A History of Symbolic Violence

A Spatial Temporal Exploration of The Cultural Capital Legacy of Bengali Pedagogy

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Abstract

This discussion paper explores historic class-based obstacles in the dispensation of secular pedagogy in the Bengal region with the objective of presenting a better understating of the present pedagogical positioning of the British Bangladeshi diaspora of Tower Hamlets. The discussion charts the visitation of symbolic violence in the historical development of pedagogy under colonial rule and continues into the East Pakistan period. Through the application of Pierre Bourdieu's primary thinking tools the discussion asserts Muslim Bengalis were educationally marginalised by both colonialists and local elites in the realisation of human capital consumption.

Keywords: Colonial, Cosmological, Hegemony, Genealogy, Pedagogy, Velarization

Introduction

This discussion paper explores the history of Bengali pedagogy with a distinct focus on how education as a historical and social lexical marker shaped the British Bangladeshi's objective range of pedagogical possibilities pertaining to upward social mobility and admittance into the labour market. Rather than assenting into the fluid frameworks and complex categories of ethnic taxonomy, the discourse instead, under a social constructionist approach, more narrowly explores the history of the British Bangladeshis of Tower Hamlets. Through the thinking tools of Pierre Bourdieu the discussion takes a more analytical value in the sociological representation and signification of Bengali pedagogy.

Bourdieu & Wacquant, (1992, p.162) contended, 'Research without theory is blind, and theory without research is empty', Bourdieu's body of work is vast and complex, and this discussion does not attempt to summarise his oeuvre, but instead, recruit his three main concepts of 'capital', 'fields' and 'habitus' in formulating the conceptual foundation for an evolving discussion. Bourdieu's (1990a, p.65) thinking was centred on 'how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience or rules?'. Bourdieu (1986, p.21) argued the academic investiture as capital was integral to the appropriation, assemblage and conduct, establishing 'on its holder a qualification, a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture'.

Bourdieu (1985) argued that every social sphere in which an individual or agent operated had its own social expectations and controls and all individuals operate within several different institutions, or what Bourdieu (1985), based on the theories of Karl Marx and Max Weber, called 'fields', exercising varying degrees of autonomy in settings 'such as families, educational settings, work and political groups' (Woodward, ed., 1997, p. 21). Participation in these range of objective possibilities (or fields) is based on the composition and

accumulation of ‘capitals’ as well as symbolic resources which Bourdieu (1984) argued determined where individuals position themselves as well as being positioned.

Bourdieu (1984, p.170) argued the ‘structuring structure’ of the systems of dispositions formed the cognitive ‘habitus’ which gave form and functional meaning to the ‘perceptions, appreciations and practices’ of the individuals, groups and institutions (Bourdieu, 1990a, p.53). Recruiting Bourdieu’s conceptual toolbox, two disaggregated arguments are explored in locating the present pedagogical position of the British Bangladeshis: (1) The historic dispensation of secular education in the Bengal region was a product of class power strategies and intra ethnic discrimination mechanisms adopted by competing factions in preserving privilege in pedagogy. (2) The embodied history of Tower Hamlets Bangladeshis range of objective pedagogical possibilities contains remnants of symbolic violence.

Background and Context

Today there are over 447,000 Bengalis living in Britain with over 90 per cent of Bangladeshi migrant population originating solely from the north east of Bangladesh, a rural tea growing area ‘particularly of the north eastern region of Sylhet’ consisting of 35 sub districts (Alexander, et al., 2016, p.6). Currently, the single most concentrated clustering of the Bengali population, over 81,000, is in the east end of London, in the borough of Tower Hamlets (Peach, 2006). The borough consisting of 17 wards in 8 square miles is home to 3 per cent of the capital’s overall population (Office of National Statistics (ONS), 2014).

