

Politics and Islamic Revivalism in Bangladesh: The Role of the State and Non-State/Non-Political Actors

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Abstract

Bangladesh is an overwhelmingly Muslim majority country in South Asia. Islam is quite predominant in its political, social and cultural landscapes. While most classical and the contemporary sociologists predicted that religion would gradually fade in importance and cease to be significant with the advent of the industrial society, Bangladesh has witnessed a powerful reemergence of the religious forces in its society. In the recent years, the country has drawn enormous attention from the scholars and experts both locally and globally particularly with regard to its Islamic revivalism. In this paper, we have examined the role of both state and non-state or non-political actors in the Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh. Drawing on “Islamic revivalism” as a conceptual metaphor and based on a triangulation of methods comprised of historical institutionalism, interviews, document analysis and internet search, we have investigated the contributions of five major independent regimes and the role of key social, cultural and non-political organizations and groups including three major non-political revivalist organizations to the Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Bangladesh; Islamic revivalism; State actors; Madrasas; Mosques; Shrines and mazars; Social and cultural organizations; Islamic revivalist organizations

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Introduction

Bangladesh, as an independent country, came into existence in 1971. Prior to its independence, Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan since 1947. Earlier, the country experienced the British colonial rule alongside India and Pakistan for nearly two hundred years (1757-1947). Bengal, East Bengal, East Pakistan and Bangladesh refer to the same territory with different names at different historical periods. The advent of Islam in Bengal, as the historians report, took place long before the Turkish Muslim conqueror Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtyar Khalji's conquest of Bengal in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Islam, indeed, entered Bengal through the Arab traders, Sufis and saints since the middle of the eighth century.¹ However, the political triumph of the Muslims had a major contribution to the spread of Islam and the consolidation of a Muslim society in Bengal. The Muslim rulers consistently patronized the Muslim missionaries, scholars and the Sufis. They built numerous mosques, *madrasas* and *khanqas* that eventually led to the emergence of a vibrant Muslim society in Bangladesh.²

The British East India Company took over Bengal in 1757.³ It ruled a large part of India including Bengal up to 1857.⁴ Then the British Raj established its direct rule in India which lasted

¹ M. A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal, Vol. 1: 1201-1576* (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1963).

² A. Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1959).

³ S. Bandyopadhyay, *From Palassey to Partition: A History of Modern India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004).

⁴ E. Stokes, 'The First Century of British Colonial Rule in India: Social Revolution or Social Stagnation?', *Past & Present*, 58 (1973), pp. 136-160.

until 1947 prior to the creation of two independent states in the subcontinent—India and Pakistan.⁵ The man who was the nucleus of the Indian Islamic revivalism during the colonial period and whose ideas had influenced the Muslims, during his time and even subsequently equally, most across Muslim India including Bengal was Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi (1703-1762), often described as the ‘greatest Islamic scholar India ever produced.’⁶ Dahlawi was enormously influenced by the philosophy and movement of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, commonly known as *Mujaddid-i-Alf-i-Thani* (1564-1624), a sixteenth-century Indian Islamic scholar and reformer. Dahlawi adopted the major strands of Alf-i-Thani’s ideas and developed them into a coherent ideology that formed the basis of the Islamic revivalist movement in the subcontinent right through the present day.⁷ Dahlawi attributed the reasons for the decline of the Muslim power and the moral decay of the Muslim society in India to the loss of the classical Islamic teachings and practices by the Indian Muslims. Thus, the revival of Islam and the regaining of the lost glory of the Muslims in India, according to Dahlawi, lied in their turning back to the classical Islam and its teachings and practices.⁸ Following the death of Wali Allah Dahlawi in 1762, his three sons—Shah Abd al-Aziz (1746-1824), Shah Rafi al-Din (1748-1817) and Shah Abd al-Qadir (1753-1827)—adopted their father’s path and served the future revivalist cause of Islam in India.⁹ Shah Abd al-Aziz, the eldest son of Dahlawi, succeeded his father and continued his father’s vision of reform. The charismatic

⁵ J. F. Riddick, *The History of British India* (London: Praeger Publishers, 2006).

⁶ R. A. Geaves, ‘India 1857: A Mutiny or a War of Independence? The Muslim Perspective’, *Islamic Studies*, 35: 1 (1996), pp. 25-44.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ F. Abbott, ‘The Decline of the Mughul Empire and Shah Waliullah’, *The Muslim World*, 52: 2(1962), pp. 115-123.

⁹ M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967).

Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly (1782-1831) who fought the Sikhs in Punjab¹⁰ happened to be closely connected to the family of Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi. Dahlawi school of thought as well as Sayyid Ahmad's tradition commanded great influence on the Islamic revivalism in British-India and Bengal and even to the present time. Haji Shariat Allah's (1781-1840) *Fara'idi* Movement and Titu Mir's (1782-1831) *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* Movement both in the 1820s, and the Khilafat Movement between the late 1910s and the early 1920s by the Indian and particularly Bengali Muslims were largely rooted in the religious and political ideas of Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi and Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly and were the remarkable manifestations of the Islamic revivalism in Bengal in the colonial era.¹¹

Pakistan emerged in 1947 on the basis of the 'two-nation theory'¹², which was a brainchild of poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal and formulated by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Bangladesh was the eastern part of Pakistan called East Pakistan. Although the Muslims in East Bengal voted for Pakistan largely being driven by Muslim religious nationalism, soon after the creation of Pakistan, Bengali nationalism powerfully emerged and superseded Muslim nationalism in East Pakistan. However, there was hardly any conflict between Bengali nationalism and Islam, and even the appeal of Islamic revivalism had not faded, let alone lost in East Pakistan.

¹⁰ Sayyid Ahmad fought the Sikhs and established a small kingdom in the North-West Frontier. At a stage, he traveled to Mecca for pilgrimage and came to contact with the Wahhabi movement, which strengthened his zeal for Islamic revivalism further. Returning home, he began to establish Islamic rule and formed a government in line with his ideas of a pristine Islamic state in the areas he controlled. However, in 1831, Sayyid Ahmad along with his several hundred followers, in a battle with the Sikhs at Balakot, became martyred. See, R. A. Geaves, 'India 1857: A Mutiny or a War of Independence?'

¹¹ R. A. Geaves, 'India 1857: A Mutiny or a War of Independence?'

¹² 'Two-nation theory' refers to as 'the idea that India's Muslims and Hindus constituted two 'nations', each deserving their own state'. See, S. P. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

The contemporary Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh results from the conscious efforts of the both state and non-state actors of the polity. The state actors include the political regimes which offer official promotion of Islamization in the country. Since Bangladesh's independence in 1971 until 2014, five major political regimes (led by five politicians and statesmen—Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Ziaur Rahman, Hussain Mohammad Ershad, Begum Khaleda Zia, and Sheikh Hasina) have ruled Bangladesh. These regimes include Mujib's regime (1972-1975), Zia's regime (1977-1981), Ershad's regime (1982-1990), Khaleda's regime (two terms, 1991-1996 & 2001-2006), and Hasina's regime (two terms, 1996-2001 & 2009-2014). The non-state and non-political actors include numerous sociocultural and religious organizations, which also played a vital part in the contemporary politics and Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh.

Following this brief introduction, the paper in the second section highlights the methodology of this study. The third section delineates 'Islamic revivalism' as a theoretical metaphor. Drawing on this theoretical framework, the paper in the fourth section examines the state-sponsored Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh. The fifth section discusses the promotion of Islamization by the non-state actors and non-political institutions and groups. These include madrasas and mosques; the three non-political Islamic revivalist organizations—the Hefazat-e-Islam, the Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan and the Tablighi Jamaat; the Sufis and saints, pirs and their shrines; and the prominent socio-religious and cultural organizations. The paper, in its final section, offers the authors' concluding remarks that seek to advance the argument that both state and non-state actors including both the civilian and the military regimes along with numerous socio-religious and cultural organizations have made contributions to the contemporary politics and Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh.

Methodology

We have employed, in this study, a triangulation of methods comprised of historical institutionalism, content analysis, qualitative interviews, and internet search. Historical institutionalism method is useful for this study because historically numerous sociopolitical, cultural and religious institutions have played major roles in the Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh. Both state and non-state institutions and organizations at various junctures of the sociopolitical and cultural history and tradition of Bangladesh contributed to the strengthening of the role of Islam and the growth of a vibrant Muslim (religious) society in the sociopolitical and cultural landscape of the country. Although there has hardly been taken any effort to systematically analyze the Bangladesh's 'Islamic revivalism' phenomenon, there exists a considerable amount of literature which mainly deals with the Islamization of the Bangladesh's polity. To study Islamic revivalism, a thorough investigation of these literatures is considered significant. Thus, the content analysis—a robust examination of relevant materials—includes credible journal articles, books, newspaper articles (of both local and international newspapers), local and international organizations' (especially human rights organizations) reports, and internet documents are relevant for this study.

Along with historical institutionalism and content analysis, we have also interviewed a dozen professional people including politicians, intellectuals and Islamic scholars in Bangladesh to organize the paper. Since the politicians are the part of the state actors, learning their views and perspectives on the subject we investigated is momentous. The Islamic scholars have been intimately associated with the socio-religious and cultural organizations such as madrasas, mosques, mosque-centered organizations, shrines, and other Islamic organizations and groups. These organizations played a tremendous role in the Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh. Therefore,

the Islamic scholars' thoughts and perspectives are also deemed significant for this investigation. Beyond this, the opinions of the academics and intellectuals who are well-informed citizens and constantly follow the nature and trend of politics and religion in Bangladesh are also important.

In this study, the state actors refer to the political regimes that made conscious efforts to promote Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh. The five major regimes—Mujib's regime (1972-1975), Zia's regime (1977-1981), Ershad's regime (1982-1990), Khaleda's regime (two terms, 1991-1996 & 2001-2006), and Hasina's regime (two terms, 1996-2001 & 2009-2014)—will be examined for this study. The non-state actors include the major social, cultural, religious and non-political organizations and groups. Three major non-political Islamic revivalist organizations will be investigated. These include the Hefazat-e-Islam, the Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan and the Tablighi Jamaat. These organizations have a large following and have been playing a major role in the contemporary Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh.

Islamic Revivalism

The term 'Islamic revivalism' is widely used as a synonym of 'Islamic resurgence' or 'Islamic revitalization.' Many scholars prefer to dub it as 'Islamic fundamentalism', while others especially the Islamists choose to label as 'Islamic renaissance.' The Islamic revivalism is not a new phenomenon. The history of Islam has always witnessed a constant fluctuation of revivalist movements.¹³ However, modern Islamic revivalism is argued to have prominently emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century.¹⁴ Particularly, since the 1970s, Islam, as an alternative

¹³ B. Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996).

