

CURRICULUM REFORM AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

Written by Liberation War Museum

Section 1: Introduction and Background

This research aimed to study the various initiatives undertaken by the Government of Bangladesh and the Liberation War Museum (LWM) as an informal institution, in the educational sector of Bangladesh to promote remembrance of past human rights violations, social cohesion and a culture of human rights among youth. In doing so, the research focused on analyzing the past education policies, their objectives, the successes, challenges and the lessons learnt from the policies.

The report is made in consultation with the experts in the field, who are partners with the LWM efforts for years and have been part of the Government of Bangladesh's educational reform committees over the years. The internal resources available at the Liberation War Museum, cut across all 64 districts of Bangladesh as it has built a strong network of teachers and students who regularly participate in the initiatives of the museum.

The report has followed an internal review process, where actors and partners of the effort have reconfirmed the analyses and the proper articulation of the changes made to the curriculum and national textbook of Bangladesh.

Context of the Liberation War of 1971

Before the partition, the Province of Bengal (now Bangladesh) was part of British India under the colonial rule. On 3 June 1947, the British government announced the Mountbatten Plan, a policy statement that recognized the inevitability of the partition of the Indian territory.¹ On mid August 1947, the British left India dividing the Sub-continent into India and Pakistan. About a million people died in gruesome communal slaughter, six and a half million Hindus and Sikhs crossed border from Pakistan to India and nine million Indian Muslims migrated to Pakistan from India.²

Pakistan was born under the leadership of Jinnah based on two nation theory. The Lahore Resolution, also known as the Pakistan Resolution, was passed on March 23, 1940, called for separate homeland for the Muslims of the Sub-continent.

Soon after the partition, Pakistan had emerged as a state consisting of two territories separated by 1200 kilometres. The Bengal turned into East Pakistan Province, where the West Pakistan (now Pakistan) controlled overall administrative and political decision making. The absence of any direct land communication between East and West Pakistan prevented social mobilisation and hindered the process of nation building.³

Pakistan in reality was a multi-national state where Bengalis of Eastern province formed the majority of population. Even after the partition, almost 11.5 million Hindus remained in East Pakistan's territory.⁴ Although the Muslims were in the vast majority in the East Bengal, it was the

¹ Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.39.

² Choudhuri Mohammed Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1967, pp.264, 268 and 274.

³ Bina D'Costa, *Nationbuilding, Gender and War Crimes in South Asia*, Routledge, 2013, p.83.

⁴ Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.100.

Hindu minority who before independence provided the most of the land owning, mercantile and educated class.⁵

In the West the communal carnage caused a serious inter-state migration so that hardly any Hindus or Sikhs were left there; while in the East despite some limited migration involving people of the upper classes, Hindus and Buddhists lived along with Muslims.⁶

Though East Pakistan had become independent from India, the majority of East Pakistanis still felt as though they were under colonial rule, this time headed by West Pakistan. Thereafter, in next 23 years, Pakistan was divided into two fundamental demands of its citizens, religious identity v nationalist aspiration.

While the language issue was the core of the conflict during the 1950s (Urdu was forcefully made as the State language whereas the majority of Bengali population used to speak in Bangla), economic and cultural problems came to the fore afterwards.

In 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of the popular political party, the Awami League presented its Six Point Programme. To establish the right of self-determination of the Bengali people, the Programme demanded for a confederation of East and West Pakistan and to separate accounts of foreign exchange earnings of each of the federating units.

The programme was rejected by the government and later Sheikh Mujib was arrested in June, 1967, accusing him for high treason, other thirty five defendants were too detained and tried. Mujib was implicated in a case under military tribunal, widely known as the Agartala Conspiracy case. Due to a mass upsurge in 1969 in East Pakistan against these fake charges, the government dismissed the trial and set Mujib free.

The conflict even more escalated after the national election in 1970, in which the Awami League obtained 167 of 300 national seats whereas the Pakistan Peoples Party won only 81 seats. The military government did not want to hand over the power to Sheikh Mujib and hence, President Yahya Khan postponed the scheduled parliamentary session in March 1971. Sheikh Mujib, in response, declared peaceful non-violent and non-cooperation movement to establish democratic rights of the people.

The Pakistan government considered military intervention as the only way to solve the political crisis and keep this domination over East Pakistan.

During that period of escalating tensions, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered a speech at the Ramna Race Course in Dhaka. In this biggest mass meeting on March 7, 1971, Mujib made a call for the freedom and rights of the people of Bengal and said : —I call upon you to turn every home into fortresses, confront the enemy with whatever you have and close all roads for life even if I am not around to give orders. The seven and a half crore people of Bangladesh had accepted these orders as more important than mere directives. He ended the speech with, “The struggle this time is for emancipation! The struggle this time is for independence!” was effectively a declaration of independence expressed with a firm resolve, which had in fact defined the speech.

Following this, the government decided to unleash a military attack during 25-26 March 1971. It became a planned act of violence with operation searchlight enforced at midnight, on 25 March

⁵ Rushbrook Williams, L., *The East Pakistan Tragedy*, Tom Stacey Ltd, London, p.15, 1972.