The east London borough of ‘Tower Hamlets has a rich complex history dating back to the Domesday Book (Taylor, 2001, p.7). Historically the borough has been a gateway for generations of immigrants arriving from across Europe and former British colonies. From French Huguenot refugees from the 1590s to the Jewish community from 1870s to 1970s and more recently the Bangladeshi population have all left their mark upon the shared heritage

(Piggott & Greater London Authority, 2004). The borough is now the 15th most ethnically diverse in the country with the most ethnically concentrated group in London, 45 per cent, (37 per cent Bangladeshi) compared to 13 per cent London average. The borough has around 74,400 young people under the age of 19. Around 37,800 pupils attend one of the boroughs 17 secondary schools, 70 primary schools, 6 nursery schools in addition to the 7 higher education providers, 7 special schools. A total of 137 languages are spoken in those schools where 63 per cent of the pupils are Bangladeshi, 54 per cent of those Bangladeshi students do not speak English as their first language (Local Economic Assessment (LEA), 2018).

Tower Hamlets is the fourth largest employment location with over 200,000 jobs accounting for 5 per cent of all the jobs in London. Over 81 per cent of those jobs are located on the fringes of the city and Canary Wharf estate. Less than 20 per cent of jobs in the borough go to the Bangladeshi residents. Over 40 per cent of the populations are not in stable work with 13 per cent unemployed and 47 per cent claiming welfare benefits for over two years or more (LEA, 2018). The borough has over 54,000 people with considerable human capital investments in a first degree but just 48 per cent of graduates are employed full time (Social Market Foundation (SMF), 2016). The borough has an economy worth over £6 billion a year (Business Register & Employment Survey (BRES), 2012).

Pedagogical Past as Prologue

In order to understand the significance and social order of cultural and human capital in the lives of the British Bangladeshis of Tower Hamlets and how these capitals have marshalled these social actors in the space they occupy, it is important to revisit the historical events, which have given form and functional meaning to these concepts. Moreover, how they connect as prologue with the forms of capital the British Bangladeshi people now embody. Gardner (1995, p.43) argued ‘the history of Sylheti settlement in Britain is closely connected

to the British labour market,' for many post-war Bangladeshi workers that arrived in the Borough, it is not coincidence that had resulted in their marginal position in their shared history of limited human capital accumulation and disadvantaged employment. But construct; an organisation of events that transpired within their pedagogical past. The origins of Bengali marginalisation can, in part, be located in their cultural capital legacy ninety years prior and a silent infliction of what Bourdieu's (1984, p.358) sociology would have defined as 'symbolic violence' during colonial rule. By class power strategies of advantaged 'native elites' that would inconspicuously rescind the potentiality of Bengali workers for generations (Acharya, 1995, p.670).

Corporate Violence

The East India Company was founded on December 31st, 1600. Its commercial undertakings in Bengals pre capitalist society can be traced back to 1633, with the domination of the richest province of the Mughal Empire established in what Reid (2017, p.vii) argued was a 'muddy field of Bengal on a wet June day in 1757', an insurgent joint stock company victory over an incumbent 25-year-old Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daulah. Eight years after the Battle of Plassey, the Bengal province of Assam and its disrupted domestic economy came under the dominion of foreigners (Akash, 2019).

By 1874 the stable agrarian economy of 'Bengal's prosperous Sylhet Districts' then locally known as '*Srihat*', and its 17,020,000 inhabitants were incorporated into the corporation's unregulated private imperial mode of expansionism (Subir, 2020, p.131). The annexation added a '250 per cent increase in revenue' for the British administration (Hossain, 2013, p.42). Exercising military power, the armed merchant monopoly emptied around £232 million in modern terms from Bengal's treasury – 'the largest corporate windfalls in history' (Dalrymple, 2020 p.133). The 'privately owned imperial power' was granted the right to tax

India's wealthiest province and extract greater surplus value from its seized lands and indigenous labourers with the protection of a private army of 20,000 Indian soldiers managed from its ramshackle headquarters more than 3,897 miles away, bordering on the fringes of Tower Hamlets, in Leadenhall street in London's financial district (Dalrymple, 2020 p.346).

