

Constructing Docile Body: an Ethnographical Study of the Pabna Mental Hospital

Thesis Presented By

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Abstract

The word ‘mad’ or ‘madness’ is very commonly used as a word that refers to several diversified person or situation. It has dissimilar meanings in different circumstances, varies from perspective to perspective that can have both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ vibe. For example we can say that sometimes ‘madness’ indicates to a certain condition where a person becomes desperate for anything or any person. Besides, it is known as a severe mental illness. Mental illness is some kind of disorder that affects someone’s mental condition, stability, mood, thinking, behavior etc.¹ In Bangla the meaning of ‘Mad’ is ‘পাগল’² which does not carry a simple meaning either. It rather replicates a situation where a person becomes useless for the society or people and cannot do anything properly. Besides, It portrays a man violently to some extent with disrespect. Most of the time, the causes behind mental illness are unclear. It can come as a result of any kind of mental pressure, problems, anxiety, depression or even genetically. However, absolute cure of mental illness is difficult according to medical science. It needs altered treatment, specialized and controlled environment. Hence, mental patients need different treatment that includes comfortable environment as well, which often becomes impossible to be provided at home. Therefore, mental hospitals or mental asylums are there for their treatment. Mental hospitals provide specialized treatments for mental disorder that cannot be compared to other physical disorders. Mental hospitals are like institutions that have some certain rules, follow some discipline and the people live there are bound to follow those. However, mental hospitals mostly have residential arrangements for their patients as they need to be kept under observation and maintain a particular routine for everything. As mental hospitals have residence for their patients, they must keep their patients under surveillance, control and make them follow some rules to keep them under discipline for maintaining certain order or system in the hospital residence. Now the issue might come in mind that surveillance and control of any authority in any institution might harm individual agency. Besides, keeping several people under surveillance to make them ‘well’ cannot

¹ This definition is taken from Wikipedia since I wanted to assert a very generic definition of mental illness which is comprehensible for mass people.

² পাগল is a Bangla word which is translated as mad or mentally ill.

be done without having power relation related to it. As mentally ill have unstable mental condition, they often fail to protest for their individual agency and independence.

In my research, I have tried to understand the individual agency³ of mentally ill people in asylum, how power is being deployed on 'docile' body and the idea of surveillance. Moreover, I have tried to explain the dichotomy of sanity and insanity. Lastly, to know about the social construction and socio-cultural phenomena regarding insanity in the context of Bangladesh. And to conduct my research I have chosen Pabna Mental Hospital, located in Hemayetpur, Pabna as my field.

³ Individual agency is having the power, authority or scenario for once to take actions according to one's own will and choice.

Introduction: Dichotomy of ‘Sanity’ and ‘Insanity’

There was a girl belonged from a very well established and economically upper class family. Her father used to run a huge business. She started loving a guy who worked in her father’s office in a lower position. That guy was not economically as strong as the girl’s family, did not belong from an economic upper class. But they loved each other a lot. Days were passing well. One day her father came to know about this relationship. When that girl’s father got to know about their love, he became very angry and upset that his daughter fell in love with someone who did not belong to the same class as them. He decided to lock her daughter up stopped her studies and cut all the contacts from the outside world. Her daughter cried and requested a lot but he denied. And one day they got to know that the guy his daughter used to love died in a road accident. Hearing this news the girl became numb and started acting weirdly. Father thought his daughter will overcome this shock by the time and will be healed. But this whole incident created a permanent damage in her mind. Day by day situation got worse and her daughter completely went out of mind. According to the medical specialists, she was becoming mentally ill, completely unstable and she needed immediate treatment. Her condition was getting worse and she started becoming ‘insane’. Her family finally decided to get her admitted into Pabna Mental Hospital. She was there for three to four months. When, they saw her situation got a bit better than previous, her family and doctors both decided to take her to Dhaka and keep her with family. But keeping her with family was a wrong decision as after a week or two, her mental condition became even worse than before. She was not at all feeling comfortable with her family. Then she was again sent to mental hospital but doctors and psychiatrists failed to make her condition better and she was again sent to Dhaka as, doctors declared that keeping her at the hospital will not cause any betterment to her condition. She finally came back and started living with her family. But this was not easy at all, nor for her neither for her family. She and family got humiliated a lot, neighbors started mentioning house as ‘mad house’. Neighbors and outsiders left no stone unturned to make them feel humiliated. They became socially vulnerable by the stones thrown directly or indirectly towards them by the society. That ‘mad’ girl was the eldest daughter of that family. People were shaming them and insulting them in several ways. Her father faced difficulties in getting his other daughters married as no one was ready to marry a girl who has a mad sister. Gradually their ‘upper class’ well established big family turned into a sad, abandoned family. They could not manage to handle the unorthodox

situation. By time girl got older and her insanity became too tough to handle even for her family members. She was kept in a locked room and only her mother could go there and fed her. This is how tough days were passing and one fine morning when her mother went in front of her room to give her breakfast, saw that her daughter was lying on the floor like a stone body and eyes were open. She realized her daughter was dead. Family members were obviously sad but deep inside probably it was a relief for them as they had a big family, had three more daughters to get married and much more. This is not a story, rather this is a real incident of a distant relative of mine. I heard this from my mother.

Now this story tossed quite a few questions and thoughts towards me. Why did she became ill? Did she become insane? How can we measure that she was insane? Why do we need to lock one up if his/her attitude does not somehow match with our pre perception? What is the power relation between not agreeing with her choice and locking her up? I thought to dig deeper into the matter. I then thought of madness. I was lost into the sea of thoughts on what madness is or what is sane and insane. I have heard this story several times from my mother's mouth and every time it made me thought about many issues. I wanted to know more, I wanted to give new dimensions to my thinking. When I grew older, read Foucault's 'Birth of Clinic', 'Madness and Civilization' 'Discipline and Punish', Freud's psycho analysis which made me think even more about these topics. These readings made me think about fine line between 'sanity' and 'insanity', when do family members or society start calling someone 'insane' or 'mad'. Foucault in his book 'Madness and Civilization' mentioned:

“self-attachment is the first sign of madness, but it is because man is attached to himself that he accepts error as truth, lies as reality, violence and ugliness as beauty and justice.”(Foucault, 1961, pp: 26)

To understand the dichotomy of 'sanity' and 'insanity' first we need to understand the general definition of these two words. In general, the meaning of 'sanity' or 'normal' is having the ability to think and behave in a rational manner. It is often defines with the particular society or condition. If someone's condition behavior or attitude becomes synced from the society's pre assumptions then he/she might be called 'sane'. On the other hand 'insanity' is declared as 'madness' 'mental illness', insane people behave irrationally. Whenever a person acts differently from the accepted behavior of his/her society can be called an 'insane'. However, as I have mentioned earlier that I

have conducted my research in Pabna Mental Hospital, I got the chance to have conversation with both ‘sane’ and ‘insane’ people at the same time going to a place that consists of these two different group of people. And through that, I observed the difference, I tried to find the fine line, tried to understand the dichotomy which I have explained in the later parts of my thesis paper.

Moreover, I came across a Baul song from band Lalon named ‘পাগল ছাড়া দুনিয়া চলে না’⁴ to which fascinated even more to know and learn about madness. Song regarding mad or madness belong to Bengali music and literature so vastly and with great interest. There are a lot of songs that have been written on ‘পাগলামি’⁵ over the period. In Bengali culture, the word ‘পাগলামি’ is considered as a very adorable word. It does not always portrays the actual meaning of itself which is eventually considered as a form of mental illness according to medical science. However, in Bengali literature, ‘পাগলামি’ is use to express keenness, desperation or divine love, affection for anything or any person. The song that I have mentioned below is one of my most favourite songs to express how the word ‘পাগল’⁶ is used to describe a particular kind of sentiment.

“তুই পাগল তোর মনও পাগল
পাগল পাগল করিস না
পাগল ছাড়া দুনিয়া চলে না
ও হয় রে
পাগল ছাড়া দুনিয়া চলে না”⁷

⁴ Translation: world is complete without madness.

⁵ Translation: Madness

⁶ Translation: Mad

⁷ Translation: You are mad, so are your mind. Don’t blame madness. The world is incomplete without madness.