⁶ Abul Maal A Muhith, *History of Bangladesh: A Sub continental Civilisation*, University Press Limited, p.157.



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1971 as part of the central planning and conspiracy. The Bengali students and intellectuals, policemen, the Hindus, unarmed civilians, Awami League supporters were the prime targets.

Sheikh Mujib on the same night was arrested and detained in West Pakistan until the independence of Bangladesh. Before his arrest, the Independence of Bangladesh which was circulated from Radio Station and, marked the resistance of Pakistan army by the freedom fighters of Mukti Bahini in East Pakistan. On 10 April, 1971 the Proclamation of Independence was declared and on the basis of this Proclamation, a provisional government of Bangladesh was formed on 17 April 1971.

Pakistan army mobilized huge troops from West Pakistan, warships, gunboats and jet planes were employed for killing people and destroying properties with a view to attaining military objectives. Despite the strong support for the independence struggle in East Pakistan, some sections of the population also backed the idea of a united Islamic Pakistan; members of the Muslim League and the Jamaat e Islami, as well as many Non-Bengalis residing in East Pakistan.

Most of them supported the cause of a united Pakistan and many also assisted the Pakistani army in its military interventions in East Pakistan. With the help of local collaborators (Razakars, Al Badr and members of the so-called Peace Committee) in East Pakistan, the Pakistan Army would go to every corner and commit mass killings, sexual violence and other international crimes against the Bengali population.

India very soon became involved in the war and backing Bangladesh's right to selfdetermination, provided military training and arms to the freedom fighters (the freedom fighters of East Pakistan was named Mukti Bahini).⁷

After nine months war, approximately 93,000 soldiers representing Pakistan troops had surrendered to the Indian Army and Mukti Bahini on 16 December 1971. Around 30, 00,000 perished in the genocidal attack by the Pakistan army, more 10 million became the victims of deportation to its neighbouring countries. According to official Indian figures, the number of refugees reached 9.89 million in mid-December 1971.⁸

According to the findings of the International Commission of Jurists in 1972, "all human rights were completely suspended in East Pakistan. Not only the Government and the Army, but every soldier with a gun had supreme authority over life and death and property, and could use that authority at will."⁹

The Bangladesh Constitution, adopted in 1972, acknowledged the sacrifices of those who fought and died for independence in its Preamble. The Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunal) Order was enacted on 24 January 1972 in order to bring the collaborators to trial. Under this Order, 2,848 were brought to trial and 852 of those were sentenced. The initiatives were taken to set up a tribunal to try the perpetrators of international crimes, in order to which in 1973 the Bangladeshi Parliament enacted the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act.

After the August 1975 assassination of Sheikh Mujibur along with his family members in a military coup, leading military officer General Ziaur Rahman took power. He nullified the ban against religious parties, moved to integrate "collaborators" into the political mainstream, and stopped

⁷ Van Schendel, p.169.

⁸ From rivalries between elites to a crisis of society: Mass violence and famine in Bangladesh (East Pakistan), 1971-77, p.136.

⁹ International Commission of the Jurists, Events in East Pakistan, 1972, Geneva.

functioning of the tribunals. This Martial Law Regime had initiated the culture of impunity in the history of Bangladesh.

The Education System in Bangladesh and School Curriculum Prior to Reconciliation-Oriented Reforms

A year within liberation, in 1972, the Government of Bangladesh established its first National Education Commission, however, it is only in 2010, after 39 years of achieving independence, that the country formulated its first National Education Policy. The Commission was formed by the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who appealed in his inspiring inaugural address to the members of the Commission to give their independent and considered opinions as to how a reconstructed education system can help achieve the people's desire for a socialistic society. He further hoped that, the Commission would make all possible efforts to evolve a: "long-term education system creating values of patriotism, nationalism, moral character and meeting all the legitimate educational requirements."¹⁰

The Commission detected deficiencies in the existing education system pre-liberation, which are briefly stated below to understand the system prior to reconciliation-oriented reforms:

- (i) Use of English as a medium of instruction,
- (ii) Bias of religious views in the curriculum,
- (iii) Lack of sufficient learning methods for children starting age 5
- (iv) Lack of a uniform textbooks and curriculum in the education system and non-availability of well-writer and attractive text books
- (v) Lack of a realistic and life-centered educational Programme.

Finally, in 1974, the Commission finalized a report addressing the deficiencies in the education system and recommended Bengali, the National Language as the mode of instruction at all levels of education. It further recommended learning of English, Sanskrit and Arabic languages, the history of Bengali nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism to allow development of a just society through education. This policy is recognized as a pro-people, easily available, uniform, universal, well planned, science oriented and of high standard according to the Constitutional directives of the country, with specific focus to inspire the students with the spirit of the liberation war and develop patriotism, nationalism and qualities of good citizens by promoting the continuity of national history, tradition and culture through an intergenerational process.

