Understanding the Relevance of Maulana Bhashani's Pedagogical Philosophy in Fostering Social Cohesion within Contemporary Educational Landscape of Bangladesh

By

Samira Ahmed Raha

Student ID: 16117002

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.

2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.

3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.

4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

Samira Ahmed Raha
Student ID: 16117002

Approval

The thesis titled "Understanding the Relevance of Maulana Bhashani's Pedagogical Philosophy in Fostering Social Cohesion within Contemporary Educational Landscape of Bangladesh" submitted by Samira Ahmed Raha (16117002) of Fall, 2023 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Social Sciences in Anthropology on December, 2023.

Examining Committee:

Supervisor:
(Member)

_____
Dr. Samia Huq
Professor, Department of Economics and Social Sciences
Brac University

Program Coordinator:
(Member)

_____
Dr. Shahidur Rahman
Professor, Department of Economics and Social Sciences
Brac University

Departmental Head:
(Chair)

_____
Dr. Wasiqur Rahman Khan
Professor, Department of Economics and Social Sciences
Brac University

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Abstract

This thesis explores the understudied pedagogical philosophy of Maulana Bhashani, a prominent revolutionary leader in Bangladeshi history, shedding light on his unique vision for education and its relevance in reforming Bangladesh's existing educational framework. Rooted in Islamic tenets and advocating for multi-religious education, Bhashani's philosophy emerges as a potential solution to the challenges faced by the Bangladeshi education system. The study delves into Bhashani's pedagogical conceptions and legacy, emphasizing their foresightedness in mobilizing religious ethical passions for social justice, equity, and democracy. Utilizing primary sources, including Bhashani's writings, 1974 questionnaires from the Islamic University School, and an in-depth interview with Syed Ifranul Bari, alongside secondary data, such as a content analysis of the current textbooks of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), the study employs content analysis, in-depth interviews, and comparative analyses. The findings expose a disparity between Bangladesh's constitutional commitment to secularism and the textbooks' emphasis on Bengali and Muslim majoritarian ethos, revealing a potential source of social tension. The study underscores the immediate need for an inclusive strategy to reform the educational framework in alignment with Global Citizenship Education (GCED) principles. Inspired by Bhashani's pedagogy, the conclusion advocates for a culturally relevant GCED policy tailored to Bangladesh's context, focusing on holistic student development to promote social cohesion and nurture ethical and globally engaged citizens.

Dedication

Dedicated to Abbu, who taught me that true strength lies in perseverance. While he may not be

here to read my thesis, he has been a constant guiding star throughout the journey of its creation.

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The completion of this thesis marks the culmination of a challenging yet rewarding journey, and I extend my sincere gratitude to those who have played pivotal roles in this endeavor. Foremost, my deepest appreciation goes to my supervisor and academic role model, Prof. Samia Huq. Her unwavering support, sincere guidance, and sustained belief in my caliber have been instrumental not only throughout the thesis writing process but also in my entire undergraduate career. Prof. Huq's mentorship consistently assisted me in transforming my fragmented thoughts into coherent and meaningful narratives.

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1.1 Introduction

"Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands."

(Durkheim, 1922/1956, p. 70)

Over the past two decades, growing recognition of education's social aspects and benefits in developed and middle-income countries has led an increasing number of policymakers and academics to consider education as a powerful institutional tool for maintaining social cohesion (Aturupane & Wikramanayake, 2011; Flecha, 2015). It plays a significant role in socializing new members of society, equipping them with knowledge and skills that enable effective social participation. One scholar argues that education contributes to social cohesion by establishing both a condition and a means for various objectives, including the preservation of social ties by cultivating interdependence among individuals and their desired societal inclusion and, transmitting values by historically imparting diverse meanings and cherished ideals, including commitment, belonging, solidarity, and a vision of a more just society (Kantzara, 2011).

Émile Durkheim argued that societies must foster a sense of social solidarity, instilling in individuals a connection to a greater whole and inculcating the norms of socially-acceptable behavior (Durkheim, 1893/1933). He proposes two forms of social solidarity: mechanical and organic. Mechanical solidarity directly connects the individual to society, where shared tasks and core values create a "collective consciousness" or shared belief system; whereas, organic solidarity signifies a more intricate society with distinct functions bound by definite relationships (Durkheim, 1893/1933). Education, according to Durkheim, equips young individuals for both types of solidarity by imparting morality through subjects such as history

and sciences, cultivating independent thinking, promoting inclusion in society, and simultaneously nurturing a sense of autonomy (Dukheim, 1973). Therefore, the primary purpose of education, according to him, is to cultivate a collective conscience to strengthen social cohesion.

On a different note, Louis Althusser proposed that education functions as an 'ideological state apparatus' to uphold the existing social order by instilling the dominant ideology to students (Althusser, 2014). This dominant ideology legitimizes the current social structure as fair or democratic and reinforces individuals' positions within the prevailing division of labor. Thus, education has the potential to assume Durkheimian role of fostering social sustainability and integration by inculcating cohesive norms, yet education can also be used as an Althusserian ideological instrument to exacerbate societal fractures.

Building social cohesion in modern societies has become a pressing need to deal with the challenges posed by the rising global mobility of culturally diverse populations to the shared values, ethics, and identities of these societies (Aturupane & Wikramanayake, 2011). The rapid transmission of diverse information via modern communication technologies has additionally heightened the importance of social cohesion (Beck, 2000). Studies found cohesive societies excel in achieving collective goals by safeguarding and integrating marginalized individuals and groups, mobilizing societal energy for effective action, and thereby resulting in increased success in attaining economic and social objectives through synergistic collaboration between diverse population (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001; Smith, 2006; Aturupane & Wikramanayake, 2011).

Bangladesh is a nation of diverse religions, ethnicities, and cultures. Officially, there are fifty recognized ethnic groups and four recognized religions, with Bengali Muslims forming the majority (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The data of the latest Population and Housing

Census report shows indigenous or non-Bengali population accounts for 1.00% of the total population, while in terms of religion, Muslims constitute 91.04% of the total population (BBS, 2022). However, indigenous leaders and researchers challenge these figures, suggesting they're underestimated[1]. On the other hand, the population of minority religious groups in Bangladesh has experienced a decline over the past 11 years.[2] Given the circumstances characterized by the lack of representation and the decline of minority groups, there is a pressing need to rebuild our existing social frameworks and establish an inclusive atmosphere where individuals from diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds can experience a sense of belonging, recognition, and participation across all spheres of citizenship. Encouraging feelings of inclusion and belonging through fostering social cohesion can effectively smooth out social divisions contributing significantly to the promotion of peace and tolerance (Aturupane & Wikramanayake, 2011). In such context, education must prioritize general values that are embedded in society's core principles. These shared values are crucial for social cohesion, particularly in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country like Bangladesh, to prevent potential conflicts.

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[1] The Population and Housing Census 2022 report shows a population of 1,650,159 indigenous or non-Bengali people residing in Bangladesh. However, indigenous rights activists claim that the actual count should be no less than 3 million. See, Roy & Deshwara, (2022).

[2] The Population and Housing Census 2022 report reveals shifts in religious demographics in Bangladesh. Hindu population declined from 8.54% to 7.95%, Buddhists from 0.62% to 0.61%, Christians from 0.31% to 0.30%, and other religions from 0.12% to 0.14%. However, the Muslim population increased from 90.39% to 91.04%. The previous Population and Housing Census report of 2011 suggested two reasons for the decrease in Hindu population: out-migration and relatively lower total fertility rates among Hindu couples. See, "Census, 2022," (2022); "Population of minority religions decrease further in Bangladesh," (2022).

In this post-modern era, even with the increasing "incredulity toward meta-narratives"[3] and an overall "loss of authority"[4] in the traditional institutions, religion remains an ineluctable part and parcel of life. In Bangladesh, religion is embedded within a myriad of social institutions and dispositions. This intrinsic entanglement of religion across a wide array of social institutions also shapes the way education is delivered in the country. Religion plays a crucial role in determining the structure of the education system, and quiescently influences the values embedded in curricula and classroom discourses. Educational challenges in Bangladesh include societal issues tied to religious and moral values, influenced by faith-based educational institutions and the expected role of the national education system in transmitting values, notably through religious teaching (Roy, Huq, & Abdur Rob, 2020). The latest national curriculum framework underscores the importance of embracing values linked to various sources[5], including religion. The framework advocates for a competency-based education and curriculum, aiming for learners to develop 10 core competencies including the ability to 'acquire and foster moral and humane qualities by following and practicing religious norms through comprehending the importance and significance of the foundational ideas, beliefs and sources of knowledge of the religion (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2021). Bangladesh's national education system offers a mix of secular and religious education at primary and secondary levels, with secular subjects including literature, languages,

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[3] This phrase was famously written by the philosopher Jean François Lyotard, in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, to define postmodern. In his highly influential formulation of postmodernism, Lyotard argues that modernity was the age of meta-narrative legitimation; whereas, the age of postmodernity began with the dissolution of the meta-narratives. According to Lyotard, meta-narratives are constituted of totalizing accounts about history and the goals of human life that enroot and legitimize knowledge and cultural practices.

[4] Hannah Arendt in her 1954 article, "What is Authority?", argues about how authority of traditional institutions have vanished from the dispositions of the modern world and have led to confusions and controversies about the whole idea of authority and what constitutes the authority.

[5] Other sources being mentioned are: national identity, the spirit of the Liberation War in 1971, history, culture, religion, and global ideals.

mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences; and religion studies being taught to students from the four major recognized religions as a mandatory subject from Grades 3 to 10, using standardized textbooks specific to their respective faiths (Roy, Huq, & Abdur Rob, 2020).

Religious education remains a burning issue in discussions concerning education's potential to fostering social cohesion in modern multi-religious societies. The debates around the role and significance of religion in education reaffirms the line between secularists and traditionalists, splitting them apart into polarized blocs. This polarization not only fails to understand why religion remains relevant in today's world, but also shuts down all the possible approaches of deploying faith-based education in order to inculcate and ensure inclusiveness and mutual tolerance among diverse communities, particularly religious communities.

An interesting example that fills the space between the polarization is the work and approach of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, who was an Islamic theologian and a radical politician advocating secular democracy and socialism. He was quite unique and an embodiment of the vision that has the potential to stitch together the polarized camps of secularists and traditionalists. In the current historical juncture, characterized by the increasing Islamophobia, Eurocentrism and takfiri[6] exclusivism, Bhashani is an important political leader of British India who needs to be re-invented and studied extensively because, as Farhad Mazhar stated, "it's not easy anymore to push him under the debris of forgotten history. I may confidently claim that he will definitely shed new lights in defining our global political task in the era of war on terror and dehumanization of emancipator projects and the role of political spirituality in revolutionary visions and actions" (Mazhar, 2015a). His political ideology defies easy classification as it exhibits a multifaceted and nuanced character, and prompts us to question the simplistic categorization of political ideologies into binary frameworks of left

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[6] Takfiri, which literally translates to "excommunicational" in Arabic and Islamic terminology, refers to a Muslim who declares one of their fellow Muslims as an apostate, essentially accusing them of abandoning their faith.

versus right, nationalists versus internationalists, and secular versus Islamic. Straddling diverse realms of thought, Bhashani embodied seemingly paradoxical traits, encompassing both religious and secular inclinations, holding a keen awareness of local issues while maintaining a global perspective, embracing socialist principles while distancing himself from the cold war communists, and espousing anti-imperialist sentiments while diverging from ultranationalism.

Apart from his identity as a staunch peasant leader and a *pir* (Sufi saint), very few know about his philosophy of education which is reflected in his vision for an 'Islamic University'. It's important to note that his vision went beyond establishing a university alone. He also founded various educational institutions, covering general, religious, and vocational education. By 1976, these institutions were materialized through the Islamic University Project.[7] Bhashani critiqued the state-run modern education system as an intrinsic apparatus for institutionalizing social stratification and advancing the interests of imperial powers.[8] In an effort to counteract this, he conceptualized an education system that would bring together people of all cultural, religious and ideological backgrounds under one umbrella with the aim to instill a nationwide solidarity against capitalism, imperialism and bigotry.[9] He called for an education movement based on the revolutionary ideals of Islam. Bhashani realized the necessity for a radical transformation in the education system, rooted in the revolutionary principles of a universal Islam, to advance the liberation movement of the oppressed. The ideological framework of Bhashani's envisioned education system is grounded on the Islamic philosophy of

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[7] It should be noted that none of these educational institutions survived in their original form, preserving the core essence of Bhashani's vision, following his passing in 1976.

[8] Bhashani asserted this in a written speech which he delivered on February 27, 1971, during the 'East Pakistan Education and Culture Conference' convened at the Darbar Hall of Santosh Islamic University. Following its presentation, educationists in attendance engaged in a day-long discussion before officially recognizing it as a foundational document summarizing Bhashani's ideologies within the framework of the National Education Movement. See, Bhashani, (1971).

[9] This was outlined in an article submitted by Bhashani for consideration during the National Education Conference held on April 7, 1974, at the Darbar Hall of Santosh Islami University. It was accepted after thorough deliberations and discussions. See, Bhashani, (1974).

"*Rabbaniyyat*", introduced to him by Maulana Azad Subhani[10] (Custers, 2012). The philosophy of *Rabbaniyyat* later became an integral part of Bhashani's creed, influencing his political-intellectual dispositions throughout his life as a revolutionary leader and even as an educationist.

This thesis reviews the relevance of Bhashani's educational philosophy in cultivating social cohesion by contextualizing it within Bangladesh's contemporary secular educational landscape. The following segments of this chapter sets forth the primary inquiries this thesis seeks to address and outlines the employed methodology.

1.2 Research Questions and Background

In the Constitution of Bangladesh, secularism stands as one of the fundamental principles of state policy, asserting the state's commitment to religious neutrality. Notably, the national education system draws upon the four fundamental state principles- nationalism, democracy, secularism, and socialism- as cornerstones of its curriculum. Paradoxically, Islam effectively holds the status of the state religion and has sparked debates regarding its compatibility with ideals of tolerance and diversity (Roy, Huq, & Abdur Rob, 2020).

Between 2009 and 2017, the government, under the rule of the Awami League party, attempted to mitigate conflicts between Islamist groups and mass movements while upholding its commitment to secularism. This was done through a policy aimed at both preserving secularism and finding common ground with Islamist forces (Wohab, 2021). The AL government sought

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[10] Abdul Qadir Azad Subhani, also known as Maulana Azad Subhani (b. 1882 in Madhya Pradesh, India), was a reviolutuionary philosopher, Islamic scholar and politician. He significantly advocated for a Pan-Islamic system, emphasizing revolutionary change guided by Rabbani ideals. His ideas have inspired prominent figures such as Maulana Bhashani, Abul Hashim, Shamsul Haque, and others associated with Tamuddun Majlish, sparking widespread discussions. In 1945, Azad Subhani broke apart from Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind (JUH) and formed Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI); which he intended to be the religious wing of the Muslim League. See, Qureshi, (1973); and Khan, (2021).

to reform its secularism policy, stirring a mixed public response. In 2016, an Islamist organization, reportedly affiliated with the ruling Awami League, attempted to halt Pahela Baishakh (Bengali New Year) celebrations, denouncing it as "haram" and a "non-Islamic festival," alleging it attempted to de-Islamize Muslims ("Politics over Baishakh Bonus," 2016). However, their efforts to ban these cultural practices among the public were in vain, as these traditions have largely remained unchanged to this day. Nevertheless, two major changes took place in 2017 as the result of influences from Islamist organizations: the discreet removal of secular contents from school textbooks of national curriculum[11] and the removal of a Lady Justice sculpture which was deemed "un-Islamic" from the High Court premises[12]. These instances highlight the regime's political strategy to appease Islamist groups through ideological concessions, despite the lack of approval from both the public and civil society. This suggests that the current AL government's secularism stance contradicts its earlier commitment, taken during the post-Independence period, of ensuring a "functional separation" of political institutions from religion without adopting Western-style secularization processes[13].

Contrary to considering religion as a counterforce to the principles of diversity and pluralism, Bhashani instead advocated for the revolutionary ideals within Islam that could potentially

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[11] A total of nine chapters were silently removed from school textbooks, including contents featuring contributions from Lalon, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Sarat Chandra, Satyen Sen, Humayun Azad, and Rabindranath Tagore. These were replaced with what were considered more 'Islamist' pieces, including texts by Shah Ahmad Sagir, Alaol, Golam Mostafa, Kazi Nazrul Islam, and Habibullah Bahar.

[12] Islamic groups openly called for and eventually achieved the removal of the Lady Justice statue, a universally recognized symbol of impartial justice and legal order, from the High Court premises backed by their belief that statues are incompatible with Islamic principles. See, Wohab, (2021); Ahmad, (2021); and Manik & Barry, (2017).

[13] The Islamist organization attempting to halt Pahela Baishakh, known as 'Bangladesh Awami Olama League,' also pushed for the removal of Lady Justice from the High Court. The ruling party AL had been holding denials of affiliation for a long time, releasing a statement in 2019 to distance themselves from the group and call for administrative action; however, the party is now considering acknowledging the BAOL. See, Wohab, (2021); and Shawon, (2023).

unite individuals of various faiths and cultures on a common platform to stand against imperialist and capitalist forces. This conceptualization of Islam sets Bhashani apart from "religionists"; in this case, the Islamic hardliners mentioned above, who primarily seek political power, aimed to influence government policies, and dominate public discourse by instrumentalizing religion (Ahmad, 2020). While Bhashani was devoutly religious, he realized the cohesive power inherent in the liberal values of Islam. Resonating with Michael W. McConnell's views, Bhashani held the vision that his proposed educational establishment, the Islamic University, would incorporate religion not as a singular voice but rather as a harmonious ensemble of diverse viewpoints, thereby aiding in constructing diversity and pluralism (McConnell, 1991). In an interview conducted by Professor Dr. Nurul Islam in 1976, Bhashani shared, "I hope that when people both within my nation and beyond its borders can see with their own eyes that Santosh Islamic University is intended not only for Muslims, not only for Bengalis, and not confined to Asia alone; rather, its scope includes people from Europe, Africa, America, and Latin America, united under a shared mission to promote economic and political emancipation, as well as the establishment of universal brotherhood, peace, and love"[14]. Against this backdrop, the first of my three research questions emerges: *To what extent does Maulana Bhashani's pedagogical philosophy resonate and hold relevance within the modern 'secular' educational context of Bangladesh?*

In order to address the question, it is necessary to evaluate the contemporary educational scenario of Bangladesh through the lens of social cohesion. Understanding the NCTB's position in shaping the education system and secular curriculum of Bangladesh will help in assessing its role in building social cohesion and identifying potential areas for improvement based on

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[14] My translation of the following quote, "আশা করি আমার এবং বিদেশের সমস্ত বিশ্বে মানুষ তারা স্বচক্ষে যখন দেখতে পারবেন যে, সন্তোষ ইসলামিক বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় শুধু মুসলমানের জন্য করা হয়নি, শুধু বাঙালিদের জন্য নয়, শুধু এশিয়ার জন্য নয়- ইউরোপ, আফ্রিকা, আমেরিকা, ল্যাটিন আমেরিকা সমস্ত মানুষের অর্থনৈতিক মুক্তির জন্য, রাজনৈতিক মুক্তির জন্য এবং বিশ্বভ্রাতৃত্বভাব, বিশ্বশান্তি, বিশ্বপ্রেম স্থাপনের জন্য করা হয়েছে", from Islam, (1988).