Context and Rationalities:

The story that I have mentioned above is the first and foremost reason that attracted me the most to write and work on this topic. Foucault's writings have always worked as an inspiration and attraction toward this particular topic. Thorough out the time of studying anthropology, I could not acquire much knowledge about mental illness or about hospital culture and asylum. But as it has always been the area of my interest, I thought to study by my own and conduct a small research to write my paper. Furthermore, I have read Dr. Shahaduzzaman's book named "একটি হাসপাতাল একজন নৃবিজ্ঞানী কয়েকটি ভাঙা হাড়"⁸ which was fascinating enough for me conduct a small research on this topic. He basically wrote is book on an orthopedic hospital culture of Bangladesh. He showed that hospitals represent several characteristics of a society, it shows different class divisions, and each ward of a hospital has its own characteristics. By reading this book, I wanted to know more about the idea and discipline of hospital. Foucault addressed 'mechanics of power' in his writing which essentially defines having a hold, power over bodies through discipline. Institutions, such as, hospital has diseased bodies that are considered to be submissive, docile and hence, the practice of power relation is there (Foucault, 1975, pp: 138). Knowing about all these matters, first thought that came to my mind was about mentally unstable people. I wanted to know that how they keep their entity or agency as mentally people are considered vulnerable, irrational and unstable according to psychiatrists. Telling this, it will be better to be clear what agency of a human is. Agency of a human is referred to a state where an individual can make his own wishes along with maintaining his own personality and choice. However, this is how I got interested into mental illness, how it is explained and accepted in the society. Thus, I chose Pabna Mental Hospital as my field of research. It is the biggest mental hospital in the country and located in my home town and so nothing can be much more perfect for this topic. Agency of a particular person works very differently from scenario to scenario and person to person. The idea of understanding the agency of mentally ill people fascinated me the most. Also when I read about isolating diseased body, institutionalizing diseases, making a body docile or submissive by deploying power, I thought of knowing more about what happens in terms of mentally ill people, how do the authority deal with them. These are the main reasons behind the choice of this topic. Likewise, the idea of

⁸ Translation of the name of Dr. Shahaduzzaman's book: 'One Hospital One Anthropologist Some Broken Bones'

institutionalizing bodies on the basis of a sickness, specifically mental sickness, dealing with mental issues, irrationalities, how body becomes a space of power practice and the process of normalizing were some more issues that attracted me towards this topic. How power can make a body submissive, how tagging someone as ‘insane’ can give you the power to control one’s soul and body, how an asylum can draw a fine line between sane and insane and such things have driven me to this research and thesis. All these issues I have stated above were running throughout my head and I have found that conducting research on this topic can be rational if I focus on these topics.

The Problem:

Understanding all these issues that I wanted to know is impossible within this short period of time. Henceforth, I felt the necessity of confining the research within some specific topics. While preparing ground for my research, I decided to be specific about what I want to understand, otherwise it would have been a problematic study for me. While I was taking a stand position of my research, many obstacles came in my way. First of all the access to the mental hospital, then came the access to the authority. Somehow I have managed all those. But a part of my research demands interviewing the patients. Some said that interviewing mentally ill people won’t help me, they won’t be in a condition of talking properly. I was told that the stand I have taken is not easy and right. The literatures and references that I am using are not relevant to write on the context of Bangladesh. I have gone thrice in Pabna Mental Hospital for doing ethnography. First time I got an easy access and could record my interviews. But second and third time, entering there became restricted. I needed a strong source to enter there. But entering there did not solved my problem, there were many more issues that was coming in my ways. No one from the authority was ready to give interview, they were disturbed with my presence. When they understood what I was trying to do, they allowed me to take notes only. After requesting a lot, they allowed me to record interviews with phone but no pictures were allowed. While interviewing the director, I encountered a situation where he was not very keen and easy to my questions and was avoiding answers while being annoyed at me. Besides there so many unwanted people or situation happened which I was not aware of. For an example I was called by a stranger in the asylum premises and was almost

forced to talk to him while his words were not making any such meaning to me. Talking to mental patients was the biggest of all since it was the first time I was having a conversation with a mental patient or someone like that. Moreover having the permission was not at all easy at all. These were some of the major problems I faced during the ethnography and while preparing the ground. Despite of all these problems. Step by step I managed to cross all the obstacles I wanted to pass and reached to all people whom I wanted to. I tried very hard to conduct my research in a way that I wanted.

Methodological Consideration:

Foucault has always been my inspiration in case of writing, thinking and philosophic understanding. His ideas have kept making me think about new dimensions quite often. ‘Madness and Civilization’ and ‘Discipline and Punish’ are the two books of him that inspired me the most to think about asylum, institution, hospital, surveillance, discipline, power practice, madness, etc. Albeit his writings that attracted me the most were mostly focused on Western Europe, I wanted to know more about all these matters in the context of South Asia; to be more specific, Bangladesh. Then I got know about the book named “একটি হাসপাতাল একজন নৃবিজ্ঞানী কয়েকটি ভাঙা হাড়” written by Shahaduzzaman on the basis of his ethnographic research. Shahaduzzaman is mainly a writer who has completed his doctorate in Medical Anthropology. This book of Shahaduzzaman is basically an ethnographic piece on hospital culture, specifically he conducted his ethnography on a renowned hospital of Bangladesh. However, I was fetched to be attracted to this matter by this book of him.

Among the four fields of Anthropology, medical anthropology has always been a study of notice for me. According to me, learning about hospital culture or submissive bodies is very unusual and reveals some unknown, underlying stories. I have faced a lot of questions before and after choosing this topic. As a student of anthropology, I was always interested in institutionalized culture, hospital, authoritarian culture, power practice and was eager to learn about this from my own observations. Hence when the time of deciding my undergrad thesis topic came, I immediately went for this topic without even giving it a second thought. Among the hospitals, mental hospitals has always been my area of interest. As my home town is in Pabna, I grew up listening about Pabna Mental Hospital and was very absorbed to observe that by my own.

My great grandfather used to live in Pabna. So one portion of my paternal relatives still live there. The biggest mental hospital of Bangladesh, Pabna Mental Hospital is located very near to my home town. I went to Pabna several times but never thought of going to the mental hospital without any reason, just to roam around. For mass people, Pabna Mental Hospital is a source of entertainment, general people just randomly entre there for casual rambling, meet the mental patient and make

fun of them. This is how mass people treat that place, they take it lightly and it has become a matter of fun for them. This did not disappoint me though rather it helped me to dig deeper so that I can see from their perspective also without bringing any judgement towards them in my mind. This scenario is somehow to me concomitant to the power practice and the hard to find entity of the patients.

However, some real incidents that I have heard and saw between some relatives of mine made me thought about all these deeply. These made me feel that there are some hidden and mysterious stories about mental asylum that are unknown to general people. These attracted me the most from my childhood. Then all these years of studying anthropology, I got familiar with four sub fields of anthropology proposed by Franz Boas and one of those is Medical Anthropology. My craving for this study got bigger when I read Foucault, Freud but found very less readings about South-Asian subcontinent. Especially about my country. In spite of knowing that entering into Pabna Mental Hospital and finding information won't be easy for me at all. Finally, I took it as a challenge and started finding answers of my questions. Throughout my research, many issues came to my mind. But for this small paper, I particularly focused on few issues. Those are: social construction about mental illness and socio-cultural phenomena. I tried to understand concept of normal body and submissive body and individual agency of mentally ill people, how power is being deployed through surveillance. Lastly to see how do the authority 'normalize' insanity. Through my ethnographic research, I wanted others to know about these issues.

I have learned that when a researcher is doing an ethnographic research, he or she must have very understandable mentality and passion about the subject. Otherwise, understanding or capturing every small details become very difficult being a third eye. Being unbiased is another major role for the researcher. Sometimes belonging from a privileged position might cause little harm while contacting with research population for getting information. Thus, I decided not to reveal from where do I belong during my fieldwork. Moreover, I made myself ready for several days before going to the field so that I can be one of them. I did not want myself to be accepted as a third person. I kept all my pre assumptions and judgments away while going to the asylum. To build up the rapport with them I first needed to look like a random and similar to them type human through my dress up and appearances. Then I had to think that since I had gone via the link of my uncle who is a journalist I must make all of the authority members forget that stuff through my

conversation. I had never mentioned about my uncle. I thought it might cause fear or obstacle towards sharing the exact. I at the very first declared that this conversation will be for a research paper and not any other purpose. Later I always maintained a toning which should bring the trust towards me. Perhaps, while talking to patients I wanted to talk in rural accents like them so that they don't feel that I am 'other'. I did not judge and made them believe that I am no way near a doctor since they have a trauma on the doctors. Thus it helped me to mingle and blend with them which was very necessary for any research finding.

When I started my fieldwork, my first priority was interviewing the authority, to be precise, the director, psychiatrists, doctors, nurses, ward boy and social workers of Pabna Mental Hospital to understand the idea of power relation, surveillance and submissive body. Afterward, I decided to interview some of the mental patients who were comparatively at a better mental state and had gone through the treatments and counseling sessions to know individual agency and entity. Lastly, interviewed some of the patients' relatives and family members to know about their condition, to understand the societal view and went through some of the case studies as well. I was excited and nervous enough as it was a research on which I had so much interest for so long and is happening in my home town. The whole experience was very different. When I went to talk to the patients first, I saw that they were kept like prisoners, locked in a big room. When I stood in front of the locked door which was see through, all of them came in front of the door, started looking at me and talking continuously. Since, that was my first time, I became a bit afraid and couldn't understand what all of them were saying. But I controlled myself immediately and focused on my work. When I concentrated on what they were saying, I heard complains about the authority most and then complains about their parents. However, conducting IDI or KII was not possible with the mental patients. But I conducted KII with the people from authority. As I mentioned earlier that my uncle who works in Maasranga Television was my source to contact there, I got the chance to conduct KII of the director of Pabna Mental Hospital as well. It was pretty much of a comfort zone for me since it was my home town, I was from a privileged position and had a powerful source of contact, but it was problematic at the same time when they got to know that I belong from a privileged position. I had semi-structured questions for interview as having structured conversation was not possible there.

