

# **Road Safety Movement: Young adults and Collective engagement in Social Movement**

A Thesis submitted by  
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requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Social Sciences in Anthropology.  
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## Declaration

I hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing a 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 accepted or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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## Approval

The thesis “Road Safety Movement: How Young People are Contributing to the Collective/Social Solidarity.” that Umme Abiha Saima (18117002) submitted in the Summer of 2022 was accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Social Sciences in Anthropology on 11/10/2022.

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## **Abstract**

Road safety is a concerning issue worldwide. As the proximity of accidents has increased, it has become a severe concern for the masses. Dhaka witnessed its second most significant contemporary movement in 2018; The road safety movement (নিরাপদ সড়ক আন্দোলন). In this movement, the majority was the youth: they gathered and stood together for their right. This movement is proof of collective solidarity that forms mobilization and contributes to collective solidarity. This research aims to examine the reason behind their participation and their experience and expectations. Further, it looks at the social phenomena it helps us to understand. For this study, the qualitative method has been chosen. In-depth interviews with open-ended questions and later thematic analysis were conducted to conduct the study. Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury's theory of crowd, 'Janata-bhir,' Emile Durkheim's concept of solidarity, and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus were used to analyze the findings. This study reflects on their willingness to participate in a movement, their attitude of showing resistance toward authority, and their solidarity during a crisis. This research contributes to further analyzing contemporary movements and examining grounds on which collective solidarity is growing.

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**Table of contents**

<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>4</b>
Introduction	
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>7</b>
Literature Review	
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>15</b>
Methodology	
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>23</b>
Demographic Information	
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>26</b>
The Common Urge to Participate	
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>33</b>
Expectation and Struggle	
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>39</b>
Impact of participating: personally and socially	
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>43</b>
Conclusion	

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

On July 29, 2018, two College students from Ramijuddin Cantonment died due to the Jabale-Nur bus's reckless driving, and more than ten students were injured. Police later arrested three unlicensed bus drivers, their helpers, and Shahadat Hossain, their owner. After the sudden death of Diya and Rajib- their classmates and students of nearby schools and colleges started protesting, blocking nearby roads. The situation intensified after the press release by Minister Shajahan Khan. With a smile on his face, the minister of shipping and the Executive President of Bangladesh Road, Transport Workers Federation said, "a road crash has claimed 33 lives in India's Maharashtra; but do they talk about it like the way we do?". His statement and smile triggered the students and mass people; agitated students protested immediately, blocking the Airport road, Mirpur, Uttara, Dhanmondi, and Motijheel; they even stopped the railway. Students stayed on the road and demanded - Shajahan Khan's resignation and law reformation.

The students stayed on the road from July 30 to August 6<sup>1</sup>. During this period , the students blocked roads, checked for every vehicle's license peacefully, and created an emergency lane for ambulances. Every process was organized and peaceful, and for the first time in Bangladesh's history, an ambulance did not face any road congestion and passed freely. They even stopped government vehicles to check if licenses had expired. At first, the government thought this was just another protest, and if they promised to reform the law, the students would return home. However, that was not the case; students declared to stay on the road until the government

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45080129>

ensured their demands were met. When the students made it clear that they would not leave the street with a vague promise and intended to continue their protest, this concerned the authority. Their firm act resulted in police brutality upon them. Police beat them up and used rubber bullets, water cannons, and tear gas shells to disperse them. Students then burst into anger and started vandalising buses (ambulances and vehicles with valid licenses did not face this). After police attacked them with tear shells and rubber bullets, university students joined them on the road to show alliance. Students from Dhaka University, East-West University, BRAC University, Jahangir Nagar University, and other universities gathered to show their full support. Students from 42 different districts were on the road with placards saying, “We Want Justice”, “আমার ভাই কবরে, খুঁনী কেন বাহিরে (My brother is dead, why is the murderer not facing the consequences?).”

Initially, the government promised to fulfill their 9-point demands; considering previous movements, the students refused to stop protesting until their needs were met. Hence, from August 2, they and the journalists experienced Chhatra-league’s (Helmet-Bahini as per many new portals and groups<sup>2</sup>) extreme brutality. They attacked students and journalists with dangerous tools while the police used teargas, sticks, and rubber bullets against the students. On August 5, Airport Road and Science laboratory intersection flooded with student and their guardians. Thousands of students stood there despite the brutality, and mass people stood by them. Even though section 144 was not imposed, police would break any circle of more than three people. While the police and Minister of Road Transport and Bridges Obaidul Quader denied brutality, plenty of evidence of brutality<sup>3</sup> was documented<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2022/04/30/the-rise-of-the-infamous-helmet-bahini-1>

<sup>3</sup> [shorturl.at/ILPR4](http://shorturl.at/ILPR4)

<sup>4</sup> [shorturl.at/dBZ18](http://shorturl.at/dBZ18)

Meanwhile, on online platforms, people experienced extreme fear and panic in the name of Section 57 - the Information and Communication Technology Act; people in white dresses arrested activists for spreading propaganda on online platforms. There has been nationwide internet blockage, and any video and photo posts regarding the incident were strictly prohibited. A draft of the reformed law, was proposed on August 6.

The basic design of anything for human use is that the user can easily use that design without any hassle. The structure must be user-friendly or human-friendly. Any design that causes human suffering is faulty. The roads are designed such that it feels like pedestrians are way more vulnerable than vehicles; whereas this should be another way around, human beings are supposed to prioritize them over vehicles. Dhaka is overpopulated, Due to centralization, Does road safety not only refer to this population's safety on the road but also, involves politics, government, and a group of people's interests. Research by Donald A. Norman (2002) states- the blame for an accident always falls upon the person, and the legal system drags them to the court or legal authority to solve that. However, this error is essentially a result of 'system error,' not 'human error.' To err is to be human- thus, a person will make mistakes, but why would a system want a human to fail by forming a dysfunctional system? Blaming humans is easy; however, designing a system that would fall over a single act of people does not make any sense.

In this context, this dissertation aims to understand how young people are contributing to the collective solidarity focusing on the road safety movement in 2018; while trying to find out why the youth feels the urge to participate in movements? why it is significant to them, and what social phenomena it helps us to understand.

