0%

According to my survey, only 5% of respondent families came to Canada between 1960 and 1980; some of them migrated from Bangladesh and also European countries. They were early Bangladeshi immigrants who migrated to Canada as professionals, refugees, graduate students, and for family reunification. I included three individuals from families who came to Canada as educated professionals. A 68 year old Bangladeshi male engineer who came to Canada in the 1970s told me:

It was not our exact plan to settle down in Canada; we thought at the end we might move to the USA, but it just happened. We just came to Canada for higher studies, jobs, and for political reasons, but we never went back to Bangladesh.

They were the elite and successful professionals in Bangladesh who came to Canada in the first wave of Bangladeshi migration to Canada. Between 1981 and 1985, 6.66% of respondent families migrated to Canada, and many of them came from European countries. Between 1985 and 1990, 9.33% of respondent families migrated to Canada. Among these families, initially male members migrated to Canada mostly from Germany and other European nations. These were the Bangladeshi young educated males

who had to seek political asylum in the mid-1970s and early 1980s in Germany and other European countries. According to them “at that time Europe was quite different from today; we faced racial discrimination, it was hard to get citizenship in Germany, and language was an issue too, and when Canada’s gates were opened, we entered into Canada”. 12% of my researched families came to Canada in the years between 1991 and 1995. During this period, Bangladeshi families who had already migrated to Middle Eastern countries as engineers, pharmacists, and doctors in the post-1973 oil boom period started coming to Canada as immigrants. The key reason to migrate from Middle Eastern Arab nations to Canada was for their children’s higher education in college and university, and the children of those who migrated to Arab nations in the late 1980s were nearing the age for university. As English education had been too expensive in the Arab nations, they elected to migrate to Canada. Several of my research respondents who migrated to Canada from Middle Eastern nations expressed themselves as follows:

In the mid-1990s, it was a flow among the professional Bangladeshi workers in the Arab world; everyone is trying to come to Canada or USA. All of our friends were applying for Canadian immigration, so we also followed them.

One respondent said that about 20 Bangladeshi families who worked in Saudi Arabia came to Canada together. They had been friends for the last 25 years, and many of them bought houses in the same neighbourhood. According to other immigrants:

“Bangladeshi families who have migrated from Arab nations are the new affluent class within Bangladeshi immigrant communities. Because they have come to Canada with ‘petro dollars’, they have not come to Canada to change their living conditions like us; they have already gained economic freedom”.

Ideologically and culturally, many of these Bangladeshi immigrant families who spent years in Arab nations are carrying authentic Islamic religious norms and traditions and they are actively involved in preaching Islamic religious values, norms, and rituals to other Bangladeshi immigrants.

Between 1996 and 2001, in response to new immigration policy changes (Family class) in Canada (commonly called the “point system” among Bangladeshi immigrant groups), the rate of migration to Canada increased 140% over previous years (see Sobahan 2007). From my family survey, I also found that a major portion of my research respondents came to Canada between 1996 and 2006 as skilled workers who were mostly

young, educated, and professionals (see Ghosh 2007:231). These immigrants who are mostly Information Technology professionals, accountants, doctors, and engineers, have university degrees and are also identified as “knowledge workers” (Khadaria 2001) and “designer immigrants” (Simoons 1998 in Ghosh 2007: 230). About 57% of immigrant families in my research survey fall into this category, and they came straight to Canada from Bangladesh in response to migration opportunities, demand in job markets, economic opportunities, and global flows of information and communication. It is worth mentioning that these professional Bangladeshi migrants generally have migrated as families and with families in contrast to previous trends when single men used to migrate and settle down, and later arrange for family members to accompany them. Between the years 2001 and 2006, of 28 immigrant families in my research who came to Canada, I found that 6 respondent families migrated from the US. After “9/11”, many Bangladeshi Muslim families who had originally migrated to the US moved to Canada for security reasons. I was told that political, economic and social insecurity in Bangladesh were major causes to migrate to Canada. It is commonly said by Bangladeshi immigrants that they have come to Canada for their children’s education, better future, and security of lives. I have also incorporated more recent immigrants (2005-2008) who make up 9.33% of total surveyed families in my research. Out of 75 immigrant families, 11 Bangladeshi immigrant families migrated to Canada from the USA, 9 families from Middle Eastern countries, and 9 families from different countries of Europe. But out of 75 immigrant families, 45 Bangladeshi immigrant families (60%) migrated directly from Bangladesh (see Table 4.1). Thus, Bangladeshi immigrants who had started their journey in the early 1970s and 1980s as exiles, refugees, and later came to Canada in skilled worker categories, little by little have become key members of the South Asian diaspora group in Toronto, Canada.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF BANGLADESHI IMMIGRANTS IN TORONTO

The foregoing overview of the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Toronto clearly shows that the numbers are growing each year in Canada. It is a new ethnic group compared to other South Asian diasporas in Canada. Bangladeshi Bengalis are still passing through a “liminal stage” with their unsettled socioeconomic, demographic, and

cultural identities in the multicultural city of Toronto. Bangladeshi immigrants are trying to work hard to settle down and are struggling to make a place in multicultural Canada.

Now I turn to socio economic conditions of Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto. In this section, I portray a general sense of immigrants' settlement patterns, family and household structure, economic conditions, marital status, and the social, cultural, and religious aspects of their immigrant lives in Toronto.

Patterns of Residence and Settlement

Bangladeshi immigrants' residence structures and settlement patterns have been shaped by several components: their particular patterns of migration (Gardner 2002), social capital and transnational communications (Bourdieu in Ghosh 2007, Ghosh 2007), symbolic ties (Faist 2000), length of migration, economic success, religious identity, kinship and social networks, and regional identity. Like Tower Hamlets in UK (Gardner 2002), and Jackson Heights in New York initially, Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto prefer to stay in several of high-rise rental apartments (Crescent town, Dentonia apartments and Macey Ave) on both sides of Victoria Park subway station. This residential area is identified as *Bengali Para*¹⁷ by Bangladeshi immigrants. Bangladeshi immigrants also have settled down in private houses and rental apartments within several blocks between Victoria Park and Main subway station areas on Danforth Street on East York, (see Ghosh 2007:235, Ahmed 1996). From the north side of Victoria Park residential areas, a section of Danforth Road (where Bangladeshi grocery stores, mosques, and other ethnic organizations are situated) to Main Street subway station, the total area is identified as *Bangla Town* in Toronto. For new Bangladeshi immigrants, finding a space in less expensive apartments represents their struggling economic status in Canada, which Preston & Cox (1999) have identified as "housing class" (also see Rex and Moore 1967). However, out of 136 respondents, 45 of them told me that their friends and families arranged places for them before their arrival in Canada, and in most of the cases the first houses were rented close to friends' houses and apartments in *Bangla town* (see also Ghosh 2007:237).

¹⁷ In Bangladesh, the term *Para* refers to a space or location that consists of 10 to 15 households where a particular occupational group lives together, for example, *kumar para* (in a particular location or corner of a village/town where several potters live and work).

About 48% of my respondent families who came to Canada within a decade live in from one to three bedroom houses in several high-rise apartments in *Bengali Para* of *Bangla Town* (see Table 4.2). Another 5 families (6.5%) live in shared arrangements (single member of a family who migrated first, husband wife, or husband and wife with a small child). I found that single person immigrants (unmarried, separated, divorced, or married but family members waiting in homeland to accompanying them) preferred these types of living arrangements.

According to my research respondents, in the beginning after their arrival, staying with other Bangladeshi Bengali speakers within the same vicinity, and living in high-rise rental apartments at *Bengali Para* close to *Bangla Town* helped them to minimize cultural shock, negotiate homesickness, and have access to helpful information to be better able to settle down as new immigrants in Toronto. A female respondent (age 42) who came to Canada in the mid-1990s with her family expressed what several others told me:

Without saying one single English word you can live in '*Bengali Para*' where you will have Bengali stores, Bengali speaking doctors, pharmacists, bankers, shopkeepers, hairdressers, bakery shops, restaurants, and any kind of Bengali foods, and what not; just name it. Even you do not have to go outside of the building to get supports like cooked foods, catering services, Bangladeshi snacks, day care facilities, religious teachers, music teachers, and many more family supports.

I also noticed that, after landing in Canada, many male members of immigrant families – those who have good professions, a business, or other involvement in Bangladesh, and are not totally ready to migrate in Canada at that moment – returned to Bangladesh for a certain period of time, while the rest of the family members remained in Canada. These types of Bangladeshi immigrant families prefer to find a basement unit of private houses owned by a Bangladeshi owner, friends, or kin with whom to leave their family members while they return to Bangladesh. In my research population, 9.31% of Bangladeshi immigrant families fall into this category. According to them, this is the best arrangement they can afford in a foreign land, but their family members also will be observed and cared for by friends and families.

Table 4.2 Residential patterns of Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto, fieldwork 2007-08

Pattern of Housing	Number of Families	Percentages
One-bedroom rented apartments	15	20.00%
Two- and three-bedroom rented apartments	21	27.99%
Subsidised houses/apartments	4	5.32%
Rooms of apartments and houses shared with other tenants	5	6.65%
Rented rooms/units in basement of independent houses	7	9.31%
Side by side owned/leased houses	5	6.65%
Condominiums owned/leased	8	10.64%
Independent house owned/leased	10	13.30%
Total	75	100.00%

Due to their economic and educational conditions and legal status in Canada, Bangladeshi immigrants who came to Canada as refugees who did not have enough financial strength to support their families in Toronto initially preferred to find government subsidised housing or a shared housing arrangement. In many cases, they are ineligible to rent a house in a commercial building right away, as they do not have proper jobs nor any credit history in Canada. Research respondents told me that Bangladeshi immigrants who get social supports, and work under the table (cash payment), prefer to stay in government houses. 5.32% of families in my research fall into this category and all of them are living in Regent Park. I found that these immigrant families are less educated, represent working class Bangladeshi immigrants, and belong to the middle age category. For several reasons they have filed to upgrade their credentials in Canada and find “proper” jobs in Canada. I did not ask direct questions about their living arrangements in government-funded housing or their financial conditions in Canada, even if they brought up the issue, because it is a sensitive issue and they might have been offended.

According to Bangladeshi immigrants, only after buying their own home do they feel that they are settled in Canada. One of my respondents said that these rented houses are rather temporary settlements, “transitory sites” (Ghosh 2007: 227) and “housing pathway” (Kissoon 2000 in Ghosh 2007:226), and one day they will move to their own house when they achieve economic stability in Canada. Almost 30% of surveyed families own their homes. Condos and side-by-sides are not considered their permanent houses; these are one step forward to the final achievement. Immigrants who are staying in rented apartments and shared houses have been dreaming that they will have their own independent house with lawn, backyard garden (with flowers and Bangladeshi vegetables) and garage in this city. Even after achieving that dream, one of my male respondents (55 years of age) who lived in an independent house in Brampton captures what others conveyed to me:

We have our houses and everything here in Canada. Still we do not feel that we are settled in Canada; still we do not know where is our home, where to move and where to settle down. You know, in Canada you have to settle down according to your age and your stages of lives. Now we are staying here with our kids, but we have to move again within a few years or so. Here children will not take care of their old parents; they will move with their own lives. And we have to move again, maybe to old age homes, or our native village in Bangladesh. After leaving Bangladesh we are unsettled for our entire life; now we are here and it is our house; ‘home’ we do not know... you tell me where is your home?

Household Structure among Immigrant Families

In my study, seventy-five families from sixty Bangladeshi households are included based on Bangladeshi immigrants’ ‘family structures’, ‘kinship and lineage networks’, ‘marital relationship’, ‘conjugal relations’, ‘domestic function’, ‘co-residential and common residential patterns’, ‘production and reproduction activities’, ‘sets of connected functional relationships’, ‘cooking arrangements’, and ‘sharing patterns of household expenditures and duties’ (see Wiest 1973:187, 1998:64; Hammel and Laslett 1974: 78; Sharma 1980; Gardner 1995:101; Bjerén 1997: 235; Ainoon 2005). Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto commonly refer to household (*ghor* or *basha*) as a physical space in which kin and non-kin members can reside together, but only kin (consanguineal and affinal) are considered as family (see Gardner 1995: 101). Based on household surveys I learned that kin and non-kin members, and multiple nuclear family

units sometimes live in the same residence, and sometimes for a single household. However, the common characteristic of household I found within the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto is “family household” (White 1992: 120). Even though Bangladeshi immigrants commonly separate household members from their families by ‘principles of kinship and locality in their social organizations’ (Keesing 1958 in Bender 1967: 439), differentiating between household and family is still a bit confusing among Bangladeshi immigrants when we see different forms of co-residential groups (see Yanagisako 1979). Bangladeshi immigrants commonly refer to family (*paribar*) – a married couple with children and members of the same lineage group, but in Bengali cultural contexts *paribar* also indicates that “my family is with me”, or “my wife is with me”. In anthropological literature, ‘family’ is a kinship group that is usually related by blood and lineage, and also through affinal relationships. In the Bengali context ‘household’ most often refers to a group of people mostly connected by kinship (both consanguinal and affinal) and who reside commonly, co-operate in the domestic economy, share food, engage in both social and biological reproduction, raise children and socialize them (see Gonzalez 1960 in Wiest 1973:187; Yanagisako 1979; Gardner 1995). In Bangladesh, ‘household’ represents a place where members eat, work and sleep together, generally a family unit where members cook meals (*khana*) in common cooking pots (*dag/dakchaies*) using stoves (*chula*) in a common kitchen and share cooked food with others (see Van Schendel 1981; Jansen 1987; Gardner 1995:101; Lewis et al. 1993). Again, the term household is also commonly perceived as home (*ghar*), and house (*basha*). Given consideration to local religious, cultural and patriarchal norms, Bangladeshi immigrants generally translate “family” in the Canadian immigration policy as a married conjugal couple (conventionally heterosexual) with or without children; therefore, the common and dominant pattern of households among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto is the nuclear family household (domestic group with married couple with or without children). About 58.5% of households are identified in my research as nuclear family households (see Table 4.3).

By looking at Latin American immigrants, Bank and Torrecilha (1998) argued that, along with economic (employment, income) and cultural (English fluency, acculturation) responses to transnational migration, immigrants have to define their living

arrangements in order to face various events in their ‘life courses’ (Tienda and Glass, 1985 in Bank and Torrecilha 1998:04; Bank and Torrecilha 1998:3-19). Like Latin American immigrants, the Bangladeshi immigrants live in extended household arrangements in Toronto to manage various needs in their lives, and four households (6.6%) in my research fall into this category.

Table 4.3 Household structures among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto, 2007-2008

Types of Households	Number of households	Percentages
Nuclear family households	35	58.3%
Extended family households	4	6.6%
Women-headed households	5	8.3%
Women-led households	5	8.3%
Single man-headed households	2	3.3%
Cost-sharing households	7	11.7%
Multifamily households (pooled income)	2	3.3%
Total	60	100.0%

Within a Bangladeshi extended family household in Toronto, I noticed that a married couple with their children (both married and unmarried), grand children, and the married couples’ elderly parents are all staying in the same house (permanently or seasonally), and sharing food that is cooked in a common kitchen. Married children are expected to contribute economically, depending on their current capacity, but parents do not expect economic contribution from their unmarried children. However, unmarried children are expected to help with household chores. I encountered this in two extended family households where married children were staying with their spouses. In both households married children were students and doing part-time jobs, so they hardly or only occasionally contributed economically to household expenditures, but they shared other household duties such as buying groceries, cooking, taking the garbage out, gardening, taking household members to doctors, and cleaning snow from driveways.

They were expected to move out when able to support themselves economically. It is a common trend among the Bangladeshi immigrant families to form an extended family household by bringing parents from the homeland to Canada to support pregnant wives during their pregnancy, and later helping to raise their newborn babies and young children. I also noticed that both kin and non-kin persons who come to Canada as immigrants stay temporarily with relatives and/or friends for certain periods of time. In sum, Bangladeshi extended family household composition in Toronto is flexible, seasonal, and influenced by age and need.

Less than 4% households in my study population fall into a multifamily category in which a couple with their unmarried children, and their married children with their spouses and children all are staying in the same house, but they eat separately as different family units. Married children share rent, and social and familial responsibilities toward each other such as occasional gifts, arranging birthday parties, taking care of each other's children when it is necessary, but they perform these roles as distinct family members. They maintain separate bank accounts and phone numbers but share the same house. I refer to these as multifamily households; they are different than joint and extended family households. They are close to a 'pooled households' arrangement (see Correa 1998) but members in multifamily households do not pool money in a common pot to meet household expenditures. However, no matter what the sharing and financing mechanisms are within the extended households, both parents and especially male children express satisfaction and pride, and gain social practice in staying in a joint family household arrangement following established Bangladeshi peasant traditions and patriarchal social norms.

I have observed that persons without kin connections in Toronto live in 'shared households'. Most of these cases consist of students, single immigrants, recently separated and divorced men and women, and married persons currently without family members in Toronto, all prefer to live in a shared household arrangement. The common pattern of shared household is when a family rents out a room of a house to a kin or non-kin person for a place to sleep and share common spaces such as living room, kitchen, and washroom with other members. In sharing space with others, Bangladeshi household members prefer someone from their hometown (*desh bari*), same religious background,

and some kind of ritual kinship relationship. This pattern of household is very flexible in receiving and losing members, and is a source of rent revenue among household members.

Another pattern of shared household arrangement was found in Toronto in which a couple of students, bachelor males, and married male immigrants without their families rent a house and share the space. Two or three unmarried females, and married female migrants without husbands, and a person recently leaving a marital relationship also arrange a shared household in Toronto.¹⁸ Bangladeshi immigrants have identified these shared households as “transition house” and “strategic household” because immigrants have formed the shared arrangements in order to negotiate initial settlement costs, manage sudden changes of life, and organize temporary shelter. According to the household members, this type of household is identified as “bachelor house” *bachelor der gor* (home for unmarried even if there is mixture of married and unmarried immigrants), “mass house”¹⁹, and modern *busti* (shanty town) in Canadian cities. They may share food with the member or may not, depending on their household arrangements. I have observed that even if they are sharing among non-kin persons, in their day to day communication they use Bengali kinship terminology) with each other in their shared households, such as *bhai* (term for brother among Muslims), *dada* (term for brother in Hindu and Christian groups), *mama* (uncle: mother’s brother), *kaka* (uncle: father’s brother), *bon/apa* (sister), *khala* (aunt). One of the members within a shared household plays the household head role, generally the one who has taken the lease, or the elder person according to age, or the one who has been living in the domicile for the longest period of time. Out of sixty households, I found seven such households (11.7%) in which unrelated non-kin are sharing a living room, bathroom, and eating space, but they have separate sleeping rooms for each member. I refer to them as “cost sharing households”, or “pooled households”, where mostly newer and young single immigrants as well as married immigrants whose family members are still living in homeland have arranged a household to minimize their living costs.

¹⁸ Mixed gender household arrangements are not common within Bengali immigrant communities, but there are a few examples among international student groups who were not part of my study group.

¹⁹ In Bangladesh, both married and unmarried workers who come to big cities without their families, they develop a cost sharing household arrangement that is commonly identified as “mass house”.

Of sixty households, five households (8.3%) are identified as women-headed households and another five households (8.3%) are “women-led household” in which women are doing all household activities in the absence of their husbands (see table 4.3). Generally, women who are divorced and separated have become heads of the households among the Bangladeshi immigrants. However, I have found that these women also continuously communicate transnationally with the male members of their natal family, and with other kin groups for personal guidance, advice and support. However, women-led households are a bit different than women-headed households. In women-led households, women are married and they maintain their conjugal relationships, but their husbands are not co-residing with them all the time in Canada. The male members of this household are working outside of Canada, but they always make the decisions for their family. These households can be called transnational and trans-city (communication between two major cities in North America, or between two nations) households in which telephone and the Internet are the key vehicles for communication and sharing household responsibilities. In analysing household composition among the Bangladeshi immigrants, I explore in Chapter Five whether globalization-led transnational migration has influenced gender roles, gender identity, and patriarchal norms between men and women, which are common markers of defining gender identities in the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant society in Toronto.

Age of Bangladeshi Immigrants

The general distribution of man and women represents prominent migration patterns, the gender dimension, age ratios between men and women, and the demographic characteristics of Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada. My survey of 69 men and 67 women (136 research participants) involved 75 families within 60 households, all first generation Bangladeshi immigrants to Canada. To examine age as a factor among immigrants, it is important to note that it is hard to determine real ages of Bangladeshi immigrants because most Bangladeshi immigrants have two birth dates; one is the “real biological age” or the day an individual was born and another one is ‘adjusted age’²⁰,

²⁰ The “adjusted age” commonly refers to “certificate age” which is determined by a high school just before filling out registration forms for the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination in Bangladesh. Often parents request teachers to reduce a year or two of their children’s age. Later this adjusted age is documented in all academic certificates, and all government documents as the official age.

which is generally one to three years less than the original birth dates. The key reason for referring to a reduced age is that it is believed to provide better access to jobs after one's academic education. Many students in Bangladesh lose a few years in their academic lives due to political unrest and conflicts, environmental disasters, and delays in finding jobs. Beyond that, after getting a job, an individual can work longer years in a harsh and competitive economic situation to compensate for time that they have lost in their early years for getting higher education.

When I asked about the age of my research respondents, some of them laughed and said “which one do you want, the original or the certificate one?” I generally asked their age with preference for their official age. Some of the male participants were uncomfortable to mention their age in the presence of their wives and other family members, because in many Bangladeshi families, the age difference between husbands and wives are ten to fifteen years, which is still accepted in Bangladesh but not very common in Canadian social and cultural contexts. I was told that the Bangladeshi male immigrants who bring wives from the homeland always try to hide their real age to impress young women. After migration, the Bangladeshi immigrant women have become more aware of “proper age gap” between men and women in Canada. More recently, the age issue has turned into a continuous struggle between husbands and wives among Bangladeshi immigrant families that I have addressed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

I did not directly ask women respondents about their age because it is culturally very offensive to do so by a male. Women participants generally provided their approximate age and many of them left this blank in the survey forms. Most men respondents provided their original age.

Table 4.4 illustrates that of 69 male and 67 female Bangladeshi immigrants surveyed, 18 male immigrants (26.1%) and 5 female immigrants (7.5%) of total respondents fall between 50 and 55 years. A significant number of the immigrant population among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto (30% female, and 23.2% male members) are within the 45 to 50 age group.

Table 4.4 Age distributions among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto, based on household survey, 2007

Age Categories	Male Respondents	Percentage Male Respondents	Female Respondents	Percentage Female Respondents
25-30	1	1.4%	7	10.4%
30-35	3	4.3%	7	10.4%
35-40	3	4.3%	10	14.9%
40-45	10	14.5%	12	17.9%
45-50	16	23.2%	20	29.8%
50-55	18	26.1%	5	7.5%
55-60	13	18.9%	3	4.4%
60-65	2	2.9%	2	3.0%
65-70			1	1.4%
70-75	2	2.9%		
75-80	1	1.4%		
Total	69		67	

In the 40-45-age range of my survey, 14.5% are men, and 17.9% are women immigrants. Most of the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto are between 40 and 55 years of age. According to Bangladeshi immigrants, the key reason is the Canadian immigration policy. Most of the immigrants who have come to Canada in the skilled workers category, have at least a bachelor degree, three years of work-related experience, and have saved a couple thousand dollars to apply for Canadian immigration. As a result, only a person in Bangladesh who is about 30 to 35 years of age can think about immigration to Canada and meet the criteria. Furthermore, the whole process takes another three to five years to get landing papers. Therefore, new immigrant families who come to Canada are commonly in their late thirties and early forties.

Only 4.3% male and 14.9% female immigrants fall into the age range of 35 to 40. Compared to male Bangladeshi immigrants, female immigrants are older, predominantly between 30 and 35 years old, or 10.4% of my total survey population. Only a fraction of male immigrants fall into the age range of 25-30. Table 4.4 shows that only 1.4% of men and 10.5% of women are between 25 and 30 years old. According to the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants of my study, the general trend of migration to Canada is for male members to be the principle applicants, and female members accompany them as married family members. Conventionally, in the context of arranged marriage, Bangladeshi men prefer to marry brides at least five to ten years younger than themselves. Therefore, married men who have come to Canada with their family are mostly 40 to 55 years of age; their spouses are at least 5 to 15 years younger than the husband. Some of the immigrants told me that even if single men come to Canada in their early thirties, they need at least five to seven years to settle down, get proper documentation (passport), and gain economic stability in Canada. Only when they are nearly 35 to 40 years of age can they think to get married. It is commonly the view among Bangladeshi immigrant men that they bring brides from their homeland who are 10 to 15 years younger than themselves. According to my research respondents, the age gap between men and women has become an issue in marital disputes among the Bangladeshi immigrant families, something I will discuss in subsequent chapters.

Only 2 men and 2 women Bangladeshi immigrant respondents (2.9% and 3%) are between the ages of 60 and 65. They belong to the early Bangladeshi immigrants who came in the late 1970s to Canada. There is one woman immigrant respondent between 70 and 80 years, and I located 2 men who came to Canada in the early 1960s. In sum, there are few Bangladeshi immigrants in their advanced years. One respondent told me that due to reduced age, he failed to admit his son in the same grade in Canada that his son used to study in Bangladesh. However, there are a few elderly immigrants who have come to Canada on a seasonal basis, generally in the summer to visit their children.

Marital Status of Research Participants

Individual immigrant's personal identity, social interaction, settlement pattern, social mobility, legitimacy, and access to community events are significantly shaped by their marital status. Legitimate heterosexual conjugal unions are the dominant component

within the Bangladeshi immigrants' social organization; marital status is a key marker of an individual's identity. Although a fair number of Bangladeshi Bengali unmarried female students are found in different universities in Canada, it is still considerably harder to accept an unmarried Bangladeshi female coming alone to Toronto. During my fieldwork, I was asked many times whether I am married or not, whether my wife was in Canada, and how many children I had.

According to my research respondents, early Bangladeshi immigrants were mostly single men, or married men who came to Canada alone, and only later on bringing their other family members. Reunion of family members with husbands has been a common mechanism in increasing the number of Bangladeshi women immigrants in Canada. Most Bangladeshi women have come to Canada as married partners or wives. After 1990, however, when skilled workers started coming to Canada in response to new immigration policies, most Bangladeshi immigrants came to Canada with their families (husband, wife and children). So, over time, single men to family migration became a common pattern of Bangladeshi immigration to Canada (see Table 4.5).

Among 75 surveyed families, 60 family units (80%) are based on heterosexual conjugal relationships. They are generally co-residential groups with or without children. Of 75 families, four domestic group units involve the head of the family having just experienced a separation. Divorced persons head seven domestic groups. Among the seven divorced heads of the households, two women came to Canada as divorced single mothers with their children; they divorced in Bangladesh. In four family units (5.3%) the head of the family is separated; in seven family units (9.3%) the head of the family is divorced. All cases of separation between husbands and wives occurred within six to ten years of their arrival in Canada. Of 75 families in my research, in two family units (2.6%) the head of the family is widowed. Both are men who have lost their wives but have never remarried. My survey also involves two single women. According to Bengali culture, "single" means they are never married. In my research I have not included structures of "blended families"²¹ and "families by choice"²² because they are uncommon and not socially acceptable among the Bangladeshi immigrant groups. I did not encounter

²¹ A blended family forms when a widow or a divorced person marries and stays with their children from a previous marriage.

²² Families formed among gays and lesbians couples.

any gay or lesbian relationships or same-sex marriage unions in my research, and such unions are still not accepted within Bangladeshi immigrant communities, and no one publicly discloses their sexual orientation. That does not mean that these components are not present within the Bangladeshi immigrant communities, but I was unable to identify any. However, issues like importance of family, monogamy, purity of marriage, heterosexuality, and marrying within the same ethnic and religious groups are strong social, cultural, religious, patriarchal, and moral norms among Bangladeshi immigrants. I will address these issues further in connecting globalization and transnational migration in subsequent chapters.

Table 4.5 Marital statuses of research participants, 2007-2008 field research in Toronto

Marital Status of Immigrant families	Number of immigrant families	Percentage of Families
Married	60	80.0%
Separated	4	5.3%
Divorced	7	9.3%
Widowed	2	2.6%
Never married/ Single	2	2.6%
Total	75	100.0%

Religious Differences among Researched Families

Initially, I identified 25 families from each religious group based on their given names and surnames as commonly reflected in a Bangladeshi individual's religious identity. Among 75 respondent families, 22 families (29.33%) of researched families identified themselves as Sunni Muslims. 22 families (29.33%) identified themselves as Hindu believers. Of the 22 Hindu families in my research, 6 families are identified as *Brahmin*, 5 as *Kashtriya*, and 5 come from Scheduled caste groups (e.g., *Shudras* and Untouchables). As I mentioned in Chapter Three, Bangladeshi Buddhist immigrant families were not incorporated into my study because Buddhist religious identity was not contested in recent historical and political contexts the way practitioners of other religious did.

Table 4.6 Distribution of Bangladeshi immigrant families based on religious identity, survey 2007-08

Religious Identity	Denomination / Caste		Number of Families	%
Muslim	All Sunni		22	29.3
Hindu	Number of families		22	29.3
	Brahmin	6		
	Kashtriya	5		
	Scheduled caste	5		
	No response about Caste identity	6		
Christian	Catholic	8	24	32.0
	Baptist	7		
	Anglican	6		
	“Fellowship”	1		
	Presbyterian	1		
	Seventh Day Adventist	1		
Atheist	Humanist, following Lalon’s philosophy, Communist (H=2, M=2)		4	6.6
Mixed Religious	Husband and wife came from different religious identities (H and M), (M and C), and (H and C)		3	4.0
Total			75	100.0%

Note: H = Hindu, M = Muslim, C = Christian

Eight families did not disclose their caste identity. As shown in Table 4.6, 24 families (32% of total researched families) have identified themselves as Christian. Among the 24 Christian families, 8 respondent families identified themselves as Catholic, 7 families as Baptist, and 6 families as Anglican.

The following Protestant denominations – Presbyterian, Fellowship, and Seventh Day Adventist – each had one family from among the Bangladeshi Bengali Christian

immigrants in Toronto. I also identified two Bangladeshi Bengali Muslim families and two Hindu families whose surnames and given names resemble common markers of distinct religious identities, but they have identified themselves as atheists and followers of *Lalon's* humanistic philosophy²³. No members among the Bangladeshi Christian families identified themselves as atheists; they clearly and specifically mentioned their denominational identity along with their common Christian religious identity. In only three families of the survey did husbands and wives come from two different religious backgrounds.

Social and Cultural Institutions in Toronto

According to an immigrant writer and teacher in my research, there are some 42 social and cultural organizations among Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto. In this section, I have only used names of those organizations that were mentioned by my research participants. There are three different types of social and cultural organizations that I observed in Toronto. One type is formed for all Bangladeshi immigrants, for example, Bangladesh Association of Canada, Bangladesh Association of Toronto, and Bangladesh Association Inc. These are the organizations formed for all Bangladeshi immigrants to reflect a homogeneous national, ethnic and cultural identity, however, they are distinct and separated according to political and cultural identities (see Box 4.1).

²³ Lalon was a folk writer, singer, master, and philosopher in Bengal who raised his voice against communalism based on religious identity, caste and class hierarchy. He upheld humanism and secularism in his songs and writings.

Box 4.1 Social and cultural institutions among Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto

1. Bangladesh Association of Canada (breakdown 1991)
2. Bangladesh Association of Toronto
3. *Uddichi* Bangladesh (Left-wing cultural organization)
4. *Chayanot* Toronto (Bangladesh based cultural institution)
5. *Amra Chayanot*, Toronto (Faction of *Chayanot* in Toronto)
6. Bangladeshi Association Inc.
7. Bangladesh Theatre, Toronto
8. *Itihash Desh Somaj* (History, Homeland, and Society)
9. Bangladesh Cultural Society
10. Bangladesh Culture Centre
11. International Mother Language Day Monument Implementation Committee
12. *Alam-Tara* Music school

Within the immigrant community, several organizations are identified that are formed to address specific goals, needs, and agendas, for example, *Itihash Desh Somaj*, Bangladesh Theatre, Bengali Music and Dance school, and Monument Implementation Committee in the contexts of migration. A couple of social and cultural organizations are formed in Toronto to replicate of homeland organizations such as *Chhayanaut*²⁴ Toronto, *Uddichi*²⁵ Bangladesh, and *Amra Chhayanaut*. These organizations are formed by the members who were actively involved in *Chhayanaut* Bangladesh and *Uddichi* Bangladesh, but now living in Toronto. *Amra Chhayanaut* is a fraction of *Chhayanaut* Toronto that originated from *Chhayanaut* Bangladesh. However, common goals of these social and cultural organizations in Toronto are to uphold and celebrate Bengali culture and traditions, national days of Bangladesh such as Independence Day (Mach 26), Victory Day (December 16), Martyr Day or International Mother Language Day (February 21), and Bengali New Years Day (*pohela Boyshak*), and maintain national and ethnic solidarity among Bangladeshi immigrants (see Rahim 1991:2).

²⁴ *Chhayanaut* – an organization for Bengali cultural and nationalist movement, a center for research, teaching and promotion of songs written by Rabindra Nath Tagoree (*Rabindra sangeet*) and Bengali performing art forms.

²⁵ *Uddichi* is cultural organization by the left wing student wings and political parties in Bangladesh, who raise their voices against dominant power, social inequality, and subalterns' rights through their cultural performance.

Local *Somitees* in Global Settings

Local *somitees*²⁶ (social group or association) are organized and formed in Toronto based on immigrants' geographical birth places, their native villages, police Station (*thana*), district towns (*Zilla*), and divisional territories (*Bivag*) in Bangladesh. Socially and culturally, as well as in terms of their distinct Bengali linguistic dialects, immigrants feel closer connections to each other if they find someone who has migrated from their home district towns. During my fieldwork, I identified the existence of 18 district *somitees*, and many of my respondents were members as well as leaders of these local *somitees*. A group of my research population found some functionality of these local *somitees* in connecting Bangladeshi immigrants to each other, and to build social and cultural networks with each other. Members of each *somitee* address each other as “*deshi*²⁷” which suggests a closer relationship than Bangladeshi Bengali national relationship. Some of my research participants were critical about various activities of different *somitees*, according to them; these associations are in many ways dividing the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Toronto into various locals, districts, regions, and cultures in oppose to an organized ethnic community.

However, the common activity of these district *somitees* in Toronto is to organize an annual get-together with all *somitee* members through picnics, cultural and social programs that represent their local culture and traditions. They do not have any particular place to meet, so they generally rent a community hall, restaurant, or a space in a Church to organize their events in Toronto. Particular district *somitees* only celebrate birthdays of national heroes who were born in their home districts in Bangladesh. Immigrant businessmen are actively involved in, and organizers of, these *somitees* because as a local men they try to represent their authenticity to the potential clients. I also observed that within one district, a couple of *somitees* were existed based on a local political faction and a leadership crisis within the immigrant communities.

²⁶ *Somitee* is a Bengali term that refers a collective force that is formed by a group of people based on their age, gender, occupation, regionalism, and common objectives, for example, co-operative *somitee*, and peasant *somitee*.

²⁷ *Deshi* is a Bengali term that refers a person who has come from same village, town, district, region and country. In transnational immigrant settings in Toronto, the term *deshi* is also used as common maker of identity that represents a person from the South Asian communities (Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan).

For example, within the Sylhet division, five different *somitees* were found, e.g., Sylhet, Jalalabad, Bianibazar, Moulovi Bazar, and Hobigang *Somitee*. All are factions of many social groups of Bangladeshi immigrants who are identifying themselves distinctly and separately as being from a particular district of the Sylhet division. Box 4.2 also shows that within the Barisal division there is one *somitee* called Greater Barisal *somitee* that represents all districts of the Barisal division. However, people of Gopalgang district have maintained a separate *somitee* and identity in Toronto even though it is a district under the Barisal division. In the same way, there is one association connecting all the districts under Dhaka division called Greater Dhaka *somitee*, but again I found this separate *somitee* to be formed by the immigrants who came specifically from the Bikrompur district town of the Dhaka division. Following the same tradition, Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto have formed associations on the basis of their native district towns, such as Madaripur, Sariatpur, Khulna, and Rajshahi *somitees*. There can be many other *somitees* within the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Toronto, but I have only mentioned the names of *somitees* that I have encountered during my field research and in which my research participants are involved (see Box 4.2).

These local and district *somitees* represent distinct and fragmented social groups, cultural traditions, food preferences and preparations, and Bengali linguistic dialects within the broader contexts of Bangladeshi Bengali cultural and social identities in Toronto. I will explore the contexts of development of various district-based *somitees* and their roles in the immigrant settings in Toronto in subsequent chapters.

Religious Institutions within Bangladeshi Immigrant Communities in Toronto

In order to represent Bangladeshi immigrants' ethnic and religious identity and traditions, Bangladeshi Muslim and Hindu immigrant members have established Mosques and Temples in Toronto. During my fieldwork in Toronto, I was informed that Bangladeshi Muslims founded three Mosques in Toronto; these are *Bitul Mokharm*, *Bitul Aman* and a mosque without a formal name (informally organized by a community leader and a newspaper owner on Danforth Road). All the mosques are established in Danforth and Victoria Park areas in Scarborough, Toronto. Mostly Muslim immigrants come to

these Mosques for Friday prayers (*jummar Namaj*²⁸), special prayer during the month of Ramadan after breaking fast (*tarabir namaz*²⁹), and two *Eid* congregations. Many devoted religious practitioners come to pray five times a day, but some people come to pray at least once a day in the Mosque; otherwise, they pray at home. In addition to religious training and Arabic lessons, distributing food for breaking fast during the Ramadan month (*Iftar*³⁰) is organized by these Mosques. I was told that Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants also arrange *Iftar* parties with other religious groups and ethnic communities to build communication with others in multicultural Canada. In many occasions, Muslim immigrants also organize special prayer meetings in their homes, common rooms in apartments, and community centres in order to practice birth and death rituals of family members, and a thanksgiving ceremony after purchasing a new house, business, or any other success in their lives.

In order to maintain authentic religious practices in a non-Muslim country, *Toblike Jamat*³¹ (a preaching-based religious organization) is actively involved within Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Toronto. Members of the Bangladeshi *Toblike Jamat* maintain close interaction with each other not only in various locations in Toronto but also in different cities in Canada and the rest of the world. Occasionally, members of *Toblike Jamat* in Canada meet in any big mosque in any of the larger cities from a few days to a few weeks to support each other's religious faith, to organize missionary activities among non-practicing Muslims, and to develop plans to expand Islam to non-Muslim areas.

²⁸ *Jummar namaj* refers to Friday noontime prayer, which is supposed to be prayer as a congregation.

²⁹ *Tarabir namaz* is a special prayer that Muslims perform during the Arabic month of Ramadan just after breaking their fast in the evening after the sunset.

³⁰ *Iftar* refers to a ceremony of breaking fast with food and drink just after sunset – a practice that Muslims celebrate during the month of Ramadan.

³¹ *Toblike Jamat* refers to a group of Islamic religious scholars who used to go to from one city to another to teach people how to maintain proper Islamic traditions, follow Islamic norms and rituals. They also encourage practicing religious practices authentically in non-Muslim foreign countries. They focus mostly on newly converted Muslims in various parts of the world.

Box 4.2 Somitee: local associations in Toronto based on birthplaces in Bangladesh, 2007-2008 field work in Toronto, Canada.

1. ***Sylhet Somitee***: A social association organized with the Bangladeshi immigrants who migrated from Sylhet division.
2. ***Jalalabad Association***: A fraction of immigrants association under the Sylhet division
3. ***Bianibazer social and cultural Association***: Another sub-group of Sylhet Somitee
4. ***Moulovi Bazar Somitee***: Association by immigrants from Moulovi Bazar District under the Sylhet division
5. ***Hobigong Somitee***: Association by immigrants from *Hobigong* district, a district under the Sylhet division.
6. ***Chittagong Somitee***: An association organized with Bangladeshi immigrants who was born in Chittagong district
7. ***Nohakhali Somitee***: Bangladeshi immigrants came from Nohakhali District
8. ***Greater Dhaka Somitee***: An association organized by immigrants who came from all districts of Dhaka Division.
9. ***Bickrompur Shomitee***: A fraction of Dhaka Somitee, whose native village is situated at Bickrompur, one of districts of Dhaka division.
10. ***Barisal Somitee***: Bangladeshi Immigrant came from the greater Barisal division
11. ***Gopalgang Somitee***: Separate association of a district of Barisal division
12. ***Madaripur Somitee***: Association based on immigrants born at Madaripur district
13. ***Pabna Somitee***: Immigrants who were born and raised in Pabna district
14. ***Sgaratpur Probashi***: Immigrants who were born at Shariatpur district in Bangladesh
15. ***Khulna Somitee***: Bangladeshi immigrants who were born in Khulan District in Bangladesh
16. ***Rajshahi Somitee***: Bangladeshi immigrants who were born in Rajshai district
17. ***Greater Comilla Somitee***: Association of immigrants from Comilla district

Bangladeshi Bengali Hindu immigrants run two temples in Toronto; one is *Hindu Mondir* (temple) and another one is *Hindu Dharmo Asrom*, which mostly organizes major Hindu religious ceremonies observed by Bengali Hindus, e.g., *Durga Puja*, *Laxmi puja*, *Soroshathi puja*, *Kali puja*, and other day-to-day religious activities. These two temples are operated by two major factions of Bangladeshi Bengali Hindu immigrants, factions that in many ways represent class and caste differences. However, Bangladesh-Canada

Hindu Cultural Society and Bangladesh Hindu associations, along with religious activities, organize social and cultural programs, weekend Bengali language training, and Hindu religious schools for immigrant children, regular evening chanting sessions to God and devotional songs (*nam kirton* and *vokti geetee*). They are also community voices for Bangladeshi Hindu religious groups in Toronto, and political voices against religious persecution of minority Hindus in Bangladesh. Sometimes they also bring well-known religious preachers from Bangladesh, India and other cities in North America (see Box 4.3).

Box 4.3 Religious institutions of Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto

Muslim Religious Organizations run by Bangladeshi Immigrants	Hindu Religious Institutions run by Hindu Immigrants	Christian Religious Institutions run by Bengali Christians
<i>Bitul Mokharam Mosque</i>	Hindu <i>Mondir</i>	Bengali Church Toronto
<i>Bitul Aman Mosque</i>	Bangladesh Canada Hindu Cultural Society	Fellowship Church (informal gathering)
No name, some people call it <i>Marhaba Mosque</i> (organized by a community leader)	Bangladesh Hindu Association	Informal gathering Bangladeshi Catholic Church
<i>Toblic Jamat</i>	Hindu <i>Dharmo Asrom</i>	Catholic Associations in Toronto
		Credit Union in Toronto
Bangladeshi Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Unity 2004		

Bangladeshi Christian immigrants generally become members of any churches in Toronto based on their own denominational backgrounds. Therefore, Bangladeshi Bengali Baptists, Catholics and Anglicans all go to their churches and attend church services in the English language and tradition. However, for the last several years, a group of Bangladeshi Bengali Christian immigrants, predominantly Baptist groups, have been trying to build a Bengali ethnic church where they will be able to practice their religious activities in their own mother tongue, and sing Bengali devotional songs. Since

2007, they have started congregating informally once in a month as ‘Bangla Church’, celebrating special religious events such as Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and Christmas by following Bengali tradition. They are in using space at the Dovercourt Baptist Church in Downtown Toronto because they do not yet have their own church building.

The Bangladeshi Catholic community also congregates several times of the years as an ethnic church when Bangladeshi fathers and bishops come to visit them in Canada. Both Bengali Protestant and Catholic groups organize separate Christmas parties and other religious ceremonies with fellow members. Bangladeshi Catholic immigrant groups also have developed two religious-based social organizations – Bangladesh Catholic Association and a Credit Union in Toronto, which are replications of Catholic denominational organizations in Bangladesh. However, in Toronto, Christian members of other denominations can be part of this credit union. I have also observed that a few members of the Fellowship church of Bangladesh regularly attend Sunday services at one of their member’s house because they do not have any permanent church building. They also celebrate all Christian religious ceremonies with their fellow Fellowship members.

Yet another association has been formed in Toronto by the three minority religious groups (Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian immigrants) in order to raise their collective voices against forms of discrimination, human rights violations, persecutions organized by majority Muslims, and the state power against minority religious groups in Bangladesh. It is a sister concern of an association in Bangladesh called *Bangladesh Hindu Buddho and Christian Okko Porishad* (Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian United Association). This association in Toronto is working to bring international attention to religious harassment and persecutions conducted against minority religious groups in Bangladesh. They also maintain close interaction with other human rights organizations in different cities in North America, Australia, and Europe who are working for religious minorities in Bangladesh.

Wings of Homeland Political Party Offices in Toronto

Two major political parties in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Awami League (AL), and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), are formed in Canada by the Bangladeshi immigrants to exercise their distinct political identity and ideology. Bangladeshi immigrants who were actively involved in national politics in Bangladesh, and their

student organizations, have formed these political organizations in Toronto. During my fieldwork in Toronto, I observed that both political parties are vocal against each other and, in addressing homeland political crises, they have raised critical comments against the roles of the army-backed caretaker government, and have been asking for freedom for their party leaders who were sentenced to jail for corruption and other charges in Bangladesh. I noted that my research respondents offered two different interpretations regarding formation of political parties and practicing political activities in Toronto. First, respondents who were actively engaged in national political parties in Bangladesh think that through these activities they can locate their political and national identity in Canada. Second, respondents who did not engage actively in any political parties think there is no benefit to engage in national political parties in a foreign land. However, formation of two mainstream political parties in Toronto clearly describe fragmented structures of Bangladeshi and Bengali nationalism that I will address in coming chapters.

I did not observe, however, any explicit or public activities of *Jamat-El-Islam* Bangladesh (JIB – a political party based on Islamic laws and traditions), the *Jatio* Party (JP – a political party formed by General Ershad in 1982 by recruiting of several opportunist political leaders from different political parties in Bangladesh), nor any left wing political parties in Toronto. According to immigrants, since JIB is a fundamentalist Islamic religious-based organization, and the party opposed the Bangladeshi Independence in 1971 and killed many intellectuals during the war, they carry out underground politics within the immigrant community. However, they have many supporters, leaders, scholars, and financiers within the Bangladeshi immigrant communities. Leaders of JIB Bangladesh visit occasionally and proselytize among the immigrant community. Bangladeshi immigrants who were once members of left-wing political parties in Bangladesh have not established any political wings here in Canada, but they are active in cultural organizations in Toronto. Some of them have merged with AL politics as a relatively close ideological alias, and many of them are involved in the New Democratic Party (NDP) in Canada. Both Bangladesh AL and BNP in Toronto observe national days, their leaders' birth and death anniversaries, and significant days and events of each party, and they organize meetings to address political crises in Bangladesh, and raise funds for local party activities. Most of the time political workers

in Toronto are busy with their party leaders, ministers, and key personnel visiting Canada for whatever reasons. They generally receive them at the airport, organize political meetings to show their leadership skills and organizing capacities, and throw parties in honour of these leaders in Canada. Both parties in Toronto have formal committees that are recognized by national political parties and their leaders. In the current global contexts, both AL and BNP leaders in Toronto have achieved some power and importance because they are useful in international lobbying for national and political issues in Bangladesh. Many of the key national political leaders of both parties and their family members are permanently staying in foreign lands and maintaining their transnational political activities by remaining in different global locations. Therefore, national political parties' wings in many global locations are becoming important institutions, and their members are also becoming key figures in local politics. It is a new dimension of Bangladeshi national politics and their role in other nations. London, New York, Toronto, and Sydney are key major cities in which Bangladeshi national politics are shaping up (see Box 4.4).

Box 4.4 Bangladeshi Political Parties in Toronto, fieldwork 2007- 2008

Name of Political Parties	Canada	Toronto
1. Bangladesh Awami League (AL)	a. Bangladesh Awami League in Canada	Bangladesh Awami League in Ontario Bangladeshi Awami League (Women's wing) in Toronto
2. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	b. Bangladesh Nationalist Party in Canada	Bangladeshi Nationalist Party in Ontario
3. Jamat-EI-Islam, Bangladesh		Jamat-EI-Islam, Toronto

Professional/Occupational Groups

Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto have formed several associations based on their occupations and professional identities. During my fieldwork in Toronto, Bangladeshi professional engineers, accountants, teachers, doctors, and pharmacists organized at least four of them. Even many Bangladeshi professionals have switched to different occupations, and have failed to achieve their professional credentials in Canada, but still they have become members of these professional organizations to reclaim and redefine their professional identity and status in the immigrant setting in accordance with what they once had before immigration to Canada.

These are corporate bodies of professional immigrants where they share their pains, struggles and successes as immigrants. Through these organizations, new professional immigrants receive support, guidance, and information from old and successful immigrants to enter into job markets. These organizations also provide settlement support to fellow new professional immigrants. In addition, these professional organizations also create social communication with family members, organize cultural and social events, and observe national days in Canada (see Box 4.5).

Box 4.5 Professional Associations among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto, fieldwork 2007-08

Canadian Society of Bangladeshi Engineers Association of Bangladeshi Accounting/Finance, Toronto Ontario-Bangladeshi Educators Community Bangladeshi Pharmacists Association, Ontario Bangladeshi Medical Association, Ontario
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Alumni Associations of Local Educational Institutions

Bangladeshi immigrants have organized alumni associations in Toronto among students who have studied in the same schools, colleges, and universities in Bangladesh. Almost all public universities in Bangladesh have their alumni associations in Toronto. During my fieldwork in Toronto, I attended the celebration of the Bangladeshi Independence Day organized by a one faction of Dhaka University Alumni Association, and winter get-togethers and cultural programs arranged by the Jahangirnagar University Alumni Association in Toronto.

Like professional organizations and local *somittees*, most of the alumni associations observe all Bangladeshi national days, organize yearly picnics and cultural programs, and build social ties with all members and their families. Alumni associations support settlement and job-hunting processes for the new immigrants. Alumni associations also create spaces for immigrants to share their common memories, nostalgia, and struggles as students of a particular institution in Bangladesh. By remembering their old and golden times of their lives as students, they also connect with various social, environment and political struggles of Bangladesh, and redefine their identities within their social groups. Again, these associations are also fragmented based on political differences, localized politics, and leadership crises (see Box 4.6).

Box 4.6 Bangladeshi University Alumni Associations in Toronto, fieldwork 2007-08

Dhaka University Alumni Association (1) in Toronto
Dhaka University Alumni Association (2) in Toronto
Jahangirnagar University Alumni Association in Canada (Informal)
Jagan-nath Hall Students' Association in Toronto (one of the residential dorms at Dhaka University was built only for Hindu students in Bangladesh)

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AMONG BANGLADESHI IMMIGRANTS

Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto celebrate many social and cultural events throughout the year in order to maintain their cultural, national, ethnic, political, and religious identities in Canada. Due to time constraint, sometimes Bangladeshi immigrants combine two events together, for example, they arrange post-*Eid* get-togethers and Bengali New Year celebrations on a same day. Most often they have to find a weekend date, or any days of Canadian national holidays that are commonly understood as long weekends because there is no national holiday for celebrating any other major religious festival besides Christmas in Canada. As most of the national days are fixed according to Bangladeshi tradition, and as religious and cultural festivals follow Arabic, Sanskrit, and Bengali calendars, to arrange a common event for all Bangladeshi immigrant organizers, they generally try to find a suitable weekend just after the main celebration in

Bangladesh. During my fieldwork, many respondents acknowledged that celebrating any cultural, national, and religious event after the formal date with which they are accustomed to is not fun, since it is already celebrated in Bangladesh and other countries. In the following section I will describe how Bengali New Year, Bangladeshi national days, Canada Day and birth and death anniversaries of Bengali national heroes are celebrated in Toronto.

Celebration of Bengali New Year (*Nobo Borsha*)

Celebration of the Bangla New Year (*Bangla Nobo Barsha*) has been considered the most important event for all Bengali immigrants, and the key marker of Bengali cultural and ethnic identity. The first day of the first month of the Bengali calendar is commonly called *Poheyla Boishak*. Celebrations of the *Bengali Nobo Barsha* occur within Bengali immigrant communities in Canada at at least three different levels, for example, family groups, close social groups, and whole community groups. The first type of celebration that many of my respondents followed, they celebrate Bengali New Year with their very close friends and families (3 to 5 families) in Toronto. On that day only traditional Bengali food (*deshi kabar*) is prepared, such as rice cooked in water (*panta vat*), fried *Hilsha* fish (*Elish mach vaja*, the national fish in Bangladesh), various types of boiled vegetables and fish that are smashed and mixed with onion, mustard oil, and red and green chillies (*vorta*), different types of sweet items prepared with coconut, concentrated brown sugar from date juice (*khaguar gur*, *patali gur*), and rice flour. They select a house and everyone gets together and cooks together. All women members wear traditional Bengali dress (*Jamdani shari*, *cotton shari*), draw small circles of color on their foreheads (*tip*, *bindee*), wear bangles on their wrists (*churi*), and decorate their feet with liquid red color (*alta*). Bangladeshi Bengali male members are accustomed to wearing traditional dress, which consists mostly of long cotton and silk shirts with traditional embroidery (*Panjabi*) and cotton and silk cloth to cover the lower part of the body (*pajama*).

The second type of Bengali New Year celebration is organized by small groups of immigrant families (at least 6 to 10) who have maintained close relationships throughout the year; they celebrate *Nobo Borsha* together. They also prepare only Bengali traditional foods, but responsibilities generally are distributed to all families involved. So they

arrange potluck parties and each family is asked to cook a certain dish, although fish, vegetable, and lentil items dominate. On that day conventional meat items are not prepared. It is a common tradition to organize a small cultural program with friends and families.