¹⁴ F. Volpi, *Political Islam Observed* (London: Hurst and Company, 2010).

ideology, began to receive large attention from the public in the Muslim-dominated countries.¹⁵ Islamic revivalism is described as the belief that Islam, as a complete code of life encompassing both religion and politics, is capable of offering a viable alternative to the prevalent secular ideologies and that it is destined to play an important role in the remaking of the contemporary world.¹⁶

Islamic revivalism does not encapsulate a single theory but a cluster of theories. Earlier, the medieval historian Ibn Khaldun offers a social theory called ‘*asabiyya*’ (group solidarity). In his *Muqaddimah*, Khaldun develops a sociological and historiographic account of the cyclical rise and fall of urban civilizations.¹⁷ He argues that *asabiyya* based on blood or strong bond of mutual affections among the members of the group leads to building up a strong military force that enables them to take over urban settlements and establish royal authority. Once the state is established, the ruler takes it to the stage of a civilization by creating a new system of power relations and governmental structures that brings political stability, a “necessary condition for the expansion of division of labor and the flourishing of civilization.” “With contentment and luxury, however, a period of decline begins, the *asabiyya* of soldiers weakens, the ruler’s extravagances lead to heavier taxes, divisions within the dynasty occur, and the urban civilization eventually vanishes. In the end, the old dynasty is replaced by a new one, which draws power from a new group.”¹⁸ Khaldun’s recommendation for averting the decline of a civilization and to craft a stable state is to

¹⁵ H. Mutalib, ‘Islamic Revivalism in ASEAN States’, *Asian Survey*, 30: 9 (1990), pp. 877-891.

¹⁶ E. Ahamed, ‘Current Trends of Islam in Bangladesh’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18: 25(1983), pp. 1114-1119.

¹⁷ A. Knudsen, ‘Political Islam in the Middle East’, *Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) Report*, Bergen, Norway, 2003, pp. 1-31.

¹⁸ M. Moaddel, ‘The Study of Islamic Culture and Politics: An Overview and Assessment’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28 (2002), p. 386.

find a permanent alternative to *asabiyya*, one that is not based on social solidarity but on the religious authority of the Islamic laws. Khaldun's assertion is called as '*dynastic theory*.'¹⁹

In the 1990s, a group of social scientists such as Samuel Huntington, Daniel Pipes and Bernard Lewis came up with the '*civilizational clash theory*.' This theory, popularized by Huntington²⁰ makes a prediction of the civilizational clash between the Islamic and the Judeo-Christian civilizations. Huntington, Pipes and Lewis provide an essentialist and monolithic view of the Islamic ideology and movements by using a limited number of conceptual categories and applying them universally in their analysis of the rise of Islamic revivalism.²¹ While other scholars such as John Esposito, James Piscatori and Edward Said challenge the essentialist view and provide a pluralist view of global Islam and Islamic movements instead, what Salla calls 'contingencist' approach.²² Borrowing from Halliday²³ Salla uses the terms 'essentialists' and 'contingencists' in his analysis of Islamic revivalism, and argues that the 'essentialists' such as Huntington, Pipes and Lewis give prominence to the textual interpretation of Islam, which they consider an enduring and immutable insight into the essence of Islam and the Muslim world, and thus they suggest that Islam is a monolithic threat to the West.²⁴ While the 'contingencists' such as Esposito, Said and Piscatori insist on the diversity of Islamic movements and their contingent

¹⁹ A. Knudsen, 'Political Islam in the Middle East'

²⁰ S. P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, 72: 3 (1993), pp. 22-49.

²¹ M. F. Salla, 'Political Islam and the West: A New Cold War or Convergence?', *Third World Quarterly*, 18: 4 (1997), pp. 729-742.

²² Ibid.

²³ F. Halliday, 'The Politics of 'Islam'—A Second Look', *British Journal of Political Science*, 25: 3 (1995), pp. 399-417.

²⁴ M. F. Salla, 'Political Islam and the West: A New Cold War or Convergence?'

factors.²⁵ Esposito argues that “the causes of resurgence have been religio-cultural, political, and socio-economic. Issues of faith, politics, and social justice—authoritarianism, repression, unemployment, housing, social services, distribution of wealth, and corruption—intertwine as catalysts.”²⁶ Esposito further argues that economic difficulties combined with geopolitical interests are the contributing factors to the rise of Islamic revivalism in many Muslim countries. The revivalist efforts are also argued to have been a result of relative deprivation particularly oppressive state policies and social injustice.²⁷ In Bangladesh, the absence of democratic practices and the oppressive state policies of the non-democratic political regimes also served to the Islamic revivalist cause. The contingencist scholars’ approach suggests that Islam can serve as a vehicle for social progress and the diversity in Islam is both more liberal and more democratic than is often acknowledged.²⁸ While the ‘essentialists’ portray Islamic revivalism as “reactive movements carried out by traditional people, intellectuals, and the urban poor against the Western-style modernization, and that the movements are anti-democratic and regressive by character”; the ‘contingencists’ regard it as “the manifestation of, and a reaction to, postmodernity”²⁹ not necessarily regressive and antithetical to plurality.

‘*Crisis theories*’ postulate that the global Islamic revivalism is a response to various forms of social, economic, political and cultural crisis.³⁰ These crises include, though not confined to,

²⁵ A. Knudsen, ‘Political Islam in the Middle East’

²⁶ J. L. Esposito, ‘Political Islam and the West’, *JFQ Forum*, Spring 2000, pp. 49-55.

²⁷ T. R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

²⁸ A. Knudsen, ‘Political Islam in the Middle East’

²⁹ A. Bayat, ‘Islamism and Social Movement Theory,’ *Third World Quarterly*, 26 (6), p. 894.

³⁰ M. Moaddel, ‘The Study of Islamic Culture and Politics: An Overview and Assessment’

the crisis of identity, legitimacy, governance, culture, economic development and military credibility,³¹ political and economic stagnation, deteriorating security conditions, persuasiveness of Western culture, and the perception of secularism as being antagonistic to Islam.³² The military rulers in Bangladesh invariably suffered legitimacy crisis and they mostly relied on the Islamization efforts to easily woo the supports of the people, who cherished strong religious sentiments, to overcome this legitimacy crisis. Secularism was also generally perceived in Bangladesh as the absence of religion (Islam).³³

‘*Cultural duality theories*’ posit a tension between the state and religious authority.³⁴ Secularization policies of the state that seek to limit the authority of the religious establishments and curtail the socioeconomic and cultural prerogatives of the religious clergy lead to the emergence of hostile relations between the state and clergy which eventually paves the way for revolution. Cultural duality theories were mainly developed in analyzing the rise of the Islamic revolutionary movements in Iran in the twentieth century. Scholars such as Akhavi,³⁵ Arjomand,³⁶

³¹ R. H. Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

³² M. J. Deeb, ‘Militant Islam and the Politics of Redemption’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 524 (1992), pp. 52-65.

³³ M. A. Hakim, ‘The Use of Islam as a Political Legitimization Tool: The Bangladesh Experience, 1972-1990’, *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 6: 2 (1998), pp. 98-117.

³⁴ M. Moaddel, ‘The Study of Islamic Culture and Politics: An Overview and Assessment’

³⁵ S. Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980).

³⁶ S. A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi’ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

Dabashi,³⁷ and Keddie³⁸ provide a detailed account of the changing clergy-state relationship in Iran in the twentieth century through which the Shi'ite *ulama* were able to challenge the secular state successfully. Although cultural duality theories emerged in explaining the Islamic revivalism and revolution in Iran, they are also pertinent to interpreting religious revivalism in Bangladesh. Particularly, the secularization efforts during the Mujib's regime³⁹ led to the emergence of antagonistic relations between the state and the religious authority which eventually added contributions to the Islamic revivalism in the country.

'*State culture theories*' are "similar to that of cultural duality theories, with the principal difference that duality between the state and religion is not presumed given but is rather produced as the Islamic discourse is shaped in oppositional relations to state ideology and cultural policies."⁴⁰ According to these theories, when the state attempts to invade the religious domain, constrain religious expression, suppress the religious symbols and icons and thus shift the balance of power in their favor, there are high chances of causing an Islamist backlash.⁴¹ The rise of radical Islamism in Algeria in the early 1970s has been explained in the light of this theory.⁴² The left-

³⁷ H. Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993)

³⁸ N. R. Keddie, 'The Roots of Ulama's Power in Modern Iran', *Studia Islamica*, 29 (1969), pp. 31-53.

³⁹ See S. Miah, "University of Dhaka", *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2009); "Salimullah Muslim Hall 85 Years of History", SM Hall Alumni Association DU. <https://smhallalumniassociation.wordpress.com/about/> (accessed 21 December 2015); "History", Islamic Foundation, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh. http://www.islamicfoundation.org.bd/pages/home_details (accessed 22 December 2015); S. S. Islam, 'The Politics of Islam in Bangladesh' in Santosh C. Saha and Thomas K. Carr (eds) *Religious Fundamentalism in Developing Countries* (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. 167-184.

⁴⁰ M. Moaddel, 'The Study of Islamic Culture and Politics: An Overview and Assessment', p. 373.

⁴¹ A. Knudsen, 'Political Islam in the Middle East'

⁴² H. Roberts, 'Radical Islamism and the Dilemma of Algerian Nationalism: The Embattled Arians of Algiers', *Third World Quarterly*, 10: 2 (1988), pp. 556-589.

oriented government policies and a wide-ranging program of radical social reforms including land reform during those days alienated a large section of society from the regime, and the opposition attacked the regime's socialist ideology in Islamic terms and vocabularies. Similarly, the radicalization of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the radical ideas of Sayyid Qutb was a response to increasing authoritarianism following the military coup in 1952.⁴³ Likewise, in Bangladesh, during the Mujib's and Hasina's regimes, in the name of secular state ideology, the state's attempts to invade religious domain, restrict religious expressions, and suppress religious symbols and icons paved the way for the rise of the Islamic forces and strengthening the religious appeal to the masses.

Borrowed aspects from crisis theories and state culture theories, the '*resurgence theory*' is grounded on the assertion that the Islamic resurgence is foremost a reaction to the failure of modernization in the Middle East countries.⁴⁴ The theory's starting point is the colonial regimes that created a number of artificial nation-states whose leaders opted for Western-styled secularism and pan-Arabism to create a national identity and legitimize their political power. "The defeat of the Arab forces by Israel in 1967 led to a widespread identity crisis that made the masses turn away from the secular nation-state and embrace Islam as a vehicle towards spiritual renewal and a revival of the Islamic state."⁴⁵ Showing the relevance of this theory to the Palestinian case, Milton-Edwards argues that the traits inherent in the Palestinian situation itself rather than the chain of events following the war in 1967 resulted in the growth of Islamic revivalism in the region.⁴⁶ The

⁴³ G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

⁴⁴ B. Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine*.

⁴⁵ A. Knudsen, 'Political Islam in the Middle East', p. 19.

⁴⁶ B. Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine*.

resurgence theory also explains the Islamic revivalism in Bengal, East Bengal, and Bangladesh. During the British colonial era, the colonial policies paved the way for Islamic revitalization efforts coupled with the anti-colonial movements. The religious movements of Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi, Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly, Haji Shariat Allah, and Titu Mir in the colonial India and Bengal were largely responses to the British colonial policies and programs. The contemporary politics and Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh has been enormously influenced by these revivalist efforts.