The next chapter contains a literature review of this research. The literature review has been done historically, where I have focused on pre-colonial, post-colonial, and contemporary movements to establish this research. In the third chapter, I have covered the methodology I relied upon for this study. Chapter four contains the demographic information of the interlocutors and how it has an impact on them. In chapter five, I have the youth's common urge to participate in a movement and their initial triggers. Chapter six contains their expectations and struggles during the movement. Chapter seven contains how the effect of participating in a movement affects social phenomena. Finally, chapter eight concludes the entire research briefly and suggests a few things that may contribute to strengthening solidarity.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Road safety matters have become a significant concern for the people living in Dhaka. According to an report, between January and December 2021, at least 6,284 people were killed, and 7,468 others faced injury in road accidents across the country (“Road Accident: A Major Concern of Bangladesh | CGS,” n.d.). A report from Bangla Tribune<sup>5</sup> states The report from Road Safety Foundation says that in April 2022, 11% of road accident victims are students. While this hazardous situation has created the fear of sudden death among mass people, the authority's actions have not been assuring.

The road accident rate in Bangladesh has become so high that it is considered an epidemic . Every day there is news of death or severe injury from a road accident. This phenomenon was relatively normalized among Bangladeshis until recently when in 2018, a reckless bus ran over two students, and later on, their classmates started blocking roads demanding road safety. As mentioned earlier, this issue eventually turned out to be one of the bold movements by young people in the contemporary period.

The youth has been an active participant in building a society. During the colonial era, the youth constantly put effort into constructing the community infrastructure. It was similar in the post-colonial era as well. The youth played a vital role in the birth of Bangladesh- starting from

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<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2022/05/07/543-killed-in-road-accidents-across-bangladesh-in-april>

forming the language movement in 1952 to the 1969 mass uprising, which eventually led to the liberation war of 1971. The youth sacrificed their life for to free their motherland. Their courageous acts are the foundation of communities. Since the youth plays a significant role in society, discuss young people's contribution to society's progress. Investing in youth and developing social responsibilities shields them from failure and ensures societal stability (Rakan & Ayman, 2020). Thus the focus on the youth remains important.

Participation of youth in a crisis constructs unity among them. It mobilizes people from different backgrounds and principles and forms tolerance- most importantly, it builds solidarity. Émile Durkheim coined "Social Solidarity" in his book *Division of Labour in Society*. He described this term as the connection between individuals, allowing them to form a social unit that sticks together through thick and thin. He explained how social orders and solidarity is formed and sustained. This carries great value in a society as it is a necessary element of any functioning society. Durkheim argues that two types of social solidarity exist in our society, how the society holds itself together and what ties the individual to society. In the *Division of labour*, he discussed mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. The first one refers to where the Division of labor is relatively limited- the one we usually see in a rural area. The latter refers to modern society where the Division of labor is highly developed. Because of the mutual needs of the individual in modern society, the Division of labor forms an organic society. Predominantly in both societies, an individual acts accordingly to their obligations to others and the society. This act results in obtaining their rights and reciprocating their contributions within the collective (Durkheim & Simpson, 2013).

As people tend to unite during a crisis, from the partition of Bengal to its separation from West Pakistan, Bangladesh has had a history of many vigorous movements. The anti-colonial movements are the fight against hierarchy, the claim of taking control over own destiny. Ranajit Guha, in his book, "Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India," demonstrated that the major portion of anti-colonial movements is peasant movements, which are considered pre-political. The portrayal behind this reason is that peasants have no political participation in national politics and lack knowledge of politics, democracy, state, and such issues. Regardless, considering these peasant movements as spontaneous dismisses their struggle and revolting identities from them. The insurgencies by these peasants were neither spontaneous nor pre-political.

Pre-liberation and post-liberation uprisings were primarily ideologically led. They were heavily based on politics and, to some extent, based on nationalistic sentiment too. Research by Jackman demonstrates that student-led movements are a systemic response to authoritarian rule in Bangladesh. This country's political history from 1971 to the return to parliamentary democracy; everything is tied to these struggles. Even though the students and middle-class primarily formed these movements, often they were instigated through the political parties (2020).

Social movements have different characteristics and are often correlated to political parties, ideologies, war, and such factors. For instance, the ideology of a political party and its organization's influence often is the core of movements; thus, the party has deeply rooted impacts on such movements (Desai 2003).

Post-independence Bangladesh has witnessed the most energetic, vibrant movement during the authoritarian regimes. In "Civil Society and Citizenship in India and Bangladesh" chapter two,' 'Women's Rights and Social Movements in Bangladesh: The Changing Political Field,' Seuty Sabur deals with de-radicalization questions by analyzing the diverse women's movements in Bangladesh over the past six decades. Shifting the focus from NGO-ization, she explores the other factors that contributed to the de-radicalization of women's movements (2021). Even though she discusses women's issues in social movements in this text, her argument is valid for people who participated in the movements, and people who wants to participate but hesitates. Despite these NGOs' works in the name of women's empowerment, they also target young people. Thus, they also go under an extreme workload that gradually becomes difficult to put their energy onto something other than their work.

Sabur especially talks about the neo-liberal wave and its terrible effects in this writing. During Zia's autocratic regime, de-nationalization happened. Communist parties got banned, and religion-based politics rose again. The second autocratic regime was the Ershad regime, with a robust backup from the west; it became the highest recipient of financial aid. The fall of Ershad occurred due to the youth's mass uprising. Both regimes can see how students protested vigorously and claimed their rights (Sabur, 2021).

The youth has always been vigorous and full of charm. Young people's enthusiasm and energy have led them to participate in uprisings and protests without hesitation spontaneously. Bangladesh has a long history of student politics and participation in revolutionary movements. From the '50s to the 2000s, Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) witnessed its most robust action by

the youth. However, this scenario has changed due to the authoritarian regime. By suppressing political opposition parties, and students in general from protesting, this regime has successfully established terror among people. However, it is remarkable how the youth has managed to protest a few times despite the terror. Bangladesh went through ups and downs and witnessed the terrifying version of politics since the 90s. Jackman (2020), in his paper, discusses how 2009, when Awami League returned to power, dramatically changed the political scenario. Awami League, considered an authoritarian ruling party, has a reputation for widespread detention and repression of opposition leaders and activists on questionable grounds. Also, its intense surveillance, state forces are turning into terrifying groups, and the controversial general election of 2014 and 2018 have ensured its dominance (2020). Thus it has become crucial for people to speak about political issues, and they have to speak in a manner that does not upset any political figure, which might result in harm.