Regardless of religious identity, celebration of the Bengali New Year is only a cultural and secular ceremony for all Bangladeshi Bengalis. However, for the Bengali Hindus it is a combination of Bengali cultural and religious traditions, but for other religious groups it is just a traditional cultural event. Generally, Bengali Hindu families go to their temple, pay homage to the goddess for last year's success, utter prayer for next year's well-being and eat certain types of food (fruits, vegetables and sweets, but no meat) to mark the event. They also observe the last day of the Bengali year, called *choitro songkrantee*, the day traditionally set aside for Bengali farmers to pay back their debts to landlords, merchants, and businessmen, and also open up a new account book by adjusting and rewriting the previous year's loans for the coming year, which is called (*hal khata*). My Hindu respondents told me that on this day they try to prepare mixed vegetable items (*niramish*) with at least ten to fifteen types of vegetables. I have seen that Bangladeshi stores in Danforth distribute free sweets to their customers on Bengali New Years day, but in Canada Bangladeshi immigrants pay their bills by using credit or debit cards, so I never observed any *hal khata* ritual among the immigrants.

I have also observed Bangladeshi Christian immigrants celebrate Bengali New Year with their fellow Christian friends, families, and other social groups. I noted that Bangladeshi Protestant and Catholic immigrant families celebrate the Bengali New Year's Day by maintaining their separate denominational boundaries. However, the *Bangla* church members (Protestant and mostly Baptist groups) also celebrate their Bengali New Year program with traditional Bengali foods, sweets, dress, decorations, cultural events and small prayer meetings. Each family is asked to cook certain types of *deshi* food according to their expertise.

The third type of *Poheyla Boishak* celebration is arranged by different social and cultural organizations for all Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto. It is a bigger and common celebration event for all. Many of my respondents told me that on the *Poheyla Boishak* day they generally attend cultural programs arranged and performed by

Chayanaut and *Uddichie*, two well-known cultural organizations in Bangladesh. Both cultural groups have established their wings in Toronto and celebrate the *Poheyla Boishak* by arranging cultural events following the same traditions as in Bangladesh. Both cultural groups intentionally involve children and the second-generation immigrants to introduce Bengali culture by organizing talent shows, art drawing and musical competitions. Following pre-urban village traditions, many cultural and social organizations in Toronto corporately organize traditional market places (*Mela*) as a part of celebration of the Bengali New Year in an auditorium for the entire Bengali community. There are many shops and stalls set up where individual families, business organizations, and community organizations sell Bangladeshi food, drinks, clothing, musical CDs, paintings, jewellery, handicrafts, and many more items. Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto come and shop, the way in the past Bangladeshi farmers in villages used to buy their household needs, agricultural tools, sweets, and cosmetics for their wives in such markets (*Boyshakhi mela*). Several of my research respondents also participated in the *Boyshakhi mela* 2008 and they brought homemade traditional sweets (*phita*) to sell, but their main intension was to participate in the *mela*, to practice Bengali traditions, to share the job of operating the *Boyshakhi mela*, and to share their Bengaliness with fellow Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants. At the end, a huge cultural event is organized with local talent and famous star artists from Bangladesh. By celebrating the first day of the Bengali month (*Poheyla Boishak*) and *Boyshakhi mela* with a small group or with the whole immigrant communities in Toronto, they are upholding their cultural, ethnic and secular identities, and celebrating their Bengaliness in multicultural Canada.

Celebration of Bangladeshi National Days

Bangladeshi immigrants celebrate all major Bangladeshi national days in Toronto, such as 21 February (*Ekushay February* celebrated as *shohid debosh*, the day announced in 1999 by the United Nations as International Mother Language Day), Independence Day, March 26 (*Sadhinota dibosh*), and Victory Day, December 16 (*Bijoy Dibosh*). These days are key events representing Bangladeshi nationhood, national identity and historical struggle that Bangladeshi Bengalis face in order to claim and reclaim their ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities.

During my fieldwork in Toronto, I observed that Bangladeshi immigrants have built a temporary structure of *Shohid Minir* (the monument that was built in Bangladesh in 1952 to remember all heroes who sacrificed their lives to protect the Bengali mother tongue) in Bangla town. All cultural organizations, social and political organizations, business organizations and individuals come with flowers to pay homage and gratitude to all *shohids*³² at midnight on 21 February. Hundreds of Bangladeshi immigrants from all over Toronto come to Danforth (*Bangla town*) in the early morning with family and children to observe the *shohid dibosh*. Many of them were barefooted in the cold morning in Toronto to maintain the same tradition of going to the *Shohid minir* and paying respect to the national heroes. They chanted and sang the famous song “*amar vair roktay ragano ekusay februray, ami ki vultay pari*” (21 February is covered with blood of my Bengali brothers, can I forget them?). Even though it was a weekday in Toronto on 21 February 2008, cultural events were scheduled on the same day. This is the day Bangladeshi immigrants proclaimed again their distinct and revolutionary Bengali ethnic and linguistic identity in Canada. Every year during the month of February, the Bangla Academy in Bangladesh organizes a month long book fare (*boi mala*) to expand the Bengali language and literature into every aspect of their social lives. Following the same tradition in Toronto, *boi mala* is also organized by *onno maela* (the only Bengali book store in Toronto) to introduce the Bengali language, novels, and literature to the immigrant communities, the next generation, and to other cultural groups.

Every Bangladeshi cultural, political, and community organization in Toronto observe *Shadinota dibosh* and *Bijor dibosh* and organizes separate cultural programs, musical and painting competitions for children, drama shows, and discussion sessions on the historical political struggles, sacrifices of thousands of lives, and glory of being a Bengali. I noted that by following homeland political traditions, members of the two key political parties, BNP and AL in Toronto, organize separate events to observe Bangladeshi National Days. They have battled against each other to define whose leaders were the real announcers of independence, whose contribution was the most in the

³² *Shohid*: According to Islam, it is believed that if a person dies in a holy war, his/her cause of death will be celebrated in heaven and identified as *Shohid* because his/her life was scarified for a moral/religious cause. Following that religious belief, all Bangladeshi Bengali who sacrificed their lives to fight in the anti-colonial movements, and for the language moment, and the Independent war are considered *Shohids*.

Independent war, what the difference are between Bangladeshi and Bengali nationalism, and key points of the constitution of Bangladesh for the last few decades. In order to celebrate the victory of the Independence war against West Pakistan, Bangladeshi social and cultural organizations organize victory celebration events (*bijoy mela*) with cultural programs in Toronto.

Celebration of Canada Day

The celebration of Canada Day is one of the major events among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto. As it is a national holiday and a long weekend, Bangladeshi immigrants enjoy and celebrate the day in arranging Bangladeshi cultural events, social gatherings, picnics and outings. I observed that two separate cultural programs are arranged by the two major factions of the Bangladeshi communities to celebrate Canada Day. One group (immigrants mostly involved in left-wing political parties in Bangladesh, Bangladeshi immigrants who are members of NDP in Canada, and a faction of Bangladeshi immigrants who came to Canada from Southern regions) is lead by an owner of a local newspaper (the name of the local newspaper is *Somoy*, which means ‘Time’ in English) who has organized day-long events with Bangladeshi songs, dances, and music in a field very close to Bengali *para* in Bangla town. The whole event is called *Somoy mela*. Along with cultural programs, several stalls are set up in the field to sell Bengali food, clothing, and ornaments.

Another group of Bangladeshi immigrants (mostly cultural workers, members of two major political parties in Bangladesh, members of liberal parties in Canada, local businessmen, people who maintain conflict relationships with the newspaper owner and his groups) also organizes a community event with cultural programs, dance, and music lead by local artists and star artists from Bangladesh. I attended both places in the same day to observed celebration of Canada Day by the Bangladeshi immigrant communities. Many immigrants attend both events to enjoy the day and musical programs. On that day, many of the immigrant families leave the city, arrange barbecue parties in different parks, and enjoy the day in accordance with traditions. It is the only event of the year that Bangladeshi immigrants celebrate along with other Canadians – a day that can be considered a fairly multicultural event celebrated by Bangladeshi immigrants.

Celebration of Birthdays and Death Anniversaries of Bengali Heroes

During my fieldwork in Toronto, Bangladeshi immigrants arranged community gatherings, cultural programs, discussions and meetings to celebrate birthdays and death anniversaries of Bengali poets and key political leaders in Bangladesh. Most of the cultural organizations arrange a day-long program to celebrate Robrindranath Tagore's and Kazi Nazrul Islam's birth anniversaries. The Noble prizewinner poet Tagore is remembered for his contribution to Bengali literature and humanistic philosophy. One of his songs – My golden Bengal, I love you (*amar soner Bangla, ami tomoy valo bashi*) – has been incorporated into the national anthem of the Independent Bangladesh. One respondent told me: “I cannot start my day without Tagore. I feel happy by his words, express my frustration, anger, love and care with his poems, and get comfort, joy, and peace with his songs. He has touched every corner of Bengali hearts; he shapes our ideologies, teaches to see the beauty of nature, and reveals true Bengali-ness”. Another respondent said: “Without Robrindranath, middle-class Bengalis cannot express their love, anger, sorrow, fear, frustrations and everyday relationships. Bangladeshi Bengalis can easily connect to Tagore's songs, poetry, novels and find their cultural, spiritual, and ethnic identity”.

Poet of revolution or rebel poet (*vidrohi kobi*) Kazi Nazrul Islam has made a huge contribution by his writing on Bengali society and culture as well as expanding Bengali literature. He is the national poet (*jatio kobi*) of Bangladesh. His songs and poems have showed the Bengali to fight against colonial and imperial power, spirited Bengali freedom fighters during the Independence war in 1971 and spirited Bengalis to stand against communalism and fundamentalism (see Islam, Rafiq 2006, *Banglapedia*). His poems, songs and novels praise Bengali secular identity. He has been very critical against religious and class differences and social and political inequalities in Bengali society. Along with these two key poets in Bengali literature, poets like Jasimuddin, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Jibananando Das, and folk writer and philosopher Lalon's works and philosophy are remembered and celebrated by the Bangladeshi immigrants. All these writers are remembered and celebrated in immigrants' lives because they have taught, guided, and showed ways in which Bengali populations in Bangladesh are able to define their self identity, social and cultural norms and worldview, and philosophy of humans as

an ethnic group and also a nation. Bengalis are able to know themselves by all these writers and poets. By celebrating birthdays of Bengali poets, scholars, and philosophers in transnational locations in Toronto, Bangladeshi immigrants want to proclaim their Bengali roots, linguistic identity, and fragmented nationalist identities as Bangladeshi and Bengali.

Birth and death anniversaries of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman – father of the nation (*jatir pita*), friend of Bengali (*Bangabandhu*), the key political and philosophical architect of the Independence of Bangladesh, first prime minister of Bangladesh, and the key leader of Bangladesh Awami League – are celebrated by arranging cultural, social and political events in Toronto in his honour. He has been remembered for his political contribution to make the country free from Pakistani domination. As the first prime minister of Bangladesh, he constitutionally defined Bengali ethnic and linguistic identities, secularism, socialism and democracy as key pillars of Bengali nationalism and the country of Bangladesh. Bengali immigrants who believe in Bengali secular identity, Bengali culture and language as key markers of Bengali identity, and Bengali nationalism celebrate and follow Mujib as their philosopher, political leader, father of the nation, and the greatest Bengali of the last century (*shotapdir shastro Bengali*).

Another group of immigrants, members of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) celebrate birth and death anniversaries of Major General Ziaur Rahman, who declared the war of Independence on behalf of Sheikh Mujib, was one of the sector commanders in the liberation war in 1971, became the president of Bangladesh after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib in 1975, and later formed a political party – BNP. He was the leader who professed and imposed Bangladeshi nationalism based on Islamic religious ideology and symbols in opposition to secular Bengali ethnic and cultural identity. Muslim identity and ideologies were expanded and celebrated during his regime between 1976 to 1981. Bangladeshi immigrants who follow Bangladeshi nationalism and political ideology of Major Zia celebrate his birth and death anniversaries in Toronto. Therefore, on one hand, by celebrating these two key political leaders in immigrant lives in Toronto, Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants are clearly defining their divided political positions as well as their unsettled issues in shaping their ethnic and nationalist identities. On the other hand, by incorporating lessons from all Bengali poets and

philosophers, Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants are also trying to redefine their core ethnic, cultural and nationalist identities in opposition to colonial and post-colonial political constructions of Bangladeshi versus Bengali nationalism. Thus, it has been a struggle for Bangladeshi Bengali populations to define their ethnic, cultural and nationalist identities, and their transnational immigrant lives are not out from under historical and political battle, issues I will explore more critically in coming chapters.

BANGLA TOWN: AN “IMAGINED” HOMELAND IN CANADA

Over the years, Bangla town became a center of all business, cultural, political and community activities for the majority of Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto. Bangladeshi grocery stores, restaurants, book stores, clothing stores, meat shops, bakeries, drug stores, legal practitioners’ offices, mosques, driver instructors’ offices, local newspaper offices, political party offices, printing presses, travel agencies, painters’ studios, music stores, and money exchange stores all are situated on both sides of Danforth Road between Main and Victoria Park intersections. All the business signs are written in Bengali in all stores in *Bangla Town*. The Bengali language is the key mode of conversation between shoppers and storeowners in Toronto’s *Bangla Town*. Bengali immigrants have transformed that particular corner of Toronto with their ethnic and cultural presence as “little Bangladesh”. All Bangladeshi-owned grocery stores are selling products imported from the Bangladesh homeland, and by all means they are trying to represent and sell images and nostalgias of the homeland, and customers are buying, consuming and reinventing their memories of their homeland in different stores and grocery shops in *Bangla Town*. The mechanism and style of customer dealing, mode and topics of conversation between shop owners, customers, and among customers are culturally distinct, and the bargaining style between shop owners and customers, and methods of paying bills, all represent Bangladesh. Shop owners and customers have maintained various kinds of personal interactions, share personal information, and customers try to go to particular stores if the owner is somehow connected to the customers personally, as if they came from the same district or region from Bangladesh. Every Saturday, Bangladeshi immigrants come from all parts of Toronto to do their weekly grocery shopping and other activities in *Bangla Town*. On any Saturday afternoon

this Bengali town has been transformed into a traditional Bengali *hat*³³ where Bangladeshi immigrants buy fish, vegetables, spices, and other food items imported from Bangladesh. They also look for pirated copies of Bengali and Hindi movies, television dramas, songs, and so on for their weekly amusement. In the summer time, every Saturday, as well as Friday afternoon, particular areas of Danforth Road are transformed into a Bengali carnival with the activities and presence of Bangladeshi men, women, young adults and children. People talk, eat food, hang around, and involve themselves in all sorts of social, cultural and political activities, standing on the street, in front of different stores, and along walkways in *Bangla Town*. Most of the cultural programs are organized, arranged, and distributed at *Bangla Town*. Information of all kinds of community events is posted in different corners and stores of *Bangla Town* too. Therefore, *Bangla Town* has become the cornerstone of the Bangladeshi immigrants with all kinds of activities, imaginations and nostalgia of homeland. It is the heart and center of Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Toronto.

By looking at the history of Bangladeshi migration to Canada, by focusing on structures of social, cultural, and religious organizations, and by addressing key national days and event that Bangladeshi immigrants celebrate in Canada in this chapter, I first have wanted to introduce some basic characteristics of Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Toronto, and second, I have contextualized my research. Based on the issues discussed above, in subsequent chapters of this thesis I bring in-depth analysis of roles of Bangladeshi immigrants' social and cultural organizations, political and religious institutions and inner dynamisms of celebrating various days and events in their immigrant lives in Canada as key markers of Bengali identities as well as major negotiation processes of reinventing their identities and claiming positions in multi-cultural Canada.

³³ **Hat:** In the pre-urban village lives in Bangladesh, one or two days in a week all villagers come to meet in one particular place to do their business, and exchange their goods and services with others. This whole arrangement is called *hat*, the day it is organized is called *hat bar* (day of the *hat*). Most of the *hat* is organized under a big Banyan tree by the side of a river or canal where people from different villages come by boats to sell their goods and services

CHAPTER FIVE

PRE-COLONIAL TO GLOBAL: KEY MARKERS OF BANGLADESHI BENGALI IDENTITY

Brother, as immigrants we are lost persons in Canada. We have lost everything in Canada: our souls, ourselves, our existence, and our culture as social beings. Racially we are a visible minority, but culturally as immigrants, we do not have any space in Canada; our roots are up-rooted. As immigrants, by practicing cultural and social traditions of our pre-migration lives in Bangladesh, we feel comfortable and find some peace in our hearts.

(The voice of a Bengali respondent in Toronto)

In pre-colonial Bengal, individuals' personal, familial, and social identities are associated with three key components: religion (*Dharma*), caste system (*Varna*) and *Jati*³⁴ (a social group based on occupation) (see, e.g., Srinivas 1962; Dumont 1970; Bhattachryya 2003:242). Gaining wealth, education, merging with higher *jati*, religious conversion, and other forms of "up casting"³⁵ (Kolenda 1978 in Miller and Van Esterik 2010:247) mechanisms have not totally diminished caste based ideologies and practices in Bengal. It is also echoed by several scholars that, from pre-Islamic and Islamic times

³⁴ *Jati* is an emic term that determines a person's own status group determined by his or her birth. There are thousands of *Jaties* in India based on their occupations too which are not clearly described the term caste (Portuguese word meaning breed or type) [see. Cohn 1971:125].

³⁵ *Up-casting* refers to a process in which lower castes Hindus have gained status by achieving education, marrying into upper caste groups, converting to different religions, achieving foreign citizenship through transnational migration, and becoming professionals in global markets. Even though it does not totally change their inherited caste identity, their new occupational and economic status brings some kind of freedom and flexibility within caste-based societies.

until pre-colonial phases in Bengal, the key markers of Bengali identities were shaped by an individual's caste system (*Varnas*), gender (*lingo*), occupation (*pasha*), lineage group (*bangsha*) and class (*shrani*) (see, e.g., Jahangir 1979; Bertocci 2002; Gardner 1986). This does not mean that, under the British colonial and post-colonial Pakistani economic and political contexts in Bangladesh, these issues were resolved. This research also suggests that globalization-led immigrant contexts, pre-colonial markers of Bengali identities, for example, occupation (*pasha*), religion (*dharma*) and class (*shrani*) contribute to shape Bangladeshi immigrants' identity in Canada.

I observed that Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants' day-to-day interactions with each other are influenced by their perceptions of class, caste influenced ideologies, occupational positions, and lineage status. By memorizing and imagining caste ideologies, establishing lineage status (*bongsho morjada*) based social hierarchy, and welcoming regional, religious, and cultural divisions among each other, Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants try to relocate themselves in the relatively unknown city of Toronto. According to a male (age 55) with the MBA degree from Canada):

As immigrants, I know that many of our cultural practices, our constructions of individual identity based on family status, our perceptions of occupational and caste identities are illogical and irrelevant in Canadian social systems. But still we practice these issues in our lives, because these are part of our identity. Otherwise we will be totally lost. For example, before migration maybe you were an engineer or army general in Bangladesh, you are supporter of a particular political ideology, you may have gotten divorced several times in your life, your grandfather used to work as an agricultural worker and your family history connected to fishing and weaving in Bangladesh, and you do not go to mosque or temple or church for your prayer. Nobody cares about this information about someone in Canada, but we do, because these are our norms, and these are all created and have shaped an individual's personal and social identity. Therefore, one's family background, your occupation, caste, religion, and political identities are all important aspects to make relationships with other immigrants, and to define your identity and your position as immigrants in Canada.

Even though many immigrants said they do not believe that caste, occupation (*pasha*), and lineage status (*bongsho morjada*) should be important components of shaping individual identity in this global era, yet in defining their personal, familial, and community identities these issues are still at work in immigrant communities in Toronto.

LINEAGE AND KIN GROUPS AS MARKERS OF IMMIGRANT IDENTITY

Imaginary construction of lineage status (*bongsho morjada*)³⁶ and nobility (*khandani/ sharafoty*) are key components of shaping Bengali Muslims' social status and identity (Arefeen 1987:43, 1977; Karim1961). I noted that despite religious differences; Bangladeshi immigrants commonly mention their family history, kin groups, descent and lineage structures in defining their personal identities. As corruption, earning illegal money, and taking bribes are social problems in Bangladesh, several of my respondents informed me that their up-brining within a middle class educated family environment has encouraged them to try honest living in Canada. A married female Muslim (age 42) said: "My father was a school teacher". A schoolteacher represents honesty, loyalty and morality, and is less concerned about one's own material wellbeing. Some of the immigrants try to define their social position by connecting their family members' economic and social class, and family's involvement in power, politics and national media in Bangladesh. I noticed that Bangladeshi immigrant identities are also constructed by whether someone is a son or daughter of a freedom fighter (*muktijodda*) or a collaborator of the Pakistani Army (*rajakar*) in the Independence war in 1971.

Bangladeshi immigrants also conveyed that they do not care much about individual's family background and lineage status (*Bongsha Morjada*) in order to identify a person. Among 50 respondents, I conducted in-depth interviews with six from the 45-55 age group who came to Canada in the mid-1990s with professional degrees but who were unsuccessful in finding jobs in Canada they dreamed of. They told me, "As immigrants, we left all these issues in Bangladesh; we are all workers (*kamla*) here who are working hard to make our living; that's it". Three of my respondents who received higher education in Canadian universities, and who are working as professionals in Canada on their own initiative they think that both family history and personal effort work together to make personal identity. I observed in Toronto that immigrant's *Bongsha Morjada*, and family histories that they brought from their homeland play key roles in

³⁶ ***Bongsho morjada***: In post-Islamic Bengal, Bengali Muslim societies are stratified according to four major lineage groups (*Bongsha*): *Syed*, *Sheakh*, *Mughal*, and *Pathan*, and a few key titles (*podobi*), for example, *Gazi*, *Khan*, and *Mir*. These are respected and prestigious lineage groups in contrast to other occupational groups such as tailor, weaver, or laundryman.

defining their social positions in Canada. If an immigrant comes from a respected and renowned family in Bangladesh or if immigrants are somehow connected to famous singers, artists, businessmen, actors, politicians, poets, religious saints (*pir*), freedom fighters, media persons, and members of royal families (*zaminders*) in Bangladesh, they generally get lot of attention within the immigrant communities.

Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants' surnames and title of their lineage, such as *syad*, *mughal*, *phathan*, *sheikh*, *chowdhury*, *bhuya*, *mia*, and *pattoary*, also create distinct social status and personal identities in Canada. At the same time, members of these families are also criticized if their ascribed statuses do not resemble their achieved economic status and success in Canada. Very often, immigrants are either defining their identities and social positions in Canada by connecting to their *Bongsha Morjada* or others identify them according to their family history in Bangladesh.

IDENTITY AND IDEOLOGY OF CASTE IN REDEFINING LOCAL IN GLOBAL LOCATION IN CANADA

Caste Identity and Ideology among Bangladeshi Bengali Hindu Immigrants

Even though it is perceived that with the expansion of education, urbanization, modernized communication technologies, and in response to social and political movements in Bengal, the caste-oriented pre-colonial rigid structure of marking personal identity has become a less dominated subject among Bengali Hindus in Bangladesh. I found that caste ideology still has significant and deep functionality among the Bangladeshi Bengali Hindu immigrants in Canada. A 52 year old Hindu respondent and owner of a restaurant told me:

When I came to Canada there were few Bangladeshi Hindu families in Toronto; we were comfortable to communicate with each other as Bengali Hindus with our common religious, ethnic, and national identities. But increased number of Hindu immigrants from Bangladesh probably have changed our priorities and brought back new options to rethink caste identity again. Brother (*Dada-a Bengali*, term for brother that is practiced by Hindus and Christians), if you live in Yellowknife, Canada, no one will care about your caste identity, we would be happy to find a Bengali Hindu, even a Bengali person from other religious groups, we would probably start thinking about caste identity when we are big in number. Still I believe caste is not a significant factor to define Bengali Hindu identity, 'Hindu' itself is enough in Canada.

Of my 22 Hindu families researched, 17 disclosed their caste identities. Of these 17 families, 9 of the Hindu families collectively shared their ideas about caste identity by saying that:

We were born with particular caste identities that we cannot change, therefore we are concerned with that identity, but nowadays you know we do not care much about an individual's caste identity in Canada. Even in Bangladesh people now care less about their caste identity. Our new generation who is growing up in Canada will not care at all.

Five of the 22 Hindu families interviewed remained totally silent about their caste identity (also see Table 4.6). To me their silence conveys two clear messages about their perceptions of the caste systems in the context of transnational migration. First, they did not want to disclose their caste identity as immigrants, and second, they do not think that it is a major aspect of their lives anymore. However, in the normative level, almost all of the Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants disown any form of distinctiveness, social and religious hatchery, ideas of privilege status, and any practices of purity and pollution based on the Hindu caste system and caste ideologies in Canada. I noted that Hindu immigrants' age, health, social upbringing, academic background, economic success, and years of migration all are strong factors in shaping their perceptions of caste-based social and personal identities in Canada.

I clearly observed that Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants' day-to-day communications with each other, together with their social and religious activities, in many ways is segregated according to their caste and class based ideologies. In order to explore functionality of caste ideology as marker of Bengali Hindu immigrants' identity in Canada, I could not separate caste from class positions. I found these two components to be intertwined and have equal impact in shaping Hindu immigrants' personal identity and social positions.

Identity of Caste and Class within Social, Political and Religious Institutions

Among Bangladeshi immigrants, a small fraction of the population in Canada is Hindu believers who truly represent their religious minority (numerically and politically) in the majority Muslim dominated Bangladesh. Being Hindus from Bangladesh, they share common national, ethnic, cultural, and historical connections with each other. Within the Bangladeshi Hindu immigrant families, on the one hand, Hinduism as religion, belief,

and way of life is joined with the historical political struggle that identifies immigrant Bengali Hindus and gives them a homogeneous entity in Canada. Their common religious identity as Hindus easily helps them to develop a closer social, cultural and economic communication among each other. Therefore, religious-based common association among the Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants has reinforced a homogeneous transnational Bangladeshi pan-religious Hindu identity in Canada. I noted that religion has guided very close interactions among Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants also encourage them to practice “religious endogamy”, rules of commensality, and to create a religion-based communal ethnic community in Canada. To some extent Bangladeshi Bengali pan-Hinduism in Canada is also radical, orthodox and highly communal, and deeply connected to broader caste ideologies and categorizations.

This transnational homogeneous Bangladeshi Bengali Hindu community in Toronto again falls into categories that are nationalist, caste and class oriented, colonial, and to some extent “improper” in relation to Bengali Hindu migrants from West Bengal, India. A 39 year old male Hindu respondent from a scheduled caste background told me:

Hindus from West Bengal, in general, believe that most of the Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants in Canada have come from lower caste groups; they also think that they themselves know better the scripture and core values of Hindu doctrine and traditions, and they are more cultured and well educated compared to us. Hindus from Bangladesh are more distorted Hindus with their caste and occupational background, ways of life, religious and cultural traditions, distinct Bengali accents and close interaction with Bangladeshi Muslims.

One of the key reasons for the inferior identity of Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants in Canada is also associated with the historical and political dependency of minority Bengali Hindus on majority Hindus in India. In response to any political conflicts and religious tensions in Bangladesh (Bengal Partition 1904, India partition 1947, 1965 war between India and Pakistan, 1971 Independence war and 2001 post-election religious and political persecutions), Bengali Hindus have sought religious and political asylum in West Bengal. Due to colonial and post-colonial caste and class oriented political mindsets among elite Hindus in West Bengal, today in the immigrant setting in Canada, Bangladeshi Bengali Hindus still are identified as religiously and socially inferior caste and class groups by Hindus from West Bengal, India. During my in-depth interview session at his home in

Mississauga, a Hindu male respondent (age 59) from an elite class (he did not mention his caste identity) said to me:

Bengali Hindus from West Bengal, India came to Canada long before Bangladeshi Bengali Hindus. Compared to Bangladeshi Hindus in Canada, they are old immigrants, well established, and an educated group in Toronto. They also follow strict caste and class differences and religious rituals in their day-to-day lives. In general, they do not consider us as pure Hindus because most of the Bangladeshi Hindus are considered to be members of Scheduled caste groups who were traditionally involved in agriculture, fishing, weaving and other less appreciated jobs under the Hindu caste system. In addition to that, our distinct (less appropriate) Bengali accent, more frequent use of Arabic words in day to day conversation, more meat items as opposed to vegetables, less knowledge about Hindu scriptures and religious traditions, closer interaction with Muslims in Bangladesh, and our national and political identities and ideologies are all key markers of distinct and separate Bangladeshi Bengali Hindu identities.

This statement illustrates, on the one hand, how global transnational migration is a force and a context for popular images of Canada as a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation that has connected all Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants as a pan-Hindu religious identity and group. On the other hand, we have also noticed that historical, colonial, and political histories and religious-based cultural differences have separated Bangladeshi Bengali Hindus from Bengali Hindus of West Bengal. In the multicultural immigrant setting of Toronto, Bengali Hindus from Bangladesh and from India who share religious and ethnic identities have so far been unable to come together in a common space as a homogeneous ethnic and religious group. At the same time, I also observed that by accepting caste-oriented attitudes of Hindus from West Bengal India, Bangladeshi Bengali Hindus maintain a social and religious network with them to establish a pan-religious identity as well as to challenge their minority religious status in Bangladesh.

I observed that caste and class identities are specific, dynamic, fluid and contextual among the Hindu immigrants. On one hand, Bangladeshi Bengali Hindu immigrant communities are segregated according to age, caste, class, regional, and political identities. On the other hand, my study suggests that caste identity and ideology are not always uniformly applied to replicate a single cohesive social unit. In the case of the

Toronto immigrant setting, caste in its rigid religious and birth-assigned perception is nurtured along with immigrants' class, social and economic status brought from the homeland, along with achieved economic success and cultural capital. Bangladeshi Hindu *scheduled caste*³⁷ immigrants can easily up their caste position and identity in Canada and they have become members of a "dominant caste" (Srinivas 1959) among the Bengali Hindu immigrants in Canada by strictly practicing religious traditions and rituals, upgrading their economic class with education and labour, donating money in order to build a temple, and lending support to religious events.

I noted that Bangladeshi Hindus who are economically successful and born with higher caste identities, do enjoy higher social status within the immigrant communities. Hindu immigrants who had been engineers, doctors, barristers, political leaders, civil servants, including a few military bureaucrats, enjoy higher status due to their homeland identity, but if they fail to achieve economic success in their immigrant lives, they have had to negotiate and compromise their status with immigrants who became successful in Canada. Those who are unable to build their economic success in Canada often strategize by trying to make social and occupational associations favourable to re-establishing their homeland-based caste and class power within immigrant communities. I observed that this elite Hindu group was challenged by Hindu immigrants who are economically, socially, and politically more settled in Canada but may not have the same caste and class statuses in Bangladesh. I felt a tension between these two groups when a fraction of Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants (*Dharma asram*) were conducting their annual general meeting and forming the next year's committee in order to run the organization.

According to two working-class Hindu respondents (one cook and another who runs a store), educated elite class and upper caste Bangladeshi Hindus found themselves uncomfortable to communicate with and participate in any religious practices with them. One Hindu respondent from a working class group informed me "in a social occasion an educated Hindu Bangladeshi brother asked me: "how I can sit and pray together with taxi drivers, cooks, and factory workers in the same temple? It is impossible and kind of

³⁷ In 1935, British India passed an act to incorporate all minority caste groups in national polices, to create quotas for providing jobs, and to reserve seats in the Indian Parliament for them. The Act brought into use the term "Scheduled Castes". In social context the lower caste groups are commonly identified in Bangladesh as Scheduled caste groups.

culturally uncomfortable to mingle with them, and share ideas with them. I do not have anything in common to share with these people”. Out of six of my elite Hindu higher caste respondents, four of them indirectly said that no such conflict had generated a split among Hindu immigrants, suggesting instead that the reasons for building another temple in Toronto was due to increased numbers of new immigrants. And two of them said: “Well, do not ignore our caste identity; we were born with that but we are not that fussy anymore in Canada”. Nonetheless, the new temple *Hindu Mondir*, established in 2008 on Danforth Road, was lead and run by mostly lower caste and working class Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants. The elite, educated and all-Brahmin Bangladeshi Hindus are mostly members of “*Dharma ashram*” which was the old Bengali Hindu religious association in Toronto. By attending the annual general meeting of “*Dharma ashram*” as an observer, I came to know that, along with caste identity, immigrants’ age, occupation, educational background, and eagerness to become leaders are major factors in organizational splits among Hindu religious groups. Therefore, transnational migration as a key force of globalization and multicultural social settings may not totally wipe out the complexities of caste identity, caste-based social hierarchy, and ideologies among the Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants. Instead, they are re-rooted among Bangladeshi Hindu immigrant groups as markers of an individual’s social, political and religious status and identity.

Encountering the Researcher’s Caste Identity

Even though many young Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants do not consider caste identity to be a major component in defining their personal and familial identities in Canada, it is nonetheless a factor when they organize a collective religious ritual and social program. I observed that the elder generation and mostly elite caste immigrants still consider caste-based identities to be important aspects in their immigrant lives. Once during my interview I was asked a few questions by my Brahmin Hindu (BMH) respondent that I will describe in detail:

BMH: What is your name?

Rumel: My name is Rumel.

BMH: Surname?

Rumel: Halder.

BMH: Halder? Are you a Hindu?

Rumel: No.

BMH: But your surname and first name do not sound like a Muslim name?

Rumel: I was raised in a Protestant Christian family.

BMH: But your surname belongs to the Bengali Hindu tradition. You know that *Halder* is a colonial occupational title given to Hindu farmers in the southern part of Bangladesh. The British administration also offered them a big chunk of cultivable land to prepare for rice cultivation. Therefore, a “Halder” used to be a big farmer who cultivates or manages a big chunk of land under a *Zaminder* (landlord). However, I guess your family converted from Hinduism.

Rumel: Yes, my father converted to Christianity from Hinduism.

BMH: I see. Why did your father convert to Christianity?

Rumel: As far as I know my father wanted to marry my mother who was a Protestant Christian. They went to the same college and took a liking to each other. My mother only agreed to marry my father if he would agree to convert to Christianity. My father did so for the sake of love and to marry my mother. Conversion did not happen to my father as a form of salvation, nor as a mechanism of “up-casting”. It was an easy thing for my father to marry his love as he was actively involved in left-wing politics and later became a member of the Bangladesh Communist Party.

BMH: Interesting!!! You know there are two different types of *Halders* among Bengali Hindus. One belongs to the *Brahmin* caste and another belongs to the *Khahasto* caste (mid-level status within Hindu caste system). Do you know what your family’s caste identity or occupational identity was before receiving the ‘Halder’ title?

Rumel: I am not sure. But I think our family belonged to the *Khahasto* caste, not Brahmin, and my grandfather was a farmer as well as a school teacher in our village.

BMH: I see ..., I see

Based on the descriptions of the dynamism and complexity of caste systems, it is clear that caste ideologies and caste-oriented mindsets are still active, strong, and reinvented in immigrants’ new lives in Canada. In day to day conversation Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants hardly mention or pay any attention to caste identities, but on deeper levels of immigrants’ religious and ritualistic activities, weddings, and other social occasions they are still guided by caste-based ideologies as a key marker of identity

among Bengali Hindu immigrants in Canada. Many young professional Hindu immigrants are also able to challenge the dominant caste structure of Hindu society by upgrading their economic class, education, and association with leading immigrant social and political organizations.

Caste Identity and Ideology among Bangladeshi Bengali Christian Immigrants

In general, Bangladeshi Bengali Christians were converts from Hindu Scheduled castes, and lower class occupational groups in Bangladesh. Very few Bangladeshi Bengali Christians converted from elite classes or the Brahmin caste, and a very small number of them came from Muslim religious groups. Even though religious conversion in pre-colonial and colonial India was a process of “up casting” in Bengali societies but were not free from caste based ideologies and social hierarchies (see Aloysius 1998). Bengali Christian association with European missionary organizations, church based education systems, and social upbringing within mission compounds in many ways neutralized strong caste based social hierarchy and ideologies in Bangladesh. In my research setting in Toronto, I noticed that Bangladeshi Christian immigrants’ patterns of migration, class and occupational positions, pre-migration social status in Bangladesh, religious doctrines, their strong position for maintaining racial and sexual purity, and their practice of endogamy are key components that significantly support Hindu caste systems and caste ideologies.

Class and Occupational Identity among Bangladeshi Christian Immigrants

I observed that Christian immigrants who were well employed in Christian charity organizations and involved in church-based developmental organizations as “directors” in Bangladesh, in Canada also try to maintain some social distance from working class Christian immigrants. In to some extent, I found that immigrants’ family background and their parents’ occupational identity are significant factors in defining individual personal identity and social position in Canada. Among Bangladeshi Christian immigrants, I heard that people feel proud in saying “my father was an English teacher and a head master of a mission school, principal of a college, director of a Church-based organization, a pastor, a government employee, a magistrate, an army officer, and so on. A 57 year old Protestant male respondent of upper middle class status in Toronto told me:

You know, sometimes it is hard to communicate and associate with regular, less educated, and working class Christian immigrants in Toronto. They may own houses, drive cars, and make lots of money in Canada by driving a taxi, or working in bars and restaurants. But I do not find any common issues to discuss with them in social gatherings. Their ways of living are different than ours. Please to not take it otherwise; still some of these immigrant families' brothers or sisters are working in our family-owned organizations in Bangladesh. You know, before their migration to Canada, many of them were employed under my supervision. I know a couple of immigrant families in Toronto whose parents used to work for me, and for my families in Bangladesh. After migrating to Canada, many of them pretend to forget their past, and act like they do not care for us. That's why I maintain very limited social communication with them. I cannot take them. Here in Canada they pretend that we are all the same; no class, no status, no respect, no difference.... orange and apple are all the same here in Canada.....so funny!! In Bangladesh, I mostly hang around with educated professional groups, for example, ex-police commissioner, cultural workers, media personnel, and university teachers. A secretary of the government of Bangladesh was my neighbour.

The wife (50 year old educated professional woman) of this particular respondent, who was also present during our conversation, jumped into our discussion by saying:

You probably know about my family in Bangladesh, who my father was; where I came from. Our family is well known and respected among the Christian communities in Bangladesh. There are many immigrant families who live in Toronto, believe me; they did not even dare to think to enter into our home in Bangladesh with shoes on their feet (*Eekhanay oken Bangladeshi Christian immigrant family achay jara amar baritay juta nia duktay parto na*); they had to come barefooted. I understand that currently we are living in a different county as immigrants, but we cannot forget our past. You cannot break all social and cultural norms and traditions in one day, it is not right. We should respect people who used to be respected in Bangladesh. But here in Canada we do not care; all of a sudden we all started to think we are all equal in status, because we are Canadian...; it is totally wrong.

I noticed that Christians who are portraying an elite status based on their family history and their occupational and leadership positions within faith-based developmental organizations, church organizations in Bangladesh are criticized, contested, and challenged in immigrant settings in Canada. I heard that in social gatherings and familial *addas*, working class Christians have brought stories and gossip about monetary corruption, cheapness, extra-marital relationships, improper affairs, and various family

crises among these elite Christian immigrants. These are all “hidden transcripts” and everyday forms of resistance (see Scott 1985, 1990) of working class Bangladeshi Christian immigrants in Toronto to challenge class and status-based elite identities in Canada. In a social *adda*, a 60 year old Protestant Christian male respondent from the downtown area in Toronto was talking about an elite Bangladeshi Christian family who continues to maintain a distance from him as well as other working class families:

I know that now Mr. Douglas (pseudonym) and his wife have big mouths; they are living a good life. They say so many bad things about different Christian families who are living in downtown Toronto. But, you know, when they first came to Canada, they stayed in my basement for a month. I went to pick them up from the airport, helped them to find a place to live, every week gave them rides to go here and there, helped them with grocery shopping, and even arranged a job for him. Well, I do not expect that they will return my favour, but I do not care. Yet I feel sorry when I see that these types of people ignore us and do not treat us properly due to our job and social position. You know people like me as immigrants work hard to make our living in Canada; we are probably not educated like them, and do not pretend that we do not know how to speak Bengali, but we pay tax in Canada. Mr. Douglas probably was a director in Bangladesh, and now making good money. Well, they may have come from a rich family, but in Canada who cares if you were a president in Bangladesh, I do not give a damn. Here in Canada, the Prime Minister and I can sit and have a cup of coffee in the same restaurant. In order to gain respect you have to treat people nicely; this I have learned in Canada. It has nothing to do with your social and economic position.

I noticed that working class immigrants also carry inferior caste and class-based ideologies and they never violate a constructed “series of codes” (see Guha, Ranajit 1994: 336) because of their subaltern and colonial mindsets in communicating with elite Christian immigrants, even though they are no longer elite in Canada. A 48 year old Christian respondent who migrated to Canada (he mentioned that he sought asylum) by himself from a working class family background in Bangladesh, said to me:

I never dare to invite Ms. Merry’s (pseudonym) family to my home because I am not sure that she will accept my invitation. You know, my father worked for her father in Bangladesh. In the post-liberation war (1974 famine), my mother used to go to her house to collect *vater fan* (water we throw out after cooking rice) to feed us, and even later her family supported us a lot. I know she is a nice person, and once in awhile we see each other in community gatherings, and I have thought many

times to invite her family for supper but it did not happen. I am still kind of scared if she refuses to come.

Thus, in the context of global migration, within the Bangladeshi Christian immigrants' caste and class based social hierarchy, and caste-oriented ideologies are alive and reshaping Bangladeshi Christians' immigrant lives in Canada.

My research suggests that transnational migration has also provided a space for many Christian immigrants to challenge their ascribed social hierarchy in multicultural immigrant settings in Canada. Through day to day practices, social *addas*, memories of old days, and their imaginations, Bangladeshi Christian immigrants reinvent ideologies of caste based social hierarchy and challenge them again. Mechanisms of caste and fragments of caste based ideologies are still present among the Bangladeshi Christians because I heard in an *adda* in Toronto "he his taking so much, but you know he came from a lowland (*beel*) area in Bangladesh, his father used to catch fish". Thus, globalization-led transnational migration and religious conversion to Christianity do not remove the ideological and practical presence of caste from Bangladeshi Christian immigrants. Still, lineage status, family history and occupational positions all play key roles in defining their personal and social positions in Canada. I also noticed that the ways in which social and cultural boundaries and differences are created and nurtured based on religious doctrinal and denominational ideologies among the Christian immigrants in Canada clearly supports caste-oriented practices and social divisions.

Relationships among Christian Denominational Groups

Doctrinal identities and denominational boundaries are key markers of Bangladeshi Christian immigrants in Bangladesh as well as in Canada. Even though there are differences in religious practices, rituals, and different social and cultural organizations, interactions are not totally prohibited among Protestants, Anglicans and Catholics immigrants from Bangladesh. However, the ideological norms of endogamy and social and cultural interactions with similar denominational groups are encouraged. I observed that Bangladeshi Catholic, Protestant and Anglican groups prefer to marry within their respective denominational group. During my fieldwork in Toronto, I came to know that one Baptist and one Fellowship church member went to Bangladesh and found their partners from their own denominations. Conventionally, it is always preferred that a

Baptist believer will marry a Baptist person. On many occasions, it was a bit easier to marry a Catholic groom with a Baptist bride, but very difficult if it is the other way around. Catholic Churches do not encourage this because they think they are losing their flock. A Bangladeshi Catholic female (age 46) from my downtown research location told me:

It is always good to marry a Catholic to another Catholic, it is even better yet to marry from the same regions because both bride and groom families can share some common cultural and religious rituals that are different among different denominations, and it even varies within same denominational groups in different regions of Bangladesh.

During my fieldwork in Toronto, I followed two Christian wedding ceremonies in Toronto. One Bangladeshi Protestant girl married an Indian Hindu bride, and another Protestant girl who was raised in Toronto married a Guyanese boy whose mother is a Catholic and whose father practices Hinduism; the boy did not follow strictly any of the major religions. A good number of friends and family from both the bride and the groom's families attended the wedding. Both wedding ceremonies followed Hindu and Christian religious traditions conducted by Hindu *pandits* and Christian pastors at Temples and Churches. Both bride and groom wore Western wedding attire and *Bollywood*³⁸ style contemporary Indian wedding costumes. These two wedding ceremonies were criticized as well as refused participation by a fraction of Christian immigrants who thought that these were not "proper" weddings according to religion. One of the bride's parents told me that they had received an email from a family who was invited but who refused to attend their daughter's wedding because the bride and groom are following two different religions, and the wedding ceremony was taking place in two religious institutions. To the family, according to Christianity, "we cannot serve two Gods at the same time".

All my Christian research respondents agreed and conveyed in the same tone that they would be blessed, firstly, if their children at least would get married rather than start living together before marriage, and secondly, if they would find their partners from the same denomination, but if not, at least Christians from any background or persuasion. They said it is their hope and prayer that their children will marry according to their

³⁸ *Bollywood*: Indian film industry playing on "Hollywood" in the USA.

religious and cultural tradition and are able to find an authentic partner from the same ethnic, cultural and religious group. If they choose a Christian from a different racial or ethnic group other than “Black and Pakistani”, they are okay with any other racial/ethnic groups. Nearly all of them said it would be hard to see their grandchildren to be dark in color. Thus, ideologies of religious doctrines, social segregation based on hierarchy, endogamy, and racial/ethnic identities are all connected among the Bangladeshi Christian immigrants. Simultaneously, a good number of immigrant families are accepting multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-traditional weddings in their new immigrant settings in Canada, something which is largely impossible in Bangladesh.

Caste Identity and Ideology among Bangladeshi Bengali Muslim Immigrants

Like Hindu’s rigid caste system, there are no strict caste-based occupations, ideologies of purity and pollution that are found among the Bengali Muslims, but by gaining wealth and incorporating various titles, Bengali Muslims were flexible to move from one social position to another (see Arfeen 1987; Karim 1962; Bertocci 1970). Scholars also have found that caste-like social hierarchy, lineage status, perceptions of purity and pollution, rules of commensality, lower status occupations, restricted social mobility, and endogamous marriage practices among elite lineage groups are to some extent visible among the Bangladeshi Muslims, however (see Arfeen 1987; Karim 1962; Bertocci 1970: 192). Questions by the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants have arisen with regard to how these issues are negotiated, perceived, and practiced in the context of globalization-led transnational migration in Canada.

Occupational Hierarchy and Caste Ideologies among Bangladeshi Muslim Immigrants

My research suggests, on one hand, that globalization-led transnational migration has neutralized and melded caste and *Jati*-based occupational patterns, and on the other hand, that caste-based occupational identities and social hierarchy are vividly re-rooted within Muslim immigrant societies in Canada. Following traditional caste-oriented occupational norms and ideology of “purity and pollution”, of 22 Muslim respondent families, all of them said they hardly take any jobs that require toilet and floor cleaning, personal touch and care, or needing to deal with garbage unless they have had to do so to survive in Canada. Among 22 respondent families, 6 female and 4 male members shared

that they have to do some kind of cleaning-related jobs in their current professions. A 40 year old Muslim female respondent told me:

Personally, I do not want to work in any personal care centers and old age homes even though they pay well. The key reason is I do not want to deal with human shit, and clean and touch other (ethnic, gender, and age groups) humans. That's why I was jobless for many months after coming to Canada; I never tried to work in a daycare centre, in personal homes or any hotels in Toronto. As a human being I know that these are not only jobs, but we need to serve people, yet I personally cannot do these things; it is not for me.

For the same reason, during my fieldwork in Toronto, and later after returning to Winnipeg, my wife's job with Value Village³⁹ was not considered to be clean, pure, and proper in the eyes of my research respondents, my kin, and my friends because her job required her to touch and deal with various used items and unclean from diversified groups of people in Canada. Her job was not considered to be a clean and pure job for a Bangladeshi immigrant. One of my Muslim female respondents who was a respected professional in Bangladesh also worked with my wife in Value Village. She also said that "it was not a great job but I have to do it to make my living in Canada". Like us, she was indifferent even though she also faced cultural and social pressure from community members.

Caste ideology and *jati*-oriented occupational divisions play a significant role in gaining prestige and social status in the lives of immigrants in Toronto. But, I observed that, after migrating to Canada, many educated Bangladeshi immigrants have opened up grocery stores where they sell fish, vegetables, sweets, and meat (excluding pork). Women and housewives are working in these stores as part-time or full-time employees. One of my respondents who came to Canada with a Master's degree in social science has started a small restaurant where he sells authentic Bengali and Indian foods. Being a Bengali person, he does not think this is the right job for him, but that sometimes in immigrant contexts in Canada it is an accepted occupation. However, if he lived in Bangladesh, he certainly would not open up a restaurant. I came to know that in most of the Bangladeshi restaurants in Toronto no alcoholic drinks are served, and pork items are not cooked. As survival strategies, still others have run catering businesses, cook for

³⁹ Value Village: A chain store in North America that collects donations of used items to sell to others.

money, sell sweets, opened hair-dressing salons, informally cut hair at home to earn or save money, worked in daycare centres where they need to clean children, and driven taxies or worked as security guards. Therefore, in this context, we have seen that transnational migration as a force has led to acceptance of new options and helped to think beyond caste-based occupational categories. At the same time, many immigrants think that these jobs are temporary; these are their survival jobs as new immigrants in Canada. Being successful immigrants would mean that they want to go back to those jobs that bring social and economic prestige, and again surrender to the caste-oriented ideologies. In this context, it is worth noting that many Muslim immigrants believe that structural and ethnic inequality, the unequal policies for professional immigrants in Canada, and no recognition of foreign credentials are major factors that force immigrants to take lower-status jobs. These issues will be discussed more explicitly in coming chapters.

Any job is socially and culturally widely accepted in Canada. I came to know that people hide their occupational identities if they do certain types of jobs that are accepted based on caste structures and cultural principles, but do not adhere to their educational degrees and social status. Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants do not mind cooking and selling food, but they do not accept cleaning toilets or sweeping floors. Three of my Muslim female research respondents quit their jobs in restaurants because they needed to serve alcohol, touch pork, wash dirty plates, go through garbage, and clean washrooms. A 32 year old married Muslim woman told me that after working a day in a restaurant, “I vomited three days, and got stomach flu because I had to deal with pork and alcohol; it is my problem because I have never touched pork or smelled alcohol in my life; many of my Bangladeshi friends do not have a problem with this.” Unlike among Muslim respondents, I did not notice these kinds of statements among Hindu and Christian respondents who worked in the food industry in Toronto. But they also said that they were uncomfortable in serving alcohol and cleaning washrooms during and after their work. Two of my Hindu respondents run Bengali restaurants in Toronto do not prepare pork or beef items in their restaurants. Thus, ideologies of caste, practices of purity and pollution, notions of touchable and untouchable, and clean and dirty jobs, are clearly viewed by Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants in Toronto. Even in Canada, occupational

identity, duties and tasks related to jobs are some of the key markers of Bangladeshi immigrants' personal, social, and family identity.

Ideology and Impact of Ashraf- vs Atraf-based Identity on Migration Patterns

In pre-British and pre-colonial Bengal, ideologies of *ashraf* and *atraf*, which were significantly differentiated, offered separate religious, political, social and cultural identities between newly-converted Bengali Muslims and the elite Muslims who had migrated to Bengal from Central Asia (see, e.g., Eaton 1993; Sarker 1972; Aloysius 1998). Among the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant groups, I observed that, in addition to patterns of migration and places of origin for migration to Canada, *ashraf* and *atraf* status also affects the immigration process. Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants who have come to Canada from Arab nations, who have brought petro dollars (economic capital) and embrace fundamentalist Muslim religious norms (cultural capital), who have performed *hajj*⁴⁰, and who compel women members of their families to wear the *hijab*, and who are able to recite the Holy Quran, these people generally gain *ashraf* status (see table 4.1). Out of twenty two *Sunni* Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant families, four of them migrated from Middle Eastern countries, and another two families migrated to Canada in the early 1970s (one from East Pakistan and another from Bangladesh) fall into this category. Muslim immigrants who have migrated directly from Bangladesh and who even follow all religious traditions in their immigrant lives are respected but do not totally gain the same *ashraf* status like Bangladeshi immigrants from Arab nations. Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants who have come to Canada straight from Bangladesh as landed immigrants with Bengali cultural, religious and political norms are commonly considered *atraf*. Based on religious norms and nostalgias and direct connection to holy land, the Bangladesh homeland does not represent an authentic religious space for Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants.

Another group of Bengali elite Muslims who had lived and worked in West Pakistan later migrated to Canada just before the Bangladeshi Independence from Pakistan in 1971. They came from the upper and middle class Bengali Muslim society

⁴⁰ **Hajj** is the pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the fifth pillars in Islam. Every Muslim believer is asked to perform *hajj* at least once in his/her lifetime. In Bengali society, pilgrimage to Mecca is a means to move up from one social status to another. People use **Hajji** as a title before or after their names to differentiate from regular Muslims.

that achieved academic and professional careers in Canada and proclaimed themselves as *ashraf* in comparison to immigrants who came to Canada in skilled-worker categories. These are the Bengali Muslims who were also very much connected to elite classes of West Pakistan, and uncultured in Pakistani Islamic and Urdu traditions.

Conventionally, in social contexts Bangladeshi Muslims have protected and maintained their pure identities by practicing religious rules and norms, and ethnic and cultural endogamy. In my research nearly all respondents are married and they have found their partners in their homeland from the same ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Both Bangladeshi immigrant men and women prefer to marry authentic cultural and religious persons. I noticed that globalization-led transnational migration has opened up racial gates, has provided opportunities to mix with other ethnic groups and has brought new marriage trends to the Bangladeshi Muslim families. In response to the pan-Islamic interactions and Islamic globalization, young Muslim men prefer to marry Bangladeshi Muslim girls who have grown up in Arab nations, or women from Muslim countries in Asia such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Pakistan. The images of the women who have grown up in Arabic nations are properly trained in religion norms, and they strictly follow Islamic rules, norms, and regulations. They carry more authentic religious identities as opposed to Bengali ethnic and cultural Muslim women raised in Bangladesh and Canada. Therefore, it is considered that Bengali Muslim women's local, cultural and religious identities are less proper and more *atraf* in the context of global migration compared to Muslim women from other Middle Eastern nationalities.