'Discursive theories' emphasize the symbolic role of religion. It accords that religious beliefs, rituals, symbols and icons rather than texts and doctrine become shaped by the local sociopolitical conditions and appear as a potent sociopolitical force in society. The discursive thesis has been developed mainly on the anthropological study of religion.⁴⁷ Geertz sees religion as a 'cultural system' that focuses on the powerful, evocative potential of religious symbolism.⁴⁸ According to this approach, Islamic texts and philosophical doctrine are of secondary importance in explaining the nature of Muslim politics. Rather, "what makes political actions and choices recognizably Muslim is the way Islam provides the symbols in terms of which diverse Muslim groups defined their identity as Muslims."⁴⁹ There has been a predominant role of the Islamic beliefs, rituals and symbols in Bangladeshi society. Both the political actors and the non-political

⁴⁷ See, C. Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); A. H. El-Zein, *The Sacred Meadows: A Structural Analysis of Religious Symbolism in an East African Town* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

⁴⁸ C. Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*.

⁴⁹ M. Moaddel, 'The Study of Islamic Culture and Politics: An Overview and Assessment', p. 375.

socio-religious organizations and groups have constantly emphasized the Islamic symbols and icons to legitimize their actions.⁵⁰ The following passage aptly illustrates this:

In general, the people of Bangladesh have strong attachments to Islam, and none would risk retribution by opposing or criticizing religious customs, practices and beliefs. A large number of Bangladeshis do not perform the mandatory religious practices, but most display their devotion to Islam in public. The slightest aspersion on Islam results in hostile public reaction, which is why neither the government nor the opposition political parties of Bangladesh speak out against Islam. Even the leftist secular political parties, which consider religion to be an instrument of exploitation, do not make anti-Islamic statements in public. Government announcements are often sprinkled with references to the establishment of Islamic values, and policies are determined in such a way as not to disturb this sensitive issue. The rulers may or may not be inclined actually to establish Islam in Bangladesh, but they have displayed a tendency to strengthen their base of power by exploiting the people's attachment to Islam.⁵¹

'*Textual theories*', unlike the discursive approach sketched out above, attempt to find out the reasons for the growth of Islamic revivalism in religion itself, that is the founding religious texts (Qur'an) and traditions of the Prophet (*Sunnah*).⁵² This approach has been increasingly accentuated by the scholars of Islamic revivalism especially in the post-9/11 world context. Academics have tended to be more engaged in Islamic scriptural scholarship and textual exegesis as a means of uncovering the hidden meaning of the Islamic revivalism and the roots of the Islamic

⁵⁰ A. S. Huque and M. Y. Akhter, 'The Ubiquity of Islam: Religion and Society in Bangladesh', *Pacific Affairs*, 60: 2 (1987), pp. 200-225.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

⁵² A. Knudsen, 'Political Islam in the Middle East'

movement.⁵³ According to Moaddel, textual analysis may proceed at the three fundamental levels.

He elaborates:

At the first level, scholars adopt a systematic comparison of Islamic texts with an ideal typical conception of rationalization and political modernization. At the second level, attempts are made to pursue a systematic comparative analysis of the Islamic texts with those of Western or other cultural traditions. The third level involves a comparative analysis of the Islamic texts with non-Islamic narrative and literary legendary in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and other aboriginal languages.⁵⁴

Textual theories are also significant in explaining the Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh. Numerous religious institutions such as mosques, madrasas, mosque-centered organizations, and shrines have been playing a major role in educating people the religious texts such as the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad relentlessly. The Islamic revivalist organizations such as the Tablighi Jamaat, the Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan, and the Hefazat-e-Islam also continuously emphasized the religious texts as the only guideline for life which largely contributes to the Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh.

Both textual and discursive approaches entail mere 'representations' of the Muslim world. In order to overcome this limitation, Halliday proposes a middle ground between 'textual' and 'discursive' approaches to uncover the 'real' Muslim world.⁵⁵ In the same token, Salla proposes a

⁵³ B. Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵⁴ M. Moaddel, 'The Study of Islamic Culture and Politics: An Overview and Assessment', pp. 380-381.

⁵⁵ F. Halliday, 'The Politics of 'Islam'—A Second Look'

“convergence approach where political Islam is not seen as temporary aberration to be contained and eventually stamped out, but on a theoretical level, as a much needed critique of the deficiencies of the Western liberal democratic paradigm, thereby allowing political Islam, as religious revival, to develop into a genuine political force.”⁵⁶

Not a single theory but a cluster of theories can explain the Islamic revivalism phenomenon in Bangladesh. The crisis theories, cultural duality theories, state culture theories, resurgence theory, discursive theories, and the textual theories of the Islamic revivalism together provide a solid understanding of the Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh.

State-sponsored Islamic Revivalism in Bangladesh

Since Bangladesh’s inception to the present time, except for the brief non-party caretaker regimes, the three major political parties—Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and the Jatiya Party (JP)—have ruled Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (henceforth Mujib or Sheikh Mujib), led the BAL and constituted the maiden government in the post-independent Bangladesh, while Ziaur Rahman (henceforth Zia) and Hussain Mohammad Ershad (henceforth Ershad) founded BNP and JP respectively and attained power afterwards. Mujib’s, Zia’s and Ershad’s regimes have made a substantial contribution to the Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh. Although the Mujib’s regime, in the original constitution drafted and effected in 1972, incorporated secularism as one of the cardinal state principles of Bangladesh, it gradually turned to promote Islamization in the republic. Later, Zia’s and Ershad’s regimes institutionalized the Islamization process. Subsequently, Sheikh Hasina (henceforth Hasina), Mujib’s daughter and

⁵⁶ M. E. Salla, ‘Political Islam and the West: A New Cold War or Convergence?’, cited in Knudsen, p. 21.

Khaleda Zia (henceforth Khaleda), Zia’s wife headed the BAL and BNP respectively and formed their governments. Khaleda’s regime followed Zia’s policy of Islamization and the adoption of Islamic symbolism, while Hasina’s regime, though in its second term, brought back secularism as a major state policy, emphasized the Islamic ideology and symbolism.

Table 1: Taxonomy of the Islamization efforts carried out under the Mujib’s, Zia’s, Ershad’s, Khaleda’s and the Hasina’s regimes in Bangladesh⁵⁷

Political Regime and Tenure	Nature of Regime	Islamization Efforts
Mujib’s Regime (1972-1975)	Civilian	The constitution of 1972 underlined secularism as a major state policy. However, it gradually launched the Islamization process. Declared, in 1973, a general amnesty for all the prisoners (including the Islamic leaders who collaborated with the Pakistani army during the liberation war) held under the collaborators act (however, exceptions were made only in cases where there were specific criminal charges). Resumed recitation from religious texts in state-run radio and television. Increased government grants for madrasas. Made Islamic studies and Arabic compulsory in secondary schools. Banned public sale and consumption of alcohol and gambling. Officially celebrated the Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi (The Prophet’s birthday). Revived Islamic Academy and also upgraded it to a foundation and renamed as Islamic foundation in 1975. Began to promote Islamic cooperation with Middle Eastern Muslim leaders. Sent a medical team to support the Arabs in their war with Israel in 1973. Joined the OIC meeting held in Lahore, Pakistan in 1974. Mujib continued to make frequent references to Islam in his speeches and public articulation by using common Islamic terms and idioms. Categorically declared that he was proud to be a Muslim and proud that his country was the second largest Muslim nation in the world. In his later days, Mujib even dropped his valedictory expression <i>joy bangla</i> (glory to Bengal) and ended his speeches with <i>khuda hafez</i> .

⁵⁷ The table is drawn with data from: E. Ahamed, ‘Current Trends of Islam in Bangladesh’; T. Maniruzzaman, ‘Bangladesh in 1974: Economic Crisis and Political Polarization’, *Asian Survey*, 15: 2 (1990), pp. 117-128; S. S. Islam, ‘Islam in Bangladesh: A Dichotomy of ‘Bengali’ and ‘Muslim’ Identities’, *Islamic Quarterly*, 41: 3 (1997), pp. 218-231; M. A. Hakim, ‘The Use of Islam as a Political Legitimization Tool: The Bangladesh Experience, 1972-1990’; and A. Riaz, *God Willing: The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004).

		(God protect you). In his later day speeches, Mujib also highlighted his efforts to establish a cozy relationship with the Muslim countries in the Arab world. On 4 November 1972, during the parliamentary session after the passage of the Constitution Bill, Mujib led the <i>munajaat</i> (Islamic prayer).
Zia's Regime (1977-1981)	Military and civilian rubric	Made Islam the focal point of the regime's ideology. Dismantled secular principle of the state and in its place incorporated 'absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah.' Incorporated the Qur'anic phrase <i>bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim</i> (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) in the above of the preamble of the constitution. Deleted Article 12 of the constitution that provided the interpretation of and a commitment to secularism. Omitted Article 38 of the constitution that had imposed a ban on the formation and operation of religion-based political parties. Made a constitutional recognition of a pro-Islamic foreign policy. Massively provided patronization and support to the spread of Islamic education and cultural practices. Established an Islamic University with an Islamic research center attached to it. Used Islamic symbols and expressions in public speeches. Displayed Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions in government offices and public places. Issued state messages on religious occasions.
Ershad's Regime (1982-1990)	Military and civilian rubric	Posited Islam as the basis of state ideology. Incorporated Islam as the state religion in the constitution. Established a Zakat fund to be headed by the President. Formulated a new education policy intended to introduce Arabic and Islamic Studies in the schools. Made state-run electronic media airing Islamic programs in increasing numbers. Attempted to turn the <i>shaheed dibas</i> (Martyrs' Day/21 February) into a religious occasion. Established a separate directorate for madrasa education. Made a remarkable contribution to the mushrooming growth of religious institutions. Sanctioned liberal grants to shrines and mosques. Made Friday, instead of Sunday, the weekly holiday and changed the name of Red Cross to Red Crescent. Ershad frequently visited religious shrines and pirs and addressed gatherings of religious devotees. Issued emotionally-charged messages to the nation on religious occasions.
Khaleda's Regime (1991-1996 & 2001-2006)	Civilian	Followed Zia's policy of Islamization and stressed Islamic symbolism.
Hasina's Regime (1996-2001 & 2009-2014)	Civilian	Demonstrated inclination to Islamic ideology and symbolism. However, in the second term, brought back the old secular ideology to the state. Returned to the constitution of 1972. Although the article 12 of the original constitution was reestablished, it retained <i>bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim</i> and the provision of state religion in the constitution. Frequently used Islamic idioms and icons in the public domain.

The Mujib's Regime (1972-1975)

In line with secularism incorporated in the constitution, the Mujib's regime initially took some secularization measures to secularize the state. These included the elimination of the Qur'anic inscription *ikra' bismi rabbi kallaji khalak* (Read! In the name of your Lord Who created everything; Qur'an 96:1) from the Dhaka University monogram in 1972⁵⁸, the deletion of the word 'Muslim' from the name of a Dhaka University students' hall (Salimullah Muslim Hall) in 1972⁵⁹, the abolishment of the Islamic Academy in 1972⁶⁰, the cancellation of recitation from religious texts in the inaugural session of state-owned radio and television, the reduction of financial allotment in madrasa education, the removal of Islamic stories in the primary and secondary school textbooks, the withdrawal of Islamiyat (Islamic studies) from the secondary school syllabus, and the banning of Islamic politics.⁶¹ These secularization efforts led to the emergence of hostile relations between the regime and the religious authority. Even people began to feel that in the name of secularism, the Mujib's regime was particularly hostile to Islam rather than to all religions in the state.⁶² Consequently, partly due to fear of being alienated from the masses and partly due to pragmatic reasons, Sheikh Mujib gradually turned to Islamic tradition and culture despite the secular character of the constitution. In 1973, Mujib declared a general amnesty for all the prisoners (including the Islamic leaders who collaborated with the Pakistani army during the liberation war) held under the collaborators act (however, exceptions were made only in cases where there were specific criminal charges).⁶³ The recitation from religious texts in state-run radio

⁵⁸ S. Miah, 'University of Dhaka'

⁵⁹ See 'Salimullah Muslim Hall 85 Years of History'

⁶⁰ See 'History', Islamic Foundation, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh.