Bhashani's philosophy. The subsequent paragraphs offer a review of the concept of social cohesion, followed by a concise outline of the accomplishments and challenges within the country's education system.

Social cohesion, a frequently used yet vaguely defined term, typically conveys the idea of a harmonious society with low crime rates, strong civic cooperation, and trust, but the extent to which it should encompass high tolerance for diverse cultures and religions, remains unclear to many, particularly those who view cultural homogeneity as a prerequisite for trust and cooperation (Green, Preston, & Janmaat, 2006).

The earliest interpretations of social cohesion involve Durkheim's perspective, which emphasizes having strong social bonds and the lack of underlying social conflicts (Durkheim, 1897), Cooley's idea of primary groups fostering cooperation and reducing disorganization (Cooley, 1909), Freud's concept of an individual's identification with shared characteristics (Freud, 1921/1966), and McDougall's perspective on group mentality and reciprocity (McDougall, 1921). Over the years, various scholars and researchers have offered diverse and new definitions of social cohesion. In 1950, Festinger et al. defined it as the individuals' desires to sustain their affiliation with a group (Festinger, Back, & Schachter, 1950). Homans in 1958 linked group cohesion to the value of rewards in interpersonal exchanges (Homans, 1958). French and Raven in 1959 introduced seven sources of social power affecting cohesion (French & Raven, 1959). Lott and Lott in 1966 associated group cohesion with the degree of liking among individuals (Lott & Lott, 1961). Janis in 1972 highlighted pressures for conformity in cohesive groups (Janis, 1972). Stokes in 1983 linked cohesion to sharing intimate topics and balanced risk-taking behavior (Stokes, 1983). Braaten in 1991 created a multidimensional model emphasizing the role of cohesion in relationships (Braaten, 1991).

In 1996 Maxwell defined social cohesion for the Canadian Policy Research Networks which is about fostering shared values, reducing wealth and income disparities, and creating a sense of community engagement and common purpose (Maxwell, 1996). Beauvais and Jenson in 2002 identified five dimensions (belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition, and legitimacy) of social cohesion (Beauvais & Jenson, 2002). Contemporary conceptualizations of social cohesion center around fostering inclusivity and achieving equitable economic progress for everyone (Binte Abdur Rob et al., 2020). The enduring 2008 definition of social cohesion by the Council of Europe underscores a society's capacity to ensure the welfare of all its members, reducing inequalities, and preventing marginalization. It is marked by mutual loyalty, robust social connections, common values, a feeling of inclusion, trust among members of the community, and the alleviation of disparities and exclusion (Council of Europe, 2008). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines a cohesive society with three key elements: social inclusion, social capital, and social mobility. It emphasizes the pursuit of well-being for all members, the battle against exclusion and marginalization, the cultivation of a sense of belonging, the promotion of trust, and the provision of opportunities for upward mobility (OECD, 2012). Parsons in 2013 saw social cohesion as shared norms and values fostering stability (Parsons, 2013). Larsen in 2013 connected cohesion to trust and a shared moral compass (Larsen, 2013).

While definitions and conceptualizations of social cohesion have evolved over the years, they still struggle to encompass the multitude of values and cultures found in diverse sociopolitical contexts. These definitions reflect the complexity of social cohesion as a concept that lacks a universal definition and standardized measurement methods due to the diversity of societies with varying geographies, politics, economics, and socio-cultural issues (Bruhn, 2009). Additionally, these definitions may not fully account for the changing nature of contemporary societies, often overlooking cultural diversities and power dynamics in favor of an ideal of

cohesion (Bulmer & Solomos, 2017). Earlier notions of social cohesion were linked to assimilating diverse groups into a nation with a common language and values, but this perspective has evolved towards fostering accommodation rather than mere assimilation (Heyneman, 2003). Now the challenge lies in fostering unity amidst diversity and determining the thresholds involved (Novy et al., 2012).

Bangladesh, the youngest nation-state in South Asia, founded in 1971, has seen significant economic growth and social development over the years. Despite its dense population of over 160 million people and periodic political violence, the country seems to have high ethnic, cultural, and religious homogeneity (Riaz, 2019). However, according to empirical data from the Asian Social Cohesion Radar, Bangladesh is positioned in the fourth tier of low cohesion among 22 Asian countries. Bangladesh ranks as the second least cohesive society in Asia in terms of 'social relations,' with very low scores in social networks, interpersonal trust, and acceptance of diversity. In contrast, in the domain of 'connectedness,' the country shows high levels of identification with the community and institutional trust, along with a medium degree of perceived fairness. However, Bangladesh displays weak orientations towards the common good, characterized by low solidarity, very limited civic participation, but a strong emphasis on respecting social rules (Dragolov, Koch, & Larsen, 2018).

Ali Riaz identifies various factors contributing to and circumstances associated with the low social cohesion in Bangladesh. At the national level, an elite political settlement between major parties has fostered exclusivity and a lack of focus on the common good. On the local level, economic and political changes have led to a decline in traditional rural power structures, impacting social relations, trust in institutions, and civic participation. The unitary system of governance and the small geographic size of the country have resulted in centralization of power, leading to politicization and increased violence, which has in turn weakened social cohesion. While Bangladeshis strongly identify with their national identity, low participation

in social organizations and declining trust in institutions further contribute to this issue (Riaz, 2019).

In the last ten years, Bangladesh has made impressive progress in enhancing education accessibility, achieving nearly universal enrollment with 98% of primary school-age children enrolled (World Bank, 2016). Gender parity in education has been almost reached, and socioeconomic disparities between economic classes have decreased at both primary and secondary levels. Despite these advancements, challenges persist in terms of dropout rates as children get older, often linked to child marriage for girls and child labor for boys (UNICEF, n.d.).

While access to schooling has improved, concerns remain about the quality of education, especially among marginalized groups (World Bank, 2016). A recent study by 'Education Watch' suggests an inclination towards an exam-centric rather than child-centric approach in the primary education system (Islam, 2020). Moreover, with just 19 percent of children aged 3-5 participating in early childhood education programs and a completion rate of only 64 percent for secondary education, there is cause for concern given that Bangladesh's children represent a significant portion of the population and the future workforce (UNICEF, n.d.).

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated obstacles to accessible and quality education in Bangladesh, with the country enduring one of the world's lengthiest school closures. Amid nationwide lockdowns, the introduction of distance learning to compensate for closed schools presented new challenges, particularly burdening economically disadvantaged families living in underprivileged areas. Furthermore, gender disparity became evident, as young girls faced even greater disadvantages in terms of device and internet access, as well as available study time (Ahmed Raha et al., 2021).

As Bangladesh advances towards its goal of graduating from the UN's Least Developed Countries (LDC) list in 2026, with ambitions to achieve upper-middle-income status by 2031 and high-income status by 2041 (World Bank, n.d.; Datta Gupta & Liton, 2023), it faces new challenges, including the need to focus on human capital development beyond conventional hard skills. To ensure sustainable economic growth, the country must prioritize social cohesion, and education plays a pivotal role in this endeavor (Rob, 2020).

The role of education in fostering social cohesion in Bangladesh is multi-layered. Firstly, it can inculcate "capabilities" in students, making them better job seekers, employable, and proficient in technical skills, ultimately enhancing their life choices. Secondly, education can broaden the mindset of citizens, allowing them to freely explore less conventional life paths, fostering diversity of views, and promoting tolerance in society (Moni & Huq, 2022). As a result, it can reduce the "social distance" between different segments of society, thus increasing the efficiency of production and exchange and augmenting economic growth (Rob, 2020).

However, to achieve these goals, Bangladesh's education system requires comprehensive reform. The education landscape is currently characterized by different streams of education, each catering to specific socioeconomic classes and, in some cases, fostering divisions among students, weakening social cohesion in the long run (Ahmed, 2022). For instance, English medium schools tend to provide a worldview disconnected from local issues, while the faith-based madrasa stream often lacks alignment with the changing socioeconomic dynamics (Moni & Huq, 2022). To address these issues, Bangladesh needs curricular interventions that promote diversity, inclusion, and citizenship, ensuring representation of different religions, ethnicities, cultures, and genders, ultimately contributing to the goal of a more cohesive country. This leads to the questioning and examination of the existing national curricula, resulting in the emergence of my second research query: *What are the gaps in the current curricula of NCTB, notably in*

their capacity to foster social cohesion? Does the NCTB's curricula effectively address the promotion of cohesive values within the educational framework of Bangladesh?

Diversity presents both challenges and opportunities for nation-states and educational institutions. Balancing diversity and unity is critical for democratic nation-states and their educational systems, as "unity without diversity results in cultural repression and hegemony, while diversity without unity leads to Balkanization and the fracturing of the nation-state" (Banks, 2008a). Therefore, it is crucial for nation-states to prioritize unity when addressing diversity within their populations.

Multicultural education theorists and researchers widely acknowledge that many educational practices in schools, colleges, and universities perpetuate harmful stereotypes and discrimination (Banks, 2008a; Nieto, 2012). Multicultural education, which functions as an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process, strives to address diversity-related issues (Banks, 2013). This educational framework advocates equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, social class, and ethnic, racial, or cultural backgrounds (Banks, 2008a). Multicultural education also aims to equip individuals from diverse backgrounds for effective participation in their communities, the national civic culture, regional culture, and the global community (Banks, 2004; Banks, 2008b).

Traditional notions of citizenship which assumes that individuals needed to forsake their cultural identities to fully participate in the national civic culture has come into question, especially since the mid-20th century due to global developments. This has led to debates and reconsiderations of citizenship and citizenship education in response to globalization, national identity, and immigration (Benhabib, 2004; Castles, 2009). Citizenship education should encompass cultural rights for individuals from diverse backgrounds and equip students with the skills needed to promote global equality and justice (Gutmann, 2004; Nussbaum, 2002).

Educational institutions and curricula should be reformed to adopt a transformative and critical approach to citizenship education, aiming to improve educational equality for all students and foster social unity within a diverse population.

In our interconnected world, a transformative pedagogy is crucial to empower learners in addressing persistent global challenges related to sustainable development and peace, encompassing issues like conflict, poverty, climate change, and various forms of inequality and injustice, necessitating cross-boundary cooperation beyond territorial limits (UNESCO, 2014a). Global citizenship is a concept subject to various scholarly interpretations but commonly signifies a sense of belonging to a broader human community, fostering a "global gaze" that links local to global and national to international perspectives, underpinned by universal values and respect for diversity, without implying legal status (UNESCO, 2014a). As a psychosocial framework, it holds the potential to encourage civic involvement in the public sphere, grounded in universal values like human rights, democracy, justice, non-discrimination, diversity, and sustainability, to create a better world and future (UNESCO, 2013).

Since 2012, UNESCO has been advocating for Global Citizenship Education (GCED), a transformative framework emphasizing the development of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes essential for a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure, and sustainable world (UNESCO, 2015). GCED represents a conceptual shift recognizing the role of education in addressing global issues across various dimensions and promoting values, soft skills, and attitudes that support international cooperation and social transformation (UNESCO, 2014a). GCED adopts a comprehensive approach, integrating concepts and methodologies from diverse fields, including human rights education, peace education, education for sustainable development, and education for international understanding, to advance common objectives for a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world (UNESCO, 2014b).

GCED encompasses three core dimensions: cognitive (knowledge and critical thinking about global issues), socio-emotional (sense of belonging, empathy, and respect for diversity), and behavioral (acting responsibly for global peace and sustainability). It aims to foster an understanding of global governance, rights, and responsibilities, promote recognition of differences and diverse identities (e.g. culture, language, religion, gender and common humanity), develop critical civic skills, examine the influence of beliefs and values on decision-making, instill care and empathy for others and the environment, cultivate values of fairness and social justice, and engage in informed and responsible participation in global issues at all levels (UNESCO, 2015).

Given the need for solutions beyond individual states and national education policies, the integration of GCED into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underscores its growing relevance in addressing modern challenges of the contemporary world (United Nations, 2015). GCED offers an avenue to appreciate diverse identities and cultural richness, understand the root causes of global inequalities and discrimination, and contribute to a fairer, more sustainable, and equitable global society (Akkari & Maleq, 2021). Despite notable economic advancements in areas like poverty reduction, health, and education, Bangladesh still grapples with issues such as violence, limited access to justice, and restricted citizen participation (Saferworld, 2016). The adoption of the 2030 Agenda by Bangladesh presents an opportunity to address these challenges.

The 2030 Agenda includes Sustainable Development Goal 4, with its focus on "Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and fostering lifelong learning opportunities for all,". The SDG 4 encompasses Target 4.7, which calls for the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to advance sustainable development, including "through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture

of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development" (United Nations, 2015).

Schools serve as sites for the sociocultural perpetuation of power and privilege, where textbooks are 'important cultural artifacts' in this process (Binte Abdur Rob et al., 2020). Textbooks play a crucial role in shaping the socioemotional development of students and are crafted to instill values like national identity, ethos, citizenship, and patriotism (Binte Abdur Rob et al., 2020). Therefore, analyzing textbooks is vital in assessing the scope of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 and implementing GCED in Bangladesh's national curriculum.

The analytical framework for textbook analysis used in this study is adapted from a framework developed by Rob, Roy, Huq, and Marshall (2020). They merged two frames of analysis developed by Cho and Park (2016): the 'Multicultural Content Analysis Frame (MCAF)' and the 'Multicultural Description Analysis Frame (MDAF)'. The categories in these frameworks encompass aspects like (1) identity, (2) diversity and pluralism, and (3) social justice for MCAF, and (1) balance of material distribution, (2) accuracy and scope of information, (3) distortion and stereotypes, (4) balance in perspectives, and (5) ethnic centricity for MDAF (Cho & Park, 2016). These categories serve as the criteria for evaluating the presence of multicultural content in textbooks.

Aligning multicultural education, citizenship education, and sustainable development within the framework of GCED has the potential to enhance students' understanding of cultural and ecological relationships, as well as the interconnectedness of issues such as citizenship, democracy, participation, identity, diversity, social justice, global challenges, and sustainability (Akkari & Maleq, 2021). However, it is important to acknowledge that policies and programs designed to promote global citizenship may have different objectives due to varying interpretations of the concept and regional differences in the articulation and

perception of GCED (Goren & Yemini, 2017). Additionally, a study found that GCED involves consolidating regional norms and adapting them for a global context (Jules & Arnold, 2021). These factors highlight the central challenge in GCED and the need for a thorough examination of the intricate web of cultural and material processes at local and global levels. Neglecting this could inadvertently promote a new 'civilizing mission,' where a generation assumes the burden of global salvation and education, potentially perpetuating universalized beliefs and power dynamics reminiscent of colonial times (Andreotti, 2014). Thus, developing a culturally relevant and localized GCED policy for Bangladesh requires a deep exploration of its history, values, and indigenous examples of interreligious and inter-ethnic harmony, particularly in light of the educational philosophy of leaders like Bhashani, culminating in my third research question: *How can Bhashani's pedagogical philosophy be effectively aligned with the principles of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) to develop a culturally relevant and localized GCED policy that best serves the needs of the people in Bangladesh?*

1.3 Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study encompasses a synthesis of primary and secondary data sources to comprehensively explore Bhashani's pedagogical philosophy and the Islamic university he envisioned, alongside an assessment of how the present secular educational scenario in Bangladesh aligns with his vision. The corpus of writings on Bhashani's pedagogy and Islamic university forms a significant foundation for this research, including his own extensive writings on the vision, mission, form, and structure of the envisioned Islamic University, along with his underlying philosophy of education. Furthermore, various scholars, thinkers, politicians, and activists have provided diverse interpretations of Bhashani's philosophy on pedagogy, contributing to a nuanced understanding.

To fully understand a school's curriculum, course materials and student records are key sources of information. However, the existing archival documents relating to Bhashani's educational institutions from the mid-seventies are very limited in number and scope. I was able to collect only three questionnaires of the annual examination of Islamic University School held in 1974. These questionnaires were intended for nursery (pre-primary), 7th grade, and 8th grade students. The questionnaires for the 7th and 8th grades cover the subjects of religious studies and social sciences, respectively. Notably, the religious studies questionnaire was intended for both 7th and 8th-grade students. Recognizing the limitations of relying on a few questionnaires, it is acknowledged that this approach has constraints in capturing a comprehensive view of the curriculum. While acknowledging the limited scope of this approach, the questionnaires that I found have the potential to offer a glimpse into the educational focus of the institution. These question papers not only reflect the historical and cultural context of the institution but also provide insights into the integrated values and ideas within the curriculum. Moreover, the complexity of questions, fostering critical thinking and analysis, underscores the depth of the curriculum.

To gain a more profound understanding of Bhashani's educational philosophy and address the central inquiries of this thesis, an in-depth key-informant interview was conducted with Syed Ifranul Bari, a close aide of Maulana Bhashani and a faculty member teaching 'Maulana Bhashani Studies' at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University (MBSTU).

To assess the present alignment of the educational landscape in Bangladesh with Bhashani's vision and to identify its limitations, a review of current social sciences and religious studies textbooks for 7th and 8th grades was undertaken. These textbooks, produced, distributed, and regulated by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), were subjected to content analysis. To strengthen the analysis, existing studies that have explored the contents of these textbooks were also referenced. The analytical framework employed for the content review of

the NCTB textbooks draws from the study conducted by Rob, Roy, Huq, & Marshall (2020). This framework encompasses dimensions of identity, diversity and pluralism, and social cohesion. The primary objective is to assess the specific roles assigned to religion in education, especially within the disciplines of social sciences and religious studies.

In summary, this research methodology involves a combination of primary data derived from Bhashani's writings and questionnaires, along with secondary data sourced from existing studies. The methodology includes content analysis, in-depth interview, and comparative analyses to comprehensively explore Bhashani's philosophy on education and its relevance within the contemporary educational context in Bangladesh.

The next chapter provides a brief account of Bhashani's political significance and philosophical uniqueness. It sketches his early life, educational background, and influences before delving into an in-depth evaluation of Bhashani's distinctive conceptualization of an educational system, which finds its bedrock in the philosophical tenets of *Rabubiyyat* and is epitomized in his proposed Islamic University. The third chapter provides a background of Bangladesh's educational landscape and evolution of textbooks, focusing on the government-facilitated national 'secular' curriculum stream operating through the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). Moreover, the chapter reviews some of NCTB's primary and secondary education level textbooks and lays out a comparative analysis of NCTB curriculum against the curriculum of Islamic University School that Bhashani established in 1974, particularly focusing on secularism, multi-religious education, and social cohesion, with the aim to understand how the current educational landscape in Bangladesh aligns with Bhashani's vision, identify limitations, and explore the potential for his philosophy to address these gaps. The concluding chapter evaluates the potential compatibility between Bhashani's educational philosophy and Global Citizenship Education (GCED) to create a localized GCED policy tailored for the people of Bangladesh.