As an anthropology student, I have learned that negotiation is one of the most important things for conducting a qualitative research. While I was interviewing the authority, especially those who belonged from an upper position hierarchically, I tried to negotiate and probe as these were the most effective ways of getting information from them. Talking with the relatives of patients were the most difficult of my research. Participant observation and informal decisions were two of the most major parts of my research for gathering information. These techniques helped me to get most of the answers of my questions. Participant observation helped me the most to understand 'hospital culture'.

According to me, an ethnographer's duty is to have the ability of identifying his or her own position to the group he/she is studying. Having the thought of "studying a particular group" might create power relationship between ethnographer and subject. Hence, involvement and trying to be a part was more convenient for me in terms of getting information.

Pabna Mental Hospital: A Brief History:

Pabna Mental Hospital is happen to be the first and biggest mental hospital and rehabilitation center for mental patient of Bangladesh. In 1957, Pabna Mental Hospital was temporarily established at a local land lord's house that was named as 'Shitolai House'. At the beginning when it started, it had 60 beds only. As it was established before the liberation war of 1971, local people say that the structure of this hospital has some essence of British architecture. This mental hospital was located at Shitolai House till 1959. After that, during the end of 1959, it was relocated permanently in a huge land of 111.25 acre at Hemayetpur. Hemayetpur was 5 kilometers far from the main town, near the bank of Padma River. This land in Hemayetpur was given by Sri Sri Thakur Anukul Chandra. He was a great influential leader, physician, educationalist. He spread the high spiritual movement in Bangladesh which gradually spread to India fas well. His initiative of giving land for making hospital was really appreciated. However, Pabna Mental Hospital is the only hospital that is ran by the Government. When the new building was established, it had 200 beds only. Later the number of bed was increased to 400. In 2003, the number of beds were increased again and made it 500 under Mental Health Research Institute. Currently, among this 500 beds, there are 150 paying bed and 350 non-paying beds. Pabna Mental Hospital is a well known mental hospital among the South Asian subcontinent. Foundation of this hospital was planned by Mohammad Hossain Ganguli, who was a civil surgeon of Pabna.⁹

Pabna Mental Hospital has total 18 wards including the drug addiction healing ward. This hospital has internal section, external section and vocational training center. This hospital even offers training centers for doctors, medical students, paramedics, nurses. But doctors and medical specialists often complain that they don't get upgraded and advanced medical instruments for doing treatments. Doctors and psychiatrists don't even get any separate space or laboratory for conducting their research on mental health. Mental hospital authority did not increased the number of staffs. As it had 200 beds only at the beginning, they appointed staffs and nurses according to that number. In all these years the number of beds has increased but authority did not increase the

⁹ These information about history of Pabna Mental Hospital was taken from the authority of the hospital and the local people near the hospital during interview as there is no in detailed documentation of the Pabna Mental Hospital. I strongly relied on oral history and for authenticity of these information, I have also checked history archive of the hospital.

number of staffs in the hospital. According to the number of 200 beds, the hospital had 472 post to run it. Among these 472 posts, only 336 staffs are employed in these posts. Rest 136 posts has remained vacant for a long time. Currently, this hospital has only 4 medical officers to run everything but they are not specialist for mental health or psychologist. Extra responsibilities are given on the assistant professors of Pabna Medical College. Other than that, it has two senior consultants, 1 clinical psychiatrist, 1 residential medical officer, 7 clinical assistant, 5 medical officer and 2 assistant register. Other 125 posts for regular staffs has been remained vacant which is causing problem in running the hospital and giving proper treatment to the patients. It shows how inefficiently authority is running and it is a prove of paying less attention on a serious matter. According to the director and doctors of mental hospital, the condition of treatment is not getting improved, those who worked here previously had lacking in sincerity might be a cause of not being able to provide proper treatment to the mental patients. The locals and relatives of the mental patients have complained about the hospital and authority.

Construction and Architecture of the Hospital:

Environment plays a key role to shape the physiological and psychological state of human. On the course of the last century, environment and architectural contribution inside a psychiatric hospital has been acknowledged to be a prime mantle that rehabilitates the human mind, and its priority has only been growing ever since. Hence, the modern thought of an ideal institution is to establish such a leeway where people can get mental health care facility, a guild to heal the psychologically challenged people, a foundation for not only learning more about the patient but at the same time also offering training and educational facilities for their families and the society. The heterogeneity of human reasoning and the philosophical aspect of mind is miscellaneous, therefore the diversity of psychiatric patients also demand diverse surrounding, so that the aim is to provide them with suitable spaces as per to their needs rather than making it a prison. On top of that, the ideal space should be able to construct a scope for to nourish the creative sides as well as basic survival skills of the psychologically challenged people, so that they are not labeled as ‘burden’ in the society. Perception is fabricated by the interaction between a person and one's surrounding, which includes planned architecture, built space, and the people using them. This correlation is of prominent

importance, especially in the field of psychiatry due to the lingering effect of a disturbed mind. There has been a considerable change in the administration toward the mentally ailed, its reflection is also seen in the progression of the related building structures. It is conceived as a fact that architecture has great influence on people, and people also influence architecture. So, the architecture of mental institutes like Pabna Psychiatric Center can resonate how or if a society still stigmatizes the mentally ill. The likelihood of design and structure, going about as an impetus, to get change in this cliché attitude of our own is likewise something that has brought about the consideration, regardless of whether architecture can add to the battle against partiality, prejudice and stigma.



(Picture take by: Moumita Islam) Entrance of the Pabna Mental Hospital



(Pictures taken by: Moumita Islam)

Corridors of the hospital heading towards the ill patients which are quite similar to Labyrinth.¹⁰

¹⁰ It is similar to labyrinth because these corridors seemed to be more like maze. Every corridor has similar look which often confuses patients who try to run away from the hospital.



(Pictures taken by: Moumita Islam) The abandoned staff quarters in the hospital compound

The initiative to establish the Mental hospital was taken by the Civil Surgeon of Pabna District in 1957, at a local landlord's house. From there due to having a small proximity, in 1959 the set up was relocated about 8 km away from the district town of Pabna, in a place known as Hemayetpur. Pabna shares its boundary with Sirajgang District in the north-east, it's south-east boundary with the Rajshahi Division and in the north-west with Natore District. The fertility of the land comes with the luxury of having Padma, Ichamati, Gumani, Baral and Hurasagar running along its course,

where Jamuna River in the eastern border separates it from Manikgonj District while in the south, Padma river main stream down the Ganges river segregates it from Kushtia District and Rajbari District. In any event, Pabna being in the monsoon region is hot and humid with an average temperature of 36.8 °C in the warmer seasons and around 9.6 °C in the colder ones, while getting mostly drenched in rainfall from May to October and with an average annual rainfall of 1872mm with humidity of 75 on an annual average.

On the geographical outset, the Hemayetpur mental compound needs to be standing against heat waves, humid conditions and heavy rainfall along with its after effects. Starting with an area of 111.25 acres of land then later due to some land allotments was cut down to 78.5 acres. comprises the compound district. Within its domain lies a 6 storied medical college compound which is newly built along with hostels for girls and boys, while the mental hospital comprises of an outdoor unit most near to the entry gates for initial patient examinations, 8 two storied male wards in adjacent columns including a two storied male ward for special cases, 3 two storied female wards where separating the male and female wards lies a single storied admin compound, kitchen, a two storied doctors chamber and diagnostic centre, recreational unit for females and an auditorium, while all these are connected via long block wise corridors. There is also a mosque, a pond and an abandoned hindu zamindar house within the hospital's plot. Along the outskirts of institute, many staff quarters were built but remain abandoned as a result of unjust price and poor facilities claimed by staffs. Provided that, the structures only occupy 17.5 acre from the district of 78.5 acre, meaning 61 acre of land still remains untouched, green, and unproductive and is potentially useful for future expansions.

In view of that the structure was designed and built during the last century, it critically lacks to provide few of the very basic criteria to stand as an ideal health care unit. Where, the damp walls cannot support even the not very modern health care machines like MRI, even few wards were forced to be emptied in consequence of damp and leaky walls. While, the monsoon sheds drizzle at places inside the institute, in summer the heat waves always easily prevail over the cramped but insufficient fans hanging down the tall ceiling. The women in the female wards faced the worse in these condition, where they to go bald-headed for not to collapse during the heat waves and for to avoid lice out breaks during wet days. Altogether, special unit for disable and cripple patient is

still unavailable, no dining space and bland white washed rectangular cage like wards revolve around the diverse inhabiting patients. On top of that, playing along the fear of social outcast, somewhat by the local community, the windows are mostly barred and shut. The only time the inhabitants get to enjoy a good view is while striding towards the kitchen through the monotonous white washed long corridors to fetch food, as in the recent years recreational activities such as outdoor games or activities has been restricted on the other hand movie room or the auditorium events are a scarce treat. However, amidst all these shortcomings, the ongoing renovation of the old tattered building and future plans of expansion hangs over like a ray of hope.