⁶¹ S. S. Islam, 'The Politics of Islam in Bangladesh'

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ R. Jahan, 'Bangladesh in 1973: Management of Factional Politics', *Asian Survey*, 14: 2 (1974), pp. 125-135.

and television was resumed.⁶⁴ The government grants for *madrasas* were increased: According to a statistics, the government increased allocation for *madrasa* education to taka 7.2 million in 1973 from taka 2.5 million in 1971.⁶⁵ The study of Islamic Studies and Arabic was made compulsory in secondary schools.⁶⁶ Public sale and consumption of alcohol and gambling were banned.⁶⁷ The government formed *Sirat* Committees (committees for celebrating the Prophet's birthday) for the observance of *Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi* (Prophet Muhammad's birthday) throughout the country.⁶⁸ The Islamic Academy that Mujib had earlier abolished was revived in 1975, and it was upgraded to a foundation and renamed as Islamic Foundation.⁶⁹ Addressing the inaugural ceremony of the Foundation, Yusuf Ali, a member of the Mujib Cabinet, affirms that "Bangladesh is committed to the ideals and teachings of Islam and she would continue her efforts for the establishment of peace and universal brotherhood—the most important tenets of Islam"⁷⁰

Mujib began to promote Islamic cooperation with Middle Eastern Muslim leaders. In 1973, Bangladesh under Mujib regime extended its support to the Arab nations in their war with Israel and even sent a medical team to help the Arabs. In February 1974, Mujib joined the OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference) meeting held in Lahore, Pakistan. Soon after being a member

⁶⁴ S. S. Islam, 'The Politics of Islam in Bangladesh'

⁶⁵ A. Riaz, *Faithful Education: Madrassahs in South Asia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), p. 118.

⁶⁶ S. S. Islam, 'The Politics of Islam in Bangladesh'

⁶⁷ P. R. Chakravarty, 'Islamic Radicalism and Politics in Bangladesh' in Satish Kumar (ed) *India's National Security: Annual Review 2014* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2015), pp. 235-245.

⁶⁸ S. S. Islam, 'The Politics of Islam in Bangladesh'

⁶⁹ S. A. Husain, 'Bangladesh Politics: From Secular to Islamic Trend' in Barun De and Ranabir Samaddar (eds) *State, Development and Political Culture: Bangladesh and India* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1997), pp. 80-97.

⁷⁰ M. A. Hakim, 'The Use of Islam as a Political Legitimization Tool: The Bangladesh Experience, 1972-1990', p. 106.

of the OIC, Bangladesh joined the Islamic Foreign Minister's Conference held at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and became one of the founding-members of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) established at the Islamic Finance Ministers' Conference held at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in August 1974.⁷¹

Mujib also made frequent references to Islam in his speeches and public articulation by using common Islamic terms and idioms such as *Allah* (God), *Insha-Allah* (God willing), *Bismillah* (in the name of God), *Tawba* (penitence), *Imam* (religious leader), and so on.⁷² He categorically declared that he was proud to be Muslim and proud that his country was the second largest Muslim nation in the world.⁷³ In his later days, Mujib even abandoned his symbolic valedictory expression *Joy Bangla* (glory to Bengal) and ended his speeches with *Khuda Hafez* (God protect you), the traditional Indo-Islamic phrase for bidding farewell.⁷⁴ Mujib also highlighted his efforts to strengthen relationship with the Muslim countries in the Arab world.⁷⁵ On 4 November 1972, during the parliamentary session after the passage of the Constitution Bill, Mujib led the *Munajaat* (Islamic prayer).⁷⁶ Griffiths and Hasan note that before the military coup in 1975, the Mujib's

⁷¹ T. Maniruzzaman, 'Bangladesh in 1974: Economic Crisis and Political Polarization'

⁷² S. S. Islam, 'The Politics of Islam in Bangladesh'

⁷³ A. Riaz, *God Willing: The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*.

⁷⁴ See S. S. Islam, 'Islam in Bangladesh...'

⁷⁵ T. Maniruzzaman, 'Bangladesh Politics: Secular and Islamic Trends' in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed) *Religion, Nationalism and Politics in Bangladesh* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1990), pp. 63-93.

⁷⁶ A. Riaz, *God Willing: The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*.

regime had already started the process of promoting Islam as a basis for national identity. It was accelerated during military rule over the next fifteen years.⁷⁷

The Zia's Regime (1977-1981)

Zia made Islam the focal point of his regime's ideology.⁷⁸ The Zia's regime obliterated the secular principle of the state and in its place incorporated 'absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah.'⁷⁹ It introduced 'Bangladeshi nationalism' instead of 'Bengali nationalism' that provided an idea of nationalism in independent Bangladesh with an Islamic character by distinguishing the Bengali Muslims from the Bengali Hindus of neighboring West Bengal.⁸⁰ It inserted the Qur'anic phrase *bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim* (In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful) in the above of the preamble of the constitution.⁸¹ It scrapped Article 12 of the constitution that pledged to eliminate all kinds of communalism, state's patronization of any religion, discrimination against persons practicing a particular religion, and abuse of religion for political purposes.⁸² The regime also deleted Article 38 of the constitution that had imposed a ban on the formation and operation of religion-based political parties. This allowed Islam-based parties and groups; such as Bangladesh

⁷⁷ M. Griffiths, and M. Hasan. 'Playing with Fire: Islamism and Politics in Bangladesh', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 23: 2 (2015), pp. 226-241.

⁷⁸ H. V. Brasted, 'Islam and Identity in South Asia, pp. At the Crossroads of Confusion and Confrontation?', in Nelly Lahoud and Anthony H. Johns (eds) *Islam in World Politics* (New York: Routledge), pp. 105-126.

⁷⁹ S. S. Islam, 'The Politics of Islam in Bangladesh'

⁸⁰ A. M. Q. Alam, 'The Nature of the Bangladesh State in the Post-1975 Period', *Contemporary South Asia*, 2:3 (1993), pp. 311-325.

⁸¹ M. A. Hakim, 'The Use of Islam as a Political Legitimization Tool: The Bangladesh Experience'

⁸² A. S. Huque and M. Y. Akhter, 'The Ubiquity of Islam: Religion and Society in Bangladesh'

Jamaat-e-Islami, Muslim League, and Nezam-e-Islam which opposed the liberation war and championed the integration of Pakistan were banned in the Mujib's regime; to return to the political arena in Bangladesh. The regime made a constitutional recognition of pro-Islamic foreign policy.⁸³ Article 25(2) was included in the constitution that reads: 'The State shall endeavor to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity.'⁸⁴ It provided generous patronization and support to the spread of Islamic education and cultural practices.⁸⁵

Zia's pro-Islamic symbolic measures included the display of Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions in government offices, public places, and the state messages on religious occasions such as *Eid-al-fitr*, *Eid-al-adha*, *Shab-e-barat*, *Shab-e-qadr*, and *Eid-e-miladunnabi*.⁸⁶ In his personal style, Zia reflected an explicit Islamic commitment and orientation: He declared the expression *Joy Bangla* (glory to Bengal) to be un-Islamic and popularized in its place *Bangladesh Zindabad* (long live Bangladesh).⁸⁷ He used to begin his speeches with the Qur'anic term *bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful), and made it almost mandatory for all public servants to also preface their speeches with this term.⁸⁸ In order to expand the horizon of Islamic education and culture, Zia's government established an Islamic University with an Islamic Research Center attached to it.⁸⁹

⁸³ M. G. Kabir, 'Religion, Language and Nationalism in Bangladesh', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 17: 4 (1987), pp. 473-487.

⁸⁴ Cited in M. A. Hakim, 'The Use of Islam as a Political Legitimization Tool: The Bangladesh Experience', p. 107.

⁸⁵ A. Riaz, *God Willing: The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*.

⁸⁶ E. Ahamed, 'Current Trends of Islam in Bangladesh'

⁸⁷ S. S. Islam, 'The Politics of Islam in Bangladesh'

⁸⁸ P. S. Ghosh, 'Bangladesh at the Crossroads: Religion and Politics', *Asian Survey*, 33: 7 (1993), pp. 697-710.

⁸⁹ E. Ahamed, 'Current Trends of Islam in Bangladesh'

The Ershad's Regime (1982-1990)

Ershad also emphasized and continued the Islamization process. Like Zia, he was also determined to posit Islam as the basis of state ideology.⁹⁰ From the very beginning of his rule, he made it clear in his speeches. In one occasion, he declared:

Islam is our ideal and it is the only way to our emancipation. The existence of the country will be at stake if we fail to establish Islam in Bangladesh. We, the nine crore [ninety million] Muslims (of Bangladesh) will certainly speak about Islam, think about Islam and dream about Islam. This is our only way for emancipation.⁹¹

In a speech delivered before the bureaucrats, he asserted: “We will have to give Islam its rightful place in our constitution. Why should there be any fear if it [Islam] is made the state religion? After all, Islam is a religion of tolerance and accommodation.”⁹² On another instance, he maintained: “Islam being the religion of the majority of the population will be given the highest place in the country’s future constitution and Islamic provisions will be included wherever necessary.”⁹³

The Ershad regime’s pro-Islamic policies included: Through the eighth amendment of the constitution, the regime officially declared Islam as the state religion of Bangladesh.⁹⁴ However,

⁹⁰ S. S. Islam, ‘The Politics of Islam in Bangladesh’

⁹¹ Cited in S.T. Rahman, *Global Geo-Strategy of Bangladesh, OIC and Islamic Ummah* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1985), p. 2.

⁹² Quoted in S. A. Husain, ‘Bangladesh and Islamic Countries, 1972-1983’ in S. R. Chakravarty and Virendra Narain (eds) *Bangladesh: Global Politics* (Vol. 3), (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1988), pp. 125-126.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁹⁴ S. S. Islam, ‘Islam in Bangladesh: A Dichotomy of ‘Bengali’ and ‘Muslim’ Identities’

the amendment also includes that ‘other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the Republic.’⁹⁵ It established a Zakat fund to be headed by the President.⁹⁶ The regime formulated a new education policy that intended to introduce Arabic and Islamic Studies in the both elementary and secondary schools. Ershad frequently asserted that the cultural life of the Bangladeshis would be firmly based on Islamic principles and ideologies.⁹⁷ The regime made the state-run electronic media airing Islamic programs in increasing numbers.⁹⁸ The broadcasting of *azan* (call for prayer) five times a day was made compulsory in these media. Verses from the Qur’an were recited before the national carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines soared high in the air and on the ground, trains rolled on the railway tracks.⁹⁹ Ershad attempted to turn the *Shaheed dibas* (Martyrs’ Day/21 February), which was/is observed nationally to commemorate the sacrifices of the language martyrs, into a religious occasion through prayers and recitations from the Qur’an instead of the barefoot procession at dawn and the traditional colorful paintings known as *alpana*, which he treated as ‘un-Islamic.’¹⁰⁰ The regime established a separate directorate under the Ministry of Education for *madrasa* education, and it also made a remarkable contribution to the mushrooming growth of religious institutions including *madrasas*.¹⁰¹ It sanctioned liberal grants to shrines and

⁹⁵ E. Shehabuddin, *Reshaping the Holy: Democracy, Development, and Muslim Women in Bangladesh* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁹⁶ E. Ahamed and D. R. Nazneen, ‘Islam in Bangladesh: Revivalism or Power Politics?’ *Asian Survey*, 30: 8 (1990), pp. 795-808.