2.1 Bhashani's Political Significance and Philosophical Uniqueness

Maulana Bhashani's intricate perspective on religious and secular affairs remains a subject of significance, exemplifying a profound interweaving of Islamic principles with a commitment to uphold liberal democratic values. Having spent nearly three years in Darul Uloom Deoband[15] between 1907 and 1909, he immersed himself in the works of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi[16]. However, rather than aligning with the Jamiat Ulamae Hind[17] Party established by his mentors, which collaborated with the Indian National Congress, endorsing its nationalist stance and rejecting Two Nations Theory, aimed to foster Hindu-Muslim unity against British imperialism (Akhtar, 2022), Bhashani actively engaged in the political circles led by Muhammad Ali

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[15] Established in 1866, Darul Uloom Deoband is a renowned Islamic seminary located in Deoband, India and has played a significant role in shaping Islamic education and thought. Following the failure of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and the fall of the Mughal Empire, financial support for Muslim education and madrasahs in Delhi came to a halt. In response, Islamic scholars established Darul Uloom Deoband to safeguard the cultural and socio-religious values of Indian Muslims during British rule. Their goals included revitalizing Muslim heritage through education, engaging in militant struggle when necessary, participating in British-introduced modern political mechanisms, and providing religious guidance for social, economic, and cultural aspects of Indian Muslims. The institution where the roots of the Islamic revivalist and anti-imperialist ideology took shape has produced numerous scholars and leaders who have contributed to religious, educational, and social spheres, both in India and globally. See, Akhtar, (2022); and Farhat, (2006).

[16] Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (1703–1762) emerged as a notable Islamic scholar and reformer in 18th-century India, playing a significant role in revitalizing Islamic thought and practices, and advocating for a reconnection with the fundamental teachings of Islam. See, Baljon, (1986)

[17] Seizing the momentum of the Khilafat movement, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind emerged in 1919 with the aim of establishing a Shariah-guided political organization. The primary objective of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind was to unite all the ulemas (Islamic scholars) of Deoband on a single platform with the role of analyzing political and religious events according to Islamic principles. Jamiat considered it both a religious and national duty to oppose British imperialism, with the ultimate goal being the attainment of independence. Moreover, they also considered the British administration to be chiefly responsible for the strained Hindu-Muslim relations and aligned with the Indian National Congress's nationalist philosophy, opposing the division of India. See, Jamshed, (1987); Anwar, Khan, & Ullah, (2023); and Ahmed & Rizvi, (2015).

Jauhar[18], Chittaranjan Das[19], and other influential figures who had distinct political ideologies from the Gandhi-led Indian National Congress in seeking autonomy, self-governance, political representation and rights for India. During a meeting with a group of Muslim theologians from Dhaka who came to evaluate Bhashani's vision of an Islamic University at Santosh, he boldly proclaimed, "For a thousand years, you bearded Muslims have adhered to a single form of Islam. Now, I aspire to show a distinct form of Islam through the unbearded".[20]

While deeply rooted in local politics and vocal in addressing the concerns of the rural and marginalized populace, Bhashani maintained an astute awareness of broader international issues and their implications. His political thought transcended narrow parochial interests, aligning with broader movements for global solidarity and progressive ideals.

Although Bhashani's advocacy of socialist principles positioned him within the ambit of leftist politics, it is crucial to discern his distinction from outright communism. His inclination towards socialism stemmed from his unwavering commitment to the rights of workers and peasants, aiming for a more egalitarian society, but he diverged from communist ideologies and organizational structures, upholding his unique position within the leftist spectrum. Maulana Bhashani, a Sufi with revolutionary ideologies, attracted numerous Islamic scholars and thinkers to Santosh, where they would seek his guidance on various matters. Following the death of China's Prime Minister Zhou Enlai in 1976, Bhashani paid tribute to him and

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[18] Muhammad Ali Jauhar (1878 – 1931) was a prominent Indian Muslim activist, a founding member of the All-India Muslim League, and a significant figure in the Indian National Congress. He played a key role in both the Aligarh Movement and the Khilafat Movement.

[19] Chittaranjan Das founded the Congress-Khilafat Swaraj Party in 1923, aiming to secure greater self-government and freedom from British rule. The "Swarajist Revolt" marked a significant event in India's freedom movement, differing from Gandhi's non-violent non-cooperation. The main contrast lay in legislative council participation: Swarajists supported it, while Gandhi's followers opposed. These groups were termed "pro-changers" (Swarajists) and "no-changers" (Gandhians) respectively. See, Sarkar, (2022); and Chatterji, (1968).

[20] My translation of the following quote from Syed Irfanul Bari's book (2014) 'Nanan Matray Mawlana Bhashani': "হাজার বছর ধরে তোমরা দাড়িওয়ালারা এক প্রকার ইসলাম তুলে ধরেছ। এবারে আমি দাড়িছাড়াদের দ্বারা আরেক প্রকারের ইসলাম দেখাতে চাই"

concluded with the phrase "May Allah bless his soul." Scholars questioned Bhashani about offering such a prayer for someone who did not believe in the Creator or the immortality of the soul. In response, Bhashani explained in simple terms, "They (the communists) have eliminated all false gods from the vast land of 70 crore people (China). Isn't that significant? Keep in mind, *'la-ilaha'* (there is no God) comes first, then *'illa-allah'* (except Allah) follows. Meanwhile, you are still entangled with false gods. How can you discover the true God in such circumstances?"[21] Bhashani viewed politics dedicated to the emancipation of humanity and the pursuit of peace as a form of *ibaadat* (worship).

An analysis of Maulana Bhashani's life and the available records of his speeches and writings reveals his apparent disapproval of both capitalist and Bolshevik forms of the modern state. This depreciation stemmed from his perception of them as centralized tools of authority and power (Mazhar, 2015a). According to Farhad Mazhar's reading of Bhashani, he maintained a strong connection to the powerful Islamic concept of 'ummah', even though he never explicitly mentioned it. Through this notion, he envisaged the potential emergence of a genuinely global community, wherein individuals could relate to each other not through earthly bonds such as property, commodities, or money, but through a divine mediation, an invisible yet omnipresent force within each of us. According to Talal Asad, the Islamic ummah is not conceptually akin to a conventional society where state, economy, and religion can be neatly delineated. He further assertsm "It is not limited nor sovereign: not limited, for unlike Arab nationalism's notion of al-umma al-'arabiyya [Arab nation] it can and eventually should embrace all of humanity, and not sovereign, for it is subject to God's authority" (Asad, 1999).

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[21] My translation of the quote from Bari, (2014e): "৭০ কোটি মানুষের দেশ থেকে তারা সকল নকল খোদা তাড়িয়েছে। এটাই বা কম কিসে? 'লা- ইলাহা' আগে, তার পরে ইল্লাল্লাহ। তোমরা তো নকল খোদার বেড়াজালে হাবুডুবু খাচ্ছ। আসল খোদার সন্ধান পাবে কিভাবে?"

To gain a comprehensive understanding of Bhashani's political trajectory and achievements, it becomes imperative to shed light on his journey as a religious leader and a *pir* (Sufi saint). For him, the message of Islam transcended mere religious doctrine; it served as a blueprint for the economic structure of society. Maulana Bhashani's interpretation of and perspective on Islam is elucidated in his last official speech delivered at Santosh in 1976, just four days before his death. He categorizes Islam into two parts. In the first part, he includes various stages of spiritual elevation, encompassing *Shariah, Tariqah, Haqiqah,* and *Marifah*. According to Maulana Bhashani, achieving the highest level of spiritual enlightenment, *Marifah*, does not lead to a full embracement of Islam, because these elements collectively represent only one of the two parts of Islam. The other part, which he labels the 'main organ,' is Jihad. Bhashani said,

> "For quite a while now, people have been instructed about Shariat, Tariqat, Marifat, Haqiqat, constituting one part of Islam. Continuous emphasis is placed on practicing Islam, yet the primary and vital commandment of Islam seems to be forgotten: it is an obligatory duty (*farz*) to engage in Jihad against injustice, tyranny, falsehood, and exploitation for the liberation of the oppressed. Remember, Islam comprises of two components - one includes *Shariat, Tariqat, Haqiqat, Marifat*; the other significant part is Jihad. Jihad against injustice, Jihad against lies, Jihad against oppression, Jihad against oppressors. Jihad against the powerful - those who attack and torture the weak."[22]

Bhashani consistently used every opportunity to convey to his followers the importance of engaging in struggles for socio-economic change. Notably, when individuals sought to become his *murid* (disciple), he insisted on a *bay'ah* (oath of allegiance) committing them to work as members of the peasant association he led. It is noteworthy that Bhashani's disciples and

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[22] My translation of the quote from Bari, (2014f): "আজ বহুদিন যাবত ইসলামের অন্যতম একটা অংশ সরিয়ত, তরিকত, মারিফত, হাকিকতের কথা মানুষকে শোনানো হচ্ছে। আমল করার জন্য বার বার নির্দেশ দেয়া হচ্ছে। কিন্তু তারা ভুলে গেছে ইসলামের প্রধান এবং অন্যতম নির্দেশ হল: অন্যায়ের বিরুদ্ধে, জালেমের বিরুদ্ধে, অসত্যের বিরুদ্ধে, শোষকের বিরুদ্ধে শোষিত মানুষের মুক্তির জন্য জেহাদ করা ফরজ। আপনারা মনে রাখবেন, ইসলামের দুইটি অঙ্গ- একটি সরিয়ত, তরিকত, হাকিকত, মারিফত; আরেকটি প্রধান অঙ্গ জেহাদ। অন্যায়ের বিরুদ্ধে জেহাদ, মিথ্যার বিরুদ্ধে জেহাদ, জুলুমের বিরুদ্ধে জেহাদ, জালেমের বিরুদ্ধে জেহাদ। প্রবল প্রতাপশালী- যারা দুর্বলকে আক্রমণ করে, নির্যাতন করে, তাদের বিরুদ্ধে জেহাদ"

devotees included not only Muslims but also individuals from different religions (Maksud, 1994). To provide insight into the unique nature of Bhashani's politics and creed, the *bay'ah,* administered by Bhashani to his disciples is provided below:

> *I solemnly profess belief in Allah as the Supreme and Rasulullah as the sent messenger. I commit to adhering to all regulations regarding the permitted and disallowed as propagated by the Messenger. I will bow my head to none but Allah. I will tirelessly strive to establish socialism as the sole means to alleviate all forms of human extortion and embezzlement. I will join the volunteer corps of the peasantry to eradicate imperialism, capitalism, feudalism, usury, and corruption from society. I will engage in litanies, contemplation, meditation, prayers, and fasting according to the tariqah of Qadria, Naqshbandiya, Chistiyyah. Annually, on the 19th/20th of January (5th Magh), I will attend the gathering at Santos, Tangail, and contribute to the progress of the Islamic University.[23]*

Bhashani firmly believed in the emancipatory power of socialism for the toiling masses. Aligning with his religious beliefs, he fervently advocated for the organization of peasants. However, despite his deep religiosity, he advocated for a secular state and coined the term 'Islamic Socialism.' He saw common ground between Islam and socialism in their commitment to humanism, universal brotherhood, and egalitarianism. His vision extended to a future society where wealth would be distributed based on the principle of equality. For Bhashani, *Haqqul Ebad*—signifying the fight for equality, justice, and the rights of the people—constituted a religious duty (Chowdhury, 2014).

Several Islamic scholars in the country refrained from endorsing Bhashani because he diverged from them by not limiting his religious duties to preaching and praying. Furthermore, the majority of his political followers and companions were atheists or adhered to a materialistic philosophy. Consequently, the Islamic scholars frequently labeled him as a 'Kaafir' or even an

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[23] Translation of the oath of allegiance adapted from Chowdhury, (2014).

atheist (Uddin, 2016). In response to these labels, Bhashani remarked in a casual conversation with Abul Hashim:

> "When there's a fire in the house, isn't it a more urgent duty to run with a bucket of water? In times when the honor of the country's mothers and sisters is compromised on the streets due to a lack of food, and farmers' corpses are buried wrapped in banana leaves for lack of shrouds—during such times, is it wrong for me to support those who may not outwardly believe in Allah but are committed to Jihad against injustice and oppression, rather than those who don't engage in such Jihad and only worship Allah at home? To scrutinize the belief of those who are fighting against injustice—am I that foolish?"[24]

Nevertheless, despite all these challenges, Maulana Bhashani emerged as a prominent political figure grounded in Islamic philosophy.
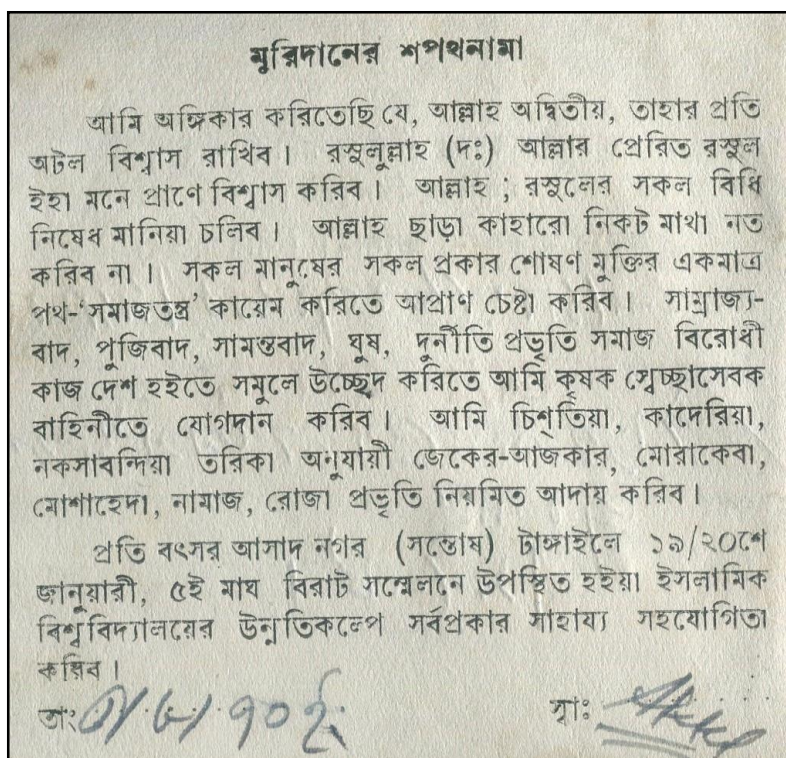

Image 1 Bhashani's Oath of Allegiance for Discipleship (Muridaner Shopothnama) signed by a disciple in 1970. Document courtesy of Syed Irfanul Bari

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[24] My translation of the quote from Mujibullah, (1988): "আচ্ছা, ঘরে যখন আগুন লাগে তখন পানির বালতি নিয়ে দৌড়ানোই কি অধিকতর জরুরী কর্তব্য নয়? এক মুঠো ভাতের অভাবে যখন দেশের মা-বোনের ইজ্জত রাস্তা ঘাটে বিলিয়ে যাচ্ছে, কাফনের অভাবে কলাপাতায় ঢেকে যখন দাফন করা হচ্ছে কৃষক মজুরের লাশ, তখনও যারা জেহাদে না নেমে ঘরে বসে আল্লাহ আল্লাহ, করছেন তাদের বাদ দিয়ে যারা দৃশ্যত আল্লাহ মানে না অথচ জেহাদ করতে চায়, আমি যদি তাদের সংগেই থাকি তাহলে কি অন্যায় হয়? অন্যায়ের বিরুদ্ধে জেহাদকারীর জাতবিচার করবো আমি কি এতই মূঢ়"

2.2 Bhashani's Early Life and Educational Background

Mohammad Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, also known as Maulana Bhashani, had a remarkable life journey that shaped his role as a prominent leader in South Asian politics, particularly in colonial Assam, Bengal, and postcolonial East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Born around 1885 in the village of Dhangara, near Sirajganj, Bhashani came from a family with a well-to-do background (Maksud, 1994; Hosen, 2020). However, his life took a challenging turn when his father, Haji Mohammad Sharafat Ali Khan, passed away when he was very young. A few years later, his mother, Mosammat Majiran Nesa Bibi, and his three siblings succumbed to cholera, leaving him completely orphaned. This early loss and the subsequent hardships he faced deeply impacted his worldview.

As a child, Bhashani witnessed the harsh realities of life, including the devastating famine of 1897, which left a lasting impression on him. He observed the stark contrast between the suffering of the poor, who perished due to hunger, and the indifference of the wealthy elite, such as zamindars, jotedars, moneylenders, businessmen who remained unaffected by the famine. This stark class difference left a significant mark on the young Bhashani, who started questioning the societal disparities and sought a way to address the plight of the oppressed (Maksud, 1994).

Bhashani's early education was disrupted due to the untimely death of his parents and financial constraints; however, his thirst for knowledge and a strong sense of justice drove him to explore the world around him. It is known that he fled from his foster uncle's house within a year or two following his mother's death. The period after leaving home was marked by great hardship. He sought refuge in the homes of various strangers, engaged in fishing with local fishermen, and toiled alongside farmers in the fields. Occasionally, he earned meager amounts. Bhashani's life took a significant turn when he crossed paths with Syed Shah Nasiruddin Baghdadi, a

distinguished spiritual leader who had migrated from Baghdad, Iraq, to India towards the close of the nineteenth century or the early years of the twentieth century.

Baghdadi, a Sufi saint, dedicated himself to preaching in Northeast India, particularly in Assam. His travels brought him to the Haluaghat and Sirajganj regions of East Bengal, now Bangladesh. It was during this period that Bhashani, in his teenage years, became Baghdadi's caretaker. Impressed by Bhashani's unwavering dedication to labor and religion, Baghdadi took him under his wing with paternal affection. In 1904, when Baghdadi returned to Jaleshwar in Assam,[25] he brought Bhashani along, assuming the roles of both guardian and spiritual guru.

Under Baghdadi's guidance, Bhashani embarked on a journey of learning. He studied Bangla in a local pathshala, delved into Arabic and Urdu with Baghdadi's guidance, and gained knowledge about the Quran, Hadith, and Fiqah. Recognizing Bhashani's talent and being optimistic about his future, Baghdadi sent him to study Islamic theology at Darul Uloom Deoband.

i. Darul Uloom Deoband

After Aurangzeb's death in 1707, the Mughal Empire lost its true authority in the Indian subcontinent, and Muslims attempted to regain their standing but faced continuous failures, especially during events like the War of Plassey (1757), Anglo-Mysore Wars (1766–1799), and the Anglo-Maratha Wars (1772–1818). As Muslims struggled for power, educational movements played a crucial role in their educational development and political socialization (Asim & Shah, 2014). However, after a significant defeat in the Indian Rebellion of 1857,

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[25] As Baghdadi continued his spiritual pursuits, he established his Khanqah in Jaleshwar, Assam, where he resided until his death in 1936. Additionally, he founded the Mazharul Uloom Madrasa in Goalpara, Assam, contributing to the educational landscape of the region.

circumstances changed drastically. Muslims lost their rule, and the British took complete control of India, leading to the division of Indian Muslims into different schools of thought.

The Deoband and Aligarh schools of thought, emerged in response to the aftermath of the Indian Rebellion, embody distinctive ideological responses to the pervasive influence of the British occupation (Farhat, 2006; Hasan, 2006). Spearheaded by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, the Aligarh Movement aimed to foster cooperation between Muslims and the British, emphasizing negotiation and the integration of beneficial aspects of Western education while preserving Islamic identity and culture (Jain, 1965; Kozlowski, 1985; Asim & Shah, 2014). In stark contrast, the Deobandi Movement, under the leadership of Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanawtawi, emerged in direct response to perceived deleterious consequences of British educational policies on Islamic principles and Muslim identity. The Deobandi movement sought to restore Islamic education, spiritually socialize Muslims against materialistic influences, unite them under a Pan-Islamic identity, counteract attempts to create sects, and eliminate the impacts of Western civilization introduced by the British educational system (Farhat, 2006; Asim & Shah, 2014). Rejecting British government funding, the Deobandi movement sought to rekindle the religio-political doctrines of the prominent South Asian Islamic scholar and Sufi reformer Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (Metcalf, 2004).