However, the policy recommended by this Commission was not implemented due to the sequence of the usurpation of power by the military rulers that began with the murder of Bangabandhu on August 15, 1975. The continuity of change in the political regime of Bangladesh unfortunately infected the Education Commission, which drafted numerous Educational Policies later in 1978, 1988, 2000, which according to Anderson, might not affect directly the general public but may have profound impact on individuals.¹¹ Needless to say, this frequent change and arbitrary education curriculum created contestation of history and hindered the process of peace and reconciliation envisioned by and for the people of a newly liberated country.

¹⁰ Education Commission Report, May 2014.

¹¹ James E Anderson, Public Policy Making, 1984, 3rd Edition.



It was desirable, after liberation that the education system of Bangladesh, by virtue of being built on the socio-economic and political conditions would reflect the history of liberation, culture, tradition, knowledge about human rights, in addition to learning the general curriculum.

However, the policy implementation never came to fruition due to the anti-nationalistic approach by the Policy implementers at the executive, legislative and administrative unit.

Pathways and Processes of Reconciliation

A core practical role for reconciliation in building peace is to create the space needed to transform, restore and (re)create relationships affected by violence, and to enable complexity

with respect to issues and identities – complexity otherwise closed down by armed conflict – to thrive within society.¹²

War crimes tribunals have three major aims: punishing war crime perpetrators, establishing the truth and achieving eventual reconciliation between the parties involved. Truth, justice, and reconciliation are fundamental elements of the healing and rebuilding of devastated societies.¹³

There is no formal reconciliation been made by Pakistan. Bangladesh has not received any official apology from Pakistan. Earlier, Pakistan proposed offering a formal apology to Bangladesh only if it (Bangladesh) dismisses the trial of 195 Pakistani Prisoners of War (PoW). The apology, which coincided with the decision by Bangladesh to drop the proposed war-crimes trials of 195 Pakistanis, was disclosed with the release of the agreement signed by the Foreign Ministers of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.¹⁴ But that was a conditional offer which Pakistan has never executed.

Bangladesh's position is that until the genocide in Bangladesh is recognized by Pakistan and international community, reconciliation cannot be achieved. Very recently, Bangladesh has reiterated the importance of resolving outstanding bilateral issues with Pakistan, including an official apology from Pakistan for the genocide it committed during Bangladesh's Liberation

War in 1971. Bangladesh's foreign minister A K Abdul Momen mentions, "The country (Bangladesh) has not forgotten Pakistan's gruesome killing of some 30 lakh Bangladeshis and rape of hundreds of thousands of women during the Liberation War in 1971. However, Pakistan has not yet apologised for the genocide it committed during the 1971 Liberation War. We want to maintain friendship with everyone but how is that possible if they could not make an apology."

In reply, Pakistan has urged Bangladesh to forget the unfortunate incidents of the past and move on to a new, better relationship. Bangladesh's the then Foreign Minister Dipu Moni demanded an apology from Pakistan on November 9, 2012, also called for Pakistan's understanding and recognition of Bangladesh's position on a resolution of outstanding issues, including repatriation of stranded Pakistanis, division of assets and war reparations. In response, her Pakistani counterpart Hina Rabbani Khar requested her to forget the past. Well short of an apology, its utterly inadequate response glosses over what remains the most shameful blot in Pakistan's less-than-stellar history. From Pakistan's point of view, any apology to Bangladesh would have

¹² Study papers, Bangladesh's genocide debate; A conscientious research, European Foundation for South Asian Studies (EFSAS), Amsterdam, April 2018, <https://www.efsas.org/publications/studypapers/bangladesh%E2%80%99s-genocide-debate;-a-conscientious-research/>

¹³ ibid

¹⁴ Pakistan Offers Apology to Bangladesh, Bernard Weinraub Special to The New York Times, April 11, 1974.



implied that its use of terror as an instrument of state policy had proved self-destructive, its exploitative policy towards its eastern province was morally reprehensible and utterly wrong.

Author Anam Zakaria commended the recent reconciliation efforts by both the Pakistani and Bangladeshi governments, but stressed that if either country wants to make any "meaningful strides," Pakistan must "acknowledge the violence of 1971 as well as the political, economic and cultural discrimination prior to Bangladesh's birth."¹⁵

It has been 50 years since the independence, Pakistan has constantly denying the historical facts. "Half a century later, Pakistan has not owned its past. Textbooks, museum exhibits and mainstream narratives continue to distort and erase history and a selective remembering and forgetting of the past has been institutionalized by the state," Anam Zakaria mentions.¹⁶

On the contrary to the development of Bangladeshi textbook policies, Pakistan textbooks do not mention anything on the genocide it has committed against the Bengali population. The Pakistan Studies textbook for classes 9 and 10 fail to mention the role of late premier Zulfikar Ali Bhutto or the Pakistan People's Party in its section on the 1971 war and lists the "role of Hindu teachers" and "international conspiracies" among the reasons for the "fall of East Pakistan".¹⁷ "A large number of Hindu teachers were teaching in the educational institutions in East Pakistan. They produced such literature which created negative thinking in the minds of Bangalees against the people of West Pakistan," the textbook states.¹⁸