⁹⁷ A. Riaz, *God Willing: The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*.

⁹⁸ M. A. Hakim, ‘The Use of Islam as a Political Legitimization Tool: The Bangladesh Experience’

⁹⁹ S. Ahmed, *Bangladesh: Past and Present* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2004).

¹⁰⁰ M. A. Hakim, ‘The Use of Islam as a Political Legitimization Tool: The Bangladesh Experience’

¹⁰¹ E. Ahamed and D. R. Nazneen, ‘Islam in Bangladesh: Revivalism or Power Politics?’

mosques, especially in order for their repairs, reconstruction, and beautification. It made Friday, instead of Sunday, the weekly holiday and changed the name of Red Cross to Red Crescent.¹⁰²

Ershad frequently visited religious shrines and pirs, especially the pir of Atroshi, Faridpur, where he addressed many massive gatherings of the religious devotees.¹⁰³ He used to deliver sermons in mosques before the Friday congregation and invite people to follow the true path of Islam. He performed multiple hajj and would refer to it frequently in public speeches. On different religious occasions, he also used to issue emotionally-charged messages to the nation.¹⁰⁴

The Khaleda's regimes (1991-1996 & 2001-2006) followed Zia's policy of Islamization and stressed Islamic symbolism.¹⁰⁵ The Hasina's regime (1996-2001) demonstrated her inclination to Islamic identity and symbolism. She began using Islamic idioms such as *Bismillah*, *Khuda Hafez*, and *Insha-Allah* in her public speeches. Party political posters displayed these idioms including Hasina's portrait with *hijab* and prayer beads in hands.¹⁰⁶ However, Hasina's second term (2009-2014) brought back the old secular ideology to the state. Through the fifteenth amendment of the constitution, the regime omitted the constitutional principle 'absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah', and in its place restored secularism; Article 12 of the 1972 constitution that demonstrated commitment to secularism was reestablished. Paradoxically it retained

¹⁰² K. M. Mohsin, 'The *Ahl-i-Hadis* Movement in Bangladesh' in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed) *Religion, Nationalism and Politics in Bangladesh* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1990), pp. 178-185.

¹⁰³ M. A. Hakim, 'The Use of Islam as a Political Legitimization Tool: The Bangladesh Experience'

¹⁰⁴ E. Ahamed and D. R. Nazneen, 'Islam in Bangladesh: Revivalism or Power Politics?'

¹⁰⁵ E. Shehabuddin, *Reshaping the Holy: Democracy, Development, and Muslim Women in Bangladesh*.

¹⁰⁶ A. Riaz, *God Willing: The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*.

bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) and the provision of the state religion.¹⁰⁷

The political regimes have consciously promoted Islamization that eventually leads to Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh. Both the secular and non-secular parties and governments regardless of their ideologies and programs equally contributed to this effort. By opposing Islam even in the public sphere, no party and no government have dared to risk their political career in Bangladesh. The promotion of Islamization by the political actors has also greatly influenced the non-political institutions and organizations in the Islamic revivalism in the country. The non-political organizations and groups have been further stimulated in their efforts for serving the Islamic revivalist cause.

Islamization Promoted by Non-state Actors/Non-political Institutions and Groups

Bangladesh is home to a large body of Islamic institutions and organizations which continue to serve the Islamic cause. These organizations include both political and non-political or in other words, social, cultural and educational institutions and groups. This section focuses on the non-political organizations and institutions which have made great contributions to the promotion of Islamization in Bangladesh.

Non-state actors or non-political institutions and organizations can be classified into three major groups. The first group includes religious institutions such as *madrasas* and mosques, and

¹⁰⁷ M. M. Salehin, 'Democracy and Islam: A Tale of Democratic Struggle in a Muslim Majority State', *Sociology of Islam*, 1: 1-2 (2013), pp. 88-114.

non-political organizations such as the Hefazat-e-Islam, the Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan and the Tablighi Jamaat. The second group comprises of the centers formed around the shrines and *darbars* of the famous Sufis and saints. The third group belongs to numerous socioreligious and cultural organizations.

Madrasas and Mosques

Madrasas have been in existence in Bangladesh for ages. In Bengal, Islamic institutions began to flourish with the advent of Islam in the hands of the Sufis and saints, as early as the eighth century. However, the conquest of Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtyar Khalji in the beginning of the thirteenth century paved the way for institutionalization of *madrasas*. Since then, *madrasas* have become a part of mainstream education. Even, during the colonial era, many members of the aristocratic Muslim families and Muslim political elites received their education in these *madrasas*.¹⁰⁸ Both the Pakistan and Bangladesh epochs have witnessed a steady upward growth of *madrasas* in the current Bangladesh territory. According to Riaz, “Over the last sixty years, socio-economic conditions, government policies, and political dynamics all have played parts in the proliferation and transformation of *madrasahs* in Bangladesh.”¹⁰⁹ One statistics shows that in 1975-1976, there were 1,830 *madrasas*, with 18728 teachers and 291,191 students of both sexes; in 1988 there were more than 2,700 *madrasas*, with 26,500 teachers and 541,500 students.¹¹⁰ Another statistics shows that between 1972 and 2004 the number of *madrasa* has grown 731

¹⁰⁸ E. Ahamed, ‘Current Trends of Islam in Bangladesh’

¹⁰⁹ A. Riaz, *Faithful Education: Madrassahs in South Asia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), p. 116.

¹¹⁰ E. Ahamed and D. R. Nazneen, ‘Islam in Bangladesh: Revivalism or Power Politics?’, p. 798.

percent, and the number of students attending these institutions has also increased phenomenally.¹¹¹

After the partition in 1947, there were at least five kinds of *madrasas* in East Pakistan: the old-scheme *madrasas*, the new-scheme *madrasas*, the *madrasas* of the Deoband tradition, Hafizia *madrasas*, and the *maktabs* or preprimary *madrasas*. At independence, Bangladesh inherited four types of *madrasas*: Aliya *madrasas*, which were government-supported and modeled after the Calcutta Madrasa (and later the Dhaka Aliya Madrasa); Qawmi *madrasas*, which were privately managed *madrasas* and modeled after the Deoband Madrasa; Furkania/Hafizia *madrasas*, which were intended for offering pre-primary education for about four years—the basic Islamic education—and exclusively meant for memorizing the Holy Qur’an; and Nurani *madrasas/maktabs*, which offered pre-primary education—literacy and basic knowledge of Islam.¹¹² To date, all these types of *madrasas* exist and continue to rise in both rural and urban settings in the country. While the government-funded *madrasas* (Aliya *madrasas*) impart both modern and Islamic education, the Qawmi *madrasas* mainly teach the traditional Islamic sciences. Imam for mosques and teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies for schools and colleges are trained in these institutions. Only a few of the meritorious students from these religious schools make headway for higher study in the universities.¹¹³

Like *madrasas*, the building of mosques in Bangladesh is also traced back to the early Muslim settlements. The Muslim rulers and preachers, especially of the early period, established numerous mosques. The country’s capital Dhaka is known as a ‘city of mosques.’ In fact,

¹¹¹ A. Riaz, *Faithful Education*, p. 116.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ E. Ahamed, ‘Current Trends of Islam in Bangladesh’

Bangladesh has earned the moniker of a ‘country of mosques.’ At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there were an estimated 190,000 mosques in the country.¹¹⁴ Another statistics suggests that there are over 200,000 mosques spread over approximately 55,126 square miles of territory.¹¹⁵ Mosques are central to the Muslim way of life. The imams and preachers of these mosques regularly preach and adjudicate Islamic laws and the rules established by the Prophet.¹¹⁶ Beyond religious purposes, mosques in Bangladesh also work as a center of sociocultural activities and a symbol of identity in a locality.¹¹⁷ A number of large-scale mosque-centered organizations have been established. They include among others Bangladesh Masjid Mission, Masjid Samaj, and Baitush Sharaf. These organizations coordinate the activities of a large segment of mosques and outline programs for religious-cultural activities including the propagation of Islam, the spread of Islamic education, and social service and reform in line with the principles of the Qur’an and Sunnah.¹¹⁸ Inspired by Prophet Muhammad’s declaration that the building of and donation of funds to mosques is a virtuous work,¹¹⁹ the Bangladeshi Muslims generously come up with funds for the construction of new mosques and the extension, repair and beautification of old ones. The government also grants funds for mosques including other non-Islamic religious institutions.

¹¹⁴ A. Kershen, *Strangers, Aliens and Asians: Huguenots, Jews and Bangladeshis in Spitalfields 1660-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹¹⁵ A. S. Huque, and M. Y. Akhter, ‘The Ubiquity of Islam: Religion and Society in Bangladesh’, p. 210.

¹¹⁶ M. H. Chowdhury, ‘Popular Attitudes, Legal Institutions and Dispute Resolution in Contemporary Bangladesh’, *Legal Studies Forum*, 17:3 (1993), pp. 291-300.

¹¹⁷ I. Islam and A. Noble, ‘Mosque Architecture in Bangladesh: The Archetype and Its Changing Morphology’, *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 17:2 (1998), pp. 5-25.

¹¹⁸ E. Ahamed, ‘Current Trends of Islam in Bangladesh’

¹¹⁹ P. Hasan, *Sultans and Mosques: The Early Muslim Architecture of Bangladesh* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007).