While Sir Syed Ahmed Khan founded Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (now Aligarh Muslim University) in 1875, aspiring to make it an intellectual counterpart to esteemed Western institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge, Deoband Darul Uloom, established in 1866, followed a divergent trajectory (Kozlowski, 1985; Hasan, 2006). While Aligarh embraced English and Western education, it lacked a progressive label due to its absence of an anti-imperialist stance. Conversely, Deoband scholars, adherents to Shah Waliullah Dehlawi's ideology, perceived British rule as coercive shackles and advocated for liberation through any means necessary (Maksud, 1994).

During the freedom struggles of India, Deoband scholars, encompassing both students and educators, endured persecution and imprisonment at the hands of British imperialism, thereby crystallizing Deoband's enduring legacy as a bastion of anti-imperialist resilience. From this perspective, Deoband stands as a venerable institution, preserving a rich tradition in the face of historical vicissitudes. By the late 19th century, Deoband's unique organizational style and educational methods, outside direct government control, had led to its significant expansion. This efficient institutionalization, conceived by Barbara D. Metcalf as a "successful example of the bureaucratization of traditional religious institutions," enabled Deoband to effectively disseminate its reformist ideology, showcasing its adept adaptation to the complexities of the modern world (Metcalf, 2004).

After studying at Deoband from 1907 to 1909, Bhashani emerged as a Deoband scholar, with his political indoctrination in anti-imperialist struggles surpassing the emphasis on academic education during his tenure at Deoband. Bhashani received mentorship from Maulana Mahmud Hasan Deobandi, a prominent teacher at the Deoband and the successor of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi. Mahmud Hasan, characterized by his staunch opposition to British imperialism, advocated for political, economic, and social liberation of the oppressed (Maksud, 1994). Bhashani, driven by a revolutionary spirit, greatly benefited from his association with Mahmud Hasan. At Deoband, Bhashani came to realize that the struggle between the oppressed and oppressors had persisted for centuries worldwide. He internalized Shah Waliullah Dehlawi's dictum, *'fuqqa qulle nejamin*,' which translates to 'abolish all existing systems (social, economic, political systems that empower the oppressor),' a revolutionary slogan that profoundly influenced Bhashani throughout his lifetime (Bari, 2014a). Studying at Deoband shaped his life's purpose, leading him to commit to the cause of India's freedom from imperialist rule and the economic-social emancipation of the oppressed. His education in anti-

imperialism took root here as he engaged with numerous progressive Islamic scholars, absorbing their anti-imperialist ethos.

Returning to his mentor, Shah Nasiruddin Baghdadi, in Assam in 1909, Bhashani brought back not only progressive interpretations of Islamic thought from his years at Darul Uloom but also an anti-imperialist and anticolonial political spirit cultivated in the political-cultural environment of Deoband at that time (Kabir, 2012). This newly acquired political orientation, combined with his inherent concern for the laboring masses, set Bhashani apart as a political trailblazer, fittingly referred to as the 'red Maulana.'

ii. Maulana Azad Subhani and The Philosophy of Rabbaniyat

In addition to examining Bhashani's academic history and his immersion in the revolutionary teachings of Islamic scholars, it is crucial to delve into the philosophy of Rabbaniyat crafted by Maulana Azad Subhani. This exploration of the philosophy of Rabbaniyat is essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of Bhashani's educational philosophy.

It is noteworthy that while Nasiruddin Baghdadi served as Bhashani's spiritual mentor, Maulana Azad Subhani played the role of his political and intellectual guide (Choudhury, 2017). Moreover, in the 1940s, both Subhani and Bhashani held esteemed positions within the Muslim League. Subhani served as a philosophical inspiration for Abul Hashim, the Secretary of ML's Bengal wing, and his young adherents, while Bhashani assumed the role of the President in ML's Assam wing (Custers, 2010). In the context of discussing about Bhashani's political philosophy, Syed Irfanul Bari shared,

> *"There is another notable figure hailing from India- Allama Azad Subhani. He*
> *approaches the philosophy of Rabubiyyat with an in-depth theoretical analysis,*
> *which is distinct from the approaches of Maulana Bhashani and Abul Hashim,*
> *surpassing the analyses performed by both. Following Subhani, Maulana Abul*

Kalam Azad also delved into the philosophy, along with Abul Hashim and Maulana Bhashani. A noteworthy aspect is that Maulana Bhashani applied the philosophy of Rabubiyyat to political interpretations, a perspective also shared by Abul Hashim. Nevertheless, Allama Azad Subhani emphasized the significance of understanding how Rabubiyyat could be applied, even in the realm of politics, stating, "You may engage in politics, become a top brass—no objection, but it is crucial to figure out how Rabubiyyat shall be implemented." Similarly, Allama Hashemi and Maulana Bhashani shared the notion that while venturing into politics and acquiring power, the underlying ideology should remain consistent. [26]

In Bhashani's 1974 essay on the policy of 'Rabubiyat,' composed at the culmination of his extensive political career, he briefly recounts his encounter with the 'revolutionary philosopher' Maulana Azad Subhani in 1946 (Bhashani, 1974). Bhashani marks this meeting as a pivotal event that shaped the rest of his intellectual and political philosophy. During the encounter, Subhani urged Bhashani to pledge his life on the holy Kaaba to the implementation of the revolutionary philosophy of *Rabubiyyat*. In the essay, Bhashani recalls agreeing to this pledge and states that from 1946 onward, *Rabubiyyat* remained his guiding ideology.

Maulana Azad Subhani, a prominent theologian of his time (1882–1963), played a pivotal role in the anticolonial Muslim politics of British India. His beliefs centered on the universality of Islamic principles and their potential to resolve the various challenges faced by Muslims in British India (Huq, 2014). He played a crucial role in both the Khilafat movement and the founding of Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind. Influenced by progressive ideals, Subhani founded several

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[26] Taken from the transcript of my interview with Syed Irfanul Bari in 2021 and translated into English: "আরেকজন, যিনি ভারতেরই সন্তান, আল্লামা আজাদ সুবহানি, তিনি আবার রবুবিয়ত দর্শনে যতখানি এনালাইসিস করেছেন, মওলানা ভাসানী বা আল্লামা হাশেমী ঐভাবে এনালাইসিস করেননাই। এই এনালাইসিসের থিওরিটিক্যাল বিশ্লেষণ আল্লামা আজাদ সুবহানি সবচেয়ে বেশি করেছেন। তারপরে করেছেন মওলানা আবুল কালাম আজাদ। এরপরে আবুল হাশেমী সাহেব, মওলানা ভাসানী। মওলানা ভাসানীও রবুবিয়ত দর্শনটা রাজনৈতিক ব্যাখায় এনেছেন, আবুল হাশেমী সাহেবও এনেছেন। আল্লামা আজাদ সুবহানিও বলেছেন, তোমরা রাজনীতি করো, মন্ত্রী-মিনিস্টার হও, আপত্তি নাই, কিন্তু রবুবিয়াতের প্রয়োগ কিভাবে হবে এইটা দেখার বিষয়। আল্লামা হাশেমীরও একই চিন্তা ছিলো, যে উনি রাজনীতিতে যাবেন, ক্ষমতায় যাবেন, কিন্তু মতাদর্শ ঐ একটাই। মওলানা ভাসানীরও তাই ছিলো।"

organizations in India, both before and after the partition, reflecting his commitment to political and social causes (Huq, 2018).

Born in Sikanderpur, Uttar Pradesh, India, Subhani received a liberal education in traditional madrasahs. His studies encompassed the Arabic language, the religion of Islam, and Greek philosophy, which, at that time, formed part of the old and traditional curriculum of these madrasahs. Dissatisfied with the outdated aspects of Greek philosophy, he envisioned a new philosophy that could simultaneously serve religion and delve into the profound realities of life. To pursue this vision, he established *Madrasah-e-Ilahiyat* (the School of Divinity) in Kanpur, India, where he taught philosophy, particularly the philosophy of religion, for seventeen years (Al-Sindi, 1947).

Although Subhani was deeply involved in Indian nationalism and politics, he made significant progress in developing his philosophical thought, eventually naming it the 'Philosophy of Rabbaniyyat.' His preliminary ideas were articulated in booklets titled "The Philosophy of Religion" and the 'Manifesto of Rabbaniyyat.' Subhani's third booklet, 'The Teachings of Islam in Light of the Philosophy of Rabbaniyyat,' deliberately written in English and published in 1947, reflects his unwavering commitment to this philosophy. Emphasizing its universal applicability, he envisioned this philosophy not merely as abstract or theoretical but as the most constructive and practical approach to life (Al-Sindi, 1947).

In his 1947 publication, Subhani explains his philosophy of Rabbaniyyat which aims to counteract existing ignorance and inaction that have obscured the profound teachings of Islam. Rooted in interconnected concepts such as *Olohiyat* (Divine Love), *Rabubiyyat* (Preservation), *Rabbiyyat* (Work of Preservation), and *Mashiyyat* (Divine Will), this philosophy delves into the essence of the relationship between God, the universe, and humanity. Subhani delves into

these concepts, unraveling the comprehensive philosophy of Rabbaniyyat intricately woven into the fabric of Islamic principles and philosophy.

Olohiyat, often referred to as divine love in Islam, holds a significant place in this philosophy. According to Subhani, the word Allah itself translates to "lover," emphasizing that the foremost quality of God is divine love. It underscores the idea that all manifestations and actions of God stem from this divine love rather than any other motive. In Subhani's interpretation, Islam advocates following the path of love as the primary and foundational quality, emphasizing *Olohiyat* (Divine Love) as the core essence for leading a true way of life.

In Subhani's interpretation, Islam identifies Allah as the supreme source of all good and considers *Rabubiyyat*, denoting Preservation, as His central quality, all other qualities of Allah revolve around and work for the preservation of the universe. *Rabubiyyat* (Preservation) is the force that sustains the entire cosmos, and all praise and admiration should be directed toward this fundamental reality. *Rabubiyyat* (Preservation), in essence, is a universal quality that encompasses and prevails throughout the entire universe. It is inherent in the nature of every being, signifying a fundamental aspect of existence. This quality finds its supreme source in Allah, where it is uniquely and completely manifested. While Allah holds the unparalleled embodiment of *Rabubiyyat* (Preservation), every human being has the capacity to seek and acquire more of this quality through the Supreme Source. *Rabubiyyat* (Preservation), in essence, is a universal quality that permeates the entirety of the universe. It is inherent in the nature of every being, imbued in the fabric of existence. While Allah is identified as the supreme source of this universal quality, possessing it uniquely and completely, every human being has the capacity to seek and acquire more of *Rabubiyyat* (Preservation) through the Supreme Source. The acquisition of *Rabubiyyat* (Preservation) is contingent upon individual capacity, suggesting a continuous process of seeking and incorporating this universal attribute into one's being.

Distinguishing between *Olohiyat* (Divine Love) and *Rabubiyyat* (Preservation), Subhani elucidates that the former is an instinctive quality, while the latter assumes a practical role. Despite this distinction, their connection lies in *Olohiyat* (Divine Love) being the cause and *Rabubiyyat* (Preservation) being the effect, illustrating the motive and action relationship.

Mashiyyat, or Divine Will, refers to Allah's continuous and infinite work guiding all aspects of existence. This divine will guides all aspects of existence, and adherence to the laws dictated by *Mashiyyat* (Divine Will) ensures the preservation of the universe. In essence, it is the guiding force behind Allah's ongoing and infinite actions, shaping the order and functioning of the cosmos.

Subhani depicts Allah as an eternal worker, constantly engaged in the boundless task of *Rabbiyyat* (Work of Preservation), utilizing His infinite capacity. *Rabbiyyat* (Work of Preservation), as interpreted in this context, refers to the fundamental work of Allah in actively preserving and protecting the entire Universe after its creation and manifestation. It involves an unwavering commitment to maintaining the integrity of the whole, even if it entails repairing or removing individual components for the greater good. In a broader sense, *Rabbiyyat* (Work of Preservation) involves instilling the ethos of preservation within oneself and extending it to govern the entire Universe. By doing so, individuals fulfill their specific role and special status as *Khalifatullah*, signifying the Deputy or Viceroy of God, in alignment with the laws of *Mashiyyat* (Divine Will). The culmination of this commitment is Rabbaniyyat, the collective effort of beings in the Universe to engage in the work of preservation.

Rabbaniyyat is the concept of preservation carried out by beings in the Universe, with a particular emphasis on humans who hold the position of *Khalifatullah* (Deputy of Allah). It represents the natural condition of human behavior, characterized by the responsible preservation of the Universe. In contrast, deviations from Rabbaniyyat, often driven by uncontrolled freedom of will, result in unnatural conditions leading to conflict and destruction.

Subhani advocates Rabbaniyyat as a practical and idealistic theory, highlighting the importance of human efforts in preserving the order and balance of the Universe.

Subhani explored the relationship between *Insan* (Man) and *Alam* (Universe), identifying man as the latest and most capable species in the evolutionary process. Endowed with an all-encompassing nature, man is viewed as a universe in miniature, granted the privilege of *Khalifatullah* (Deputy of Allah). This elevated status entails a dual responsibility: fulfilling duties arising from his relationship with Allah and those stemming from his connection with the universe. Maintaining a proper balance between these dual responsibilities leads to the achievement of Rabbaniyyat.

The Rabbani Movement, led by Subhani, served as a vehicle for propagating the Philosophy of Rabbaniyyat. Subhani aimed to establish Rabbani groups and associations globally, delivering an overarching message to humanity: "*kunu rabbaniyyin*" (Oh, People! Become Preservers).

2.3 Bhashani's Political Philosophy

Although heavily influenced by Maulana Azad Subhani's philosophy of Rabbaniyyat, Bhashani took a distinct approach to its establishment, as outlined by Bhashani's comrade, Syed Irfanul Bari, "Maulana Bhashani adopted a more practical and execution-oriented approach to the philosophy. Abul Hashim shared a similar perspective, but Maulana Bhashani's execution had a broader scope than that of Abul Hashim. It even surpassed the scope of Allama Azad Subhani, who is more of a theorist. Notably, Maulana Bhashani integrated socialism into this philosophical framework."[27]

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[27] Taken from the transcript of my interview with Syed Irfanul Bari in 2021 and translated into English: "হ্যা ভাসানীর রব্বুবিয়াতটা প্র্যাক্টিস ওরিয়েন্টেড ছিলো, প্র্যাক্টিস করা, কার্যকর করা। আবুল হাশেমীরও তাই ছিলো। কিন্তু কার্যকর করার ব্যপ্তি মওলানা ভাসানীর বেশি ছিলো। এমনকি আজ়াদ সুবহানি সাহেবের চাইতেও; আর উনি (সুবহানি) তো তাত্ত্বিক। মওলানা ভাসানী তারমধ্যে সমাজতন্ত্রকে এনেছেন"

i. Palonbaad: Philosophy of Rabubiyyat

Bhashani's interpretation of the philosophy of Rabbaniyyat, which he refers to as *Rabubiyyat*[28] or *Palonbaad,* centers around its egalitarian message within Islam and emphasizing Allah's role as the supreme sustainer and 'nourisher'. The concept of *Palonbaad* (Nourishment) or *Rabubiyah*, derived from the Arabic word *'Rab'*. Bhashani believed that the Quranic idea of *'Rab,'* signifying Allah's direct material presence as the provider of care and nourishment for all, conveys a powerful message that deeply connects with the oppressed (Mazhar, 2015a). According to Bhashani, the essence of the philosophy is a vision to establish a society devoid of exploitation, where individuals share equality, prosperity, and mutual support, free from sentiments of jealousy and egotism (Custers, 2010).

All living beings, from colossal mammals to miniscule microbes and everything in between, possess the inherent right to live, be nourished, and sustained. Allah, the 'Rab' or the supreme 'Nourisher,' impartially extends his love to all, without discrimination based on religious, cultural, or ideological affiliations. Regardless of one's religious or philosophical beliefs—be it Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Communism, or atheism—every living being has the right to share in the splendor of Allah's creation. Bhashani underscores that, in his view, Allah, whom he identifies as 'the source of all consciousness,' regards all humans as equals (Custers, 2010; Mazhar, 2015a). The sunlight embraces everyone, rivers universally weave their courses, and the land stands as a communal asset accessible to all to harness for their sustenance. Asserting sole 'ownership,' which bars others from accessing Allah's creation for

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[28] In his discussions of the philosophy, Bhashani mentioned the term "Rabubiyyat" more frequently than "Rabbaniyyat," occasionally using the two interchangeably. Despite this variation in terminology, the core essence of the philosophy remained consistent. It is noteworthy that Bhashani introduced the Bangla term 'Palonbaad' (meaning 'Nourishment') as an equivalent to "Rabubiyyat," a concept Subhani translated into English as 'Preservation.'

their livelihood, is considered contrary to Islamic principles and the supreme attribute of Allah. Bhashani, in his 1970 essay titled 'Palonbaad: What & Why', stated,

> "The Islamic revolution gained a new character through the principle of equality and fraternity, rooted in Islam's concept of Palonbaad (Rabubiyyat). At the core of Islam lies the acknowledgment of God's existence and recognition of God as the ultimate nurturer and guide in evolution. Just as God nurtures every element in the universe, the pinnacle of His creation—humans—are also beneficiaries of His nurturing. Given that humans are appointed as God's deputies, it is their responsibility to embody and enact Palonbaad in their everyday existence" (Bhashani, 1970a).

While the message of equality is not exclusive to Islam and is also championed by those adhering to socialist ideologies, *Rabubiyyat* distinguishes itself by advocating for the elimination of private ownership in the light of Islam. Bhashani asserts that humans are mere custodians, while Allah is the ultimate owner of all properties. This perspective sets Bhashani apart from learned Islamic scholars (*alem-ulama*) who recognize Allah's ownership but do not advocate for the abolition of private property. It also differs from the materialist stance of modern communists, who endorse equal wealth distribution without acknowledging God's supremacy (Custers, 2010). As Bhashani stated, "Communists advocate for the elimination of private ownership, proposing that it be held in the state's name rather than in the name of God. On the contrary, Islamic scholars acknowledge Allah's ownership of everything but do not seek to abolish private ownership" (Bhashani, 1974). Therefore, Bhashani argues that the state should abolish private ownership and distribute resources equally based on need in line with *Palonbaad* or the philosophy of *Rabubiyyat*.

ii. Hukumat-e-Rabbaniyyah: Islamic Socialism

The intellectual appeal of Bhashani lies in his conceptualization of *Hukumat-e-Rabbania*, a governance system rooted in nurturing values drawing from the philosophy of *Rabubiyyat*. His

vision resonates with a form of communism devoid of coercive state and capitalist structures, emphasizing a community respectful to all life forms. Bhashani asserts that human beings are elevated as *'Khalifah,'* representing Allah on earth and tasked with stewardship of His creation. This representation entails emancipation from self-centered and egoist desires '*Nafsaniyat*' toward spiritual transcendence '*Ruhaniyat*' (Bhashani, 1974). Ruhaniyat, which Mazhar translates as 'political spirituality,' can be achieved at the personal level, as well as historically through Islamic revolution. Bhashani envisions an economic and ecological revolution, coupled with a governance system suitable for a community of divine souls free from destructive egocentric desires (Mazhar, 2015a). Striving to address the worldly and non-worldly needs of people from diverse communities, including Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians, Bhashani aimed to establish Hukumat-e-Rabbania. His aspiration was for the spiritual development of every individual according to their respective religious traditions (Bari, 2000).