Defining and Explaining Mental Illness

It's not at all an easy task to define anything mental. First of all it is hard to define illness actually. Then comes the mental illness. Illness is a state where a person cannot feel good enough to pass his/her daily life. It is a condition where body and mind does not work properly according to the person's wish or so. Illness is a complex condition where the body or the mind or both cannot sync properly. Drawing a one liner defining illness is almost an impossible task. Still we can draw a situation where illness can be comprehended through some explanations and examples.

In a generic view illness is occurred when any sickness hits upon one's body. Sickness can be of any name. Illness can be defined in both physically and mentally. Normally we often ignores the mental illness by just overlooking them. Physical illness is very much visible and on the contrary mental illness can't be seen so easily. But no matter what the illness is about it will definitely affect both body and mind of a single being for sure. In social science the illness is not that simple as it is in the medical science. In medical science any disease can be found to find out your illness. Then one can feel sick or ill. But in social science it varies a little from the medical science. It is not mandatory to have a certain disease for illness. In social science in the structural functionalism it is assumed that each of the elements including human in the society is a part of the society to run it. Each of it plays a different role also. Hence, each of the persons contribute a certain amount of role for the society. Whenever they become unable to play their own role in the society they are marked as ill. Or they become ill. Any state or situation where a person cannot play his own role is called illness.

In medical anthropology there is a fine line between disease and illness. In medical anthropology disease is generally associated indicating the measurable pathological condition of the body. And illness is a feeling of not being normal. It is rather an abstract phenomena. According to Arthur Kleinman illness is a cultural and social construction. It may differs from space to space and society to society. Illness is not referred as a constant state of body or mind. Rather it is defined differently in different part of the world and in different societies. We can put CG Helman's writing here. In the book of him named 'Pain and culture' he also indicated the same thing about illness. There are a lot of certain other things which are very much affiliated with the illness. Even what is illness to

a particular person cannot be illness to another person. Age, personality, growing up, cultural establishment and many other secondary stuffs are very much related to this defining.

Mind is one of the most complex phenomena of a human. So it is not that stress-free to draw a definition of mental illness. Generally, it is a state or condition where a person cannot behave or act properly. To dig deeper into the scenario we need to fetch Foucault here. According to Foucault, there is a power relationship in everywhere. So mental illness is relevant with power relationship also. It is needed to be described a bit more. If a person does not feel okay mentally or cannot act accordingly that is because when the most of the people act otherwise. So when do you see that a person is not acting normally? When you see that the action of him is so different from the action of the other people of the society. So here society decides which is normal and which is not normal. If a person's continuous actions, words or behavior does not match with what is granted in the society is called mentally ill. Mental illness can be different from one form to another form. It can be varied from person to person. For example, a person who cannot talk making sense and a person who blend with other people or a person who attacks other people in front of him are different types of illness.

Mental illness has different external pattern also. Like if a person becomes sad and depressed in a particular time or become anxious can be called mentally ill. Here is a thing to be realized properly. If a person does not act violently and don't make any harm to another person cannot be called mad or crazy. But whenever he or she starts doing so can be called mad. So violence and behavioral pattern draws an important role defining mental illness. Here power plays a role also. Whenever it is granted that you are acting weirdly it is seen that the people who are announcing that you are acting weirdly become superior to you. So that's how power relation happens here. Moreover, at a certain stage when people are tagging you as mad from that very moment they put a bar on your soul and body. A person who acts differently cannot be seen normally anymore.

There is a matter of hide and seek here also. Like people don't want to reveal if there is anyone such in their house. Society does not take it as a good sign rather they humiliate them and the person. There is a relationship between madness and mental illness. When mental illness become chaotic, gross or even bigger and violent it is called madness. And that plays a different role also in the society. Society does not believe on the soul of a mad man actually.

Let's now concentrate a bit on the after math of mental illness. It is so obvious that whenever a man goes out of control of his or her surroundings or of the society, it becomes tough for other to

get used to it. So when on earth it becomes out of others comfort zone or it gets violent people make efforts to get away from it. Violent behavior leads to madness and if we get ourselves associated with the scenario of madness and its aftermath then it will be easier for us to evolve regarding the aftermath. Before and during the eighteenth century it was seen that the punishment of mental illness like madness was very offending. Such as penal system was so omnivorous at that time. At that time penal system was not at all attentive towards the reformation of the ill rather they wanted to punish them. And it was seen that the punishment took place in front of many people. Mass people came and join in that particular event and they found pleasure watching the punishment.

“Hence mental work is not to be rejected; yet with absolute rigor, all exercises of the imagination must be excluded as being in complicity with the passions, the desires, or delirious illusions.”
(Foucault, 1961, pp: 248)

Thus we can know from Foucault that mental illness cannot be a thing which should be rejected or less cared. Rather it is to be treated removing all other presets and other desires or backwardness. So I can totally agree on this very point regarding my thesis work. But here I can see the reason why it should be treated excluding some behavioral characteristics. But I can also see here that with what one should deal with mental illness or such. And what can be the consequences also. I have wanted to found those perspectives and way outs also in my work.

Here we can see that the time when those punishments took place the system was not convinced enough for the rehabilitation rather it was very revengeful. Day by day it changed. And after the eighteenth century we have seen a change in the system. Taking care of the patient and not giving punishment to them in front of mass people have emerged. Besides, medicine and approaches took place to the scenario also so vibrantly.

On another note, if it we look forward to the illness which are not referred to the madness than even people face severe detention like being incarcerated in a single room or no socialization or even identity surveillance. People not only feel frightened but also feel ashamed to meet them. In our society we can see that in so many cases minor mental ailment does not have the attention of the family also. We often feel that illness must be of physical. Not at all mental. So families just don't get alarmed with these and that might cause another worst situation which is not at all expected. Madness comes after that so often. And then when after that people get alarmed it

becomes too late. Day by day offensive outcomes happen. I have seen in my life around my relatives that whenever one gets damaged or sick mentally they don't get any care but even if one feels a bit sick physically or someone catches fever they find care and attention. Though the first case might be alarming and needed to be taken care of so often. In recent days, world has given so much priority to the mental illness but in my experience we are lagging behind in this particular situation for so long. And it's time we felt that mentally ill beings even need more attention according to their soul and characteristics.

Understanding Individual Agency of Mentally Ill People in the Asylum:

Having individual agency or independence is one of the most important things that an independent person must have. And whenever someone misses that he misses one of the pleasing and important parts of survival. Not too many people miss this though or rather not too many people are bound to miss this. Mentally ill people are one those entities who in their life on this mother earth does not face the ecstasy of having an agency. Somewhat they are not given the agency due to many pertinent factors. Mentally ill people are considered to be vulnerable, unstable. According to the director of Pabna Mental Hospital whom I interviewed during my field research,

“As mental patients are mentally and emotionally unstable which is medically proved, they can't have any individual agency. They lost the idea of what should be done and what not, they have lost all logics.¹¹”

Now the questions arise that can a mentally unstable person have personal agency? Before that let's see what an agency is. In brief, agency is the power, habit or scenario for once to take actions according to their own will or choice. This though is affected and provoked by some other staffs like gender, age, economy etc. For understanding about the agency of the mentally ill people, it was very necessary to observe how the mental patients were kept, what do they do, how they do live and everything about them. Foucault is his book 'The Birth of the Clinic' discussed about how medical science has controlled diseases and isolated diseased bodies. Sickness has become source of experiment for medical sciences and doctors (Foucault, 1963, pp: 64-70). However, Goffman compared hospital with many other institutions like, prison, military asylum etc. and found similarities between these institutions. In the modern society, there are separate sections in people's everyday life where they meet and deal with different people. But there is no separation or difference in those people's lives who lives under any institution (Goffman, 1961, pp: 321-330). Hospital is a place where diseased bodies are kept isolated, under observation, they become bound to listen to the protocol as they become submissive or docile which makes the diseased bodies submissive and docile (Foucault, 1963, pp: 82-85).

¹¹ This statement was given by the director of Pabna Mental Hospital during interview.

In Pabna Mental Hospital, mental patients are kept in a locked room similar to prison and under 24 hours observation. They are not allowed to go anywhere and they can't go even if they want to. Some of them are locked up with iron chain with their bed as doctors declared them as violent patient. When it comes to the question of individual agency in the mental asylum, we first need to know that how 'individual agency' is defined generally. Individuality is something that makes every person different from each other by one's action or characteristics. Individuality creates a person's identity. Agency on the other hand is having the power or authority to perform according to one's own wish. In other words, individual agency is the ability or power to do anything according to the wish. From the idea of individual agency given here, a locked up person cannot have his agency properly. When a person is kept in a locked room, tied up with chain, being observed and told what should be done and what not, his individual agency is being harmed. One thing to notice is that a man can only uphold his agency whenever he has the control over his own body and soul. And in this case, mentally ill patients do not have that. And society or authority actually cannot take the risk to let them do whatever they like to do since sometimes they even don't know what they want to do. And sometimes their wish might be harmful for others also.