In the deltaic region of Assam, known today as Sylhet, most peasant Bengali workers were semi-literate. Literary production and consumption, their modes of address both theological and secular, remained the preserve of a small petty religious class of 'highly educated urban sufis' [Islamic mysticism], educated Sylheti Bengali Hindu '*Bhadrolocks'* [Sanskritised synonym of the English term gentlefolk] and highborn '*Ashraf'* Muslims [landowning elites of distinguished decent] prominent from 1757 to 1947 (Uddin, 2006, p.26). These groups, loyal to the crown out of conformity, had high consumption rates of British pedagogy yet discharged by their colonisers as little more than 'hybrid babus' (Robinson, 1989, p.122). Their sovereign failed to reorganise the imperial production logic by incorporating the new indigenous agents within the imperial transnational habitus as British subjects with equality of opportunity as colonised. The human capital investments made by these Indians remained never fully acknowledged, forestalling their credibility in the imperial field that eventually led to 'national protests that would invoke the Charter Act of 1883' introducing open competition in the selection of Indians for civil servant jobs (Mangan, 1993, p. 191).

Pedagogical Strategy

Throughout colonial rule in the dense forest region of Assam and the surrounding states of Hindustan now comprising of Bangladesh, the rural elite *Brahmans, Baidyas* and *Kayasth* [class in Hinduism] prescribing to a Hindu doctrine of salvation, regarded the British pedagogical system as a power system for emancipation and entrance into other social arenas or fields (Raychaudhuri, 1966). These privileged groups comprising of landed rural and urban

dwellers and peasant aristocracy formed the backbone of the Assam's administrative workforce, as 'a vital human resource in the fields of education'. They sought to preserve their controlling interests in the delta region by first lobbying to deny access to the colonial curriculum system to Muslims and then monopolising the mechanisms of the system to ensure their continued material and symbolic domination of the region (Subir, 2020, p.193), a form of 'symbolic violence' exercised upon agents through their 'complicity' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.167).

Equally, at the same time in direct contradiction to Qur'anic injunctions advocating egalitarianism (Qur'an, 49:13), Urdu speaking Muslim aristocracies of foreign descent belonging to the landowning upper class *Ashraf* group, occupied all the designated Islamic religious stations of leadership and local administrative roles. Muslim aristocrats 'traditionally dominated Sylhet from the Mughal era' and did not desire the presence or occupation of *Chhotolok* [lower class workers], *Atraf* [landless lower class] Muslims and native small land holding Bengali speaking peasant workers to access the same secular economic and social mobility spheres as themselves (Hossain, 2013, p.75).

Rural as well as urban Sylheti Muslim peasantry were defined by work, moreover, the work they did subsequently defined them in mirroring the 'socially stagnant and discriminatory' Hindu habitus (Uddin, 2006, p.21). Most peasantry communities originated from a caste system 'that controlled their external locus of identity', the workers from these local Bengali Muslim convert communities occupied jobs to their detriment vacated by the promoted middle stratum. Unable to vacate their own inferior position typified of poverty and social inequality many worked jobs predefined as ignominious by the promoted prevailing classes (Aziz, 2017, p.79).

The Field of English Education

Throughout early British corporate colonisation of the delta region the Bengalis first ran the public administration of their Bengali region instilling Bengali in 1836 as the language of legitimacy in the social and legal institutions such as schools and courts etc. However, increasingly under imperialism, new codes of legitimacy began to emerge, merchant shareholder interests developed into state ruler interests with India's transition to colonialism in 1858 (Roy, 1993). The colonial education system operating in rural Bengal region intensified, relegating the agrarian Bengali Muslims to the lowest stratum of the socio-cultural hierarchy, structurally placing and eclipsing the Bengali Muslims. In addition, in their actions, symbolically displacing their mother tongue as 'second language' and venerating English and the English educated elite *Brahmans, Baidyas* and *Kayasth* and highborn *Ashraf* groups in the middle layers of social, legal and spiritual administration. This led to the proliferation of a colonist tribal hierarchy of bourgeois Hindus and Muslims at the forefront of pedagogical production and consumption in an English colonial curriculum, rather than a Bengali scriptural framework (Singh, 2017, p.58).