On 25 December 2007, on the occasion of Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah's birthday anniversary held at Islamabad Press Club, eminent journalist and Executive Director of Geo TV, Hamid Mir, led a banner campaign with fellow Pakistani media and lawyers apologizing for 1971. The words on the banner read "Dear Bangladeshi's sorry for '71 genocide from Pakistan media and lawyers".¹⁹ It gained Hamid Mir and his colleagues a lot of respect for their brave stance and reassured Bengalis that their long standing cry for justice was heard by their brothers and sisters 1,000 miles away.²⁰

Section 2: Reforms and Innovations

Education is a sector that simultaneously reaches multiple generations as it has the potential to reach both the first generation emerging from the conflict and subsequent generations that become increasingly responsible for nurturing and protecting civil society and, in some cases, democracy and democratic institutions.²¹

Broadly, education in Bangladesh is delivered through the Formal and the Non-formal Sector, having focus on, primary, secondary and higher education. Within the formal sector, there are

¹⁵ Should Pakistan apologize to Bangladesh for the 1971 war?, DW.com, <https://www.dw.com/en/should-pakistan-apologize-to-bangladesh-for-the-1971-war/a-57051549>

¹⁶ ibid

¹⁷ PTI Islamabad, Pak textbooks still see '71 war as conspiracy, The Daily Star, December 17, 2021, Dhaka. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-166327>

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ <http://www.londoni.co/index.php/23-history-of-bangladesh/1971-muktijuddho/184-muktijuddho-bangladesh-liberation-war-1971-mir-hamid-imran-khan-and-dawn-newspaper-plead-government-for-formal-apology-war-trial-adds-pressure-history-of-bangladesh>

²⁰ ibid

²¹ Karen Murphy, "Educational Reform through a Transitional Justice Lens: The Ambivalent Transitions of Bosnia and Northern Ireland II (Internal Study, ICTJ Research Project: Transitional Justice, Education and Peace building, 2015).



special educational streams, 'the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board' which delivers education on Islamic Studies and 'the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education' delivers education using English as its medium of instruction, through the 'English Medium Schools'.

Bangladesh pledged to the international initiative of Education for All (EFA), proposed by UNESCO in 1990 to create access to education for all by 2015, in light of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). At the completion of the initiative, Bangladesh successfully made improvement in the universalization of its primary education and through early childhood development at the pre-primary level through the involvement of the government institutions, as described below.

Bangladesh's Education Policy of 2010, the first official policy post-independence, laid out by the Ministry of Education, of the Government of Bangladesh, enumerates the recommendation of the Education Commission of 1974 along with the EFA, and provides direction towards creating a uniform education system, instilled with the spirit of liberation, the history of Bangladesh that promotes the continuity of national history, tradition and culture through an intergenerational process.

This policy further reiterates the Constitutional directive of ensuring access to education for all and therefore introduces the pre-primary education system for children from 5 years onwards as preparatory education prior to enrolling in the formal education of primary education, mandates primary education system till Grade 5, free of cost. It is with this policy that the 'Madrasah' stream is formulated as a registered method of formal education under the Government of Bangladesh, known as the 'Aliyah Madrasah'. The English Medium schools are also mandated to include specific subject on Bangla and Bangladesh Studies as in practice in the general stream of secondary education.

The policy directs the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) to reform the curriculum, syllabus and national textbooks for both the formal and non-formal education sector.

It is with this objective, that the NCTB reformed the national curriculum in 2012-2013 and redesigned the national textbooks in light of the curriculum, ensuring inclusivity for all streams of education. The curriculum and syllabus of all stages of educational levels including primary and secondary at present reflect the spirit of liberation war, the context of liberation war, inclusivity, its spirit and factual narrative, language movement, the existing realities of the country, mother language, literature, culture and history in addition to the general and basic subjects. Walking the pathway of inclusivity, NCTB has successfully distributed free national textbooks to students since 2011 in order to create opportunity of education for all and to prevent dropout. In 2021, 41.6m students get 344m free books in 2021, translated books in 5 ethnic languages of Bangladesh, such as, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Garo and Sadri. The books have also been made inclusive towards blind students, for which, demand based books in 'Braille' language is printed and distributed. These initiatives make Bangladesh not only the largest financer of Primary Education but also the largest publisher of textbooks in the world.²²

Moreover, Bangladesh's proposal of resolution titled 'Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace' at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is adopted unanimously in 2020, due to the country's strong will and dedication towards promoting a culture of peace and non-violence through peace education and global citizenship education for the youth.

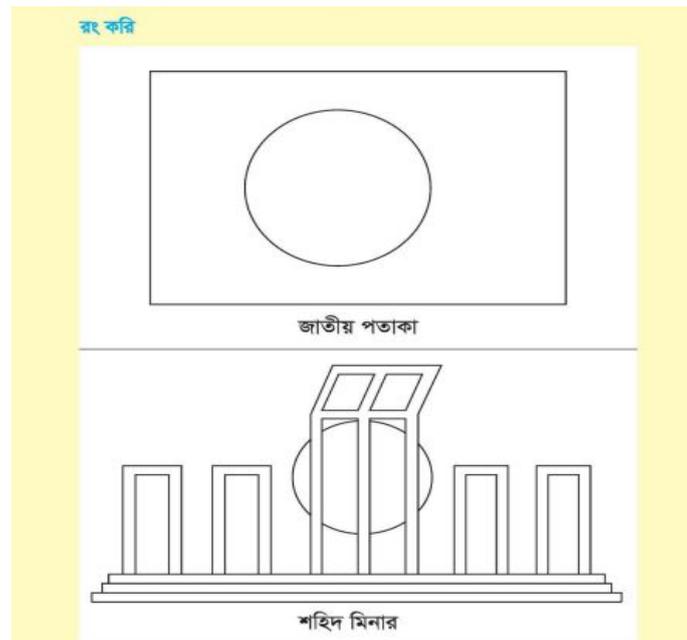
²² World Bank Working Report, 2017.