Recently, the stream of movement has changed in Bangladesh. First, this country has witnessed the least amount of uprisings in many years. Movements we have witnessed in the past ten years and so have ended the draught. If we notice these contemporary movements closely, we will find that the characteristics of movements have changed.

Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury (2019) , in her book, conveyed that these events result from a long chain of negotiations between policies, state repression, and structured violence, representing the postcolonial world. Further, she mentioned that Bangladesh went through double postcoloniality. First, the British Raj, and later, the West Pakistani hegemony, and the double colonization changes the landscape of south Asian politics). In the book, Chowdhury has used Partha

Chatterjee's explanation on this subject matter; where Chatterjee demonstrates, the notion of politics emerged from the remains of 1971 and the everyday dealings with the functions and activities of modern governmental systems, what has been called popular politics (2006).

Recently, we have witnessed a few movements that were not initially organized by any political party; instead, the urban middle-class youth initiated them. These movements, to some extent, also brought pressure upon the government. In 2013, a group of online activists started protesting in front of a public library in Shahabg. They gathered around to demand the death sentence for Abdul Quader Mollah, a senior leader of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh- for the crimes he committed during the liberation war of Bangladesh. Students made caricatures of war criminals and posted them on the walls of Charukala, TSC, and neighbouring areas. The place was later named "Gonojagoron Mancha (গণজাগরণ মঞ্চ/ Mass Awakening Platform). Jackman, in his paper, related the Shahbag movement to the Arab spring saying , "The movement was young, with many protestors, not supporters of a mainstream political party." This was supported predominantly by the middle class, drawn sizeable student body, was popular (some celebrities supported the movement), spread around the country, and was mobilized partially through social media, such as Facebook (Jackman, 2020, p. 12). The government passed an amendment and sentenced Mollah to death, which was implemented by the end of that year. This event was a backdrop for many upcoming uprisings Bangladesh witnessed in the following years.

On April 2018, the youth again gathered at Shahbag to reform the quota system that dominates the mass population's access to employment in the public sector.. Thousands of

students gathered and delivered speeches and slogans. Early in February, a small group of students organized themselves under the banner of the 'Bangladesh Shadharan Chhatra Odhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad' (Bangladesh General Students' Rights Protection Forum) and began protesting at Dhaka University. Most of the students had no political affiliation. 56% of quotas are allocated to public sector jobs for. Among this 56%, 10% is allocated to women, 10% to the people from 'backward districts,' 5% to ethnic minorities, and 1% to people with disabilities. half of the quotas (30% ) is allocated to the children and grandchildren of 'freedom fighters' of Bangladesh's 1971 war of Liberation against West Pakistan (Jackman, 2020, p. 15). The protesters outlined a few demands, and before turning into a giant mass blocking streets, they peacefully tried to convey their demands. This movement initially formed at Dhaka university, and the heat soon spread across the country. Students from public and private universities joined the struggle. "Inflammatory comments in parliament by a government minister further motivated the movement, with the then agriculture minister labelling the protestors' children of rajakar' (war criminals, collaborators in Bangladesh's War of Liberation) (Jackman, 2020, p. 16).

A few months later, Bangladesh witnessed its biggest uprisings since the 2013 Shahbag movement, when school-college-going children blocked the street for the death of their classmates Rajib and Diya in a road accident. Even though there is much research on contemporary movements in South Asia, this particular movement needs extra attention. Solely because, due to Bangladesh's double colonialization, it has a different stream of politics and a distinct effect on the uprisings. The road safety movement is one of the most significant contemporary movements. Recently, we have witnessed a change in the stream of movements; this study sheds light on the change: more precisely, the factors responsible for these changes.

In her book 'Paradoxes of the Popular: Crowd Politics in Bangladesh,' Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury mentions that the recent uprisings in Bangladesh mainly formed outside party politics. This is unusual for Bangladesh, given its long history of party politics. Neither organizations delimited the scope of these protests, nor the protesters depended upon infrastructure as a medium. This is new because, in South Asian culture, techno-politics is usually the language of the poor (2019). In this book, Chowdhury starts with the movement in Phulbari against the open-pit coal mining issue in 2007 and turns to the Shahbag movement in 2013 to establish her ideas on crowd politics in Bangladesh.

Chowdhury explained since Bangladesh is a highly dense populated country, the 'Janata'<sup>6</sup> will always be on the road in 'Bhir'<sup>7</sup>. This crowd holds a significant place in Bangladeshi politics. "In Dhaka, political groups aim to take over historically meaningful spaces of public gathering, like the Paltan Maidan, Bangabandhu Avenue, the roundabout called Shapla Chattar, the footpath in front of the National Museum in Shahbag, or that narrow stretch of concrete—a sidewalk more or less—named Muktangon. The word means "free space," and despite its gradual downsizing, it is still dedicated to offering a safe place for venting political and social grievances" (Chowdhury, 2019, p. 9). Thus blocking roads and highways linked to the city is the first step in establishing a solid stance in a protest. Chowdhury comments that these are not spontaneous crowds of angry citizens. Even though spontaneity occurs in the public sphere, these crowds are almost rehearsed spectacles of presence. This crowd is there for a cause (Chowdhury, 2019).

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<sup>6</sup> Janata refers to the mass people.

<sup>7</sup> Bhir refers to the crowd.

Chowdhury explains that these crowd politics arises from those who do not fit into the social realm. She further explains how we instantly think of a movement when we hear the word 'mobility,' but it also refers to the ordinary, marginalized, the working class, and of course, the mob. She argues that it is not resistance that forms this mobility. Instead, the everyday monotony and unpretentious acts of degrading subjectification cannot be turned into typical politics. This everyday cultural and practical escape exercise is what Chowdhury remarks as the politics of the crowd (2019).