Concerning this I asked the authority about this. While I was interviewing doctors and some of the people from authority of mental hospital who were in the power position, I questioned them that if their treatment can be going without locking them up, the reason and everything. From his answer, it was pretty clear to me that the idea of having agency of the mental patients is not there in authority and doctors' mind. They say that when a person is getting in into the hospital as a patient, he/she is bound to do whatever they say and according to their rule. This mental hospital is an institution where its patients have no option but following the rules. They take their parents' or family members' consent regarding this. Doctors don't think that mental patients have that stable mental condition where they can have individual agency and they keep patients in a locked room so that they cannot harm anyone. As the authority is responsible not only for the patients, but also for the people who work here, hence to make sure their security, authority decided to lock them up. During interviewing a patient who was in a better mental condition than other according to the doctors complained that most of the time they were given sleeping pills so that they don't disturb the nurses or ward boys. When asked a nurse about this, she said that often patients become violent and start shouting, talk a lot, tear dresses, try to harm herself or sometime even others. To avoid these kind of critical situations, they give them sleeping pills so that most of the time patients

become dizzy, they don't get the energy to create any unusual situation. Even though doctors denied about giving them sleeping pills. They said patients feel dizzy because of the side effect of the high dosed medicines and dizziness prevents patients from occurring any unusual incident. Director of mental hospital said that proper sleep can cure mental illness and that is why they are given sleeping pills.

Anything can be truth here. No matter what is the truth. No matter whether they are given sleeping pills or not one thing here is very clear that justifiably the authority's will to make the patient such a situation where they can't make any harm to others refer to the situation where the patients cannot have the agency. And which is for the security and existence of all for sure. So here circumstantial crisis does not let them have the agency of their own. I have come to this point from my research actually.

The statements differs from person to person. When patients want to meet their parents or want to talk to them, authority does not allow. Authority says that they can't let the patients do whatever they want because they are unstable and illogical. Throughout my research, I have heard the word 'unstable' a lot of time while talking about the mental patients. When I asked about using this word to the authority, they said that unstable is appropriate to describe their condition as they can't take any decisions, they don't understand anything and can't do anything by their own. I came across a woman who was sitting on the floor and crying inside the locked room. I went in front of her saw that she was crying holding a bunch of long hair in her hand. When I asked her about that, she pointed a nurse out and said the nurse cut hair. She loved her hair a lot and did not wanted to cut that, but nurse forcefully did that. When I asked the nurse about the incident, she rudely said that dealing with mental patients is not easy at all. Long hair creates a lot of problem for patients. I did not get any answer about what kind of problems can be arose from long hair. Psychiatrists told that mental patients need to keep their head cool, thus the decision of cutting hair is there though I have seen some of the female patients having long hair. I did not get my answer properly. And here the same thing comes, since you don't have the power for making your own wish and style and someone else is being responsible for that so it will be someone else who can make the decisions of your life no matter what.

In the mental hospital patients pass their every day and night in a locked up room. They are kept in lock up room because, according to doctor and psychiatrists of Pabna Mental Hospital, patients

are mentally unstable, irrational, they might do anything for which authority might not be ready, they might act violent sometime. To control that, authority decided to keep them in a locked up room. They don't have anything to do other than sleeping and eating. They can't even get out of the room and walk. Only during the time of meal, they are allowed to go to the dining room, finish meal within a given time and go back to the room. If one cannot finish meal within the time, he don't get extra time. Then again taken back to the room. There is no source of entertainment for them either.

While interviewing the psychiatric social worker, I came across an unusual occurrence. He shared an unorthodox story about a mental patient. He told about a patient who was a prisoner and sent to mental hospital from jail. He killed another patient with whom he had a little fight over a silly thing. While everyone was sleeping, he followed the guy whom he planned to kill. The guy woke up to go to the bathroom which is attached to the room at 4 am in the morning. As everyone was sleeping, the guy followed him to the bathroom and closed the door. Then used the iron rod of the mopping brush to slay the guy buy pushing the rod from one side to another side of his throat. And then he came back to room and went back to sleep. Then the patient was sent to the violent ward. Besides this, there was a girl who committed suicide by strangling herself with the iron stand of the bed. After these incidents, the patients are kept under strict observation. And by these incidents clearly visible that to elude these types of condition which are no way expected it is often authorities responsibility not giving the agency to the patients. Here I am not drawing any fine line whether it's justified or not or it is good or evil it just happens and happens for these reasons as far as my research is concerned.

Concept of 'Normal Body' and 'Docile Body':

The definition of normal is known as a body which is disease free, healthy, has a stable and logical mind and has own agency and independence. This is how society constructs the idea of a 'normal body'. Normal body has acceptance in the society without being judged. On the other hand, the body that does not have the ability to act according to its own will is essentially known as disciplined body. It is also called docile body or submissive body. The docile body is subjected,

used, transformed and improved. According to Foucault, in order to create a docile or disciplined body, one need to deploy power over that body (Foucault, 1975, pp: 162-170).

Foucault in his book “The Birth of Clinic” (1963), talked about how society gathers knowledge from ‘normal body’ by isolating the ‘diseased body’ in institutions like hospital. Basically, birth of hospital means to isolate the diseased bodies and categorizing them according to their diseases. This is a very modern idea, this is more like institutionalizing the diseases. It’s not because to make those bodies disease free, but to understand the normal body.

In the mental hospital, diseased bodies, mental patients to be more specific are kept locked and isolated like a prison. When I asked the authority about the ways of understanding mental illness, they claimed about social construction and social normativity. When a person fails to act according to the social norms and discipline given by the society, then that person is considered to be ‘abnormal’, different from regular, general people. This ‘abnormal’ activities make a person mad and thus taken to the mental hospital. Then the psychiatrists, doctors go through some medical tests to make sure about the person’s mental health. Although I haven’t found their responses logical enough to test a person’s mental health. Most of the doctors claimed that mad person stairs differently at any certain thing than a ‘normal’ person and they understand that stair by looking at the person. The director of the mental hospital has different opinion to add with this. He said that there are some other tests as well to know about a person’s mental health other than only looking at a person’s eye sight. One of those tests is, physician asks the person to go for reverse counting. Failing in this test makes a person mentally unstable. When I told them that even I won’t be able to count reverse, how come this is a test of judging someone’s mental condition? They did not make any response to this. Nevertheless, after testing, if the result becomes positive, then the person is considered to be mental patient. This is how the authority identifies the diseased body and the bodies of those mental patients can be labeled as docile bodies which eventually becomes a subject of power relation to make those bodies disease free, normal.

Creating Docile Body by Deploying Power Relation:

To make anything docile you need to have authority on the certain thing. And to have the authority power is the most driving force. These happen in the mental hospital every now and then. We can bring Foucault in this context. In his book named “Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison” (1975) talked about how modern state executes power. He talked about body and its consequences of power relationship within the society. He was much more interested in power relationship and showed how power is being deployed to regulate a body. This is where the idea of discipline came from. Power, the effects of power, state, body, how institutions create body and such things were his area of interest. Foucault was interested in seeing how sociology is dealing with the idea of power and it’s after effects. According to Foucault, in order to create a docile or submissive body, one need to deploy power over that body.

Foucault considers all the institutions to be same and shows how prisons and asylums are using its power to create docile body. Basically, birth of hospital means to isolate the diseased bodies and categorizing them according to their diseases. This is a very modern idea, this is more like institutionalizing the diseases. It’s not because to make those bodies disease free, but to understand the normal body. He focused on mostly the after effects of power and how society uses its power to make a body submissive. He also tried to understand modernity and provided a sustain critique of modernity, how power relation creates modern body.



(Source: Google)

Here similar to the saying of Foucault we can see how knowledge can make someone superior to have power over one body or even soul. Here in Pabna Mental Hospital it’s seen that the people

who are coming are brought here by their relatives and loved ones. So in my field work I have come to know that people bring their loved ones here when they don't have the clue on what to do. Now here is the thing that should be observed. They give the hospital the full authority of their loved ones. Here comes the why. Since they don't have the knowledge on this situation. And doctors do have. So no matter what the doctors do or how the doctors treat them are accepted warmly by the mass people. Here knowledge is the source of power. Moreover, the sick people themselves don't have the authority or agency of their own body either because they don't know how to behave 'normally' according to the society. They don't have the knowledge on that. So here whatever steps are taken be the doctors make the body docile since those sick people also even know to some extent that the doctors have the knowledge to heal them and to control them. From every perspective knowledge being the power here.

Authority categorizes the diseases and deploy the power relation on the diseased bodies. As the authority has the power about the diseases, they by default become more powerful than those who do not have any knowledge about them and become submissive in front of them for treatment. They practice their power on the diseased bodies to identify and cure their diseases. But, this process of making the patients disease free, eventually makes their body a territory of power relation. The scenario in mental hospital itself talks about creating docile bodies by deploying power on those bodies. Patients are kept locked in the room and the authority is roaming freely, keeping patients under observation, ruling them, disciplining them, telling them about the dos and don'ts – this whole situation shows the practice of power relation. A body becomes bound to be docile when it is kept isolated and tied with iron chain and lock. Moreover, as discussed in the earlier topic, patients do not have any individual agency which takes them one step closer to become docile and a field of power practice.