The Hefazat-e-Islam

The Hefazat-e-Islam (Protection of Islam) is a Qawmi *madrassa*-based religious organization which emerged in 2010 in response to the then government's secular education policy. However, it came into prominence in 2013 after the launch of the 'Shahbag Movement' (under the banner of Ganojagoron Mancha) that demanded the death penalty for the Islamist leaders who were accused of committing war crimes during Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971. The Shahbag Movement was spearheaded by a group of online activists who were accused of being atheists and writing commentaries derogatory of Islam and its Prophet Muhammad. The Hefazat burst onto the scene in February 2013 following the mass media publicity of these writings,¹²⁰ and launched a 13-point charter of demands. These included reinstatement of the constitutional provision of absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah, and cancellation of all laws repugnant of the Quran and Sunnah; enactment of an anti-blasphemy law with provision for the death penalty (for anyone found guilty of 'insulting' Islam or the Prophet); making Islamic education mandatory from primary to higher secondary levels, and cancelling the women and education policies which they termed anti-religious; a ban on free mixing of men and women in public and on candlelit vigils what they called an anti-national culture; an end to mock Islamic symbols and culture, and an attempt to create hatred in the young minds against Islam by portraying villain and negative

¹²⁰ R. Hasan, 'Rising Extremism in Bangladesh: A Voyage towards Uncertainty', *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 3: 2 (2015), pp. 143-153.

character of Muslims in the mass media including radio and television; an end to erect sculptures in public places; and declaring members of the Ahmadiyya community non-Muslims.¹²¹

In April 2013, the Hefazat presented the government this charter of demands in a huge public rally. It also gave the government a thirty-day ultimatum to take measures to implement their demands. The period for the ultimatum passed without any government action. On 5 May 2013, Hefazat organized a blockade and rally at Matijheel, Dhaka in which hundreds of thousands of people mostly the students and teachers of the Qawmi Madrasas across the country attended. Prior to this, the permission to hold the program was given on the condition that it would be over by dusk. However, the siege continued even after dusk and eventually came to an end before the dawn of the following day as the security forces cracked down on the blockaders which cost, as Mufti Fayzullah, a central leader of the Hefazat, in an interview with the authors, claimed, thousands of lives of their activists. The government, however, initially claimed that no one had been killed,¹²² although later acknowledged that eleven people were dead in that incident.¹²³ London-based *The Economist*, attributing the figure to European diplomats in Dhaka, put it at fifty.¹²⁴ *The Economist* also described the incident as ‘like a massacre’.¹²⁵ Local human rights body

¹²¹ See ‘Hefazater 13 Dabi’ (13-Point Demand of Hefazat), *bdnews24.com*, Dhaka, 7 April 2013. <http://bangla.bdnews24.com/bangladesh/article610788.bdnews> (accessed 22 January 2016).

¹²² A. Riaz, ‘Bangladesh’s Failed Election’, p. 126.

¹²³ See ‘Bangladesh: Independent Body Should Investigate Protest Deaths.’ *Human Rights Watch*, 10 May 2013. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/10/bangladesh-independent-body-should-investigate-protest-deaths> (accessed 24 January 2016).

¹²⁴ A. Riaz, ‘Bangladesh’s Failed Election’, p. 126.

¹²⁵ See ‘Political Violence in Bangladesh: In Hot Blood: The Killings of Islamist Hardliners Promise Further Instability.’ *The Economist*, 11 May 2013. <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21577418-killings-islamist-hardliners-promise-further-instability-hot-blood> (accessed 23 January 2016).

Odhikar reported the death toll being ‘some hundreds’¹²⁶, while Human Rights Watch’s report said ‘large numbers’¹²⁷ and Asian Human Rights Commission’s report suggested that ‘the number of deaths could be as high as 2,500 or more.’¹²⁸ The local media remained silent about that incident for understandable reasons. Two television stations—Diganta TV and Islamic TV—that were live telecasting the incident were immediately closed down by the government.¹²⁹ These stations are still shut down. Habibun Nabi Khan Sohel, a BNP leader who was interviewed by the authors, criticizes the Awami League government’s regulation of free mass media: “the Awami League government is a regressive government which always regresses and takes the country to regression. Although there has been a remarkable development of mass media in our country, the Awami League government always tries to control the positive role of the media.” “The Mujib’s regime in the 1970s”, Sohel continues, “started regulating mass media by banning all the newspapers except four state-owned dailies such as Bangladesh Times, Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Daily Ittefaq.” Nevertheless, both military and civilian governments, throughout the history of independent Bangladesh, have tended to control mass media more or less by employing various political and legal mechanisms.

The Hefazat-e-Islam’s movement was successfully subdued by the government. However, the Hefazat has not retreated from its 13-point charter of demands. In the interview with the

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ See ‘Bangladesh: Independent Body Should Investigate Protest Deaths.’ *Human Rights Watch*, 10 May 2013. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/10/bangladesh-independent-body-should-investigate-protest-deaths> (accessed 24 January 2016).

¹²⁸ See ‘Bangladesh: A Massacre of Demonstrators.’ *Asian Human Rights Commission*, 6 May 2013. <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-088-2013/?searchterm=Hefazat-e-islam> (accessed 24 January 2016).

¹²⁹ Ibid. Also see ‘Bangladesh: Independent Body Should Investigate Protest Deaths.’ *Human Rights Watch*, 10 May 2013. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/10/bangladesh-independent-body-should-investigate-protest-deaths> (accessed 24 January 2016).

authors, Mufti Fayzullah, Hefazat's Joint-Secretary, informs that "the Hefazat has just adopted a 'strategy' to avert confrontations with the government. The movement for our 13-point demand would continue until they are eventually met", he adds.

The Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan

The Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan (Ahl-i-Hadith Movement) aims at reviving the spirit of the classical pristine Islam by following only the Qur'an and the authentic sayings of the Prophet. Although the term '*ahl-i-hadith*' literally refers to the followers of the Prophetic traditions, the creed of this movement consists of the teachings of Qur'an and the authoritative traditions of the Prophet. In terms of *aqeeda*, the Ahl-i-Hadith emphasized the doctrine of the absolute unity of God, the eradication of all innovations, and, above all, the rejection of the four recognized Sunni schools of thought.¹³⁰ The ulama of these four schools have thus been critical of the Ahl-i-Hadith and entitled them as *ghair muqallid* (non-conformist) or *la madhabi* (followers of no *madhab* or *imam*). However, the proponents of this movement claim that their imam is the Prophet himself, and the *Sahabas* (companions of the Prophet), the *Tabi'is* (companions of the Prophet's companions) and their followers all were Ahl-i-Hadith.¹³¹ The Ahl-i-Hadith opposes the *ahl-i-ray* who are said to follow *taqlid* (blind imitation) of the *faqihs* (Islamic jurists). According to al-Ghalib, the Ahl-i-Hadith is referred to as *ahlul-hadith*, *ashabul-hadith*, *ahlus-sunnate-wal-jamaat*, *ahlul-asar*, and *ahlul-haq muhaddisin* in various authoritative books of *Hadith* and *Fiqh*. They are also known as

¹³⁰ K. M. Mohsin, 'The *Ahl-i-Hadis* Movement in Bangladesh'; M. A. K. al-Quraishi, *Ahl-i-Hadis Parichiti* (An Introduction to Ahl-i-Hadith) (Dhaka: Dr. Muhammad Abdul Bari, 1992).

¹³¹ M. A. al-Ghalib, *Ahl-i-Hadis Andolan Ki O Keno?* (What Is the Ahl-i-Hadith Movement and Why?) (Rajshahi: Hadith Foundation Bangladesh, 2005).

Salafi (the followers of the people of righteous path). In different parts of the world, al-Ghalib continues, the Ahl-i-Hadith is introduced in a variety of names: in Egypt, Sudan and Sri Lanka, they are called as *ansarus-sunnah*; in the Middle East as *salafi*; in Indonesia as *jamaat-i-muhammadiya*; and in the Indian Subcontinent, they are known as *muhammadi* and *ahl-i-hadith*.¹³²

Historically, the Ahl-i-Hadith appeared as a significant religious and social reform movement in the Indian subcontinent in the early nineteenth century.¹³³ It was related to the reform movement launched by Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi (1703-1762). Siddiq Hasan Khan (1832-1890) and Syed Nazir Hossain (1805-1902) are credited to have played a pioneering role in spreading the Ahl-i-Hadith movement in the subcontinent. In Bengal, the same was done by Maulana Abu Abdullah Mansur Rahman Ansari in the sixties of the nineteenth century. Ansari's sons Maulana Abdul Jabbar Ansari and Abdul Hakim Ansari greatly helped spread their father's cause. About the same time, two other personalities—Maulana Wilayet Ali and Maulana Inayet Ali—played a leading role in widening the sphere of the movement in Bengal. After the partition of India in 1947, the movement was spearheaded prominently among others by Maulana Abdullahil Baqi and his brother Maulana Abdullahil Kafi al-Quraishi and son Professor Muhammad Abdul Bari (former vice chancellor of Rajshahi University and National University). During this time, the organization founded its printing and publishing house which paved the way for easy publication of the movement-oriented books, journals and magazines that eventually led to the extension of the activities of the movement.¹³⁴

The aims and objects of the Ahl-i-Hadith movement are as follows:

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ K. M. Mohsin, 'The *Ahl-i-Hadis* Movement in Bangladesh'

¹³⁴ Ibid.

- (i) the reorganization of the Muslim community (the *Jamat-i-Muhammadi*) through concerted efforts and the implementation of the principle of *Kalima Tayeba* in all spheres of life;
- (ii) to bring the community under a single banner irrespective of political and other rivalries and differences;
- (iii) to eradicate all innovations and oppressions from the society;
- (iv) to expose the ideologies propagated by the imperialist, expansionist, and communist powers;
- (v) to invite the educated people of Bangladesh to make realistic comparisons between the Islamic way of life and the other systems;
- (vi) to find out ways to eradicate poverty, corruption, and other social evils; and
- (vii) to render social and humanitarian services to the people.¹³⁵

The Ahl-i-Hadith movement in Bangladesh is not directly involved in any organized politics; however, unlike the Tablighi Jamaat, its followers are not devoid of political consciousness. They are highly zealous of the religious, social and political role of the Indian and Bengali Muslim reformers such as Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi, Shah Ismail Shaheed, Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly, Haji Shari'at Allah, and Titu Mir.¹³⁶ The Ahl-i-Hadith considers modern political and economic philosophy such as democracy, socialism, capitalism, nationalism, and secularism as '*kuffari matabad*' (the doctrine of unbelief).¹³⁷ Through building mosques and *madrasas*, publishing journals and books, and regularly organizing seminars and conferences, the Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan has emerged as a strong Islamic revivalist movement in Bangladesh.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 182.

¹³⁶ This perception derives from the authors' interview with Muzaffar Bin Mohsin, the then President of the Ahl-i-Hadith Youth Movement.

¹³⁷ M. A. al-Ghalib, *Ahl-i-Hadis Andolan Ki O Keno?*

The Tablighi Jamaat

The Tablighi Jamaat is a popular Islamic movement in contemporary Bangladesh. Originating from Northern India in the 1920s, the Tablighi Jamaat emerged as a response to the sociopolitical, cultural and religious developments of the time such as the Hindu-Muslim conflict, the dismemberment of the Ottoman Caliphate and subsequently the Khilafat movement, the declining of colonization, and a growing Muslim nationalist movement for creating a separate Muslim state in contemporary India.¹³⁸ These developments, according to Ahmad, were also facilitated by the “emergence of right-wing Hindu revivalist movements, especially the *shuddhi* (purification) and *sangathan* (consolidation) movements that were founded to reclaim those fallen-away Hindus who had converted to Islam in the past.”¹³⁹ More importantly, the emergence of the Tablighi Jamaat can be seen as a direct response to the social, cultural, moral, and religious decadence of the contemporary Muslims in India and particularly in Mewat, the hometown of the founder of the Jamaat Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944), a Deoband educated Islamic scholar. Nadwi, a close associate and biographer of Maulana Ilyas, has depicted the religious ignorance and decadence of the then Indian Muslims. Quoting from Powlett, he informs that—

All the Meos [people of Mewat] are now Muslims, but only in name. Their village deities are the same as those of the Hindu landlords, and they celebrate several Hindu festivals ...