The Role of the Teaching of Recent History/Arts and Culture/Human Rights Education in the School Curriculum (and in Informal Programs) in the Post-Conflict Situation

History, arts and culture and human rights education plays an important role in a person's life, and the Education Policy of 2010, addresses the necessity of such learning at each stream and level of education. Bangladesh's history is culturally enrich in terms of folklore, music and arts and it is this culture that allowed the people of the country to identify their uniqueness as a nation. In 1971, a group of cultural activists joined together travelled to the makeshift refugee camps and training camps and performed songs and puppet plays that expressed emotions of Bengali land and culture. This journey is depicted by the historic film titled 'Muktir Gaan- Song of Freedom' and is a first-hand account of the importance of arts and culture during and post conflict.

In this line of thought, the national curriculum of Bangladesh includes music, painting, arts and crafts, recitation, acting, dancing, body language etc. These help develop the quality of learners' minds and contribute to intellectual enhancement. This education provides the students with knowledge of the painting, sculpture, music, plays, folk performances and theatrical arts of the country. It is at the pre-primary level of education, that the young children learn their history and culture through arts and culture.

The picture below is from the Bengali textbook of pre-primary education, where the students are taught through methods of coloring, about the National Flag and the historical monument, of the language movement, the 'Shaheed Minar'.



At the Primary education, mandatory for all students to complete till Grade 5, more significance is brought in towards teachings of arts and history. From Grade 3 onwards, a subject titled 'Bangladesh and Global Studies' is introduced for all streams and is taught till Grade 8 with dedicated chapters on the national dates of remembrance, the ways of celebration with community, the valiant heroes of war, culture of ethnic community in Bangladesh, fundamental rights, history of liberation from initiation to victory and most importantly the vision and birth of the Father of the Nation. It is a milestone to have such factual depiction of the history of Bangladesh in the national curriculum and textbooks of Bangladesh as for a good while post-independence, there was no mention or importance provided towards such knowledge. The



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Government of Bangladesh, through its Vision 2021 implemented the inclusion of history, culture, liberation, peace and solidarity in all curriculum to develop a generation that is respectful of its own and others culture.

The following pictures are captured from the national textbook of the Bangladesh and Global Studies depicting the significance of the celebration of Victory day.

In the picture below, inclusivity is addressed with regards to showing the image of both girl and boy child including child with special needs participating in mainstream education.



In the picture below, the students are taught about the various ethnic community in Bangladesh adorning their cultural attire. Such image in the national textbook creates both inclusivity and recognition of the ethnic culture of Bangladesh.



The picture below, enumerates the basic fundamental rights, such as the right to life, education, freedom of movement, religion and the right to practice one's own culture and norms.



 <p>বেঁচে থাকার অধিকার জীবন রক্ষার অধিকার সকল অধিকারের মধ্যে অন্যতম। আমাদের বেঁচে থাকার জন্য প্রয়োজন খাদ্য, বস্ত্র, বাসস্থান, চিকিৎসা ইত্যাদিসহ জীবনের নিরাপত্তা।</p>	 <p>ধর্ম পালনের অধিকার এদেশের মুসলমান, হিন্দু, বৌদ্ধ, খ্রিস্টান প্রত্যেকেরই নিজ ধর্ম ও ধর্মীয় উৎসব পালনের অধিকার আছে।</p>
 <p>শিক্ষার অধিকার শিক্ষালাভের অধিকার প্রতিটি নাগরিকের একটি অন্যতম অধিকার। রাষ্ট্রের উন্নয়নের জন্য প্রত্যেক নাগরিকের শিক্ষা গ্রহণ করা প্রয়োজন।</p>	 <p>ভাষা ও সংস্কৃতির অধিকার নিজ মাতৃভাষায় কথা বলা নাগরিকের মৌলিক অধিকার। একইভাবে নিজ নিজ সংস্কৃতি চর্চা করা ও উৎসব পালন করাও এই অধিকারের অন্তর্ভুক্ত।</p>
 <p>চলাফেরার অধিকার প্রত্যেক নাগরিকের দেশের ভিতরে স্বাধীনভাবে চলাফেরার অধিকার আছে। এ কারণে আমরা কোনো রকম বাধা ছাড়া সহজেই যেকোনো স্থানে যেতে পারি।</p>	

The picture below, is from the Bangladesh and Global Studies national textbook for the primary students in 'Madrasah education.' This image shows girls in religious attire, participating in parade to the National Marching song. Such inclusion creates acknowledgment of music, national culture and right to participate by all children irrespective of their religious differences.