This class power action inter alia excluded the power of rural Bengalis their ability to internalise the legitimate mode of consumption dictated by the dominant structures which led to an inferior social position at the nexus of three different social spheres i.e., social, legal and spiritual. The installation of universities with British educational hierarchies, new English legal judicial frameworks within the courts and new administrative networks all served to reinforce the positional manufacture, distribution and consumption of goods and services that was no longer Bengali and Islamic, but British. A new secular institutional production symbolically weighted as the most legitimate mode of appropriation for 'better British governance' and employment opportunities (Mangan, 1993, p.186).

The Bengali Muslims dominant numerically in the delta region had become marginalised substantially as the establishment of English in 1858 eroded mogul Muslim hegemonic power and cemented the English educated Hindus and *Ashraf* Muslims (Peers, 2015). These privileged groups were more receptive and encouraged by their imperial employers to identify not with their own indigenous people's internalised 'shared syncretic traditions' (Tharoor, 2018, p.121). Instead, synchronise with the dominant 'doxa' ['the natural and social world'] of their colonising British bourgeois class and secular imperial curriculum Bourdieu (1977, p.164), which provided the detailed locus of an ingrained habitus of the 'hexis' [bodily performance of habitus], delivering the dividing mechanism by which continuity of structural inequality in accessing pedagogy continued (Bourdieu, 1977, p.159).

Myth of Meritocracy

Despite assurances of equality of opportunity in employment decreed in 1858 by the empress of India, Queen Victoria (1858-1901), many Indians remained unaware that concealed within the power relations lay a corollary of discriminatory policies and measures that would inherently 'reduce prospects for Indian candidates to its foremost ranks' (Robinson, 1989, p.122). Indians would not without difficulty succeed in being appointed to the most senior positions superficially open to all indigenous workers within the imperial service. The premature proclamation held out to its native subjects remained a notional meritocratic illusion rather than an actual pledged policy that would be placed into operation.

Undeterred and buoyant, the socially and culturally highly homogeneous middle and upper class British educated Hindu groups in collusive simper with their rulers forestalled the power of the Muslim *Ashraf's* in order to preserve their group hegemony. The attention in western human capital consumption by the competing Hindu and Muslim groups marked a

new index of growing interest in the consumption of other forms of valued cultural capital goods and services (Raychaudhuri, 1966).

Only a small crop of educated Bengali rural Sylheti Muslim peasantry and urban Dhaka educated workers existed within the Indian social hierarchy. Prominent amongst these small groups of Bengali Muslim modernist thinkers was Abdul Latif (1828–1893) from the Faridpur district. A teacher by disposition and a social worker by profession. 'Abdul Latif founded the Mohamadan Literary Society in 1863' for the advancement of minority Bengali Muslims in western knowledge within the imperial service to bridge social and economic inequality laid bare by the educated Bengali Hindus occupying disproportionately greater share of professional jobs in the Bengal region that was dominant numerically by a Bengali Muslim majority. But, conspicuously inferior and marginal in representation in public office and share of positions in the imperial social sphere (Ahmed, 1991, p.79). The education of these relegated minority groups was a product of access to local trade markets, the sale of agrarian surplus supply of raw crops. The profits facilitated expansion of these rural and semi-rural labourers' religious education into a more successful western transmission of knowledge via a secular education. Within this unequal pedagogical avenue, set against the complex structured economic and cultural class subordination of the *Ashraf's* and *Bhadrolock* only a small number of rural and semi-rural Bengali workers prospered (Lelyveld, 2003).

Symbolic Hierarchies

The constructs of dharmic codes and genealogy tradition and how it is understood from a natural science perspective, as well as its perceived presence in everyday life, seldom share the same accretion of logic in terms of reason and reality. Genetic science liquidates cosmological ordering of genealogy claims and dharma principles ascribed to velarize social actors within a shared culture or social sphere. 'Bringing culture into human biology' renders

a reading that submits a truth that there is neither a congenitally superior nor an inferior ethnic group (Benedict, 2019, p. xiv). Deconstructing these logical non sequiturs of natural entitlement, there appears to be little concrete evidence posited of an unending celestial supervision in 'the religious universe of eastern Bengal' or a shared private middle eastern genealogical code pre-equipped with extra-ordinarily superhuman agency (Eaton, 1993, p.269). Only the Bengali rural *Ashrafs* 'attained *Ashraf* status through education, and not through any genealogical association' (Faubion, 2001, p.123).