Meos are largely ignorant of their faith (Islam). Very few of them know the *kalima*, and

¹³⁸ M. Ahmad, ‘Islamic Fundamentalism in South Asia: The Jamaat-i-Islami and the Tablighi Jamaat of South Asia’ in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds) *Fundamentalism Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 457-530.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 511.

fewer still observe *namaz* regularly. About the hours and rules of *namaz*, their ignorance is complete.¹⁴⁰

The Tablighi Jamaat has turned into a global Islamic movement in the contemporary world. The organization has vibrant activities all across the planet earth.¹⁴¹ Nonetheless, there body of literature on the topic remains scarce. The prime reason, according to Sikand, might be the fact that the Tablighi authorities themselves discourage writing about their movement having a worldview of Islam that involves a ‘practical activity’ and not something to be simply written or read about.¹⁴² Maulana Manzoor Nomani, a prominent spiritual guide of the Tablighi Jamaat, is reported to have said that “Tablighi work is not a book, it is action.”¹⁴³ The Tablighi authorities exclusively focus on the spiritual development of individuals and tend to shun the exposition of the organization. Metcalf thus describes the Tablighi Jamaat as “a quietist movement of spiritual renewal.”¹⁴⁴

The Tablighi Jamaat believes in spreading the message of Islam (*tabligh*) first among the Muslims themselves to make them better Muslims, strictly observant of the Shari’ah in every aspect of their private life.¹⁴⁵ The movement does not stipulate the preaching of the faith of Islam among the non-Muslims, at least in the beginning; rather it suggests that if Muslims faithfully

¹⁴⁰ A. H. A. Nadwi, *Life and Mission of Maulana Mohammad Ilyas* (Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1978), pp. 24-25.

¹⁴¹ M. A. Haq, *The Faith Movement of Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972).

¹⁴² Y. S. Sikand, ‘The Tablighi Jama’at in Bangladesh’, *South Asia*, 22: 1 (1999), pp. 101-123.

¹⁴³ Cited in M. Ahmad, 1991. ‘Islamic Fundamentalism in South Asia: The Jamaat-i-Islami and the Tablighi Jamaat of South Asia’, p. 516.

¹⁴⁴ B. Metcalf, ‘New Medinas: The Tabligh Jama’at in America and Europe’ in Barbara Daly Metcalf (ed) *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 110.

¹⁴⁵ Y. S. Sikand, ‘The Tablighi Jama’at in Bangladesh’

follow Islam in their personal lives, non-Muslims would be so impressed that they themselves would offer to embrace the faith. The Jamaat is run by the voluntary contributions made by its members and isolates itself from politics.¹⁴⁶

The Tablighi movement gained its foothold in East Bengal before the partition of India in 1947, however, only began to rise in the region after partition. Several professional individuals most of whom hailed from India were responsible for the early spread of the movement in the place now called Bangladesh. Haji Mohsin Ahmad, an emigrant from Calcutta and later on a teacher of the then Dhaka Engineering College (later Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology [BUET]), made a great contribution in this regard. In fact, he is considered the pioneer of this puritanical movement in Bangladesh. Today, the Tablighi Jamaat in Bangladesh has become one of the largest Islamic movements that is actively working in almost every nook and corner of the country. It has a *markaz* (a central mosque from where activities are coordinated) in every district and most sub-district or *Thana* headquarters.¹⁴⁷ The movement has attracted people from all walks of life, from the urban educated middle class to rural unlettered poorer class. A substantial number of college-university teachers, doctors, engineers, government and non-government employees, peasants, and laborers all flock together to the path of spiritual awakening under the umbrella of the Tablighi Jamaat. The biggest congregation of the Jamaat called *bishwa ijtema* is held on the bank of the river Turag at Tongi, some fifteen kilometers north of Dhaka city, and joined by hundreds of thousands of devotees. The *akheri munajat* (concluding prayer) of the congregation is attended by millions of people including the local political elites, such as the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

President, Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition of the Republic. The local media highlights the occasion with special significance. The *bishwa ijtema* is said to be the second largest Muslim congregation after the Hajj.¹⁴⁸ The Tablighi Jamaat has become one of the most influential religious revivalist movements for twenty-first century Islam in general and Bangladeshi Islam in particular.

The Sufis and Saints/Pirs, and Their Shrines

Islam was spread in Bangladesh largely by the Sufis and saints who came from other parts of the world especially the Arabian Peninsula. These Sufis and saints or in other words called pirs were highly revered in the society. Their *mazars* (tombs) and shrines are regularly visited by a large number of people. The visitors often offer monetary and other donations (*dan*) to these shrines, thinking it an act of the fulfillment of religious duty. Many do *manat* (intention for donation) to shrines to gain prosperity and get rid of difficulty in personal life. *Urs* (celebration of the death anniversary of the saint) is regularly organized in shrines and tens of hundreds of devotees of the deceased saint join it. However, this syncretistic Islam which is often branded as *pir puja* (worshipping saints) and *mazar puja* (worshipping the graves) is vehemently opposed by a large section of ulama, who regard these practices as *shirk* (polytheism) and *bid'ah* (sinful innovations) in the religion.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ S. A. Husain, 'Bangladesh Politics: From Secular to Islamic Trend'

¹⁴⁹ M. A. al-Ghalib, *Ahl-i-Hadis Andolan Ki O Keno?*; Also Mufti Fayzullah, Hefazat's Joint-Secretary, Muzaffar Bin Mohsin, a central leader of the Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan, and Mufti M. Abu Yusuf, Vice Principal of the Tamirul Millat Kamil Madrasa, in separate interviews with the authors, placed this views.

According to the government statistics released in 1981, there were at least 298,000 pirs in Bangladesh.¹⁵⁰ These pirs have their respective traditions which do not necessarily agree with one another even in both Islamic *aqeeda* (doctrinal beliefs) and practices. For example, many of the religious beliefs and practices of the Atroshi and Dewanbagi traditions do not resemble the traditions followed by the pirs of Charmonai, Sarsina and Nesarabad. The latter groups accuse the former groups of having deviated from authentic Islamic *aqeeda*, teachings and practices.¹⁵¹

The pir traditions in Bangladesh are rooted in the practice of Sufi orders such as the *Naqshbandiyah*, *Mujaddidiya*, *Qaderiyah* and *Chishtiyah* in India. The Atroshi tradition is an offshoot of these Sufi orders. Maulana Hashmatullah (1910-2001) was a disciple of Maulana Yunus Ali Enayetpuri (1886-1952), a follower of the *Naqshbandiyah-Mujaddidiya* order and the pir of Enayetpur. However, the Atroshi tradition is highly critical of the *Wahhabism* and *Salafism*, and it, in fact, denounces these movements as a modern *fitna* (chaos and discord in religion) in Islam.¹⁵² It also virulently criticizes the Deoband tradition as well as political Islam especially advanced by Maulana Mawdudi. The pir of Atroshi enjoyed enormous power and influence particularly during the Ershad's regime. Ershad himself was his *murid* (disciple); 12 ministers, 62 members of parliament, and at least three military generals were also *murids*.¹⁵³ The pir amassed wealth, and constructed a 600-bed hospital, entered into the textile business, built a spinning mill

¹⁵⁰ M. A. al-Ghalib, *Ahl-i-Hadis Andolan Ki O Keno?*, p. 45.

¹⁵¹ Ashraf Ali Akan (Charmonai tradition), Maulana Dr. Syed Sharafat Ali (Sarsina tradition) and Maulana Khalilur Rahman (Nesarabad tradition) shared this view in interviews with the authors.

¹⁵² M. A. Hye, *Sotto Islam ebong Khareji-Wahhabi Fitna* (True Islam and the Kharijite-Wahhabite Fitna) (Dhaka: Maulana Abdul Hye, Khadem, Biswa Zaker Manjil, 2014).

¹⁵³ S. A. Husain, 'Bangladesh Politics: From Secular to Islamic Trend', p. 92.

and resorted to a machinery import business.¹⁵⁴ This tradition claims to have millions of followers who play an important role in Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh.

The pir of Dewanbag Mahbub-e-Khoda Dewanbagi is a self-proclaimed great reformer, reviver of Muhammadi Islam, the father of modern Sufism, and the emperor of the Sufis (*Sufi Samrat*). According to several booklets published by the Sufi Foundation Bangladesh (founded by the Dewanbagi pir), the Dewanbagi has introduced the *Sultania-Mujaddadiya Tariqa* by reforming the system of *tasauf* befitting the times. He also claims that he has upheld the real ideals of the Prophet, what he calls 'Muhammadi Islam', for mankind with the esoteric as well as the exoteric reforms.

The Dewanbagi pir has established a *madrassa*, a school, a hospital, an orphanage, and several research organizations such as Sultania-Mujaddadiya Research Center, Sufi Foundation, and Al Qur'an Research Center for Islamic research. He claims to have founded hundreds of mosques and *Khankahs* in different parts of Bangladesh and beyond. Apart from writing books, he has published a number of journals and magazines such as *The Atmar Bani* (dictum of the soul), *The Message*, and *The Dewanbag*.¹⁵⁵ The Dewanbagi has thousands of followers and *murids* who are contributing to the advancement of his teachings and doctrinal beliefs (*aqeeda*).

The Sarsina and Nesarabad traditions, which are critical of the both Atroshi and Dewanbag traditions, are an offshoot of the Furfura tradition of Calcutta. Maulana Nesaruddin Ahmed and

¹⁵⁴ S. L. Mills, 'The Hardware of Sanctity: Anthropomorphic Objects in Bangladesh Sufism', in Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu (eds) *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 31-54.

¹⁵⁵ See *Mukti Kon Pothe?*, pp. 9-10; *Shanti Kon Pothe?*, pp. 9-10; *Manater Nirdeshika*, pp. 13-14; and *Wazifa*, pp. 11-12.

Maulana Azizur Rahman Nesarabadi (commonly known as Quaid Saheb Huzur) were founders of Sarsina and Nesarabad traditions respectively. However, Sarsina became prominent during the late pir Maulana Shah Abu Jafar Muhammad Abu Saleh, who was also the pir of Quaid Saheb Huzur. During the Pakistan period, President Ayub Khan visited Sarsina several times and sought blessings of the pir. Bangladesh's Presidents Zia and Ershad also sought blessings from Sarsina.¹⁵⁶ In an interview with the authors, Maulana Dr. Syed Sharafat Ali, the Principal of Sarsina Madrasa and a leading figure of the Sarsina tradition, asserts that “in response to the call of the late pir Maulana Abu Saleh, Ayub Khan had changed the uniform of Pakistan's defense force: from half-pant to full-pant, Ershad had made Islam as the state religion, Islamic education compulsory in schools, Friday as a public holiday, and also changed the name of Red Cross to Red Crescent. Declarations of all these changes were made from the podium of Sarsina”, Ali adds.

The Sarsina tradition does not believe in the involvement of active politics. Ali maintains that “our politics is to correct self, society and state. We do not have any political activity to attain power. Power politics is not our goal. We try to influence the rulers to act in favor of Islam.” Although this pir tradition lacks any organized political activity, it has a vibrant Islamic organization called *Bangladesh Jamiyate Hizbullah* through which the act of Islamization is done. The organization is conventionally headed by the pir of Sarsina. It is actively working throughout Bangladesh.