Social Construction and Socio-cultural Phenomena of Insanity: Definition and Analysis

Social construction refers to a situation how a society portrays see or react to a certain scenario or condition. It is not so simple always though. Any incidents or happening which occur in a specific society might not be the similar to any other society. For any social constructions there are some certain factors which works for the construction. Like gender, race, economy legacy and such. Social construction may varies from society to society and from time to time. Like in a particular society what is constructed a hundred years ago might be different after a hundred years. This is how it works. Sometimes it is not the same as the particular incident and sometimes it might be the same. It may be exaggerated also. But there is a huge role of this construction on any incident or human or a group of people.

A society day by day provoked by some other forces which I have mentioned earlier establish several phenomena around it. Throughout the time and people of the society each and every aspect of a society become established by itself. Culture and society are both related by a strong tie. Nevertheless they might act differently from time to time also. Culture is the thing what actually describes the cumulative forms, norms and characteristics of a society. Besides it represents the material and abstract things of a society also. One's daily life and each and every tiny details are included in the culture. Each and everything is included in the culture. So when we are talking about insanity we have to dig deep regarding social construction and socio cultural phenomena. Without these we cannot even get the view and opinion or perception of mass people regarding insanity.

Insanity is a stage where people cannot act according to their conscience or cannot draw a fine line between good or evil. This is is a stage which no one expect and not satisfactory to anyone. Besides it was discussed previously in my thesis also. Let's now discuss from a different perspective. Like if a person hits another person so badly and he does it again and again. Then what can be the outcome? If society refers him to am addict he becomes an addict if society grant him as a criminal then he is a criminal. And if society refers him as a sick person mentally then he becomes that. Actually lot is depended on the society's eye. That is why social construction plays a very important role regarding insanity.

In my interview with the director of the Pabna Mental Hospital I have come to know his opinion. He told me that to some extent they are the burdens to the family. According to him it might sound a little raw but every time you just cannot be so emotional. You have to think rationally. He told me that a mentally sick or insane person first of all cannot take care of his own and moreover he makes others' lives so difficult. Besides they can make any severe harm to any of the people of the family or the society. So you cannot make harm to a person for being emotionally attached and not thinking logically towards the sick patient's condition. In that circumstances it's always a must to think for the greater good. To add keeping a mentally ill person with you in the family does not make any good to the family or to the person either. So here it is not actually bad what society does to a mentally ill patient. They need to be isolated from others. It is not rude rather it is logical.

So from his opinion I can clearly see the perception of the authority of the mental hospital and I am not judging at all. It might be the right thing. No matter what here social construction is like you cannot take risks or make others life hard for any mentally insane person or so. If society sees it a differently than any different outcome might come.

I have already put my eyes to the bridge between insanity and social construction. Insane people are not at all accepted in society so normally. And there may be different types of perceptions towards insanity. But generically no one wants to get them affiliated with their own normal life. Here I can mention a story which will make it clear also.

In Pabna mental hospital there are some patients who are very old. Let me tell you about two patients first. One was admitted in 1994 and another one was admitted in 1996. After so many years it is seen that there address was wrongly given and the authority tried to send them to their home after becoming better day by day but could not find the proper address. Nobody lived in the given address. Thus it is clearly visible that nobody may be actually want them back even after they become well. There is a fear a confusion and tension always happen and occurs around the ill people. This ideas spread also and nobody want such 'hassle' in the society so society in fact want them to be in there.

To understand socio cultural phenomena we can also put another story of another patient. Who is an old patient also. When he becomes a bit well hospital wanted to send him to his house. They contacted with the family. To be clear his family was very well of economically. But his brother told that he would not grant him in the house since it will cause complexity. He added that he is

doing his duty giving money regularly which was not at all mandatory since it was a government run hospital. So then he refused to accept his brother and justified his wish also. So he refused to take his brother to home. And importantly there is now way we can judge the brother. In fact hospital did not find it very offensive either. Because they have seen such situation previously also. So here we can see the social cultural phenomena of illness. Before this particular patient there were more 7 patients who had died here because of the age. Nobody came to look up for them. It happens every now and then.

Our culture does not act empathetically towards an insane person who is mentally ill. There plays some superstitions and fundamentalism. Like often people think that it is genetic. No matter how you convince them or how you give them proof that it is not. They will always believe that. Doctors clearly deny that but people believe is so arbitrary. Even in rural areas mostly and in the city areas also people don't want to marry in a family where there is a mentally sick person. They think that it might spread and affect them through their next generation. People find them funny mock with them and so on. Thus they don't even feel like those people also have an entity. People believe that they are not similar like human beings. They are not worthy of good behavior and so. And our society and culture accept that in such a way without being bothered.

In rural areas some village identities are constructed through a mad man. People often say to indicate a village like this is the village where there is a mad. Or like mad village or so. This is so familiar. This types of comments and talking happen in our culture. It is the society and the culture which portrays how an insane should be treated or how he is being treated. From country to country and society to society it varies a lot. Our construction and view might be visible by some proverbs regarding insane men.

“পাগল কি গাছে ফলে

আক্কেলেতে পাগল বলে।¹²

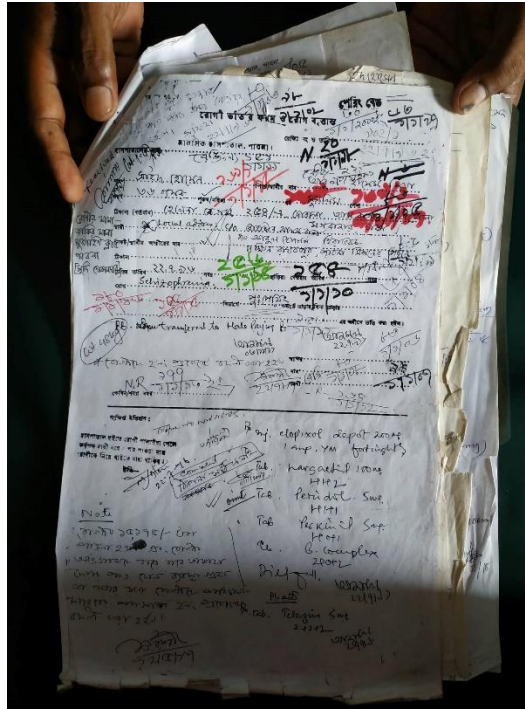
“পাগল ভাত খাবি, না হাত ধোব কোথায়?”¹³

By this two proverbs it is easily seen that insane men are demeaned. and these are not created newly. these run from long before. first proverb replicates in a stirical way that you cannot find a

¹² Translation: Will you be able to find a mad here and there? You have to be a scholar to for being called a mad.

¹³ Translation: Will you take rice? No, where will wash my hands?

mad man here and there rather only when you will loose your intelligence. and in the second proverb it is portraying that one insane man has to find a place to wash his hands before taking food but it was pretty hard to find one for him. these are not the proper meaning since these are hypothetical and indirect. but more or less these portrays the scenario also. So we can easily comprehend the bridge between society, culutre and insanity. Besides, the own model of onsanity lies inside the socio cultural phenomena and social construtions.



(Picture taken by: Moumita Islam)

Concept of Power Practice and Surveillance in the Asylum:

This is what a patient was saying during interview “না খাইলে মারে”¹⁴. While I went to the dining hall to see what do they eat, how is the environment and everything, I saw a batch of patient eating there. I sat with them and asked one of the patients that if he liked the food served here or not. According to him the quality of food is very low and unhygienic. They don’t like these food at all. Some of the patients accused that authority does not allow food from outside, hence they cannot have the food sent by their family members. However, a patient was making a very sad face. When I asked him the reason behind this face, he answered that they bit them if they don’t eat food properly, force them to eat. This is a very essential example of power practice. When anyone does not want to have food, they get forced. There is no chance of expressing their will. One thing can be brought up here like a person no matter how his mental condition is might not feel ready to take whatever food he is given at regardless of time. But here the situation does not allow them to share that thought or exercise that particular wish of them. They become oppressed or punished. Authority does not live with so many other options though. According to doctors and physicians, they are unable of thinking what is good and what is bad. So if authority don’t force them, they will never understand the ‘good’ things that are necessary to be done by them. So, they get no scope of establishing their will other than following the rules. As from the earlier discussions, by observing the physical condition of mentally ill people, point of view of authority towards mentally ill, overall violent and non-violent actions of patients, the steps that are taken by the authority to avoid violence by some the patients and as a whole, a situation that is provided by the authority of mental hospital to the patient, it can be said that they don’t have any agency of their own. Hence, they can’t go against these rules. And not having any agency makes a body docile, submissive. Besides, submissive body subjected to power relationship.