Bhashani did not envision *Hukumat-e-Rabbania* through the lens of a modern Western state. Instead, he aspired to establish a governance system whose primary responsibility is to ensure the nurturing of all individuals. Bhashani referred to this concept as Islamic Socialism, underscoring the idea that, similar to Allah's care for everyone regardless of religious, caste, race, or gender differences, governance should prioritize the well-being of all (Mazhar, 2015b).

Bhashani highlighted that, unlike a tyrant, Allah does not withhold essential resources from anyone, irrespective of their beliefs. Bhashani justified rebellion against oppressors, asserting that Islam prohibits interference with people's sustenance or living conditions. His vision advocated for Rabbania, emphasizing decentralized leadership in contrast to centralized bourgeois states and the authoritarian Soviet state (Mazhar, 2015b). He vehemently rejected the state model based on *Shashonbaad* (authoritarianism), which relies on hierarchical ruler-ruled relations. Instead, he advocated for governance rooted in the philosophy of *Palonbaad,*

mirroring the nurturing relationship between a parent and children, free from authoritative imposition (Bhashani, 1970a). He emphasized that,

> "Unless we accept something spontaneously from our heart, external pressure only complicates the matter. Authoritarian arrogance in *Shashonbaad* tears apart the relation between human beings, creating cleavages. The ruled see the ruler suspiciously and rebel whenever an opportunity arises. Therefore, there is no place for *Shashonbaad* (the ruler-ruled relation) in Islam. Islamic governance is full of the pleasant and hearty relation of love and nourishing care. There is no hierarchy between the ruler and the ruled. The objective of the Islamic revolution is to establish *Rabubiyyat* or the principle of nourishing and caring."[29]

Bhashani was frequently questioned about how and to what extent his concept of Hukumat-e-Rabbania could acquire a non-communal character. In response, he explained,

> "Some may wonder how Hukmat-e-Rabbania can be inclusive of non-Muslims. This question arises naturally among those unfamiliar with the essence of Rabubiyyat. The philosophy of Rabubiyyat transcends religious boundaries; it is a universal law. Therefore, Hukumat-e-Rabbania, established on the principle of Rabubiyyat at a state level, ensures the well-being of all, irrespective of their Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, or Christian identity. The one whom Muslims recognize as the Lord or supreme 'Nourisher', is the same provider of air, fruits, water, clothes, and food for Hindus. It is only through the ideal of Rabubiyyat that true brotherhood among people can be established. […] The opponents of Islam are spreading misinformation, claiming that the establishment of Hukumat-e-Rabbania would lead to the expulsion of non-Muslims. I emphatically assert that Hukumat-e-Rabbania alone can eliminate feudalism, capitalism, imperialism, and all forms of exploitation, ensuring well-being for every individual, regardless of caste or religion. Regardless of the name by

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[29] Chaumtoli Huq's translation of the following quote from Bhashani, 1970a: "আন্তরিকভাবে স্বতঃপ্রণোদিত হইয়া কোনো কিছুকে গ্রহণ করিতে না পারিলে বাহ্যিক চাপ শুধু সমস্যারই সৃষ্টি করে। শাসনবাদে যে কর্তৃত্বের অহমিকা রহিয়াছে তাহা মানুষে মানুষে সম্পর্কের ভিতর ফাটল সৃষ্টি করিয়া থাকে। শাসিত শাসককে দেখে সন্দেহের চোখে, সুযোগ পাইলেই শাসনের বিরুদ্ধে সে প্রতিবাদে মুখর হইয়া ওঠে। ইসলামে তাই শাসনবাদের কোনো স্থান নাই। প্রতিপালনের প্রীতিপূর্ণ মধুময় রসে ইসলামি রাষ্ট্রীয় ব্যবস্থা আপ্লুত- যেখানে নাই শাসিত ও শাসনের ব্যবধান। রবুবিয়াত অর্থাৎ পালনবাদের প্রতিষ্ঠা ইসলামি বিপ্লবের অন্যতম প্রধান লক্ষ্য"

which you address God, He is the sole creator and caretaker of every human being, regardless of their belief, whether Hindu or Muslim. Through Rabubiyyat, the 'nourishment' (*Palonbaad*) of that supreme God will be established, not the authoritarianism (*Shashonbaad*) of man. Consequently, equal rights will be ensured for all individuals, irrespective of their religious affiliation." [30]

The idea of Hukumat-e-Rabbania encourages maintaining a deep connection with the entirety of life forms. His unequivocally anti-communal interpretation of Islam, shaped by his profound comprehension of the concept of Hukumat-e-Rabbania, strongly echoes the cause of the oppressed (Hussain, 2021). As Bhashani, the advocate of Islamic Socialism, declared, "The first condition of Hukumat-e-Rabbania is to elucidate the rights of individuals in various aspects such as administration, commerce, education, religion, etc., irrespective of caste or religion in any country."[31]

2.4 Bhashani's Pedagogical Philosophy and Islamic University

"Revolutionizing our educational system according to the universal ideals of Islam is crucial to advance the liberation movement of oppressed people", stated Bhashani as he argued that the existing education system, carrying colonial legacy, has led to an increasing divide between the literate and the illiterate (Bhashani, 1971). Bhashani critiqued colonial education, which,

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[30] My translation of the quotes from Maksud, 1994, pp. 487-488; and Bari, 2000: "কেউ কেউ প্রশ্ন করিতে পারেন হুকুমতে রাব্বানিয়া কিভাবে অমুসলমানদেরকে আপন করিয়া লইবে? যাহারা রবুবিয়তের মর্ম বুঝেন না তাহাদের এই প্রশ্ন করা খুবই স্বাভাবিক। রবুবিয়ত কোনো ধর্মের কথা নহে। উহা বিশ্বব্রহ্মাণ্ডের একটি স্বতঃসিদ্ধ বিধান। তাই হিন্দু-মুসলিম-বৌদ্ধ-খৃস্টান সকল মানুষের জন্য হুকুমতে রাব্বানিয়া অর্থাৎ যে দেশে রবুবিয়তের আদর্শ রাষ্ট্রীয় ভিত্তিতে কায়েম হইয়াছে, কল্যাণকর বৈ কিছু নয়। মুসলমানদের জন্য যিনি রব বা পালনকর্তা, বিবর্তনকারী প্রভু, হিন্দুদের জন্য তিনি একই বিধানে আলোহাওয়া, ফল, পানি, বস্ত্র, খাদ্য সবই যোগাইতেছেন একমাত্র রবুবিয়তের আদর্শই মানুষে মানুষে ভ্রাতৃত্ব প্রতিষ্ঠা করিতে পারে […] হুকুমতে রববানিয়া কায়েম হইলে অমুসলমানদের উচ্ছেদ করা হইবে বলিয়া ইসলামের দুশমনরা অপপ্রচার শুরু করিয়াছে। আমি মুক্ত কণ্ঠে ঘোষণা করিতে চাই যে, একমাত্র হুকুমতে রববানিয়াই সামন্তবাদ, পুঁজিবাদ, সাম্রাজ্যবাদ এবং সকল প্রকারের শোষণ উচ্ছেদ করিয়া জাতি ধর্ম নির্বিশেষে প্রতিটি মানুষের স্বাচ্ছন্দ্য বিধান করিবে। আল্লাহকে যে নামেই ডাকা হউক না কেন, তিনিই একমাত্র স্রষ্টা এবং বিশ্বাসী-অবিশ্বাসী হিন্দু-মুসলমান নির্বিশেষে প্রতিটি মানুষের লালন পালন একমাত্র তিনিই করিতেছেন। রবুবিয়াতে সেই মহান আল্লাহরই পালনবাদ কায়েম হইবে, মানুষের শাসনবাদ নহে। সুতরাং সেখানে মানুষ মাত্রেরই সমান অধিকার থাকিবে- সে যে ধর্মাবলম্বীই হউক না কেন"

[31] My translation of the quote from Bari, 2000: "জাতি ধর্ম নির্বিশেষে কোন দেশের প্রশাসনিক, বাণিজ্যিক, শিক্ষাগত, ধর্মীয় প্রভৃতি ক্ষেত্রে বান্দার হক বুঝাইয়া দেওয়াই হইল হুকুমতে রববানিয়ার প্রথম শর্ত।"

in his view, created educated individuals detached from society leading to a lack of significant contributions from them. He stated,

> "We are blindly following the education system introduced by colonialists and imperialists, agents of capitalism, to perpetuate their rule and produce clerks in the country. This education system, devoid of faith and morality, has instilled disdain for our religion and culture by introducing so-called madrasa education that has no real connection to life. It systematically omits the contributions of Islam and the East from syllabi, curricula, and textbooks, leading to modern educated individuals leaving school with a sense of inferiority about their heritage" (Bhashani, 1971).

His dissatisfaction led to the conceptualization of his brainchild Islamic University, envisioned as a non-communal institution, aiming for inclusivity and cohesion across diverse population. Bhashani's envisioned Islamic University, representing the pinnacle of his politics and creed, transcends the role of a mere educational institution; it functions as a systematic blueprint for an educational framework dedicated to nation-building. His vision strives for an inclusive yet progressive education system, and he extensively wrote, discussed, and engaged with contemporary thinkers and educators to foster the intellectual and spiritual development of Bengalis. Bhashani perceived the prevailing education system as an apparatus reinforcing inequality and injustice, arguing,

> "Just as one does not expect milk from a liquor distillery, it is impossible to create independent, self-reliant, hardworking, and compassionate individuals from an education system designed to cultivate a clerical and servile mentality. Consequently, many highly educated individuals in leadership roles today are engulfed in corruption, bribery, usury, gambling, and alcohol, shamelessly selling the country and its people for their narrow interests. This education fails to instill a sense of humanity; instead, it fosters self-interest. Hence, highly educated individuals comfortably reside in luxury while millions of impoverished people live in huts. This educational system leads to an aversion to manual labor among the so-called gentlemen, who are solely dependent on

penmanship, creating a class that despises professions involving manual work"
(Bari, 2014c).

Recognizing the shortcomings of the existing education system in addressing the nation's ideological, economic, social, and cultural needs, Bhashani envisioned his university as both a school and a workshop, aiming to set an example for an educational system spanning from primary to university levels, oriented toward agricultural production and rural development (Bhashani, 1970b). Bhashani sought to instill in students a systematic and disciplined lifestyle, along with honing their moral values and respect for labor, equality, compassion, and a service-oriented mentality. Though unable to fully actualize this vision, he left a lasting legacy through significant contributions, including a body of writings and speeches on his pedagogical philosophy. Additionally, he established numerous feeder institutions for the Islamic University, leaving a conceptual framework, educational curriculum, and a comprehensive outline of his envisioned education system for future generations to explore and develop further.

In the 1960s, Bhashani faced criticism and backlash from leftist and secular circles after announcing his intention to establish the Islamic University in Santosh, resulting in the labeling of Bhashani as communal. However, Syed Irfanul Bari, appointed as the Registrar and Office Secretary of the Islamic University, argued that Bhashani's proposals unveiled an exceptionally 'secular' concept of an education system, a perspective not previously advocated in Bangladesh (Bari, 2014a). As an illustration of Bhashani's secularity, Bari recalled that in 1970, Bhashani sketched the draft design of the Islamic University monogram on his palm and suggested to Bari, "Devdas Chakraborty is a skilled artist; ask him to create this monogram for the university" (Bari, 2014b). The monogram featured a tree positioned in the center of a globe, with the Arabic inscription "*rabbi zidni ilma*" (Lord, increase me in knowledge) at the base. Bhashani shared this emblem with his leftist associates, emphasizing that it symbolized the

essence of a particular version of 'Islam' underpinning his vision for the Islamic University—a university akin to a tree, providing fruits and shade to everyone, irrespective of caste, religion, or nationality. Bhashani explained, "Everyone in the Islamic University should be non-sectarian, much like a tree. You see, a tree provides fruit and shade to everyone without asking for anything in return. Embrace the qualities of a tree, and you will truly be a person" (Bari, 2014b). Bhashani's vision of the Islamic University was grounded in the same spiritual-political philosophy that underpinned his conceptualization of Hukumat-e-Rabbania—the philosophy of Rabubiyyat or Palonbaad. However, journalists Faiz Ahmed and Fazle Lohani voiced concerns about the perceived communal nature of Bhashani's Islamic University, expressing reservations in the weekly Swaraj newspaper (Lohani, 2018).

Bhashani resisted the idea of securing government funding for his Islamic University, fearing that it would entail undesirable conditions and compromise his vision, a concern heightened by past government attempts. Disputes in 1957 with party leaders, including then-President Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, over East Pakistan's autonomy and foreign policy differences, such as joining US-led defense pacts, led Bhashani to distance himself from the Awami Muslim League (AML), despite being its founder. Due to his unwavering anti-capitalist stance, he rejected Pakistan's alignment with the US capitalist government. Remaining steadfast against capitalist politics, he left AML and established the National Awami Party (NAP) with a socialist agenda. Regarding Bhashani's Islamic Socialism, Syed Irfanul Bari mentioned, "In his later years, he delved into the concept of *Rabubiyyat*, and realized the absence of faith and spirituality in socialism. Recognizing the challenge of garnering support for atheistic politics among the common people, Bhashani strategically associated Islam with socialism to ensure

broader appeal. This connection between Islam and socialism is evident in his plan for the Islamic University".[32]

In addition to being influenced by the philosophy of Rabubiyyat or Palonbaad, Bhashani's vision and conceptualization of his pedagogical philosophy stem from his firsthand observations and experiences with various educational institutes worldwide. His departure from conventional education systems can be traced back to his encounters at Darul Uloom Deoband in the early 20th century, where he interacted with anti-British imperialist clerics such as Maulana Mahmud Hasan Deobandi and Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi.[33] Actively participating in the anti-colonial movement with figures such as Congress leader Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar[34], Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das of the Swaraj Party, and under the leadership of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose profoundly influenced Bhashani, shaping not only his political perspectives but also fueling his commitment to educational reform.

In the 1930s, two pivotal experiences shaped Bhashani's pedagogical viewpoints. First, he visited Al-Azhar University in Cairo, accompanied by Maulana Azad Subhani, allowing him to compare it with educational institutions like Deoband and Aligarh in his own country. Later, in 1937, he explored Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan, adding a new dimension to his

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[32] My translation of the following quote from the interview with Syed Irfanul Bari: "শেষ জীবনে উনি ব্যখ্যা করলেন রবুবিয়াত বা সমাজতন্ত্র। সমাজতন্ত্রের ভেতর আল্লাহ-রসুলের কথা আসে না। মওলানা ভাসানী দেখলেন, নাস্তিকতা ভিত্তিক রাজনীতিতে এই দেশের সাধারণ জনগণের সাপোর্ট উনি পাবেন না, তাই সাধারণ মানুষের যাতে সমর্থন থাকে, তাই তিনি সমাজতন্ত্রের সাথে ইসলামকে জড়িত করলেন। সেই ইসলামি সমাজতন্ত্রের মধ্যেই পাবা, উনি লিখছেন, ইসলামি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় নিয়ে উনার পরিকল্পনা"

[33] Ubaidullah Sindhi (1872 – 1944), a student of Darul Uloom Deoband and a leader of the Indian independence movement, joined the Deobandi leaders, notably Maulana Mahmud Hasan Deobandi in the Silk Letter Movement, seeking international support for a Pan-Islamic revolution in British India.

[34] Like many of his contemporary Muslim leaders who aligned with the Indian National Congress under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, Muhammad Ali Jauhar initially believed that joint efforts by Hindus and Muslims were the key to swift achievement of Indian independence from the British. Nonetheless, he later realized that despite the numerous compromises made by his associates, Hindus struggled to accommodate Muslims within their envisioned future India. He disagreed with the rejection of separate electorates for Muslims in the Nehru Report, supporting Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Fourteen Points and the Muslim League. This caused a separation with Gandhi and distanced him from fellow Muslim leaders such as Abul Kalam Azad, who remained supportive of the Indian National Congress. See, Wasti, (2002); and Rahman, (2013)

thinking. This exposure led him to contemplate an educational system integrating the spiritual essence of Deoband, the global culture of Al-Azhar, and the humane appeal of Santiniketan. Bhashani's first practical application of this influence was in Assam, where he observed challenges such as a lack of educational infrastructure. In response, he not only established model schools and colleges but also emphasized silk production. In the 1930s, he pioneered a paradigm for work-oriented, productive education in Assam. This multifaceted approach reflected his commitment to both political and social movements and his dedication to spreading education in the face of adversity (Bari, 2014d).

In the 1950s, Bhashani gained international experience during a ten-month tour of various European countries. Engaging with renowned figures in London and Stockholm, he organized the historic Kagmari Conference in February 1957 at Tangail, bringing together scholars from around the world to discuss the form of national education and culture. Notable participants included Dr. Hassan Habsi from Egypt, Dr. Charles J. Adams from Canada, David Garth from the USA, and Humayun Kabir, the then Education Minister of India (Bari, 2014d). In the conference, Bhashani made the announcement of establishing a residential university in the Kagmari-Santosh area. Additionally, he decided to build schools and colleges in the region to serve as feeder institutions for this university.

During the 1960s, Bhashani visited China twice and admired certain aspects of their education system. He extensively traveled to various socialist countries, such as Japan and Cuba, where he observed their education systems closely, including a second visit to Egypt's Al-Azhar University on the invitation of the then President, Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein. During this period, he engaged in discussions with notable intellectuals like Abul Hashim, Dr. Kudrat-i-Khuda, Dr. Syed Moazzem Hossain, Dr. Kazi Motahar Hossain, Dr. Innas Ali, Dr. Nazmul Karim, Principal Dewan Muhammad Azraf, and others, exploring how developed and tested systems could be applied in his country (Bari, 2014d).

Starting in 1969, Bhashani publicly announced his intention to establish a unique residential university in Santosh, covering all levels from Nursery to Ph.D., named 'Islamic University.' In January 1970, he once again officially declared the establishment of the Islamic University during a conference held in Santosh. In his analytical article, 'My Plan for Islamic University,' published in June 1970 in a Pakistani newspaper, Bhashani elaborated on his vision for the Islamic University, envisioning it as a combined school and workshop where students, teachers, staff, and employees would adopt a systematic and disciplined lifestyle, engage in domestic production, and receive robust spiritual and moral education. In the article, Bhashani outlined five key principles for the educational framework of his University (Bhashani, 1970a):

1. Compulsory technical education is mandatory for all students.

2. Every student must undergo a prescribed level of physical training.

3. All students are required to undergo fundamental religious education through a systematic and objective approach, and it is mandatory to practice it.

4. Students in the university premises are responsible for producing everything except kerosene oil and salt.

5. Each student is required to dedicate four to five weeks between academic years to engage in manual labor in a remote village or industrial area.

Bhashani advocated reshaping the education system to nurture individuals with comprehensive capabilities, emphasizing hands-on education in agriculture, cottage industries, technical, and scientific fields alongside theoretical education. He warned that if progressive Islamic values, which are against all forms of imperialism and capitalism, were not established through research and implementation, imperialist capitalist forces might distort and introduce their own version of Islamic education (Bari, 2014d). Despite this, Bhashani's viewpoint faced

misunderstanding and neglect, with Islamists casting doubts on his intentions and asserting his version of Islam as fundamentally flawed.