By the same token, compared to Muslim men from Arab nations, and brothers from Pakistan who are fluent in Arabic and Urdu, Bengali Muslim men are also considered as *atraf* because for their national, ethnic, and cultural identities. It is commonly believed even by the Bengali Muslims that they do not have much Islamic knowledge or clear ideas about religious norms like their brothers from Arab and Middle Eastern countries. Most of the religious events and ceremonies arranged by Bangladeshi immigrant families, or people have led groups from Arab nations. Therefore, in the context of global migration, both Bangladeshi men and women are identified as *atraf* Muslim status, similar to the way they were identified in pre-colonial India compared to noble Muslim *ashraf* who came from central Asia (see Sarker 1972; Aloysius 1998).

Bengali Muslims once thought that conversion to Islam would end the caste-based discrimination and neutralize the social hierarchal positions, but in the context of transnational global migration these issues are reinforced in their social and religious lives. The ways newly converted Bengali Muslims in Bengal acquire the *Sheikh* title from the Arabs and *Mughal*, *Syed*, and *Pathan* from outsiders, following in the same path are Bangladeshi Bengali Muslim immigrants in Canada, who are reshaping and negotiating their authentic identities by making connections with Arab cultures and traditions. Furthermore, in multi-ethnic Canada, many Bangladeshi Muslim women have been influenced by orthodox Arab religious and cultural customs, traditions and norms as authentic markers of Muslim women. Bengali local, national and cultural norms and practices which Bangladeshi Muslim women used to practice to define their identities are questioned, disjoined, altered, and negotiated in relation to powerful Arab Islamic cultures and traditions in Canada. Global migration is a significant force that has altered religious, social, and cultural syncretism, and is reinforcing Arabic religious and cultural norms among the Bangladeshi immigrant communities. Ideologically, Bangladeshi Bengali men and women are following these norms to “up-cast” their religious positions within their own communities and other Muslim groups.

Thus, Bangladeshi Muslims’ pattern of migration, locations from where they have migrated, and their cultural capital all shape their caste-like *ashraf* status in Canada. Bangladesh as a nation and Bengali culture are considered less Muslim-oriented, more *Atraf*, and to some extent improper for a group of elite Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants in Canada. From the post-Islamic conversion period to the post-colonial Pakistan period and current globalization context, Bengali as ethnic and cultural identities, and Bengali titles, customs and rituals have never been enough to define proper and authentic Muslim identities for Bengali Muslims. Every stage they had to define their authentic identity by incorporating core Arab title and orthodox Islamic norms, which are in many ways contradictory to secular norms of local Bengali culture and traditions. My study also suggests that from colonial British India to transnational global Canada, Bangladeshi Bengali Muslims learned the English language and traditions as a means of gaining knowledge and upgrading their class and social positions, but English language and cultural norms have never been considered key markers of Bengali Muslim identity.

Globalization-led transnational migration to Canada is not a westernization process to Bengali Muslim immigrants; rather, it is a force that disjoins Bengali local cultural and religious traditions and reconnects to global Islamic norms.

Perceptions of “Purity and Pollution” as Weapons in Negotiating Identity in Multicultural Canada

In multicultural and multi-ethnic immigrant settings in Canada, Bangladeshi immigrants do not always define their authentic identities just by practicing their own cultural and religious norms. They also proclaim and establish their pure ethnic, cultural and religious identities by physically separating themselves from other ethnic and religious groups, and by opposing other ethnic groups as impure, colonial, imperialist and anti-immigrant. From my fieldwork experiences among the Bangladeshi Hindu, Christian, and Muslim immigrants in Toronto, I came to know that all three religious groups carry common understanding of ethnic “purity and pollution” in communicating with other ethnic/racial groups in multicultural Canada. Bangladeshi immigrants’ common perceptions of defining other ethnic groups in Canada are guided by colonial and global “nostalgia and imaginaries” that are gained and transmitted through various processes of colonial modernization, global media, print capitalism, and day-to-day struggles against other ethnic and religious groups in global settings (see Appadurai 1996). Despite different religious identities, the Bangladeshi immigrants commonly view other ethnic groups as improper, impure, untouchable, exploitive, and colonial in order to define their authentic ethnic, cultural and religious identities and spaces in Canada. In a multi-ethnic dinner party at a family I was invited to with some other Bengali families in Toronto, when the last person from other ethnic and linguistic groups left, one of the guests said “now Bangladesh has gotten independence; let’s speak in Bengali”. Even before their migration to Canada, Bangladeshi immigrants consumed the constructed colonial, racial, and dominant images of other ethnic groups; for example, Black people (*kalu* in Bengali slang) are rough, uncivilized, refugee seekers, and unpredictable. The Aboriginal populations in Canada (generally identified as “Red Indian” (*lal varotee*) in Bengali, or called *lallu* (slang) among Bangladeshi immigrants regardless of religious differences) live on social welfare, are dirty, dangerous, drug users who are lazy and “loony takers”. They are said to have no self-esteem or personal drive to change their

social, economic and political positions in Canada. The common understanding of the White European people (*sada*) are that they are dirty and impure, do not use water after defecation, they keep dogs as their pets and sleep with them in the same bed, they drink alcohol, they do not have family life, they have a high divorce rate, they are polygamous, racist, anti-Islamic, anti-immigrant, and so on. As most of the Bangladeshi immigrants have to compete against many Chinese and Indian (South Asian) skills and networks to find better jobs or buy houses in Canada, they are therefore also rather critical of them. During my fieldwork, I heard that Bangladeshi immigrants are saying:

Indians and Chinese are everywhere in Canada. Chinese people are gaining control over the whole world; they look like they are innocent, but they are very strategic and they know how to establish their lives; they are very adaptive. The Chinese own most of the good cars and big houses; they can do any kind of work, and they are cheap. You can see how many Indian descendents are in Canadian parliaments and in the media. Brother.... do not say anything about Jews in Canada; they are the richest group and very organized. They control markets, the economy and media. And they are big-time anti-Muslims.

By ignoring, criticizing, and gossiping about other ethnic groups and their social and cultural norms based in colonial nostalgias, and images constructed by global media (i.e., they are impure, racially profiling, dangerous, and exploitative), Bangladeshi transnational immigrants are in general trying to assert their ethnic, cultural, political and religious authentic spaces and identity in Canada. Bangladeshi Christian immigrants often socialize with other ethnic groups (mostly White Europeans they know from their church organizations in Canada) and sometimes they invite them to their homes. But they also said that they are afraid to meet and build close friendships with others who are not Christians. Upper middle class Bengali Muslims and Hindu families often talk to their neighbours about weather, games, and events in their neighbourhood, but during my research I did not notice any of their presence in immigrants' social and familial events. Therefore, communications with other ethnic groups are not considered pure nor authentic for political, social and economic reasons. Perceptions of "ethnic purity and pollution", and gossiping about other ethnic groups, are political, cultural and religious identity negotiation strategies and "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985) – strategies that are relatively new among economically struggling Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada.

In general, Bangladeshi immigrants are culturally, socially and religiously homophobic and cannot support homosexual behaviour; they always support monogamous heterosexual relationships. None of my respondents mentioned that they hang around with, invite to their home, or know any of same-sex married couples, that they have gay and lesbian friends, or that they know anyone from their own community or outside who practices same-sex relationships. On several occasions, my respondents joked around about their children:

Well, we won't expect that our sons will marry Bangladeshi girls, but if they do, we will be the happiest persons in the world, I would be relieved at least if my sons bring girls from anywhere. In Canada you cannot predict anything; they can bring boys too; this is a crazy country.

Therefore, among the Bangladeshi immigrants any kind of homosexuality, sex before marriage, or same-sex marriage are considered as sin, impure, untouchable, unacceptable, and disgusting. It became abundantly clear that premarital sex, free sex, and living together in boyfriend and girlfriend relationships are not culturally, socially, and religiously acceptable among the Bangladeshi immigrants. Only post-marital heterosexual relationships between men and women are considered pure and acceptable. Thus, in religious, social and cultural terms, maintaining proper sexuality in Canada is one of the key indicators of defining Bangladeshi Bengali identity.

All three religious groups strongly speak against drinking alcohol because they all believe it is a sin. According to Bangladeshi social and cultural norms, drinking alcohol is an improper and impure habit. Bangladeshi Muslims generally do not drink in public, but during my fieldwork I observed several of my respondents drinking occasionally in private. Drinking alcohol is less taboo within Bangladeshi Hindu and Christian communities, but drinking alcohol is not considered culturally acceptable to them either. It is a common view that the Christian religion permits drinking, so if any Bangladeshi Christian person drinks it is considered okay, but not for Muslims and Hindus. However, to a different degree and level all three Bangladeshi religious groups commonly think that inter-ethnic communication, premarital sex, homosexuality, and drinking alcohol are all improper and impure activities. These are impure and sinful activities that are more exposed in their immigrant lives. In order to protect themselves from these sinful events

and keep their cultural, ethnic, and religious identities intact, they strongly practice their religions, and nurture social and cultural values both personally and as a group.

OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITY AMONG BANGLADESHI IMMIGRANTS

My research suggests that Bangladeshi immigrants' pre-migration social status, prestige (*Ijjat*), class, and power based on their professional identity as well as their post-migration occupational status all work together in making their social and class identities in Canada. In any social gathering, two common questions are asked of a new immigrant: "Where did you work in Bangladesh?" and "What was your profession?" ("*Bhai desh e kothay chilen? ki korten?*"). Typical replies from Bangladeshi immigrants are: in my homeland I was an engineer, doctor, civil bureaucrat, university teacher, businessman, lawyer, development worker, managing-director of a company, director in a non-profit organization, artist, media person, accountant, United Nations' employee, and so forth. They do not mention much about their current occupational identity because most of the Bangladeshi educated professionals I interviewed who came to Canada after 1990 have failed to find professional jobs that they used to do before migration to Canada (see Chapter Six, and Table 6.3). Among my 136 research respondents only 31 female respondents were homemakers and 12 male respondents were ordinary workers in Bangladesh.

I observed that Bangladeshi immigrants closely maintain transnational interactions between Canada and Bangladesh, so immigrants easily capitalize on their pre-migration occupational power and status of both home and host countries. Being retired army officers, civil bureaucrats, political leaders, and top-level administrative personnel in Bangladesh, immigrants still have significant control over – and influences in – social, economic, political, and legal institutions in the homeland. If an immigrant or his/her family members need to deal with government offices, hospitals, academic institutions, political leaders, and law and enforcement agencies in Bangladesh, he/she would seek help from their former professional immigrant friends in Canada. It is commonly viewed that Bangladeshi legal, financial, social, and political institutions are not transparent; they are being questioned for illegal activities, nepotism, politicization, religiosity (majority religious groups have more control than minority religious groups), bribery, and various forms of patron-client relationships. As a result, immigrants who ran and worked within

these national institutions in Bangladesh still have networks and influences over local institutions as former bosses and professionals. These former professional groups maintain transnational networks, and can solve various problems while residing in Canada. A Bangladeshi engineer (age 50) in Toronto told me:

My elder brother bought an apartment (flat) in Dhaka. He was harassed several times by income tax officers in order to get a bribe from him. He offered something but they were not convinced. He felt so helpless and informed me. I said to him, “do not worry; I will be able to solve the problem”. I asked help from a person who was a retired civil bureaucrat in Bangladesh but now living in Toronto. He called his friends in Bangladesh, dealt with the issue, and just by paying a very small amount of money my brother could register his apartment.

During my fieldwork of 2007 and 2008 in Toronto, the caretaker government⁴¹ (the state power was taken by army-backed civil bureaucrats) was ruling the country and working for fair election in Bangladesh; arranging a fair election was the key objective of that government but they moved in a different direction. In the name of political reform and their fight against corruption, that government arrested, detained and tortured several ministers, political leaders, professionals, and rich businessmen in Bangladesh. The state army actually took power and tried to depoliticize the whole political institution by arresting two key political leaders in Bangladesh. In that tense situation, many Bangladeshi immigrant families saved their family members, kin groups, and relatives from any kind of army harassment by calling their friends in Canada who were former army officers in Bangladesh. From these two events I came to know that Bangladeshi immigrants’ pre-migration professional positions, power, and networks are useful in shaping their social identity in Toronto.

I found that highly educated Bangladeshi professional immigrants who came to Canada with a hope that they would be able to sell their skills in job markets found that their credentials and professional experiences were not being recognized by the Canadian government. One of my female respondents (age 48) who came to Canada as a doctor is now working as a sales person in a used items store in Canada. I met a male Bangladeshi

⁴¹ A non-party caretaker government system in Bangladesh was formed in 1990 as a mechanism for a smooth transfer of power from one government to a newly elected government. It is a transitional government whose key role is to arrange a fair election. In January 2007, in response to political crisis in Bangladesh, the army-backed civil bureaucrats formed a government, which is commonly called “1/11”.

respondent (age 50) in a Bank in Toronto working as a security guard; he and his wife both were heart surgeons in a recognized medical hospital in Bangladesh. As immigrants, they hoped that they could be able to save some money to sit for medical exams to get professional licences to work as doctors in Canada. According to them, it is hard to work full time, earn money, maintain family responsibilities, and prepare for exams in Canada. With their age and other constraints, they had to give up. During my fieldwork, they decided to go back to Bangladesh and they finally did. They said that they were frustrated with their disgraceful immigrant lives in Canada, and with misleading Canadian immigration policies for educated professionals. This family left because they were unable to recreate their professional and social identity in Canada as immigrants.

In reshaping professional identity among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto, I found five different professional associations (see table 4.2) based on their pre-migration occupational identities and post-migration occupational positions. One of my respondents used to be the president of a professional association, but he is no longer practicing that profession in Canada. In an *adda* in *Bangla Town* over tea with two Bangladeshi male engineers, one doctor, and two other university graduates, they mentioned that:

Even though many of us are not professional doctors and engineers in Canada, we were once so in Bangladesh. Since we came to Canada with families, we had to earn money to pay our bills, therefore, eventually we failed to manage time and money to sit for professional exams and gain Canadian certificates. Nevertheless, many of us could make it. However, being a member of a professional association, we are able to connect with our fellow professional friends, so we try to locate ourselves to find our professional identity and social status that we have lost as immigrants, and socially we want to be recognized by others as professionals. We want to show our children and try to remind our wives/husbands that once we were engineers or doctors in Bangladesh. It gives us some peace and comfort as educated professional immigrants in Canada.

In social gatherings, I noticed that Bangladeshi immigrants introduce themselves with their professional identities, first names and family names. In Toronto, they were identifying themselves as follows (all names are pseudonyms): “I am Engineer Kasam Chowdhury, or Doctor Richard Sarker, or Barrister X or Agriculturalist Y”. After a brief conversation, Bangladeshi immigrants want to convey what were their professions, and what types of social and economic positions they hold in Bangladesh before coming to

Canada. For these pre-migration professionals, social and economic markers of identity play important roles in shaping their social and occupational networks in Canada. Based on imaginaries of professional success and social status, Bangladeshi immigrants try to create and negotiate their new identity in Canada.

GENDER IDENTITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF BANGLADESHI TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

Bengali social, cultural, religious and political spaces are segregated and separated between men and women. Therefore, being a girl (*may*), boy (*chalay*), man (*purush*) and woman (*mohila*), a person lives in a distinct world and maintains separate social and cultural norms (see Jahanir 1979). Bangladeshi men conventionally are more connected to production systems and public and cultural spaces; whereas women are involved in reproduction mechanisms, and private and natural processes (see Ortner 1974). On top of that, patriarchal ideologies, unequal access to resources, women's lack of entitlements (see Kabeer 1996; Sen 1982), religiously enforced cultural and patriarchal norms, perceptions of social shame and modesty (*lojja, sharam*), veiling (*Purdha*), and honour (*ijjat*) are major components that are shaping gender differences and inequalities within the social systems (Afshar and Agarwal 1989 in Pattman 1996:192; Gardner 1995:162, 1999).

By following cultural and religious gender norms and ideologies brought from their homeland, Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant men and women must maintain separate social and cultural spaces, and perform distinct roles in private and public spheres. Immigrants' distinct gender spaces and gender roles between men and women are also connected to their social and economic class, religious identities, length and patterns of migration, and educational qualification. It seems as if in both public and private spaces Bengali Muslim immigrants in Canada are more gender segregated compared to Bengali Hindu and Christian men and women, but at deeper and more personal levels of their immigrant social and private lives, I clearly observed separate and distinct gendered positions in all three religious groups. Among the Bangladeshi immigrants, transnational migration as a global force has in one way disjoined traditional gendered norms, but in another way, it has also reinforced gendered norms as authentic markers of Bengali men's and women's identity in Canada. In order to explore these issues, this research focuses on patterns of migration to Canada between Bangladeshi men and women.

Male-dominated Bangladeshi Migration to Canada

Like Bengali migration to England (Gardner 1996, 1999) and other European, Asian, and Middle Eastern nations, Bengali migration to Canada from Bangladesh is predominantly male migration or male-initiated migration. Among 75 researched families, 32 families migrated to Canada as family category immigrants among whom 28 male members were principal applicants; in 4 families women were the principal applicants. I identified another 33 families (mostly early immigrants, skilled workers, and asylum seeking categories) in which male members migrated first and then later brought their families to Canada. I incorporated 4 families in which women members migrated first as singles, later returning to Bangladesh, later got married and then brought their husbands to Canada. Four divorced women came to Canada with their children. The general perceptions within the Bangladeshi immigrant community are that men have brought women to Canada as married wives, offered them glorious lives and have converted them into global citizens by providing Canadian passports. Becoming immigrants to Canada as wives, Bangladeshi women are more liberated, have gained more social and economic entitlements, and have been freed from all poverty and crisis situations that they used to experience in Bangladesh. From this perspective it is assumed that women are incapable to come to Canada with their own capacities. On many occasions, Bangladeshi immigrant men use it as a tool to have control over their wives. In a family gathering at one of my respondent's home, I heard a voice of a Bangladeshi man:

I brought you here in Canada; because of me you are carrying a Canadian passport, driving cars, and living a good life; otherwise, you, as a woman, cannot make it all on your own; now you have everything, speaking loudly and showing Canadian laws to me.

Nevertheless, it is a common trend for the Bangladeshi women to migrate to Canada in the 'dependent' category. But I interviewed five women respondents who divorced in Bangladesh and decided to come to Canada in order to protect themselves from patriarchal norms and to gain power to survive as independent humans. It also came to my knowledge that four of my women respondents are more educated and skilled workers compared to their husbands. They applied for migration as the principal candidates and came to Canada on their own credentials. Even though a good number of

unskilled Bangladeshi women have migrated to Middle Eastern countries, today, it is not very common for Bangladeshi single women to migrate to foreign lands. It is a huge challenge for single women to migrate and adapt in male-dominated patriarchal Bengali immigrant societies in Canada. On top of that, in their homeland natal family members have to face many questions about their judgements to send their daughters alone to a foreign land. In a few cases, I noticed only unmarried single Bangladeshi elite class young women are permitted to migrate to Canada for higher studies, and women who have brothers, sisters and uncles, as their “local guardians” in Canada can take care of them. Even Canadian immigration policies encourage migration by giving extra points to heterosexual married couples with one or two healthy children. Therefore, migration to Canada as a global process has intensified and regenerated local patriarchal ideologies, religious and cultural perceptions of gender norms. Due to structural inequalities and patriarchal and cultural norms, migration to Canada is a male-dominated journey in which Bangladeshi married women are invisible, dependent and are in family support groups.

Re-imposition of Gendered Norms in Immigrant Contexts of Canada

As immigrants, Bangladeshi men and women perform gender-based roles both in their private and public spheres. I observed in both public and social gatherings that both Bangladeshi men and women make two separate gender-oriented circles according to age and social and economic class. In women’s circles, immigrant women are mostly engaged in discussing issues that are also connected to their gendered roles and responsibilities as good mothers and loyal wives at home. In social *addas*, I heard that Bangladeshi immigrant women commonly talk about issues such as: problems of feeding babies, children’s health, schooling and day care, recipes of foods that their husbands like or not, local dress (*Shari*), ornaments (*Gohona*), and importance of practicing religious rituals, social and patriarchal norms, and cultural regulations as proper Bangladeshi married women in a foreign country. However, issues connected to jobs, education, and personal careers are discussed in women’s circles depending on Bangladeshi immigrant women’s age, financial crisis and need, marital status, religious identities, and educational backgrounds.

In public spaces, social gatherings and *addas*, the common discussion issues among the Bangladeshi immigrant men are jobs, careers, housing prices, cars, economic recession, American foreign policies, immigration laws, food prices, war, and local politics in Bangladesh. Even in public places, I observed that Bangladeshi immigrant women play their private and gendered roles such as feeding their children, looking after young children, observing whether or not children are eating properly, and also taking care of elderly persons. Very seldom did I see, in public gatherings, that male members eat second or eat with their young children while women are chatting with others. In most cases, women eat after men and also after feeding their children, or sometimes they start their meal on dirty plates with their children's leftover food as Bengali women used to practice at home in Bangladesh. Interestingly, in social gatherings, women without children always wait for other women to take care of their young children, and then eat food together.

Both in social and personal levels, Bangladeshi men enjoy more freedom of information, social, cultural and economic mobility; they are engaged more in public affairs and production systems in comparison to Bangladeshi women. Images of Bangladeshi immigrant men are more as leaders, risk takers, negotiators, problem solvers, and decision makers, whereas the general image of Bangladeshi immigrant women is that they are passive, secondary followers, observers, listeners, and supporters.

During my fieldwork in Toronto, I observed that Bangladeshi men are walking faster – a couple of feet ahead of other family members – and women are holding their children's hands and trying to follow their husbands in Victoria Park subway station areas. Sometimes men ask women to walk faster to catch the next train. I saw that men are guiding women about subway communication in Toronto, showing them subway maps to different stations and offering tips to take South or North bound trains, and the importance of taking a transfer. On several occasions I heard Bangladeshi men teaching women and children not to take particular seats or sit beside certain racial groups in order to avoid physical and sexual attack on trains, especially at night and weekend late hours.

Among 67 female research respondents, 19 are homemakers, and the rest of them are women employed as service workers, teachers' assistants, computer engineer, music teacher, settlement workers, and also working in call centres, coffee shops, stores,

restaurants, day care centres, and factories (see Table 6.3). They are making a good financial contribution to meet their household needs. But women's involvements in Canadian markets and public spaces have made very insignificant impacts in changing their gender-oriented responsibilities as wives and mothers in their immigrant lives in Canada. My research suggests that both Bangladeshi men and women are repetitively performing and practicing socially, religiously, and culturally constructed gender rules and norms in Canada to make authentic and familiar immigrant spaces as in Bangladesh, and to re-establish their gendered norms as part of their social, cultural and religious identities in Canada.

Gender Roles among Bangladeshi Immigrants

Conventionally, based on religious and patriarchal culture and traditions, Bangladeshi immigrant women mostly perform roles as housewives, mothers, and “good women” (see Mies 1986:1003) generally associated with household spaces, and perform reproductive duties, whereas immigrant men are involved in production and public spaces (see Ortner 1987). I also noted that in response to economic hardships, available opportunities in Canadian markets, new social norms, and flexible survival strategies, Bangladeshi immigrant men and women have to move beyond their traditional gendered roles and need to break down conventional patterns of a gender-based division of labour. However, it does not mean that they can deconstruct gender-based roles, identities, and patriarchal ideologies in their immigrant lives in Canada. In Toronto, I found that immigrant economic and social class, age, religion, and educational qualifications between men and women all make a difference.

In immigrant lives, crossing gendered boundaries is also situational, contextual, and relatively opportunity-oriented among the Bangladeshi immigrants. I noticed that immigrant women who come directly from rural villages and small towns in Bangladesh, with less language and occupational skills, are now working fulltime in factories and driving cars on busy Toronto streets. By engaging in labour markets, they have boosted their status and gained more power within household decision-making processes. In contrast, I also found that many professional women, who were medical doctors and engineers in Bangladesh, are performing traditional gendered roles after migrating to Canada, and spending time at home as caregivers, mothers and wives because their

credentials are not recognized by the Canadian government. Even if Bangladeshi immigrant women are working fulltime outside, they must still do their expected gender-based women's work in their households.

My research suggests that in both public and private spaces Bangladeshi immigrant women's positions have intensified because of their gender-based roles, responsibilities and repetitive performances as ideal "house wives", "good mothers", "monogamous virtuous women", and proper "married women" (Mies 1986). In order to meet demands created by global capitalist consumer culture (vacation, diamonds, big-screen TV, car, SUV, etc.) and household needs, Bangladeshi skilled and unskilled immigrant women are directly involved in the market for "survival", or as "temporary", "on call" and "part time workers". In many occasions, they are working in factories, big box chain stores, food stores, coffee shops, and day care centres with cash payments; therefore, they are not even getting minimum wage payments and other benefits from their employers. Therefore, Bangladeshi immigrant women are struggling on shop floors for their subordinate positions as a cheap and gendered labour force (Sassen 1993:65) and controlled by traditional gender norms and disciplines of markets (Ong 1987; Gardner 1995). Very few Bangladeshi immigrant women are working as professionals such as doctors, engineers, lawyers, professors, teachers, and other high end jobs in Toronto. As immigrant women, they have to meet demands of their family members in Canada, their work places, and relatives in Bangladesh. Munni (pseudonym), age 36, explains her story:

Case Study 1: Munni, age 36

Life is tough here in Canada for Bangladeshi immigrant women especially when you are married; you have to work fulltime as well as take care of your family. Brother, I graduated from Dhaka University and I did my Masters in Economics. I came from an upper class family in Dhaka city. My family had their own houses, and we maintained cars, drivers, and several maidservants in Bangladesh. I never worked for a living. After my marriage, within a year I got pregnant, so I was unable to enter the job market. Most of the time, I stayed at home and took care of my daughter. After three years of my first baby, I had my second child. My husband was an engineer in

Bangladesh, and he made good money in Bangladesh. We had a family business too, and rented out property. We applied for Canadian immigration because of our children's education and their security of life. Even though we had economic support, we did not find any hope for your children in Bangladesh. Social security, health care, population, corruption, pollution, and political instability are the key problems in Bangladesh. Some of my husband's friends, mostly engineers, had applied for Canadian immigration, and we just followed them. We came to Canada in the year 2006. In our first year in Canada, my husband tried to get a job but did not find anything related to his professional field. By this time, we became frustrated because we were running out of money and my husband did not get any positive responses from anywhere. He was offered a couple of jobs that required him to work in overnight shifts in a factory. He did not want to do that. As a family we were having a stressful time mentally, socially and financially. Furthermore, we could not share these stresses with our family back home because my parents would get upset and would ask us to return to Bangladesh. So we decided that my husband would go to school and get a professional degree in Canada that would support him to find a job he wants to do. I would work full-time to maintain household expenditures. My husband also collected Ontario student aid from the government to help support our family. Since summer 2007, I have begun working in a coffee shop and my shifts start at 4:30 am in the morning and end at 1:00 pm. Sometimes I work longer hours too. In the morning I generally wake up at least an hour before my shift starts, prepare breakfast and put lunch in boxes for my two children, my husband and for me. I have to stay on my toes all day long and work my butt off. Work means work here; it is not like Bangladesh where you will go to the office, drink tea, read newspaper, take some phone calls and work a few hours.

After returning home, I have to work at home, do some preparation work for dinner at night, and then go to pick up my children from school. Then I prepare snacks for my children, and I also have some food with them.

After that I start cooking food for our dinner. I have to cook something different for my children each day; they do not want to eat Bangladeshi food regularly, and my husband does not want to eat food cooked several days ago. He wants to eat freshly cooked food all the time; therefore, like other men in different families, there is no way I can cook on the weekends and put food in the refrigerator for a few days in a week. This does not work in my family. I have to cook every day. My husband comes home from school by 6:00 pm, takes his shower and eats dinner with us. Then he makes a few phone calls to his friends, spends some time with our children, watches TV a bit, reads a Bangladeshi newspaper on the Internet and then he studies. I have to clean the kitchen, arrange leftover food, and monitor my kids' homework. After that, I take a shower and try to go to bed by 10:00 pm, but sometimes I go to bed late. At night it is always in my mind that I have to wake up early in the morning. On the weekends I have to work at home, clean household things, and make phone calls to my in-laws and family members in Bangladesh as a good daughter-in-law and modest wife, and a caring daughter. I have to maintain different birthdays among our family members and send cards and gifts to them occasionally.

In the wintertime, it is dark in the morning when I start my work; you know on cold mornings it is hard for a Bangladeshi woman to start her life. We are not prepared for that, neither physically nor mentally. In many days of the week, my husband wakes me up early in the morning for his sexual needs, yet I am so tired and I want to sleep, but you cannot say no to him every night. I hate sex now, and I do not enjoy it the way I used to. But you know the key problem of my family is that my husband has not learned to support me at home. He does not know how to cook; he never cooked or cleaned the house in Bangladesh. As a good male student in his family he did not have to think about anything; he just studied and became an engineer. But as a man you have to learn so many other things. Anyhow, I should not complain much. He is good at other things like going to the mall, doing grocery shopping, and taking care of garbage, but he's not interested in cooking or

other household tasks. If he supports me in cooking a bit and taking care of my kids' homework, it would be much easier to deal with my home life and my job. Anyhow, this is my life; I do not blame him. I have been working like a machine for the last three years both at home and the workplace. I am almost close to forty and having health issues. Nowadays, I need to take painkillers at night because of pain in my legs and toes. I am tired. I never thought that my life would be like this in Canada. You know, nowadays I do not miss my family members – my sister and my brothers – that much, but I miss most my two maidservants. Now I can realize how they served me, how much work they did for me, so I decided I will take some gifts for them when I go back to Bangladesh for a visit next time. Now I am a fulltime mother, cook, cleaner, wife, and worker in the market. But I believe one day I will be able to reduce some of my responsibilities when my husband will get a good job. Now I have lots on my plate.

I also captured a different image of Bangladeshi immigrant women. A group of Bangladeshi women who used to work as professionals, or as homemakers in Bangladesh, hold the view that migration to Canada has offered them responsibility, freedom, and confidence in life. My respondents including house wives, single mothers, or divorced persons, and whose husbands are absent in Toronto for professional and strategic reasons, do not feel frustrated, burned out or overloaded with their huge productive and reproductive responsibilities in Canada. Rather, as immigrants they feel economic and personal freedom, social and cultural mobility, and legal security in Canada. According to another of my female respondents:

Before immigrating to Canada, I have never realized that as a woman I can do so many things without my husband's or my father's support. Now I am earning money, buying groceries, clearing snow, driving car, taking care of my children, having a social life, and also taking care of my in-laws in Bangladesh. I have become a more responsible and confident person. Immigration to Canada has shown me to trust myself as a person, encouraged me to work hard, and made me confident. I do not have any fear and shakiness as a woman anymore. I can go anywhere, even at night. I collect more information than before migration and learn many things in my life that I could never do in Bangladesh. When I came to Canada and watched women driving cars, running businesses, and living

independently, I felt why not me. Here in Canada, women enjoy more rights and have more opportunities and freedom.

A group of women respondents shared their views by saying that Bangladeshi immigrant married women enjoy comparatively more control over making decisions and enjoy more freedom than their lives in Bangladesh allowed, even if it is not quite equal to men yet. One of my women respondents said:

Even women stay at home, take care of their babies at home, but here in Canada, a married woman only listens to one man (ha ha ha,... laughing... her husband), but back home they had to listen and follow many orders from their own father, brother, father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law and many other people (*bibahito mohilara shudu ek bater kotha shunay (ha ha ha hashi), tar husband er kotha shunay, tar shava koray, kintu Bangladesh e gustier sholar sheba kortay hoto, skol inlaws der kotha shuntay hoto tader*).

A group of men and women also responded similarly:

A good number of Bangladeshi men have changed after migrating to Canada. Nowadays, even if they do not do much work at home, they at least have learned to recognize that women do a lot of work at home. Many Bangladeshi men take care of their babies all day, cook food, do laundry, clean dishes, things they have never done in Bangladesh.

I heard another version of opinions saying:

Bangladeshi working men do not work at home; they do not feel like working because they are so tired of having worked long hours that sometimes they do not know how they do it. Bangladeshi men hardly ever change diapers or prepare food for babies.

A male version of gender roles among the Bangladeshi immigrants is:

Well, I can cook, I used to cook when my wife was not accompanying me in Canada, but she cooks better than me, and she loves cooking. So I help her in preparing meals by cutting chicken, slicing meat, cleaning fish, and so forth. Well, in Bangladesh, as a husband I never entered into the kitchen or dealt with most of these issues. But here I used to look after my baby when she was young. It is all about time and opportunities. I am a man with all the values and ideologies carried from home; I cannot be changed totally within a few months, but I am supporting my wife and I care for her. It is not picture perfect, but Bangladeshi men do care for their women. It is also true that many Bangladeshi men do not support their wives much in making the home, because they do not realize how hard it is to manage a house without any support.

The common image of Bangladeshi immigrant men is they are the principal “breadwinner” of their family. Their key responsibility is to have a good job, earn good money, and lead the household. Bangladeshi men also believe that as men it is their responsibility to take care of their family and support their household. On top of their economic responsibilities, Bangladeshi men also do several “men’s jobs” such as clearing snow, cutting tree branches, carrying groceries, clearing driveways, driving cars, and disposing of the daily garbage. I have observed that men cook but not on a regular basis if it is not essential. The professional men generally cook for special occasions, social and religious ceremonies, and specific cultural food items (such as *Kachi Berani*, *Halim*, *BBQ* and other ethnic foods). Bangladeshi men cook for a party at home, and other mass gatherings at temple, church, and mosque because this type of cooking brings them glory, honour and appreciation as men. I also observed that many Bangladeshi unemployed immigrant men have to stay home and take care of household chores, cook food each day, take care of babies on a regular basis, but they do not get the same recognition if someone does it along with a good outside job.

In response to their cultural, social and religious norms, Bangladeshi immigrant men work hard, sometimes working two jobs, but they do not encourage their wives to enter into the labour market. Only in case of emergency, and to manage economic uncertainty in their lives, do married immigrant women break the conventional gender norms and enter the labour market. I noticed that women respondents who are young, educated in Bangladesh and have started their professional career either go to schools and universities after their migration or enter into the job market right after arriving to Canada. I observed that elite and upper middle class (Bangladeshi standard) and middle-aged women are only involved in housework. It is not culturally nor socially appropriate and respectful for a good mother with children who is also a devoted wife to work outside for money when the husband is a professional who is making good money in Toronto. I learned that transnational migration to Canada changes gender roles between men and women in many ways. At the same time, the complexity of gender roles are also associated with immigrants’ economic opportunities, age, marital status, educational status and their differential involvement in the labour market and at home before migration to Canada.

Re-imposing Gendered Roles among Bangladeshi Immigrants

It is commonly argued that globalization as a force has brought economic and social liberalization, created cultural homogenization, connected various nations and ethnic boundaries, opened up employment opportunities, and has developed poor nations (see Brown and Lawson 1985: 29, Jones 1995; Ratha 2005). Globalization-led transnational migration to Canada has provided opportunities to Bangladeshi educated men and women to enter into global markets as skilled and unskilled workers. On one hand, I observed that a section of Bangladeshi-educated young married immigrant women who used to perform private tasks, have been mostly engaged in reproduction activities before migration, but migration to Canada brought them into more public spheres and has engaged them in production activities as unskilled workers in Canadian job markets. One of my respondents said that migration to Canada has offered Bangladeshi women a flexible gendered space that is less dominating and patriarchal compared to the lives they led in Bangladesh. I noticed that Bangladeshi women who are single mothers, divorced, the breadwinners of women-headed households, and living in Canada in absence of their husbands (see Table 4.3) enjoy more freedom and greater entitlement, and face less strict gendered norms in comparison to their lives in Bangladesh. I found that women's age, education, marital status, religious identity, social and economic class identity, lineage status (*Bongsho mojada*) and the extent of transnational communication with their Bangladesh homeland all are significant factors affecting their gendered position in Canada. I also observed that Bangladeshi male immigrant members have less control over public spaces, lack social and political power, experience more uncertainty of job markets and economic dependency, all of which neutralizes their power and dominance within households. I came to know that despite one's religious identity, educational status and skills, and age, Bangladeshi immigrant women are obliged and forced to take several jobs which are designed for women, for example, sales persons, food servers, unpaid employee in family-owned business, early childhood educator, care giver, childcare support worker (formal and informal settings), and all kinds of part-time work. Thus, my research illustrates again that globalization-led transnational migration as a force has intensified as well as reemployed strict gendered norms and private spaces as culture, traditional, and authentic spaces for the Bangladeshi women in Canada. Both in

private and public spaces, the lives of Bangladeshi immigrant women as housewives, mothers, and workers in the job market are intensified, controlled and dominated by gender-based workloads, norms, and exploitive capitalist market mechanisms (also see Wiest 1984: 125; Mies 1986; Ong 1991; Cholen 1991: 189; Mines in Binford 2003: 305). Here I feature a story about middle-aged and less educated Bangladeshi immigrant women who picked traditional gendered roles as their survival strategies due to their lack of control and access over formal structures of the Canadian job market.

A story about *Parata-Bhavi, Ruti_Khala*: Reinvention of a Housewife's Roles

During my fieldwork in Victoria Park, Toronto, I came to know that a couple of Bangladeshi immigrant women who lived in several high-rise buildings in Crescent Town had started a home-based informal catering business. These women are married, middle aged, came from working class backgrounds, and do not have enough English language skills and institutional education to enter into formal sectors as professionals. However, they have entrepreneurial capacity, innovative ideas, and proper cooking skills that they have applied as their survival strategy in Canada. Due to lack of structural opportunities, familial obligations, and financial constraints, they have not been able to start a formal food business in Canada. Instead, they have started and developed a business that goes hand in hand with cultural norms and authentic gendered roles of Bangladeshi women. By cooking and serving authentic, traditional and culturally Bangladeshi foods to many immigrant families, they are not only re-imposing gender roles but also reviving authentic Bengali culture and traditions in their immigrant lives in Canada. Most of their clients are bachelor immigrants, students, and newcomers without wives, and working couples who do not have much time to prepare traditional Bengali food items in their homes. These women also prepare Bangladeshi party food, regular dinner, lunch, and breakfast items, snacks, sweets, and desserts according to people's needs and orders. Some women also take orders to cook for busy immigrant families if they are given all cooking ingredients, spices, oils, and raw fish, meat, and vegetables. People generally come to pick up their orders from these women's houses.

They hardly ever deliver their services unless someone is living in the same building, or someone is well connected to them, in which case they make some exceptions. A social network within the community runs this business. An individual woman who prepares *Parata* (a type of round chapatti, generally prepared by rolling flour dough on a wooden surface and fried in oil and butter) is called by people their *Parata* sister (*apa*) / *Parata* sister-in-law (*Bhavi*) / *Parata* Aunt (*Khala*). A person who prepares *Roti* (following the same process to prepare chapatis but it is fried in oil) is identified as *Roti Bhavi/apa/khala*.

By calling *Bhavi* (elder brother's or friend's wife), *Khala* (aunt, mother's sister among the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant), *Apa* (sister) or *Bhai* (brother), immigrants are reconstructing imaginary kinship ties and authenticating traditional gender roles of Bangladeshi women in homes. Both service givers and takers are terminologically related to each other as members of households and reinvented transnational fictive family ties in which women are performing their traditional roles as cooks. Women also feel that they are offering care to Bangladeshi families who, like their relatives, left their homeland. Even though they are charging money for their services, they feel that they are providing care to their distant kin groups. In this process, Bangladeshi women also are re-establishing their moral obligations and gender roles within the immigrant communities. By the same token, Bangladeshi male immigrants who left their family, mother, sister, and wives in Bangladesh feel that they are having food that used to be cooked for them. They are eating food that is cooked at home; they are eating homemade food the way they used to have it in Bangladesh. They imagine these women, as their relatives who they left behind in Bangladesh, even if they are paying for services. Providing and receiving cooked food is in one way or another reconstructing a care bond that also reinforces the gender division of labour and housewifization (Mies 1996), and that essentializes gender roles within the immigrant communities. According to my observation and understanding, the term *Parata Bhavi* refers to an individual's occupation, name of the

product, class status, gendered roles and imaginary fictive kinship connections among Bangladeshi immigrants.

I observed that many educated professional Bangladeshi immigrant women whose previous academic and professional credentials are not properly recognized in Canada, and who are not yet ready for jobs, stay at home, get pregnant, and raise babies again. One of my respondents said to me “Since I am not working now I am having another baby”. Thus, even though transnational migration in many ways has changed gender identities, norms and roles, in accordance with Judith Butler, “repetitive performance” (Butler 1990 in Parreñas 2005:5) of Bangladeshi immigrant men and women in Canada is re-rooting their dominant gendered systems both in their domestic and public spheres.

Globalization-led Transnational Migration and Re-rooting Patriarchal Ideologies and Norms

Global economic forces, and transnational migration as a process, on one hand allows Bangladeshi men and women to communicate with global markets, interact with global media and expand cultural spaces and boundaries. On the other hand, scholars have argued that in immigrant social and cultural settings, transnational women’s movements and spaces are controlled, monitored and dominated by local religious, cultural and patriarchal ideologies and norms, for example, *Purdha* (Kabeer 2000 in Gardner 2003:133; also see Wiest 1973, 1983). Like immigrant contexts in England, Bangladeshi immigrant women face continuous pressures to be modest (*shalin*), submissive, virtuous, and authentic (Arnes and Van Beurden 1977; Gardner 1995); they have to maintain sexual purity and follow monogamous sexual behaviour (Mies 1986), and negotiate gossip as a means of social control (Wiest 1973: 206). Women are encouraged to stay away from all modern technologies (car, cell phones, and global communication culture) as a means to control their movements and social mobility (Shiva 1996).

I observed that Bangladeshi immigrant women are respected and recognized distinctly if they are submissive, soft spoken, wear traditional Bengali dress, strictly follow all religious norms and rituals, cover their heads, respect elderly people, follow their orders without asking any questions, and follow the traditional gender division of labour in private spaces. Married women are only encouraged to work for wages as long

as their husbands are not quite capable to cover household expenditures with their own income. Bangladeshi working class women are not encouraged to work outside and earn money when their husbands somehow manage secure jobs. Culturally and traditionally it conveys men's care and love if women are told to stay home. A 46 year old hardware engineer said about his wife:

The last several years she worked hard; I was not able to take care of many things in our family. Now that I got a federal government job, she did not need to work anymore; she should stay at home, get rest, and provide time to our daughter. Our daughter had missed her mom a lot; Arifa should stay at home now.

I also heard in *addas* a woman counselling another woman, "Sister-in-law, why do you work outside? Now my brother is making good money, you should take rest and look after your family (*"vavi apner er kaj er ki dorkar, bhai to valo chakree koray, ekhon rest nan, ghoray shomoy den"*). I have noticed very few cases where a man is working and a woman member is attending school, and not a single case where a husband left his job when the wife got a better position.

According to eco-feminists, men control technology and culture, women are part of nature, and by controlling technologies men also control nature and women (Shiva 1996). I observed that Bangladeshi immigrant women are systematically discouraged from using credit cards, opening separate bank accounts, getting driver's license, carrying a cell phone, accessing a personal computer, and having a Facebook account. Even professional and educated immigrant women are celebrated in social settings if they are not keen to embrace modern technologies. I noticed that one of my research respondents was not allowing his wife to drive in Canada because it is too dangerous, even if she has a proper driver's license. According to the husband, "she is scared and too shaky (*voy pay, hat kapay*) a person to drive car, and she does not have driving and road senses". One of my female respondents told me that "Bengali husbands say that they love their wives; that way they do not want to let their wives drive a car; these are all politics of love (*valo basher namay rajniti*), but actually they do not want to see us moving in cities; they are scared to lose their control over us". One of my respondents whose wife works for a Canadian Bank in Toronto said to me:

Even though my wife works in a Bank, she never maintains her bank account or follows family expenditures. She uses credit cards and ATM cards, but I pay bills on her behalf. She does not know where money is coming from and where it is going; I pay all bills, the mortgage payment, even her credit card bills, and maintain all financial activities; she does not know anything about our financial matters.

Another Christian immigrant woman (age 35) told me: “I do not ask my husband how our money is handled; we maintain a common account and my pay cheques go to our account. Whenever, I need money I take it from our account – very seldom and not a significant amount though”.

A male Muslim respondent (age 47) told me: “my wife is a very modest person; never asks how I use her salary and does not ask for statements; she trusts me because I am a good steward of our wealth; she is such a sweet heart (*amar bou kokhono tar pay cheque er hishab chay na, say onno rokom, say ei sober modday jatay chay na*)”. I also heard a husband saying to his wife who recently got a good position in a city office, “now you are earning money so you do not bother to ask what to buy and where to buy (*duita aaey koro bolay ekhon are kichui gigasha koro na, nijar moto sob kinay falo*)”. If a woman asks her husband about her own income, and if a woman wants to maintain her own bank account, and if a married Bengali woman and a good mother becomes concerned about child benefit cheques, and if a woman publicly discloses that she is the major contributor for a new house and new car, men get upset. Such a woman is criticized as not being a modest person, submissive, and polite. Commonly, she is identified as “Canadian” among Bangladeshi immigrant communities who are asking for fifty-fifty shares. She is considered to have lost her proper cultural, social and religious identities as a modest wife and a submissive Bangladeshi woman.

In response to my questions about gender identities and ideologies in immigrant settings in Canada, a 45 year old female respondent who works as a social worker said to me:

Bangladeshi women are dominated and they are very submissive. They still think the way they used to think back home. Mostly in Victoria Park areas, women generally work in stores, but they do not want to go to school here. Their partners do not support them. At the same time, there are some educated women who hardly do anything. Mostly they go to the Mall with other women; that's it. It is their mobility map. Even they do not put their own opinion into their family matters. Still they are carrying the same

Bangladeshi cultural and religious ideological norms in Canada. Even if male members or husbands at home torture women, they are unlikely to report to the police or ask for any support from the law enforcement and social agencies. There are a lot of support centres here in Toronto for women. But Bangladeshi women hardly ask for any legal help or financial support. Provincial law is strong and supportive here for women but they do not seek that. Still women are stigmatized with the idea of “husband’s prestige, personal shame, *ijjat* (honour) of their families in Bangladesh, and family values, goodwill, and status. Some women said, “if we ask for help from others or go to court against our husbands, our relatives back home do not accept it nicely. They will think we are the problem, we do not know how to adjust with our husbands. We are scared how people, and my relatives in Bangladesh, judge me (*deshay ki bolbay?*)”. Therefore, shelters, social workers, family councillors, rehabilitation centres in Canadian family support forces hardly do anything for the Bangladeshi immigrant women.

Similar to Wiest’s (1973) study in Mexico, gossip is a weapon of control of immigrant women, and a cultural means to preach patriarchal ideologies among the Bangladeshi immigrant women. In immigrant social *addas*, I heard gossip about Bengali women’s affairs with: 1) other men in Bengali communities; 2) white men; 3) men from different ethnic groups; 4) men at work and so forth. Bangladeshi immigrant men also have become issues of gossip, but the issue is more critical and serious for a woman if she is married, a mother and a wife. Due to faster communication, gossip also moves faster to different locations of the world. A Bangladeshi woman very consciously tries to avoid any kind of gossip because it will ruin her life, and she will lose the respect of her natal parents in Bangladesh. Any gossip towards a woman as an impure and improper woman extends not only to her life but also that of her family in Bangladesh and her children’s lives too. It is a weapon that ensures that women continue women’s modesty, sexual purity, heterosexuality, and monogamy, and these ideological ideas are very unequally practiced between men and women immigrants. A Muslim married woman (age 40) whose husband lives in Bangladesh said to me,

“As I am living in Canada and my husband currently in Bangladesh, there are many eyes within the community that are guarding me; I am staying alone with my children, I am careful how I move, how I dress and how I talk to other males members of the community, I do not want to make a new story (gossip) within the community (*onek chok amar pichonay, ami eka thanki*)”

baccha der nia, shami desh e thakay, amakay oken subdanay choltay hoy, jama portay hoy, subdany purush manusher shatay kotha boltay, ami notun golpor jonmmo dittay chain a).

Ambia (pseudonym), age 30, and living in Victoria Park tells her fear of gossip as a married woman with young children:

Case Study 2: Ambia, age 30

I am a mother with two young children. My husband used to be an accountant in Bangladesh. Now he works part time in an accounting firm; during the tax season he supports people in filing income tax. Recently he started driving Taxi to maintain our household needs. His shift starts mostly in the evening to early morning (3 am). Almost every day I wake up until he returns to home. When he is in the street, especially stormy nights in winter, I become so scared; I cannot go to bed and sleep. You know it is a risky job. Anyhow, as Bangladeshi immigrants we are living in several high-rise buildings in Crescent Town Victoria Park area. You know we are living like in government colonies in Bangladesh. Here among the Bangladeshi immigrant communities, especially among women, everyone is eager to know about your personal life, your family issues, and they always analyze you according to their own scales. To me, all these high-rise buildings are North American slums (*busti*). People want to know where do you go, with whom you are talking and laughing, how come you got a good job, whether you have issues in your personal lives, how is your married life, whether it is your first marriage, why did your previous marriage not work out, who was the man you were walking home with the other day, who was the person you were sitting beside in the subway, whether I wear low-cut shirt, and so forth. People collect all this information and make gossip about others. People are very judgemental; they always talk about people behind their back. I can give you one example. Last winter around 7:00 pm after attending an immigrant women's group meeting arranged by a non-profit organization in Victoria Park, I was coming to home. One of the trainers in the seminar

(a white young man) offered me a ride home. I wanted to take the ride because it was a cold night, and I did not have any problem to sit in his car with him. But you know, I had to think of the consequences. Listen, my husband is a taxi driver. He works night shifts. What is going to happen if any of the community people see me that I came to home at night with a white man? On top of that, I left my kids at one of my friend's house for a few hours in order to attend the meeting. Therefore, I would be considered not only a terrible wife, but also a bad mother. I know my husband would not have an issue with this – and he is a good person – but if he listens from different corners, he may start questioning me, and eventually the result will be sour. I had to think of all these issues within a few seconds and I had to refuse the offer because I feared gossip.

My research suggests that Bengali immigrant women's identities are not only determined by their ethnic, cultural, national and religious subjectivity, but their “proper” identity as authentic Bangladeshi immigrant women is also associated with ideas about feminine tender behaviour, submissiveness, modesty, monogamy, good listeners of husbands, someone who consciously ignores her entitlement, and close association with traditional “private” spaces at homes. Patriarchal norms and ideologies are as “invisible hands” shaping and monitoring Bengali immigrant women's identities in Canada. If someone breaks the boundaries, she becomes a topic of social gossip. And gossip about a woman has become a weapon to teach others. In that case, men enjoy more freedom than Bengali women; men's identities are more connected to their social status, economic position and achievements as immigrants. In many ways, along with patriarchal norms, religious ideologies and practices also become major components in defining Bengali immigrant women's identities. In this context, I will discuss *pardha* as a marker of authentic Bengali identity among the Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women.

Globalization Forces and ‘Purdah’ within Immigrant Settings of Canada

In the western media and liberal development discourse, *pardah* represents “un-development”, “bondage”, “subordination”, “women's separation from men's powerful spaces”, “expression of gender inequality” and specific patterns of exchange between

sexes (see Feldman and McCarthy 1983; Papanek 1971; 1973). According to Nazmul Karim (1963), *Purdah* is a social and cultural form of “seclusion” from men’s world and public spaces that also represents women’s good status and good morality (Karim 1963 in Feldman and McCarthy 1983). Bengali Hindu and Christian women also maintain cultural and social aspects of *purdah* by covering their heads with a part of their *shari* as a symbol of modesty, gentleness, status, and class (*shalinota*). As modest Hindu and Christian women, whenever they enter into holy places, come to public spaces, and need to communicate with male members both within and outside of family and lineage groups, they cover their heads with a part of their *sharis*. Among the Bangladeshi Muslim women in Toronto, maintaining *purdah* is a one of the key symbolic markers of their religious, cultural, and class status and identity (see Feldman and McCarthy 1983). In homeland Bangladesh, in response to globalization-led employment opportunities, and intervention of NGOs, Bangladeshi poor women cross the patriarchal and religious boundaries of *purdah*, or use *purdha* as a means to engage in public spaces as day labours, shop keepers, and garment workers (Mohiduddin 2004:139). According to Feldman and McCarthy (1983), Bengali poor women have maintained *purdah* and use of the *burkha* (long veil covering women from head to toe) that was introduced to Bangladeshi women by their husbands who performed *Hajj* as a means to gain noble status and respect.

In the context of transnational migration to Canada, I observed that Bangladeshi Muslim women either ideologically or politically become closer to *Purdah* or embarrassed all norms of *Purdah* as a tool and a mechanism of re-inventing their proper Muslim, and Bengali cultural and ethnic identities in Canada. According to majority Bangladeshi Muslim women and men, Canada is considered a space which is full of anti-Islamic norms, a country of free nation, less modesty, people expose much of their bodies, and they are surrounded by multi ethnic non Muslim males who do not follow similar values and approve of the Canadian norms. . In order to protect their ethnic, cultural, religious and moral identities they have to practice *purdah* strictly in their immigrant lives in Canada. *Purdah* symbolizes identities of Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant women that sometimes goes beyond their ethnic, cultural and national

identities. A Muslim married woman respondent (age 37) with the Master's degree in Economics now works in a coffee shop in Toronto said to me:

I do not follow rules of Islam strictly, but as Muslim women we should follow *purdah*, especially when we are living in a foreign land, and living in country where everything is non-Islamic: dress, food, laws and culture. In Bangladesh, I did not have to practice *purdah*, but here in Canada, I feel like I should follow it, but due to my job and everything I could not.. I respect those Bangladeshi women who practice *purdah* in Canada.

According to my observation, there are several factors that encourage Bangladeshi Muslim women to embrace *purdah* as a means to maintain and negotiate their distinct and proper identity in Canada: a) *Purdah* is a symbol of their religious identity in immigrant settings in Canada, b) *purdah* is a weapon to protect and protest against western culture and western dominancy, c) *purdah* is a vehicle to interact with global Islamic womanhood and identity for local Bengali women, d) *purdah* is a mechanism to transfer religious and cultural values to the next generation, e) *purdah* is a way out to manage all differences and difficulties in their immigrant lives, and f) *purdah* is also a tool for re-establishing patriarchal norms and continuing male dominancy over liberal immigrant spaces in Canada.