Nesarabad tradition upholds the doctrinal beliefs and methodology of the Furfura and Sarsina traditions. It emphasizes the unity of the Muslim Ummah. Quaid Saheb Huzur propounded

¹⁵⁶ S. A. Husain, ‘Bangladesh Politics: From Secular to Islamic Trend’; T. Hashmi, ‘Islamic Resurgence in Bangladesh: Genesis, Dynamics and Implications’ in Satu P. Limaye, Robert G. Wirsing and Mohan Malik (eds) *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia* (Hawaii: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004), pp. 35-72.

a doctrine called ‘*al-ittihad ma’al ikhtelaf*’ (unity with disunity) to make the ulama and the ummah united. A large number of people are connected through this tradition. Like Sarsina, Nesarabad also disdains party-politics, but favors Islamic politics that is isolated from power politics. Citing the examples of Mujaddid-i-Alf-i-Thani, Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti and Imam Abu Hanifa, Maulana Khalilur Rahman Nesarabadi, the central figure of this tradition and the then Principal of Nesarabad Madrasa, whom the authors interviewed, argues that “these great Islamic personalities worked in politics and served people without resort to party-politics. The power-centric Islamic parties do more harm than good for Islam and the Muslims”, he adds. The Nesarabad tradition denounced, in its term, the ‘radical ideas’ (*ifrat*) of Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and Mawdudi.¹⁵⁷ Former *Nazim-i-A’la* (General Secretary) of Sarsina’s *Jamyiate Hizbullah*, Quaid Saheb Huzur subsequently founded *Bangladesh Hizbullah Jamyiatul Muslehin*. This organization is working throughout the country to serve the cause of Islam.

Beyond these, there are many other Sufi traditions spread over Bangladesh which continue to be followed and practiced by millions of Bangladeshi Muslims.

Socio-religious and Cultural Organizations

In Bangladesh, there are plenty of socio-religious and cultural organizations working towards Islamic revivalism. Among the prominent organizations, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh is the largest umbrella organization under the Ministry of Religious Affairs working to disseminate

¹⁵⁷ M. A. R. Nesarabadi, *Ahllle Sunnat Wal-Jamaater Porichoy O Aqayed* (The Introduction and Doctrinal Beliefs of Ahle Sunnat Wal-Jamaat) (Jhalakati: Nesarabad Hizbullah Daruttasnif, 2011).

values and ideals of Islam and carry out activities related to those values and ideals.¹⁵⁸ One of the major contributions of the Islamic Foundation to the process of Islamization was the translation of the Qur'an from Arabic into Bengali, making the Qur'an cheaply and readily available to the readers.¹⁵⁹ Currently, the Islamic Foundation has offices in all sixty-four districts. It also has six divisional offices as well as seven Imam Training Academy Centers and twenty-nine Islamic Mission Centers. Through the Imam Training Academy Centers, the Foundation trains the imams of mosques as community leaders. This autonomous institution has five major objectives: to propagate Islamic values, to promote research underlining the contribution of Islamic culture, to propagate Islamic concepts of tolerance and justice, to provide grants for Islamic projects, and to promote collaboration with and between organizations and groups whose philosophy aligns with the Foundation.¹⁶⁰

Bangladesh Masjid Mission (Bangladesh Mosque Mission) works to turn the country's mosques into centers of socio-religious life of people through conducting mosque-based programs. The Islam Prachar Samity (Association for Preaching Islam) is engaged in preaching Islam among the non-Muslims through its *dawah* (call to Islam) activities which include the finding of new converts through social services, providence of education and shelter to the needy converts, the imparting of vocational training to the newly converts, and the implementation of mass education program to eradicate illiteracy and the undertaking of charity works such as the building of medical

¹⁵⁸ See 'History.' Islamic Foundation, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh. http://www.islamicfoundation.org.bd/pages/home_details (accessed 22 December 2015).

¹⁵⁹ M. Griffiths and M. Hasan, 'Playing with Fire: Islamism and Politics in Bangladesh', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 23: 2 (2015), pp. 226-241.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

centers for the poor people.¹⁶¹ The Quranic School Society pursues character building programs for the school children from Muslim families to inculcate in them Quranic values and morality. Bangladesh Islamic Center conducts research on the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet and translates Islamic literatures from Arabic, English and other languages into Bengali. It organizes Islamic seminars and symposia to propagate the message of Islam and nurtures Islamic research scholars and authors. The Center also cooperates with other organizations working along its line.¹⁶² Bangladesh Jamiatul Mudarreseen (Bangladesh Madrasa Teachers' Association) is the single and largest organization of *madrasa* teachers and employees having more than a hundred thousand members.¹⁶³ It mainly works in the development of the *madrasa* education and promotes the ideal of the Islamic way of life.¹⁶⁴ The World Islam Mission is a charitable organization rendering services to orphans and the disabled; Ittehadul Ummah (The Unity of the Muslim Nation), guided by several religious leaders, endeavors to forge unity among the Islamic forces to better serve the cause of Islam; and the Council for Islamic Socio-Cultural Organizations renders effort to coordinate diverse sociocultural and missionary activities of various Islamic groups in Bangladesh.¹⁶⁵

Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought (BIIT) undertakes research and educational programs such as publishing Islamic books and journals, translating Arabic and English books into Bengali, organizing Islamic workshops, seminars and symposia.¹⁶⁶ Bangladesh Quran Shikhya

¹⁶¹ See 'Association for Preaching Islam.' <http://www.apibangladesh.org/about-api> (accessed 21 January 2016).

¹⁶² See 'Bangladesh Islamic Center.' <http://www.bicdhaka.com/23-bic/1-bangladesh-islamic-center> (accessed 21 January 2016).

¹⁶³ E. Ahamed, 'Current Trends of Islam in Bangladesh', p. 1116.

¹⁶⁴ See 'Bangladesh Jamiatul Mudarreseen.' <http://bjm.org.bd/about-jamiat/history-of-the-establishment> (accessed 21 January 2016).

¹⁶⁵ E. Ahamed, 'Current Trends of Islam in Bangladesh'

¹⁶⁶ See 'BIIT.' <http://www.iiitbd.org/biit/> (accessed 21 January 2016).

Board (Bangladesh Quran Education Board) aims at promoting Islamic education throughout the country by establishing at least sixty-eight thousand *madrasas* in sixty-eight thousand villages.¹⁶⁷ The Islamic Research Society, Bangladesh is engaged in propagating Islam, spreading the teachings of Quran, facilitating inter-faith dialogue to ensure peace and harmony in society, and organizing seminars and conferences for advancing the Islamic cause.¹⁶⁸ The World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY)-Bangladesh works to promote *dawah* activities; support orphans in education, health and livelihood; and to impart education for youth—both male and female. It also supports the construction of mosques and religious institutions, publishes books, and provides opportunities, particularly to the youth, to work together by conducting youth development programs, workshops, counseling and awareness programs, and sports.¹⁶⁹ The Saimum Shilpi Gosthi (Saimum Singer Group) has made a silent revolution in the field of Islamic culture and entertainment in Bangladesh. It has produced Islamic singers, artists and cultural personalities who continue to serve the cause of Islamization of culture in the country.¹⁷⁰ Finally, the Phulkuri Ashar (Gathering of Flower Buds), a larger national Islam-oriented children organization, works with school children to build moral character, develop performing quality and good physique with versatile caliber. With the slogan ‘Build Thyself to Build the World’, this organization aims at molding the children into intelligent, patriotic, religious and overall decent human beings. To that end, it implements several human-building programs such as education and literary activities;

¹⁶⁷ See ‘Bangladesh Quran Shikhya Board.’ <http://quranshikkhaboard.com/> (accessed 21 January 2016).

¹⁶⁸ See ‘The Islamic Research Society, Bangladesh.’ <http://irsb.net/aims/> (accessed 21 January 2016).

¹⁶⁹ See ‘WAMY-Bangladesh Office.’ <http://wamy.org.bd/v2/> (accessed 21 January 2016).

¹⁷⁰ See ‘Welcome To Saimum.net.’ <http://saimum.saimum.net/> (accessed 21 January 2016).

morality-awakening cultural activities; sports and physical exercise; agricultural, art and science-oriented programs; and social welfare activities.¹⁷¹

The non-political sociocultural and religious organizations have made enormous contributions to the contemporary Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh. Both the private citizens and the government organizations have provided considerable support to the religious cause of these organizations. The role of the political and non-political actors in the consolidation of the Islamic forces leading to Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh has been complimentary. Although they followed separate paths, their actions resulted in the same—the Islamic revivalism.

Conclusion

Both the state and non-state or non-political actors contributed to the contemporary Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh. Islam is so predominant in the politics, society and culture of the country that every political party, non-political group or organization regardless of their ideologies and programs make a reference to it. The Mujib's regime adopted secularism without the consensus of the people.¹⁷² It, however, gradually embraced the pro-Islamic policies which were later on institutionalized by the Zia's and the Ershad's regimes. Through a number of amendments to the constitution, these two regimes bore the brunt of the state-sponsored Islamization in Bangladesh. Subsequent rulers followed suit with the exception of Sheikh Hasina whose regime (2009-2014) adopted strategies to emasculate the Islamic forces and their influence in the state. Secularism was restored in the constitution, again not on a consensual basis of the population, but as a 'tactical

¹⁷¹ See 'Phulkuri Ashar.' <http://www.phulkuriashar.org/index.html> (accessed 21 January 2016).

¹⁷² M. Griffiths and M. Hasan, 'Playing with Fire: Islamism and Politics in Bangladesh'

guise' to win the Western and Indian support.¹⁷³ The evidence lies in the regime's inability to remove the provision of state religion as well as the Qur'anic phrase from the constitution.

Beyond the state actors, non-state actors or non-political organizations and institutions have also made significant contributions to Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh. Non-political Islamic movements such as the Tablighi Jamaat, the Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan, and the Hefazat-e-Islam have been actively working in promoting Islamization of the society. Hundreds of thousands of religious schools, mosques and shrines or pir traditions have engaged a bulk number of the population and have been serving the religious cause of their ways. A large number of socio-religious and cultural organizations continue to work in spreading the sphere of power and influence of the Islamic traditions. The overwhelming majority of the Bangladeshi Muslims have been actively engaged in these organizations. It seems unlikely that secularization would gain a sturdy foothold in such a society. Rather, the Islamization done by the state and non-state actors has created a fertile ground for an effective development of Islamic revivalism in the country. While the founding fathers of sociologists predicted a secularizing trend in the wake of modernity, the Bangladesh case, at least, does not support their prediction and Marx's judgment. Both the state and non-state actors in Bangladesh have historically contributed to the process of Islamization. The current secularization process adopted by the Hasina's regime through various forms of de-Islamization is clearly devoid of public support, and hence took on a violent form. This secularism is diametrically opposed to what democracy (and to some extent Western secularism) offers such as the rule of law, human rights, free and fair election, and people's choice.

¹⁷³ M. S. Islam, "'Minority Islam' in Muslim Majority Bangladesh: The Violent Road to a New Brand of Secularism", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 31: 1 (2011), pp. 125-141; M. S. Islam, 'Trampling Democracy: Islamism, Violent Secularism, and Human Rights Violations in Bangladesh', *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights*, 8: 1 (2011), pp. 1-33.

The more democratic deficit exists, the more fertile ground the religious forces and elements will gain in Bangladesh.