Amid the tumultuous beginning of 1971, preceding the Bangladesh Liberation War, Bhashani, in a conference, emphasized the need for a reform in the education system to actualize and preserve the sovereignty of an independent nation-state, "In a liberated nation, the integrity of independence and sovereignty is at risk unless we foster citizens who embody patriotism, loyalty, and are liberated from the shackles of education that perpetuates servitude" (Bari, 2014d). In retrospect, Bhashani's declaration appears both prophetic and admonitory. Addressing the shortcomings of the existing education system, Bhashani proposed a solution, "A new system should be developed where every student receives hands-on education in agriculture, various cottage industries, and technical and scientific fields, alongside theoretical education. This approach will nurture hardworking, physically and mentally healthy individuals, fostering the development of a virtuous and believing citizen" (Bhashani, 1970a).

Subsequently, he organized three education conferences in February 1971, December 1973, and April 1974. Collaborating with prominent educators and Islamic thinkers gathered in these conferences, he formulated the structure and conceptual framework for the Islamic University. The actual construction of the institution commenced in 1974. Notable figures, including Islamic thinker and politician Abul Hashim, Islamic scholar Sayed Moazzem Hossain, writer Qazi Motahar Hossain, academic Syed Sajjad Hussain, painter Zainul Abedin, litterateur Principal Ibrahim Khan, journalist Mujibur Rahman Khan, physician Professor Dr. Nurul Islam, philosopher Dewan Mohammad Azraf, politician and educationist Principal Abul Kashem, and many others, answered Bhashani's call, providing valuable advice during the university's formative stages (Bari, 2020). They played a crucial role in offering guidance during educational conferences and in the formulation, structuring, and outlining of the Islamic University Ordinance.

Bhashani envisioned the gradual development of the Islamic University as an independent and self-sustaining residential institution. To achieve these goals, Bhashani initiated the establishment of the Islamic University School for boys and girls in February 1974, along with various other feeder institutes and projects associated with the Islamic University. The initial administrative framework of the university included Chancellor Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Mir Faruzzaman, Treasurer Barrister Saifuddin Ahmad Siddiqui, and Registrar Syed Irfanul Bari (Bari, 2020). The envisioned structure of the Islamic University reflects Bhashani's holistic approach and comprises the following institutes, faculties and departments (Bhashani, 1974):

1) **Institute for Educating Children:** The institute will constitute of classes from Nursery to grade 8, focusing on fostering a positive learning atmosphere through music, sports, storytelling, etc. The curriculum will be strategically crafted to instill values of truth and justice, with an added emphasis on compulsory technical education. Additionally, a sports program will be introduced to awaken a sense of dignity in physical labor and bring forth latent talents among the students.

2) **Institute for Educating Adolescents:** The institute will comprise of grades 9 and 10, where teaching methods will be tailored to match students' interests. Subjects aligned with students' natural inclinations will be introduced, and students will be grouped into categories such as Science, Arts, Commerce, etc.

3) **Institute for Education Preparatory to Higher Learning:** The institute will offer a comprehensive two-year program aimed at preparing students for higher education. The institute will focus on identifying students with potential in specific subjects and provide targeted preparation for fields such as medical science, engineering, and agricultural science.

4) **Academics for Higher Learning:** The institute will be focused on holistic individual development and specialized subjects, higher education will be organized into distinct groups, each overseen by a dedicated academy. These academies are:

a) **Academy for Islamic Research & Studies**:

    i) Department of Al-Quran and Al-Hadith Education

    ii) Department of Islamic Philosophy

    iii) Department of Islamic History

b) **Academy of Social Sciences for Social Science:**

    i) Sociology Department

    ii) Economics Department

    iii) Political Science Department

    iv) History Department

c) **Academy for Human Relations:**

    i) International Relations Development Department

    ii) Family Organization and Family Relationship Development Department

    iii) Demography Department

    iv) Anthropology Department

d) **Academy for Bio-Social Science:**

    i) Department of Psychology

    ii) Department of Physiology

    iii) Department of Herbal Science

    iv) Department of Pharmacology

    v) Department of Domestic Science

e) **Academy for Bengali Language & Culture:**

    i) Bengali Department

ii) Sanskrit Department

iii) Pali Department

iv) Bangladesh Culture and Environmental Studies Department

f) Academy for Arts and Letters:

i) Arabic Department

ii) Department of English

iii) Department of Urdu and Persian

iv) Department of Other Foreign Languages

g) Academy for Dramatics & Fine Arts:

i) Department of Dramatics

ii) Department of Fine Art

iii) Department of Music

iv) Department of Crafts

v) Department of Handwriting

vi) Department of Folklore and Folk Literature

h) The Academy for Basic Sciences:

i) Department of Mathematics

ii) Department of Applied Mathematics

iii) Department of Informatics

iv) Department of Applied Informatics

i) Academy for Natural Sciences:

i) Department of Physics

ii) Department of Applied Physics

iii) Department of Chemistry

iv) Department of Applied Chemistry

    v) Department of Naval Science

    vi) Department of Geography

    vii) Department of Geology

j) Academy for Biological Sciences:

    i)   Department of Botany

    ii) Department of Zoology

    iii) Department of Biochemistry

k) Academy for Social Work:

    i)   Department of Social Service

    ii) Department of Muballig (Preaching of Islam)

    iii) Department of Philosophy

l) Academy for Agricultural Sciences:

    i)   Department of Agriculture

    ii) Department of Soil Science

    iii) Department of Horticulture Preparation and Development

    iv) Department of Animal Husbandry Education

    v) Department of Fisheries Education

    vi) Department of Textiles

m) Academy for Medical Sciences

n) Academy for Engineering Sciences

o) Academy for Business Administration

p) Academy for Comparative Study of Religions and Ideologies

q) Academy for Teachers Training

r) Academy for the study of Sufism

s) Academy for the study of African, Middle-Eastern, South-East Asian, and Far Eastern Countries

By 1976, Bhashani had established a multitude of institutions and projects associated with the Islamic University, spanning general, religious, and technical education. The institutes included:

1. Islamic University Children's School

2. Islamic University Girls High School

3. Islamic University Boys High School

4. Islamic University Technical College

5. Islamic University Imam and Muballig Training Center

6. Islamic University Taleemat-e Qur'an and Sunnah

7. Islamic University School of Fine Arts

8. Islamic University Textile Training Center

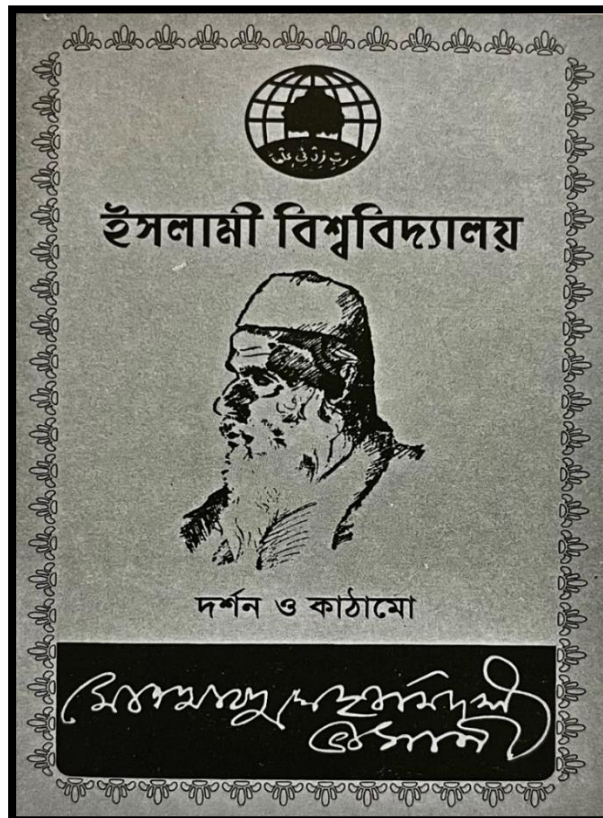9. Islamic University Poultry Training Farm

Image 2 Front cover of the September 1978 article "Islamic University: Philosophy and Structure," featuring the monogram and a sketch of Maulana Bhashani, both illustrated by artist Devdas Chakraborty in 1970. Document courtesy of Syed Irfanul Bari.

In addition, he founded a vocational training institute covering areas such as Sericulture, Fisheries, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Woodwork, Electrical Work, Beekeeping, etc. Bhashani also initiated several press and publications, including Islamic University Shanti Press, Islamic University Publication, Weekly Huq-Kotha, Monthly Biswa-Shanti, and Quarterly World Peace (English). Furthermore, he established a few cooperatives, including the Islamic University Multipurpose Central Cooperative Society and the Islamic University Consumables Supply Cooperative Society (Bari, 2020).

Following the demise of Bhashani, the feeder institutions affiliated with the Islamic University have deviated from the visions and objectives initially set by him. While some continue to operate, a majority have ceased to exist due to insufficient government backing and recognition. Among the defunct establishments are the Islamic University School of Fine Arts, Islamic University Textile Training Center, Islamic University Poultry Training Farm, Weekly Huq-Kotha, Islamic University Shanti Press, Islamic University Imam and Muballig Training Center, and Islamic University Taleemat-e Qur'an and Sunnah. When questioned about these institutions established by Bhashani, Mahmudul Haque Sanu, the General Secretary of Bhashani Foundation and Bhashani's grandson, remarked, "Maulana Bhashani founded these educational institutions with a specific philosophy. Unfortunately, due to insufficient patronage, particularly from the state, thirteen institutions have already been lost" (Hak-Katha, 2016).

The only exceptions are the Islamic University Children's School and Islamic University Girls High School, which have been assimilated into the government system and renamed as the Islamic University Government Children's School and Santosh Islamic University Government Girls High School, respectively. These schools receive complete government funding and support. Other institutions, such as Islamic University Boys High School and Islamic University Technical College (now Maulana Bhashani Adorsho College), are under the

government's Monthly Pay Order (MPO) scheme, receiving partial subsidies but predominantly relying on private funding and fees from enrolled students.

Regrettably, the current state of these remaining educational institutions no longer aligns with the conceptual framework and curriculum envisioned by Bhashani. Instead, they adhere to the national curriculum, with students studying textbooks provided by the NCTB. In this regard, Syed Irfanul Bari emphasized the need for coordinated leadership aligned with Bhashani's ideology to sustain these institutions. He views each institution as a distinct organ of Maulana Bhashani, underscoring the necessity for a unified vision to guide them (Hak-Katha, 2016).

3.1 The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB)

The origins of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) can be traced back to the establishment of the East Pakistan School Textbook Board (EPSTB) in 1954. Post-independence, an immediate need arose to create new textbooks tailored to the preferences of the emerging generation of Bangladeshi students, resulting in the establishment of the Bangladesh School Textbook Board (BSTB). The National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee (NCSC) was formed in 1976, aligning its report with the recommendations put forth by the 1974 Qudrat-E-Khuda Education Commission.[35] In 1981, the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) was established as part of the Ministry of Education, responsible for refining, renewing, developing, and assessing curricula across educational levels. Implementation began from pre-primary to higher secondary levels, with technical support

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[35] The 1974 Education Commission underscored the significance of providing compulsory and free primary education for every child. It proposed the implementation of a standardized curriculum nationwide to promote national unity and educational consistency. In alignment with the core principles embodied in the Bangladesh constitution, the education commission's recommendations aimed to cultivate the following aspects among the emerging generation of students in the newly independent nation (See, Qudrat-e-Khuda et al., 1974):

  a. Fostering patriotism and good citizenship, creating national cohesion and a shared connection with the collective aspirations of the nation's people.
  b. Expanding national awareness and solidarity beyond group identities to ensure overall national unity.
  c. Cultivating socialism by nurturing a sense of responsibility, citizenship consciousness, and the acquisition of skills and knowledge essential for both individual and societal welfare.
  d. Instilling a clear understanding of mutual respect, basic human rights, and the determination of human dignity within a democratic society.
  e. Upholding secularism to guarantee equal rights and privileges for all citizens regardless of their religious beliefs.
  f. Encouraging humanism and a sense of global citizenship, emphasizing respect for international friendship, human rights, and dignity.
  g. Developing high moral character and ethical standards among students.
  h. Promoting applied learning conducive to economic development, enhancing the capabilities and skills of the workforce to contribute to the nation's progress.
  i. Encouraging respect for manual labor and achieving a balance between productive manual work and intellectual endeavors through a multifaceted education system.
  j. Enhancing leadership and organizational skills, creativity, and research abilities by democratizing the education system and acknowledging the importance of youth's creativity and energy.

provided to the BSTB. By 1983, the NCDC and the BSTB merged into the Bangladesh National Textbook Board, later renamed as the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) (Alam, n.d).

At present, the NCTB is a major national organization in Bangladesh, operating autonomously under the Ministry of Education. Its primary responsibilities include curriculum development and the production and distribution of textbooks for primary and secondary education levels all across the country. The NCTB plays a pivotal role in shaping the education system of the country and its expansion (NCTB, 2020).

3.2 The Evolution of NCTB Textbooks

Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the education system of the country has become more puzzling over the years. The historical, cultural and religious identities of Bangladesh have continuously been subjects of debate and dispute within the pages of school textbooks through an unstable and politicized process (Binte Abdur Rob et al., 2020). However, even prior to the secession of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) the school curricula and textbooks of Pakistan have been a battleground for historical contestations and ideological hegemony. The complete erasure of any discussion surrounding the causes and effects associated with the formation of Bangladesh is one of the notable aspects of Pakistani textbooks (Rosser, 2003). Some Pakistani textbooks completely left out any mention of the East Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh since they were considered as the "eras and events deemed either irrelevant, hostile or inconvenient to the fulfilment of the Pakistan Movement" (Powell, 1996).

Following the liberation in 1971, the country vehemently distanced itself from Pakistan, transitioning from an Islamic Republic to the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Led by Dr. Qudrat-e-Khuda, the first Education Commission Report of 1974 put forth a plan outlining primary and secondary education framework, highlighting, among various aspects, the timely

necessity of secular education for all (Qudrat-e-Khuda et al., 1974; Chowdhury & Sarkar, 2018; Binte Abdur Rob et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the implementation of the recommendations in the report was largely hindered by a sudden political shift in 1975 that resulted in the assassination of the country's founding leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Ministry of Education, 2010; Chowdhury & Sarkar, 2018). Over the following three decades, from 1975 to 2003, multiple Education Commissions were formed, yet their recommendations were consistently neglected and invalidated due to the fluctuating political landscape (Binte Abdur Rob et al., 2020), which I will discuss in the following segments.

Under the two military regimes led by Maj. Gen. Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and Lt. Gen. H.M. Ershad (1982-1990), the identity politics of Bangladesh was transformed from a secular, ethnic 'Bengali' identity to a state-centric, pseudo-Islamic 'Bangladeshi' identity, aimed to establish political legitimacy and represent anti-Indian orientation. Constitutional amendments were enacted during these periods, replacing secularism with an emphasis on "absolute trust and faith in Allah" and declaring Islam as the "State religion" in 1979 and 1988, respectively (Rahman et al., 2010). During this period, history was molded by the influence of military rulers, resulting in contentious alterations in textbooks that had profound social and political implications. School textbooks were used as instruments for the propagation of this new 'Bangladeshi' nationalism (Rosser, 2003).

Following the restoration of electoral democracy in 1991, tensions between the two major political parties– Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Awami League (AL)–have led to the pendulum of Bangladesh's historiography to "flip rhythmically back and forth every six years" instead of swinging (Rosser, 2003). With origins tied to the cantonment, the BNP adheres to a historical account of Bangladesh distinct from that of the AL's. Hence, upon assuming power, the BNP diligently worked to safeguard and uphold the narrative that had been propagated during the period of military rule. On the other hand, when the AL won the

election, they actively engaged in rewriting textbooks to rectify what they viewed as distortions in history spanning two and a half decades due to military dictatorship. However, from 2008 to this day, the AL has been maintaining the position of authority, allowing them an uninterrupted upper hand, with the exceptions of various Islamic groups achieving success in pushing for curriculum adjustments, in reshaping the curriculum in accordance with their political ideology (Binte Abdur Rob et al., 2020). For instance, in 2017, responding to the requests of a particular Islamist group, the NCTB made arbitrary changes to primary and secondary level textbooks, omitting writings of renowned authors disliked by Islamists, including non-Muslim authors, and aligning the contents with the demands of the Islamist group ("NCTB changed textbooks based on communal group's demand", 2017; Sajen, 2017).At present, the NCTB, along with the National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE) and the National Academy of Educational Administration and Management (NAEM) are engaged in rolling out the new curriculum, which was last revised in 2012 (Ahmed, 2022). In January 2023, students in 1st, 6th, and 7th grades received textbooks aligned with the new curriculum. Shortly after the introduction of new textbooks, false information and rumors about their content spread on social media, sparking unrest. The new textbooks faced various accusations, including the portrayal of bearded Muslim men and the Islamic veiling system of women in a negative light, promotion of homosexuality, the teaching of human evolution from monkeys and unequal coverage of the history of Muslim rule in Bengal compared to Hindu and Buddhist rule (Alamgir, 2023). In response to these rumors, the NCTB released 5 videos on their official website and YouTube channel to clarify and refute circulating content-related rumors (NCTB, n.d.). However, within two weeks of launching these videos, the NCTB withdrew two school textbooks ('History and Social Science: An Inquiry-based Reader' for classes 6 and 7) due to controversies over specific content. This action was deemed a "political decision" by prominent educationists, suggesting that the government yielded to pressure from

religion-based groups (Alamgir, 2023). The new curriculum will also be introduced to students in the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 8th, and 9th grades in 2024, followed by the 5th and 10th grades in 2025 (Alamgir, 2023).

In order to understand and assess the potential for social cohesion in Bangladesh, it is essential to examine the range of socio-political factors that shaped the contemporary education system, consequently inculcating social fissure. The timeline of the evolution of textbooks in Bangladesh, particularly the narrative of the nation's history, can be classified into five distinct phases. The table below highlights the significant phases of textbook change instigated by the hegemonic forces in Bangladesh that have turned education into a vehicle for perpetuating their own set of values.

Phases of Textbook Change	Features
Pre-1971	- Historical narratives in Pakistan predominantly focus on central India and Lahore. - While Islam-centric, these narratives are not excessively anti-Hindu. - The grand narrative of the nation's creation often overlooks the significant contributions of East Pakistan. - Notable Bengalis, like A.K. Fazlul Huq, receive only perfunctory mentions in these narratives.
1972-1975	- The West Pakistani regime takes the place of the British colonial power. - The remarkable emergence of Bangladesh and the pivotal importance of the Liberation War are prominently commemorated. - Bengali nationalism emerges as the unifying force for the nation grappling with the aftermath of war.

1976-1990	• Textbooks are significantly shaped by military influence.
	• During Zia-ur-Rahman's regime, Islamiyat became a compulsory subject for grades 1-9.
	• Under the rule of military autocrat Hussain Muhammad Ershad, Islam was declared the national religion.
	• Ershad mandated religious education up to tenth grade.
	• The prevailing ethos is distinctly anti-Indian and pro-Islamic.
1991-2008	• Electoral democracy was reinstated.
	• The curriculum introduced during the military regime continued under the BNP government elected in 1991.
	• Upon assuming power in 1996 after 21 years, the Awami League reworked the curriculum.
	• In 2001, the BNP and its right-wing coalition returned to power and reversed the interim curricular changes made during the Awami League era.
2008-present*	• Awami League has maintained its hold on power for three consecutive terms, ensuring stability in the educational curriculum.
	• The inaugural National Education Policy of Bangladesh was introduced in 2010, offering guidelines for the development of textbooks.
	• Changes in textbook content in recent years have been influenced by the demands of Islamic groups.
	• Starting January 2023, a revised curriculum will be introduced for 1st, 6th, and 7th grades.
	• The implementation of the new curriculum is scheduled for grades 2nd to 4th, 8th, and 9th in 2024, followed by grades 5th and 10th in 2025.