I also came to know that not all Bangladeshi immigrant women support the idea that maintaining *purdah* can be the only way to uphold Bengali women's identity and protect their honor (*ijjat*). A professional Muslim woman respondent (age 46) and social activist (singer) said to me:

I did not come to Canada to go back a hundred years in my life. I am not doing anything wrong here. I am a working woman and I pay tax. I need to make money in order to maintain my family, I cannot afford to maintain *purdah* and stay home all the time. Only those Bangladeshi women can maintain so-called *purdah* who do not have much potential to enter into the job market, and women who are middle-aged persons have immigrated mostly from Middle Eastern countries, their husbands make lots of money, and they are an economically affluent group. I am not any of them; I have to work hard, and my husband also works hard to survive here as immigrants, I do not have time.

As in Bangladesh, many working class immigrant women are not interested to strictly follow *purdah* in Canada. A 43 year old female respondent who came to Canada in 2004 said to me:

I cannot afford it, I work in a store. I package food and sell food. One Bangladeshi woman came to my store and asked for a job. I talked to my manager and offered her a job in my store. After three days, she stopped coming to work; later she said to me that the manager did not allow her to wear a scarf as he does not see it as hygienic, so she quit the job.

In a focus group discussion with Bangladeshi Muslim women, they discussed reasons for maintaining strict *purdah* in the context of migration to Canada. They said:

As Bengali women in Bangladesh, we were unable to meet white women and Arabic Muslim women in their entire lives in Bangladesh. Migration to Canada, and living in a multi-ethnic and multi-religion city such as Toronto, this is the first time we came to know both white women in Canada and Muslim women from Arab nations. Outside of Bangladesh, this is the first time we were exposed to so many things (sex, divorce, immoral stuff) so we feel that need to cover up to protect our souls and our lives. In our immigrant lives by Arabic women also influence us. They are considered *Ashraf* women who know the proper meaning of Islam, and who are authentic practitioners of Islam as Arabians. As Muslim women, we try to follow their style, their ways of life, and their ideologies to be true Muslim women.

In this context I call attention to the fact that Bangladeshi immigrants who first migrated to Arab countries and then moved to Canada are playing significant roles within Bangladeshi immigrant societies to expand Islamic and religious norms among the Bangladeshi women who have come directly to Canada. For the same reason, I observed that many Bangladeshi educated middle and upper class professional women who never followed *purdah* in Bangladesh, within a few months after their migration to Canada they started maintaining *purdah* to enter public spaces as a means to define their authentic religious, ethnic, and cultural identities. I also learned that in order to face cultural and moral shock, to negotiate financial and other uncertainties, and to adapt in a foreign land, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant women depend on religious norms and rituals. Islamic globalization and transnational migration to Canada to some extent offers them good reason to incorporate *purdah* as a global identity of Muslim women, and they ignore local and cultural Bengali Islamic identity features, which they deem less Islamic and more secular *Atraf* identities.

Many immigrant mothers also start practicing *purdah* as a way of living true lives and identities. By incorporating strict norms and practices of *purdha* as immigrant mothers, they try to expose their young daughters to Islamic norms to teach and make

them understand the importance of sexual, ethnic, and religious purity as immigrant Muslim young persons in a non-Muslim (“other”) nation.

Thus, maintaining and embracing *purdah* as reflecting religious and patriarchal norms and ideologies, it is not just an image of emergence of fundamentalism and darkness of Islam the way western media portrays it to be. Rather, in global context, *purdah* is a strategy to protect otherness in their immigrant lives, a mechanism to minimize cultural shocks and all other uncertainties among powerless women. Like Arab Muslims, by maintaining *purdah* and donning *burkha* in a transnational and multicultural migration setting in Toronto, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant women want to disown and challenge their powerless local and cultural Muslim identity, and want to elevate themselves as global Muslims or members of global Islam. Therefore, *Purdha* is a critical, complex and contextual marker of Bengali Muslim identity that is also connected to class, education, age and life uncertainty.

CHAPTER SIX

COLONIAL TO GLOBAL: RE-INVENTION OF LOCAL MARKERS OF IDENTITY IN CANADA

NEGOTIATION OF BENGALI COLONIAL IDENTITY MARKERS AMONG BANGLADESHI IMMIGRANTS IN TORONTO

Within both the colonial and post-colonial political economy contexts of British Bengal, religion has been a key component in shaping distinct political, national and ethnic identities among Bangladeshi people. A number of key factors have shaped separate, religion-oriented identities among Bengalis in the British Bengal: 1) conversion by lower caste/class Hindus to folk Bengali Muslims, and later conversion to Christianity by lower caste Hindus and lower class Muslims (see Eton 1993; Ahmed 2001; Van der Veer 2002); 2) politics between Hindu and Muslims of separated education systems (Ahmed 1989, 2000; Hardy 1972); 3) emergence of “*Bhadralok*” classes in Bengal (Chakrabarty 1989, 2000); and 4) India’s partition in 1947 based on religious majority and minority identities (Panday 1999, 1971). In the post-colonial majority Muslim Pakistani regime (1947-1971), the Independence war in 1971, and post-independence political and economic contexts in Bangladesh (1975 and onwards), emergence of Islamic nationalism (Sobhan 1982) and “Islamicisation of the Bangladeshi state” (Gardner 1999) presented the major political contexts that have shaped majority and minority identities, and separated contested religious groups in Bangladesh.

Similarly, global migration, deterritorialization processes, and transnational communication also have enhanced “fundamentalist markers of cultural identities based on local religious movement” (Appadurai 1990), have re-emphasised “religion as a grounding concept of creating self and other among ethnic groups” (Gledhill 1994: 158), and have brought back religious practices as a “process of transforming” (Yang and

Ebaugh 2001) immigrants' own identities. At the same time, immigrant religious identity is also reshaped and contested in response to “global dominant categorization of religious identification by state and media” (Gardner 2003, 1999), and constructed “powerful discourses” (Asad 1983). Furthermore, the post-9/11 global political and economic contexts (Gardner 2003, Peek 2005), wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the “global war on terrorism”, and politics of national security are determining factors in the development of political and religious extremism.

Along with historical and global factors in the homeland (especially in the 2001 post-election religious persecution against minority Hindus in Bangladesh), between 2001 and 2006, state-guided radicalization of Islam, and several brutal attacks against minority religious groups and people with different political ideologies, have made a significant impact in shaping separate and antagonistic religious identities in Bangladesh as well as among Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada.

In diasporic and immigrant settings in Canada, I have noted several factors that affect identity. These factors include structural inequalities within the Canadian state, uncertainty of immigrant life, faster transnational communication, interactions between different religious groups across the world, and the freedom of practicing various religions under multiculturalism. In order to maintain and re-establish Bengali cultural traditions, and religious and patriarchal norms, Bangladeshi immigrants have embraced religion as one of the key components in shaping Bangladeshi immigrant identity in Canada. Religion has become a means of challenging – and juxtaposing – ethnic, cultural, and national identities of Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada.

Building on my research findings, in this chapter I discuss first how Bangladeshi Muslim, Hindu and Christian immigrants are redefining their religious identities by practicing fundamentalist religious norms, including behaviour and rituals, maintenance of doctrinal differences within the same religious groups, and creating religious institutions and spaces in Canada. Second, I will discuss how colonial and post-colonial constructions of “minority and majority” classifications have re-rooted themselves in immigrant lives in Canada. Third, I will explain the meaning of colonial “*bhadralok shari*” and “*salarit class*” norms and practices that also are shaping Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants' class identities and ideologies in Canada.

Religious Practices, Norms, and Rituals among Bangladeshi Muslim Immigrants in Canada

Gardner (1999) observed that in England Bangladeshi Muslim migration to the West is not only just for just selling labour but also to some extent it has a “spiritual dimension”, to create an authentic religious identity and space (Metcalf 1996 in Gardner 1999: 68). Gardner also explained that, in response to various complex global and local issues, British Bengali Muslims disowned their Bengali ethnic and cultural identity and preferred to claimed their “first and foremost identity as Muslims” (Gardner 1999: 68). In my research, I found that, in general, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant respondents in my research follow religious norms, obey and practice all Islamic religious rules and rituals, and consider Islam as their way of life, existence, and destiny as immigrants in Canada.

Of the 25 Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant families in Toronto that I interviewed, 22 families identified as believers and practitioners of Islam. Three families identified themselves as non-believers and secular even though they had grown up in Muslim families and carried Islamic names as part of their religious and social identities (see Table 4.6). Among 22 Muslim respondent families, 16 conveyed that they strictly follow all religious norms and rules and believe that religion is the most important component of their lives and their identity as human beings. One of the respondents, a practitioner of Islam, said, “first of all I am a Muslim (*Musalman*), this is my core identity, then, I am a Bangladeshi (nationality), Bengali (linguistic and ethnic identities), a South Asian, and now I am a Canadian”. The other 6 families consider themselves “regular Muslims” because they are unable to strictly and regularly follow closely all religious norms and rules such as praying five times a day (*namaj*), maintaining purity of body and mind (*Ojju*), fasting (*roja*⁴²) during the month of Ramadan, performing pilgrimage (*hajj*⁴³), and carrying out other religious related activities in their immigrant lives in Canada. However, they consider that practicing Islam and following all religious norms is important for all Muslims even though they themselves are not personally able to do so.

¹ *Roja*: Restraining oneself from food, water and sex from dawn to dusk with intent to please Almighty Allah.

² *Hajj*: A pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, and one of the five duties that Muslims are ordered to follow in their lifetimes. It is believed that by performing the *hajj* a person will be renewed as free of all sin like a newborn baby.

Celebration of Major Religious Rituals among Bangladeshi Muslims in Toronto

Based on my research findings, there are four key religious practices that support Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants in maintaining their distinct religious, ethnic, and cultural identities in Canada. *Eid-Ul-Fitr* (celebration after fasting in the entire month of Ramadan), *Eid-Ul-Adha* (celebration of sacrifice remembering the roles of Abraham and Isaac), *Sob-E-Borat*⁴⁴, and *Ramadan* (holy month for sacrificing) are observed by the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants in Toronto.

During the month of Ramadan, Bangladeshi Muslim most immigrants fast from dawn to dusk. Fellow friends and families help each other by making phone calls before sunrise so that they wake up and eat food (*Shaheree*) and then start fasting. In the evening, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants gather either as a group in several Bengali Mosques, apartments' family rooms, restaurants, or individually at homes and work places. They break fast (*Iftar*) by eating special types of foods (rice crispy, *chola* (one type of bean), *piaju* (onions fried with lentils and rice powder mix), *bagune* (fried eggplant) and dried dates and other types of fruits. Many of my respondents said that it is a bit difficult to fast from dawn to dusk in summer months in Canada because summer days are so long (the sun sets after 21- 23:00 hours on a typical summer day) in Canada.

Celebrations of two *Eid* (an Arabic word referring to festival) ceremonies are the major religious and social rituals among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada. They celebrate and gather with their friends and families, but many visit Bangladesh during this time of year. During the *Eid* day, I observed that adherents follow religious and social traditions with Bangladeshi immigrants coming in the morning to Danforth and Victoria Park areas to pray for special *Eid namaj/Jamat* (prayer) at Bengali Mosques and multi-ethnic Mosques. After *Eid* prayer, immigrants greet each other by hugging and saying "Eid Mubarak" (Happy Eid). Bangladeshi immigrant men wear special religious clothing (Pyjama, Panjabi, and *Tupi* – a special hat for religious purposes), put on perfume (*ator*) and visit friends and families on that day. Immigrant women wear new ornaments and traditional Bangladeshi dresses (*Shari, Sallower, and Kamij*), and decorate

⁴⁴ *Sob-E-Barat*: The 14th day of the eighth month (Sha'ban) of the Islamic lunar calendar. It also refers as "the night of records". Bangladeshi Muslims believe that on that night Allah opens up every person's record and blesses that night. Bengali Muslims pray all night on that occasion and share sweets with their neighbours.

themselves with fresh flowers. Buying new dresses and gift giving are major parts of celebrating *Eid-ul-fitar*, but sacrificing animals is the key component of celebrating *Eid-ul-Azha*. Most of my female respondents told me that on the *Eid* day they generally pray at home because they have huge cooking responsibilities, and food needs to be ready for entertaining friends and families at their homes. Two women also told me that “as women we do not have opportunities to [go to] Mosques in Bangladesh like our male family members, but in Canada as women we can go to Mosques and pray like our husbands, so we feel good to pray at Mosques in Canada”. My Muslim research respondents who live in Victoria Park, Crescent Town, Denton Avenue, and Teesdale Place apartments in Bengali Para in “Bangla Town” areas told me:

In Canada we celebrate *Eid* like in Bangladesh. Or you can say we enjoy more with friends and families here in Canada. You know it is true that most of the people in Bangladesh do not have money and time to celebrate like us. We prepare *deshi* (homeland) food items, wear traditional dresses mostly brought from Bangladesh, and decorate our hands with *mehidee* (henna) before the *Eid* day. As many Bangladeshi immigrants are staying closely in apartments in Victoria Park areas, we can visit each other on *Eid* days. We prepare different types of sweets like (*payash, jorda, fenni, shemay*), cook all traditional and special food items such as *kabab, Biryani, haleem, polow, chatpati*, and share with our friends and families. We go shopping together and buy dress from Bangladeshi stores and Indian market in Gerard Street. Even though we have all material things to celebrate any religious festivals here in Canada, we miss our relatives, parents and family members who are staying back in Bangladesh. You know, all of our friends in Canada are now our close relatives in this foreign land; we share our joys with them. It goes beyond religious identities and differences too.

At the same time, in *adda* sessions with Muslim respondents who live on Bloor Street and Regent Park areas commonly conveyed to me:

Even though we celebrate our religious festivals quiet gorgeously and openly in Canada, but we do not get the same feelings like Bangladesh. Because in Bangladesh, the whole country gets ready for celebrating *Eid*, for example, people are going to their village, meeting relatives, and all the shopping centers are busy with people. The whole atmosphere of *Eid* that we used to enjoy in Bangladesh is missing here in Canada. We are living in a different country with different cultures and religious traditions. The most important aspect we miss in Canada is that as Muslims we do not have national holidays in order to celebrate our religious festivals. Most of the Canadians get holidays during the Christmas seasons.

A 49 year old Muslim male respondents who works in a factory as a shift engineer spoke for many in saying:

Many of their *Eid* days both we had to work, and several years one of us had to work and one stayed at home as *Eid* was celebrated in week days in Canada; in those years we called our friends in following weekends to share fellowship with us. They say it is a multicultural country but we do not have holidays to celebrate our religious festivals, but in Bangladesh we have at least one day of national holidays for Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists to celebrate their major religious festivals.

Practicing religious rituals is one of the major components of Bangladeshi Bengali Muslim immigrant life in Canada. By celebrating religious rituals with Bengali cultural traditions, dress, and foods with fellow Bangladeshi Muslims in Canada, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants have created a religious, cultural and ethnic space and identity. At the same time, they have mentioned that as Muslim immigrants in “Multicultural Canada” they feel they are not having equal opportunities in practicing and celebrating their key religious festivals because they often have to work during their holy days.

Inventing Muslim Identity though Creating Islamic Spaces

I noted that Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants have converted an unknown, different, and Judeo-Christian religious immigrant space to an authentic Islamic space by building mosques and *madrasas* (religious schools), opening up *halal* meat shops, having *halal* butchers, practicing core religious norms and values, and bringing Islamic scholars (*moulanas*) and religious books from their homeland. According to research respondents, successful transformation and all these facilities in Canada helped them to adapt in this foreign “Christian majority” country.

I found that five Mosques in Toronto are run by Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants and are identified as “Bengali Mosques”. I was told that a group of Bangladeshi Muslims bought a pub in Toronto, and transformed it into a Mosque. Many of them also think that they are capturing non-Islamic spaces by bringing Islamic architecture, religious symbols, and building religious institutions. Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants believe that it is a graceful and holy work to build a mosque in a non-Muslim nation and that they will be rewarded in heaven for this work. These Mosques are playing significant roles in

practicing daily religious activities, arranging yearly rituals, teaching religious norms to the next generation, and preaching Islamic norms to community members. Along with religious reasons, there are social and political functionalities of building Mosques in immigrant spaces in Toronto. I came to understand that Bangladeshi immigrants achieve social status, political power, and spiritual leadership power, thereby gaining points (*sowab*) towards entering heaven as founders and donors of these religious institutions. With the support of *moulanas* from Bangladesh, and Bangladeshi immigrants who have come to Canada from Arab nations, immigrant children are taught to read Arabic as a holy language, rules of prayer, and religious norms in Mosques in Toronto. I observed that young Bangladeshi immigrants are going to privately organized schools in different homes in apartment buildings, wearing proper religious costumes, learning how to pray and how to read the holy Quran. Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant associations organize religious meetings in Mosques by bringing Islamic scholars and preachers from the homeland and abroad.

Many Bangladeshi immigrants are members of *Toblic-E-Jamat* and they attend *chilla*⁴⁵ in various cities in Canada to maintain their core religious identity. There are also political activists of the transnational political wing of *Jamat-E-Islam* in Bangladesh (a political party whose objective is to rule by the laws of the holy Quran) who preach to maintain Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants' religious faith and identity in Canada as a non-Muslim "other" country. Even in family, social, cultural and community gatherings, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants take a few minutes break from core events, find a corner and stand facing The *Kabba* in Mecca for their daily prayers. I noticed that even in non-Muslim homes, they ask for a washed bed sheet and find a corner to pray. In Muslim households, pictures of the *Kabba*, and Arabic verses, are hung on the wall to make their home into authentic religious space. I observed both practitioner and non-practitioner Bengali Muslim men and women greet each others in public places by following Islamic traditions and norms. By re-establishing religious institutions, and practicing core religious rules and values in their immigrant lives in Canada, Bangladeshi immigrants

⁴⁵ Chilla: A form of mediation in which a group of Muslims leave their homes for several weeks (traditionally forty days) to visit various Mosques and pray to Allah...

have created a new authentic religious and cultural space. This is also one of the key identity negotiation processes among the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants in Toronto.

Eating halal foods as a marker of making Muslim identity

I observed that eating *halal* food is one of the significant components in maintaining authentic, pure, and proper religious identity among the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants in Canada. Among 22 Muslim respondent families, 16 of them strictly eat only *halal* meat. The other 8 families said they do not eat pork and if it is convenient they buy *halal* meat, but they do not make extra efforts to eat *halal* meat. One of them said, “now we can buy *halal* meat anywhere in greater Toronto Area (GTA), but when we came to Canada, there were few *halal* meat shops in the city, not even one Bengali store in Toronto, so often we had to drive two hours to farms to get *halal* meat”. One of my respondent families told me that they came to Canada almost fifteen years ago; in the last twelve years none of his children have eaten at McDonalds or Kentucky Fried Chicken because they did not sell *halal* chicken. Now they have *halal* burgers and sell fish fries, so they take their children into these stores. According to a married Muslim female (age 45) who lives in the downtown Toronto area:

In Bangladesh we ate all sorts of contaminated foods (*vajal*) and we got sick; we were given buffalo meat instead of beef in the markets, but we did not care because we ate *halal* food. But in Canada we have to be strict to pick our foods because back home we were never exposed to pork and alcohol like in Canada. These are all over the place; you cannot even eat a pack of chips or cookies without reading ingredients. Being Muslims, it is really hard as well as expensive to eat *halal* food in Canada.

I observed that eating *halal* is a social discourse and a means to guide Bangladeshi immigrants to practice Islam, and protect their authentic religious identity in Canada. Within the community, people observe each other and whether or not someone is eating proper *halal* foods. Many members within the Bangladeshi immigrant communities feel the responsibility to preach to each other about the importance of eating *halal* food if someone is not strictly following the rules. A Muslim male respondent (age 43) who works as a professional engineer told me:

As a family we do not eat pork or drink alcohol, things that we are not allowed to consume as Muslims. But we did not care to eat non-*halal* beef,

lamb, and chicken from different stores. But after our second baby was born, one day a lady (who migrated from Arab nations) came to visit my wife and asked what we ate for supper. My wife replied, “duck meat”, to which she asked, “Was it a *halal* duck”? My wife replied, “No, it was bought from a regular store”. The lady who came to see my wife said, “as an adult you are eating non-*halal* meat, and committing sin, but as parents, why are you allowing your young kids, who are innocents, to eat *haram*⁴⁶ meat?”

Community members support others to have *halal* meat by helping them to find *halal* food. They may need to drive four hours in order to bring *halal* meat from different cities. A male research respondent (age 58) who was a member of left-wing political parties in Bangladesh and claimed himself to be a non-practicing Muslim , said:

You know that there is a community policing among us. Some people are always concerned who is eating *halal* and who is not. If you do not care much, they will try to teach you, harass you, make gossip about you, and force you to eat *halal* meat. It has become a strong phenomenon in our Bengali Muslim immigrant communities in Toronto. Our Bengali grocery stores owners also preach this ideology; otherwise no one will go to buy their frozen/out-dated/unhygienic meat. I do not think eating only *halal* will keep our religion alive; we have so many other important things to do, and I know what to do the best for me. You know brother, I think we are doing all these things here as part of our frustrations and discomfort towards this unfamiliar culture in Canada, many of us never lived outside of our own Islamic and cultural territories as Muslim immigrants; these are all outcomes of our identity crisis. We were not that concerned about all these issues in Bangladesh, because we do not need to, but in Canada, probably we do.

Even though there is a small group of Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants who are not strongly following food taboos as a significant marker of their religious norms, purity and authentic identity, it is still a strong and significant marker shaping authentic religious identity among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada. According to my observation, eating *halal* is not only maintaining a dietary rule guided by Islam in transnational immigrant lives, but also a means to create a common religious imaginary and nostalgia which is allowing them to re-state religious-based common identity and space in Canada. In their day to day lives, eating *halal* is also a symbolic means to

⁴⁶ *Haram*: An Arabic word that refers to foods that Muslims are not allowed to eat according to Islamic dietary rules, for example, eating pork, drinking alcohol, or any kind of religious impurity.

challenge western globalization, and the hegemonic power of Judeo-Christian norms and traditions in Canada. Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada prefer to eat *halal* foods.

Hijab and burkha: global Islamic markers for local Muslim women

Traditionally, Bangladeshi Muslim women wear *burkha*⁴⁷ and *hijab*⁴⁸ and follow cultural and social dress codes according to their age, religious identity and class and social status. Good portions of them wear the *burkha* and *hijab* to follow religious and patriarchal norms. Wearing the *hijab* also symbolically reflects on women's class and social positions and identity within Bangladeshi society. However, it is not a common practice for all Bangladeshi Bengali Muslim women to cover their face and head by wearing a *burkha* and the *hijab* to identify themselves as Muslim women. For working class Muslim women, wearing a *burkha* and *hijab* are strategic decisions and a means to enter into public spaces and protect themselves from gender-based physical and sexual harassment. By wearing the *hijab*, Bangladeshi Muslim women also gain social and religious status within the male-dominated patriarchal society (see Mohiuddin 2003). For creating contrast images with working class and landless poor Bengali women, the elite and middle class Bangladeshi Muslim women are asked to wear the *burkha* to demonstrate their class and social mobility of colonial and post-colonial rural Bengal (see Papanek 1971; Feldman, Shelley and McCarthy 1983). Therefore, the *burkha* and *hijab* are also an indicator of class and caste mobility within Muslim communities in Bangladesh.

However, in immigrant settings in Canada, more and more Bangladeshi Muslim women have started wearing the *hijab* and *burkha* as markers of their religious, cultural, and ethnic identities in Canada. Six of my Muslim female research respondents (between the ages 28 and 45) said that they never covered their heads in Bangladesh, but after migrating to Canada they started wearing the *hijab* for social, cultural and religious reasons. It has been observed that Bangladeshi Muslim women's closer interactions with other ethnic (Arabic) Muslim women in Canada, plus access to information about

⁴⁷ *Burkha* refers to a full body covering dress that many Muslim women wear to go to public space. It represents modesty of a Muslim woman.

⁴⁸ *Hijab* is a head-covering scarf that Muslim women wear to represent their modesty, morality and religious identity.

political struggles of other Muslim women and clothing issues all over the world, uncertainties and struggles as immigrant women, cultural shocks, and sudden loss of life within family circles, all have influenced Bangladeshi women to embrace religious clothing and actively practice religious norms. I observed that, by wearing a *burkha* and *hijab*, Bangladeshi local and ethnic Muslim women are becoming members of a global Islamic womanhood, which is more powerful compared to their ethnic and local Islamic identities in Canada. As I have discussed in previous chapters, both in colonial and post-colonial political contexts, Bengali Muslims, with their own ethnic and cultural traditions, are never recognized as a core Muslim group. Therefore, as a negotiation strategy, in globalization-led transnational immigrant settings, Bangladeshi Muslim women have incorporated core religious dress codes, and have disowned Bengali cultural dress in order to be recognized as global Muslim women. For them, within a multicultural immigrant setting, Bangladeshi Bengali ethnic, cultural, and national positions make for less powerful and visible subjects in comparison to the global Islamic identity. Wearing the *hijab* and *burkha* as markers of religious identity provides them more freedom, a more powerful position, greater honour and safety as female subjects in multi-ethnic, religious and male-dominated spaces in Canada. A Muslim woman respondent (age 37) with a Master's degree in International Relations at Dhaka University came to Canada in 2006 to join her husband in Toronto, and started wearing the *hijab* after six months of her migration to Canada. She said:

In Bangladesh, I never use *hijab* and never cover my head. I did not feel like doing so in my own country. Here in Canada, it is different world; you will encounter males from all over the world; you never know what their intentions are, and how they are going to treat you. You may find some of them are drunks, or sexist and racist. So in order to protect myself as a woman, and to secure my *Ijrat* (honor), I started covering my head.

I interviewed several Muslim women during my fieldwork. Four of them said that they did not maintain the *hijab* before coming to Canada or even many years after their migration. Later I came to know from my research respondents that all women have different stories, contexts, reasons, and situations that encourage them to accept Islamic customs and follow religiously defined roles for Muslim women. A Muslim woman respondent (age 43) and a homemaker in Toronto, said:

I have been trying to have a baby since 2004. After coming to Canada I had become pregnant two times but I had two miscarriages. Then, I promised to Allah, if I am blessed with a child, I will maintain hijab. When I became pregnant again I started maintaining hijab.

A professional Muslim woman respondent (age 46) told me she started covering her head and wearing the *hijab* when her eldest daughter started going to high school. By maintaining *hijab*, she wants to encourage her daughter to follow religious norms and teach her the sanctity of sexual relationships in order to protect the religious and ethnic purity of a Bangladeshi Bengali Muslim girl.

Another married Muslim woman respondent (age 52) living in “Bengali Para” told me that her father-in-law, who lives in Bangladesh, recently performed the *hajj*. Being a *hajji*, he asked her to wear the *hijab* as his daughter-in-law, therefore she started to wear the *hijab* in Canada. A married woman respondent (age 32) in “Bengali Para” started wearing the *hijab* to gain spiritual favour because she was facing economic hardships in Canada. She said that one day her husband suddenly lost his job and she surrendered all her anxieties to Allah, becoming a religious person. Five of my Muslim female respondents told me that they have become more fervent religious believers and practitioners of Islam since beginning their immigrant lives; therefore, they started following Islamic religious dress codes.

In opposition to dominant images of the *hijab* and *burkha* constructed by the Western capitalist model of democracy, modernity, secularist and orientalist discourses (see Siddiqi 2008: 58; Said 1989, 2002), my research suggests that Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant women in Canada follow religious dress codes as a strategy to cope with their economic uncertainty, gender inequality, and to protect their religious, sexual and cultural honor and purity as Third World immigrant women. They wear *hijab* and *burkha* as “a sign of their religious distinctiveness and community identity” (Siddiqi 2008: 67) and also to mark their social and political recognition in multicultural Canada (see also Hoodfar 1989 in Siddiqi 2008: 67). Influences on wearing *hijab* in Canada also symbolically represent globalization as flows that can create cultural and religious *Arabization* as opposed to Americanization and McDonaldisation processes. For Bangladeshi Muslim women, going back to core Islamic dress codes and norms are forms of symbolic and political resistance against the western-influenced global construction of

Islam and a systematic strategy of creating counter-hegemony against Judeo-Christian religious cultural traditions in Canada

Religious Practices, Norms, and Rituals among the Bangladeshi Hindu Immigrants in Canada

Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants in Canada freely practice their religious rituals, and follow religious customs and norms as key markers of their religious and personal identities as Hindus. Religion is considered their way of life. Among 25 Hindu respondent families (based on their names and surnames), 22 Hindu immigrant family members have informed me that they strictly practice Hindu religious norms, rituals and follow dietary regulations in their immigrant lives in Canada. Even though two of my respondent families have Hindu names, they identified themselves as “humanist and communist”. A Hindu member of a mixed-religion married family unit informed me that neither he nor his family members practice any religious rituals at home. Most of the Hindu respondents have expressed that they peacefully practice all religious rituals (*puja*). Many of them told me that immigration to Canada has provided them with more religious, economic and political freedom than they had as a minority religious group in Bangladesh. Therefore, in Canada they try to observe all religious practices to the fullest extent. Even though they do not face any economic, political or communal tensions when celebrating religious festivals in Canada, they also do not experience the same joy in celebrating *puja* as they used to experience among their families and friends in Bangladesh.

All of the Hindu respondents from Bangladesh are associated with two Bengali Temples. The social and religious associations of the two Bengali Hindu Temples represent two major factions among the Bangladeshi Hindu immigrant communities in Toronto. I also noted that Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants occasionally visit, pray and attend religious meetings at Hindu temples established by the Indian Hindu immigrants in Canada. I observed that, by practicing all religious rituals in public, Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants have re-invented authentic Hindu spaces and religious identity in Canada (see Appadurai 1990).

Key religious rituals among the Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants

There is a saying in Bengali that the Bengali Hindu community celebrates thirteen religious festivals in twelve months (*Baro mashay tero puja*). It also means that Hinduism is full of religious rituals. It is worth mentioning that Hindu religious rituals are not fixed and common to all Hindus, unlike other religious traditions are for their adherents, e.g., Christmas and *Eid* days.. Religious rituals and festivals (commonly called *puja*⁴⁹) are different between Bengali and non-Bengali Hindus according to their ethnic, linguistic, and regional identities. Bengali Hindus in Canada celebrate their goddess, *Durga*⁵⁰ (*Durga puja*, *Durgitsava*) as the major religious festival by following Bengali traditions and customs. This festival is popular among the Bengali Hindus, and it is one of the key markers of Bengali Hindu identity. Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants in Toronto brought the scripture (*murthy*) of the goddess *Durga* (*devi Durga*) from Bangladesh. To celebrate *Durga puja* they go to temples to pay homage, and rejoice over her arrival on earth that year. Bengali Hindus in Canada also celebrate other key religious festivals such as: *Kali Puja* (ritual for strength), *Laxmi puja* (ritual for wealth), *Saraswati puja* (ritual for knowledge) and *Janmastami* (birth of Lord Ram) in their immigrant lives in Canada.

I observed that nearly every evening about 30 to 40 of Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants would come to Hindu temples where they would sing spiritual songs called *nam kirtan* (*hora Krishna*, *hora Rama*) and perform regular *darshan*⁵¹ and pay homage to the goddess who is called mother (*Maa*). In celebrating each religious festival, they offer foods (any types of fruits, and sweets) to all goddesses, goddesses bless these foods, and later these foods, called *proshad*, are shared by all participants. My respondents also mentioned that in celebrating any religious rituals they mostly attend *puja*, arranged by the Bangladeshi Bengali Hindu Associations, but they also visit other temples in Toronto too.

⁸*Puja*: A Sanskrit term that refers to honour, adoration and worship. Hindus perform *puja*, including a series of rituals to adore and worship the goddess and offering gifts to the deity in order to receive blessings (*Ashirvad*).

⁵⁰ *Durga* (Invincible) is a Hindu goddess who has power to bring justice in this world. *Durga Puja* is one of the most important religious festivals among the Bengali Hindus.

⁵¹ The term *darshan* refers in general in Bengali to see, observe and to be viewed. But in Hindu religious practices, *darshan* is a complex relationship between a devotee and God; a devotee goes everyday to a temple or performs *puja* to receive *darshan*, which means receiving divine knowledge and instruction. “By doing *darshan* properly a devotee develops affection for God, and God develops affection for that devotee.” (Wikipedia).

Creation of authentic Hindu religious spaces

Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants have created authentic religious, social, cultural and personal devotional spaces in their homes and within communities in Canada. I observed that Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants start their day by praying and remembering their goddess. In each Hindu household, whether the individual immigrant lives in a shared house, one bedroom rented apartment or in an independent house with six rooms, a devotional space has been created (*pujaghar*⁵²) in order to practice religious rituals. They brought holy books, scriptures of the Hindu goddess, framed photographs of the goddess, and oil lamps made of clay from Bangladesh to create authentic and appropriate holy religious space in their immigrant lives in Canada. I observed that immigrants decorate their *pujaghar* with flowers, photographs of Hindu secret places and temples, and use perfume and incense (*dhoop*) to transform their regular places into holy spaces in Canada. Among the rich Hindu immigrants, I noticed a room on the main floor of their houses, or whole basement have been transformed into a temple where each day they pray for family well being and also arrange religious rituals with friends and families.

As community initiatives, Bangladeshi Bengali Hindu immigrants have established two temples (*Hindu Mandir* and Bangladesh-Canada Hindu Cultural Society) in Toronto that represent their ‘proper’ religious, ethnic cultural and social space in Canada. According to the Bangladeshi Hindus in Toronto, their ‘proper’ religious space refers to a space where they can practice their religious rituals the way they used to practice in Bangladesh, with Bengali people, and by following Bengali local and cultural traditions. Therefore, *Hindu Mandir* does not represent only a religious space to Bengali Hindu immigrants but a space where they can be proper Bengali Hindus and differentiate themselves from other ethnic, cultural and national expressions of Hinduism.

Several members of the Hindu Temple informed me that, along with religious activities, they have also started schools to teach Hindu religious doctrines, rules and rituals as well as the Bengali language. Every Saturday morning, young children from immigrant families attend classes to learn Hindu religious doctrines and traditions so that

⁵²*Pujaghar*: A particular room or a corner of a house where each day a Hindu person performs *puja* to start his/her day with blessings of goddess (*MA* or mother). I found that rich Hindu immigrants have separate rooms or whole basements of their house where they put various scriptures of Hindu goddess and transform it into a *pujaghar*

the next generation can keep maintaining their ethnic, cultural and religious identities. Every year Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants bring religious preachers, scholars, and philosophers, pundits and ritual conductors (*thakur*) either from Bangladesh or from India (West Bengal) in order to strengthen their religious faith in a foreign land. The Hindu temples also arrange yearly spiritual and cultural events led by famous singers both from Bangladesh and India. Therefore, like Bangladeshi Muslims, Bangladeshi Hindus have also created their ethnic, cultural and religious spaces by following local and cultural religious traditions in Canada. Bangladeshi Hindu believers create and negotiate their authentic religious identities in Canada by practicing core religious traditions and by transforming immigrant space as holy and spiritual. Religious and cultural nostalgias and homeland cultural and religious traditions play key roles in defining and protecting their core Bengali and Hindu identities in Toronto.

The Unique Case of Bangladeshi Christian Immigrants in Canada

Religious practices, norms, and rituals among Bangladeshi Christians

Since Canada as a nation has predominantly Judeo-Christian religious and cultural values, Christian Bangladeshi immigrants do not have difficulties in the practice of religious rituals and exposure of their religious identities in Canada. I observed that Bengali Christian immigrants generally find churches in Canada according to their religious doctrines. As a result, Bangladeshi Bengali Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostal and the members of Fellowship Church⁵³ in Bangladesh attend churches which have similar doctrines and traditions to what they were familiar with in Bangladesh. As members of a homogeneous and universal Christian brotherhood, Bangladeshi Christian immigrants attend regular Sunday church services, and celebrate all Christian religious rituals such as Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and Christmas Day in different Canadian churches along with multi-ethnic Christian groups. By practicing dominant and common religious traditions in Canada, Bangladeshi immigrants are able to create functional, social and religious networks within diversified communities, and powerful church-based religious institutions in Canada. I noticed that being a part of

¹² Fellowship Church: a small local Baptist Christian religious group in Bangladesh who practice core religious doctrines very strictly, have separate church and mission organizations, maintain close connection among fellow brothers and sisters of the church, and practice endogamy to maintain their fellowship identity. They have a local saint and they are also commonly identified as Halleluja Mission.

powerful dominant religious institutions, and widely accepted religious traditions, Bangladeshi Christian immigrants in some way pretend that they are part of the majority religious groups in Canada.

Bangladeshi Christian immigrants are on one hand claiming a universal, global, homogeneous, apolitical, classless, equal, and modern religious identity as members of world Christianity. On the other hand, they also celebrate their local, cultural, and ethnic forms of Christianity and religious rituals as markers of Bengali-Christian identities in Canada. Bengali Christian identities and ideologies are a product of colonialism, politics of religious conversions, roles of Christian missionaries in the homeland, and their economic and political association within the Bangladeshi nation state. I found that Bangladeshi Christian immigrants in Canada are continuously shifting their positions from Bengali local, cultural and ethnic Christianity to homogeneous, global and universal Christianity. They carry both local and global markers of identity at the same time.

In order to maintain their authentic and proper religious identities, and for comfortable and acceptable assimilation within global Christian groups, many Bangladeshi immigrants only use and establish their English/Christian names carried from their homeland. For example, they would use David, Angela, or Michael in order to define their authentic religious identity and proclaim equal social caste and class status in Canada. They politically and technically try to hide their Bengali middle names, for example, *Proshanto*, *Shafalee*, or *Bhavudan* in their religious settings in Canada. Some of them also pronounce their family names with an English accent. Some of them use different English first names as their first and last names out of ignorance, e.g., Albert Anthony. They want to act more like a “Canadian” by changing their names using the English and Biblical traditions.

I observed that Bangladeshi Christian immigrants have a tendency or at least try to be a “proper/universal-only Christian person” while they attend church services in Canada with White Canadians. To create their religious-based authentic global identity, strategically and politically Bangladeshi Christian immigrants ignore and neutralize their local, colonial, national, ethnic, and cultural identities in Canada. Many of them carry a pre-conceived notion that Canada is a Christian country and they want to be part of

majority religious and political groups in Canada, a position they have never experienced, having come from a minority religious group in Bangladesh.

My research suggests that immigration to Canada, together with Bengali Christian immigrants' close associations with religious institutions, has shaped their religious and personal world views and identities to be more communal, fundamentalist, and orthodox in nature. By incorporating only English names, upholding Christian religious identity, and ignoring local markers of ethnic and religious identity, Bangladeshi Christian immigrants are de-constructing their minority religious status and redefining unequal immigrant positions in Canada. Colonial religious conversion politics and Christian missions have consciously isolated Bangladeshi Christian converts from anti-colonial and nationalist movements in Bangladesh in the past, and similarly, Bangladeshi Christian immigrants have become isolated from Bengali nationalist, ethnic, class, and cultural movements in Canada.

Bangladeshi Christian immigrants and their 'authentic' religious, cultural, and ethnic spaces

In contrast to apolitical and global Christian religious identity, Bangladeshi Bengali Christian immigrants also try to uphold their religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identity as Bangladeshi Bengali Christians in Canada. Even though, as members of universal Christianity, Bengali Christian immigrants attend any English church services in Canada, devotions in different language do not meet the needs of their Bengali ethnic and cultural souls. A Bangladeshi male Anglican Christian (age 52) who lives in downtown Toronto told me:

Going to church every Sunday with proper dress is like a formal ritual for me. I understand that our God understands all language. But you know if I pray to God in English, sometimes I feel that God does not understand my English, or I have failed to make him understand my situations. I always prefer to pray in Bengali because this the way we learn to seek God in our own mother tongue. Sometimes I say God's prayer in Bengali while the whole congregation is praying in English. I love reading verses from the Bengali Bible that I brought from Bangladesh; by praying in Bengali, and singing Bengali Christian songs, I can make a closer relationship with God. After 20 years in Canada, still I feel that I am only comfortable to worship in Bengali, and I know our God understand Bengali.

Bangladeshi Christian immigrants always prefer to pray to God in Bengali, sing Bengali hymns, and follow the homeland cultural traditions to celebrate Christian rituals in Canada. I noted that Bangladeshi Christian immigrants in Canada arrange religious gatherings and prayer meetings to acknowledge God's grace in their lives (*dhonnobader shova*) with fellow ethnic and same denominational groups. Generally, when religious leaders, scholars, and fathers from Bangladesh come to visit Canada, prayer meetings and informal worship services are arranged in a church or someone's home. A specific denominational group leads the worship service if a religious leader came from their own denomination. At the individual and family levels, Bangladeshi Christian immigrants arrange prayer meetings in their houses for celebrating of birthdays, marriage and death anniversaries, newly bought houses, receiving immigration papers, baby showers, and for making safe travel to their home country. These kinds of gatherings transform the particular house into a Bengali ethnic and religious "sacred space" (Werbner 1988). Through singing Bengali devotional songs (*christo shongeet*), praying in Bengali, and reading scriptures from the Bengali Bible and by arranging and attending prayer meetings in their immigrant lives in Canada, Bangladeshi Christian immigrants try to define their local, cultural, and ethnic identities in Canada.

As an applied researcher, I was actively involved in a group initiative led by several Bangladeshi Christian immigrants who had been working to establish a *Bangla Church* for all Bengali Christian immigrants in Toronto. Every second Saturday of each month at 6: 00 pm, the Bangladeshi Christian immigrants from various denominational and doctrinal backgrounds congregate in the basement of the "Dovercourt Baptist Church" in downtown Toronto. I observed that members of the *Bangla Church* celebrate Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas services following the same Bangladeshi cultural and social traditions even though they reside in Canada. People came with Bengali Bibles, Bengali songbooks, Bangladeshi musical instruments, and they worshiped in Bengali. Along with Christian rituals, members of the *Bangla Church* also have organized cultural programs to celebrate Bengali New Year, Independence and Victory Days in Bangladesh, and International Mother Language Day (21 February) in Toronto. I observed that they sing the Bangladeshi national anthem, wear traditional Bengali dress, and carry national flags and share stories about political struggles and movements recounting the emergence

of Bangladesh as an independent nation for the benefit of the second-generation Bangladeshi immigrants. After each church service, they have traditional Bengali dinners arranged by members of the Bangla Church in Toronto. I noted that Bangladeshi Christian immigrants create their authentic religious and cultural spaces and their core identities by incorporating and practicing their ethnic, cultural, and religious customs in Canada.

Doctrinal Identity as a Marker of Bangladeshi Christian Immigrants' Religious Identity

The doctrinal and denominationally-oriented differences as distinct markers of religious identity were introduced to newly converted Bengali Christians in Bangladesh by the Western missionaries and Churches in order to establish their separate existence, and as indicators of their success in rates of conversion in Bangladesh. I noticed that the constructed doctrines and denomination-based separated identities in Bangladesh are clearly rooted in immigrant lives in Canada. As a result, culturally, socially, politically, and religiously Bangladeshi Baptists, Anglicans, Catholics, and other denominational groups form disjointed and distinct social and cultural spaces in Canada.

Bangladeshi Christian immigrants keep maintaining their distinct religious doctrinal identities as proper and authentic markers of religious and social identities in Canada. I observed that at personal and familial levels, Christian immigrants generally maintain interdenominational communication, and visit each other beyond their doctrinal identity. However, as corporate denominational groups, Bangladeshi Baptist, Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Fellowship, Pentecostal, Seventh-Day-Adventist and other denominational members prefer to celebrate separately for Christmas and Easter parties, and also in seasonal picnics.

Even though planting the Bangla Church as an initiative to uphold and celebrate the commonality and homogeneity of the Bengali ethnic, linguistic, national, and cultural traditions, it has continuously been facing doctrinal crises and differences in organizing church services, forming committees, and electing leaders. I observed that as the Bangla Church services are led predominantly by Baptist and Anglican groups, Bangladeshi Catholics are not interested in being involved actively. In the context of leadership disputes and conflict among committee members, a person who belongs to a different

denominational group said, “I committed a sin (*pap*) to become involved actively in a Church council run by Baptists and Anglicans; I and my family will never do it again”.

By following Church-based separate doctrinal orientations in Bangladesh, the Bengali Catholic immigrants in Toronto have established the “Bangladesh Catholic Association in Toronto”, and organized a credit union (financial organization mostly led and organized by Bangladeshi Catholic members). Following the same ideological paths, Bangladeshi Baptist, Anglican, Fellowship and other denominational members also maintain a close social, religious, familial communication among their own denominational clusters. In most of the cases, if any religious preacher/leader comes to visit Canada, each denominational group tries to organize a church service in a house or in a community centre where they can celebrate their religious traditions by following their local, homeland, cultural and proper doctrinal traditions. All denominational groups, even those with very few members, will separately celebrate Good Friday, Easter and Christmas services (devotion), and parties (social associations with foods) with fellow members. Thus, Bangladeshi Christian immigrants in Canada are re-establishing the authentic doctrinal identities of their homeland as their distinct markers of religious identity in Canada.

Doctrinal Identity among the Bangladeshi Muslims and Hindu Immigrants

Unlike Bangladeshi Christian immigrants, I did not find sharp doctrinal and denominational differences among the Bangladeshi Muslim and Hindu immigrants in Canada. However, because most of the Bangladeshi Muslims are *Sunni*, I learned that Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants prefer to go to *Sunni* Mosque and follow *Sunni* traditions. There are very small numbers of *Shia* and *Ahamedia* Muslims and they have separate Mosques in Bangladesh. In my research all my respondents are Sunni Muslims. I did not find any *Shia* and *Ahamedia* Bangladeshi Muslim respondents in my research in Toronto. Both are religious and political minority Muslim groups in Bangladesh. One of my research respondents (age 54) who is a non-believing/non-practicing Muslim male cultural worker in Toronto said , “In Canada we still are concerned who is who within

Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant communities, who is *Wahhabi*⁵⁴; who is *Hanafi*⁵⁵, and who is *Sufi* is still an important issue to define our authentic Muslim identity. Someone cannot be only a Muslim; we have deeper roots”. I observed that in a multi-ethnic and multicultural immigrant setting in Canada, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants (predominantly followers of *Sufism*⁵⁶) have received opportunities to create direct communication with Muslims from Arab nations; their religious, social and cultural traditions are guided by *Wahhabism*. As Arab Muslims migrated from the birthplace of Islam and the holy land of Mecca, therefore, their religious and social practices are considered to be authentic traditions of Islam by Bangladeshi Muslims. By focusing Bangladeshi Muslim migration and doctrinal conversion from Sufism to *Wahhabism* in Canada, one of my key research respondents (a 57 year old male Bangladeshi immigrant in “Bangla Town”) explained:

Islam as a religion was carried and preached by various saints and *Sufis* in Bengal (which is called *Sufism* as a doctrine). In order to make familiar an unknown religious belief and practice to predominately lower class and caste Hindus in Bengal, they incorporated various forms of local and cultural traditions, forms of music, chanting style from Hinduism, secular religious norms, and established monuments and worship places (*dorgha*) in the remembrance of local saints (*pir*). However, first, Bengali migration to Arab nations and later Bengali Muslim’s interactions with Muslims from Arab nations and emergence of radical Islamic norms and symbols in the Bangladeshi nation-state are key political economic contexts of injecting *Wahhabism* as the proper Islamic doctrine for Bengali Muslims in Bangladeshi. Powerful Muslim leaders and Islamic political parties have identified *Sufism* as a cult and less Islamic. Now and Bangladeshi Muslims have become more inclined to the doctrine of “*Wahhabism*” that Saudi Arabian Muslims used to follow.

Among the Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants, I did not clearly observe that they have any strict doctrinal and denominational differences from each other as markers of a

⁵⁴ Wahhabism: A religious movement led by **Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab** (1703–1792) who taught a focus on core religious rules and regulations stated in the holy Quran and Hadith. This religious doctrine does not support the presence of any saints in Islam.

⁵⁵ Hanafi: One of the four ‘schools of law’ in Sunni Islamic tradition that was introduced by a scholar named Abu Hanifa, born in Kufa, Iraq about A.D. 700. It teaches the ‘role of reason’ in everyday life.

⁵⁶ Sufism: This school of thought explains the mystical dimension of Islam. According to Ajiba, *sufisim* is "a science through which one can know how to travel into the **presence of the Divine**, purify one's inner self from filth, and beautify it with a variety of praiseworthy traits". Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba (1747-1809), see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sufism>. Followers of Sufism respect religious differences, acknowledge saints, pay homage to saints, and practice cultural traditions to communicate with God.

distinct Hindu identity. However, several of my research respondents have informed me that they have taken discipleship (*shirshotto*) of different saints, and they try to follow their religious and philosophical doctrines and teachings in their personal lives. Three of my respondents told me that they follow *Swami Vivekananda*⁵⁷ as their personal mentor, teacher and philosopher. Another five Hindu families have become disciples of *Rama Krishna Paramhansa*⁵⁸, a prominent Bengali Hindu scholar and philosopher in India who has thousands of disciples, and who has established religious and social institutions all over the world. I came to know that Bengali Hindu immigrants believe that by becoming disciples of saints, and by following their teaching, they can improve their lives as pure human beings, and get spiritual support to avoid worldly desires. However, being followers of various saints and their religious and spiritual doctrines do not separate them from other Hindus.

The Context of “9/11” and Bangladeshi Immigrants’ Religious Identities

I noted that like other Muslim immigrants in Canada and elsewhere in the Western World, the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 has been a powerful force in shaping the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants’ religious identity in Canada. The event has changed, redefined, disjointed and caused questioning of day-to-day social, economic, and cultural interactions between the Bangladeshi Muslims and other ethnic and religious groups in Toronto. Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants also have felt threatened in Canada, especially the immigrants who wear religious costumes. Due to widely constructed ‘Islamophobia’ in a post-9/11 global context (see Gardner 2002), Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants have encountered silent and symbolic– yet vivid – attitudes of fear and distrust, and have been assigned an alien religious status within the Canadian state. Bengali ethnicity has been de-valued and normalized, whereas Islamic names and costumes are considered as essential markers of

⁵⁷ *Swami Vivekananda*: A Bengali saint, and a key thinker of modern Hinduism (12 January 1863 - 4 July 1902) who popularized Indian philosophy of **Vedanta** and **Yoga** to the Western world. He was one of the key disciples of *RamaKrishna Paramhansa* and established *Ramakrishna Ashrams* (institutions).

⁵⁸ *RamaKrishna Paramhansa*: A Bengali saint, scholar and social thinker (18 February 1836 - 16 August 1886) who attacked middle class and intellectual Bengali Hindus for their secular religious and philosophical orientations of human life. He practiced all three key religions (Hinduism, Islam and Christianity) and said all roads lead to God. He is one of the key leaders of the Bengal and Hindu renaissance in India.

shaping Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants' identity in Canada. I asked a 37 year old Bangladeshi female Muslim respondent who worked in UN organization in Bangladesh, and is now a part-time worker in a food store in Toronto, "Do you think that '9/11' has been a major event in shaping the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants lives in Canada?" She replied:

It was "off course". I could not take 9/11 because all Muslims were identified only as "terrorists" in this world. It has created a tension within our society; it is not always visible in Canada but as a Muslim you can feel it. It is very silent but humiliating and discriminatory. The Canadian state has become more hard on Muslim issues, and suspicious about Muslim immigrants' movements, travel plans and many other things in post-9/11 contexts.

According to a Muslim male respondent (age 68) who came to Canada nearly 25 years ago and is a retired professional:

Canadians welcome and celebrate differences, and as a brown Muslim from Bangladesh, I never felt that I am an unexpected and suspicious person in Canada. But after the 9/11 incidents and its media coverage and political propaganda it has changed common Canadians' hearts. Today I do not believe that all Canadians (White and English-speaking) distrust Muslim immigrants, but somehow deep in their minds there is a distrust and fear of Muslims. Therefore, they do not totally trust us anymore; they smile but keep distance. To heal the situation it will take many years, and I believe it is a huge loss for Canada as a multicultural society.

Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants commonly feel that, along with their skin color, their religious identity and Islamic names have become icons of silent social and political discrimination in Canada. Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants have been transformed into essential subjects for criminal and security checks. Several of my research respondents told me, "After 9/11, they were not even called for any regular jobs; still it is happening due to their Muslim identity". In almost every social gathering (*addas*), people said that as Muslims they are afraid to face any western immigration officers in any airports. Several of my Muslim respondents in a focus group discussion conveyed the following:

Even though, in the post 9/11 contexts, we Bangladeshi Muslims did not face any physical harassment in Canada, 9/11 as a global force has broken down the whole social, cultural, and religious spectrum and norms of the Canadian society. It may not be intense like in the USA, but in Canada Muslim identity is being questioned and contested silently. Like Muslims

from other nationalities, after the 9/11 attack the Bengali Muslims' names, customs, and physical presence are considered 'distinct', 'odd', 'different', 'improper', 'special', 'not normal' and 'unfit' in multicultural Canada. Muslim religious identity has created much more uncomfortable feelings in subways stations, shopping malls, offices, restaurants, shops, and any other public spaces in Canada. We know a fraction of Muslims were part of the terrorist attack, but we do not know who actually played the game. Anyhow, we do not believe that Muslims in general were a part of that. Being a Muslim in the Western World is a mental pressure. You know, after the 9/11 attacks, as Muslims we are scared to fill out any government documents because we may be questioned for any reason.