Short of going into the metaphysical minutiae, membership to these authorised pools of social agents remained an exclusive continuing process and limited to patrilineal honour, genealogy, and dharmic principles. The *Bhadrolock* Bengalis consisted of casts from *Baidyas, Brahmins* and *Kayasthas* who followed a detailed Hindu prescription for the designation of their workstation within the Bengali social sphere and occupations available which they alone were ascribed from birth and entitled to occupy. The elite *Ashraf* Bengalis consisted of an assemblage of *Sayyid, Shaikh, Mughal* and *Patans* prescribing to middle eastern assertions of Islamic orthodoxy (Eaton, 1993). In a new strategy of taxonomy that Wimmer (2008, p.1026) characterised as "ethnic boundary making", *Ashraf* groups that despised local Bengali 'mode of life' in 'matters of language, dress, or diet' pursued ethnic segregation from local peasant converts to Islam known as *Ajlaf*, they turned to the Islamic Middle East for their symbolic legitimation in venerating their group entitlements through connotations with the authority of Arab Caliphs in Baghdad through a Sunni Islamic prescription (Eaton, 2002, p.251).

A Bourdieusian analysis of class and colonial habitus of India suggests these privileged groups, besides their symbolically weighted dharmic codes and genealogical exclusivity affirmations, have without concession, maintained many of the axiomatic assumptions through what Durkheim's (1964, p.70) [1893] sociology characteristically would have

defined as their non-secular ‘mechanical solidarity’ coupled with Bourdieu’s (1986) cultural and symbolic capital, over the lay populace sufficiently to press into taciturn service claims of entitlement. In a complex operation of class suppression and exploitation of the local peasant population in the inegalitarian social field.

Applying Bourdieu’s (1977; 1990) primary conceptual thinking tools as a prism it could be argued the collective weight of the *Bhadrolock* and *Ashraf* groups’ capitals coupled with their inversed logic of the pre-partition state field, enabled these privileged groups to expunge the objective pedagogical possibilities of the poor. Through a hybrid control of the sub structural modes of production they maintained their ideologically stable position of economic and cultural domination for decades, amassing vast economic capital in their complicit contribution to the East India Company’s imperial mission of economic exploitation of the region in the interest of shareholders (Dalrymple, 2020).

The Imperial Field

The entire ‘British population of India by 1901 stood at just 154,691’, minuscule in comparison to the rest of the 315, 156, 396 indigenous populations (Gilmour, 2005, p.10). ‘Unable to understand the complexities of the societies it ruled’ the imperial administration was in effect in the cultural hegemony of a highly heterogeneous state field of agents detached spatially, linguistically, theologically, ethnically and by less in a national bureaucratic field two thirds the size of Europe at over 1, 805, 332 square miles with the recruitment of just 120,000 Indian soldiers in the service of the crown (Chakravarty, 2018 p.274).

The structuralised relegation of Indians in the labour market and the expansion in the promotion of cultural hegemony and consumption of British pedagogy in the 1860s and 1870s had in effect created a field dispute, i.e., a palpable division in the imperial

occupational hierarchy. Moreover, a concentrated surplus supply of homogeneous Indians, western educated, attuned to western philosophies and dispositions. These educated classes as racialised subjects were relegated to an unequal occupation of positions within the wider colonial occupational hierarchy; occupying inferior tiers of the administrative bureaucracy with congealed aspirations of being considered respected agents within the imperial field with equality in governing their nation in tandem with their rulers.

The Influence of Education as Agency

Trapped in different structures of discrimination, educated Indians, several from the Alumni of the University of Calcutta, united in Bombay's Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College in 1885 to form the first assembly of 72 skilled social actors that would lead a newly formed nationalist movement in improving the positional absence of Indians in the political process (Sitaramayya, 1935). In addition to embodying significant human and cultural capital, this movement, 21 years later, would compete for 'equality in power and public leadership' with another 'intellectually equipped' assembly that arose from a literary movement from the alumni of the Aligarh Muslim University in Dhaka (Lelyveld, 2003, p.330).