She clarifies that this is not to identify the crowd as a clear manifestation of a unified popular voice but to approach the matter as a strong yet sometimes self-contradictory act of political articulation. As she mentions, we should try to identify the circumstance under which a group of individuals gathers and acts in the name of "the people" (Chowdhury, 2019).

Recently, we have observed solidarity among individuals through the movement. While Chowdhury explained the change in the stream of movement, we have to go back to Durkheim to explain solidarity. In his book "Division of Labour," Durkheim coined two types of solidarity; Mechanical and organic. According to Durkheim, In earlier days, society was built on a smaller scale in rural areas. Where the division of labor was less. Therefore people were familiar with each other and shared similar tasks more or less. These societies are built upon likeness, where all members share the same value based on everyday tasks and similar life experiences; thus, this type of solidarity is called mechanical solidarity. As per organic solidarity, Durkheim explained, with the consequence of the division of labor, collective consciousness starts to fall. It results in

each individual having a separate set of tasks for them. It eventually leads to different life experiences for each of them.

Consequently, this leads to a 'personal consciousness,' emphasizing individual distinctiveness. It affected the situations that formed shared collective consciousness. Hence individuals are no longer capable of experiencing them yet have a combination of different experiences directed toward their individual consciousness. Durkheim argues that each individual has two consciences within the self. One is common to the group entirely, and another is personal and distinct. The familiar situation that created the common collective consciousness is disturbed, and individuals no longer have shared experiences but have various settings, each leading towards its own (Durkheim & Simpson, 2013).

However, as the new form of division of labour deteriorates the collective consciousness, it also constructs a new form of solidarity. Now individuals are dependent on each other by the division of labour and cooperation to some extent. Cuff et al. note that "differences are expected and indeed become expected. Thus the nature of the moral consensus changes. Commonly shared values persist because there would be no society without them, but they become generalized, as they are not rooted in the totality of commonly shared daily experiences. Instead of specifying the details of an action, common values tend to be a more general underpinning for social practices. In this sense, the division of labor can be seen as a moral phenomenon" (Cuff, 2015).

Finally, the concept of 'habitus' was coined by Pierre Bourdieu, which he explains as a system of dispositions. While he stresses the relation between social structure and human agencies,

Bourdieu demonstrates that 'habitus' is neither result of free will nor determined by free will; it is something created by the interaction of both over time. Sharing similar interests creates a sense of collective identity and group position among people. Here class plays a vital role, as people from a similar class have similar exposure to social experience, albeit the different flow in which they experience it. Bourdieu explains that objective homogenizing of a class habitus comes from the homogeneity of their experience. This enables practices to be objectively harmonized without intentional calculation or consciousness (Bourdieu & Nice, 1977).

These ideas have assisted me while I tried to make sense of the themes. In the latter chapters, the themes are discussed and analysed with the help of these frameworks.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

This dissertation focuses on the participant experience regarding the movement and how it shapes their view. Moreover, it focuses on the trigger points from which the youth participates in a movement and the significance it serves. Finally, it looks into the social phenomena it helps us to understand. In order to explore this phenomenon, this study focused on middle-class and lower-middle-class participants. I reached out to my interlocutors through my social networks. . Reaching the working class was beyond the scope of this study; hence the working class was excluded. As an urban middle-class student, I grew up with the stories of the liberation war and post-liberation struggles. My parents witnessed the anti-Ershad movements and were active participants. While I grew up, these stories and the absence of movement created a romanticised version of movement in my mind. When I participated in a few, the romanticism started to fade away. This study attempts to turn my younger self's romanticism into the grown-up self's anthropological understanding.

I spent about two weeks in the field. Each interlocutor shared their own unique experience. I got to experience how their personal beliefs, fear, and stereotypes were challenged and how they overcame them. Time restraint was indeed a fact; hence, I only had to settle for five interviews. Among my five interlocutors, I knew three of them beforehand; the rest two were friends with them. Except for one, all of them live in less developed areas of Dhaka. Two of them came to

Dhaka for higher education. Despite their different background, they are settled in Dhaka and have their own income source.

Since I had only five interlocutors, data bias is inevitable regardless of my attempt to minimize it. A few of the stories were striking to me, and they questioned my personal belief too. I started working on this study with a specific purpose, but when assembling the findings, I ended up with a few more interesting facts.

The general objective of this study is focusing on the effect of movements on them and analyzing their experience. The specific objective of this study is to recognize why the youth feels the urge to participate in a movement and why it is significant to them. Moreover, determining the social phenomena, this study helps us to understand.

## **Data Collection**

For this study, data was collected through primary and secondary resources. For this study, qualitative analysis has been used for the primary data collection. As per the secondary data, pieces of literature have been used. In-depth interviews were taken as the study demands an open-ended conversation. Since in-depth interviews are a qualitative research method, they aim to explore a respondent's point of view, experiences, sentiments, and perspectives.

## **In-Depth Interview**

The study required in-depth interviews to understand the young people's participation and contribution through an event. As I had chosen students from colleges and universities for this study, I conducted in-depth interviews. Interviews were based on their willingness to participate in a movement, the trigger point behind this event, and their experience. Furthermore, the discussion focused on their willingness to participate in future movements and their expectations. Conducting in-depth interviews has helped me understand their perspectives more efficiently and reduced barriers between us, which made the conversation flow smoothly.

## **Secondary Resources**

Since this is an undergraduate dissertation, interviews were conducted on a small scale. Hence, choosing literature was crucial. This dissertation has incorporated the literature from books, journals, articles, news articles, and the internet to establish the background.

## **Data Analysis**

All interviews were recorded. Each of them was 35 to 40 minutes long. Further follow up were conducted when needed. Before starting the interview, I introduced myself and the purpose of my study and asked for their consent to record the interview. They agreed to participate using a pseudonym and had the option to withdraw at any moment. The questionnaire was semi-structured, and interlocutors spoke freely as they wanted. Their comfort and easiness were maintained throughout the interview.

After I was done conducting interviews, I translated and transcribed them as soon as possible. Besides, I took notes during the interview, and after transcribing, I added those notes with star marks in the main document. An in-depth interview and semi-structured questionnaire helped me understand their perspective better.