I noted that the powerful presence of global media, the iconic image of 'ground zero' and political speeches about national unity and security in the USA, plus the construction of terrorist fears and risks by the Canadian state have together been creating complex discourses about Muslims and Islam as a religion. The phenomena of 9/11, as a discourse and as a form of hegemonic power, has created political, communal, racial, and fragmented truths about both Islam as religion and about Muslims as believers. It has also separated Islam and Muslims from the rest of the religious groups in this world. Even social, educational and business institutions are somehow convinced that "Islam is a terrorist religion, or Muslims are associated with global terrorism". A Bangladeshi Muslim mother (age 48) with two sons who is living in "Bengali Para" and who works in a non-profit community organization told me:

One of the issues that I am concerned about in Canada is that in many schools somehow teachers are convinced with the idea that a group of Muslims initiated the incident of 9/11. Based on that idea, they teach it in the classroom. The 9/11 incidents can be true or can be false, since there is lots of propaganda about the incident. But my concern is that it is a judgemental idea, and how are you sharing the idea with students in classrooms? What I have learned from one of my sons is the way the 9/11 issue was presented in his class; the Muslim students obviously are identified differently than non-Muslims within the school systems in Canada.

The political and religious context of 9/11 has not only brought a critical dimension to the global religious and racial conflicts between global Muslims and Western Christians. It has also created a powerful discourse which has broken down inner religious harmony and trust among the Bangladeshi Muslims, Hindus and Christians, and has positioned religious subjects in opposition to immigrants' common ethnic, cultural

and national identities in Canada. Bangladeshi minority Hindu and Christian immigrants in Canada have taken the incident as a discursive weapon against the Bangladeshi majority Muslims in social *addas* in Toronto. My research suggests that even though minority religious groups do not believe that Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants are involved in any kind of terrorist activities, nor that all Muslims are terrorists, they will use the 9/11 events to challenge their own historically-constructed religious minority status. Bangladeshi immigrants from the minority religious groups use the 9/11 event as a discursive and political weapon against Bangladeshi Muslims. In social gatherings and *addas* members of minority religious groups commonly blame “all Muslims as terrorist, fundamentalist, inhumane, and uncivilized”. In immigrant lives, the minority Hindus and Christian groups use information broadcast in the Western media as “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1985) to fight against Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants. Whenever Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants face potential threats by Canadians, or are challenged as potential terrorists or Muslims; minority groups feel happy because, as minority religious groups, they also faced similar or worse situations in Bangladesh.

Thus, 9/11 has become a very powerful event bringing not only phobia, tension, war, and conflict between Islamic and non-Islamic Western worlds, but also injecting communal tensions among religious groups. Many Bengali immigrants who were cultural workers, freedom fighters and progressive thinkers in Bangladesh came to Canada with hope to build a secular Bengali immigrant society in Toronto based on their common markers of ethnic and cultural identity. Several of the cultural workers in Toronto said, “We came to Canada because we could not accept cultural, political, and social Islamitization by politicians and state leaders.” However, their hopes as immigrants were shaken and fragmented, and disjointed in the religious political contexts of 9/11. As in Bangladesh, religion has become the key component of defining immigrants’ social, political and personal existence in Canada. I also observed that Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants incorporate core values of Islam, follow dietary restrictions, wear religiously accepted clothing, and share religious greetings as their “means and weapons” to resist global and western political, economic and religious pressures against Islam. The event has turned North American societies into intolerant and orthodox religious societies, and has transformed other religious groups into communal and fundamentalist groups.

Therefore, 9/11 as a global force has only brought religious tensions and antagonistic relationships between two major religious groups in the west. But it has huge impact on local and historical tensions and struggles in different local religious groups. It has changed the global mindset regarding accommodating and addressing religious differences. As a global force, 9/11 has disjointed and transformed secular and rational social and political norms into religious orthodoxy.

Immigrant Religious Names and Identity Negotiation Processes

Patterns and structures of Bengali names based on religion and gender are key markers of an individual's identity. Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants' given names clearly identify their religious, ethnic, lineage, social class and gender identities. Surnames in general reflect on lineage (*bangsho*) and status, family history, ascribed and achieved status, and *jati*-oriented social identity. Commonly, after birth, a Bangladeshi Hindu person is given a Bengali name based on his/her gender identity. For example, if a person's name is *Shri* (referred to as Mr. for a Hindu male person), *Sholil* (a Bengali word meaning a source of water, pond, or someone pleasant), and *Karmokar* (refers to a goldsmith as his occupation, caste and *Jati* identity).

If a person is male and has converted to Christianity, he generally incorporates an English Biblical name as his first name in order to make a distinct Christian religious identity along with Bengali middle and surnames. Therefore, a typical Bengali Christian name can be *Mr. Michel Sholil Karmaker*. It also can convey the message that an individual has converted from a specific religious, occupational and caste group.

In order to make distinct religious identities, in most of the cases Bengali Muslims incorporate Arabic and Urdu given names along with traditional Bengali surnames. Bengali Muslim surnames also reflect on their ethnic origins, families' migration history to Bengal (such as *Syed, Sheik, Pathan, Mughal, Khan*, etc., who mostly migrated to Bengal from central Asia), and their economic and social status (*Chowdhury, Khan, Islam, Patuary, Hussein, Mojumder, Rahman, Ahmed*, etc.). A common Bengali Muslim male name can be Mohammad (commonly used to remember the prophet Mohammad, accompanied by Mr.), *Moshiur* (which in Arabic means power of a pen), *Chowdhury* (elite social status), and a female name can be *Mosummad Sabera Sultana*. *Mosummad* is the term women use in front of their names to remember the prophet Mohammad. *Sabera*

means “early morning” in Urdu, and *Sultana* means “queen” in Arabic. Therefore, in defining proper religious identity and separating from Hindus, Bangladeshi Bengali Muslims incorporate Arabic names. Migration to Arab nations, and in response to Islamic globalization in Bangladesh, Bengali Muslims now prefer to take Arabic names only.

Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants’ given names have been contested, challenged, and negotiated in the post 9/11 religious and political contexts in Canada. My Muslim respondents informed me that, because of their Muslim names and religious identities, they are distinctly separated from “common” and “general” Canadians (i.e., accepted ethnic and Christian religious groups) who carry English names. A 55 year old male and highly educated respondent who came to Canada from Germany and who is living close to “Bangla Town” told a story about his family:

My brother-in-law came to Canada almost fifteen years ago. He settled down in Quebec, and married a French Canadian woman. They have two sons and a daughter. I think in their families they celebrate more Christian traditions than Islam. Kids do not even look like Bengalis: they are more like their mother, and they have been growing in French culture and Catholic religious traditions in Canada. But after 9/11, people left nasty messages on their home phone and threatened them because of Muslim surnames. Even his children were racially attacked on the school’s playground because their father was neither French nor Christian. So I do not know what you guys are talking about with “multiculturalism” and religious tolerance in Canada. What else can my brother-in-law do to be a multicultural Canadian person? I think he did everything, but at the end of the day, he is a Muslim, an immigrant, but can he get rid of his Muslim identity? Never!

Another respondent who is prominent painter (age 57) in Toronto told me:

Listen, as an artist, I am a global citizen. I do not care about any national, religious and ethnic boundaries. As artists, we fly like a bird, we think freely, and we belong to a free world. As a Bengali artist, my recent artistic works are all about global humanity, climate change, and multiculturalism. I have changed the subject of my art works so that I can fit in a global world, and I can establish myself as an artist in Canada. I do not paint anything connected to Bangladeshi subjects that people in Canada will find difficulty to connect with my art. Being an artist, I have submitted my art works in several art competitions in Canada. Out of a thousand artists, one of the paintings has been selected as the ten best works. I was informed that becoming a one out of ten artist with a Muslim name is very rare. You should consider yourself lucky. It has happened several times with me. Because of my Muslim name, my painting was

rejected. Even if I were to change my name because of my racial identity, I will be discriminated against; my artwork may not be given proper attention. It is hard to survive as an artist with a Muslim identity; if I were from Europe, things could be different... I do not know.

I was told that those who use Muslim names as a marker of religious identity have been challenged in finding jobs in the post 9/11 immigrant context in Canada. Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants feel pressure and discomfort when dealing with day to day events such as sending money back home, banking transactions, and showing photo IDs on many occasions in Canada. In social chat sessions (*addas*), several of my Muslim respondents who came to Canada after 9/11 told me that they will never go to the USA again, because they think they will be harassed by immigration officers. Several of my respondents told me that they would prefer to fly straight to Arab nations while they are going to Bangladesh. As Muslims, they want to avoid airport security in England or any other European country, because every day they listen to stories of how the Muslim passengers are being harassed by immigration officers in the name of “random” security checks. A Muslim male respondent (age 43) said:

I wish I could change my name. I wonder why my father made this damage in my life! Man, I have both Mohammad and Islam in my name. Whenever I put my passport on the counter of any airport, the guy who happens to serve me with a smile, looks at me and my passport several times, and probably starts thinking... holy shit ...Mohammad and Islam together...its a combo..., this guy should not be passed easily! Man, no matter what your citizenship is, and what color passport you are carrying, you have to go through several security checks because of your names; this is the must.

Another Bengali Muslim male respondent (age 53) who completed the Master’s degree at Dhaka University and was working as a drivers’ instructor in Toronto said:

Even Bangladeshi Muslim people who are married to white Canadians, living like Canadian (White) families, changed their Bengali Muslim name *Mahabub* to English name *Bob*, given the kind of English-neutral names to their off spring, for example, Lina, Rosy, Mary, and Russell, but still they are identified as Muslims and they are also separated in different ways.

However, unlike Muslim immigrants, Bangladeshi Hindu and Christian immigrants are not socially, culturally, or politically challenged and harassed for ethnic and religious names in Canada. I observed that many Bangladeshi Bengali Hindus have changed their given names in order to meld into multicultural Canadian society. Several

Hindu respondents told me that their Bengali names are hard to pronounce for English White Canadians and other ethnic groups. One of the Hindu respondents who runs a restaurant and also serves food in downtown Toronto has changed from his Bengali name “*Susanto*” to the easier to pronounce “Shun.” I found that several Hindu couples have picked only English names for their children so that they do not face problems at schools and their future lives in Canada.

I was told that several Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants have changed their birth names, and incorporated either Hindu or Christian names as a strategy to enter into Canada as refugees. In order to get easy access to “Christian Canada” and achieve economic and political security, Bangladeshi Muslims have come to Canada with Christian religious/English names, wearing Christian religious symbols and dress. I was told that several Bangladeshi Muslims have applied for political asylum to Canada as Hindu victims of religious persecution in Bangladesh. As immigrants, they have to maintain two different names and identities to maintain their original religious identity and immigrant status in Canada. In the context of globalization and transnational migration, Bangladeshi Bengali identity, based on ethnic, linguistic, and religious names, are not permanent; in order to achieve successful migration to Canada, and to avoid future ethnic, racial, and political difficulties, they re-negotiate their name-oriented identity in Canada.

Among Bangladeshi Christian immigrants in Canada, I observed that they always use their religious/Biblical/English names as a means to gain open access to economic opportunities. It is a strategic move to establish themselves as a part of the majority religious group in Canada. A Bangladeshi Bengali male Christian immigrant, Mr. *David* (English first name) *Monoranjan* (Bengali middle name) *Adhikary* (family name), and Bangladeshi Bengali female Christian immigrant *Christina Sajutee Rosario* both prefer to identify themselves in Canada as David and Christina.

For practical, political and strategic reasons, Bangladeshi Christian immigrants hide their Bengali ethnic and cultural names as markers of their local identity. First, with their Christian/English names they want to neutralize their ethnic, cultural, class and national differences as immigrants. Second, because Bangladeshi Christians commonly perceive that Canada is a Christian country, they want to uphold religious norms in a

Christian space, something they did not experience in Bangladesh. Third, they want to gain the advantage of a position in the majority religious group in contrast to Bangladeshi Muslim and Hindu immigrants. Fourth, Christian names are considered as a means to negotiate and challenge their minority religious and unequal immigrant ethnic status, and to meld into or adapt to mainstream Canadian society. Fifth, English names make them look similar to the dominant actors of Canadian society. In conclusion, Bangladeshi Christian immigrants think that Bengali local, ethnic and cultural names can be an obstacle in having access to wider economic, social and political opportunities in Canada. I noted that within transnational immigrant settings, and in the post-9/11 context, Bangladeshi immigrants' names as distinct markers of religious and political identities are contested, negotiated and re-defined in the Canadian setting. Choosing, changing, contesting, and highlighting names in immigrant settings is a complex, political, discriminatory, and strategic process for Bangladeshi Muslim, Hindu, and Christian immigrants. Bangladeshi immigrants' religion-based name identities are fluid, simultaneous and flexible in response to various global, religious, cultural and economic forces in Canada.

Images of Canada as an Immigrant Land from Religious Standpoints

From Bangladeshi Muslim, Hindu and Christian immigrants in Canada, I noted two different and dichotomous images of Canada as "immigrant land". First, respondents from all three religious groups have clearly stated that they enjoy religious freedom in Canada. One male Muslim immigrant (age 37) told me:

Being a Muslim, I think only in Canada can one practice proper Islamic life. Even in a Muslim country, you will maintain a pure religious life, but there is no way you can do it in Bangladesh. Here in Canada, you do not have to tell a lie; you can freely convey your views, and you have fewer chances to earn illegal money. In Bangladesh, there is no way you can maintain an honest life, even if you do not want to you have to do illegal things. Here in Canada, Bangladeshi Hindus do not face any economic and political pressure to celebrate religious rituals. And Bangladeshi Christians culturally and socially enjoy a favourable social and cultural environment to celebrate their religious rituals. Canada is a good place for any religious people, or even if you do not practice any religion, that is acceptable too.

Second, in contrast to the first argument, a good number of Bangladeshi immigrants from all three religious groups do not consider Canada as their authentic

religious and cultural place to live. Immigrants enjoy religious freedoms, but culture and social contexts of celebrating religious rituals are different in Canada. According to a married 46 year old woman respondent:

As religious persons, we can celebrate *Eid*, *Puja* and Christmas (*Bhado Din*) and all religious rituals in Canada, but as immigrants we do not feel the same kind of joy and happiness in Canada, the ways in which we celebrated. Everything is here but our hearts are not here. In Bangladesh we used to celebrate all religious rituals with our family members, friends, kin groups, and with the whole nation. The social and cultural contexts of religious rituals are missing in Canada. We miss style, events and ways of celebrating religious events. You know, we as Bengalis always love to visit our native villages during festival periods, and celebrate with our wider village communities. Even though we cook the same food, do the same things, and wear the same clothes, all these initiatives do not taste, feel and look the same as we did things in Bangladesh. Something is missing.....

To me, what my respondent refers to as “something” is Bengali culture, common memories and traditions, kin groups, known roads to homes, and the whole social and cultural context of upbringing in Bangladesh. Thus, having the freedom of celebrating religious rituals does not make “immigrant land” an authentic religious space to Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada. Their cultural and religious traditions, memories of homeland, and kin groups all are key components that make an authentic religious space.

I noted that even though many Christians think that “Canada is like a promised land flowing with milk and honey”, deep in their hearts they believe that it is not a Christian nation. The images of the pure religious space they used to be given by Canadian missionaries in Bangladesh have very little resemblance to what they have experienced in Canada when the Canadian state permits same-sex marriage, parents allowing their unmarried children to live together, cultural and social norms that promote alcohol use, free sex, and gay pride. Many wonder how it can be a Christian country when it allows so many “sinful” things.

In conclusion, even though Canada as a nation offers the freedom to practice religious rituals, and establish religious institutions, there are some problems for all three religious groups. The authentic religious identity and religious spaces associated with culture, tradition and common memories are being re-invented by the immigrants so they will not be uprooted totally.

“MINORITY AND MAJORITY”: FACING LOCAL, COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL DIVISION IN IMMIGRANT LIVES IN CANADA

Panday (1999: 610) argued that colonial history in British India invented a powerful discourse of majority and minority religious identity which had less connection to numerical numbers of religious groups. By looking at population distribution based on religion in Bangladesh over the last century clearly represents that the numbers can speak to the social and political realities and struggles of Bangladeshi Hindus and Christians in Bangladesh (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Percentage distribution of population of Bangladesh by religion 1901-2001

Religious groups	1901	1941	1951	1961	1974	1991	2001
Muslims	66.1%	70.3%	76.9%	80.4%	85.4%	88.3%	89.7%
Hindus	33.0%	28.0%	22.0%	18.5%	13.5%	10.5%	9.2%
Christians	?	?	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%

Source: Christopher 2006: 349

The numbers clearly show that, over the years, a significant number of Hindus have been drastically eliminated from Bangladesh. The post-independent political *Islamicization* processes in Bangladesh abolished secularism from the constitution; it introduced the “Vested Property Act” which is also commonly known as the “Enemy Property Act” in Bangladesh. Along with restoring “Islam” as a state religion, these changes have been major political factors in forcing many minority religious groups out of Bangladesh. Furthermore, the dominant and hegemonic presence of Hindu India (as Hindu dominancy), and Muslim Pakistan (as anti-liberation/radical Islamic forces) in current national political discourse in Bangladesh, are creating different subjects of Bangladeshi Hindus, Muslims and Christians within a Bangladeshi Islamic state. According to many Hindu immigrants, currently no more than 5%-6% of Hindus live in Bangladesh due to violence against religious minority groups in Bangladesh and forced migration to India.

As a microscopic minority religious group, Bangladeshi Christians were not forced into exodus in the political context of the Bengal and the India partitions the same way in which Bengali Hindus and Muslims had to relocate between India and

Bangladesh. Their lesser entitlement to state power and economy, compared to Bengali Hindus, and their lack of control over agricultural land in Bangladesh, are key reasons why Christians were viewed as a harmless minority religious group in Bangladesh. Interestingly, Bangladeshi Christians have only been severely persecuted when there was global tension between Christians and Muslims, and between the West and Arab nations. Specifically, the Rushdie crisis in England, two recent Arab wars, global wars against terrorism, and the 9/11 event in New York are global issues that have brought significant pressure on Bangladeshi Christians as a minority religious group in Bangladesh.

Globalization-led transnational migration to Canada has not neutralized, disjointed, or changed the constructed identities and ideologies of the religious minorities and majorities of Bangladeshi immigrants. This research argues that Bangladeshi immigrants' "imaginaries and nostalgia" (Appaduari 1996) of minority and majority as colonial and post-colonial political subjects (see Chakrabarty 1989, 2000; Ahmed 2000; Panday 1999) are functional and visible in shaping immigrant social organization in Canada. Immigrants' faster and frequent transnational communications between Bangladesh and Canada, and their free access to information about religious-based violence and exploitation in the homeland, also intensifies differences between the homeland-constructed religious "minority-majority" identity in lives in Canada.

Transnationalism as Means of Shaping Religious Minority and Majority Identity

I observed that faster communication technologies, such as cheap phone calls, access to the Internet and online newspapers, have provided Bangladeshi religious minority immigrants open access to information about how and why minority religious groups are raped, tortured and forced to migrate to India. Every day minority religious groups can read news about temples and houses of minority religious groups being burned. They express their fear and anger against political uprising of radical Islam in Bangladesh. By communicating with multi-ethnic Hindu religious groups in Toronto, Bangladeshi minority Hindu immigrants are able to establish closer interactions with the political uprising of *Hinduttadad* in India, and global Hinduism as a means to negotiate their minority religious status in Canada. The Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants in Canada redefine religious positions when they read in the newspapers about Bangladeshi men and women being killed by Indian border guards, or when India as a dominant Hindu nation

is grabbing most of Bangladesh's natural resources and controlling waters from all joint rivers. Despite their constant transnational interaction with the homeland, Bangladeshi immigrants are unable to go beyond colonial construction of religious minority and majority ideologies in Canada.

In my research I observed that immigrants' closer associations with religion-based national politics, establishment of homeland political party offices in Canada, and the frequent visits to Canada of homeland political and religious leaders, play key roles in shaping Bangladeshi immigrant communities based on pro-Islamic religious and ideological norms in Canada. In comparison to the other minority religious groups, as a majority, Bangladeshi Muslims have enjoyed opportunities in Bangladesh inaccessible to others. By maintaining transnational communication and by transferring their economic, social, religious, and political capital from Bangladesh to Canada, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants again have established their majority dominance with numerical numbers and economic and social power. Ironically, I observed that Bangladeshi Christian immigrants' strong interactions with Canadian churches, exposure to the dominant Christian culture and traditions in Canada, and the post 9/11 global political activism of Christianity have transformed them into orthodox religious subjects and has provided them some space to act like members of the majority Christian group in Canada. As with Bangladeshi Hindus, due to lack of entitlement in the homeland economy, politics, and power, Bangladeshi Christian immigrants still hold a minority position within their own ethnic and cultural communities in Canada. My observation is that Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants are still key movers and shakers of Bangladeshi immigrant social, political, and religious organizations due to their networks, transferred capital, and close transnational association with homeland power blocks.

My research has led me to conclude that transnational migration as a process, and living in minority conditions (religiously, culturally and politically) in Canada, have caused Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants to learn to become more reflexive and self-critical regarding their own dominant and powerful majority positions in Bangladesh. Several of my Muslim research respondents expressed to me: "Brother, being Muslims as well as immigrants in Canada, this is the first time in our lives we have felt the pains of a minority religious group; we never felt this feeling in Bangladesh". In the post-9/11

global political religious context in Canada, Bangladeshi Muslims face more ethnic and religious discrimination than their Bengali Hindu and Christian counterparts.

I noticed that, after migration to Canada and living in a multicultural society, both Bangladeshi Hindu and Christian immigrants are still struggling and negotiating their minority ideology and norms. In their immigrant lives they have failed to come out from the minority syndrome that is from their colonial and post-colonial political and religious histories in Bangladesh. As minority religious groups, they were not given much opportunity to show their personal skills or leadership potential. As religious minorities, they used to hide themselves from national events and public activities to keep their lives hassle-free. Following the same ideological position, both Bangladeshi Hindu and Christian immigrants in Canada are reluctant to be visible, to participate, and to take the lead in organizing any national, cultural, and social events. Because of their minority status, in the immigrant setting in Canada they feel less compulsion to perform in core Bangladeshi national events in Canada too. In this context, my research suggests that, as minority religious groups, their lack of economic, religious, and political entitlement and control over national institutions in their homeland makes them reluctant to be visible again in their immigrant lives in Canada. I discuss religious minority identities along with class and transnationalism in the following section.

Colonial Imaginaries in Global Transnational Diasporic Contexts

Globalization-led migration to Canada as a force has not melded, disjointed or up-rooted religious-based majority and minority identities and ideologies among the Bangladeshi Muslims, Hindus or Christians. A Muslim male respondent (age 50) conveyed his feelings this way:

Being a Bengali Hindu or Muslim, it is not possible for us to forget and ignore the fact which is injected in our blood. In our mind, it comes all the time who is Hindu and who is Muslim, who has come from a minority or majority religious group. This religious-oriented separated Bengali identity was politically created in colonial India, and the legacy has been continuing in our day-to-day lives. Actually, the British were the culprits; they were successful in dividing and separating us along religious lines. Our political leaders could not understand their diplomacy. Before leaving India, they destroyed us; historically we did not have any problems among different religious groups. But now our political leaders use these religious differences in order to get votes. We were victims of colonial politics.

Another male Muslim respondent (age 49) said:

A Muslim in India cannot forget religious and political violence, and discrimination against him that started officially in 1947. How come a Bangladeshi Hindu forgets his/her political and economic exploitation in Bangladesh as a minority? If a Hindu family has a beautiful daughter, and the family has owned enough agricultural land, and a business in Bangladesh, that family will face pressures by the majority groups. Both in 1947 during India and Pakistan separation, and later during our Independent war, people had to leave their ancestral homeland because of their religious identity. We did not think that he/she is a Bengali, a son/daughter of our land, but we identified ourselves as Hindu and Muslim, minority and majority, patriot and enemy.

A male Hindu Bangladeshi immigrants who identified himself as an “atheist” said:

It is not possible to get rid of these minority and majority ideologies from our thoughts and minds. It is a kind of cancer; colonial politics injected the cancer in our blood and separated us as Hindus, and Muslims, minority and majority... it's all bullshit you know. Even if we mix with different religious groups in our social lives, our subconscious minds tell us we are Hindu and that guy is a Muslim or a Christian. In deeper levels of our mind, these issues are there. Migration to Canada will not change anything in us; probably our children will think differently, but we, as first generation immigrants from Bangladesh, we want to die with all these issues in Canada. You know, after death even if we go to heaven or hell, we will probably ask for separate territories for Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. You know what? I want to pee on religion, it's all bullshit; if Lenin had been born in Bangladesh, he had to be either a Muslim, a Hindu or a Christian; he died with either a member of majority or minority groups; he had to be a supporter of BNP or Awami League, and there was no alternative; he had to live between two opposite poles.

In immigrant settings, personal and social interactions with different religious groups are guided by immigrants' lived experiences in Bangladesh as members of either minority or majority religious groups. The political and ideological separations are deeply rooted among the Bangladeshi immigrant communities. Immigrants from minority religious groups always recall their religious and political status in Bangladesh in order to defend their current positions in Canada. One of my Hindu respondents said, “Muslims are the same in Bangladesh and in Canada; in Canada, they act like they are secular, and they did not do anything wrong against us; being Hindus we do not have much to do with them”. Whenever I asked Muslim respondents about social, cultural and political interactions between different religious groups in Canada, I heard a very common as well as political statement from them. Most of my respondents initially told me, “We do not

have any tension here between Muslims and Hindus like in Bangladesh; everybody does their own things”. This very liberal global view that is enshrined in Canadian laws as multiculturalism and individual rights is used to hide their roles in Bangladesh as a majority religious group.

In order to define their ethnic and religious positions in Canada, I observed that Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants identified themselves as a minority religious group in comparison to white, English-speaking Christian settlers. Therefore, the ideology of religious minority and majority are continuing to play a significant role in building communal, distinct, and separated social spaces in multicultural Canada.

Memories as a Means of Shaping Minority and Majority Identity in Canada

The memories that Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants brought from their homeland either as members of a minority or a majority religious group play important roles in creating their religious identity and space in Canada. I noted that, as members of minority religious groups, the immigrant always remembers his or her political, religious and social struggles as well as episodes of discrimination they faced in their homeland, (*desh*), thus shaping their national identity. All of my research respondents from minority religious groups have said that their fears and uncertainties as members of religious minority groups forced them to migrate to Canada. A male respondent (age 65) from the Bangladeshi Hindu community in Toronto shared his views:

Historically, being a Hindu in Bangladesh, I was created as a minority; I am recognized as an enemy, and an untrustworthy person. You know, my father was a freedom fighter, and my uncle was killed in the Independence war in 1971. I was told how Hindus were killed and their houses were burnt during the war. After all these sacrifices for our motherland, as Hindus we are considered as second-class citizens in independent Bangladesh. Commonly we are told that India is our homeland, even if our family did not migrate to India, but two of my elder sisters had to move to India at one point of their lives because they were beautiful Hindu girls in my small town in Bangladesh. After the 2001 election in Bangladesh, when I read all these stories how Bangladeshi Hindu girls, women, and young children were raped in front of their family members by the fanatic Muslims in Bangladesh, and thousands of Hindu families had to migrate to India, being a lucky Hindu in Canada, can I be so easy with my Muslim neighbours in downtown Toronto? I know all Muslims are not bad, still there are good Muslims all over the world; but being a minority Hindu, I have to see the whole picture of religious discrimination in Bangladesh.

Dada, I have two daughters; I can only imagine the pain of a father whose daughters were raped, was not able to go to justice, but forced to leave his village and go to India. I cannot forget my family history, my father's struggles with my two sisters. Even I was actively involved in progressive politics in Bangladesh, but in Canada I have become only a Hindu again, that's it... Because in Bangladesh and in Canada, at the end of the day I am a Hindu and I am also a minority...

A Baptist Christian respondent (age 55) shared his memories:

I worked in a Christian missionary organization in Bangladesh, and lived in a small Christian neighbourhood in Dhaka. I did not feel that much personal threat as a Christian in Bangladesh because I always maintained a low profile personality (*nijaykay jamala thekay dura raktam*), and was not actively involved in any political activities. However, when the first Gulf War started in 1990, every Friday an *Imam* of a local mosque preached against all Christians, and against America. One evening thousands of *Madrasha* students gathered with torches, and they were chanting against America and Christians. As a closer enemy of these fanatic Muslims, I got frightened, and in the next morning I sent my family to our native village for several months. We were threatened and we feared for any kind of loss. Still, I remember during this time that police and army surrounded our church to provide us security. They searched each person who had come to pray at Church in Sunday service. That day I decided to move from Bangladesh because I felt things are going to get worse in the near future. As a minority Christian, I did not see any hope for my two sons in Bangladesh. I did not even think that their lives were secure in Bangladesh. I decided to migrate to a Christian country where I can live my life peacefully. I did not want to go to USA for several reasons, so then I came to Canada with my family.

In contrast to the Bangladeshi minority religious immigrants in Canada, members of the majority Muslim religious group have brought different perspectives and memories to their diasporic lives in Canada. Their memories of the homeland are connected to the more glorious history of Bangladesh, such as victory in the Independence War. They also remember their freedom to practise religious rituals, their special foods, and their memories of village life, homes, businesses, social status, power, authority, and freedom. A respondent (age 48) from a Muslim immigrant community and who works as a manager in a big retail store in Toronto shared his memories of Bangladesh as follows:

There are so many things I miss in Bangladesh – my childhood friends, my friends from university, my relatives and family members. We had a good life in Bangladesh; still we have a family business, garment industry, own houses in Dhaka, and a nice house in our rural village. Being a

Muslim, I miss celebration of Ramadan in Bangladesh; I miss different varieties of *Iftar* (foods used to eat upon breaking fast), and the whole atmosphere of Holy *Eid* in our country. In Canada, I can practice my religious rituals but not like in Bangladesh. The most I miss in Canada is celebrating *Eid* festivals with families and friends in Bangladesh. Every year, all my family members, uncles, and cousins who live in Dhaka used to go to our native village in *Nokhali* (one of the 64 districts in Bangladesh) by car. I miss the journey. You know, our family used to sacrifice ten cows each year during the *Eid* ceremonies, and we distributed meat to the poor in our village. Here I celebrate *Eid*, but not the same way I did in Bangladesh. I do not feel the same feelings and joys in Canada. I feel that I am mentally, culturally and socially poor and excluded in Canada. I am a minority here for many reasons.

Therefore, memories for religious minorities and memories from Bangladesh are different based on religious identities, entitlement to resources, and social positions in Bangladesh. I found that by sharing and nurturing common memories with fellow immigrants, Bangladeshi immigrants have created distinct and separated religious and communal spaces in Canada. In social chat sessions (*addas*), Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants memorize and share stories about their glorious religious, familial and social lives, attendance at local mosques, *Eid* prayer in their local village, and their joyful and authentic moments in various social and religious festivals. They acknowledge that they will never find equivalent experiences here in Canada. Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants remember their personal struggles as a minority religious group linking it to their present status as minority immigrants. By memorizing and sharing their stories and memorizing their pre-migration lives in Canada, both immigrant groups try to create religious and social bonds, spaces and associations that are more communal, religious and distinct. It is also a mechanism for them to re-organize their religious identity and existence in their diasporic immigrant lives in Canada. By memorizing stories, immigrants have tried to juxtapose images of their lives connected to two nations, but they all speak a single story of being either a member of a minority or a majority.

Social Discourses of Religious Identity among Bangladeshi Immigrant Groups

The distrust, fear, and antagonistic relationships that flourished and were infused into the minds and ways of life for Muslims, Christians and Hindus in Bangladesh are still active in their immigrant lives in Canada today. Immigrants' close interaction with the faster *Islamization* in Bangladesh, together with global religious tensions, are also

magnifying distrust and tensions between each of the different religious groups. However, I noticed that despite their religious differences, when immigrants find common interests in their lives in the foreign land, such as common hobbies (gardening, fishing, playing music, drinking, playing poker or cards, and so on), their different religious identities are not such an issue in communicating with each other. In many cases, if they attended the same schools in Bangladesh, and were supporters of the same political ideologies, relationships are able to cross religious boundaries as well as minority and majority identities among the Bangladeshi immigrant groups. It all depends on the depth of the personal relationship when crossing religious boundaries.

I observed that immigrants from different religious groups are able to maintain good relationships if they studied at the same academic institutions, belonged to the same political parties and migrated from the same regions of Bangladesh. A Muslim and a Hindu can be good friends in Canada if they have come from the same town (*desh er bari ek gram e*) and use the same local Bengali dialects in Canada. I noticed that immigrants from different religious identities are able to work together when there is a monetary issue where both can benefit from the support of the other.

Even though immigrants from both minority and majority groups maintain generally civil interactions with their fellow countrymen (*sadiron vodotar shomporko*), when one goes deeper one finds that the structures of the Bangladeshi immigrant society are fragmented according to their religious identities, constructed ideologies, and carried memories. One of my respondents said, “Difference between Hindus and Muslims are like oil and water; you cannot mix together. It is a painful statement; our hearts are shaped like that (*tel ar pani, kokhono mix kora jay na, kub badoner kotha, kintu amader redoy kay ei vavay toiray kora hoyechay*).”

Several statements showed the common understanding and constructed discourses about Bangladeshi Hindus commonly believed by Bangladeshi Muslims: “Bangladeshi Hindu brothers are comfortable to maintain good relationships with Indians (*Dada der sob kathir Indian der shatay*)”. Three of my respondents told me: “It is hard to trust Hindus anywhere in this world, no matter whether in Bangladesh or Canada. As a Muslim you will never get the real truth from their mouths; they will only convey it to other Hindus”. Among the Muslim groups, there is a saying, “They say that they are

going to send money from Canada to Bangladesh to build a house, but later we find out that they bought an apartment in India (*Oder kay bishawash kora ja na, Ora bolay ek koray arayk, bolay taka patachi desh a gor thik korar jonno, poray deka jai India tay gor toiri koraychay*)". Some of my respondents told me that they generally know what Hindus do: ... they make money in Bangladesh, but save it in India. They think that Bangladeshi Hindu people are neither patriotic nor good citizens of Bangladesh. One of my respondents also commented: "Even many Hindu and Muslim immigrants do business together, and lend money to each others, but deep in their hearts, they feel some kind of distrust and fear of each other as they did in Bangladesh".

Of my 25 Muslim respondent families, 16 of them do not know any Bangladeshi Christians in Canada. Out of twenty-two researched Muslim families, twelve of them said:

Bangladeshi Christian immigrants have become more Christian in Canada than in Bangladesh because they think that Canada is a Christian country, which is not true. They hardly get involved in any Bengali social, cultural, national, and political events arranged by Bengali immigrant communities.

Ten of my Muslim and seven of my Hindu research families believe that "Bangladeshi Christians get economic and legal support from church organizations".

In the same vein, Bangladeshi Christians and Hindus are very critical and fearful about the huge numbers of the Bangladeshi Muslims migrating to Canada. Their history of being minority religious groups in Bangladesh does not bring back pleasant memories of Muslims in Bangladesh as neighbours, office colleagues, and state leaders. In addition, current terrorist attacks in their homeland and many other parts of world, as well as Islamic militant uprisings in Bangladesh, make them suspicious, negative and fearful not only about Muslims from Bangladesh but also of Muslims from all over the world. A Hindu male respondent (age 58) who lives in Mississauga said:

You will hardly find liberal Muslims in this world. You may think that your Bangladeshi Muslim friend is an educated, progressive, moderate and cultural Muslim; you are wrong. Just bring a religious issue into your discussion; you will see his/her response. At the end of the day, he will sound like a religious person, only a Muslim. No matter what is a Muslim's educational background, perceptions about secularism, minority rights and religious liberty, at the end of the day all are Muslim? That is their identity.

A Catholic Christian woman respondent (age 43) expressed her views about the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants who are the majority religious group in Bangladesh:

There is a saying in Bengali: all parts of a ginger are connected to a single root (*Roshoner gora sob ek Jaygay*). In the name of almighty Allah (*Narayar Tagbir Allaha Uihakbar*) they are all united under the same religious umbrella. Muslims in Canada are like “camouflaged”; you will never know what their plan is in the future for this country and for their religious groups. You know, Canada is receiving many Muslim immigrants and refugees from all over the world. Now you cannot say even “Merry Christmas” in Canada, because it offends other believers; you have to be politically correct and say “Happy Holidays”. No more Christmas trees in schools. It is totally wrong and it’s all bullshit. Do you think that the Muslim countries will change the names of their religious rituals *Eid* or *Ramadan* to make others feel good? We do not think so. The Canadian government should think much about Muslim immigrants; otherwise, they will have to pay in the long run. Freedom is important but not for all, I would say.

Bangladeshi Hindu respondents also express critical comments about possible Muslim uprisings in Canada. They express fears similar to minority Bangladeshi Christians. A male Hindu respondent (age 45) said:

What is the point of coming to Canada if all the Muslims from Bangladesh migrate to Canada? We have left the country because of them; now they are all here with full spirit. To me, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants are way more radical and fundamental compared to my fellow Muslim neighbours in Bangladesh. If you make a phone call to any Bangladeshi Muslim family in Canada, no matter who calls them, you will hear a common reply from the other side: “*Assalamualaikum*” (Arabic for “peace be unto you”); even in public spaces they deliberately say “*Assalamualaikum*” to each other, and also to different religious groups in order to uphold their religious identity. In Canada, it should be English, or being a Bengali person, you can greet individuals with Bengali traditions, but no, that is not happening here among most of the Muslim immigrants. They glorify their Muslim religious identities and traditions, and this is the problem with our fellow Muslim brothers. They are Muslims in Canada, not Bengali in many ways.

Several of my Hindu respondents argued that the Danforth and Victoria park areas have been transformed into a “little Bangladesh” with the development of Bangladeshi businesses, cultural organizations, groceries stores, and restaurants. There are also increasing numbers of mosques, visual images of Bangladeshi Muslim men and women wearing the *Hijab* and *Burkha* as well as signs for *halal* meat stores. One of my Hindu

respondents who came to Canada in the early 1960s spoke from his long experiences in Canada as an immigrant: “Both in Bangladesh and Canada, I have found Bengali Muslims as only Muslims; Bengali secular norms are missing among them (*Muslim der ei kanay o Muslim ei pilam*)”. Seven male Hindu respondents added:

In Canada Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants do not bother to build a closer relationship with Pakistanis who killed two million Bengalis and raped half a million women in the 1971 Independent War, because they belong to a common Muslim brotherhood (*Ummah*) but they hate common Hindus from India and also from Bangladesh for strange reasons. So how come we get along with them?

I observed that Bangladeshi Hindu and Christian immigrant groups in Toronto are more connected to each other than to Muslim Bangladeshi immigrants because they share common social and cultural spaces. Several Christian respondents pointed out in a group discussion that, “as religious minorities, both Hindus and Christians were persecuted in Bangladesh, and we have common issues to share; therefore, we are more comfortable with each other”. In the same vein, in a focus group discussion, Hindu immigrants commonly agreed that:

Bangladeshi Hindus and Christians have much commonality among each other, for example, our food patterns, cooking style, culture, tradition of dress and ornaments, and musical forms in celebrating religious rituals (*Kirtton*). Even our kinship terminologies are the same. For example, both Bangladeshi Hindus and Christians call our mother “*maa*”, it is a Bengali term, but our Muslim friends use *amma* for mother, which is a foreign language (Urdu)”. We say *jol* for water; they it call *pani*; we do not find that many differences if we visit each other’s families. We call each other’s mother’s *mashi*, but not *khallamma*. We think that most of the Christians converted from Hindu backgrounds but they still use Bengali terms in their day-to-day lives. Our Muslim brothers use many Arabic and Urdu traditions.

Both Hindu and Christian immigrants in Toronto said:

At the beginning when there were not many Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto, we used to hang around with all religious groups, but many of our Muslim friends started practicing Islam more fundamentally, and their wives started wearing *hijab*. Therefore, both parties are not comfortable to see each other, and on top of that now we have plenty of immigrants from our own ethnic and religious groups in Toronto, so we do not bother to mix with other religious groups. And the same things are happening to our old Muslim friends.

I noticed that social invitations and sharing food among different religious groups is strongly influenced by separate religious identities and traditions. I observed that occasionally a Muslim immigrant family will invite a couple of Hindu families over for dinner at their place. Generally, Muslim friends are not invited on that day because foods that are authentic for Hindus are the only ones prepared. It is commonly called a “Hindu night” because no beef items will be served. There will be lots of fish and vegetable items. It is commonly perceived that Hindus prefer to eat vegetables, fish and sweet items, while Muslims prefer meat.

Following the same religiously constructed norms on an evening of a weekend, Bengali Hindu immigrants may invite only Muslim friends over for dinner. I did not notice whether Christian families in Toronto invited only a couple of Muslim or a couple of Hindu immigrant families (i.e., not both together) to their home for social gatherings. In most cases they invite both Christians and Hindu families together. I found in several social gatherings that only one or two families, or none, from Muslim religious background are invited when Christian immigrant families are celebrating wedding anniversaries or birthday parties. I found there are strategic and micro-level separations among different religious groups among the Bangladeshi immigrants. These are guided by broader separate identities and ideologies constructed in the colonial and post-colonial political histories of Bangladesh.

TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION AND REPRODUCTION OF COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL CLASS IDENTITY

Despite the complex socio-cultural interactions and separation between minority and majority religious groups in Toronto, the Bangladeshi immigrants’ class identities and class ideologies have been shaped by the global fetish consumption consciousness (Friedman 2004), colonial enlightenment and English educational policy oriented “*Bhadralok* class” perceptions (Chakrabarty 1989, 2000), and ideologies of occupational “*salariat*” class (Alavi 1989). On one hand, I noticed that Bangladeshi immigrants’ achieved and ascribed economic, social, and political status is re-rooted in their immigrant lives due to their frequent transnational communications between two nations. On the other hand, like many scholars, I observed that by entering the Canadian labour market as unskilled and ethnic workers, the Bangladeshi immigrants in general have

become part of “under-class, redundant, ethnic, gendered, and global ad hoc” subjects (Robinson 2001; Kabir 1990; Parreñas 2005; Gardner 1995; Ong 1995). Generally Bangladeshi immigrants think that immigration to Canada has caused an overall class degradation. Several of my respondents think that their underclass social positions and lack of economic, social and political entitlement as immigrants to Canada also brings some sense of “loss of personal identity, self-esteem, power, and authority”. Among the economically successful immigrant classes, I noticed that their perception of class identity is not always connected only to current economic success but also to their cultural and social perceptions of class and levels of material consumption.

Ideas of Class among the Bangladeshi Immigrants in Canada

Based on my socio-economic survey data in 2007-8 among Bangladeshi immigrant families in Toronto, I found that 10.7% of my research respondents identified themselves as belonging to the upper class, 17.3% to the middle class, and 26.7% to lower middle class status in Canada (see Table 6.2). In looking at their class positions in Canada, I focus mostly on whether immigrants have a permanent job, whether they own their houses, where their residence was located, their pre-migration family and social history, and their occupations. I also looked closely at their educational status for understanding my research respondents’ class identity. I did not ask questions regarding their annual income in Canada. In my research I relied on statements of my respondents in regards to their class position in Canada. According to a settlement worker, 50% of Bangladeshi immigrants and 90% of all new immigrants live below the poverty line according to Canadian standards. Therefore, even though 32% of my respondents said that they belong to the lower class, the percentage could be higher. I found that many of my respondents are confused about whether they should define their class identities based on their economic, social, and political class status in Bangladesh or their current conditions in Canada. It is also interesting to see that 8% of respondents said they do not believe in class as a marker of identity. Four of my respondents also opposed the question because in Canada they believe theoretically that no one is judged by their economic status.

Table 6.2 Class Perceptions among the Bangladeshi immigrant families in Toronto, 2007 and 2008

Self-Identification of Social Class	Number of Respondent Families	%
Upper	8	10.7
Middle	13	17.3
Lower middle	20	26.7
Lower	24	32.0
Do Not Believe in Social Class	6	8.0
No Response	4	5.3
Total	75	100.0

I came to the conclusion that many of my respondents have identified their current class position and identity by comparing their positions in relation to other Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto. Their ideas about wealth, ideology, norms, and educational status have followed them from the homeland. Therefore, the Bangladeshi immigrants' perceptions of class identity are also religious, local, colonial, and transnational in nature.

Colonial Class Ideologies in Immigrant Contexts in Canada

Globalization-led transnational migration as a force and a process has re-established ideologies and identities of Bengali gentleman (*Bhadralok shrani* or *babu* culture) class (see Hardy 1972; Chakrabarty 1989, 2000; Ahmed 1989, 2000) and “salarial class” (Alavi 1989) among the Bangladeshi immigrant groups in Canada. The British English education system in colonial Bengal shaped new professional and occupational classes (e.g., bureaucrats, clerks, typists, accountants, lawyers, surveyors and many others), successfully separating them from the previous land-based class

structures. By following the same norms, the upper and middle class Bangladeshi English-educated professionals who come to Canada as immigrants want only desk jobs, such as administration or managerial tasks in offices. Based on their colonial and national bureaucratic imaginations and nostalgias, they want to work at jobs that allow them nice office space with chairs, tables, telephones, and now computers.

On several occasions, five of my research respondents invited me to visit their offices in high-rise buildings in downtown Toronto to show their working environment, their own office spaces, job status and class identity. They feel that they have proved they are different than the many other Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada. Due to their mental and cultural structures they do not like to take jobs that require physical work or that are connected to the land. In various social chat sessions (*addas*), I noticed that in order to prove their occupation-oriented class status, Bangladeshi immigrants say: “In my job I do not have to do any physical labour, and do not need to carry stuff; I scan bills, or thank God, after many years of struggle in Canada, working here and there, finally I have got a desk job, an office job, and a 9 to 5 job”. One of my research respondents showed me his identity card as a medical doctor, which was issued to him after passing several exams in Canada.

I noticed that Bangladeshi immigrants feel that getting a “government job” (federal or provincial) gives them the opportunity to move up in the class structure. It is thought of as “up-casting”. No matter what positions they have in government offices, Bangladeshi immigrants proudly share visiting/business cards with others in order to highlight their achievements, new status and identities as government employees in Canada. A male respondent (age 45) who came from a rich family in Bangladesh and completed the Master degree in Science from a public university in Bangladesh said:

I worked as a manager for many years in retail stores. But there was no life; any time you could get a call to go to work. Even during my holidays I had to go to the store. There was no family life and no social life for me. I could earn more than 30 thousand yearly that I am making now as a government employee. But you know, now I feel different, and a bit relaxed. I can tell others that I am working for the Government of Canada. I am feeling more settled and more secure with my job.

Among the Bangladeshi immigrants government jobs are considered to be more worthwhile, permanent, and a symbol of status and power compared to working for any

private organization. The elite status of “government jobs/civil bureaucrats” was invented within the British colonial administration, and this same norm has been transferred to the post-colonial and national government in Bangladesh. Several of my respondents who had worked as bureaucrats, engineers, professors, and doctors in government institutions in Bangladesh would never consider their current job status in Canada as equivalent to their previous jobs in Bangladesh. Among Bangladeshi immigrants, social prestige, authority, and the perceived amount of power, along with rate of pay, are key factors in the attractiveness of a job.

I observed that, like the perceptions of British colonial English education, any degrees in Canadian community colleges, vocational institutions, and universities have created new identities and class status among the Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Canada. In order to gain respectable status and potential access to job markets, young immigrants are keen to attend any academic institution in Canada. Bangladeshi immigrants who have achieved any academic degrees and diplomas in Canada always try to separate themselves from others who do not have Canadian educational qualifications. In several of my respondents’ houses, graduation photos are on display in their living rooms as markers of their achieved status in Canada. Therefore, still in global contexts, Canadian English education is shaping new professionals and nobility like the British colonial system did in Colonial Bengal.

Colonial English education systems in Bengal brought modernized, westernized and secular social and cultural norms to the Bengali *Bhadralok* and *Salarit* classes. In the immigrant context, Bangladeshi immigrants who have studied in Canadian academic institutions have become the new global *Salarit* class in Canada (i.e., professional immigrants such as computer engineers, software designers, business management professionals, financial brokers, settlement workers, doctors and any other professionals). However, they are more religious and orthodox in their ideology. I noticed that successful professional Bangladeshi immigrants, regardless of their religious identities, are key promoters of religious norms and practices in their diasporic lives in Canada. Many of my respondents believe that it is God’s grace (*Allaha er mahirbani, Eisshor er ashirbad*) that has brought their economic and professional success in Canada.

Young, English-educated professional Bangladeshi immigrants' wives and daughters maintain religious customs, regularly visit temples and churches, and actively practice religious rituals as their way of life. I found that newly graduated Bangladeshi immigrants got jobs and married young girls from the homeland. They convinced their wives to wear the *burkha* and *hijab*, or to attend church services, or pray to goddesses each morning. Secularist and English norms are not totally absent among the Bangladeshi immigrants, however, Bangladeshi professionals and English-educated immigrants are very serious about incorporating religious norms and rituals as key markers of their cultural, religious and "noble class" identities. Even though globalization-led transnational migration has successfully transplanted colonial economic class structures and occupational norms, ideologically the Bangladeshi immigrants belong to camps of anti-modernist, anti-western, and pro-religious groups. However, they support the global consumer culture whole-heartedly.

Transnationalism and Perceptions of Economic Class Identity

Like many other South Asian immigrants, 90% of new Bangladeshi immigrants who are all staying in high-rise buildings in Crescent Town and Victoria Park areas are living below the poverty line, according to Canadian standards (see Ghosh 2007). According to a social worker, in comparison to other South Asian immigrant groups, Bangladeshi immigrant's lack of English proficiency, gendered ideologies, patriarchal and religious norms, cultural shyness, and less awareness of existing government support system are all reasons for poorer economic outcomes in Canada.

I observed that Bangladeshi immigrants do not often compare their class status with other ethnic groups. Bangladeshi immigrants want to define and compare their class positions with their own kin and ethnic groups both in their homeland and in Canada. Bangladeshi immigrants' class identity and position in Canada do not only depend on their current household income, consumption patterns, and household composition; they also define their class identity by focusing on their pre-migration social and economic status in Bangladesh, *bangsho*, lineage, and professional identity, educational qualifications and political associations.

Bangladeshi immigrant writers, poets, musicians, artists, and filmmakers who migrated from Bangladesh, and who are not that economically well off according to

Canadian standards, are respected class-wise among Bangladeshi immigrant groups. Most educated Bangladeshi immigrants do not consider themselves as belonging to lower class positions based on their annual income. At the same time, I noticed that several of the Bangladeshi “global elites”, and “transnational bourgeoisie” (Friedman 2004) have transferred significant amounts of wealth to Canada and they have bought million dollar mansions in Toronto. These elite immigrants are considered to be the rich classes among Bangladeshi immigrants, but they do not always gain elite social status due to their “illegal” transfers of wealth. They are an invisible class in immigrant settings in Canada.

Global Migration: Contradictions between Global Economic Class and Local Social Status

Migration to Canada has upgraded immigrants’ economic status in Canada as well as in Bangladesh. Being members of the global consumer classes, many Bangladeshi immigrants are driving expensive cars, living in mansions, moving frequently to new neighbourhoods, watching big-screen TV’s and taking vacations and trips to various global cities. I also observed that Bangladeshi immigrants are working two jobs in order to fulfill their “American dreams” in Canada. However, perceptions of economic class and social status are two different issues among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada. One female respondent shared her story:

Case Study 3: Anonna, Age 32

I was born and raised in a lower middle class family at a small town in Bangladesh. I did not gain that much higher education in Bangladesh. My parents and guardians had arranged a marriage with an immigrant person when I was writing degree examinations (Bachelor of Arts) in Bangladesh. My uncle called me and asked me to come to Dhaka. I had to go to Dhaka in between two examinations, and got engaged with my husband. Next day I went back to my home to finish my final exam. Two days later I went to Dhaka again for our wedding ceremony. Everything went so fast; it was beyond my imagination. You know (laughing), I had failed to pass the exam that year, but I got married with a man who came from Canada. I passed the exam the following year when I was alone in Bangladesh with my in-laws. My husband had just 15 days to

get married. I got just seven days to stay with him just after our wedding. In those seven days, I had to visit my husband's family, his village, and later stayed in my mother-in-law's house for several months before I came to Canada.

My husband is almost 18 years senior to me. At the beginning, I was not that happy because of age difference, but it is normal in arranged marriage, and especially marriage between a local girl and *bideshi chalay* (a foreign boy). But it is okay now anyways. He is a good person and we have kids so life is different now. After one and a half years of our wedding in Bangladesh, I came to Canada and started living with my husband. I worked hard to learn English and capture the Canadian accent. I become familiar with Canadian culture, weather, dress, food, and fashion. Now I am a mother of three, I am married; I have a job, Canadian passport, full G driving license, and social security. If I lived in Bangladesh, I could not even dream to buy a house where I am living now. We have an expensive car, big screen TV, life insurance for my family members, and educational plans for my kids. You know, I do not have any worries for food, shelter and security anymore like I had in my childhood and teenage years in Bangladesh. I have also supported my natal family members to build a new house, and bought a color TV for our home in Bangladesh. I send some money occasionally to my parents and family members whenever they need something. Being a girl, I probably could not do it if I lived in Bangladesh.

We have sponsored one of my brothers; let's see whether he can come to join us. My husband also has sent money to Bangladesh when my in-laws need something. We would not be able to do anything if we lived in Bangladesh. Every year we go for a vacation anywhere in Canada or America. Last year we went to New York, to Maryland, and to Washington DC. Every two years we visit Bangladesh. So far we are doing well in Canada. I would say personally and as a family, Canada has

provided me a lot. As an Immigrant, I have changed my previous class status and achieved a new class in Canada.

Compared to normal economic outcomes in Bangladesh, most of the Bangladeshi immigrants have gained economic security in Canada. This is also referred to as “up casting”, a means of up-grading social stratification and economic class status. Several respondents have also argued that migration to Canada has increased their economic stability but sadly they have lost the honour, authority, and respect they enjoyed as members of particular occupational groups in Bangladesh. One of my respondents said, “by driving taxi, selling fish and vegetables in Bengali grocery stores, selling houses and cars, filing tax returns, or doing anything to survive in Canada, somehow we are making money, but we are still invisible in Canada”.