Informal Education Initiatives aimed at Promoting Truth-Telling, Non-Recurrence, Peace and Reconciliation within the Education Community

In the aftermath of mass atrocity, places of memory or Sites of Conscience serves as a safe place involving the community. The Liberation War Museum (LWM) of Bangladesh, established in 1996 is such a Site of Conscience that has dedicated its work towards upholding truth, to go beyond the want of persecution of perpetrators and preserving the memory of war and building a culture of human rights and social justice in post-conflict societies. The LWM initiated a reach out and outreach program aimed at promoting truth-telling and includes primarily the students of Bangladesh across Bangladesh. In doing so, it has created a strong network of teachers across the country, which promotes the importance of memory culture and teaches about the local history to the students to create awareness within their locality.

The innovative program by the LWM is its 'Mobile Museum' which performs the activities including the students across Bangladesh as the museum understood the importance of the younger generation to learn about the country's history and, at the same time, be imbued with the core values of the struggle to establish a secular liberal democratic society. This Mobile Museum visits education institutions in various parts of the country, where representatives implement a multicomponent program and appeal to the students to collect eyewitness accounts of 1971 from



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their elders. The target population of the program is students from the post-primary to university levels, although secondary-level students respond more enthusiastically than those from higher levels and thus form the core target group. When the bus travels to a district, it usually spends a month in the locality, and the team formulates the schedule to include all sub-districts in an attempt to be as inclusive as possible, reaching out to the education institutions of towns as well as deeper rural areas and marginalized communities. The exhibition inside the Mobile Museum includes the following components:

- A mini-museum with a display of historical documents and artefacts, mounted inside the bus
- A projector and screen to show the twenty-two-minute documentary film 'Bangladesher Muktishongramer Itihaash' (Emergence of Bangladesh: 1947-1971).
- A display on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in which various articles of this document are presented through posters created by an eminent Bangladeshi artist.
- A poster display on the concept of peace and tolerance, designed by a leading Bangladeshi cartoonist. The display, "The World as a Village", scales down the world into a village with one hundred people, showing how many of them belong to each religion, nationality, language, and so on. It also highlights how many children the village has and their access to food and education, as well as the importance of respecting diversity and ensuring social justice. The idea is to enable the students to contextualize the violent past of the war period with the UDHR and learn not only about their own rights, but also the rights of other people.
- A comment book for the students to write down their reactions

The students are at present well versed with the activities and existence of the Liberation War Museum, as they study in their national textbooks. The following picture is from the national textbook of the Bangladesh and Global Studies of Grade 5, where a picture of the LWM is provided and the students are taught the reason behind its existence and its activities including students.

প। আরও কিছু করি



এটি ঢাকায় অবস্থিত মুক্তিযুদ্ধ জাদুঘর। এই জাদুঘরে স্বী আছে বলে গভোমাদের সনে হয়। স্বাধীনতার সুবর্ণজয়ন্তী বা ৫০তম বার্ষিকী উপলক্ষে একটি স্মৃতিসৌধের নকশা তৈরি কর। স্মৃতিসৌধের ফলকে খোদাই করার জন্য কিছু কথা লেখ।

Upon completion of the Mobile Museum visit and activities, the LWM has initiated an oral history collection project where the students ask their elderly family members about 1971 experiences. The students are encouraged to select and ask any one of the eyewitnesses about his or her experiences of 1971, and write down what they hear from the person. The process has been made simple and manageable. There is no set of questions to ask or instruction manual to be followed, just a leaflet that is distributed among the students explaining the process. The students are requested only to maintain authenticity in doing the write-up. Each student records his or her name, class, and institution and the name and age of the person interviewed, with the written

version of the oral interview following. Each institute nominates a network teacher who collects the oral accounts and arranges to send them to LWM.

To encourage the students to do the exercise, LWM sends a letter of acknowledgment to the student's ad also publishes a quarterly booklet with the basic information about each interview, which is sent to the institutions so the students can see their names in print, maybe for the first time in their lives. The booklet also includes a few of the testimonies. The museum pledges that each and every piece of oral testimony will be preserved in the museum, thereby creating an 'Archives of Memory'. If the students come to the museum years later, they will be able to see their write-ups from their student days.

This activity pioneers in promoting peace and reconciliation, as LWM addresses various strata of society through its reachout program, with the Mobile Museum connecting with a diverse range of institutions, from urban, elite schools to those in slums, from institutions in towns to those in deep rural areas, and from schools for the general population to those for small ethnic groups.

Such diversity and wide reach is reflected in the oral accounts the students collect. Most importantly, the voices of the families, their accounts and experience of life during conflict is heard and registered by their own grandchild or family member.

Such informal education initiative has made a significant impact in the life of the students as it demonstrate how history is perceived by common people. Through LWM's educational activity, the students understand that history is not only what is written in the textbooks; it is also present around oneself. The students collecting testimonies gain an understanding of the past beyond the official version provided in the textbooks, which comes as a blessing to those teachers committed to upholding the truth in history.