As per the questionnaires, a thematic analysis was done for the findings. The analysis primarily focused on four themes, including demographic information. The remaining themes are the common urge to participate, expectation and struggle, and the impact of participating: personally and socially.

## Chapter 4

### Demographic Information

There are thousands of students actively participated in road safety movement. To understand the sheer desire of the students to participate in such movement, I have depended on other people's first-hand experience, academic writings, and media portrayal of the road safety movement. Through these interviews, I tried to understand their motive, political stances, and the urge to participate in a movement. Along with personal experiences, I have thoroughly viewed existing literature to get a more nuanced version of this phenomenon to understand the scenario, which will eventually lead me to my destination. In this chapter, I will discuss the socioeconomic condition of the five people I interviewed. Their basic information includes age, ethnicity, income, educational background, and political view.

As per my ability and accessibility, the interlocutors I have chosen are from Dhaka metropolitan, belonging to the city's middle to lower middle-class area. Among five, one is a dropout from a private university, three is from Dhaka university, and one is from Nalanda. Their demography is following:

No	Name	Age  (During the Movement)	Gender	Family Income	Educational Background	Personal Income	Political view
1	Hiron	18	Male	Monthly  20000-3 0000 BDT.	DU	(Graphic Designer)	Anarchist
2	Mitu	21	Female	Monthly  50000-6 0000 BDT.	Dropout	(Photogra pher)	Liberal
3	Ritika	16	Female	Monthly  50000-6 0000 BDT.	Nalanda	(Graphic Designer)	Apolitical/ left-leaning.
4	Anita	21	Female	Monthly	DU	(Tuition,	Liberal

				90000-100000 BDT.		Social Media Manager)	
5	Amin	24	Male	Monthly 20 Thousand BDT.	DU	(Tuition)	Liberal

Three of my interlocutors belong to a lower-middle-class family, and others belong to the middle class. One's father is a farmer, and two of their fathers are retired. Despite being from middle-class or lower-middle-class backgrounds, they were not obligated to share the family's financial pressure. They all had some income based on freelancing, tutoring students, and graphic design. Also, they all share the same ethnicity- Bangladeshi. Hence they are living a life on their own term. They had some source of income that helped them to stay independent to some extent; thus, when they made life choices, in this case participating in a movement where the risk of facing violence is high, they did not asked for their parents' permission.

The interlocutors' exposure to a particular culture through their lifestyle has shaped their political views. Dhaka university has a great history of political activities and to some extent influence three of the interlocutors who were studying there. The other two also have exposure to this environment, affecting their political views and perception of movements. Their usage of specific terminologies indicates that they have used jargon in conversations and have some knowledge about them, if not entirely.

Our surroundings shape us as a person. Personal growth happens due to diverse life experiences, including gender stereotypes, family background, political views, and exposure to events happening around us. Since our experiences shape us, and we behave in a certain way in a different context, in this dissertation, I have tried to understand the youth's urge to participate in a movement based on their social context.

## Chapter 5

### The Invincible Youth

As per Bangladesh's history, movements have always been dominated by political parties, not by the "Janata (public)." The road safety issue is more or less concerning to all of us. However, participating in a movement such as "Janata" takes much more than concern. In this chapter, I intend to explore why youth are eager to participate in movements, and what were their experience throughout the movement.

When I asked my interlocutors what was the trigger for joining the movement, I received different answers. While their answers varied in some way, they all seem to imply that the lawlessness of transportation and the death of fellow students are their primary triggers. When I asked them what made her join the movement, Anita said,

*"I have participated in movements before, Quota, Daksu, etc. That didn't make any difference. I didn't want to participate in the road safety movement initially. But then I saw that the police were beating students on my campus. Most importantly, the political leaders of the 'Chhatra League,' who used to be our friends, classmates, or acquaintances, were using their power to beat people up, holding sharp weapons (ramda, chapati). I couldn't stay quiet! I had to go on the field to show solidarity with the protesters."*

All of them mentioned one of their trigger points: violence toward the students. Since three of them were university students back then, they felt the urge when they witnessed violence in their known area. The rest two were college-going students back then; thus, the murder of their

classmates was very infuriating for them. Besides, anytime they could be the victim of this occurrence- this thought has hovered over them.

Ritika said,

*"A few years back, my sister and I had a severe accident. After that, we were traumatized, especially my sister. We both suffered from PTSD from that road accident. After that incident, I stopped using buses, but my younger sister still uses them for transportation. So, when I heard about accidents, I felt extremely anxious. And that was a trigger for me."*

As they talked about their trigger, they also mentioned how participating in the road safety movement was significant. Mitu said,

"As a conscious citizen, if people stand for something that resonates with your cause and if you face the problem every day, then you should participate."

Amin stated a similar concern. When I asked why it is important to participate in such events,

Anita said,

*"I think we are slowly becoming cowardly nations who don't know how to stand for themselves. Of course, the state holds power. But in crucial times like this, we must stand up for ourselves. And I don't think authority will come to their senses without facing backlashes. So, yes, I think it is vital."*

While Ritika has a similar view, she added, *"I prefer to do something rather than do nothing."*

The youth's urge to do something- to take a step against injustice seemed a common trait. However, this outburst took years of injustice and slowly built rage. It is challenging to form uprisings against this regime, yet when they occur, it reflects hope and re-habitus. If the notion of raising one's voice for their right becomes their subconscious choice, this shall lead to groups of people who shall choose their liberty over oppression.

Hiron mentioned,

*"I think it's important to stand against any wrongdoing or crime. A society that is corrupted and unfair to its citizen needs to face the consequences, and I believe it is absolutely necessary. Also, raising our voices in movements reminds people in power to rethink their actions for upcoming days.....Honestly, even though we gathered to claim justice, it almost felt like a celebration because we do not naturally get to meet everyone and stay this much time together. Also, for people like us who have been interested in politics for so long, it almost felt like a win to participate in a movement that concerns us directly,"*

Since three of my interlocutors lived with their parents, I thought they must have adopted various techniques to participate in the movement. Their responses surprised me and made me wonder how our parents grew with us. Two interlocutors came to Dhaka for higher education; therefore, their families were not aware of their participation at first. However, when their activities went viral on social media their parents became aware of their actions. One of my interlocutors, Anita, said she initially lied to her parents about participating in the movement.