Based on social and cultural scales of class identity constructed in Bangladesh, a discussion group (*adda*) of Bangladeshi immigrants made this point:

We can eat three times day, we have shelter to live, and we have health cards to go to hospital, but as immigrants we are unknown in this country, we do not have relatives and friends who are going to recognize us in a foreign and an unknown country. Recognition is important; otherwise you will not feel good. As immigrants we have lost our social and cultural recognition that we had in Bangladesh. We have lost our status, respect, and our total identity. Here in Canada, anyone can buy a house, drive a car, have a cell phone, and eat in a restaurant once or twice in a month; nobody cares about these issues. Even if you drive a BMW it does not make that much difference among the white Canadians. Money is important, probably that’s why we all came to Canada, but it is not everything for human lives that we think.

Another male respondent (age 50) who is a taxi driver in Toronto said, “In Canada, our class status is like a rickshaw pedaler (*Rickshaw wala*) in Bangladesh, who does not have any certainty in his life. We are just riding our rickshaws on different highways and byways in Canada, and we still dream one day we will return to our village and get acknowledged”.

Scholars have also argued that transnational migration downgrades immigrants’ class status to ethnic, gendered and non-permanent workers in global markets. One of my respondents said, “In Bangladesh I was a civil bureaucrat, and here in Canada I am a day labourer (*achilam amla in Bangaldesh, and hoilam kamla in Canada*)”. Among the

Bangladeshi immigrants, acquiring a “dream job” helps them to regain their class and social identity even though they are still immigrants in Canada. A government officer who migrated from Bangladesh said to me, “Until today I am lost; I did not have any identity. I have not received a job that I am supposed to have in Canada. If I could live in Bangladesh, I could be a high official. I think that there is huge class degradation among the Bangladeshi immigrants”.

I found that most of my research respondents who are employed in Canada are not working at the type of job they had in Bangladesh. This is a major factor in class degradation, with loss of identity and respect among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada.

Bangladeshi immigrants’ class perceptions are not only connected to their economic status, but are also connected to historical and cultural constructions of occupations and jobs, mechanisms of power and authority, social re-organization, education, and social status. When Bangladeshi immigrants feel they cannot achieve status in their new Canadian lives equivalent to what they had in their former lives, including increased financial power, many feel that they have lost their class, their status, and their identities as immigrants in Canada. See Table 6.3 for a summary of before and after migration employment and respondents’ perceptions of associated status.

Global Migration and Disjuncture of Local Class

Migration to Canada as a global process has contested local class-based norms, identities, and status that Bangladeshi immigrants have brought to Canada. By incorporating Canadian law for all citizens (equal rights to all Canadian citizens) and global cultural norms (achieve status, smartness, knowledge, no ascribed status, and no boundaries between age, gender and class) Bangladeshi immigrants have created a counter-force to challenge social stratification and boundaries based on the local norms of class, lineage, and gender. A 34 year old male immigrant who moved to Canada four years ago and working in a restaurant, said:

In Canada, nobody cares about how much you make per year, your family status and your *bangsho* (lineage identity), apart from only a few first generation Bangladeshi people. Even Canadian people do not talk all this nonsense in public. You are considered as a respected citizen if you pay tax, work hard, and do something for your community. There is no such

thing like class and status like in Bangladesh. You will have to stand in the same line for buying a cup of coffee, paying postage cost, and paying bills; you will not get any advantage because you are rich, or you are a minister, or someone else. As long as you pay tax and follow the state law, you enjoy civic rights and all equal benefits. Here people respect labour; if you work hard you will eat the fruit. In Bangladesh respect always travel in one way – you have to respect higher-class people; here I will respect you and you have to respect me.

Bangladeshi working class immigrants who have gained enough economic stability by working two jobs both legally and illegally have started to challenge *Bhadralok* and *Salarit* classes, and all kinds of ascribed status structures brought from the homeland. With the influence of “a culture of equal rights” in Canada, as an organized force Bangladeshi working class immigrants have been trying to capture community leadership either by breaking social organizations into different parts, or by establishing new religious, social, and cultural organizations. The notion of equality as a “Canadian ideology” has brought tension and class conflicts among the immigrant groups. One elite, educated and highly successful professional male respondent (age 64) shared his views:

You know why I stopped going to attend all these community gatherings, and cultural events among our country people? Because, as immigrants in Canada, we started thinking we are all equal in Canada. We stopped respecting educated people and our elders. People judge everything with money. You make \$5000 per month with a Ph.D. degree, and I also make \$6000 without the Ph.D. degree; you have a car, you own houses; so do I, why should I care about you? *Gaga and khoja ek hoyo gachay* (Apples and oranges are the same within immigrant society) Now all the taxi drivers run community newspapers; they are the leaders of the Bengali mosques, and they are leaders of all social organizations.

I also observed that several of my respondents have been very critical about defining immigrant identities based on economic and social class. They have been especially critical about a survey question where I ask, “Which class do you think you belong to in Canada?” At least six of my respondent family members said, “We do not believe in class, we are hoping to have a classless society. We do not want to identify ourselves under any class boundary. We are free now” (see Table 6.3). Two of my respondent families said, “We do not believe in class, we disown class ideas and we are followers of Lalon”.

Table 6.3 Changes of Occupational identities and status among Bangladeshi Immigrants in Toronto, 2007 and 2008

Occupations	BEFORE-Migration Occupational Identity	AFTER-Migration Occupational Identity			
		Same	Similar	Below	Totally Different
Engineer	14	3		9	2
Doctor	4	1	0	2	1
Journalist	2	0	1		1
Army Officer	1	0		1	
Government Service	4	1		2	1
Non Profit UN/High Commission Employee	25	4	4	13	4
University/College/School Teacher	6	1	1	3	1
Business Manager/Administrative Job	20	2	3	13	2
Accountants	2	1	1		
Business	6	2	2	1	1
Graduate Student	13	1		12	
Pharmacist	1	1			
Artist	1	1			
Homemaker	31	19		6	6
Other	6	No response – classification deemed irrelevant			
Total	136	37	12	62	19

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION: DEBATED NATIONAL IDENTITIES

Even if we are all legally and politically Canadians, deep inside of our hearts we are Bangladeshi. We speak Bengali, every day we read Bangladeshi news as a ritual, and we dream about Bangladesh. In a quiet winter night in Canada when everything is covered with white snow, we think about our mothers, we remember our village, in our mind we walk through green paddy fields, visualize a little river close to our home, try to remember faces and names of our childhood friends, connect with political and national struggles of Bangladesh, listen to Tagore's songs and we cry inside to go back to Bangladesh. We miss our home and our existence, we become nostalgic. If someone said they are Canadian, they are telling a lie, or they are hiding the hard truth of immigrants' lives and their emotions. Perhaps the third generation – our grandchildren – will be able to say that they are Canadian, but we cannot. We are Bangladeshi-Bengali.

[Statement of a Bangladeshi immigrant married man (age 52) who came with his family to Canada from Bangladesh in 1995 as a skilled worker immigrant in Toronto]

BENGALI AND BANGLADESHI: DEBATED NATIONALISM AND CONTESTED NATIONAL IDENTITY

Several authors have argued that nation and nationalism can be constructed through a wide range of common components such as history and language (Calhoun 1993), culture and territorial base (Clay 1990), colonial movement and western derived discourse (Chatterjee 1986), imagination of the past, traditions, sacrifice, and print capitalism (Anderson 1991), invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), pre-existing ethnic solidarities and differences (Giddens 1984), certain transformations of the culture (Gellner 1983), and the structures of class exploitation, struggles, and ideology

construction (Marx and Engels). Ahmed (1998) argued that in the classic stage of emergence of nationalism and nation-states in Europe, language and religion were combined into a communal movement (Ahmed 1998:5).

Shaping of Bengali or Bangladeshi national identity has not followed any particular prescribed mechanisms or common imaginations. In the early 19th century, British Bengal, print capitalism and the literacy movement brought Hindu and Muslim nationalism – two separate religion-based imagined communities – together in opposition to Bengali nationalism by using their common language, culture, and ethnicity (see Ahmed 1989; Alavi 1989; Chakrabarty 1989, 2000; Aloysius 1997; Jalal 2000). Nicholas (1973) argued that Bengali (ethnic and national) identity was always contested and were defined by the dominant power (1973: 66). The mass Bengalis, whether they were Muslim or Hindu, had little choice in the political construction of their identities. From pre-colonial to post-colonial independent Bangladesh political contexts, either religion or language and ethnicity have been the key components in determining Bengali and Bangladeshi nationalism. Bangladesh as an outcome of political and arms movement organized by all Bengalis as a homogeneous ethnic, linguistic, and cultural group reinvented the secular ideologies of Bengali nationalism in opposition to religious based Pakistani Islamic and Indian Hindu nationalism (Nicholas 1973; Jahangir 1979, 1986; Khan 1985; Ghosh 1993; Ahmed 2000). In independent Bangladesh, Bengali nationalism was not freed from colonial and post-colonial hegemonic classes, political religion, and dominance of national lumpen classes (Jahingir 1986; Chakrabarty 2000). By incorporating Islamic norms, symbols and ideologies, post-independent Bengali nationalism was replaced by Bangladeshi nationalism. Islamic religious-based “Bangladeshi” national identity and nationalism were reintroduced to make a clear difference between Hindu Bengalis of West Bengal, and Muslim Bangladeshi nationalism (see Nicholas 1973; Khan 1985; Ahmed 1989; Ghosh 1993). Thus, Foucault’s argument of ‘de-individualization’ by multiple displacements through a nationalist struggle was not successful in shaping Bengali national bourgeois classes, class struggles, and organized nationalist movements in independent Bangladesh (Foucault in Chakrabarty 1989: xiv). Even today it has not been settled whether it should be Bengali or Bangladeshi nationalism in Bangladesh, or whether people are identified as both Bengali and Bangladeshi.

In regards to nationalism and nationality as makers of identities among Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Canada, one of my key respondents (a 45 year old well educated woman social activist working for a non-profit organization, actively involved in immigrants' community building programs, and who critically follows movements of Bangladeshi immigrants and their day-to-day lives in Toronto) told me:

Most of the Bangladeshi immigrants who came to Canada were either born or raised in post independent political and economic contexts in Bangladesh. Therefore, their nationality and their perceptions of nationhood and nationalism were obviously shaped and guided by post independent national politics in Bangladesh. I believe that the majority Bangladeshi immigrants define themselves with their religious identity and nationality, which is Bangladeshi. A small number of Bangladeshis still identify themselves as Bengali. We fought against the Pakistani Army in 1971 as a united Bengali ethnic and cultural group for a free land for all Bengalis and non-Bengalis, and all religious groups had been living in that geographical boundary called Bangladesh. But, after 40 years of independence, we are dreaming for Islamic nationalism and Muslim identity both in Bangladesh and in Canada, and it is also a global reality. In this 21st century, religion became a powerful issue in this global world. Our two major national political parties (BNP and AL) both have a major contribution to bring religious based nationalism and national identity in Bangladesh. Frankly speaking, migration to Canada and elsewhere has weakened our cultural and linguistic ties but made our religious norms stronger and stronger. I do not know why, probably you have the answer.

Connecting to colonial and post colonial political, religious and economic aspects of Bangladeshi and Bengali nationalism, Bangladeshi national and citizenship identity, and transnational migration to Canada, in this section I will discuss key events in Bangladeshi immigrants' lives that define their national identity and perception of nationalism and nationhood. In the following sections I describe the significance of celebrating and observing Bangladeshi national and historical days in Canada by the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants in Canada.

COLLECTIVE IMAGINATIONS OF BANGLADESHI NATIONALISM AND BANGLADESHI/BENGLI IDENTITIES IN CANADA

Celebration of Independence and Victory Days in Canada

In defining their national identities, and to make a closer connection to Bangladeshi/Bengali nationalism and nationhood, Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada

memorize, observe, remember, and celebrate all national days of Bangladesh e.g., Independence Day (March 26), Victory Day (December 16), and Language Day (February 21). These days remind Bangladeshi immigrants of the historical journey of a birth of a nation, their personal and collective connections and memories with the journey of the Bangladeshi state, and their political and ethnic identity as Bangladeshis and Bengalia in this world. Celebrations of national days are a process of reconstructing their nationalist identity in a foreign land, and a means to negotiate their Bangladeshi national identity in Canada.

I observed that Bangladeshi immigrants set up a temporary Independence monument (*Srite shoudo*) in “Bangla Town” to observe national Independence Day (March 26) and Victory Day (December 16) in Toronto. On those days, Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants gather in “Bangla Town” to remember all national heroes and freedom fighters that sacrificed their lives in 1971, and to memorise the political struggle and loss of family members. They pay homage to all *shohids* (who sacrificed their lives) by putting flowers at the *Srite shoudo*, following the homeland traditions. I participated with immigrants who were singing the national anthem, songs about the war of Independence, and about the natural beauty and symbols (rivers, paddy fields) of Bangladesh on street corners of “Bangla Town”. I observed cultural workers reciting poems about the Independence war, and the struggles of Bengali mothers who lost their sons. Immigrants carried national flags of Bangladesh and they also dressed with green and red dresses that represent the national flag. On these occasions “Bangla Town” in Toronto is transformed into a Bangladesh in Canada with her glorified history, memories, colours, people and cultures. Different activities and initiatives of the Bangladeshi immigrants on national day celebration programs are one of the key public means to proclaim their true national identity that they carry so deeply in their hearts. Several of my respondents informed me that they always try to participate in Independence Day and Victory Day celebration programs with their children to teach them and make them familiar with the history of the origin of the Bangladeshi nation, our history, and our traditions and political struggles. According to them, these moments will teach them to know who we are and form where we have come in this country. A female research

respondent (age 37) who came to Canada with her four year old son in 2005 and now is also a writer and a professional social worker said to me:

Being a Bengali from Bangladesh, how come I forget *chabisay* in March (March 26) and *sholoe* in December (December 16)? These two days are closely connected to my existence, my national identity, and the history of our heroic war against the brutal Pakistani army. These two dates uphold our political identity as free citizens, our Bengali identity, and Bangladesh as our free motherland. As an immigrant in Canada I live several thousand miles away from my homeland and these two days are separately kept in my life from any other days of the year. I remember the history of our nation, my relatives who were killed, my childhood and young age in Bangladesh, and I sing Bengali national songs even if I am driving my car home on the 401 highway. In the end I am a Bangladeshi and a Bengali. Without these two days, I do not belong to this world; there is no existence of Bangladesh.

A male respondent (age 47) who works in a bank told me:

When I cannot attend cultural programs organized by Bangladeshi cultural groups to celebrate Bangladeshi national days in Toronto due to job-related business, I watch Bengali TV programs at home, read online Bengali newspapers, and see celebration photos published in newspapers on the Internet to remember my existence and my identity as a lonely immigrant in Canada. You know, I show war photos and documents of the Independence war to my sons to explain the glorious full history of our Bangladesh.

Collectively, Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada memorize and imagine the “golden Bengal,” a nostalgic image of glorified Bengal, their homeland, and in her they find peace, wealth, and prosperity in their hearts. Through these processes they can locate their Bangladeshi as well as Bengali identities in their immigrant and diasporic settings in Toronto. The Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada are also politically ranked and divided between Bengali and Bangladeshi nationalisms. By following homeland political ideologies and histories of post-Independent Bangladesh in Canada, supporters and members of two political parties – BNP and AL – in Toronto organize separate National Day celebration programs. Separation from each other is also a process of maintaining distinct political identities among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada. Based on immigrant political ideologies, they attend any of two or more of the national day celebration programs organized by the two political parties and their cultural wings in Toronto.

On one hand, leaders and members of BNP in Toronto uphold Bangladeshi nationalism, which commonly refers to Bangladesh as a land for majority Bengali speaking Muslims, and a sovereign nation which is distinctly separated from the Bengali speaking Hindus in India. Politically, they also publicize contributions of their political leader Major Zia who was one of the eighth sector commanders during the Independence war in 1971, and is famous for making the radio announcement of the “official declaration of Independence war on March 26, 1971”.

On the other hand, members and leaders of Bangladesh AL in Toronto celebrate Independence and Victory days to celebrate Bengali nationalism, secular Bengali (ethnic and cultural) identity, and free Bangladesh for all the Bengali population. They also popularize contributions of their leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (father of the nation) who provided political and ideological leadership of the independence of Bangladesh. According to them, as well as many common Bengali people, March 7, 1971, Sheikh Mujib declared the independence of Bangladesh in a historical public meeting in a Dhaka racecourse field. Political dispute of the declaration of independence is a major political rivalry between two political parties in the homeland and in Canada. Both political groups play recorded speeches of their leaders in order to refresh their political identity, and to redefine separate Bangladeshi and Bengali nationalism and nationhood. I listened to leaders of both political parties make political speeches during the celebration of national days. It is worth noting that several social organizations and the left-wing cultural organizations also arrange cultural events and programs to celebrate and observe national days in Toronto.

However, the celebration of Bangladeshi national days by two leading political parties in Toronto and Bangladeshi immigrants’ participation in these activities have clearly defined a collective imagination of nationhood, a closer connection to Bengali/Bangladeshi nationalism, and their ideological national identity in Canada. The active presence of these two major Bangladeshi political parties and their cultural wings in Toronto are proclaiming a strong presence of local and fragmented Bengali and Bangladeshi nationalism in Canada. From my observations, even though the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant communities in Toronto are separately celebrating Bangladeshi national days based on historically and politically constructed fragmented nationalism,

these differences and factions are also clearly stating their national and political identities in Canada. Therefore, the homeland's nationhood and nationalism are re-established in their immigrant settings. Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto carry on their homeland's political and ideological tensions, as well as the differences in their immigrant lives as lead by two major political parties' transnational wings in Canada. As Gardner (1996) said, *desh* and *bedesh*, and local and global are on the same page among the Bangladeshi immigrants, and it is hard to separate. Thus, globalization and transnational migration to Canada has not changed local constructions of nationalism and national identities among the Bangladeshi immigrants.

Celebration of Language Day and Bengali Language in Canada

The Bengali language is the key marker of shaping the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants' ethnic, cultural, secular, and national identity in Canada. Every year Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto observe 21st February, which is generally called *shohid dibosh* in Bangladesh (now it is called "International Mother Language Day") to remember all Bangladeshi Bengali national heroes who sacrificed their lives in 1952 in order to protect the Bengali mother tongue as the state language of East Pakistan (see also 4.4.1). At the same time, by celebrating language day programs within immigrant communities, immigrants want to teach their next generation and parents about the importance of Bengali language for their own existence and identity in Canada. In the post-1952 political economy contexts in Bangladesh (former East Pakistan), the Bengali language became an icon, emblem, and a key symbol of united Bengalis. The language movement has provided them much spirit to gain their political, economic, and cultural rights in Pakistan. As a result, the Bengali language has become a significant component of Bengali nationalism in opposition to religious-based *ummah* (Islamic unity), Islamic brotherhood, and Pakistani nationalism. By celebrating the history of language movements, and by arranging cultural and political activities on the *shohid dibosh* in Canada, Bengali immigrants have also recreated a united ethnic and cultural space in their immigrant lives that does not welcome religious and political-ideologically based divided communities. A small fraction of the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants who define their identity with fundamental doctrinal ideologies of religion and who carry pro-Pakistani Islamic nationalism in their hearts generally avoid cultural and ritualistic events

of the language day celebration in Toronto. According to them, any celebration with human-made scriptures (monuments of International Language Day), pay homage to *vasha shohids* (people who sacrificed their lives for mother language), and lighting candles for their memories are anti-Islamic, non-Muslim Hindu traditions. I observed that different factions of political, social, and cultural organizations work together in organizing *Shahid dibosh* programs in Toronto. Among the immigrant communities, celebration of the language movement for their mother tongue, and the Bengali language, is the most significant component of defining Bengali identity and Bengali nationalism in Canada. Even thousands of miles away from their homeland, the Bengali language is still connecting people to their language and filling gaps that were created politically. While I was doing my fieldwork in Toronto, Bangladeshi immigrants stopped me in subway stations, shopping malls, and gas stations, asking: “By any chance are you from Bangladesh? Because I heard you are speaking Bangla on your cell phone”. Several times I went to coffee shops, and when a store person came to know that I was from Bangladesh, I was told “no worries *deshi bhai* (brother from the homeland), you do not have to pay for the coffee; it is taken care of”. A male respondent (age 50), a supporter of Bangladesh Awami League (AL), and a key believer in Bengali nationalism, said to me:

Religion cannot be the key component of Bengali identity and Bengali nationalism. It is obviously our language; before we have become Hindu, Muslim and Christian, we spoke in Bengali, and we were Bengali first. If religion works for making a nation, why are there so many counties in the Middle East? I knew that Pakistan as a nation was build for Muslims, but it did not work out. The main point was language and culture, which were totally different from religion.

Even though Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants are divided and fragmented along political and religious lines, as well as their nurtured ideologies of Bangladeshi and Bengali nationalism, I observed that Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto remain active and motivated enough to set up an International Language Day monument in one of the city parks in Toronto. Who leads the event and gains the glory has brought some tension to these immigrant communities, but that too was an organized effort. During my fieldwork, I attended a community meeting in which members of the monument committee, cultural workers, researchers, university professors, social workers, and local lawmakers all discussed the importance of the mother tongue in immigrant diasporic

settings. The International Mother Language Day monument structure, funding possibilities, and probable location for the scripture were showed and discussed in the meeting. I came to know from key persons of the International Language Day monument committee that, by setting up a monument in Toronto, Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants will able to share their glorious past and history with other ethnic and linguistic groups in Canada. The Language Day monument will speak for the Bengali language, and illustrate the importance of protecting all languages in this world.

Often, religious identity, ideologies of religious minority and majority, class and gender differences, and regionalism play significant roles to disjoint Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant communities. However, when it is a question about language, I observed that Bangladeshi immigrants act as a united and organized community. The huge turnout to 21 February cultural programs represents the care and love of the Bengali language in a foreign land. Speaking Bengali in subways, communicating to each other in mother tongues in stores, offices and public spaces, and putting Bengali signboards and posters in “Bangla Town” will help ensure Bengali immigrants’ ethnic and cultural space in multicultural Toronto.

Speaking Bengali Language as an Everyday Form of Identity Negotiation

I noticed that most of my respondents speak in Bengali amongst themselves at home, and also with fellow Bangladeshis. During my fieldwork, I only had to communicate in English with the research population on four occasions. Two individuals who were a Christian couple from an upper middle class family background answered all my question in English. That individual person came to Canada 36 years ago as a professional engineer who preferred to speak in English. He was a highly educated person who asked me meet him at his office, and he answered all questions in English. Among the same regional groups, people use local dialects to communicate with each other in Toronto. I listened as Bangladeshi immigrants spoke over the phone in local dialects (immigrants from Brishal, Chittagong, Nokhali, Sylhet, and Rajshahi districts in Bangladesh all have distinct Bengali dialects). In immigrant settings in Toronto, by speaking in local Bengali dialects Bangladeshi immigrants are not only defining their broader Bengali linguistic, ethnic and national identity, but also they have created pure and core spaces and identities that refer to their home district, region and village as

markers of identities in Canada. One of my research respondents from Barisal district said to me, “I am a Bengali, Bangladeshi... whatever. But on top of all I am a *Barishallya*: a man from Barishal district. People call me *Barishallya Alam*, I am proud to be a *Barishallya*”. I also noticed that immigrants from Chittagong and Sylhet districts seldom communicate with each other with proper Bengali; they always prefer to speak with their own colloquial regional tongues. It is also popular among the Bangladeshi immigrant communities that Bangladeshi immigrants from Sylhet district always identify themselves as *Sylhetees*, not as Bengali or Bangladeshi. Thus, shaping immigrants’ identities in their immigrant lives in Canada, along with their Bengali institutional (proper) language, local and regional dialects also play significant roles.

Ninety percent of my research respondents believe that it is important to speak Bengali in their daily lives. Bangladeshi immigrants also think that it is their responsibility to teach the Bengali language to their children. It is the major part of their identity as Bengali as well as Bangladeshi. Several of my respondents in a group discussion (*adda*) in the “Bangla Town” area (in an office room and a Bengali bookstore where almost every summer evening between 7:30 pm to 10:30 pm a group of Bangladeshi male immigrants who are culturally and politically active in Bangladesh come for an *adda* and they drink tea, eat Bangladeshi food, smoke cigarettes and talk about various issues) conveyed that:

It is really hard and painful to even think that our children will not be able to speak Bengali, will not be able to understand literature written by all great Bengali poets like Robindranath Tagor, Najrul Islam, Jibonondo Das, Jashim Uddin and many others. As Bengali people, we express our anger, loss, sorrow, love, and every humanistic emotion in our Bengali literature, poems, and songs. You know, just speaking the Bengali language does not make someone Bengali; it is something deeper, rooted in soil, philosophy, culture, and tradition. Living in a foreign land we know it will not be totally possible, but we are trying to teach at least the Bengali language, customs, and traditions so that at least our children can know their roots and make some kind of connection with their traditions and cultures. If we fail, it will be a huge loss for us as immigrant parents.

I noticed that parents feel happy and proud if their children are able to read and write Bengali and understand complex Bengali worlds and concepts. I saw that Bangladeshi immigrant families in Toronto hang on to Bengali words and sentences

written by their children on entrances to their homes, for example, welcome (*shagotom*) and Eid greetings (*Eid Mubarak*). These posted sentences represent their language skills and markers of their Bengali identity. One of my respondents told me that she taught her son how to read and write Bangla. Her son was going to recite a poem written by Kazi Najrul Islam during a Bangladesh Cultural Night at the University of Toronto, organized by Bangladeshi Students' Association. A conjugal pair (58 year old man and a 50 year old woman) told me during our in-depth open-ended conversation at their home:

At home we speak Bangla, call each other in Bangla, and use our Bengali kinship terms (*amader shomodhon, terms sob Benglay*) in Bengali. Our kids do not call us mom and dad; they call as *maa* and *baba* (mother and father). Only Bengali is the official language at our home. [Laughing] I told my son and daughter when you enter into my home, you are in Bangladesh: speak Bengali. We do not speak Urdu or Hindi at home or any other language – only Bangla. My son and daughter are fluent in Bengali even if they were raised in Canada.

I learned that in order to teach one's mother tongue to the new generation of Bangladeshi immigrants, the Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Victoria Park were able to convince local schools to introduce a Bengali language program. Bangladeshi students take Bengali language at school in their international language-learning program. There is also a Bengali Studies Program at the University of Toronto. Students can take Bengali language course as 3 a credit hour course. Among my seventy-five respondent families, seven of them take their children to a privately run Bengali school, and four Hindu families take their children to the Hindu temple to teach them the Bengali language. Bangladeshi immigrants arrange these initiatives to protect their linguistic and ethnic identities in Canada. None of my Christian respondents send their children to any Bengali classes. A Catholic male respondent said to me that during summer vacation every year he sends his two sons to Bangladesh so that they can learn the language and Bengali culture. It works well for them. While staying in Toronto with my cousins' family, one day I heard my cousin say angrily to his seven-year-old daughter:

Do not bring English home, okay? Leave it at school. Once you enter into this home you have to speak Bengali with us and also with your brother and sister. You remember that – otherwise, you will be punished. Remember; make sure I do not have to tell you again.

I noticed that even children of the Bangladeshi immigrant families understand Bengali words but they hardly speak Bengali to their parents. Generally, they are comfortable to respond to their parents in English. A prominent cultural worker among the Bangladeshi immigrant community and a known activist for establishing a monument to recognize the International Mother Language Day in Toronto expressed that:

A good number of Bangladeshi immigrant families do not even want their kids to learn Bangla and Bengali cultural norms and traditions. You will see some people just after coming to Toronto; they start speaking English to their children with the wrong accent, and wrong grammar. Or they are speaking *Benglish* (i.e., Bengali + English) and they have created such a situation that when their children grow up they will not want to speak the Bengali language anymore.

In social and family gatherings, parents are trying so hard to teach their children to speak their mother tongue. I found that immigrants who lived in other countries before migrating to Canada and who worked for multinational corporations (i.e., elite class immigrants whose children used to attend English schools in Bangladesh), as well as a goodly number of common Bangladeshi families, hardly speak Bengali to their children or use their mother tongue to communicate with fellow country people. I noticed that Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant families who have been living in Canada for many years and have chosen partners from different ethnic and linguistic groups prefer to communicate in English. I point to several reasons influencing Bangladeshi immigrants to speak English in Canada. First, early immigrants who have almost forgotten how to speak proper Bangla are too shy to speak Bengali with others because it will bring gossip within the immigrant community; rather, they speak English with others. Second, the new and English-educated professional immigrants want to be recognized as global citizens by speaking English within immigrant communities. Third, in immigrant settings educated Bangladeshi immigrants who also want to differentiate themselves from fellow working class persons and less educated immigrants always speak English. Like colonial Bengal, the English language has created powerful and hegemonic class positions among the Bangladeshi immigrant groups. To me they are global *bhadralok shraynee*; similar to *bhadralok* classes in the post-Bengal renaissance in Colonial Bengal, they are ideologically global *bhadralok shraynee*, never having belonged to Bengali culture and tradition. In global context, I observed that immigrants gain *bhadralok* status not just by

speaking current English, but by learning American, Canadian, or British accents. I also noted there is a significant difference between colonial and global *bhadralok shraynee*. Like English-educated colonial *bhadralok shraynee*, even though global *bhadralok shraynee* prefer to speak English and live and consume all Western products, politically and ideologically they are critical of Americanization and Western dominancy. These global *bhadralok shraynee* class norms are mostly shaped by religious practices, doctrines, and orthodox nationalist positions in immigrant lives in Canada. Global Bengali Bangaldeshi *bhadralok shraynee* are basically Western-educated global *salariat* classes who dream to work for IBM, GOOGLE, and any other multinational corporations, but in terms of their religious and political orientations, they are not culturally pro-Western like colonial *bhadralok shraynees*. In post-9/11 contexts, their class ideologies are shaped mostly by anti-English sentiments, but culturally they are global consumers.

Among the Bangladeshi immigrant communities, I noticed that immigrants who often speak English in social gatherings are also teased by other Bengali immigrants for acting like “*shada*” (which means mimicking someone, like a Caucasian person) or they are identified as “confused *deshi*”. Gossip and criticism also play important roles in encouraging people to speak their mother tongue and local dialects as markers of their authentic identities. It is very common both in Bangladesh and also in Canada for Bengali people to speak in broken *Benglish* all the time, what Appadurai (1996) has called “disjuncture” of language as an impact of global forces in local lives.

However, six of my respondent families have brought out a different perspective while discussing their perceptions of practicing Bengali language as a key marker shaping authentic Bengali identity in Canada. They defined their positions by saying:

We want to raise our children as global citizens. We are not concerned whether our children must learn Bengali or not, or whether they are losing their identity or anything like that. We believe at the end of the day, no matter how hard you try, the next generation will not speak Bengali, period, because most of their time they stay at school and communicate in English with their friends and teachers. They will act English and talk English because it is an English nation. It is a crude truth, but many Bengali parents are scared to face the truth. This is a must; we know it is so hard to accept that our children will speak a totally different language. It never happened in the past, and it will not happen with us either. You

will stay in Canada, get all the opportunities of this country, but you are dreaming if you think that your kids will be Bengali. You are living in “fools’ heaven”. You know as parents we are happy that our new generations are learning English, French, Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, and other languages and becoming global citizens. You know, even in Bangladesh students who attend English medium schools hardly know how to read and write Bengali; and we are in Canada...

Bengali New Years Day

Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada reclaim, celebrate, and redefine their cultural and ethnic traditions and identities by celebrating the first day of the Bengali calendar *Pohela Boyshakh* at a personal and also a community level. It is one of the key cultural and ethnic markers of Bengali identity. I have provided a detailed description of various perspectives and aspects of celebrating *Pohela Boyshakh* in Toronto (see Chapter Four). A Hindu male respondent (age 49) and a supporter of Bengali nationalism in “Bangla Town” said:

It is the only day we as the Bengali immigrant community, despite our religious, political, social, and class differences, all come together in a place as Bengalis (ethnic and religious markers of identity) to celebrate our Bengaliness, our traditional village culture, our roots, our peasant norms, and our traditional foods as Bengalis. This is the day we all become Bengali and uphold our homogeneous form of culture and ethnic unity.

Out of 136 respondents, about 90 respondents (66%) told me that if they are in Toronto they try to attend *Bengla mela* in the afternoon to meet friends and family, enjoy Bengali foods, buy Bengali clothes, and enjoy Bengaliness together in Toronto. They mark the date and celebrate with their friends and family. These are all activities bringing their homeland (*desh*), village (*desh or gramer bari*) and memories closer to Canada. They can go back in reminiscence to their previous lives they left in Bangladesh.

My understanding is that even though Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants have widely celebrated the Bengali New Year with their close family, small circle of friends, or similar religious and occupational groups, on that day, at least, in their hearts and minds they all proclaim their Bengali cultural and ethnic identity in Canada. By bringing cultural workers and singers from the homeland on that day, they also prove that they are maintaining transnational communication between home and host nations in order to maintain their ethnic and cultural identity. On this occasion, I observed less division and

more unity and happiness in immigrants' eyes. By looking at different arrangements and involvements of celebrating the first day of the Bengali calendar in Toronto, I discovered Bangladesh as a separate national and political boundary for particular Bengali ethnic groups. The Bengali immigrants from West Bengal, India were not part of the New Year celebration ceremonies in Toronto because they belong to different country. Therefore, separate political and religious histories and identities are maintained in transnational global settings in Canada. Culture, tradition, and ethnicity are not homogenous or apolitical phenomena, like nationality and nationalism in this current global world. They are all products of history, and basically colonial history.

Bangladeshi nationality and nationhood, beyond cultural, linguistic and ethnic homogeneity-based separate political and religious histories, are celebrated in the Bengali New Year in Canada. Therefore, colonial and post-colonial divisions and separations of constructing national, ethnic and cultural identities are still vibrant in transnational global settings. The nation is alive in a globalized world.

Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants in Toronto uphold their own political, ethnic, cultural and national identity in celebrating *Pohela Boyshakh* according to separate political boundary lines. Thus, globalization-led transnational migration as a global force and a process has little to do with the colonial and post-colonial markers of Bangladeshi Bengali nationalism, nationality, and ethnic identity based on nationhood.

DISOWNING BANGLADESHI NATIONAL DAYS IN CANADA

From the above discussions it is commonly viewed that the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants in Canada celebrate all national days to define their national, political, cultural, and ethnic identities in Canada. Through corporate celebration and their active participation of these national days and events, Bangladeshi immigrants have created a common “nostalgia and desire”, “imaginary” and “imagined community” (see Anderson 1993 in Appadurai 1996:31), which is one of the key indicators of defining Bengali/Bangladeshi nationalism and nationhood in Canada.

In contrast to the perceptions of common history, language, culture, and tradition as homogeneous markers of Bengaliness and Bangladeshi nationhood are questioned in immigrant contexts in Canada. One of my respondents, a popular cultural worker in the Bangladeshi immigrant community and who also belonged to a minority religious group,

complained about Bengali Christian religious groups for their lesser involvement in celebrating Bangladeshi national days and nationhood in Canada:

Bengali Christian communities are not connected to any wider Bengali community-based cultural and political events in Toronto. In many cases, they do not even attend any Bangladeshi National Day celebration programs, events, and cultural gatherings in either active or passive ways. Most of the Bangladeshi Catholic immigrants generally have come from the Middle East and do not have much formal education or university degrees. They celebrate their regional and religious unities with food, music, and alcohol. Both Bangladeshi Catholic and Protestant Christians are less concerned with Bangladeshi national days, nationhood, and less involved in the wider Bangladeshi immigrant community's events. It is my observation but I do not know why.

As a researcher, I addressed the issue and was able to identify that there are several reasons for the minority religious groups from Bangladesh to have less active participations in cultural and national day celebration events. The Bangladeshi immigrants from minority religious groups (both Hindus and Christians) responded to my questions by saying:

Do you think we did not fight for Bangladesh? Were our houses not burnt by the Pakistani army and their local collaborators in 1971? Do you think that our women were not raped? They are still being raped by fellow countrymen. Bangladesh is not our homeland and we are not Bengali? We do not speak in Bengali? But you know, *dada* (brother), being a Hindu or a Christian among dominant Muslim religious groups in Canada, it is difficult to be active among majority groups – religious and political. Many of us are here in Canada because we did not have equal political, religious, and economic rights in Bangladesh, and we were considered enemies of Bangladesh. Many of us do not have happy memories about the Bangladeshi nation-state, or about Bangladeshi national politics. Therefore, as immigrants in Canada, we celebrate these days according to our ways – sometimes in a small group, or sometimes due to our work load and time constraints, we attend the events as viewers and enjoy the event but we are not overly involved in organizing those national days. It does not mean that we do not love our homeland. Even in Canada, among Bangladeshi immigrant groups, we are a minority; it is nothing different than Bangladesh; therefore, how can we are so visible and active in community events? Active involvement is part of the political game and power that we do not have in Bangladesh, and also not in immigrant settings in Canada.

A Protestant Christian male respondent (age 46) who lives in the Bloor Street area in Toronto said:

Bangladeshi Christians are less involved in national politics in Bangladesh. We were mostly voters, followers, and members of social, cultural and political organizations, but we were not political leaders and organizers. As members of minority religious groups, we were taught by our families and by our churches that it is better not to be involved in national politics because it is a nasty and risky game and you will never be able to be a minister or parliament member in a majority Muslim dominated Bangladesh. As we did not have such futures, we never were a part of national events. As a minority we did not try, we did not fight; rather, we hid ourselves, and now finally we have ended up here in Canada because we are lucky. Tell me, how many Bengali Christian national political leaders and parliament members will you find in Bangladesh? I think no one, right? Therefore, we did not bother to take part in Bangladeshi national events in Canada or actively organize national days. Most of the national day celebration events in Toronto are organized and lead by people who had been actively involved in Bangladeshi politics, are members of political wings in Canada, and are leaders of immigrant social and cultural organizations. Therefore, like in Bangladesh, as political and religious minorities, we are out of the picture. We are general members; we are not leaders or organizers of any event. In addition to that, we do not want to be involved in any dirty political or power games with the majority Bangladeshi groups in Canada. We have nothing to gain or lose here in Canada as Bangladeshi Bengali with our active participations. We are okay with that.

Therefore, perceptions of collective memories, imaginaries, and nostalgias for national days, Bangladeshi nationalism, national identity and nationhood are different between the majority and minority Bangladeshi immigrant groups in Canada. Minority religious groups' lack of political and economic entitlement to the Bangladeshi nation state also influences them to define their nationalist identity in their immigrant lives in Canada. The ways in which Anderson (1993) and Appadurai (1996) argued for symbolic integration, common imagination, nostalgias, and diseases that create national identity and ethnicity in global contexts are not as common or homogeneous among religious and political minority immigrants from a post-colonial nation like Bangladesh. Bangladeshi religious minority immigrants carry unequal political, and contested, imaginaries of "motherland" based on their violent encounters and experiences as Bangladeshi nationals. In homeland and transnational diasporic settings in Toronto, the Bangladeshi religious

minority immigrants are ideologically and to some extent physically invisible in any arranged national day celebration rituals and events.

I observed that minority religious groups' disassociation is not totally against their motherland or political history of the Bangladeshi nation. To me, in the transnational diasporic settings in Canada, they are trying to keep distance from the dominant religious and political majority. Bangladeshi immigrants also take part in creating dominant discourses of nationalism and national identity in arranging national days and events. Minority religious groups become consciously disjoined from unequal structures of the Bangladeshi nation-state because they no longer want to be minority in a new country.

In Toronto, Bangladeshi minority religious immigrants connect to their homeland, national history, and proclaim their nationhood by arranging separate ceremonies that are more religion-oriented, communal, and disjoined from majority religious groups. I observed that minority Bangladeshi immigrants arrange national day celebration programs at home, at Church, and in temples among their own religious groups. At the same time, they consciously separate themselves from the majority religious and political perspectives of Bangladeshi nationalism from which they have been excluded both in colonial and post-independent Bangladesh. They are less visible and less active in celebrating national days and in celebrating Bangladeshi nationalism in public along with the dominant political and religious groups from their homeland.

The political and religious construction of Bangladesh, Bangladeshi nationalism, and dominant Muslim ideologies and symbols that were invented in colonial and post-colonial states again have disjoined, separated, and disenfranchised the collective imagination of Bangladeshi nationalism and nationhood in immigrant settings. Thus, due to religious differences and religious-based unequal Bangladeshi nationalism, minority religious groups have brought a distinct nationhood and nationality to Canada. It is obvious that globalization-led transnational migration has less of an impact on local and modern constructions of Bangladeshi nationalism and nationhood. In shaping Bangladeshi nationalism and Bengali ethnic and cultural identities – from colonial to current global contexts – religion is playing a vital role. Within global transnational migration and the current diaspora settings in Canada, colonial and post-colonial categorizations are also shaping immigrants' national, ethnic and political identity as well

as their entitlements to their diasporic community. In the end it can be said that globalization is a juxtaposition of colonialism and post-colonialism.

LOCAL TO GLOBAL: NEGOTIATIONS OF BANGLADESHI NATIONAL IDENTITY

Transnational migration to Canada as a process of globalization has not disjoined nor melded the local and modernized ideas of Bangladeshi national identity and nationalism. Rather, Bangladeshi nationality, national identity and citizenship status has been re-rooted in Canada as opposed to being “uprooted” (Bourduieu 1963), and experiencing “disjuncture” (Appadurai 1996; 2002). I found that “Bangladeshi”, as national, ethnic, religious, and citizenship identities are more “simultaneous”, “contextual”, “opportunistic”, “hybrid”, “fluid”, and “in between” (see Hall 1992; Bhaba 1994; Gardner 1995). In many occasions, Bangladeshi immigrants’ transnational interactions with their homeland and with their frequent movements to different locations as global citizens have challenged the bounded Bangladeshi modernized national identity and their connection to Bangladeshi nationhood (see Gardner and Osella 2003).

By looking at transnational movements of the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants in England, Gardner (1995) clearly explained that homeland (*desh*) and foreign land (*bidesh*) are different locations in the same society in post-colonial global settings (Gardner 1995:102). From my own research experience in Canada, Bangladeshi immigrants’ religious, class, gender, and age group identities play significant roles in building connections between *desh* (Bangladesh) and *bidesh* (Canada) and in negotiating their national identity in Canada. I found that Bangladeshi immigrants feel more connected to Bangladesh and uphold Bangladeshi nationality if their parents are still alive and the rest of the family members live in Bangladesh. The meaning of “Bangladeshiness” and Bangladeshi Bengali national identity is not homogeneous; rather, it is more unequal among minority religious groups, women, the unemployed, and working class immigrants in Canada. One of my respondents said, “immigrants only start feeling Canada as their home or consider themselves Canadians when they have found secure jobs. For unemployed immigrants, both Canadian and Bangladeshi nationalities are the same”. I also noticed that new immigrants more actively uphold Bangladeshi nationhood than do more established immigrants.

In order to gain economic, religious, and social freedom and security, a religious minority among a Muslim majority, or a divorced woman from patriarchal Bangladesh, always tries to rationalize immigration to Canada. In the immigrant context, images of motherland and relationships to nationhood are contextual and simultaneous to immigrants based on their lived experiences and their constructed identities from their homelands.

Bangladeshi immigrants as global skilled workers who have come to Canada with desires to gain economic and political opportunities find that Bangladeshi nationality serves as a barrier to entry into global markets. Several of my research respondents said to me that they think that they were not called for any government job interview because those are reserved for Canadian citizens and predominantly those who were born here in Canada. They had been counting the days until they would be citizens and better able to apply for secured government jobs. Bangladeshi citizenship and landed status do not provide them equal access to job markets in Canada. As immigrants, they cannot uphold Bangladeshi identity when they are desperately looking for jobs. Thus, Bangladeshi immigrants' negotiation processes of nationality and national identities are also connected to immigrants' existing socioeconomic positions and their political, religious, and economic positions in their homeland.

When I asked my respondents what their national identity was, and where their homeland nation (*desh*) was, out of 136 respondents, 110 respondents (81%) clearly mentioned that, even though they have been living in Canada for a decade or two, staying in Canada as permanent residents, and who already had become Canadian citizens, Canada is still a temporary space (like a motel) and a place they cannot define (*vogi jogi gayga*) because they did not have a dream to come. Rather, they are already here. For many Bangladeshi immigrants, getting Canadian citizenship is like a stepping stone for achieving social and monetary security, but they want to return to home, the real place for them. In their hearts and minds they are connected to Bangladesh as their "home", and Bangladeshi is their national identity. Twenty (15%) of the respondents said that they belong to both Bangladesh and Canada, and six (4%) of them said "we are Canadian now – that's it. We do not have any connection with Bangladesh anymore".

Of Course We Are Bangladeshi

For Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada, the meaning of nationality is not just a paper or carrying Canadian passports. Their perceptions of nationalism and national identities are associated with lived experiences, memories of childhood, cultural and political histories, and mental associations with particular lands, cities, or villages. As a result, after living several decades in Canada, many immigrants still identify themselves as Bangladeshi/Bengali. I participated in a social *adda* at “Coffee Time” on Danforth Avenue with four of my research participants and two of their friends, and we had a discussion and debate about Bangladeshi immigrants’ national identity and nationalism. A 46 year old man, Rafiq (pseudo name), argued in the discussion:

Look, legally you can achieve citizenship and nationality of a particular country, but to make mental relationships with other countries, it takes a couple of generations. No one can forget his or her birthplace and where they have grown up. Individuals need to know about the political histories of that land, and become closely connected to the people, culture, language, physical environment, traditions, and social systems to feel some attachments to a country. We came to Canada as adults with Bangladeshi passports, and our norms and memories are constructed fully by Bengali culture and Bangladeshi national and political histories. As immigrants, how much do we know about Canada as a nation? Or, how close are we to this snow-covered cold land? We bring our physical bodies for economic reasons, but our hearts are left behind somewhere in Bangladesh. Even if we are all legally and politically Canadian, deep in our hearts we are Bangladeshi. We speak Bengali, every day we read Bangladeshi news as a ritual, and we dream about Bangladesh. In a quiet winter night in Canada when everything is covered with white snow, we think about our mothers, we remember our village; in our mind we walk through green paddy fields, visualize a little river close to our home in a small village, try to remember the faces and names of our childhood friends, connect with political and national struggles of Bangladesh, listen to Tagore’s songs, and cry inside to go back to Bangladesh. We miss our home and our existence, we become nostalgic. If someone said they are Canadian, they are telling a lie, or they are hiding the hard truth of immigrants’ lives and their emotions. Perhaps the third generation – our grandchildren – will be able to say that they are Canadian, but we cannot. We are Bangladeshi/Bengali.

In defining Bangladeshi immigrants’ national identity and individual existence, Bangladeshi immigrants always remember the soil of their homeland. They believe that:

Allah/God built them with special clay that can be found only in Bangla delta, and the soil of their village. Therefore, even though they have come to Canada and have become Canadian citizens, it does not matter that they are Canadian. Their identity has been shaped with their birthplace, and their physical bodies created by the clay of the motherland.

A 62 year old male respondent who came to Canada in 1990 and later brought all six members of his family (they were all living together in a multi-family household in which he is head of the household), said to me:

I told my son, when I die, send my body to Bangladesh and bury me in our family graveyard in a small village in Khulna district. I was born on Bangladeshi soil and I want to end up there. In this cold Canadian soil my body will not decompose and mix [with the earth].

In defining Bangladeshi national identity and Bengali ethnic and cultural identity in Canada, I bring the case of a female respondent:

Case Study 4: Puspoo, age 50, who migrated with her family in 2002 as a skilled worker:

Even though I am a Canadian citizen, I am still a Bangladeshi-Bengali. First I am a Bangladeshi, then I am Canadian. ‘Bangladeshi’ is my identity. You can tell me I am a Bangladeshi Canadian. As the major portion of my life was spent in Bangladesh, I am obviously Bangladeshi. I was born in Bangladesh. Bengali culture and traditions are injected in my blood; it is my identity. I do not feel shame to be a Bangladeshi; rather I am proud of my Bangladeshi identity. As an individual, my “self” has been constructed in Bangladesh. I have been living here in Canada as an immigrant/citizen, but I have never felt for Canada as my country (*desh*) the way I feel for Bangladesh when I visit Bangladesh (*jokhon Bangladesher Mati tay pa fail*). I am talking about me, but I do not know what other people may say about Canada. In my childhood, I lived in Barisal (a southern district in Bangladesh), all my childhood memories are connected to my village in Barisal, and later we moved to the district town of Barisal. I feel proud to be a *Barishaillya* (people who came from that district town) and I speak Bangla with my local accent even in Toronto. I have not even changed my accent because it is my identity and my roots. As a Bangladeshi Bengali, I

am trying to teach children the history of Bangladesh, our culture, our language, and our cultural traditions because Bangladesh is our nation. I think Canada is a nation established by immigrants from all over the world. Some came earlier, or their ancestors settled here long ago, and others came later. So people who are living here for a long time are senior immigrants to us. Who the Canadians are is a tricky question. I am a junior immigrant in Canada. I came to Canada by my choice; nobody forced me to come. I came with some purposes, goals, objectives, and dreams. I came for my children, their better education, and for secured lives. But I was born in Bangladesh, and I lived in Bangladesh. My parents are from Bangladesh, and my fourteen generations *choddo gusti* [ancestors] lived in Bangladesh. Being a Bangladeshi is my natural existence; I did not have any objectives to be a Bengali/Bangladeshi, but coming to Canada, I had some objectives that I wanted to accomplish. The two countries are different to me. I did not have to do anything to be a Bangladeshi because I was born in Bangladesh. I have a purpose-driven life in Canada. For example, I have to be economically solvent, I have to provide my children a better education, and I have to be successful. If I can fulfill my dreams and objectives in Canada, then Canada will be my country, otherwise, it will not. When I listen to the Bangladeshi National Anthem, I feel like electricity is flowing in my blood. I feel that my body is shaking (*shoriray jamon kata shir day*). I do not find the same feelings when I listen to the Canadian National Anthem. I feel something, but not like when I hear the Bangladeshi National Anthem. Maybe it is because it is sung in a different language, or maybe I do not have the same strong mental connection to Canada yet.

I noted that out of my 136 respondents, 54 (40%) male and 48 (35%) female respondents believe that culturally and politically they belong to Bangladesh. On one hand, memories of their homeland, their birthplace, and their lived experiences all shape their national identity. Their closer association with the history, culture, language, and tradition all shape their national identity. Transnational migration to Canada allows them to see more clearly who they are and where they belong. It can be said that Bangladeshi

immigrants who have strong familial, social, and political connections and entitlements in Bangladesh feel a closer association with their homeland and nation. On the other hand, some others do not feel the same way because of their unequal status as women, religious minority, and political minority in the Bangladeshi Islamic and patriarchal nation state.

Both Are My Home: Simultaneous Nationality

In the context of transnational migration to Canada, my study suggests that a considerable number of Bangladeshi immigrants locate their national identity in both locations. They are now more comfortable with a hyphenated identity as Bangladeshi-Canadians. Most of the Bangladeshi immigrants carry dual citizenship status. In general, immigrants who have gained better economic access and opportunities in Canadian markets are acculturated a bit more within Canadian consumer culture, have already lost – or are continuously losing – homeland networks, and who have less chance of going back to Bangladesh permanently, tend to identify themselves with the hyphenated identity. A Catholic male respondent (age 54) who came to Canada in 1991 as a skilled worker clearly defined his dual nationality status as follows:

I am a son of two mothers. Bangladeshi is my own mother who feeds me her milk, air, and water. With her care, I was born, raised and became a young person. However, when thinking politically and religiously, I was considered as a step-son within my own mother's home by political colonizers of our own family members, so I decided to leave my home. I did, and I came to Canada as an immigrant, and my Canadian mom helped me to survive here. She adopted me as one of her multiethnic sons, and cared for me with all assistance, and taught me her language, and provided me a means to live in her heart as a free person. So Canada is my mother too, just as I am a son of a Bengali mother.

The Bangladeshi homeland's unequal political and economic structures also shape immigrants' identity negotiation process in diaspora settings. A Bangladeshi religious minority immigrant in Toronto told me that she has no strong desire to go back to Bangladesh anymore because she is unable to settle down in Bangladesh. She has nothing left as a woman and minority Hindu second-class citizen in Bangladesh. Simultaneously, immigrants also conveyed that:

Nobody can forget their motherland. We feel for Bangladesh, and we always remember our parents and relatives but we are not directly associated with the Bangladeshi nation-state and we cannot fit in

Bangladesh after living many years in Canada. Our memories of Bangladesh have been distorted, and some of the memories we have are not pleasant.

In a social gathering at one of my respondent's homes, I was invited along with his three friends and their families who were also my respondents. After having a huge Bangladeshi dinner, all male members sat on my respondent's patio and started an *adda* with tea and cigarettes. They brought out various perspectives on living in Canada and connections to their homeland. One of them said:

You know, many of us have been living in Canada for at least two decades. By this time we have lost most of our connections in Bangladesh. We even feel unknown when we visit Bangladesh. Our old friends and family members all moved out to different places. So many things have changed in Bangladesh while we were here in Canada. Therefore, we have created new friends and families here. We have established our new lives here. On top of that we cannot survive in Bangladesh if you consider job security, health care, and political and social security. Practically speaking, Bangladesh is an old story for us but she is in our hearts even though we are more Canadian. This is our present. Brother, we had everything in Bangladesh, but we have left it all for so many reasons. Migration is one way for us; there is no return. For our own peace we should say we are Bangladeshi-Canadian. We cannot go back to Bangladesh, or we cannot become authentic "Canadian" [culturally, religiously, and ethnically] but we are a combination of both.

Globalization-led transnational migration has disjoined and uprooted the modernized concepts of nationhood, nationality, and national identity. Bangladeshi transnational immigrants are loyal to multiple nations depending on their religious, class and gender positions in both home and host nations.