Other Similar Initiatives in Both Government and Civil Society in Bangladesh

In addition to the Mobile Museum and the Oral history program, the LWM introduced a program that continues till date, bringing the students from across Bangladesh, to visit the museum premises in the capital, Dhaka city. The visiting students are shown a documentary film, produced by LWM and directed by an award-winning Bangladeshi filmmaker, on the history of the freedom struggle, using actual footage of the historic events. The students are guided through the galleries for further understanding of the history through visual representation. The students are invited to participate in a quiz competition to assess their learning outcome from viewing the museum galleries. At the end of the program, they are addressed by the museum staff or trustees, and prizes are given to the winners of the quiz competition.

Initially, LWM was apprehensive about the truthfulness of oral accounts collected through such an informal process since, as mentioned, the museum provides no guidelines to the students on how to approach the person to be interviewed or conduct the interview. LWM has not provided any set questionnaire, as is usually done in oral history collection. But the concerns disappeared as the accounts started to reach the museum. The feeling of authenticity in the oral accounts was not difficult to identify. Some of the accounts may have contained minor factual mistakes, but in some ways these were a reflection of how the narrator looked at history. The statements collected by the students are not historical documents; rather, they demonstrate how history is perceived by common people. The collection of such eyewitness accounts has significance in many ways beyond their historical value. The process of collecting them by the students plays an educational role by, for example, helping them develop their writing skills and creativity and giving them confidence in undertaking individual projects.

The testimonies have also proved of great educational benefit for LWM by constituting a rich storehouse of historical knowledge. A significant number of eyewitness accounts put together from a particular area provides a depiction of local history. As the students collect and send the accounts individually to LWM, they do not know what other students have done. LWM therefore makes printouts, binds them in spiral volumes, and sends them back to the schools so the students can share the accounts they themselves delivered. This collection contributes to the creation of a new kind of synergy in the community, as students and teachers see what they have done collectively. They are also encouraged to organize events based on the oral testimonies- for instance, inviting persons selected from those whose oral accounts have been collected to join various national events held at the institution and share their narratives in more detail. Through this activity, the students get a complete overview of learning about the history, to identifying family members involved in the liberation war, to recording their testimonies, understanding the history and engaging in intergenerational dialogue programs in their school premises, in participation with other students in visiting the museum premises, at national day celebrations etc.

LWM provides institutions with materials that can be used in celebrating various national days. These include a DVD copy of the documentary film shown to the students and two sets of posters on the UDHR and the concepts of peace and tolerance. Besides these, LWM has also published a set of 101 posters with photographs depicting the history of the liberation struggle and its links with the history of Bengal from ancient times. How different waves of civilization and religion mixed together in Bengal is highlighted in historical perspective. LWM provides this set of posters to the education institutions so they can organize visual displays on various occasions.

The Successes and Challenges that have been Encountered

How to link the past with the present and imbue the new generation with the core values of the liberation war was a challenge that led to the formulation of a project that aims to inspire and activate students with the power of memory as they collect eyewitness accounts of the events of 1971 from older members of their families or communities. Against the backdrop of distortion and debate regarding the history of the liberation war and the tinkering with the textbooks by subsequent government authorities, the Liberation War Museum pioneered as a citizen's initiative that relentlessly attempted to uphold truth and provide a safe place for reconciliation.

The challenge of having lack of funding became a raging success as it allowed the museum to engage the community, the younger generation to initiate activities voluntarily.

While the oral history project has provided a rich dividend to the museum and opened up opportunities to promote the ideals of harmony and contribute to educating the new generation, it should be kept in mind that part of its value is symbolic and that LWM is not a lead agency, but an institute working by and for the people. LWM does not have the means or resources to run elaborate follow-up activities, nor has it created any manuals or education materials to be used in the classroom. As a memory museum, its education strategy is to play a supportive role in strengthening students' understanding of history and promoting peace and human rights education. LWM's input can enrich the mainstream education system as an informal contribution from outside, through the synergy the program has generated and the enthusiasm it has created among various stakeholders.

One major achievement of the network teachers was changing the practice of keeping schools and colleges closed on government-approved holidays commemorating days of national importance. Bangladesh observes February 21 as Language Martyrs Day, March 26 as



Independence Day, and December 16 as Victory Day. These are important occasions that the nation celebrates, but education institutions remained closed, with no activity on their campuses.

A memorandum drawing attention to this problem was submitted to the Education Ministry on behalf of the network teachers, and many other civil society organizations also raised their voices on the matter. Subsequently, the government decided classes would remain suspended on national days, but students could go to the institutions to celebrate.

Thus, education institutions are now more vibrant and engage in collective action on days of historical significance, which has created opportunities to connect the new generation with history by planning effective ways to celebrate. Another positive development is the national education policy adopted in 2010 after elaborate discussion and exchange of opinions. LWM organized a special meeting of network teachers and submitted to the ministry a proposal highlighting the importance of having textbooks that reflect secular liberal values, and it recommended including a section on the UDHR in a textbook used in secondary schools.

Although the UDHR was not specifically mentioned in the new textbooks, a section on the United Nations and its accomplishments was added to the curriculum. The social science textbook also has a chapter on children's rights.