Later on, when they saw her video clips on social media, they repeatedly warned her to stay safe and asked her to think twice about taking any steps. They constantly remind her that if she has to live in this country, she must not pick a fight with people in power. The rest did not face any obstacles from their families regarding participation.

One of my interlocutors Ritika said,

*"My parents were a little skeptical because I was just 16 or 17. But then they didn't really stop me. They didn't join me but supported me and later got involved in the movement on a small scale. Basically, we, all students, joined the movement from our school Nalanda. Our teachers and principal took all of us to the movement."*

They were very young when this event happened, and lying to the parents for something they would disapprove of is not uncommon. Given this fact, it was quite interesting when my interlocutors said that only one of them had to lie to the parents or devise tactics for their absence at home.

During the movement, activists faced many difficulties. Internet cutoff, mobile network error, rumors, and social media under surveillance were a few common issues they all have faced. Some communicate through Facebook messenger and WhatsApp, and during the internet cutoff, they switched to texting on their mobile phone. They mentioned their helpless moment when

they heard some news that made them angry but could not detect the authenticity of it, and later on, they figured it was a rumour. Hiron said,

*"During the protest, we did not care for the internet shutdown, as we are already with the allies. But, ordinary people did not have access to the true scenario. Also, I did not have a cell phone with internet access."*

Anita mentioned,

*"We used two methods for the network disconnections. We divided into small groups of two or three people during the movement. We used our phones to contact other groups until the phone network was jammed. And we used to fix a few places known to all of us and tell each other that we shall see each other at that place at a given time."*

One of the interlocutors, Amin, mentioned an interesting fact,

*"Since we joined with our department, the people I know or might know- everyone was there. So the issue of communication was not there. However, when we faced the internet cutoff, we switched to 2G network from 3G; hence we had an internet connection, but slower."*

Our personal experiences shape us. Structural dispositions make us choose subconsciously. Pierre Bourdieu said, 'history turns into nature,' which indicates that we tend to do a lot of , things mostly unconsciously, which we later forget. Even though we tend to forget those, it becomes our muscle memory or second nature that we use further in our life. We become a slave to our habits and might not even recognize them. After an extended period, movements are

happening, and no matter how small or insignificant they might appear, they still would have their effect. People underwent changes from not reacting to the lawlessness for the longest time to standing on the street for their rights. Despite how little the change is, it might lead to something significant.

In Bangladesh, politics occurs in a crowded place and requires a crowd to have any relevance. Bangladeshi seem to adopt a new stream of politics where a 'body' or an individual plays an essential role within the crowd. Since its journey through double colonization, this country has previously observed the body's role. However, Since the Shahbag Movement in 2013, it has become more prominent that the stream of protest has changed, and the body now carries more importance in a movement than ever. As Sabina Chowdhury examined the popular crowd, we can observe similarities in the interlocutors' statements. No movement is autonomous. Recently occurred protests are also not entirely spontaneous. Even though spontaneity is a part of this crowd, they are well thought out and focused on their goal. Despite the state's strategy to break their solidarity by sending goons disguised as students or allies, these movements set excellent examples of collective action: as they stood still in front of violence.

As the interlocutors agreed, the movement did feel like a celebration. They stood on the road for hours claiming justice, yet feeling enthusiasm because people their age were protesting with them. It is indeed exciting when you are in the field, claiming justice with thousands of like-minded people. While most of the crowd was there due to their everyday struggle, some people participated spontaneously. It was an attempt to ensure their rights as a citizen. The road-safety issue is growing, and it is astonishing how easily we could lose our loved ones. In a

third-world developing country like Bangladesh, road safety is seemingly the government's least concern. It is intertwined with the political sphere that concerns government officials' interests. The Janata has struggled with poor conditioned or lack of public transport, and the reckless behavior of drivers along with a poor traffic system. Despite these struggles for years, it took a strong trigger for the Janata, in this case, the student, to start an uprising. The trigger was clear- the death of their classmate, but the reaction was phenomenal. Students, mainly from the age group of sixteen to eighteen, claimed their space on the road and demanded their fundamental right: the right to live. This movement was far different from an ideologically led movement. No political party had the lead, not at least at the beginning; it was the apolitical generation ("I Hate Politics" generation) who led the movement in an orderly manner with the solidarity of their peers.

Coming back to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, since we adopt and become enslaved by our habits, knowingly or unknowingly, participating in a movement to claim justice would eventually be embedded in their habitus. Thus with the practice and the habit of protesting, a generation that verbally once refused to join in political conversation may contribute to these again. There is a higher possibility that this would lead to forming a culture where contributing to social causes will be a choice, and they will choose it consciously. In later chapters, I intend to draw a picture of their expectations from the movement and how their personal perspectives were challenged through it.

## Chapter 6

### Expectation and Struggle

Every time someone raises their voice against injustice, we plant the seed of hope. This chapter discusses participants' expectations from the movement and the struggles they had to face during the movement, This chapter contains their experiences during the movement and how it shaped their perspective further.

While participating in the movement, three of the interlocutors expected some sort of change, whether in leadership or the traffic condition. Apart from those three, Anita said,

*"I didn't participate in the movement hoping the system will change. However, I hoped that at least if we protect the children together, the government and related ministries will get the message that the public is not always cowardly. That was my expected outcome."*

Years of state oppression have created a pattern of enduring injustice and wrongdoings. Breaking this cycle is necessary, as it projects resistance. Thus, when the youth shows their resistance to the violence against school-college-going children, it shows a sign of the cycle being broken.

Hiron mentioned,

*"I have noticed that in movements like this, we get to witness solidarity. People of different ideologies gather and stand together for one goal. For the time being, they*

*forget their hatred toward other groups. Together they stand against injustice. And that is beautiful- the solidarity they form."*

Crisis brings people together. Different people, coming from different background gathers together in crisis forming mobility. They form solidarity from standing together for a cause to getting beaten up by state forces. While many of these participants have faced police brutalities such as rubber bullets, teargas, and water shell, many also face the brutality of certain groups.