The Bangladeshi Nation Is Very Male For Us

In the context of transnational global migration, the Bangladeshi nation-state and nationality are questioned, challenged, and critiqued as dominant, unequal, exploitative, and patriarchal by Bangladeshi women immigrants in Canada. It does not mean that Canada as a state is not exploitive, dominating, and patriarchal in relation to gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, but in Canada women are oppressed within broader social and political contexts. Nonetheless, socially, culturally and institutionally women in Bangladesh have faced more gendered discrimination, enjoyed fewer opportunities and

limited inheritance rights, and had less entitlement both in the home and outside. In a group discussion with immigrant women in Toronto, they reported:

We cannot ignore our Bangladeshi nationality and our Bengali cultural norms and traditions. We are Bengali women, and Bangladesh is our homeland, which is our identity in Canada. We speak Bengali and we are proud of that. But Canada is our home too; she gives us hope too and has provided us space to struggle as women. Here in Canada, we can make our living independently. Being immigrant women in Canada, we have more freedom and have equal social status. You know that, being women, we have more legal power and institutional support in Canada than in Bangladesh. Socially, culturally, legally and politically, as women we are way more secure in Canada than in Bangladesh. Even a single Bangladeshi woman can live safely in Canada, and can do her own things – but in Bangladesh, no. No way. People, society, and family will be concerned. At every step of your life you have to find a guardian, and your guardian should be a male. A single woman in Bangladesh will not be issued her passport without mentioning her male guardian's (father or husband) presence in her life. Hey, we are Bangladeshi by birth, and culturally we are Bengali. We cannot change or ignore that. But being Canadian women, we feel more security and freedom.

Immigrant women, who were socially, culturally and physically exploited with their gendered identity and marital status in Bangladesh, have raised critical voices against the Bangladeshi nation state. They find that Canadian citizenship offers them a space to live and the support to stand on their own feet by entering into markets. As women (e.g., minority women, single women, divorced women, and married women) they could not get proper social, institutional, and legal support in male-dominated Bangladesh. Comparatively free access to economic markets as employees, better economic opportunities, social security, health care facilities, and other institutional support systems in Canada have encouraged Bangladeshi immigrant women to view Canada as their nation.

According to Bangladeshi immigrant women, by staying far away from their homeland, they are not totally freed, but they are not directly controlled by local patriarchal norms and gendered inequalities. A 34 year old Bangladeshi married woman who lived with her in-laws in a joint family household said: “In Canada, as a married woman I do not have to deal with my in-laws each day; I can make my own decisions more freely; my husband also listens more here because I make money. So I am fine here in Canada”. In another interview session one woman respondent (age 45) in “Bangla

Town”, who had a daughter the same age as my daughter, asked me: “Do you want to raise your daughter in Bangladesh? Do you think she will have equal opportunity as in Canada? Will she be able to make her own life choices, or will you send her to Bangladesh so that you can have better control over her? It does not mean that, being a Bangladeshi woman, I hate Bangladesh, but as a woman I am secure here”.

Bangladeshi immigrant women also pointed out that being both immigrants and unskilled women they are employed in lower-end jobs in factories, coffee shops, stores, and offices. They are exploited gendered, religious, and racial subjects in Canada. Immigration to Canada as a global flow provides them some kind of economic and cultural freedom and power to fight against and negotiate gendered norms and patriarchy. I noted that immigrant women from religious minority groups have brought different imaginaries and perceptions of Bangladeshi nation-state and national identity to Canada. Within majority Muslims’ Bangladesh they were more vulnerable and exploited subjects. Thus, *desh* and *bedesh* are separate imaginaries to Bangladeshi women based on their gender, class, and religious identities. Therefore, modern and enlightened ideas of nation, nationalism, and nationality are key elements defining ethnic, cultural, and political identities and spaces. But, based on gender, religion, and ethnicity, these spaces are not equal. Globalization-led transnational migration has at best offered Bangladeshi women disjuncture from their unequal gender status within the Bangladeshi nation-state.

Are We Canadian Now?

Immigrants’ nationality and identity negotiation processes are also connected to the success and failure of the nation from which they have migrated. Influenced by neoliberal and global norms and lived experiences, Bangladeshi immigrants often criticize Bangladesh as “hopeless”, “corrupt”, “lawless”, “a failure” and as an unliveable nation. Due to a lack of effective political and economic leadership, weak institutions, and large-scale corruption, Bangladeshi immigrants are frustrated to have to identify themselves as having come from Bangladesh. These are common images for any post-colonial state in this world. In contrast, by migrating from a post-colonial state to a global city (Toronto) and incorporating Canadian identity, Bangladeshi immigrants find a sense of fair society, more freedom, better social and economic security, and comparatively good governance. I noted that Bangladeshi immigrants who were politically active in

Bangladesh but failed to stay due to post-independence changes in Bangladesh, and who worked for various non-profit NGOs and UN organizations, have been more critical and frustrated about the political and economic failures of the Bangladeshi nation. Immigrants' unfulfilled hopes from their homeland, and the broken imageries and nostalgia of their nation's success in many ways are influential in shaping their current understanding of national identity. By focusing on the current Bangladesh as a nation, one freedom fighter who left Bangladesh in 1976 after the assassination of the Father of the Nation, and who later came to Canada, said to me:

If I knew I would have a country like this, personally, believe me, I would not have gone to fight as a freedom fighter in 1971. I am frustrated when I see anti-liberation forces running the country. It is a country of criminals, corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, religious fanatics, and opportunist businessmen. There is no patriotism, no care for humans, and no space for a gentle person to live in Bangladesh. Can you believe what an unfortunate nation we are? We killed our Father of the Nation and also four key political leaders who brought our independence. Whatever you may think about me, I do not care: I am a respected Canadian citizen now. I respect my citizenship rights and I enjoy my freedom and the peace of this nation. I do not feel like connecting myself to today's Bangladeshi nation anymore, but I love my birthplace and the soil I walked on. If you talk about Bangladeshi nationality, and nationalism, these are politically invented and I am not part of that politics.

Religion and Nation: Contested Identity

Bangladeshi Muslim and Hindu respondents in general believe that, culturally and socially, Canada is suitable for Christian believers. Among 22 Muslim families, five of them migrated from Middle Eastern nations and they are economically and socially secure in Canada, and one respondent family has paid off house mortgages and also own businesses. These Muslim Bangladeshi immigrant families in my research do not belong ideologically to either Bangladeshi or Canadian political nationhood or geographical boundaries. Their perception of nationhood is guided by ideologies of pan-“Islamic *ummah*”, “Islamic brotherhood”, and “land of Islam” (Alavi 1987), and nostalgias of multiethnic Islamic “imagined community” (Anderson 1991). “Bengali” as ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identities, and the celebration of the Bangladeshi national days as markers of Bangladeshi nationalism, have less significance on their perceptions of nationhood and national identity. Furthermore, the post-9/11 *Islamophobia* (Gardner

2003), the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Western nations' wars against terrorism and increased antagonism towards Muslims, the policies of the current ruling Conservative government in Canada, and the revival of the radicalization of religious norms in this current global world have all been significant forces in shaping their nationhood based on religion. In negotiating and protecting their proper religious identity, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants try to make closer religious communication with other Muslim groups from different nations, and have become a part of a global Islamic *uhmma* and world Muslim *Jahan* (nation). Therefore, among the orthodox Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants, Canada will be their nation if they convert the nation with their religious doctrines, rituals, norms and rules. Otherwise, they will define their nationalist identity as Bangladeshi Muslims, or members of the Muslim *Jahan*.

Among the immigrants from minority religious groups of Bangladesh, Christians in particular hold slightly adventitious positions in Canada with familial religious customs and traditions in comparison to Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants. A Bangladeshi male Christian immigrant and a follower of Fellowship Mission in Bangladesh said: "to me, Canada is the Promised Land for us; I see this country as a land of flowing milk and honey. I believe that it is a heaven where I was sent by God's blessings". Based on my observation, it is a common perception about Canada among Bangladeshi minority Christian immigrants who did not have equal representation, rights and religious security in Bangladesh. Like Bangladeshi Muslims, Bangladeshi Christian immigrants also try to associate with various church bodies in order to proclaim their global religious *Uhmma*. Simultaneously, in their immigrant lives they want to identify themselves as culturally Bengali because there also are many "non-Christian" traditions that they cannot accept with their Bengali ethnic and cultural norms. Therefore, Bangladeshi Bengali Christian identity is complex, simultaneous, and localized in the immigrant context in Canada.

Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants enjoy more social, political and economic liberty under multicultural Canada. Since they are freely able to practice their religious events and rituals alongside Muslim Bangladeshis, the Hindus do not have a problem in defining their national identities in Canada. Like Bangladeshi Muslims and Christians, Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants also create closer associations with global Hindu communities. In this context, it is worth saying that Bangladeshi Bengali Hindus in

Canada have created closer associations with Hindus from West Bengal India. Therefore, political and national boundaries of nation states within transnational settings can be conquered and crossed by religious nostalgia and norms. Nation, nationality, and nationhood are contested components in the context of global migration and transnational movements.

DILEMMAS OF IDENTITY: BANGLADESHI OR CANADIAN?

I observed that the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants face a dilemma in defining their citizenship and nationality in Canada. Immigrants who are permanent residents undoubtedly identify themselves as Bangladeshi. However, early immigrants, who are legally Canadian citizens and travel with Canadian passports still hesitate and seem confused about defining their citizenship status in Canada. From a nationalist standpoint, taking citizenship and becoming loyal to another nation and her constitution, or having dual citizenship, does not bring glory to a person. Immigrants are hesitant because they feel they may lose their Bengali and Bangladeshi identity if they say they are Canadian citizens now. On the one hand, I observed that Bangladeshi immigrants proudly celebrate their citizenship ceremonies in Canada as a major “rite of passage” in their lives. Immigrants wear new clothes, invite friends, and take photographs of the ceremony. Photographs of their citizenship ceremonies are hung in immigrants’ living rooms symbolically to represent their achieved prestigious national identity in Canada. They also share citizenship photographs with their friends and families in Canada. At Bangla Church in Toronto, Christian immigrants pray for having God’s grace to pass the citizenship tests and to be Canadian citizens. During my fieldwork in Toronto, I received my permanent residency status in Canada, and I had to arrange a party at home. I was congratulated by my research respondents for having gained permanent residence status in Canada – as my grand achievement. Bangladeshi immigrants consider Canadian citizenship their “license of freedom”, their “powerful status as global citizens”, their “ticket to hassle-free travelling”, and achieving status as a member of first world nations and so forth.

On the other hand, many Bangladeshi immigrants believe that, because of their ethnic and cultural traditions, Bengali norms and ethos, nationality, and skin color, they can never be real Canadians in cultural, ethnic, and religious terms. One of my

respondents said “‘Canadian’ means *shada* (white Caucasian persons, and not Aboriginal); an East European white immigrant can be Canadian very easily with their racial, religious, and cultural identities. But for us, it will take a couple of generations”. The essence of “Canadianness” and Canadian citizenship to them has a closer connection to the English and French language, Caucasian race, Christianity, and to a longer connection to this land. Among the Bangladeshi immigrants, Canadian citizenship and Canadian national, political, and cultural traditions are different. One of my research respondents expressed his views by saying:

Even if I become a citizen of Canada, I cannot be Canadian in my life. It will be difficult to wave Canadian flags because Canada is not my birth place. I am not connected to the history of the Canadian nation state, its political and religious traditions, or its culture. I will be identified as a Bangladeshi for my entire life; Canadian citizenship is an opportunity for me, but my son probably will be more connected to Canada; obviously my grandchildren will be identified as Canadian.

During my fieldwork in Toronto, two of my research respondents became Canadian citizens. After staying three years in Canada as landed immigrants, they applied for Canadian citizenship status, and after meeting all security checks, and passing citizenship exams, they attended for the citizenship oath and ceremonies. I asked them: “How do you see your new identity as citizens of Canada?” A male respondent (age 36) who is a supporter of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and a supporter of Bangladeshi Nationalism, replied:

I do not know, it is a mixed feeling. I am confused. I am a Canadian citizen now, but I do not know how I will take the Canadian flag in my life. And how do I bow down to the Queen’s law? I never thought that I would be a citizen of another country in my life. It is a really hard job for me to put aside my Bangladeshi national flag and wave the Canadian flag for the rest of my life. Probably I will always put the green and red Bangladeshi national flag in my heart. It will be a really hard job for me.

A woman respondent (age 41) who was actively involved in progressive politics in Bangladesh, and who now lives in “Bangla Town” in Toronto, said:

It is hard to sing “Oh Canada” instead of singing the Bangladeshi national anthem “our golden Bengal; I love you” (*amar shonar Bangla, ami tomay valobashi*). It is a feeling like rejecting my poor mom for a rich aunty from a foreign land. Sometimes I feel I am a betrayer and selfish person; for my personal gain and interests I changed my identity. Now I have to send my

passport to Ottawa (Bangladesh High Commission to Canada) to get a “no visa required” seal in my Canadian passport to visit my home country. But what can I do, I left Bangladesh for many reasons.

The Canadian citizenship status and having a Canadian passport provides Bangladeshi immigrants a prestigious identity as a member of a wealthy and peaceful North American country, Canada. Canadian citizenship offers the huge advantage of having economic, social, and political stability in their lives. They can easily cross several national borders and have the opportunity to engage in global markets as Canadian skilled workers. Bangladeshi immigrants have to achieve Canadian citizenship by passing several hurdles and tests. Therefore, when they get the blue Canadian passports with maple leaf symbols, they consider it as a lifetime achievement, an investment in a prosperous future for the next generation, and a means of up-casting their ethnic, national and economic identities.

I also clearly noted that Canadian citizenship produces a dilemma, confusion, disjuncture, and loss of national and cultural identity inside Bangladeshi immigrants’ hearts. Canadian citizenship is being translated as loss of their nationality, their own existence, and their rights to be politically active in Bangladesh. Being a citizen of another country, Bangladeshi immigrants also feel a permanent separation from their own culture, tradition, and kin groups. Appadurai (1996) would identify these feelings of Bangladeshi immigrants as “disjuncture”.

Both Canadian and Bangladeshi national identities and nationalisms simultaneously exist among the Bangladeshi immigrants. In order to maintain their Bengali cultural and Bangladeshi national identities, Bangladeshi immigrants celebrate all Bangladeshi national and cultural days, speak Bengali, and shape their lives with Bengali cultural and social norms. Again, they celebrate citizenship ceremonies, uphold Canadian passports as a means to “up-casting” their national identity and as their ticket to enter into global markets. Immigrants’ new citizenship identity, and their closer association to global markets bring a feeling of loss of identity. Therefore, nationalism and national identities among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada are not always connected or bound to political and geographical boundaries, but rather, these identities and ideologies are continuously being shaped in relation to transnational interactions, economic and legal opportunities, and global events.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MULTICULTURALISM IN CANADA: A SPACE TO RESIST LOCAL, COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL BENGALI IDENTITY MARKERS

BANGLADESHI BENGALI IMMIGRANTS WITHIN MULTICULTURAL CANADIAN

In addressing Bangladeshi Bengali identity construction and negotiation processes in Canada, I looked at Canadian multiculturalism as a structural context. I have not explored theoretical conceptualizations of Canadian multiculturalism, nor have I focused on its policy implications within the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Toronto. Rather, I begin with Berry (1990) to provide a context for my research and then probe more deeply into the multiculturalism construct by looking closely at Bengali cultural practices in Toronto. According to Berry, the three key objectives of bringing multiculturalism into Canadian nationhood are: “first, enhancing sharing and contacts of inter ethnic and cultural groups, second, promoting ethnic groups’ cultural heritages, and third, acceptance and tolerance” (Berry 1990: 201-34; also see Dhamoon 2009). These are the most common, popular, celebrated, and apolitical characteristics of the Canadian brand of multiculturalism. My research addresses two different perspectives of Canadian multicultural policies. On one hand, Canadian multiculturalism is a “device of integration” (Abu-Laban and Stasiulis 1992: 370), and a liberal ideology of acceptance and tolerance (Dhamoon 2009: 9) that has created an open space for the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants to freely practice their cultural, national, and religious identities in Canada. I learned that, under the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), Bangladeshi immigrants have found a moral boost, received a positive mindset, and achieved a freedom of action to practice and celebrate their cultural, national, and religious traditions

in Canada (see Miller & Van Esterik 2009) [In Chapters Six and Seven I discussed celebrations of Bangladeshi national days and major cultural events in Canada]. I noticed that in East York (Danforth and Victoria Park) the local administration, members of parliament, and representatives of the federal government of Canada supported and encouraged the arrangement and practice of Bengali cultural and national events in Canada. Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants' social and cultural organizations are given space and financial support to organize Bangladeshi National Day ceremonies and Bengali New Year events in Toronto. Local MPs, leaders of political parties and local administration have attended Bengali New Year cultural programs, acknowledged the richness of Bengali culture, and tasted the spicy and exotic Bengali ethnic foods. Like many other cultures in multicultural Canada, Bangladeshi Bengali as a different ethnic and cultural group is accepted and consumed by the Canadian state. The Canadian multiculturalism as a constructed truth, a powerful hegemony, and a false consciousness of cultural freedom has been successfully transferred to various immigrant groups in Canada. While discussing living within such multicultural hegemonic relationships, A 58 year old man had left Bangladesh in the mid seventies for Germany and later migrated to Canada noted:

Canadian society has accepted differences of culture, language and ethnicity in her heart. I lived in Europe and I had a different feeling there for my religious and racial identity. As an individual, I have not found any problem to practice my religious and cultural events in Canada. I know it is a multicultural country and I am legally protected as a member of a visible ethnic and cultural minority group in Canada. The Bangladeshi immigrants can celebrate all national events and major religious and cultural programs here. You may know that the Bengali language curriculum has been accepted in a couple of school districts so that the next generation of Bengali Canadians can learn and understand their mother language. They can keep their ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity. In Toronto, you will find Bengali music schools, traditional dance schools, language schools and drawing schools. There are several cultural organizations regularly performing in Canada. At least a dozen community newspapers have been published; we have a Bengali TV channel which is also promoting Bengali ethnic existence and broadcasting cultural events in Canada. Even though we are not that old an immigrant community in the GTA (greater Toronto area), at least two or three Bengali immigrants are vying for local parliament member positions. Now we have developed "Bangla Town" which has become a centre of all community activities. We have Bengali book stores, restaurants, grocery stores, art studios, and

we have Bengali artists, singers, politicians, poets, actors, and social workers in Toronto who are all working together to represent Bengali communities and cultures in multicultural Canada. Thus, as Bangladeshi Bengali national, ethnic, and cultural group, we have been trying to create a spot in multicultural and multiethnic Canada.

On the other hand, I came to know that within the dominance of the two official languages, English and French (Wilson 1993), the state recognized the Anglo Canadian English culture and Judeo-Christian religious traditions in multicultural Canada (Makey 1999). Within white supremacy and power (Dhamoon 2009), Bangladeshi Bengali nationalism, culture, ethnic identity, and Bengali Muslim religion have little or no place. Bangladeshi immigrants little by little have understood that as a part of multicultural and “other” components, they have had to learn English or French and have had to adjust their biological and cultural clocks to the dominant culture in Canada. In comparison to other white ethnic groups, they are a visible minority. After the 9/11 political and religious contexts in Canada, the majority of Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants are Muslims who have brought with them the contested components of “ethno-religious culture” (Moddod 2007 in Dhamoon 2009: 21) such as Islamic names, gendered and religious norms, the *hijab*, and dietary laws. Several of my respondents said, “after 9/11 it was hard to find a new job, and as Muslims we were identified as a suspicious and untrustworthy religious and ethnic category”. However, the Canadian Multicultural Act is shaped and adjusted in response to global ethnic and religious tensions: Bengali immigrants’ language, ethnicity, and their majority Muslim religious identities are managed, regulated and governed under both multiculturalism acts in Canada (see Tussman 1985: 207; Wilson 1993) as well as global forces. In focusing on political, economic, and communal perspectives of Canadian multiculturalism, a 57 year old male respondent who is also an account in Toronto said:

Frankly speaking, politically and economically any educated and skilled immigrant group is a better alternative than the Canadian First Nation groups in Canada. As immigrants, we are more submissive and less concerned about our legal, political, and cultural rights. We are not a political threat so far to White settlers. We work hard, pay taxes, and want to accommodate ourselves the way the state wants to see us by learning their language, obeying laws, and changing our norms. Within the policies of multiculturalism, immigrants as different cultural and ethnic groups are welcomed to maintain the economic and political growth of the state. If it

is achieved, and we become a political threat to the White dominancy, we may see a different image of Canadian Multiculturalism.

The perceptions of Canadian multiculturalism to Bangladeshi immigrants are multifaceted and contradictory. It is worth mentioning that Bangladeshi immigrants have understood and defined the meaning of multiculturalism variously, based on their religious identity, political orientation, age, gender, and class positions in Canada. In the following sections, by connecting the liberal understanding of multiculturalism as “freedom of choice”, “acceptance and tolerance” and “sharing spaces” (Berry 1990), with the critical perspectives of multiculturalism as a “means of managing and governing other cultures” (Wilson 1993), the “power and politics of accepting differences” (Ahmed in Dhamoon 2009: 6) and the “violence of naming” (Bannerji 1995: 23), I underscored how Bangladeshi Bengali ethnic, cultural, religious and political subjects are celebrated, accommodated, negotiated, and challenged in multicultural Canada.

Practicing Religion in Multicultural Canada

In Bengali social and political contexts, by building schools, mosques, and temples, and contributing financially to religious institutions, people can gain prestige and social status, and can rise in social class. Following the same tradition, within a multicultural system, economically successful Bangladeshi immigrants have been involved in establishing religious, cultural and social institutions. These initiatives provide immigrants access to power, and achieve social and economic recognition, leadership status, and glory in their immigrant lives. Therefore, liberal components like freedom of choice, and the acceptance of religious differences in the multicultural acts not only allows Bangladeshi immigrants to practice their religious norms and rituals but also offers opportunities to re-establish personal and social identity within the Bangladeshi immigrant community.

I noted in my research that “freedom of choice” and “tolerance and acceptance of differences” under the Multicultural Act in Canada are also perceived as anti-religious and immoral initiatives by the Canadian state. Immigrants from all three religious groups of my research commonly express that in the name of freedom of choice, Canada is welcoming dangerous social and cultural values, sexual impurity, and what some call “immoral” events. To protect from sinful and immoral events in Canada, Bangladeshi

immigrants have engaged practicing religious events more strictly, and sending their children to faith-based educational institutions, which is also established under the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. Three of my Muslim research respondents send their children to faith-based schools, and two Christian families send their children to Catholic schools in Toronto. In order to maintain religious and moral purity, Bangladeshi Muslim parishioners as a group visit different mosques in various cities in Canada annually from a couple weeks to a couple of months to encourage and teach fellow brothers and sisters so that they may practice core religious values, norms, and laws in a non-Muslim and culturally “sinful” foreign land. This Islamic religious tradition is commonly called “*Chilla*”. I observed that in order to maintain core values of their religion and faiths, Bangladeshi Hindus and Christians bring religious scholars from their homeland to Canada, and they congregate as closed religious and ethnic groups in Canada.

Ten Muslim male respondents, ten Hindu (six male and four female) and fifteen Christian respondents (twelve male and three female) critically argued that too much freedom of religious practices in Canada under multiculturalism is turning the new immigrants into radical and fundamentalist religious communities in Canada that go against the core values and objectives of multiculturalism and human liberty. I clearly noticed that when Bangladeshi Hindu and Christian respondents discussed religious orthodoxy they commonly pointed out Islamic fundamentalism and increasing numbers of Muslim immigrants in Canada. They did not mention the emergence of radical Hinduism and Christianity in the current world. Even though Canadian multiculturalism offers great freedoms, and accepts diversified religious groups and beliefs, without some proper monitoring mechanism of the state, fundamentalist religious norms and orthodoxies can emerge. In this context, a research respondent who was politically involved in the Communist Party in Bangladesh, participated in the Freedom fight in 1971, and came to Canada in 1994 argued that Canada as a capitalist nation will encourage religious fundamentalist norms and values, but not anti-religious radical social and political values because religious groups pay taxes and are not inclined to challenge state dominancy and power.

Local Political Parties in Multicultural Canada

Influenced by “freedom of choice” in Canadian multicultural policies, Bangladeshi immigrants have re-established transnational wings of homeland political party offices in Canada. The BNP and AL (the two major political parties in Bangladesh) opened up their party offices in “Bangla Town” in Toronto. The supporters and members of these political parties can easily practice their local political ideologies, thoughts, and actions in multicultural Canadian state. Both political parties elect their party leaders in Canada by arranging political conventions and connecting other political organizations established in other cities in Canada. They also maintain close connections with Bangladesh. A male respondent (age 50) who is a leader of a political party conveyed:

I think that Canada is the best place to practice all kinds of political activities. In Bangladesh, when a particular political party runs the government, in many ways the opposition political parties cannot practice their political activities openly and freely. Opposition political parties are always controlled and harassed by the government. We do not face this kind of issue in Canada.

I noted that by re-establishing local political party offices, and by actively involving local politics in global locations, immigrants are able to locate their political identity and nationalism, and they are able to re-establish local political cultures. Out of fifty in-depth interviewees, only twenty respondents said that through these processes, Bangladeshi immigrants are also able to re-gain their political and social identities in Canada. Simultaneously, out of fifty respondents with whom I conducted in-depth interviews, thirty of them thought that “practicing local politics in immigrant settings is a foolish initiative; rather, in order to establish our ethnic, cultural and political rights as immigrants in Canada, we must be actively established in national politics”. Therefore, by encouraging the development of local political parties under the Multicultural Acts, Bangladeshi immigrants as “other”, or a minority group (ethnic and cultural), are excluded from gaining national power and challenging politics. This is the politics and hegemony of multicultural acts and practices in Canada. The entire multiculturalism process does not disown the modernized understanding of shaping nationhood and nationalism based on a dominant ethnic and linguistic homogeneity. In the colonial historical processes of building the Canadian nation state, Bangladeshi immigrants have

not lived on the same page as the Aboriginal population in Canada. But current multiculturalism is a *depoliticization* process in which Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants as post-colonial subjects are also identified as colonial and/or racial subaltern subjects like the First Nations population in Canada. The whole process is like creating “political reserves” for immigrants in Canada.

Politics of Language in Multicultural Canada

Like many other ethnic languages, Bengali as a different language is spoken in informal and private settings in multicultural Canada, but no other language is truly able to enter the institutional structures of the Canadian state. Even though under multicultural policies the Bengali language has been taught in a couple of school divisions and at the University of Toronto, these initiatives are only recognized as a tool of tolerating and accepting a difference within the dominance of bi-lingual Canada. Within the Canadian multicultural and bi-lingual nation state, the Bengali language is not able to create any “imagined communities” to become a part of Canadian nationhood. In multicultural Canada, non-official languages are still subjected to the historical colonial power games between English and French nationalism and bilingual policies in Canada. In response to global market demands, by introducing “multiculturalism as a new form of nationalism” (Makey 1999), Canada has incorporated and accepted different ethnic and linguistic groups, but Canadian nationalism is still guided by either English or French language and ethnicity. Bangladeshi immigrants have to negotiate and choose between the two official languages to become successful multicultural immigrants in Canada. Being members of the former British colony, and with familiarity with English as a global language, Bangladeshi immigrants feel comfortable settling in English dominant provinces in Canada. Four of my respondent families initially went to Montreal, in the French speaking province of Quebec, which is commonly viewed as the easiest place to get political asylum and which also has the most social support systems. After a few years, however, they moved to Ontario, an English speaking province. Bangladeshi immigrants find it harder to learn French because it is not something to which they have previously been exposed. A respondent family that moved from Montreal to Toronto said:

Even though I could learn French for my day to day work in Canada, in the future I will not be able to communicate with my children properly in

French, and I will not be able to help them with their school homework, so these are problems. On top of that I did not like the mandatory law of sending children to the French school in Montreal, so we moved to Toronto.

To me, the global acceptance of the English language by Bangladeshi immigrants, their exposure to English language under colonial educational policies in British Bengal, and colonial nostalgias of the “global *bhadralok* class” are the key factors for picking the English language provinces. The Bangladeshi immigrants’ desire and comfort to settle down in English speaking provinces and to send their children to English schools is one way of replacing colonial mindsets in global settings, but in another way it acknowledges the dominance and hegemonic presence of English within the Canadian multicultural state. Globalization-led transnational migration and Canadian multicultural policies are supporting the colonial discourse of language politics and restating dominance of English in Canada.

UNDERSTANDING THE BENGALI CULTURE WITHIN MULTICULTURAL CANADA

In anthropology, the first popular definition of culture was “a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor 1971 in Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952: 81). Traditionally, culture is also explained in looking at the meaning of symbolic systems, motivations, and thoughts of a particular local or ethnic group (Geertz 1966; 1983), and people’s ways of life or the life style of people (Harris 1975). However, ideas of localized culture and “local culture” (Geertz 1966, 1983) as an organic whole is a bit difficult to understand in relation to colonial trade networks, transnational migration, movement of human and capital, telecommunication, international development, and current globalizing processes (Kearney 1995; Ong 1999; Indra and Rosaldo 2002; Miles 2004; Parreñas 2005; Miller & Van Esterik 2010: 18). By looking at global movements of humans and global connectedness, both Gupta & Ferguson (1997) and Appadurai (1996, 1988a, 1988b) argued that understanding culture in relation to a bounded specific location is “problematic” and “empiricist”.

Similar to conventional anthropological understandings of culture, Multiculturalism as policy defines culture as “an umbrella term used to describe *specified* ethnic groups, historical nations, and linguistic minorities rather than all cultural groups”

(Dhammon 2009: 21). It is assumed that an immigrant group will bring a distinct, authentic and localized version of culture in a multicultural box and that a culture in multicultural contexts can be “pinpointed and judged” (Dhammon 2009: 28). In the context of Canadian multiculturalism Brotz (1980) raised an interesting argument by saying, “the real question – indeed the only question – is whether the pastrami has the right amount of garlic in pastrami meat. If this is ‘culture’ then multiculturalism turns out to be a choice of pizzas, wonton soup, and kosher ‘style’ pastrami sandwiches to which one can add ethnic radio programs” (Brotz 1980: 44). Scholars also argued that by looking at cultures as a free choice of consumer products, alternative options in the markets, and homogenous essential racial subjects within multiculturalism policies, we are neutralizing the power and dominancy of culture (Dhammon 2009), ignoring “internal contradictions and debates within culture” (Benhabib 1995: 204), and masking and covering social, ethnic and religious inequalities within cultural groups (Yong 1997 in Dhammon 2009: 39; Narayan 2000).

In the contexts of globalization and multiculturalism, my study suggests that it is problematic to search “the complex whole” in Bengali culture that carries organic and homogeneous components based on a close relation of location, language, ethnicity and common ethos. Rather, Bengali culture and traditions are fragmented and politicized. Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants in Canada have brought multiple “cultural narratives” (Benhabib 2002) of Bengali culture based on their historical interactions with colonial and post-colonial policies, political and religious identities, class, gender, and age differences. On the one hand, significant historical events – including religious conversions to Islam and Christianity from Hinduism, the 19th to early 20th century Bengal Renaissance, the separation of economic and education policies between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal, the formation of *bhadralok* classes in colonial Bengal, the India partition in 1947 which was based on minority and majority religious lines, the post colonial language movements in 1952, the Independence War in 1971, and the development of post-independent Islamic Bangladesh – all have created distinct and disjointed Bengali cultural ethos, imaginaries, and worldviews among the people of Bangladesh. On the other hand, the current global economic and cultural flows in the homeland, including satellite TV, internet, and computer education, as well as English-

language education and the presence of private financial and telecommunications industries, have also brought global and Western perspectives of Bengali culture. Therefore, it is problematic to identify culture based on a certain timeframe and specific location. Culture is always shaped in response to various forces and events and adaptations to various social, political and ecological changes. Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants' culture must be constructed within the historical factors and in response to global economic flows. Bangladeshi immigrants who base their identity on their social and economic class, gender, political norms and religious orientation have brought multiple narratives of Bengali cultures to multicultural Canada.

I found that before migration to Canada, several of my research participants in Toronto lived for many years in Arab nations, in the USA, and in European nations, and they incorporated different cultural and moral perspectives from those nations. I observed that Bangladeshi immigrants from Arab nations and from the USA brought core Islamic religious and cultural norms and anti-Western political stands in comparison to Bengalis who migrated directly from Bangladesh. Bangladeshi immigrants who migrated from European countries spoke more about racial and political discrimination issues in Canada, whereas Bangladeshi immigrants who migrated from the USA focused more on anti-western, anti-Republican, and political religious views in their lives in Canada. In Canada, all these people are considered Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants with their core cultural, ethnic and national identity regardless of their prior appearances.

I clearly observed that the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants' cultural ethos, worldviews, narratives and nostalgias vary and are fragmented according to religious orientation, political ideology, educational background, age, class and gender identity. The Bangladeshi immigrants who believe in Bangladeshi nationalism (Independent Bangladesh is a country for majority Bengali Muslims) versus immigrants who connect themselves with Bengali nationalism (secular Bangladeshi state based on common language, ethnicity, and political struggles of building the nation) have both carried totally different cultural, political, and nationalistic narratives to Canada. Politically and culturally they imagine very different and distinct forms of Bangladeshi nationalism and Bengali culture. In addition, Bangladeshi Christian and Hindu immigrants as minority religious groups in Bangladesh have brought distinct cultural and political orientations

and ways of life based on religious and culturally constructed norms that are in many ways distinct from those of the majority Bangladeshi Muslims.

Therefore, Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants as a distinct ethnic group have brought diversified forms of cultural traditions, religious and social norms, and ways of life that are constructed within colonial, postcolonial and current global contexts. Within the complex wholes of Bengali culture we have found diversity, differences and disjointed forms of cultural practices, ethos, and norms based on immigrants' patterns of migration, location of migration, political orientation and religious identity. Even though Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada celebrate all national days and Bengali cultural events, they connect themselves to Bengali culture according to their specific political and religious orientations. According to my understanding, the Canadian multicultural project in many ways provides a "one size fits all" approach to ethnic and cultural groups, but misses the complexities, inequalities, and diversity of Bengali culture created under the colonial and post-colonial political contexts in Bangladesh.

ARE BANGLADESHI IMMIGRANTS MEETING ALL MULTICULTURAL OBJECTIVES?

Canadian multiculturalism generally conveys the message that immigrants from all over the world will practice their cultural, religious and ethnic traditions freely in Canada, and that they can share those traditions with other ethnic and cultural groups (Berry 1990; Wilson 1993). However, my study conveys that institutionally there is no such organized sharing, and spaces have developed for small ethnic and cultural groups in Canada as "multicultural subjects" (Dhamoon 2009). I observed in a limited way and on a mostly personal level that Bangladeshi immigrants share their cultural ceremonies, traditions, and foods with their neighbours, friends, and coworkers in Canada. A 40 year old married woman respondent in "Bangla Town" who works in a grocery store said:

I am learning a lot from different cultural groups in Canada. I cook and eat different ethnic foods, and I use different spices now. My family members love to try different ethnic foods. Sometimes we go to restaurants to eat. It is not that I am [only] learning from my co-workers and friends, but I am also sharing with others. My non-Bengali colleagues always want to eat my spicy curry; they just love it but I do not know how they manage to tolerate our hot spices and green chillies.

Sharing food with others and eating ethnic foods are common means to create multicultural society in Canada. A majority of my research respondents think that cooking and eating Bangladeshi food is an important practice to protect their ethnic identity and cultural traditions in their immigrant lives in Toronto. I observed that most of the Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto prefer to cook mostly traditional Bengali food (rice, fish and meat curries, lentil (*dal*) and mixed vegetables (*sobjee*) at home with lots of spices imported from Bangladesh. They will only cook less spicy food if they are ill. I also observed that immigrant parents encourage their children to eat Bengali fish curry and rice as a key marker of Bengali identity. Sometimes parents force children to eat food without using any utensils, the traditional way Bengali people eat. I also observed in various family gatherings that most of the second generation immigrant children do not prefer eating Bengali food each day, and most of them do not know how to eat bony fishes. In order to get an authentic taste of food, Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants often carry cooked fish, dried fish (*shutkee mach*), cooked beef, cooked stomach of cow (*vuri*), tobacco, crispy rice (*muri*), various types of sweets (*misti*) and many other food items when they return to Canada after a visit in Bangladesh. Many of the spices or food items are not allowed to be brought to Canada, but people take risks in order to get the ‘authentic’ taste of ethnic food in their immigrant lives. With their friends they share these foods as precious ‘authentic’ ethnic foods brought from their homeland. Therefore, eating ones own ethnic food is one of the key components in maintaining ‘proper’ Bengali identity in Canada.

I noticed a cultural bias among the Bangladeshi immigrants that “Canadians (White settlers, European origin immigrants) do not eat spicy food and their foods are not tasty. They cannot handle Bengali spicy foods”.

In multicultural Canada, Bangladeshi immigrants hardly cook any ethnic and cultural foods at home that are not spicy. Guided by ideologies of “purity and pollution” and caste norms, Bengali people believe that eating home-cooked food is the most healthy and proper food behaviour, because who cooked for you and how your foods were cooked are important issues to them. Many Bangladeshi immigrants do not want to eat foods prepared by different ethnic and religious groups. Immigrants who follow strict religiously prescribed dietary rules do not eat in restaurants because they are suspicious

whether a cook prepares pork and beef items at the time. For cultural and religious reasons, I observed that Bangladeshi immigrants prefer to go to Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Indian restaurants. On many occasions eating restaurant foods, they compromise and select culturally and religiously authentic food over hygienically cooked food. If they go to fast food restaurants, both Hindus and Muslims prefer to eat fish and vegetable items. Therefore, perceptions of foods, cultural construction of proper eating, and religious dietary laws in one way do not allow Bangladeshi immigrants to test foods of other ethnic groups. However, in some cases Bangladeshi immigrants also eat foods from Middle Eastern *shawarma* houses, Indian and Pakistani restaurants, and “halal pizza” places.

I observed and participated with my research participants in the Canada Day celebration program as a major multicultural public event in Toronto. I noted that various forms of the Bengali folk cultural traditions, music, dress, dance events, and foods are shared with other ethnic and cultural groups in Canada. Young girls from different ethnic backgrounds perform traditional Bengali dance forms by wearing traditional Bengali dresses (*shari*) and jewellery (*chrui*, *tip* and *alta*) with their Bengali friends during Canada Day celebration programs. This is the key cultural event in which Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants showcase their cultural events in public places in Toronto. Every year a mega cultural event (focusing on Bengali culture and traditions) is also organized and performed by Bangladeshi immigrant groups at Dundas Square in downtown Toronto. The key objective of this program is to display Bengali culture to other ethnic and cultural groups in Canada. The core performers and observers of cultural events are Bengali immigrants, with no performers from other ethnic and cultural groups other than one or two Indian artists. I observed very few non-Bengali “white” Canadians come to observe and enjoy these cultural events unless their friends especially invite them.

I was also told that several Bangladeshi singers and dancers perform in cultural events organized by the Indian immigrant community in Toronto. Often their Bengali ethnic, cultural, and Bangladeshi national identities are not clearly defined in these cultural programs. Another research respondent said, “as a small ethnic and cultural group in Canada, we are still covered by the popular and dominant Indian cultural umbrella in Canada; people think that we are part of India. It will take time to bring our

own cultural national identities to Canada, but we are trying”. Community leaders, cultural workers and cultural organizers also argued that:

There are not many initiatives organized by the Canadian government for creating space to share our cultural traditions with others. Here and there with our personal initiatives we set up a Bangladeshi stall to sell a few dresses or food items. Or Bengali immigrant artists perform dance and music routines in cultural programs through their personal networks organized by the South Asian immigrant organizations. You cannot say it is a multicultural sharing space for a small ethnic group like us. There is no such space and those opportunities are created by the Canadian state where Bangladeshi Bengali cultures, heritages, and traditions are performed and shared with others. If it is perceived that it is an individual immigrant’s responsibility to communicate with other ethnic and cultural groups, and build Canada into a multicultural country, it will never be successful. However, if we organize something and invite local MPs, they come to support us because those leaders of local governments need our ethnic votes to be elected. They want to try everything, even eating five green chilies at a time to show their support for our culture. On top of that, our Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant cultural groups are also divided due to local and national politics, leadership crises, and personal ego problems. All together we have a long way to go to establish Bengali cultural and ethnic positions in Canada.

My study also suggests that first generation Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants in Canada are afraid to open up their cultural doors to allow others to know their pure religious, ethnic, and cultural spaces. By closing those doors and keeping themselves within their own groups, Bangladeshi immigrants try to protect their cultural and ethnic purity and resist all impure and polluted social and cultural aspects in multicultural Canada. One of the key reasons is that first generation Bangladeshi immigrants in general perceive that the dominant culture of Canada accepts free sex, alcohol consumption, divorce as a natural event, same sex relationships and marriage, more female rights, and courtship between different ethnic and religious groups. Among my research respondents, I did not notice any pattern or trend that more educated and elite class Bangladeshi immigrants are more open than less educated and more religiously conservative immigrants, or that older educated immigrants are more conservative than young and educated recent immigrants, or that one religious group is more flexible than others. I think it is more a matter of cultural and ethnic norms, and insecurity of losing own family members, therefore, by closing and separating themselves from outsiders they try to

protect their cultural and ethnic identity. Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants think that if they open up their ethnic, cultural and personal spaces to others and come closer to mainstream Canadian culture, their pure heterosexual, monogamous, endogamous, patriarchal, alcohol-free social, religious and cultural lives in Canada will be destroyed, changed, or polluted. In order to protect their ethnic and cultural purity and resist so-called “openness” in Canadian cultures, they do not want to share their private and public lives with other ethnic groups. In this context, I think that as in the past, peasants in rural Bengal were looted by foreign pirates and exploited by foreign rule; therefore Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants do not trust others who are unknown to them in a foreign country. I would see Foster’s argument about the “image of limited good” (Foster 1965) to be present among the Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada. They do not want to lose their limited cultural, religious, and moral goods by mixing and sharing with others.

Religious and cultural restrictions of food and drink among Bangladeshi immigrants; lack of cultural and linguistic communication skills; controlled and unequal social mobility among immigrant men and women; immigrants’ continuous economic pressures; and unfamiliarity with Canadian cultural life, main stream sports, and music are major factors that limit Bangladeshi immigrants’ connections with other cultural and ethnic groups. Bangladeshi immigrants hardly go to pubs for drinks, nor are involved in multi-ethnic community events, nor watch national games, nor follow Canadian national politics. As a result, in any multicultural and multi-ethnic spaces, Bangladeshi immigrants either remain silent or try to find fellow countrymen to talk with.

As an adaptive strategy, five to eight Bangladeshi immigrant families in my research – from similar social and economic status and age, carrying similar political ideologies and regional and religious identities, and who all belong to the same occupational and professional groups – have come to live together, sharing their close social lives and forming a social circle. Immigrants think that they find difficulties maintaining close interactions among each other if numbers of a social group exceed eight families. These social circles are ethnic, class and religion oriented, and are also shaped by their regional identity in Bangladesh. Families of each social circle maintain very tight networks among each other and share their personal, social, and religious lives together. They want to do everything together in their immigrant lives in Toronto,

including residence, shopping, traveling, praying, and even moving to another city. Several of them had maintained these close relationships for more than twenty years. As a result, Bangladeshi immigrants do not bother to communicate with other ethnic and cultural groups, nor do they try to extend their social networks or expand their social capital beyond their ethnic, cultural, and religious boundaries. To me, the formation of these family-based social circles in transnational immigrant settings is influenced and guided by caste-oriented closed social norms, and *jati*-based social and occupational associations in Bangladesh. Even though these social circles have functionality in expanding care, sharing information, and providing social insurance in risk situations, 40% of my research participants are very critical about these kinds of family-oriented ethnic social circles. According to a 78 year old male migrant and a freedom fighter who came to Canada as a political victim of the post 1976 crisis in Bangladesh:

The Bangladeshi immigrant community in Toronto is expanding in numbers but their thought processes, or “schools of thought”, have not developed up to the mark. I mean that they are living in a global city but ideologically they are living in rural villages in Bangladesh. The community as a whole has not been successful in assimilating with wider Canadian society. I do not see Bangladeshi immigrants as multicultural global citizens in Canada; they are more maintaining Bangladeshi rural social and cultural norms. Five to six immigrant families make a cluster and their own world in Canada. It is not healthy. Bangladeshi immigrants always try to protect themselves from the Western-English rational norms. They have not learned much from this multicultural society except religious orthodoxy (I am talking about all religious groups, but Muslims are leading others). You know, Bangladeshi immigrants do not even want to learn from other cultural groups because they always think that one day they will go back to Bangladesh. Canada is not their home, and never will be their country. But the funny thing is that they will not go back, yet they are putting themselves in a closed box. They feel proud that they are protecting their identity; I see they are full of confusion and contradictions about the meaning of religion, culture, and truth within Bangladeshi immigrant society. They do not know where they belong with their culture and religious norms. By the way, I am talking about first-generation immigrants. I hope the next generation will grasp some good things from this society and culture, because most of the time they are confused when seeing their parents’ dual roles at home and outside. To me, the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Canada is a very local form of Bangladeshi peasant society with various factions and fragments between different districts and regions. There are many groups within the communities and all maintain a small group in their immigrant life in

Canada. I do not see us as multicultural global citizens. We are living within a small world of our own creation with a few other immigrant families.

Bangladesh immigrants consciously practice locally fragmented and separated cultural, social and religious norms in Canada in order to protect their identity and prevent the influence of globalization. Like many other cultures, Bengali food, dress, music, and dance are celebrated and consumed within multicultural Canada as ethnic products and commodities. However, Bengali culture as a minority subject has not yet achieved its own spot in bilingual Canada. My research indicates that multiculturalism also has provided an ideological space for freedom and a fighting ground to resist politically constructed local markers of identity and existing inequalities within Bengali society.

MULTICULTURAL DIASPORIC SPACE: A SPACE FOR RESISTANCE

Multicultural Diasporic Space for Resisting Religious Identity

The multicultural diasporic space in Canada has not only welcomed, accepted and consumed local Bengali cultural diversities but it has also created a contested site of “unfiltered communication” (Abusharaf 2002 in Bernal 2005: 662), an “area of argument” and “imaginative creativity” (Webner 1998: 12), and a space for an “everyday forms of resistance of power” (Scott 1985) for Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto. In attending various social and family gatherings (*addas*), I learned that concepts of “minority and majority” as political and religious hegemonic consciousness and identity as constructed among the Bangladeshi Muslims, Hindus and Christians is challenged in multicultural “free space” in Canada.

Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants who used to enjoy majority status (religious, political and economic) in the homeland have experienced the pain and unequal status of being a religious minority as immigrants in Canada for the first time in their lives. Even though Canada as a nation accepts different religious traditions and faiths, the fact is that cultural, political, social, and religious spaces in Canada are dominated by Judeo-Christian religious norms and traditions (see Macky 1999). Furthermore, in the contexts of the post “9/11” political, cultural and economic clashes between Western countries and the rest of the world, plus ongoing pressures and propaganda against the “war against

terrorism” by the Western states and the media, the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants’ majority religious identity, norms and power from the homeland are challenged in Canada. My study suggests that in order to maintain and negotiate religious identity, and to face the global challenges against Islam, the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants in Canada commonly embrace core Islamic religious laws, values, norms and customs. I learned that Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants actively practice religious rituals, and women who never maintained *hijab* in their homeland now have begun to cover their bodies in Canada. Immigrants who were not that conscious about religion before migration to Canada have deliberately started to pray five times a day at home and in public places; and they always eat *halal* food, and teach others to follow Islamic ways in Canada. I noted that Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants closely practice their religious rules, norms and traditions in Canada as “weapons of the weak and as everyday forms of resistance” (see Scott 1985) to resist Western power against Islam and to challenge religious and cultural hegemony within multicultural Canada. Therefore, practicing core religious practices has become a functional tool to face cultural and religious differences in a new country, and to negotiate religion-based global minority status that they first encountered as immigrants to Canada.

In order to minimize and to contest their religion-based inequalities, the Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants in Canada have developed “unfiltered religious and social communication” (Abusharaf 2002 in Bernal 2005: 662) and have established a Pan Islamic unity (*ummah*) with Muslim immigrants from various ethnic and national backgrounds (see Nicholas 1973: 77; Ghosh 1993). I observed that members of Muslim religious groups support each other by performing day-to-day familial events (babysitting, giving rides to the shopping mall and airports, buying *halal* food, and helping with shopping), and also by celebrating religious ceremonies like *Namaj*, *Rojja*, *Eid*, and performing *Hajj*). I even noticed that in their diasporic lives, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants developed a religious-oriented interaction with the Pakistani Muslims who never recognized the existence of Bangladesh as an independent nation, or the purity of Bengali Muslims, or Bengali culture and traditions. In order to fight against the global West and establish authentic religious spaces, and to deal with their minority religious status and *Islamophobia* in Canada, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants forget the

brutal history of the 1971 Independence War against the Pakistani Muslim state. Nonetheless, as a strategy to face current global challenges within the multicultural Canadian state, many Bangladeshi Muslims have relied again on the notion of the global “Islamic brotherhood and unity” (*ummah*) even though the very idea did not work in the post-colonial Pakistani state. In their diasporic multicultural setting in Canada, Bangladeshi Muslims are contested, controlled, and challenged by the majority Judeo-Christian identity, and ever more so since the post-9/11 rise in globalized “Islamophobia” (Gardner 2003). At the same time in multicultural Canada, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants have ignored their own nationalist political and cultural values and identity that was gained with the cost of millions of lives; instead they have embraced core religious values of a globally united Islamic *ummah*.

My study also suggests that the Bangladeshi Hindus and Christian immigrants who used to be identified as minority religious groups in Bangladesh find their multicultural diasporic place in Canada to be a battleground in challenging and fighting back against the ‘majority’ Bangladeshi Muslims. The Bangladeshi religious minority groups as immigrants and citizens in Canada have gained moral strength to challenge the dominance of the Islamic state of Bangladesh, Bangladeshi nationalism, and the majority Bangladeshi Muslims in Canada. During my fieldwork in Toronto, in several social gatherings and chat sessions (*addas*), I listened to heated debates among immigrants from different religious groups. Immigrants from minority religious groups mentioned how the Bangladeshi state incorporated various acts and events that had been executed against the minority religious groups in Bangladesh. Over the years the religious minority groups in Bangladesh have been tortured, raped, killed, or displaced by Muslim compatriots, but being of minority status in the homeland they could not legally nor politically challenge them in Bangladesh. They could not even talk much about these issues among fellow Muslims. Therefore, migration to Canada and diasporic space in Toronto offers them a moral boost to challenge their unequal status as religious minorities in Bangladesh.

I observed that Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants frequently listen to, and try to accommodate, their fellow Hindu and Christian countrymen’s arguments a bit in their new legal and political situations in Canada. In the diaspora setting, many Muslim immigrants acknowledge the exploitive roles of majority religious groups against

minorities in Bangladesh, but some also resist minority religious groups' accusations by saying that "Bangladeshi Hindus never consider Bangladesh as their homeland; they are more connected to India in their hearts, a country for all Hindus". Five of my Muslim respondents responded by saying:

Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants in Canada are too close to Hindus from the homeland and also to Bengali Hindus from India; they only socialize with Bangladeshi Muslims if they really need to. Even if they do, they obviously keep a distance, but they will open up their hearts and secrets to Muslims.

A Muslim male immigrant (age 46) noted of Bangladeshi Christian immigrants in Canada:

Bangladeshi Christians are too much Christian in Canada because they think Canada is a Christian country and as Christians they are more protected than other religious groups from Bangladesh. They feel like Canada is their mother land; they are too much English here, they do not give a damn for us; many of them maintain white friends from their churches. Sometimes they do not even think that they are Bengali who came from Bangladesh. You know many of them are converts from lower caste Hindu background for economic reasons.

I found that under the protection of Canadian laws, Bangladeshi Muslims also throw counter-challenges at the minority religious groups in Canada by raising the colonial and post-colonial separation and partition politics between Hindus and Muslims.

In everyday immigrant lives in Canada, I observed Bangladeshi religious minority groups to challenge, encounter, and resist Muslim dominancy by gossiping, teasing, mimicking, and satirizing them. Bangladeshi minority religious groups in Toronto also use globally constructed popular discourse and images to resist Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants. I came to know that majority Muslim political and economic dominancy in multicultural Canada is contested and challenged by calling Bangladeshi Muslims "Bangladeshi Taliban", "terrorists", "Muslim fundamentalists", so-called "*halal* eaters (*halal party*)", veiled group (*Burkah party*), fundamentalist (*molla*) religious groups, and social assistance seekers (*social party*). One of my research respondents from a minority group said:

Many Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants in Canada are too much concerned with *halal* food and social assistance. They eat *halal*, make babies, go for

chilla (go to different cities to attend religious meetings for several weeks) and live on social assistance in Canada, that's it; they do not need to work. I do not know how a person can live like that; you know many of them are educated.

Members of minority religious groups sometimes joke around with majority groups as a form of resistance in their immigrant lives in Canada. One day I was in a Bengali grocery store on Toronto's Bloor Street. A Bangladeshi Christian immigrant customer (I confirmed later) came to the store and bought a pack of cigarettes and some other things. As an anthropologist in the field, I was observing and overhearing conversations between the storeowner (Muslim man) and the customer. Their conversation provides a clear view of how Bangladeshi minority religious groups challenge the majority Muslims in Canada. The conversation was as follows:

Shop owner: Hello *dada*, *Assalamalicum*. How are you doing?

Customer: Good, yourself?

Shop owner: Good, thanks. How can I help you?

Customer: Give me a pack of cigarettes first; let me see if I need to buy anything. [Then, the customer looked at a sign posted in the store saying "we sell all *halal* meat" and after reading the sign he asked the owner]: ...so *bhaijan* (*the term commonly used for a brother and buddy who comes from a Muslim background*), do you carry all *halal* meat in your store?

Shop owner: Oh Yes *dada* (*the term used for a brother or a buddy from Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian background*), we sell all *halal* meat. Everything is *halal* here. Do you want some meat or anything?