Moreover, the 2010 national education policy stated that one aim of education, among others, would be 'to inspire students with the spirit of liberation war (Muktijuddher Chetona) and foster in them patriotism, nationalism, and human qualities'. It thus created the scope and opportunity to redesign LWM's education outreach program in light of the revised curriculum and new methods of teaching. The education reform aimed to promote creativity among the students, and the textbooks and examination system were changed accordingly.

Nevertheless, the changing reality of education in Bangladesh and the growing recognition of LWM's work in the field have made it an important stakeholder. The trustee of LWM and director of the education program, Mr. Mofidul Hoque, who is a key interviewee of this research, was appointed a member of the committee formed by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board in 2000 to study and recommend how the history of the liberation war can be properly incorporated into textbooks. The recommendations of the committee have contributed to improving the textbook's quality.

Section 3: Lessons, Reflections and Recommendations

In interviewing the experts in the field who work with the LWM, it is that the curriculum and textbook contents have been vividly used as a weapon of history contestation to prevent any form of reconciliation for the society. The continuous change in the political dichotomy, broke the momentum of the spirit of liberation that Bangladesh envisioned in 1971. The formulation of an education policy well within a year of liberation reflects the will and strength of the liberators, which, however was successfully diminished by the anti-liberation institutions.

The specific lesson learnt is that peace and reconciliation efforts are relentless and continuous and that it is first and foremost required to engage the younger generation to advocate the history through engaging them in informal activities. The textbooks and national curriculum are reformed and now inclusive of bridging gender gap, creating diversity awareness and most importantly articulating the spirit of liberation through participation through artistic and cultural activities.

The Role of Multi-Stakeholder Participation Enhancing Government Actions to Implement Relevant Curriculum and/or Education Reform

The LWM outreach program was designed to create a synergy in its interaction with the new generation, which is why the program was made open ended. While the program presented by the Mobile Museum at individual institutions is only for a day, the connection remains ongoing, kept alive by the collection of oral history accounts and the role played by network teachers.

Multi-stakeholder involvement can enhance in formalizing the activities conducted by the informal sector as part of educating the formal curriculum in formal educational sector. The informal initiators lack resources and forum to implement the wider objective on a global scale and with the support of multi-stakeholder actors, such as the civil society organizations and the non-governmental organizations, further reform, creating of digital content can be mobilized.

Challenges and Lessons in Informal Initiatives

The first and foremost challenge of the informal sector is that the Liberation War Museum as an informal education sector, begin its work within 25 years of liberation of Bangladesh. The continuous change in the political regime and the contestation and creation of false history, created a challenge to reach out to children with another version. The objective of such initiatives has been to build peace and reconciliation and therefore the museum reached out to the local schools at the rural level, who were most welcoming to speak of their local history. The museum and its activities have been citizen-centric and involved the young students to allow them to understand the history in addition to their curriculum studies. More innovative platforms and the multi-stakeholder partners would address the outreach and reach out Programme faster and effective.

Strategies that Facilitated System-Wide Adoption or Wide Reach of Initiatives

As mentioned above, the formulation of the Education Policy 2010, the curriculum reform and textbook redesign in 2012/2013 highlighting the need for inclusion of history, stories of liberation, arts and culture, peace and reconciliation studies for students of all stream in all educational sector of Bangladesh is highly commendable. Students are the future of a just society, and formalizing all streams of education in uniformity in terms of curriculum and textbooks is applaudable. In concept of peace and reconciliation, the continuity of truth is paramount. With students being the flag bearer, ensuring their participation in upholding the national history and culture through both formal and informal sectors is a well thought of strategy, as it facilitated system-wide adoption or wide reach of initiatives.

The mode of instruction being in Bengali language ensures education for all, the translation of the national textbooks in 5 ethnic languages prevents discrimination and creates openness and diversity, the formal and informal initiative to celebrate national days with specific methods of celebration creates peace and reconciliation with a society that has gone through the perils of conflict and genocide.

Reflections on What Could Have Been Done Better or Could Be Improved in the Future

As highlighted in the report, it is well established that the history of Bangladesh's education policy if implemented at the right time, with the right objectives would have made Bangladesh's education sector more successful in its 50 years of independence. The first education policy of 1974, was visionary and the constant change in the political and social environment prevented a generation of the country from attaining peace through truth and reconciliation. The educational



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policies and reforms in 2010 and 2012, could be more developed in terms of including informal activities as a part of the formal curriculum.

Although the one stream of madrasah education is registered under the government of Bangladesh and follows the uniform national textbooks and curriculum, another stream, the 'quami madrasah' is self-funded and has its own curriculum. At the same time, the English Medium schools of Bangladesh are also outside the domain of the national curriculum. This subsequent existence, students are finding it —de-linked from their own nation's culture and history. LWM's education outreach activities are an opportunity for the museum to play a more effective role in education reform, but, again, as a museum, it can only play the role of a facilitator, not a lead agency. More initiatives at the wake of the 50th year of Independence by all development actors is required to create a just society and to achieve the Sustainable Goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.