One of the interlocutors Mitu said,

*"The day the Jigatola clash happened, I was there than on the spot. I was there for a different purpose; I can't remember now. I was in there leaving from the North end. That is when I noticed the students were there looking for shelter. They were hyper and talking about police throwing rubber bullets and tear shells at them. It made me very angry, and I went outside to see what was happening. I went to the location where they attacked these students and saw an injured kid being carried away by others. If I didn't face these events directly, I wouldn't be that active throughout the movement. Another important thing I remember is that this one movement where students from both private students and public students are being together and with everything they are fighting. Before this movement, I never witnessed private university students being this active."*

While some still think that public university students exclusively form movements, recent periods tell a different story. We have witnessed the vigorous participation of private university students in the Quota reformation movement<sup>8</sup>, the No vat movement<sup>9</sup>. Private university students are engaging in national causes, and political issues show that the consciousness is spreading.

Hiron mentioned how he encountered "সাদা পোষাকের লোক" (state force in plain clothest). He said, *"We have encountered conflict with Chatra league near Hathirpool and the Science Laboratory area. And I personally was in white attire investigating officers who were disguising themselves among us, but I was eventually let go. This encounter happened thrice in my life, but by a white-shirted person; this is the first."*

Anita said how she became a part of the local police's passive aggression, *"There is an anonymous complaint to the police in my name. If someday, I become part of any trouble, which might cause the ruling party or anyone influential any harm, they will just put my name in the complaint to file the case. Also, the policeman around the entry point of the green road, who was on duty in that police box, knows me very well. And every time I crossed that area, they would sarcastically smile and comment at me. They even stopped my rickshaw several times just to verbally harass me."*

The remarkable fact about collective action is it gives you hope. These interlocutors have directly faced or witnessed brutality in some form, yet they chose to participate the next day. Violence could not stop them from portraying their rage.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/2018/04/10/traffic-normal-students-lift-blockade>

<sup>9</sup> <https://m.theindependentbd.com/printversion/details/15471>

Hiron mentioned how he became a part of this,

*"we were heading towards Jhigatola from the science laboratory. We saw rubber bullets fired at the student protesters in front of Yellow. At that time, a person was injured right before me."*

One of my interlocutors, Amin, faced brutality by "Helmet Bahini," and he was admitted to the hospital for days due to injury.

*"I clearly remember that day. I, along with three other friends, was in the protest. Suddenly police came and blocked three ways and tried to scatter us. We were running towards that one free way to leave. When we moved past ScienceLab Aarong, this is when a bunch of people with hockey sticks and big sticks caught us and started beating us brutally. ওরা লেবার লীগ ছিলো নাকি ছাত্র লীগ বুঝার উপায় ছিলো না। আমাদেরকে ফেলে এলোপাথাড়ি পিটাইছে। যেখানে খুশি মারছে। ঐ সময়ে আরও যেইসব হেলমেট বাহিনী আমাদের ক্রস করতেছিলো, ওরাও থেমে আমাদের দুইটা বাড়ি মেরে গেছে (These young people might be from the Labour league or Chhatra league, I don't remember. But while this group beat us, every other passing "Helmet Bahini" associate who saw this stopped and beat us for a while)."*

Amin also mentioned, "আমাদের যেখানে ফেলে মারেতছিলো, তার ঠিক ৫০ কি ৬০ গজ দূরেই অনেক পুলিশ ছিলো, তারা একটাবারও আসে নাই। তাকায় দেখছে যে

মেয়েই ফেলতেছে, কিন্তু এক পাও নড়ে নাই (*Police were standing about 50 or 60 gauge distance, yet they did not bother to come and save us. None even tried.*)”

Amin and his three friends were injured. However, Amin's case was worse, and they took him to the Popular medical center. In the medical center, the doctors secretly took them and offered them their cloaths because they were ordered to not provide treatment to the protesters. Amin's arms and legs were broken. He could not join the next day, naturally. But his friends, who were quite injured, still joined as they did not have to be admitted to the hospital.

Hiron said, “*One of my friends, Rimon, single-handedly tried to stop other students from trying to vandalize public transport. And it was a common scenario among protesters.*

*A guy from Chatra League tried to disguise himself among us, and when other students realized it, they were willing to beat him up, but then some other protestors handed the guy over to the police. Experiencing such a dynamic movement of student protestors inspired me to attend more.*”

These are the experience that shapes us. Breaks our stereotypes and challenges our internal dogma. It shows us that there is so much more than our understanding of a person. When the youth participated in this movement, they did not expect any solid outcome from the authority. Yes, the youth had expectations to some extent, but it was not utopian to begin with. All they did was acknowledge an injustice (on a big pile of injustice formed over many years), and without

overanalyzing, they took a stance against it, because they too have faced these at somepoint of their daily life. Dhaka growing as a metropolitan, witnessing rapid urbanization, making it difficult for its people to have anything but a hustle life. It is the mindset where one thinks they must crash work all day to reach their goal; otherwise, they are not worthy. The peer pressure of capitalist society does not allow a person to grow as a community; it keeps their individuals unsatisfied, under the terror of losing basic needs at any given moment. In a situation like this, looking after another person or oneself is crucial. Losing people to an unfortunate event, in this case, road accidents have become normalized in Bangladesh due to their repetitive occurrence. The road safety movement, hence, was long overdue.

As the division of labour grows into a smaller portion, the dependency of individuals also grows more. This dependency led to a collective consciousness, eventually making society capable of collective movement. Participation is considered one of the critical contributions towards building a society. The mobilizations we see, of course, spontaneity is noticed first, albeit the repetitive everyday life and slow endurance of repression that begin to trigger our instinct of revolting. When he participated in the movement, knowing he could be the victim of brutality, Amin did not stop. Even after getting beaten up by Helmet Bahini, he would have participated the next day if only he could. Two friends who got beaten up also did not face extreme injury and participated. All five of my interlocutors admitted they knew people who faced state brutality during the movement yet participated the next day. It was a long negotiation among different types of people. Despite all disagreements, they all stood together in the end.

## Chapter 7

### Impact of participation : Individual and Social

Social change often breeds social movements, and movements, in turn, breed additional change. Social movements are organized group efforts to generate socio-cultural change (Rao, 2006). In this portion, I will discuss possible shift in individual and their social settings through participation in by a particular social movement- Road Safety Movement 2018.