Customer: No, thanks – we do not care for *halal* meat.

[I went closer to them and listened to their conversation. Then the customer asked a question to the shop owner].

Customer: Do you sell *halal* sausage or *halal* pork?

[The customer in the store was teasing the owner and laughing about Bangladeshi immigrants' key concerns to eat *halal* meat in Canada as a marker of authentic Muslim religious identity.]

Shop owner: I cannot understand. What do you want, *dada*? [and after a few moments] What are you saying, *dada*? Oh, I see... you must be joking! [they both then laugh].

Upon reflection, I realized that the Bangladeshi immigrant was from a minority religious group who is in Toronto now and would never have dared even think of making a joke like this if he were still living in Bangladesh. He would be beaten in Bangladesh because, according to Islamic dietary law, eating pork is a sin and it is a forbidden meat. They believe it pollutes the human body. Even in Bangladesh, Christians cannot buy pork in public places, let alone tease a Muslim person about their religious food taboo. “Pig” is an everyday form of slang in Bangladeshi society. Eating pork in a predominantly Muslim country is considered a social, cultural and religious stigma. Even elite Hindus and Christians consider pigs as dirty animals in Bangladeshi Bengali society. The common belief is that only lower caste Bangladeshi Hindus (untouchable *harijans*) and non-Bengali sweepers and clearers (Hindi and *Telugu*-speaking *harijan* workers brought to Bangladesh by the British to clean human waste, deal with dead animals, work in the tannery business, or to plant tea) are permitted to raise pigs and eat pork. They are considered untouchable in Bengali society and culture because of their caste and occupational identity. However, in Toronto, by saying “*halal* sausage and *halal* pork” this immigrant customer has not only made a joke about Muslim religious dietary traditions, but in the diasporic setting in Canada, he has challenged the majority Muslim power and dominancy. Jokes are weapons and an everyday form of resistance that the Bangladeshi religious minority immigrants practice in a multicultural diaspora setting in Toronto (see Scott 1985). At the same time, it is also an act of disrespect to another person’s religious faith under multiculturalism and the laws in Canada; the immigrant customer intentionally challenged his minority status. A Protestant Christian male respondent (age 55) told me:

When a Muslim guy invited me to come to the Mosque to pray without knowing my religious faith, I replied to him that he had better come to Church now because he was in Canada. I could not imagine replying in this way to a Muslim person in Bangladesh because we were a powerless small minority religious group.

Thus, even though scholars criticize Canadian multiculturalism, my study suggests that the idea of a free society is not properly practiced, but at the micro level it has created an open and fearless diasporic immigrant setting in which Bangladeshi

minority religious groups have gained power to challenge their long history of religious and political dominance and subordination.

Multiculturalism: Space for Questioning Patriarchal Norms and Gender Identity

There appear to be two contradictory responses to multiculturalism by Bangladeshis in Toronto. On the one hand, as I have explicitly discussed in Chapter V, Bangladeshi immigrant women perform and practice core gender roles in Canada, guided by patriarchal norms and cultures – as housewives and good mothers, monogamous, submissive, and gossip-free blue collar women workers (Mies 1986; Kabir 2000 in Gardner 2003). Immigrant women are expected to maintain social, cultural and religious rules and *purdha* (veiling, meant to separate and hide them from other male members in male dominated public spaces) to maintain their authentic Bengali cultural and gender identity. Men are mostly in the public spaces while women are associated with private space. Even if women work fulltime in a store or factory, they have to perform their gendered work, for example, cooking, cleaning, and feeding children. Globalization-led transnational migration to Canada has brought few changes in gender and patriarchal norms in Bengali immigrant societies.

On the other hand, migration to Canada has forced Bangladeshi immigrants to come out from local (homeland) gendered rules, and patriarchal norms and traditions. Bangladeshi immigrant families do not foster much discrimination between their sons and daughters as might be expected as structured in Bangladesh. I observed that Bangladeshi immigrant male members have started to help their wives in household activities, take care of babies and cook meals while women attend school. Several of my female research respondents told me that immigration to Canada gave them courage to come out from their long and exploitative marriage relationships. After coming to Canada some have gone through divorces and started a free life. A Muslim woman respondent (age 46) said to me:

I did not realize how exploitive my husband and my in-laws were until I came to Canada. I worked seven years in Bangladesh, raised two daughters, and contributed equally to our migration cost. After coming here to Canada, within a month I managed to find a sales clerk job. I worked hard and made money for the last 12 years, but you know, I did not have any savings. I was hardly allowed spending on my own, but I did;

I used to spend money for my daughters and family needs, but not for my personal cause. I thought it was okay because I was doing it for the sake of my family. My husband never recognized my sacrifice nor appreciated my hard work for the family. Rather, he misbehaved all the time, always saying bad things about my family. He tried several businesses, opened up a grocery store, and later worked in a retail store, but he did not like anything. He wished to make more money within a short period of time, but nothing worked out. On top of that he often expressed his anger and frustration on me and beat me for no reason. One night we had a fight about our individual financial contributions to our family, and he beat me a lot. I could not work the next day. My daughters have grown up and they do not like to see such events every day in our family. I should also think about my life and their future too. I discussed all these issues with some of my close friends, and relatives both here in Canada and in Bangladesh. They said me, “enough is enough”. One of my close friends here in Toronto introduced me to a social worker and took me to a support centre. One month after that incident I decided I should move out; I should not live like that. So I rented a house and filed a divorce case against my husband. My ex-husband tried to settle our issues and said he was sorry; I replied, ‘no more apologies. I want to live my life. I am not a donkey.’ You know, I could not have made the decision if I still lived in Bangladesh. Here society is supportive and different.

During my fieldwork, I was informed by several of my research respondents of a few gay and lesbian couples within the Bangladeshi immigrant community, and one or two of them publicly announced their sexual orientation. However, this is a huge challenge for Bangladeshi persons, even in Canada. I noted that Bangladeshi immigrants have started marrying into different ethnic, religious, and age and gender groups. Appaduari (1996) explained these kinds of changes among the transnational immigrants in various diasporic locations with the term “disjuncture”, which Bourdieu (1966) defined as “uprootedness”. However, my study suggests that globalization-led transnational migration is not just a force that has brought disjuncture in cultural, religious, and social structures and norms in global diasporic settings. Rather, transnational immigrants’ pre-migration economic, political, and religious status and positions are contested and challenged in diaspora settings. Bangladeshi minority religious groups have created the space to contest and challenge their historical minority status, and as immigrants they want to fight against social, political, and religious inequalities from which they have been suffering as religious minority groups in Bangladesh. Thus, in multicultural

disaporic spaces, homeland unequal structures and practices are not always intensified and integrated but they are challenged and also contested.

Multicultural Diasporic Place: A Space for Contesting Class and Caste Identity

As I have mentioned in my previous chapters (VI and VII), faster transnational communication between the homeland and a foreign land, and easier access to transfer resources and finances to Canada has made it possible for Bangladeshi immigrants to restore their pre-migration social class, power, occupational and caste identities in Canada. Class and caste are a much contested and debated contextual phenomenon within the Bangladeshi immigrant community. I observed that class and caste identity are being shaped either by immigrants' ascribed and inherent family and social status or by their achieved status on the global capitalist index and material patterns of consumption. Therefore, multiculturalism and Canadian citizenship have provided them a false consciousness of equality, ideas of freedom, and of living in a classless and casteless society. Nonetheless, there is a common, proudly stated perception among Bangladeshi immigrants "that both super rich persons and everyday workers go to the same store to do their grocery shopping and eat the same food, so people do not discriminate based on their class and caste status". The whole idea of false class and casteless immigrant lives in Canada, and equality of all citizens has provided a consciousness to Bangladeshi working class immigrants to challenge elite Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada. In order to contest and challenge the powerful blocks and elite Bangladeshis, a young working-class male immigrant said:

Everyone is equal in Canada. What you had, who you were in Bangladesh, what is caste: we do not give a damn. It is a new country and we have to do it differently. We all pay taxes and we are all equal Canadian citizens.

I noticed that in order to challenge educated, professional and elite immigrants from Bangladesh, the new and young working class Bangladeshi immigrants have organized and established themselves within several immigrant social, occupational, regional, religious, cultural and political organizations in Toronto. They manage and lead these organizations, which offer them some kind of social recognition and power to challenge, and negotiate with, the elite professional classes and dominant caste groups. Through this process they want to regain their social and political identity in Canada.

However, the elite and educated Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada also challenge initiatives of various types of social class mobility among the working class immigrants. One of my elite class respondents said to me, “all taxi drivers in Toronto are owners of community newspapers, and they are the managing committee members of the local mosques. All these groups are now journalists and priests, so can you imagine where we are living?”

A Multicultural Diasporic Place: Space for Contesting National Identity

As I have discussed in previous chapters, in the process of maintaining their national identity Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada remember the Independence War, observe International Mother Language Day, celebrate all national days, and remember both historical crises and joyful moments for Bangladesh as a nation. They also carry images of the national flag, all major national monuments, green paddy fields, rivers full of water in monsoon, fried *Hilsha* fish (national fish), and lotus flowers (national flower in Bangladesh) to define their connection to their motherland. One respondent conveyed, “Bangladesh is like my old mother; she cannot walk properly and sometimes she fails to remember my face, but her heart is filled with love and care for me. I had to leave her alone for many practical reasons, but I cannot forget her”. In their immigrant lives, Bangladeshi immigrants uphold their Bangladeshi national and Bengali ethnic identities even though the country is also widely viewed as a disaster-prone nation, a poverty driven country, or a bottomless basket. But immigrants feel proud and share their joys when they hear any kind of good news about their homeland. I remember that when the Bangladeshi national cricket team won a game against Pakistan and South Africa, as well as when a Bangladeshi economist was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, immigrants celebrate these events by sharing sweets in Toronto, and arranged social gatherings and chat sessions (*addas*) to share the pride of a Nobel Prize together. By celebrating national events, discussing good and bad news of the homeland, carrying images of Bangladesh in their hearts, and though the various imaginaries of the motherland, Bangladeshi immigrants create transnational “imagined communities” to define their national identity and their connection to their nation.

At the same time, I noted that not all Bangladeshi immigrants are created equally; some have become members of an “imagined community” due to their historical struggle

as religious, political and social minorities within the Bangladeshi nation state. In diasporic settings, as Shukla (2003) argued in relation to “opposition forces”, “violence” (Axel 2001), “unequal opportunities” (Sheffer 2003: 17), “political and ethnic struggles” (Gledhill 2000: 177-183), and lack of freedom, opportunity, hope, and social security are important factors that influence immigrants to challenge their nationality, nationhood, and national identity. In a social *adda* with four of my respondents and two outsiders in “Bangla Town”, immigrants shared their nostalgic connections and their hopelessness about their motherland:

We carry memories of our childhood, remember our golden young ages in Bangladesh, feel for our kin and relatives, but if you talk about my connection to Bangladesh as nation: sorry, we do not feel that much. A gentle man cannot live in Bangladesh. We had a hope that after liberation we would be able to build our nation, but we failed. Now the country is full of corrupt businessmen and politicians. We have nothing to do with Bangladesh as our nation; we have crossed that part.

Bangladeshi minority immigrants who had less social and political entitlement to the Bangladeshi nation clearly say:

We are Bangladeshi Bengali-Canadian. We were born in Bangladesh, but we do not have any space and rights as members of the minority religious group in that nation; we are still considered as enemies of the state, or a block vote bank.

Many Bangladeshi immigrant women commonly disown Bangladesh as their nation because of male-dominated social positions and patriarchy. In a diasporic setting in Toronto, Bangladeshi immigrants commonly accept Canadian passports for economic and political opportunities and social security. Thus, national identity and nationality in a transnational diasporic setting are complex and multi-layered, and images of the homeland and nation are not equal among all immigrants, but vary according to their economic, religious, and political entitlement to their homeland.

“Bangla Town”: A Contested Multicultural Diasporic Space

In major cities and towns in this current global world, we will find that various ethnic and cultural enclaves have become organized, for example, Chinatown, India Bazaar, Little Greece, and Little Italy. Immigrants have created these spaces with images of their homelands, their cultures and nostalgias of shaping authentic spaces in foreign

lands. These ethnic small towns and bazaars represent a multicultural and multi-ethnic global world that also is questioning the single ethnic/culture-oriented modern nationhood. Bangladeshi immigrants have established a “little Bangladesh” in Toronto commonly called “Bangla Town”. Even though Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants come to “Bangla Town” at least once a week to buy Bangladeshi food, fish, vegetables, spices, and *halal* meat, some of them come to meet their friends for social *addas*. Cultural workers organize and perform programs in “Bangla Town” too. But I came to know that “Bangla Town”, as an ethnic and cultural space for Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants, and as a core centre for representing Canadian multiculturalism, is challenged and contested by the elite, educated and professional Bangladeshi immigrants who are mostly settled down in suburban areas of Toronto (e.g., Brampton, Mississauga, and Oakville). According to them, “Bangla Town” is a place where mostly Bangladeshi new immigrants, working class groups, the less educated, taxi drivers, and shop owners live and/or hang around. Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants who live in “Bangla Town” areas hardly speak English, do not collect any information about the whole of Canada, and only communicate with fellow country people living in the same neighbourhood. Therefore, even though “Bangla Town” is considered to be an emblem of multiculturalism and center of Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Toronto, it has few activities with diversified cultural and ethnic groups. It is an ethnic and cultural endogamous space by Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants.

The Bangladeshi inhabitants in “Bangla Town” are very active in practicing Bengali culture and respecting Bangladesh national days, and are seriously involved with national political parties as well as social, regional, and cultural organizations. A 43 year old elite female respondent lives in Mississauga said to me:

I hate the “Bangla Town” area. First of all, there are too many *deshi* people and that always brings problems. Second, it is a very ethnic and dirty place, you smell Bangladesh if you enter into any apartments close to Victoria Park subway station where many Bangladeshi immigrants live. I do not want to hang around only Bangladeshi people all the time. So what is the point to come to Canada if I just live with fellow country people, eat rice three times a day and speak in Bengali all the time? These people are trying to re-build Bangladesh in Canada. Why? If these guys miss their country so much, then go there. I did not come to Canada with a dream to convert Canada to Bangladesh.

Therefore, “Bangla Town” as a multicultural diasporic space in Toronto does not represent a homogeneous cultural and ethnic space that is integrating all Bangladeshi nationals and Bengali ethnic and cultural groups in Toronto. Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto practice multiple cultural norms and nostalgias which are shaped by their achieved economic and social class status in Canada as well as global cultural flows. Ideologically and culturally elite and educated Bangladeshi immigrants do not want to connect themselves with “Bangla Town”. Not all Bangladeshi immigrants as an ethnic group have brought the same culture to Canada that can be kept and re-organised in “Bangla Town”. I noted that “Bangla Town” as an ethnic and cultural space is contested based on Bangladeshi immigrants’ social and economic class norms and status, pre-migration homeland’s caste-based social norms and *jati*-oriented occupational stratification. Elite and educated Bangladeshi immigrants go to “Bangla Town” to do their grocery shopping and buy fish from stores, but they do not want to associate with the people who clean and sell the fish. To them, it is a distinct village (*gram* or *para*) based on specific occupational, class, and caste groups. Furthermore, many Bangladeshi immigrants do not even want to practice Bengali cultural customs in multicultural Canada. They find too many local cultural practices are creating walls to global citizenship. Bengali culture has disjointed, fragmented and melded in response to neoliberal global cultural forces. On the one hand, “Bangla Town” is representing one of the core objectives of Canadian multiculturalism where Bangladeshi immigrants can consume authentic culture, rituals, and foods. On the other hand, it reflects the complexity and dynamisms of Bengali culture and ethnic groups that base their perceptions of class and caste-oriented social stratification in Bangladesh. “Bangla Town” is not just a place for Bengali ethnic food, culture and Bengali speaking native people, but it is a diasporic space where Bangladeshi elite gentlemen immigrants are separating themselves from fellow working class immigrants who are closely associated to “Bangla Town” and Bengali cultural and linguistic traditions. Ideologically they disown this place but they do not ignore the functionality of “Bangla Town”. Therefore, “Bangla Town” does not represent the ethnic, united, homogeneous homeland Bengali culture in multicultural Canada. Rather “Bangla Town” is a complex space where Bengali culture has been shaped by connecting diversities between English-educated

global gentlemen (*bhadralok*) classes and new global working class Bangladeshi immigrants. “Bangla Town” in Toronto is not a global space disjointed from colonial and post-colonial aspects of Bengali culture, but it is a culturally-contested space between *desh* (homeland) and *bedesh* (foreign land) (see Gardner 1995).

Thus, what does culture mean in such small ethnic enclaves in the context of a multicultural new global nationalism? Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants have not brought a homogeneous Bengali ethnic culture into this multicultural box. Bengali culture is diversified and fragmented due its flexibility, and the experiences of encountering colonial power, and religious, cultural and political struggles. On one hand, from functionalist and symbolic points of views, Bangladeshi immigrants find their ethos, imaginaries and selfhood – their identity – by practicing cultures in multicultural Canada. On the other hand, multiculturalism has created a space where Bengali culture is simulated based on political, class and religious histories in Bangladesh. Again, like many other small exotic cultures, Bengali culture in Canada is an exotic product in global cultural markets. Bengali culture is always changing as a simultaneous and ongoing process.

CHAPTER NINE
CONCLUSION

“What does it mean, at the end of the twentieth century, to speak ... of
‘a native land’? What processes rather essences are involved in present
experiences of cultural identity?”

[James Clifford’s (1988: 275) question in Chaudhuri 2005: 285]

GLOBALIZATION AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION

Globalization-led migration to Canada has re-territorialized, re-rooted, and contested Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants’ ethnic, national, religious, social and cultural markers of identity that were constructed within colonial and post-colonial political contexts in Bangladesh. My research explicitly defines that, in response to flows of globalization, “Bangladeshi Bengali” as ethnic, national, cultural and religious identity has not become totally a homogenous, disjoined, and hybrid subject that globalization scholars commonly have argued (Harvey 1989; Gilroy 1993; Bhaba 1994; Gardner 1995; Kearney 1995; Appaduari 1996, 2002). This research also suggests that in the processes of re-territorialization, Bangladeshi as a nationality and nationhood as a political identity have to some extent disjointed as well as turned into a simultaneous subject among religious minorities, working classes, and women immigrants. The lower strata of the society – women, working classes and religious and political minorities – never had their entitlements recognized in the anti-colonial movements within India or in post-colonial independent Bangladesh (see Chatterjee 1993; Hasmi 2000 in Ainoon 1995: 53). Therefore, Bangladeshi national identity has not made much sense to those immigrants; in other words, their imaginations and nostalgias of Bangladeshi national identity are different from those of privileged religious and social classes. But all Bangladeshi

Bengali immigrants commonly define their Bengali ethnic and cultural traditions as essential elements in forming their personal and community identity in multicultural Canada.

Migration to Canada has supported Bangladeshi men and women immigrants to enter into low-paid jobs in Canada and to leave behind political, social, gender and class inequalities of their homeland. However, my findings do support scholars who have argued that globalization creates an underclass, inequalities, dependency and vulnerabilities (see Wiest 1983; Ong 1996; Sassen 1998; Friedman 2004; Chowdhury 2005). Bangladeshi immigrants as an “ethnic-class group” (Ahmed 1985) have become an underclass and subaltern group due to lack of entitlement to Canadian economic and political institutions, and because of the politics of credentials and their recognition by the Canadian state. Formations of Bangladeshi immigrants’ class identity in Canada are closely connected to their interactions with economic and political institutional structures in Canada. This research also suggests that perceptions of class and class identity of the Bangladeshi immigrants are also determined by their pre-migration educational qualification, family history, lineage identity, and occupations status in Bangladesh, even though Bangladeshi immigrants commonly believe that migration to Canada is a class degradation process for them. However, this study finds that unskilled and less-educated Bangladeshi immigrants find their agency to some extent in Canada with its comparatively transparent social and economic structures. But the educated Bangladeshi skilled workers undoubtedly get the message that globalization is an unequal process; still, they respond as if in denial of the experienced barriers to finding their roots and identity as immigrants to Canada. This study also suggests that through faster and more frequent transnational communication between Bangladesh and Canada, elite classes can re-establish their social hierarchy in their immigrant lives in Canada. Bangladeshi immigrants’ social class is also determined by several non-economic components such as religion (minority and majority), gender, and immigrants’ positions in the Bangladeshi nation-state. Therefore, class identity among the Bangladeshi immigrants is shaped by their pre-migration economic and social positions in Bangladesh and their economic entitlements in Canada.

This study clearly shows that Bangladeshi immigrant women as a whole are more vulnerable subjects both in private and public spaces in Canada as they are forced to follow both cultural – patriarchy and gender norms – and global market regulations (Mies 1986; Ong 1987; Kabeer 1991; Kibria 1994). I also found that Canadian social and economic structure and laws have provided an agency and a space to working class Bangladeshi immigrant women, women from minority religious groups, single women, and divorced women to fight against local patriarchy and inequalities. Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant women as vulnerable subjects are still struggling and continuously negotiating their ethnic, religious and gender identity and norms between Bangladesh and Canada. Bangladeshi women have incorporated gendered norms, religious symbols, and patriarchal ideologies of Bangladesh in defining what they deem as their ‘proper’ identity in Canada, and in so doing, they have faced unanticipated challenges and risks in their immigrant lives. Both at home and in their host locations, Bangladeshi immigrant women have been trapped and controlled by multiple forces – class, gender and ethnicity.

On one hand, various small fragments of Bangladeshi Bengali identity have been constructed “around the people, places and institutions” (Sarup 1994 in Ahmed 2005: 100). Identities have also been shaped and re-shaped within the historical, political, economic, religious, cultural and class struggles in Bangladesh (Chaudhuri 2005: 285), and are then re-rooted in an immigrant setting in Toronto. Bengali identity construction processes were not uniform in either colonial Bengal or in independent Bangladesh. However, this study finds that Bangladeshi immigrants in Toronto frame their identity by making a “link to location” (Hall 1997), and by imagining, memorizing, simulating, and celebrating core Bengali cultural and religious traditions, and invented national days (see Appadurai 1996, 2002). From a reflexive point of view this study has incorporated an emic process of making and negotiating Bangladeshi immigrant identity. Papastergiadis (2000) said that immigrants define their identity by creating “proper space”. This study notes that Bangladeshi immigrants have converted “foreign land” to “proper space” by simulating “Bangla Town” with their local imaginaries, establishing religious, social, political, regional, and cultural institutions, and by continuous communication between home and immigrant space. Bangladeshi immigrants also turn their homes into “private museums” (Werbner 2002 in Ahmed 2005: 2003) in Toronto by bringing cultural

artifacts, symbols of national monuments, spices, books, photographs of national leaders, and the work of Bengali writers and poets. These are all means to settle down in an unknown and improper place, and negotiation initiatives in relocating their lost identity in relation to multiple proper spaces. Based on ethnographic research, my study reveals that the Bangladeshi immigrants' ideology of caste, *jati*-oriented occupational and social boundaries, regionalism, religious orthodoxy, notions of "minority and majority", patriarchy and gender division also play key roles in shaping their identity in their immigrant lives in Toronto. Historically constructed political, religious and cultural factions and differences in the homeland are re-rooted in the immigrant land to create their personal and community identity. This research clearly demonstrates that there are core components of Bangladeshi identity which "remain fixed" to the land (Ahmed 2005: 221), for example, religion, caste, and *jati*-oriented occupational identities which are not disjointed in their diasporic lives in Toronto. Less confusion and hybridity are noticed when immigrants define their religious and national identity in Canada. There are distinct and separate differences in identity noted between Bengali immigrants from West Bengal, India and Bangladesh, which clearly denotes the modernized presence of national boundaries in this borderless global world. Furthermore, ethnic and linguistic commonalities do not create a homogeneous identity among two Bengali ethnic groups from two different nations. Religious, cultural, and nationally separated boundaries and identities constructed within colonial political and economic contexts are not disjointed in the context of globalization and transnational migration. Therefore, globalization and transnational migration have not created homogenous or disjointed qualities of homelessness, up-rootedness, simultaneousness, fluidity, ambiguousness, hybridity or plurality among Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants. In order to negotiate identity, and to challenge differences and inequalities, Bangladeshi immigrants often go back to their cultural roots, the political history of emergence of the nation Bangladesh, and they try to reconnect their identity to their imagined proper place in their homeland (*desh*, native village).

On the other hand, this study argues that immigrant identity is constantly shaped and reshaped in relation to local and global social, political and economic contexts, as Stuart Hall (1997) said that "identification" is a continuous process. Bangladeshi

immigrants also negotiate their ethnic, religious and cultural identity in response to various forces of “opposition” and “difference” both in and outside of the immigrant community in Toronto. Identity is not always being shaped by creating “sameness” but rather by making “differences”. Bangladeshi Bengali Muslims, Hindus and have all integrated core religious norms, customs and rituals to maintain their distinct identity within multi-religion Canada, and have taken religion as a weapon to challenge local differences and global religious flows. Based on colonial and pre-colonial “minority and majority” religious identity and ideologies, and case oriented “purity and pollution”, all three religious groups are creating opposition and defensiveness among their own ethnic community and also with outsiders. Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants who maintained status as the religious majority as well as the most politically powerful group in Bangladesh have incorporated core religious values, and “scripturalist” ideologies (Hopkins & Westergard 1988: 5; Ahmed 2005) to resist majority Christian cultural and political dominancy in Canada. Additionally, in post-9/11 contexts, in contrast to Bengali as a secular marker of identity, Muslim immigrants have incorporated core Islamic norms, beliefs, symbols, and rituals to challenge the Western discourse of “Islamophobia”. Bangladeshi Hindu and Christian immigrants who were minority religious groups in Bangladesh have incorporated core religious values and norms also to resist and challenge Bangladeshi ethnic Muslim dominancy in their immigrant lives in Toronto. Bangladeshi Christian immigrants have become core religious persons by connecting to dominant Christian culture and institutions to challenge their minority religious identity in Canada. A major feature of my research is the suggestion that Bangladeshi immigrants have used religious practices and rituals as key components to negotiate their ethnic and cultural identity in Canada.

At the same time, all three religious groups in my research practice key features of Bengali culture, Bengali language, Bangladeshi dress and food in order to separate themselves from other ethnic and cultural groups in Canada. By transporting these elements of their culture, Bangladeshi immigrants challenge their ethnic and class inequalities and differences in comparison to other dominant ethnic groups. Therefore, processes of identity construction and negotiation among the Bangladeshi immigrants are

dependent on opposite forces, differences, “situational” and appropriate in particular contexts (see Woodward 1997; Ahmed 2005: 122).

This research illustrates how Bangladeshi migration to Canada has created a diasporic space which is not just an in-between and imaginary space, but a battleground to challenge, contest, and resist existing local inequalities. Immigrants are constantly violating a “series of cultural and social codes” (Guha 1994: 336) in their diaspora lives in Canada in order to negotiate their identity. Less educated working class and low-caste groups challenge elite Bangladeshi immigrant classes and high-caste groups by creating and leading diaspora social, regional, political and religious institutions. Minority Hindu and Christian immigrants have challenged majority Muslims’ dominance by making jokes, gossiping about Muslims, and disowning the Bangladeshi nationalist identity which centered on incorporating Islamic norms and symbols. Bangladeshi immigrants as a “deterritorialized and disenfranchised” ethnic and class category (Appadurai 1996) challenge “white and English dominance” (Bannerji 2000) through constant criticism of Canada as an improper and impure space. Bangladeshi immigrants consider Canadian identity as a key to enter into the global market and a weapon to challenge the inequalities that Bangladeshi nationals face due to their Bangladeshi identities (racial category, poor, Muslim, “citizens of a Third World nation who are a potential threat to become illegal immigrants). Transnational migration as a response to trade liberalization has offered Bangladeshi immigrant women opportunity to engage directly in service sectors and the feminine job market. This economic freedom has created a space to resist local gender and patriarchal dominance in an immigrant context in Toronto.

Thus, Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants’ key markers of identity as national, ethnic, cultural, religious, class and gender subjects have not become totally homogeneous, disjointed, hybrid, and unequal in response to economic and cultural globalization. Bengali immigrants’ class and gender identities are disjointed and contested within the global economic contests as racial and communal class subjects. At the same time, they also challenge and disown dominant class and gender ideologies in multicultural Canada. This is a disjuncture but it is also a form of resistance that globalization has fostered. Bangladeshi immigrants find religion to be the most important marker of their immigrant identity along with their ethnicity, culture and nationality.

Globalization forces have not disjointed and up-rooted these identity markers totally. In order to negotiate their identity, on one hand Bangladeshi immigrants reinvent and re-root class, religion and political separations and differences that were intensified and politicized within colonial and post-colonial contexts in Bangladesh. In global immigrant contexts they have continuously created differences in opposition to finding commonality within their own their ethnic and cultural boundaries as well as outside. On the other hand, Bengali immigrants challenge and contest their homeland identity (traditions, religious and class norms) in response to multicultural global flows in Canada. Due to their more frequent and faster transnational communication, Bangladeshi and host-land tensions and changes are also shaping their selfhood; they are looking at each other according to religious and class differences. Bengali cultural identity has never been a constant phenomenon; in immigrant contexts Bengali and Bangladeshi identity are being shaped by constant negotiation and challenging internal and external forces. Some elements of Bangladeshi Bengali identity is relatively static, such as religion and caste, whereas other elements, like gender and social class, are more easily contested. Immigrant negotiation always positions their identity within these changing and simultaneous forces. These forces are sometimes local, global and transnational. Bengali immigrant identity and their immigrant lives in Toronto is an ongoing process.

SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Globalization, Transnational Migration and Pre-Colonial Markers Of Identity

Global economic and cultural networks, faster communication technology, and print and electronic media have not up-rooted, disjointed and hybridized pre-colonial markers of Bengali identity. Bangladeshi immigrants have reinvented their individual and group identities, and organized diasporic social organizations and boundaries by reemploying ideologies of the caste system (*varnas*), *Jati*-oriented occupation (*pasha*) identity, lineage status (*bangsha morjada*) and gender (*lingo*). Even though, at the normative level, immigrants convey that these issues are not as important anymore in their immigrant lives, still, in practical terms, this study suggests that in maintaining and relocating Bangladeshi immigrants' lost identity these issues are still essential.

- a) Despite religious differences, Bangladeshi Muslim, Hindu and Christian immigrants carry caste ideologies, perceptions of purity and pollution, and

support practices of ethnic and religious endogamy. Surnames remain important representative markers of caste identity. Caste-guided ideologies and identities of *ashraf* and *atraf*, which started in post-conversion Islamic India, have created a separated religious and social identity between folk Muslims and elite Muslims who migrated to India from central Asia. This study unpacks the essence of *ashraf* and *atraf* in making separate and distinct identities among Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants. Following homeland traditions, Bengali Muslims in Toronto try to achieve *ashraf* identity and status by incorporating Arab cultural and Islamic norms, traditions and symbols. Bangladeshi Christian immigrants remember their pre-conversion caste status, occupational identity, and family history in their immigrant lives and use those memories to define their current social identity. All three Bangladeshi religious groups believe that sexual, ethnic and cultural purity are key makers of authentic Bangladeshi Bengali identity in Toronto. There is a complex relationship between caste and class among the Bangladeshi immigrants that shapes their individual and social identities. Religious differences and religious norms that have guided social and cultural boundaries and differences are significant factors in defining and creating Bangladeshi immigrant identity in Toronto. Therefore, transnational migration is not a secular journey to Bangladeshi immigrants, but rather a more religious one.

b) Transnational migration to Canada as a key global force has not disjointed or up-rooted *jati*-oriented occupational identity. In the immigrant context in Canada, e.g., who is a cook, who works for Canadian government, and who cleans washrooms all matter in marking immigrant personal and family identity. In order to negotiate identity, immigrants always relate post-migration occupational positions to pre-migration occupations. Bangladeshi immigrants have organized occupational social groups (e.g., Bangladeshi Engineering Association and Doctors' associations) in Toronto even though many of them are not employed as doctors and engineers. This study finds that the Bangladeshi immigrants' perceptions of classes and class identity do not depend on their current income scales in Canada, but their pre-migration social and economic position in Bangladesh.

c) In shaping Bangladeshi immigrants' personal and family identity, lineage status (*bangsha morjada*) that immigrants have brought from Bangladesh plays an important role in defining their personal and family identity in Toronto. When an immigrant says, "I have come from a *Syed* family, [or] a *zaminder* family, [or that] my father was a minister," all these issues still play key roles in shaping individual identity in Toronto.

d) Bangladeshi immigrant women's direct involvement in the capitalist market as an ethnic and gendered work force has intensified gender inequality and the gendered division of labour. Immigrant women may enjoy more freedoms in Canada compared to their homeland situation because they are economically, socially and legally secured within the Canadian nation. But they have to follow cultural rules, and patriarchal norms, and a gendered division of labour to redefine their authentic identity of Bengali women in Canada. As a result, immigrant women have to cook food, and raise children at home and make money in the job market by following religious and cultural codes of conducts, which makes them face a double-burden situation. This study finds that the Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant community is highly gender-segregated. Men and women belong to two separate worlds. By practicing core private and public divisions between men and women through their distinct productive and reproductive roles, and by practicing core religious and patriarchal norms, both Bangladeshi immigrant men and women define their authentic gender identities.

e) Dominant gendered norms, patriarchy, and male dominance are maintained in immigrant settings in Canada by creating a threat of gossip. This study finds it is a means to control immigrants' initiatives (both among men and women) to cross social, religious, and cultural boundaries. However, women are more vulnerable than men.

Globalization and Colonial and Post-Colonial Markers of Identity

This study documents that separate religious identities based on "minority and majority" ideologies, and English-educated social class (*bhadralok shrani* – gentleman and *bhadramahila* – lady) which emerged in the colonial and post-colonial political and economic contexts in Bengal are active in shaping current Bangladeshi immigrants' class

identity. Globalization and transnational migration have not created disjuncture, hybridity and up-rootedness to colonial and post-colonial key markers of Bengali identity. This study finds that globalization is a process that has re-rooted colonialism and colonial nostalgia in immigrant settings.

a) In post-9/11 global political, economic, and religious contexts, by openly practicing religion within a multicultural environment in Canada, and through immigrants' various political and economic uncertainties and challenges, Bangladeshi immigrants are forced to incorporate core religious values, doctrines, and symbols as markers of their identity. All three religious groups actively practice religious rituals and events to define their authentic identity within multicultural free religious environments. By practicing core religious norms, creating religious institutions, and eating foods according to dietary laws, Bangladeshi immigrants create proper space in 'sinful' and 'impure' social and cultural spaces in Canada. By looking at relationships between globalization and colonial and post-colonial constructions of separate religious identities between Bangladeshi Hindus and Muslims, this study finds that globalization forces have re-rooted religious differences to create authentic religious identities – acknowledged marked differences that matter – between Bangladeshi Hindus and Muslims in Toronto.

In order to challenge dominant caste and class-based Brahmin dominance in pre-colonial Bengal, lower-caste Hindus converted to Islam. In creating separate religious and social identities, Muslim/Arabic and Christian/English names were incorporated by Bengali lower class newly converted Muslims and Bengali Christians. Both religious groups in Bengal created different religious identities to challenge caste, religion and class-based social and political inequalities. Bengali names clearly define separate religious and class identity and it is a key means to identity-negotiating mechanisms in Bangladesh. In addition to that, colonial educational policies and distinct economic and political policies created antagonistic religious minority and majority identities and ideologies between Bengali Hindus and Muslims. In the context of the Bengal Partition in 1904, and the India Partition in 1947, forced migration and communal riots

between Bengali Hindus and Muslims also created a highly fragmented religious identity. Colonial political and economic histories and post-colonial nationalist struggles failed to create common “imaged communities” (Anderson 1983) or common “nostalgias and imaginaries” (Appadurai 1996) among the Bangladeshi Bengali Hindus, Muslims and lower class groups. Furthermore, the emergence of the Islamic state, Bangladeshi nationalism, and state-organized religious persecution and discrimination contributed to the development of different Muslim and Hindu identities in Bangladesh. My study underscores that globalization and economic and cultural communication between Bangladeshi Hindus and Muslims in an immigrant context in Toronto have not disjointed and up-rooted colonial and post-colonial “minority and majority” imaginaries and nostalgias. Globalization forces have not melded down the historical differences, nor have they created homogeneous communication between Bangladeshi Hindus and Muslims. Rather, within multicultural Canada, Bangladeshi immigrants have incorporated core colonial religious categorizations to create their distinct and separate identities as Bangladeshi Hindus and Bangladeshi Muslims. They belong to two different political and ideological spaces in Canada. Bangladeshi immigrants try to reinvent their majority identity by memorizing their homeland religious rituals. Minority Bangladeshi immigrants challenge their religious status in Toronto by mocking and making jokes about majority Muslims. They have restated their separate identity by memorizing their religious and social struggles in Bangladesh as a minority religious group. The identity and ideology of the minority and majority Bangladeshi immigrants is not a simultaneous, fluid and hybrid subject; rather, it is a fixed marker of identity. They create different and distinct identities though colonial imaginaries and through their opposition to each other.

b) Ideology of colonial social classes (*bhadralok*) in immigrant contexts play significant roles in shaping Bangladeshi immigrant class identity. Bangladeshi immigrants dislike and resist work that makes their hands dirty; instead, they imagine government jobs, permanent jobs, and desk jobs that will provide them *bhadralok* identity in Toronto. This study finds *bhadralok* and *bhadramahila*

classes that emerged in colonial Bengal were influenced by English tastes and Western secular nostalgias, and that these identities are disjointed in immigrant contexts in Toronto. Bengali *bhadralok* and *bhadramahila* classes incorporate global consumer patterns, but their ideology has become more anti-Western in immigrant contexts. Bangladeshi Muslim English-educated *Bhadralok* and *Bhadramahila* (see Bannerji 1994) have embraced core Arabic cultural dress, symbols, and norms – in opposition to Western dress – to resist Western hegemonic power.

Globalization and Bengali and Bangladeshi Identity

In general, Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants in Canada celebrate all national days in Toronto to define their national identity. They also reorganized transnational Bengali political party offices in Toronto to political space and gain social recognition as leaders. These are identity negotiation processes. However, this study demonstrates immigrants' class, gender, political affiliation, and religious positions create fragmented imaginations, memories, and nostalgias about their national identity. The religious minority groups and women immigrants disown Bangladeshi nationalist identity in diaspora contexts in order to resist religious and gender-oriented discriminations and inequalities in Islamist and patriarchal Bangladesh. They want to be Canadian citizens as a marker of global identity and to experience less discrimination. Therefore, transnational migration as a global force disjoins the modernized bounded entity and common imagination of Bangladeshi nationality and nationalism.

MULTICULTURALISM AND BENGALI IDENTITY

In the context of transnational migration and Canadian multicultural policy, this research finds that:

a) The Canadian Multicultural Act of 1988 has given the Bangladeshi immigrants ethnic and subaltern subjects the freedom to celebrate their cultural and religious traditions in Canada. At the same time, due to structural inequalities and the dominance of English and French traditions in Canada, Bangladeshi Bengali as an ethnic-cultural category has little or no space within the Canadian multiculturalism project. In the end, immigrants have to surrender their ethnic and

linguistic identity under colonial English or French dominancy. They have to gain language skills and become familiar with the Canadian system (which is mostly English tradition). This study suggests that Canadian multiculturalism is a new form of hegemonic dominancy and power of two colonial powers, where all multicultural subjects are “sub-cultures” and they are colonized by two main cultures. Bangladeshi immigrants as pre-colonial British subjects prefer to go back to the English dominancy again as a preferable settlement space in Toronto in contrast to Montreal.

b) Bangladeshi immigrant groups and Bengali culture are fragmented in response to colonial, post-colonial, national, and global forces in Bangladesh and other locations. This study finds that The Canadian Multicultural Act (commonly viewed as ethnic groups bringing their singular culture to share with others in the multicultural box in Canada) fails to understand the complexity, diversity and simultaneousness of Bengali culture and the various factions within Bangladeshi ethnic groups.

c) In order to maintain authentic and pure cultural, ethnic and religious identity, and with the influence of caste-based purity and pollution ideology, Bangladeshi immigrants prefer to communicate with their own ethnic communities. Bangladeshi immigrants find cultural plurality a danger that may destroy purity of the Bengali culture.

d) Bangladeshi immigrants use the freedom and openness of Canadian multiculturalism as a weapon to resist and challenge existing gender, class and religious inequalities within their own immigrant communities.

e) Ethnic cultures are a new commodity within neoliberal multicultural projects where other cultures are consumed as exotic brands and tastes.

f) “Bangla Town” in Toronto is not only a homogeneous Bangladeshi ethnic, cultural and national space, and an icon of multiculturalism in Toronto, but it is also a space where Bangladeshi class norms and class-guided social boundaries are contested.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) Bangladeshi immigrant identity is closely related to class and occupational positions in Toronto. Most of the educated Bangladeshi immigrants have lost their class identity, self-esteem and their identity-negotiating spirit when they found that their educational and professional degrees and credentials are not recognized in multicultural Canada. They feel that they are betrayed by Canadian immigration policies. Therefore, it is essential to find a way to include the huge number of Bangladeshi skilled and educated immigrants who come with hope to Canada, but they are doing ad-hoc and part-time jobs referred as “survival jobs” among the Bangladeshi immigrant community. They must be provided social, cultural and economic space where they can contribute as active Canadian citizens rather than as ethnic-class members or members of the “visible minority”.
- b) In order to shape the future Canadian nation-state, and to develop harmonious immigrant communities and a better settlement plan in Canada, policies should be developed and implemented to address diversity, complexity, and inner dynamisms of each immigrant group, which better incorporates our knowledge of gender, class, and religion.
- c) It is essential to address Bangladeshi-educated immigrant women in Canada. Due to patriarchal and cultural norms, and unequal opportunities within Canadian job markets, they have become a vulnerable immigrant group in Canada. They need proper and organized institutional support so that they can have equal opportunities similar to other Canadian citizens.
- d) Definitions and understanding of culture, ethnic groups, identity, and multiculturalism should be revised and redefined outside of the whole idea of commoditization.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Consent Form for Bangladeshi Bengali Immigrants in Canada

Research Project Title:

Immigration and Identity Negotiation within Bangladeshi Immigrant Communities in Toronto, Canada.

Researcher: Rumel Halder, 435 Fletcher Argue Building, Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. Telephone: (416) 536-5990, Email: sumonju@yahoo.com, umhalde2@cc.umanitoba.ca

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Sponsors: University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship, Faculty of Arts J.G. Fletcher Award, and Global Political Economy Research Grant, Department of Economics, University of Manitoba. Research Fellowship from SSHRC Research Grant to Professor Raymond E. Wiest, Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada.

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only a part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This research is being conducted for the partial fulfillment of the PhD degree in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba. The collected information of this research project will be used for writing a dissertation, journal articles and a book. Results of the research will be published or released publicly after completion of the degree.

This research will involve my observation of and participation in, every day event of Bangladeshi immigrant communities in Toronto, as well as discussion and interviews with members of these communities. The research will focus on several questions: 1) How do identity features derived from the Bangladeshi Bengali homeland, such as religion, class and gender, figure into everyday life in Toronto? 2) What are the bases and principles of communication, and how are relationships established among Bangladeshi immigrants and with other ethnic groups? 3) How do Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants

situate and identify themselves in their immigrant life in Canada? The complexity of global migration, current ethnic and religious tensions, the role of global media, the relationship between state policies and immigrants, and communication of immigrants between homeland and host country all form the context for this study.

The research will be conducted in three phases using three methods: a survey questionnaire, arranged interviews, and group discussions. Initially, the study will involve survey questions with you about the number of family members living with you, their age, gender, occupation, marital status, first and most recent year of migration to Canada, legal status in Canada, religious identification or affiliation, and memberships in social, cultural, religious, and political organizations. Based on information collected in the survey, research participants will be selected for more detailed interviews. For selection of research participants for these in-depth interviews and discussions, I will attempt to achieve some balance in representation, consider religious identification, gender, social class, occupation, and education, as well as length of time in Canada, legal status in Canada, and roles in immigrant community organizations.

If you are selected for the second phase, an interview will be requested and arranged with you to find out about your history of migration, your everyday activities, communications and relationships with immigrants from your own country and other countries, your involvements and roles within the immigrant communities and in your homeland, your sense of your own self-identification, and strategies you use, as an immigrant, to maintain your own sense of identity. The interview will generally take about one and one-half hours, but may be shorter or longer depending on your own schedule. It will take place in a location you are comfortable with, and at a time convenient for you. In some cases, the first interview may be followed by at least one return visit.

The study may also involve a third phase that would consist of group discussions with a number of selected participants selected to represent a range of issues and patterns of identity drawn out of the previous research. The proposed group discussions would be conducted among a number of participants in the research project who are willing and interested to enter into group discussion. This phase of the research is to provide a time and place to share your ideas with other Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants. If I consider it important to consult with you in follow-up research, upon your approval I would contact you personally. In some instances, and with your prior approval, I may also wish to take photographs of you in your everyday activities as well as some of your special family events.

Please initial all those that apply:

_____ I agree to participate in a survey questionnaire.

_____ I agree to participate in an interview.

_____ I agree to participate in a group discussion.

_____ I allow the researcher to take photographs of me and/or my family events.

Participation in this research will present no risk beyond what people face in their day-to-day living. Your privacy will be respected and the confidentiality of your personal information will be maintained. With your full knowledge and approval, all information you provide will be tape-recorded and transcribed. In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, your name and address will be kept separate from all information obtained from you and/or recorded in field notes, and stored in places secured with locks. Privacy and confidentiality will be maintained in the questionnaires, interviews and field-notes by assigning numerical codes or pseudonyms. I will save all the information I obtain until my dissertation has been completed and defended. After writing my dissertation, I will destroy all personal information and erase all tape-recorded records.

Initial the following if you agree to grant permission:

_____ I agree to allow use of an audio tape-recording device in the interview with me.

I will use your and other participants' information for understanding how Bangladeshi Bengali identities in Canada are constructed, negotiated and maintained. Based on the result of this study, published material will be available to you upon your request.

No monetary payment will be made for participation in this research project. Instead of payment, I will try to reciprocate for your time and energy with help or assistance that is mutually considered to be helpful and appropriate.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a participant. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout the time of your participation.

This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at (204) 474-7122, or e-mail: **Margaret_Bowman@cc.umanitoba.ca**. A copy of this consent form is given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

MATRIX OF 136 RESEARCH RESPONDENTS, TORONTO, 2007-2008

Categories/Variables		% Respondents	Respondents
Gender			
	Male	50.74%	69
	Female	49.26%	67
Age			
	Young (<35)	13.24%	18
	Middle Age (35-55)	69.12%	94
	Senior (>55)	17.65%	24
Marital Status			
	Married	88.24%	120
	Divorced	5.15%	7
	Widowed	2.21%	3
	Separated	2.94%	4
	Single or never married	1.47%	2
Education			
	College or Less	23.53%	32
	Undergraduate (University or College)	36.76%	50
	Graduate and post graduate	39.71%	54
Religion			
	Muslim	36.76%	50
	Hindu	29.41%	40
	Christian	29.41%	40
	Atheist		6

Continued next page...

MATRIX OF 136 RESEARCH RESPONDENTS, TORONTO, 2007-2008

(continued from previous page)

Occupation		% Respondents	Respondents
	Engineer	2.21%	3
	Doctor	0.74%	1
	Pharmacist	0.74%	1
	Teacher / Teachers' assistant	3.68%	5
	Photographer	0.74%	1
	Artist	0.74%	1
	Accountant	1.47%	2
	Mortgage broker	3.68%	5
	Sales	14.71%	20
	Non Profit/ social service	10.29%	14
	Homemaker	13.97%	19
	Business	5.88%	8
	Business Manager/ Administrative	8.82%	12
	Graduate Student	0.74%	1
	Government service	2.21%	3
	Driving Instructor	3.68%	5
	Taxi driver	4.41%	6
	Security Guard	2.94%	4
	Cook	2.94%	4
	Factory Worker	4.41%	6
	Early child care worker/ assistant	3.68%	5
	Food server	2.21%	3
	News paper owner	0.74%	1
	Other	4.41%	6
	Total	100.00%	136

Appendix D

Sample of Family Survey Questionnaires for Bangladeshi Immigrants in Toronto

1. Family Information:

Name of Respondent(s):

Numbers of Family Members:

Residence of Family Members:

2. History of Family Migration:

Year of migration to Canada:

Did you (primary respondent) come by yourself or with your family?

Did you migrate directly from Bangladesh, or from another country?

If from another country, which country?

What part of Bangladesh did you originally come from?

3. Occupations:

- Before Migration:
- After Migration:

4. Property Ownership in Canada: House: Car: Business: Other property:

5. Status in Canada: Citizen: Permanent Resident: Others:

6. Property Ownership in Canada: House: Car: Business: Other property:

7. Monthly Rent/Mortgage/Payments: House: Car: Business: Other property:

8. Annual family Income (optional):

9. Identity in Canada and Bangladesh:

What do you consider your social class identity to be in Canada:

Upper: Middle: Lower:

What do you consider your social class identity to be in Bangladesh:

Upper: Middle: Lower:

What do you consider your religious identity to be:

Muslim: Hindu: Christian: ...

What do you consider your denominational identity:

Sunni/ Shea Catholic/ Baptist/Anglican/ Presbyterian/ Seven Day
Adventist Others:

What do you consider your lineage (bongsho) identity?

What do you consider your caste identity:

Brahmin/ Kashtriya/ scheduled caste Ashraf/ Atraf Others

What do you consider yourself in terms of Minority and Majority divisions?

10. Involvements in social, cultural, religious, and political organizations:

Did you a member of any social, cultural, religious, and political organization in Bangladesh?

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)

Do you a member of any social, cultural, religious and political organization in Canada?

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)

11. Involvements in Professional Organizations in Canada:

Are you a member of any professional organization in Canada?

- a)
- b)
- c)

Appendix E

2. Example In-Depth Interview Questions for Bangladeshi Immigrants

A. History of Migration:

1. Tell me about your history of coming to Canada?
2. What are the key reasons and issues that encouraged you to migrate to Canada?
3. Tell me about your settlement experiences as a Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant in Canada.

B. Current Immigrant Life in Canada

1. Tell me about your everyday life in Canada?
2. What is your role in the family as well as outside of the family?
3. Are there any new roles that you are performing in your life in Canada as an immigrant?
4. In your opinion, what are the key components in creating a Bangladeshi immigrant society in Canada?
5. How do you identify yourself within the immigrant society?

C. Culture, Ethnic, National identity:

1. How do you practice Bangladeshi Bengali cultural events in Canada? Do you think that practicing Bengali culture is important to all Bangladeshi immigrants? Why?
2. Are there Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants who do not practice Bengali culture and tradition in opinion? Why or why not?
3. What is the meaning for you of “Bengali”, “Bangladeshi”, and “Bengali-ness” in Canada?
4. What are the events you are practicing in Canada that you think are essential aspects of Bangladeshi national identity and your Bengali identity?
5. In order to communicate with own Bangladeshi Bengali people what are the factors you consider the most important?
6. Which nation do you belong to as a citizen? How do you define your national identity?
7. As an immigrant, how do you distinguish between Bangladesh and Canada as nations? What is the meaning of “Canadian” to you? To what extent, and in what manner, do you feel “connected” to Canada as a nation?
8. As an immigrant in Canada, where is “home” to you? What constitutes “home” for you

D. Religious Rituals among Immigrant:

1. Is the practice of religious rituals and events significant in your immigrant life in Canada? Why, and in what way?
2. Are there any specific barriers, challenges or difficulties for you in maintaining your religious beliefs and practice of religious rituals in Canada?
3. How do different religious groups among Bangladeshi Bengali immigrants in Toronto communicate and interact with each other?
5. How would you compare the patterns and structure of relationships among Hindu, Muslim and Christian immigrants in Toronto with those of your homeland?
- 6) What is your perception about “minority and majority” division based on religion?
- 7) How do you define your position in the contexts of minority and majority division?
6. How would you consider the “9/11” incident in the US, and the US and Canadian war against terrorism, to have affected relationships, attitudes, and conversation patterns between different religious groups and individuals?

E. Local and Transnational Communication:

- 1) How do you communicate with Bangladesh?
- 2) How often you visit Bangladesh?
- 3) Why do you communicate with Bangladesh?
- 4) Do you consider that one point of your life you return to Bangladesh?
- 5) What do you miss so much about Bangladesh?

F. Multiculturalism:

1. Do you communicate with people in Bangladesh? How, how often, with whom [not personal names, but categories of people], and for what reasons?
2. Who are you in multicultural and multiethnic Canada? How do you define and identify yourself
3. Have you ever attended any cultural events of other ethnic and cultural groups in Canada?
4. What is your perception about Canada as a multicultural country?
4. Do you see “Bengali culture” within the Canadian multicultural project?

G. “Bengali Para” and “Bangla Town”:

1. Do you often go to Bangla Town?
2. If yes why? And if not why?
3. How do you define “Bengali Para” and “Bangla Town” in Toronto?

Appendix F

A. Focus group discussion with women respondents:

1. As a woman how do you see your life in Canada?
2. As a woman do you consider that migration to Canada has brought some changes in your lives?
3. Do you think that your work load has changed in Canada?
4. Do feel any inequality/discrimination as a Bangladeshi immigrant woman in Canada?
5. What are the major limitations of the Bangladeshi immigrant women may have, and how do they overcome them?

B. Focus Group Discussion with Muslim, Hindu and Christian Male respondents:

1. How do you define Canada as country in terms of practicing your religious events?
2. Do you think that Bangladeshi immigrants become more religious persons in Canada?
3. How do you see communication among Bangladeshi Bengali Muslims, Hindu and Christians?
4. Do you think that perceptions of religious “majority and minority” play a role among the Bangladeshi immigrant groups?
5. How do you define 9/11 as a Bangladeshi Bengali Muslim immigrant?
6. Do you think that immigration to Canada has caused a huge occupational and class degradation?