Table 1 a comprehensive timeline of textbook evolution in Bangladesh, highlighting five pivotal phases. The table is adapted from Rob et al., 2020. Recent changes in the textbooks have been added to provide the current context.

3.3 NCTB Textbook Review

This section outlines the main findings derived from the review of NCTB textbooks designed for students in seventh and eighth grades. The textbooks, which provide knowledge in social sciences and religious education, underwent qualitative content analysis.[36]

As part of the constitutional commitment to uphold Bangladesh as a secular and pluralist nation-state, the NCTB curriculum includes separate textbooks for the four major religions in Bangladesh, specifically designed for religious studies—a compulsory subject in the national curriculum. Students adhering to the four major faiths are educated exclusively in their respective religions. For religious education in grade 7, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian students are provided with textbooks titled Hindu Religion Studies, Islamic Studies, Buddhist Religion Studies, and Christian Religion Studies, respectively. In grade 8, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian students are offered textbooks titled Hindu Religion and Moral Education, Islam and Moral Education, Buddhist Religion and Moral Education, and Christian Religion and Moral Education, respectively.

For providing knowledge on social sciences, the NCTB curriculum developed textbooks titled History and Social Science, and Bangladesh and Global Studies for students of grades 7 and 8, respectively. The grade 8 textbook, Bangladesh and Global Studies, has been designed to encompass of the following subjects, Sociology, History, Civics, Economics, Geography and Populations.

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[36] Some of the insights presented here draw from the paper titled "Faith and Education in Bangladesh: Approaches to Religion and Social Cohesion in School Textbook Curricula," authored by Aisha Binte Abdur Rob, Sudipta Roy, Samia Huq, and Katherine Marshall. The paper is the outcome of a research study conducted by the Centre for Peace and Justice, BRAC University, in collaboration with the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University. Published in 2020 by the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, the paper is based on a study in which I participated as a Research Assistant in 2019. My role involved qualitative content review and analysis of the school textbooks of the NCTB and Qoumi madrasa curricula. As a result, I have incorporated and adapted certain findings from this study in my thesis.

The textbooks assigned for social science and religious education of grade 7 were published in December 2022 for the academic year of 2023. It was developed according to the latest curriculum of NCTB. However, the social science and religious education textbooks of grade 8 has not been revised according to the latest curriculum. Bangladesh and Global Studies textbook has been prescribed by NCTB since the academic year of 2013. It was last revised in 2020. The four separate textbooks for religious education has been prescribed by NCTB since the academic year of 2013 and it was last revised in 2014.

i. Social Science

An analysis of Social Sciences textbooks designed for students in grades 7 and 8 is conducted using the analytical framework encompassing identity, diversity, pluralism, and social cohesion. The findings are as follows:

Within the textbooks, the emphasis on individual identity underscores attributes related to nationality, reflecting the broad ideologies of patriotism and majoritarianism. Moreover, the textbooks acknowledge various individual identities, encompassing gender, religious, ethnic, and linguistic categories. Additionally, intersex or third gender identities are also recognized. However, upon closer scrutiny of the texts, it becomes evident that there is an emphasis on the Bengali and Muslim majoritarian ethos, contradicting Bangladesh's constitutional commitment to promoting secularism and fostering an inclusive society regardless of religion and ethnicity.

In terms of group identity, the portrayal of Dalit communities primarily emphasizes their professional roles and labels them as 'Harijan,' without delving into the complexities of the caste question. In the section titled 'Professional Community,' an example is provided, stating, "A separate community is formed by those working in specific professions through descent. In our country, people of the Harizan community usually pursue the profession of cleaners" (Grade 7 textbook, page 58).

The formation of national identity is constructed through a narrative of Bangladeshi political history, highlighting the diverse group interests that played a role in Bangladesh's struggle for independence against Pakistan. It is suggested that Bangladeshi national identity is also influenced by Bengali cultural identity. The social science textbooks portray a specific image of social diversity in Bangladesh, acknowledging minority groups only on the periphery of the dominant majority.

Global identity is articulated through the legal and political collaboration of states within the United Nations and a broader concept of global society grounded in notions of interconnectedness and shared respect. Furthermore, shaped by an Orientalist interpretation of the East, the textbook views the Indian Subcontinent, especially Bengal, as primitive, lacking civilization, and devoid of rationality. Textbooks depict Western education, encompassing philosophy and science introduced by colonial rulers, as the savior of Bengal from social and religious bigotry and superstitions. This narrative implies that Western education introduced rationality, science, and reason, enlightening the perceived backward and uncivilized people of Bengal. Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Begum Rokeya are recognized as pioneers of Western education, dedicating themselves to paving the way for the emancipation and reformation of Bengal society.

The textbooks fail to offer a comprehensive representation of social diversity in Bangladeshi society. It categorizes individuals or groups deviating from conventional social norms as 'dissidents' and 'minorities,' shaping attitudes and perspectives toward pluralism. The implication that the social norms of minorities will inevitably assimilate with those of the majority is suggested. In the chapter titled 'Social Values and Norms,' one reason why people adhere to conventional social norms is explained: "Dissidents (individuals who think differently) often perceive themselves as a minority in society, feeling outnumbered or in the

minority. Eventually, they alter their own norms and adopt the norms of the majority" (Grade 7 textbook, page 88).

The portrayal of Bangladeshi culture is predominantly synonymous with Bengali culture, placing a greater emphasis on heritage rather than contemporary cultural practices. The chapter titled 'Cultural Change and Development of Bangladesh' in the textbook of grade 8 outlines the art and culture of Bengalis, depicting Bengali culture as the prevailing or dominant cultural identity of Bangladesh.

The dominance of Bengali ethnic identity is evident, while ethnic minorities are addressed as a distinct collective, providing descriptions of their cultures, lifestyles, religions, languages, and food habits.

Women's rights and access to opportunities are framed as grants or provisions from the state. In the section discussing the advancement of women in various aspects of Bangladeshi society, it is mentioned, "There may still be numerous barriers for women in society or family. However, women in this era also have opportunities that enable them to progress. The law grants them rights equal to men in almost all respects, a scenario that differed significantly a hundred years ago. The government is actively working to improve their status and enhance their social role" (pp 127).

The texts include concepts of social justice, human rights, and equality, but they emphasize moral obligations to take action rather than guaranteeing specific rights. Citizenship education promotes addressing socio-economic issues like poverty, low-wage labor, and lack of education through charity and philanthropy, rather than fostering a critical understanding and challenging of the existing status quo.

A comprehensive analysis of religious education textbooks intended for students in grades 7 and 8 applies an analytical framework that considers identity, diversity, pluralism, and social cohesion. The examination of the four separate textbooks designated for each grade, each focusing on a major religion, leads to the following insights:

The textbook titles for the four religions are as follows: For grade 7, Islamic Studies, Hindu Religion Studies, Buddhist Religion Studies, and Christian Religion Studies. For grade 8, the titles are Islam and Moral Education, Hindu Religion and Moral Education, Buddhist Religion and Moral Education, and Christian Religion and Moral Education. A distinctive pattern emerges in the titling, revealing a notable 'otherization' of religions other than Islam. Specifically, only the textbooks on Islam lack the term 'religion' in their titles, while the remaining textbooks explicitly include it. This titling divergence, particularly between Islam and the other three religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity), subtly suggests the omnipresence and intrinsic significance of Islam.

Each of the four religious textbooks for seventh-grade features a chapter on religious harmony, with unique content tailored to the specific religion covered by the textbook. This insertion represents one of the latest updates in the textbooks implemented by NCTB in alignment with the 2021 national curriculum framework.[37] However, the content addressing religious harmony in the Islamic Studies textbook is notably the most unsound, contentious, and has the shortest length when compared to the content in the other three religious textbooks. The text mentions that Islam has numerous examples set by Muhammad regarding religious harmony but fails to provide any details about these instances. The singular example of religious harmony presented

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[37] The religious education textbooks designed for sixth-grade students, also revised to align with the new curriculum, similarly include chapters focusing on religious coexistence and harmony.

is that of Hindu scholar Girish Chandra Sen, who is the first person to translate the Quran into Bangla. Once again, this subtly reinforces Islam's perceived superiority by highlighting its appeal to non-Muslims, without offering an example of how Muslims have also embraced elements from various religions. In the Christian Studies textbook, religious harmony is expressed through social welfare and voluntary services extended to all people in need, irrespective of their religion. The Buddhism and Hinduism Studies textbooks convey a genuine egalitarian message and have the most potential for instilling religious harmony or coexistence. For instance, the textbook on Buddhism quotes Siddhartha Gautama and provides a socially cohesive interpretation, "Gautama Buddha did not refer to any particular caste, religion, community, or individual in his words. He always spoke of all beings everywhere. He spoke of universal wellbeing. In his above mentioned words, he did not indicate any special importance to any particular religion, community, or group. It tells about heartfelt love for all beings including human beings, irrespective of religion, race, community, caste, or group. It is proposed to build up sincere and heartfelt relationships between Buddhists and non-Buddhists." (Grade 7, page 85).

Contrary to the message of religious harmony presented in the textbooks, the prevailing undertone in Islamic textbooks implies a stance of disassociation from followers of other religions, supported by an exclusionary interpretation of the Quran and Hadiths. For instance, a passage states, "In this surah, displeasure with shirk and kufr and breaking relations with disbelievers have been declared. [...] There are instructions to inform the disbelievers that there is no way for the Muslims to reconcile with the disbelievers in matters of religion" (Grade 7, page 65). On the other hand, the Hinduism textbook portrays atheists or people with no faith as malevolent, justifying their elimination through violence: "When non-religious activities increase on earth, then the Creator emerges in various forms to save the religion by destroying the irreligious evil" (Grade 7, page 19).

In Islamic studies textbooks, individual identity is molded by principles rooted in the Islamic faith, emphasizing values such as filial obedience, integrity, humanitarian service, and compassion towards animals. The reader is subject to ethical and religious standards with limited room for personal agency. A sense of Muslim group identity and unity prevails in the texts. National identity is portrayed as an integral aspect of religious faith, invoking an attachment to Muhammad and his birthplace (Mecca) as the norm. The global identity presented is Pan-Islamic, encompassing Muslim-majority regions of the world. Religious practices are intricately linked with the Arabic language, fostering a reliance on Arab culture and fostering a communal bond with Arabs. The texts predominantly feature Muslim and Arab cultures, while non-Muslims are explicitly characterized as deviants deserving to suffer and be punished. Regarding the non-Muslims, termed as 'disbelievers', it is stated in a textbook, "Their worship mixed with shirk [polytheism] cannot be called any worship" (grade 7, page 66). Socioeconomic disparities are acknowledged, and zakat is proposed as a recommended solution. Nevertheless, discussions on the significance of zakat tend to place greater emphasis on individual and spiritual growth, rather than centering on the socio-economic consequences of wealth redistribution.

In the textbooks on Hinduism, the formation of individual identity is influenced by the principles of Hindu religious beliefs, with moral values derived from the tenets of Hinduism. The identity of the Hindu community is conveyed through normative expressions, while national identity is intertwined with the patriotic ideology that promotes endurance and sacrifice for the country. Hindu religious culture takes center stage in the texts, with mentions of other religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. There is an instructional emphasis on following one's own religion while acknowledging and respecting other religions. All religions are depicted as distinct paths leading to the Hindu deity. The textbooks convey a powerful message of social unity, similar to Bhashani's philosophy of Palonbaad. The seventh-

grade textbook explicitly states, "Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism does not pray for any particular being or people of a particular religion. The welfare of all castes and religions in the world is the only aim or goal of Hinduism" (page 87).

In the Buddhism textbooks, individual identity underscores qualities, attributed of Gautama Buddha, such as merit, empathy, moderation, frugality, civic duty, and ethical conduct. The prominence of Buddhist group identity is evident in the texts. National identity weaves together the identity of the Bengali group and the Liberation War of Bangladesh, creating a story of a unified nation. The global identity encompasses Buddhists worldwide, including in Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and India. Guidance is given to treat individuals who are not Buddhists with respect and to refrain from subjecting them to denigration or mistreatment. Buddhism and its followers are portrayed as inherently possessing good moral character. The concept of karma suggests that individuals facing disability, physical unattractiveness, or disadvantageous life circumstances deserve their misfortune. Donation is advocated as a just measure for addressing social inequality. Civil society and the duty of care are endorsed, promoting equality among all living beings. According to the eighth-grade textbook, the potential of Buddha's principle of equality is described as having the ability to "remove racial conflicts and establish unity in society, ensure the basic rights of all people, create tolerance towards other religions and opinions, establish the dignity of profession and labor, remove the difference between men and women and ensure equal rights, ensure justice in the society, remove all sorts of dissimilarities from family to the state level" (page 7).

Textbooks on Christianity express individual identity rooted in a Christian frame of mind, acknowledging the individual's purpose as the pursuit, love, and praise of God. The collective identity of Christians is portrayed by emphasizing the shared beliefs within the Christian faith and promoting unity among Christians. National identity is shaped by patriotism and nationalism, with a focus on highlighting the Christian community's role in the independence

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of Bangladesh. The global identity is grounded in a sense of belonging to the worldwide Christian community. The texts are saturated with Christianity and its religious practices. The eigth-grade textbook features a chapter discussing the responsibility and significance of nurturing all of God's creations, echoing Bhashani's philosophy of Rabubiyyat or Palonbaad. It states, "God has created every single thing of the universe with His own hand. […] It is mankind's duty to love and take care of all the creation of God. Through performing this duty, human beings express their obedience and faithfulness to God" (page 11).

The religious studies textbooks covering four major religions promote ethical living through selected examples of peace and justice, yet they also endorse values of nationalism exclusively tied to middle-class Bengali Muslims. These texts propagate a 'Bengali spirit' narrative, not only presenting a truncated and distorted version of the historical narrative of Bangladesh's formation but also contributing to the otherization and marginalization of non-Bengali, non-Muslim, and non-Bengali speaking minorities in the country.

3.4 Comparative Analysis of the Curricula: NCTB and Islamic University School

Bhashani's political pursuits and endeavors play a pivotal role in understanding how the Bengali Muslim community responded to the influence of modernity, specifically its connection with liberalism. This underscores a significant emphasis on the socio-political history of Bengali Muslims, focusing on social justice and radical redistributive politics. Despite growing recognition of influential figures like Abul Hashim and Abul Mansur Ahmed, there's a notable gap in academic exploration of Bhashani's role. While extensive research is available in vernacular Bangla, the lack of scholarly attention on Bhashani indicates a prevailing nationalist narrative in academia. Hence, the educational philosophy of Bhashani holds profound relevance in the contemporary context and merits scholarly consideration.

Historian Sumit Sarkar extensively delves into Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education." Macaulay, in 1835, advocated for an education system favoring Western literature, science, and language, particularly English, over traditional Indian learning. Sarkar, among other historians, critiques Macaulay's approach as part of the broader colonial agenda to shape India's education system in alignment with British imperial interests. Sarkar contends that Macaulay's push for English education aimed to create a class of anglicized Indians acting as intermediaries between British rulers and the Indian population, furthering British dominance (Sarkar, 1989).

Sarkar also examines how Macaulay's views reflected a Eurocentric perspective that devalued indigenous knowledge and traditions. He critiques the imposition of Western education, which undermined traditional Indian languages and educational systems, resulting in a disconnect between education and the socio-cultural context of the Indian subcontinent. In summary, Sarkar's analysis aligns with the broader historical view that sees Macaulay's Minutes as a crucial moment in colonial education policy, reshaping Indian education to serve British imperial interests while undermining indigenous knowledge and cultural practices.

In terms of the impact of educational policy, it is worth noting Joya Chatterji's work on the Bengal Partition and the role of the Hindu 'bhadralok' influenced by Macaulay's vision. Chatterji explores how certain members of this class, indoctrinated in Western education, actively participated in various political organizations, contributing to communal polarization in Bengal. She notes, "The 'Hindu' communal discourse of the bhadralok articulated the deeply conservative worldview of an embattled elite, determined to pay whatever price it had to in order to cling to power and privilege. It was a discourse that was deeply communal in intention even when it did not invoke religious imagery or deploy sacred symbols" (Chatterji, 1994, p. 267). Their involvement in nationalist politics, fears of losing influence, and responses to religious tensions all played a role in shaping the discourse around partition, ultimately leading

to the division of British India in 1947 into two separate nation-states based on religion. Chatterji further asserts, "Nationalism was directed against imperialism, giving top priority to anti-British action. The communalism of the bhadralok was directed against their fellow Bengalis. History for the one was the struggle against British rule; for the other, it was the celebration of British rule as an age of liberation from the despotism of Muslims. Its key political objective was to prevent this 'despotism' from returning when the British left India, and to deny that Muslims could be Bengalis, and by extension Indians" (Chatterji, 1994, p. 267).

Realizing the significance and influence of education policies, Bhashani showed a particular interest in understanding and resolving issues related to religion, secularism, and their connection to the broader dissemination of state-sponsored educational ideology.

Apart from Bhashani's comprehensive firsthand writings and speeches detailing the conceptual framework and academic curriculum of his brainchild, the Islamic University, I managed to obtain merely three questionnaires from the 1974 annual examination of the Islamic University School. For my thesis, I specifically utilized two exam questionnaires pertaining to the subjects of Social Sciences and Religious Studies, which were part of the curriculum at Bhashani's school. The Social Sciences questionnaire was designed for seventh-grade students, while the Religious Studies questionnaire was intended for students in both seventh and eighth grades.