"ওরা আমাদেরকে দেইখা হাসে।"¹⁵ "আমারে কইসে নাচ দেখাইতে আর গান হুনাইতে।"¹⁶ "মজা লয় মাইনসে আইয়া।"¹⁷ – these are some of the accusations of mental patients about people who randomly enters into the hospital and see the patients. Recently, entry has been restricted into the

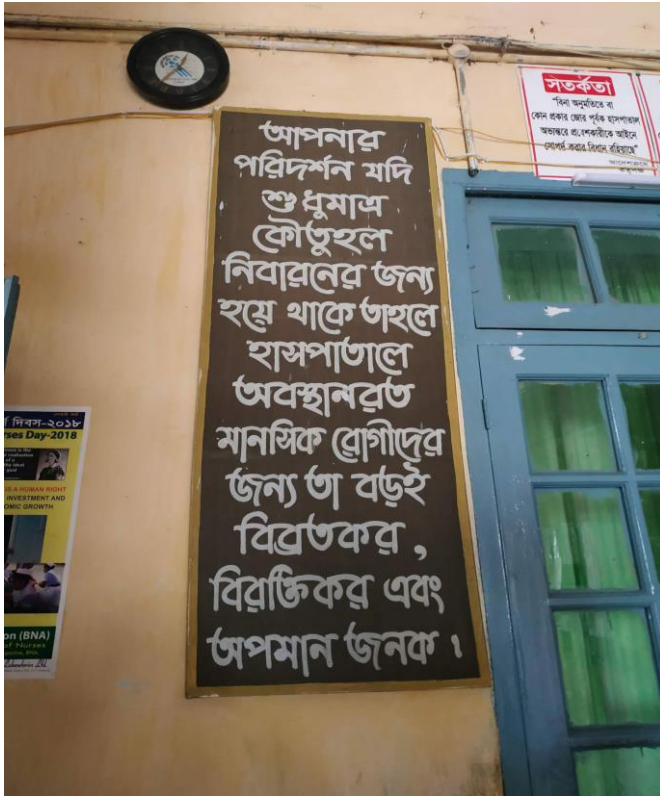
¹⁴ Translation: I get beaten if I don’t eat.

¹⁵ Translation: They laugh at us.

¹⁶ Translation: I was asked to dance and sing.

¹⁷ Translation: People make at us.

hospital area. But before that, anyone could randomly roam around in the hospital area, meet the patient, talk with them standing in front of the locked room which looks more like a cage, make fun of them. This whole scenario was very similar to the scenario that we get to see in zoo. People randomly roaming around, having fun, standing in front of the cage and laughing at the caged animals. Same goes for the mental hospital as well. Just the difference is that, there are locked up humans instead of animal in the hospital. However, people used to go there and asked the patients to sing, dance, make fun of them, laugh at them. These were obviously very offending and humiliating for the patients. Hence, the patients were telling about these accusations which make them very upset. When I asked a woman about complaining to the psychiatrist or authority about this humiliation thinking that psychiatrist or counselor might understand their problem, the woman replied, “বন্দি পাগলের কথা কেউ শুনে না আপা। অনেক কিছুই তো আমরা কই। সকলে ভুইল্লা যায়গা।”¹⁸



(Picture taken by: Moumita Islam)¹⁹

¹⁸ Translation: No one listens to captive mad. We say a lot of things but everyone forgets.

¹⁹ Translation: If your visit is only to fullfill your curiocity, then it will be very my embarrassing, annoying and insulting for the patients staying at the hospital.

This reply itself talks about the power relation again. As these people are submissive and powerless, they become subjected to power practice. According to Foucault, body means the effects of power, power is the essence of the construction of the body. It is power that make a body docile, submissive. And docile bodies are those that never question about the command given by the society (Foucault, 1975). Patients that can addressed as docile bodies as well, cannot question or accuse the authority for anything. Even the family members of the patients are considered to be less powerful in compared to the authority of the mental hospital as they don't have any knowledge about them.

“There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations.” (Foucault, 1975, pp: 27)

This idea talks about having institutional knowledge about any particular topic and working as a part of authority under any institution makes a person powerful than others. Knowledge is linked to power which has the power to make anything 'true'. Knowledge can be used as a powerful tool to practice discipline. Those who come to seek help from the people has knowledge about any topic, might become a part of power relationship. Here we can see that the families of the ill patients and the ill patients none of them has the knowledge to decide what should be done. So here knowledge gives the clear power to the hospital authority for their patients and they can easily take the hold of the ill's body.

Maximum number of patients in the hospital keep talking about going home, they don't want to be in the hospital. They say that they are okay, treatment is done, none of them are mad, so want their families to take them home. Sometimes they become very violent for going home, making them calm and stay in the hospital seems to be very difficult. There are many patients who claim that they are not mental patients, rather their family or in-laws or husband sent them here for any negative purpose. They believe that they are completely fine, they don't need to be at hospital anymore, and they are ready to go home. According to the director of mental hospital, “One of the main characteristics of psychiatric illness is there won't be any reality task. And the person who is mental patient won't consider him as a mental patient. This is the number one problem of all patients. There is no chance of admitting people who are not mental patients. We have medical board who decides who needs medical treatment.” Psychiatric social worker says, “Mental patients

go through manic phase. Manic phase makes a patient think everything differently. Manic phase creates the difference of thinking between real and unreal world.” But the documents of each patients shows that there is valid reason behind admitting them into the hospital. There is no chance of any kind of conspiracy done by the relatives of the patient. Patients’ demand for going home is a part of their illness. Hence, to make the situation balance, authority do need to create the power relation so that patients become bound to listen to the authority. Controlling patients become very difficult without making them submissive. Patients are not allowed to talk even with their family members by the authority. These stories essentially can be taken as the examples of power practice in the asylum.

Besides, of course there is surveillance. The whole architecture of the building is made in such a way that makes every ward visible from the authority building. Patients are continuously taken under observation and surveillance. Surveillance essentially means having the power of observation on the persons who are submissive towards any particular authority. Idea of surveillance is pretty much similar to the idea of panopticon given by Jeremy Bentham. Bentham in his book “Panopticon or the Inspection House” discussed that panopticon is a certain kind of design which makes the surveillance more effective. He further added that panopticon might be needed in such institutions where surveillance is necessary, for example: school, asylum, insane asylum or hospital (Bentham, 1791). However, most of the institutions have the practice of surveillance to observe human being belong to them. Pabna Mental Hospital is not at all different from these. It has the practice of surveillance towards its patients. There are nurses and ward boys who keep observing the patients and report to the authority about their everyday deeds. If anything seems wrong to the authority, they take the necessary steps to make the patients follow their rules. According to the authority, treatment and controlling mental patients is very difficult without observation. And where there is observation and surveillance, there comes the idea of power practice. Whenever you make any living being under surveillance there has to be chance of your doubt that any evil or bad thing might occur there. That is how surveillance takes place. In mental hospital we see that since the whole area is observed by several people so all of the patients are watched and you cannot be yourself when you are watched and someone just cannot fetch you under a surveillance until they have the power over you. Here power practice and surveillance are connected to each other very closely.

Medicalization and Normalization of Insanity:

Medicalization is considered as a part of ‘normalizing’ insanity. Mad people are considered to be abnormal according to medical science. So there must be a procedure or something by which they can be normalized or sane. Hence, there is the process of treatment through which every mental patient goes to become a ‘normal’ person. Now the question might come in mind that whom we consider to be ‘normal’. Normal or sane is that person who has a stable, sound and logical mind, has the ability to do things rationally. Those people who come to mental hospital and get admitted into the hospital for treatment after getting permission of the medical board are considered to be abnormal. They need medicalization for treating insanity.

Medicalization of mental patient must be different than the medicalization process of other sickness. These patients do need different environment, care, medicine, counseling session etc. Providing only medicines won’t be enough for them only. According to medical science and doctors, mental patients must be taken at a healthy environment, where there must be the source of entertainment for them, they should have the scope for expressing their creative skills. Besides, having counseling sessions with psychiatrist is one the most important of all the points. Mental patients must be kept active and happy. They need extreme care and good behavior.

The environmental scenario of Pabna Mental Hospital is quite different from the doctors’ advices. Despite having a huge land of 111 acres, authority could not have made it usable for the patients. There are huge lands that are abandoned and authority is not any steps to use those lands. When I questioned them about renovating this abandoned lands and making them reusable, they completely denied to answer properly by saying as this is a government hospital, all the responsibilities must be taken by the government officials. They have nothing to do about it. Basically, people are passing out duties on one another. As a result, the patients are becoming the sufferer. They are being prohibited from getting any kind of facilities or source of entertainment which is a lack in their process of treatment.