Our expectations rarely meet reality. When these young people participated in a movement, they had something on their minds. Their perspective could change in many ways. The experience could lead them in various directions. Interlocutor Mitu said:

*"I was not disappointed; instead, I was very hopeful. We stood together- that was important to me. Though I expected to see better leadership later, I still didn't see anything. So, a slight disappointment is there for me. But, the thing is, I have participated in the anti-rape movement since then. And I like to take photos; if I hear about a movement that resonates with me, I go there. As per participating in the further movement, I will definitely observe their stance first, if that resonates with my view, then I would participate again,"*

Anita said, *"I was then a sophomore at Dhaka university and witnessed a very peculiar mass mobilization in front of my eyes. We have this conception of the new generation: they are self-centered, always busy with social media, and not concerned*

*about the country. They stood up for an unknown boy; I witnessed that many guardians also joined to save the children. Not only just their kids but also other people's kids. So I saw that the collectivism of our country is not always very bad. That day I learned to appreciate the power of solidarity.....However, I might rethink participation in upcoming movements, as I have physical conditions that do not allow me to be as active as I was in 2018,"*

*Hiron said,*

*"Solidarity is the most important factor for me. How different people came across and stood together for a cause, for me, this act is what builds and holds society together."*

*Amin mentioned his disappointment, "Nothing matters. Nothing matters because no matter the purpose of any movement, it is always portrayed as a stance against the government. As if it is a conspiracy to bring the ruling party down. The Road Safety movement also had this portrayal; hence we witnessed no positive outcome. As per participating in future movements, If I am deprived of my rights, why won't I protest? As responsible citizens, we should stand against injustice.*

*I participated in the 'Sundarbans Bachao' movement when we were students in the first or second year. After that, nothing much happened. Then I was in the protest against rape organized by the DU. So if it resonates with my view, I will definitely participate."*

While talking to them, they shared many experiences. Many striking moments forced them to change a part of themselves, even if it was very minor. Hiron shared the experience that challenged him to rethink his stereotypes. He discussed how one road safety movement turned the most reluctant person about politics from their own opinion and joined the movement. People who do not engage in political conversations started discussing these issues and stated their opinion regarding more national issues. Hiron stated a moment that was most striking for him,

*"I was in Nilkhet, printing posters for the movement along with a few classmates. While we were taking a break, one of my classmates said, 'দেশের এই অবস্থা হইছে কারণ প্রধানমন্ত্রী একজন নারী। লোক হইলে এমন হইতো না (All these issues are occurring because of our Prime Minister is a woman. This situation would not occur if a man was in power).' Immediately another responded, 'বাজে কথা বইলো না। এরশাদ, হিটলার কি মহিলা ছিলো? (Stop talking rubbish, was Hitler or Ershad a woman!?)'"*

What was striking in this conversation was that the one who countered the misogynist comment had studied in Madrasha before college. Hiron, along with his other mates, had this impression that this person was probably a misogynist. After this conversation, they slowly realized that their idea of him was entirely wrong. They were under the impression of stereotypes. This person does have his personal view and political view.

The youth has an enthusiastic approach toward life that makes them construct a decision that older people might not consider. These movements are constructed by this youth, who has energy

and is hopeful. They are old enough to experience the cruelty of life and young enough to jump a bridge to make life less miserable. Even though the youth has been and will be initiating the movements, we have witnessed participants of different ages. In the road safety movement in 2018, we have seen parents' solidarity with the students. We have witnessed parents feeding the protesters. Working-class people, especially the tea-stall owner and rickshaw pullers, have shown their support by providing them with food or free rides. In fact, the moment when the student faced brutality, it was the rickshaw puller who helped them get away from the place. People from various classes acknowledged the struggle.

The interlocutors have experienced an event where their truths about life were questioned. When Hiron mentioned this event, where his stereotypes were questioned, and he had to reevaluate his perspective, it indeed is a greater accomplishment in life. Growing by any means is a significant thing in life. We as humans hold our version of truth and observation towards people and life. We often get caught up with these factors and refuse to consider other person's reality. When we are struck by a situation like this, we question our reality; it changes us as a person. Holding certain perspectives toward a particular group has become institutionalized through social practices. These perspectives can be decreased through collective solidarity and create a unified society. These events and participation on a broad scale have increased people's tolerance toward each other. They will be able to endure the outcomes of a movement despite their personal disagreements, which makes us hopeful about this generation.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

Not long back, young people took over roads to claim justice for their mates. Their courageous act and strong will surprised the mass people. People were hopeful when the students were in charge of the roads, and they carefully checked every vehicle for licenses and even created a separate lane for ambulances. Almost four years have passed since the movement took place. Many things have changed, yet the road safety concern remains the same as before. Mobilizing in an authoritarian regime is challenging. As per the literature, it is evident that the stream of movements has changed. In the era of rapid urbanization and capitalism, people face challenges in mobilizing. However, the youth has once again proved that they indeed are future of the society. Ironically, a crisis can bring different people together and allows them to mobilize for a better cause. Their collective consciousness, willingness to help in a crisis, and endurance of the brutality contribute to building social solidarity.

This dissertation first examines their primary demographic information to identify their social position. It also looks into their political views, as it plays a vital role in shaping a person's perspectives. Secondly, it looks deeper into why the youth feels the utmost urge to be a part of a revolutionary act and the reasons behind this. Further, it explores their expectation of the movement and the struggles they faced during and after the movement. Moreover, this dissertation aimed to look deeper into the social phenomenon; it helps us understand how it impacted individuals and society.

Almost three months spent on this study have taught me to be hopeful in a challenging situation because as long as young people are willing to participate in a social cause, things will turn out

okay, if not good. Time constraint was indeed a factor. It creates a limit on collecting data. Since I have only interviewed five people, that too only focused on a particular area of Dhaka city; the findings are limited. Since this is a work in process, I intend to look further into the issue while exploring more factors of this issue. The information and experience I have gathered through this work is going to help conduct the study on a bigger scale. The shortcoming and experience opened a path for me to go beyond my comfort zone to explore and learn how to endure different situations that would allow me to work more carefully.

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