The two questionnaires, examining the content, structure, and scope, have undergone a comprehensive review and analysis. The goal was to attain a profound understanding of the curriculum at Islamic University School, as developed and implemented by Bhashani in early seventies Bangladesh. The insights derived from these questionnaires are subsequently discussed in juxtaposition with the findings of the NCTB textbook review.
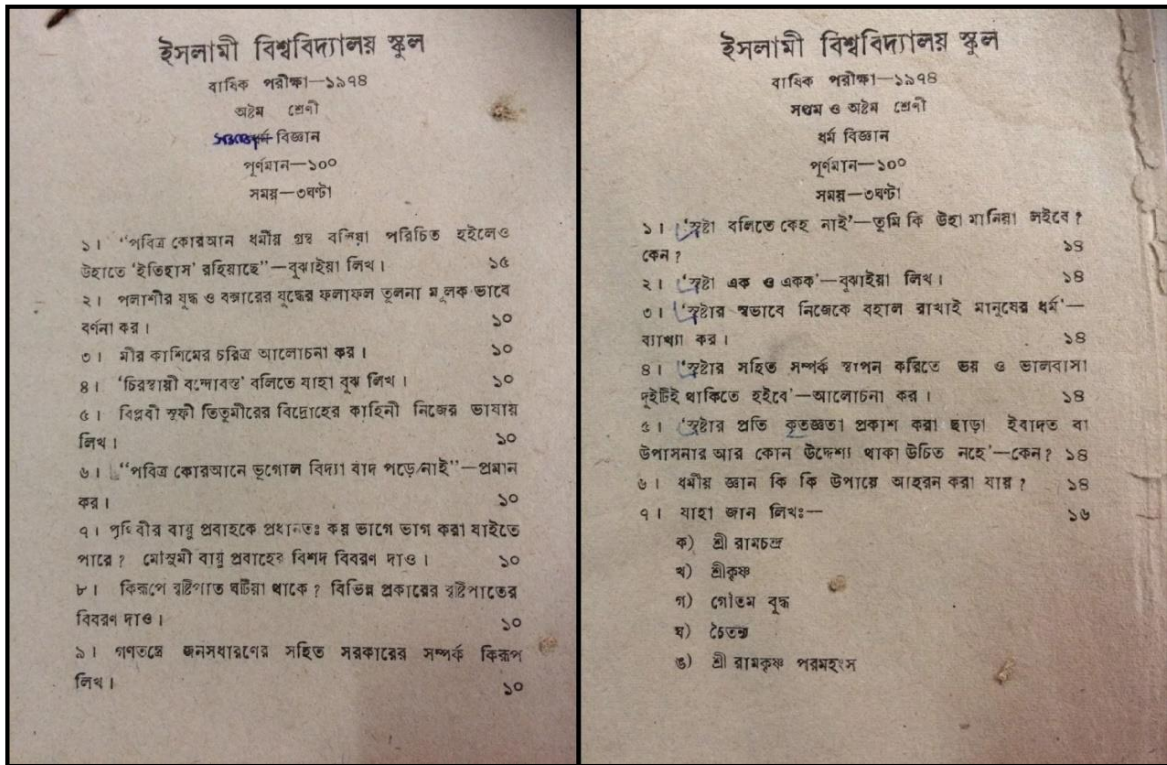

Image 3 The questionnaires from the 1974 annual examination of Islamic University School, intended for students in seventh and eighth grades. Document provided by Syed Irfanul Bari.

Both questionnaires include opinion-based queries, providing students with the opportunity to critically engage with the subject of study. This approach leaves space for constructive criticism, debate, and reasonable disagreements. For instance, consider the first question presented in the social sciences exam for eighth-graders: 'The Holy Quran is known as a religious book, but it also contains 'history' – Explain it.' At first glance, this question might seem misplaced in a social sciences exam, and to some, it might even carry a communal undertone. However, a closer examination of Bhashani's pedagogical philosophy and his

conceptual framework for the Islamic University curriculum elucidates the critical scholarship underpinning this question. Bhashani was well aware that philosophical engagements with religion do not occur in a historical vacuum. Here it is worth noting Angelika Neuwirth's work on the relationship between the Quran and history. Neuwirth contends that while the Quran has generally been dismissed as having little interest in history, the connection between the Quran and history is complex. She asserts that by employing a literary approach and conducting a microstructural reading of the Quran—examining not only its contents but also its form and structure—one can discern traces of both a historical and a canonical process. This approach, she argues, makes it possible to reconstruct the intellectual history of the Quran, providing evidence for "both the emergence of a scripture and the emergence of a community" (Neuwirth, 2003).

In contrast to the NCTB textbooks, which omit discussions on social tensions, power imbalances, and various social issues—including oppressions based on ethnic and religious identities, income inequality, and lack of political representation—the conceptual framework of Islamic University aims to cultivate among students an awareness of diverse social challenges. Bhashani saw students as active agents in the reformation of the country and therefore sought ways to establish a pedagogical template free from capitalist imperialist influences and religious bigotry. He recognized well that "the experience of religion in the 'private' spaces of home and school is crucial to the formation of subjects who will eventually endorse a particular public culture" (Asad, 1999).

In contrast to the contemporary religious education textbooks of NCTB, the 1974 questionnaire for the religious studies exam at the Islamic University School demonstrates a more profound philosophical engagement with religion. It encourages students to explore spirituality and faith rather than simplifying religion to mere rites and rituals. The NCTB textbooks, covering four major religions, serve as a moral compass for individual improvement and well-being. Instead

of considering religion as a potential platform to refine the ideals enshrined in fundamental rights and other constitutional commitments, it emphasizes personal development. The questionnaire comprises a section on prominent religious figures from various faiths, such as Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Gautama Buddha, and Ramakrishna Paramahansa, prompting students to share their knowledge about them. This suggests that the religious studies curriculum at the Islamic University School is fundamentally multi-religious, in contrast to the NCTB system, where the four major religions in Bangladesh are represented in distinct textbooks, each offering a perspective on its respective religion without any connection to the other religions. These texts assert the superiority of their respective beliefs and, either explicitly or implicitly, make comparisons that may undermine other belief systems (Binte Abdur Rob et al., 2020). Moreover, restricting the content of religious studies textbooks to cover only the four major religions marginalizes students from Bangladesh's indigenous and folk religious traditions (Binte Abdur Rob et al., 2020).

In this regard, I want to recall what M. N. Roy expressed in regret, "Indeed, there is no other example of two communities living together in the same country for so many hundred years, and yet having so little appreciation of each other's culture. […] Spiritual imperialism is the outstanding feature of our nationalist ideology" (Roy, 1937). In order to foster social cohesion through civic friendship, it is crucial to strengthen inter-religious understanding and dialogue between diverse religious communities in Bangladesh. Creating peaceful and just societies is not achievable by maintaining the conviction that all religions, except one's own, are incorrect and by imposing one's own faith. Instead, such societies can be established when diverse groups of both believers and non-believers actively engage in mutual understanding, accommodation, and acceptance. It is important to realize the relevance and urgency of incorporating sensible multi-religious education in the national curriculum because "what is needed today is not just that Muslims or Hindus or Christians be good Muslims, Hindus and Christians only in their

respective religious communities, but rather that they be good Muslims, Hindus or Christians in a world where other intelligent and sensitive people are not Hindus or Muslims or Christians" (Bhargava, 2013). Bhashani not only recognized it well in advance, but he was also among the very few who led the way. In September 1974, Bhashani released a pamphlet to raise funds and garner support for his Islamic University. In it, he pledged to introduce multi-religious education and sought support from all religious communities (Bari, 2018).

3.5 A Secular Exploration of Bhashani's Pedagogical Vision

To comprehensively grasp Bhashani's pedagogical approach in promoting social cohesion, particularly through multi-religious education, it is essential to examine it within the context of discourses on secularism. The notion that Bhashani, as a Sufi saint, envisioned his university through the lens of Islamic philosophy, might lead one to scrutinize the validity of his secular mindset and methodology. In this regard, it is important to remember social theorist Ashis Nandy's assertion that the enduring symbols of religious tolerance in India throughout the last two millennia do not align with the modernist conceptualization of 'secularism,' which views religion as inherently harmful and detrimental to social cohesion. He critiques modern secularists for "hijacking" and distorting the histories of religiously tolerant leaders and symbols of the pre-colonial India, "when the modern Indians project the ideology of secularism into the past, to say that Emperor Ashoka was 'secular,' they ignore that Ashoka was not exactly a secular ruler; he was a practicing Buddhist even in his public life. He based his tolerance on Buddhism, not on secularism" (Nandy, 1998). Likewise, Bhashani's anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist political stance as the revolutionary leader of the oppressed, his promotion of religious tolerance and harmony as a Sufi saint, and his political-spiritual philosophy advocating for multi-religious education are firmly grounded in the egalitarian and tolerant message of Islam, rather than Western doctrines of secularism.

Examining the discussions surrounding a post-secular inclusive model of secularism, I posit that Bhashani's political ideology and philosophy possess the capacity to embrace a version of secularism deeply connected to the local traditional-cultural religious ethos and reasoning. Departing from a rigid separationist approach to secularism, I juxtapose Bhashani's ideas and educational principles with the conceptualizations of secularism put forth by philosophers Charles Taylor, Akeel Bilgrami and political theorist Rajeev Bhargava.

Both Taylor and Bilgrami argues for a redefinition and recharacterization of secularism. However, they differ in their emphasis on the two aspects of secularism: the separation of church and state and the state's neutral stance towards different religions in a pluralistic society. Taylor emphasizes the need to move beyond the traditional focus on the separation of church and state. He argues that the second aspect, often overshadowed, is crucial, especially in the late modernity, where diverse societies include both religious and non-religious individuals. In Taylor's view, modern societies should uphold, in addition to the principles of liberty in worship and equality among various faiths, the inclusion of all voices, religious or non-religious, in shaping societal norms. He emphasizes the importance of the state maintaining neutrality and equal distance from all religions, allowing democratic participation of religious voices in shaping societal commitments. Taylor advocates for a broader understanding of cultural diversity and intellectual positions, extending beyond religious perspectives. Moreover, he has argued that in a society characterized by religious pluralism, the adoption of secularism should be grounded in what Rawls termed an "overlapping consensus" (Rawls, 1987). In this context, Taylor emphasizes the importance of finding common ground among diverse religious and non-religious perspectives to build a shared understanding of secular principles. To sum up, he seeks a more inclusive definition of secularism that considers the diversity of beliefs and perspectives in contemporary pluralistic societies (Taylor, 2011).

On the other hand, according to Bilgrami, secularism encompasses three key features. First, it is a stance regarding religion. Second, it represents a political doctrine. Third, secularism is not inherently good; rather, it aims to advance certain moral and political goods to counter perceived harms. Bilgrami proposes a characterization of secularism, asserting its relevance in the face of religious majoritarianism, notably in the context of modern nationalism, which aligns with Taylor's emphasis on non-phobic accommodation of religion but introduces a lexicographical ordering. This ordering prioritizes political ideals over religious practices when conflicts arise (Bilgrami, 2014).

Bilgrami argues that his characterization of secularism differs from Taylor's vision by accentuating its potential adversarial nature against religious practices but emphasizes that this stance only becomes adversarial when religious practices conflict with the society's adopted principles and goals. Bilgrami highlights that his version of secularism is a political stance focused solely on the impact of religion on the polity and is not concerned with religiosity in broader societal or personal contexts. He suggests that the lexicographical ordering does not negate the coexistence of religiosity in a society's culture and practices. Bilgrami recognizes the potential for individuals to find internal reasons within their religious traditions to resist majoritarian forms of religion in the modern political sphere. Resonating with Nandy, Bilgrami realizes the potential of local religious traditions in reforming and rescuing the modern polity from the grip of imperialist Western separationist modes of secularism, he asserted, "It is a childish non sequitur to think that considerations leading one to change one's mind in the future cannot contain elements of one's past traditions" (Bilgrami, 2014).

Bhargava, as well, stressed the need for reimagination and reconceptualization of political secularism. He contends that it is time to shift focus from doctrinal versions of Western secularism to examining constitutional provisions and normative practices, advocating for a fresh perspective on secularism that does not require an alternative of secularism but rather a

different conception of it. He emphasizes the necessity of identifying a form of secularism that respects both liberal and non-liberal religious lifestyles while addressing religious-based oppression and exclusions. According to Bhargava, this secularism is well-suited for societies marked by profound religious diversity and aligns with principles of freedom and equality. He suggests that the best embodiment of this version of secularism can be found in the inter-communal practices of the Indian subcontinent, and in the careful interpretation of its constitution (Bhargava, 2013).

Bhargava argues that the Indian subcontinent harbors numerous unique features of secularism that could be refined to shape a distinct model of secularism, one that is contextual and guided by the policy of 'principled distance.' Bhargava clarifies the concept of principled distance, stating, "The state must keep a principled distance from all public or private and individual-oriented or community-oriented religious institutions for the sake of the equally significant-and sometimes conflicting-values of peace, worldly goods, dignity, liberty, equality and fraternity in all of its complicated individualistic and non-individualistic versions." The concept of principled distance reinterprets the notion of separation of church and state in a manner distinct from mainstream Western secularism. The policy of principled distance involves a flexible stance regarding the state's interaction with or detachment from religion, as well as its decision to include or exclude religious elements. The implementation of principled distance, at the legal and policy levels, is contingent on the context, nature, and contemporary condition of relevant religions. In contrast to the typical liberal notion, principled distance dismisses the idea that equal respect is achieved only when individuals enter the public domain by setting aside their religious reasoning (Bhargava, 2013).

Considering the earlier discussion on contemporary critical conceptualizations of secularism, there is a necessity to reinterpret and consequently reinvent Bhashani within the context of serious academic discourses concerning secular education in a pluralistic modern state. It is

important to bring Bhashani into the limelight because his pedagogical philosophy has the capacity to cultivate the development of individuals, regardless of religion or caste, into sensible and ethical citizens who can contribute to the construction of a socially cohesive society.

Chapter Four

4.1 Conclusion

Maulana Bhashani's views on education remain largely unexplored in scholarly research. Despite taking initiative in various educational activities, such as establishing educational institutions and holding discussions with experts regarding educational systems and policies, this aspect of Bhashani's legacy has received minimal attention. His unconventional vision for an education system, coupled with his lack of formal education, has led to a misconception that he may not possess a relevant educational philosophy tailored to contemporary needs. However, despite never experiencing the contemporary era of globalization, Bhashani "did provide the key to its potential to serve human well-being: he saw that religious ethical passions and reasoning could be mobilised in movements for social justice, equity, and democracy".[38]

The current state of the Bangladeshi education system needs to identify a comprehensive strategy to reshape the educational framework. The existing national curriculum appears to contribute more to escalating social tensions than alleviating them, especially in the case of religious studies textbooks that exhibit various forms of othering and lack opportunities for inter- and intra-religious dialogues (Binte Abdur Rob et al., 2020). As a result, the constitutional commitment of Bangladesh to provide secular education remains largely unrealized to this day. Furthermore, the didactic teaching approach of religious education and the glorification of specific religions in the texts may foster a sense of superiority, potentially leading to social othering and exclusions (Binte Abdur Rob et al., 2020).

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[38] This quote is taken from an abridged version of a paper presented by David Ludden, a professor of history at New York University, during an event in New York commemorating the 36th death anniversary of Maulana Bhashani.

Considering such context, it is high time to think of a pedagogical framework that aligns with the modules of GCED and simultaneously addresses the context-specific educational challenges of Bangladesh. Therefore, I argue that Bhashani's pedagogical philosophy, rooted in Islam and advocating for multi-religious education, can be examined in order to develop a contextualized form of GCED. Formulating a culturally appropriate and localized GCED policy for Bangladesh by situating Bhashani's pedagogy within the modules of GCED requires identifying common concepts and attuning educational strategies to meet the specific needs of the population. For developing a culturally relevant GCED policy it is crucial to recognize and integrate traditional indigenous examples of tolerance and interreligious harmony drawn from the region's complex history and syncretic values, into the national curriculum. Tailoring GCED policies according to the specificities of the local context can ensure its effective resonance with the socio-cultural fabric of Bangladesh.

Bhashani's educational methodology strives for the comprehensive development of students, encompassing intellectual, spiritual, and practical aspects. On the other hand, GCED also emphasizes multifaceted development. Thus, the shared pedagogical approach of holistic development between Bhashani's envisioned University and locally contextualized GCED needs exploration to theorize a comprehensive education framework that extends beyond cognitive learning, contributing to the cultivation of ethical and engaged global citizens. Consequently, these locally tailored GCED policies, aligning with Bhashani's pedagogical philosophy, can contribute to fostering social cohesion in Bangladesh. I will conclude my thesis with a saying of Bhashani:

> "Each educational system adheres to a particular life philosophy. Simultaneously, the philosophy of life inherently mirrors itself in the educational system. Conversely, the education system plays a role in constructing and advancing the life system rooted in the same philosophy" (Bari, 2000).
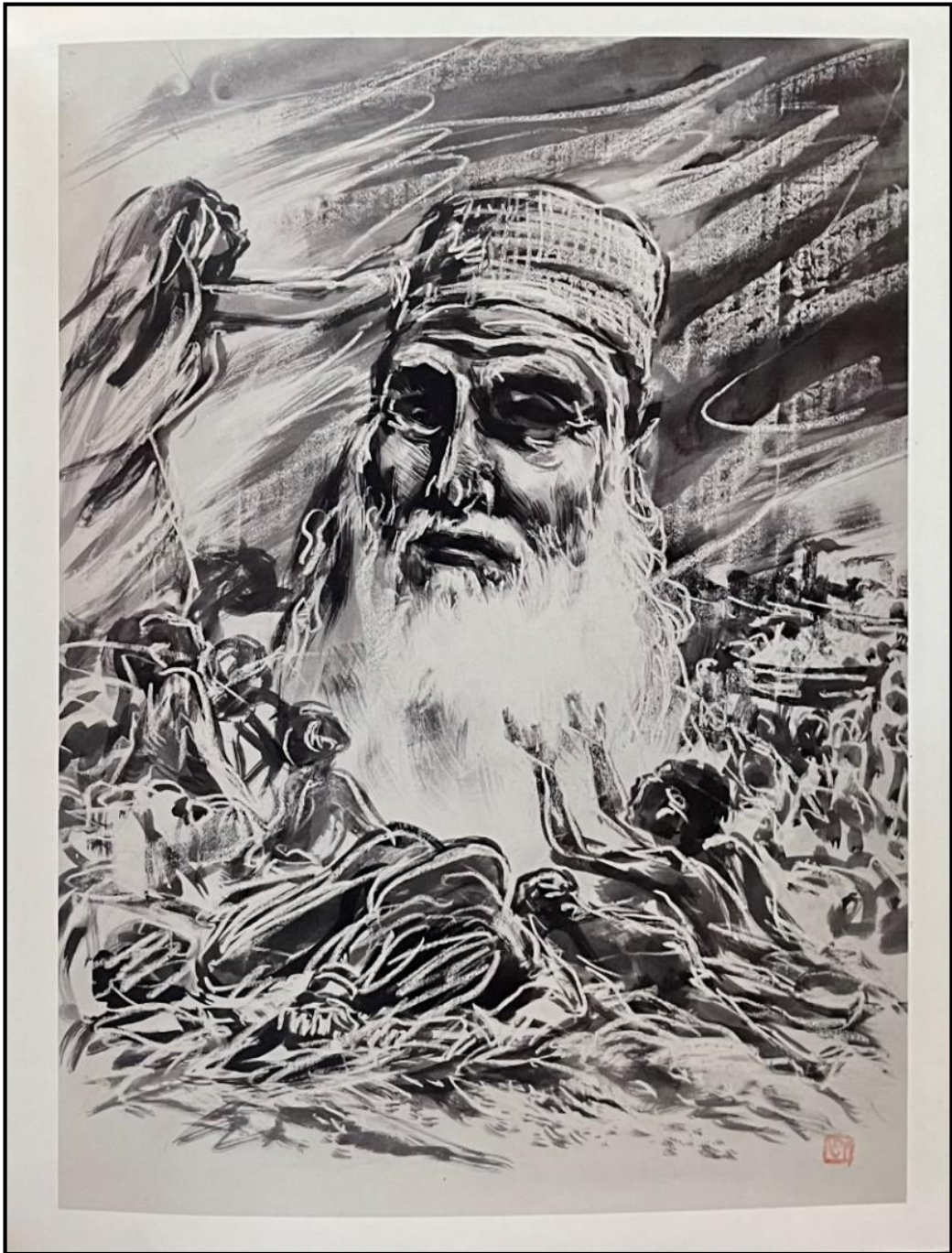
Image 4 Zainul Abedin's portrayal of Maulana Bhashani from the 1970s. Image courtesy of Bengal Foundation.

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