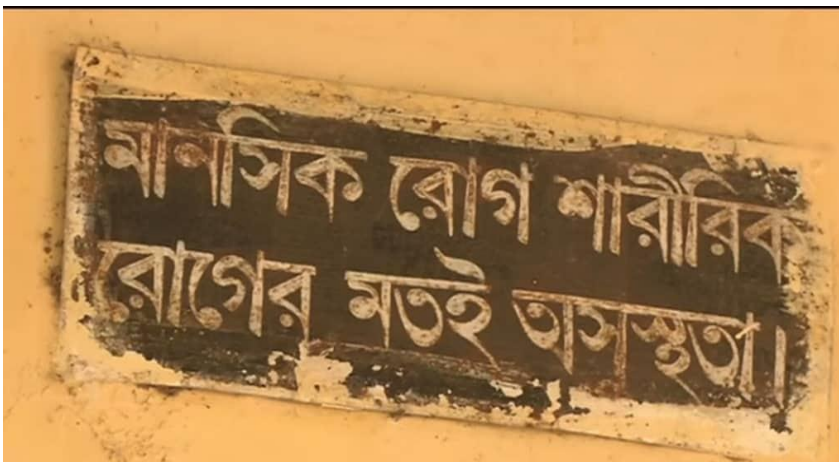
Local and nearby people of the mental hospital, parents or family members of the mental patients often complain that patients are given sleeping pills only so that they feel dizzy every time and don’t get the scope of creating any noise or making a disturbed situation. But authority completely

denied this accusation about them by saying that medicines of mental treatment are very high dosed which has some side effects as well. And feeling sleepy, dizziness, laziness is some of the side effects of those medicines. If they only would have given sleeping pills to the patients, patients would have never been better. There are some other ways as well than only providing medicines to normalize insanity. Providing electric shock is one of them. They use voltage stabilizer to provide electric shock. Director of Pabna Mental Hospital said about electric shock that, applying electric shock is not a general treatment, it is not given to every mental patient. Only those who are suggested by the psychiatrist under a special condition gets this electric shock treatment. He also said that for some patients, this treatment works amazingly. Especially for those patients who patients who had the first attack of their manic phase, electric shock does a very fast response on them. Besides, they of course need medicines timely. Pabna Mental Hospital initially provides treatment for a time of two to three months. In most of the cases, doctors see positive changes in the patients and they are sent to their home. But maximum time it happens that patient comes back again to the hospital for getting his condition worse again. Patients again need the care of mental hospital. According to the mental health specialists, parents cannot take care of the patients like hospital does. Mental patients need special care, healthy environment which often family members fail to provide them. And maintaining time of feeding medicine is a very important part of the treatment of mental patient. In the hospital, nurses provide medicine timely every day. But parents often fail in this particular case. Timing is a very important issue for mental patients according to doctors and patients can never miss medicine for a single time. Missing medicine, a day causes big harm to their condition. Besides, of course there is humiliation at the house. Family members, neighbours, relatives most of the time fails to behave in good way with mental patient, sometimes they feel offended, humiliated, insulted. These feelings also cause harm in their condition. As a result, parents again send them back to the mental hospital. And patients again go back to the condition from where they started their journey.

For having a sound mental health, mental patients must be kept in a very good and healthy environment. But reality is completely opposite. Mental patients are kept in a locked room like prisoners. They have no option of going out from that room, they have no source of entertainment, they have nothing to do to pass their days, don't have scope of expressing creativity. They only way of passing their day is lying or sitting on the bed and doing nothing. There are some windows in their room through which no beautiful sceneries are visible. As a whole, they are kept in a very

depressing environment. I have mentioned before that they have a huge abandoned land, but the authority is not using those lands as a source of the patients' entertainment. Whereas, those lands could have used as playground, authority could have arranged educational facilities, singing and dancing classes, handicraft sections etc. Having these options could have added a better change in the mental health of the patients. Even letting patients walk in the free spaces also might bring some kind of change which the authority does not allow. The process of normalizing insanity in Pabna Mental Hospital is not much versatile. They don't have much option other than providing medicines and electric shock to some of specialized patients.

Other than these, authority also provides counseling sessions with psychiatrist. Authority says that, counseling is one of the very effective way of healing mental patients. They do provide counselors and arrange counseling session for every one separately in every three to four days. But patients during interview said that they don't provide counseling always. Counseling sessions are not provided much for them. Counselor comes once or twice a month, seats in every ward for half an hour to forty five minutes maximum, talk with everyone at a time and then leave. This is how a counseling session should not be done.



²⁰(Picture taken by: Moumita

Islam)

However, dealing with the relatives of the patients and counseling with them is also considered as a part of normalizing the patients. There is psychiatric social worker in the mental hospital who is assigned for dealing with the parents or relatives of the patients. Psychiatric social worker's duty is to seat with the family members of the patients, have session with them. In those sessions, his

²⁰ Translation: Mental disease is a sickness just like physical disease.

responsibility is to make them understand that mental illness is not something that not curable. He teaches them to accept mental illness like every other disease. During his interview, he said that dealing with the family members of the mental patients is as difficult as dealing with the patients. They are not ready accept mental illness normally. Most of relatives of mental patients consider them as a burden. Psychiatric social worker tries make them understand that if family members would never have considered mental patients as a burden, they could keep patients at house and their condition would have been better after finishing the first stage of treatment and sending them home from the hospital. This whole part of dealing with them is a part of patient's medical treatment and normalizing insanity. There are some of the patients who are sent to the hospital by giving wrong address. Hence, authority is unable to send him home. He is the oldest patient of mental hospital; he is living in the hospital for last 24 years.

Throughout my research, I have observed the power relation between the patients and authority. Observing this, I questioned psychiatric social worker about this power relation between and if it harms the process of normalizing insanity or not. He answered, "Power relation is important to control the patients. Authority must need to exercise power over these patients because they are mentally unstable. And dealing with mental illness is different than dealing with any other form of sicknesses. This is a certain kind of disease that needs to control your patients. Thus the practice of power relation is there for their betterment and normalizing their insanity."

Further Research:

While conducting a field research, one of the most essential parts for a researcher is to look from the ground level and observe every tiny detail. While looking at the ground, researcher must avoid his own biasness, cultural assumptions and own judgment. A researcher must conduct a research keeping these aside. For conducting a research which includes every tiny detail and perspectives about a particular topic needs a lot of time. I have had two and a half months to conduct this small research of mine for my undergrad thesis. Two and half months is a small time to look at such big issues. Hence, I have narrowed down my topic a lot. Even after narrowing down my topic, I did not had enough time to look at every issues. I did not have much time to conduct my research and write my thesis paper, hence I faced some limitations of time, reading sources, materials etc. I have focused on one mental asylum and tried to conduct my research on some particular issue of that mental asylum.

There are several mental hospitals in Bangladesh. But I have chosen Pabna Mental Hospital to conduct my research. As it is the first and biggest government mental hospital of Bangladesh, I thought of conducting my small research in this hospital. In this short period, I could not look at all the issues from the very deepest core but left no stone unturned to cover up which cannot be left behind. In my research, I have discussed about my findings which focused on history and architecture of Pabna Mental Hospital, tried to define and explain mental illness and its social construction and socio-cultural phenomena. I have also focused on understanding individual agency, power practice, surveillance and normalizing insanity. But only in the context of Pabna Mental Hospital. As I had a time limitation, I got the chance to find very limited works on mental hospitals in the context of South Asia. I would like to know and read more about mental hospitals. There are more issues and aspects of mental hospital that a researcher must look at if he wants to conduct further research on this topic.

If I get another chance to conduct further research on this topic, I would like to explore the mental hospitals that are placed in Dhaka. I would like to conduct research on the private mental hospitals of Dhaka. As Pabna Mental Hospital is a government hospital, it might have some difference and dissimilarities compared to a private hospital and there also might be a difference in the process of treatment and everything. I want to know about the system of mental hospitals of Dhaka, and

would like to see if there are any certain differences or not between a hospital located in the capital of a country and a hospital outside of the capital. I would also like to explore if there is economic differences patients and if this difference makes any impact on treating the patients or not. Looking at the relationship between patients who are politically and economically strong and the authority of the mental hospital would bring an interesting dimension to the research. To conduct more detailed research and know about all these issues, it will need more time. I want to make a documentary on everyday life of mental patients. In my further research about this topic, I would definitely look at all of these points which would be a boost for me undoubtedly.

Conclusion:

Mental hospital has its own culture which is difficult to be understood at a glance. Everything might look very judgmental but there are some inherited meanings of every actions. Conducting a research within this very short period of time was not at all easy. Still, more or less I have finished my research focusing on the points that I wanted to cover. Throughout my whole research I wanted to understand the individual agency of mentally ill people and how power is being deployed on the mentally ill people. I have also explained about the idea of surveillance, social construction and socio-cultural phenomena and normalization of insanity. The brief history and architecture about the mental hospital tells about how it was constructed, how it does look, and the practice of surveillance through its architecture. I have seen the idea of power practice and surveillance in mental hospital which has become a practiced culture there, and people are okay with this practice. Society too some extend is still not ready to accept mental illness as a regular form of disease. They still try to avoid their family members who is a mental patient by sending them to mental hospital. After analyzing my findings, I have understood that the authority of mental hospital is constructed in such way that does not let the patients have their agency by tagging them as mentally 'unstable'. Understanding socio-cultural phenomena about insanity says about their less acceptance in the society.

To conclude, I would like to say that understanding the about the notion of a certain mental hospital and observe the characteristics of this hospital was not easy for me. It has its own culture, practice, rules according to the societal view and from medical science as well as that everyone need to understand. Judging Pabna Mental Hospital without understanding and observing anything about it won't bring a good result. There are a lot of sayings, rumors about this mental hospital. Patients, authority, family members of the patients, local people everyone has different view about this hospital. To understand the exact idea, we must observe things mingled with the ill and the authority as well without being biased and judgmental.

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