These strategizing and spiritually practising agents would go on to refashion new ideas of group and class advantages. A new emergent political and national critical consciousness with new expressions of agency and possible field of opportunities that Freire (1970, p.42) first characterised as 'conscientization', expounded by a new '*Swaraj'* [self-administration] philosophy that would lead to the reversal of the dominant position of their colonisers, transmitted through a new locus of collective identity (Gandhi, 1946, p.20).

Through their participation in western education these recalcitrant groups in receipt of an encoded set of behaviours conditioned by a 'political vocabulary' would go on to challenge foreign rule (Peers, 2015, p.59). The strategizing agents with the most mediated and distinct

forms of habitus and social and cultural capital would coalesce in possession of reformist zeal that would eventually on 15th August 1947 overturn the dominant doxa i.e., the accepted normalcy of their 'benign and paternalistic' domination and 'exercise their own agency' (Gopal, 2019, p.398). These educated Hindu and Muslim agents of change would go on to compete for more strident political group hegemony and legitimate control of the social instruments of their surplus subjection and homogenising power within the emergent national state fields of India, West Pakistan and East Pakistan (Ahmed, 2013)

Field Dispute

Post partition, 24 years later a second state field discord would pre echo again, the locus of a struggle set against a Muslim manifesto of increasing political and economic unrest in East Pakistan. The west Pakistani government placed severe restrictions on East Pakistan, the government proactively 'refused to allow passports to east Pakistanis' wishing to deploy their labour power in Britain (Adams, 1987, p.58). For over two decades West Pakistan extracted greater surplus value in labour and material resources from East Pakistan with a severe unequal distribution of economic rewards and economic gains returned to East Pakistan. Overseas, in Britain support for regional autonomy galvanised, spearheaded by Bengali immigrant students, intellectuals, educationalists and activists. These educated agents of change worked together in lobbying the British government and international agencies for recognition of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh (Gwynn, 2020)

The Urdu speaking West Pakistanis controlled all dominant structures of power with unbridled ethnic discrimination, occupying key civil service jobs in East Pakistan, maintaining their social advantage 'using religion to supress the people of east Bengal' (Ahmed, 2013, p.46). Within the rubric of nationalism West Pakistan sought to politically deny the existence of a majority Bengali speaking Muslim populace, the sixth largest

linguistic group in the world, in a state field dispute where nearly 60 per cent of the population spoke Bengali, who's ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences aligned with 180 million people, setting them apart from their minority Urdu speaking exploiters positioned more than 1,369 miles apart in West Pakistan. In this state field dispute incumbent Bengali speaking Muslims in East Pakistan battled their Urdu speaking Muslim exploiters to overturn their subjugation and preserve their identity and language (Ahmed, 2013).

For many February 21st, 1952 is etched into their national consciousness as 'a milestone in the history of Bengali nationalism', known as *Ekushey* [21st - the day of the language martyrs struggle] – the day Urdu speaking dictators opened fire on Bengali speaking demonstrates for seeking state autonomy and recognition of Bengali as the national language of East Pakistan (Ahmed, 2013, p.42). Between 1947 – 1971 the subsequent struggle for military monopoly between Muslim Urdu exploiter and Muslim Bengali exploited culminated in Bengali Muslims along with over 90 other ethnic groups coalesced as a group in a bloody nine-month liberation war on 25th March 1971 that eventually led to the formation of a new nation on 16th December 1971, a new emergent state field, the people's republic of Bangladesh.

Bengali civic authority supplanted Pakistani military rule. Bengali supplanted Urdu within this symbolic interactionism as lingua franca of the Bengali Muslims, legitimated under the production and reproduction of a secular ethno linguistic code for cultural reproduction of identity as Bengali. For contemporary Bengali Muslims, their identity was forged against the backdrop of opposition against the Urdu speaking West Pakistanis and class antagonisms of the privileged that all lost their status and government jobs in December 1971 (Gwynn, 2020).

Bourdieu, Class Power and Pedagogy

Bourdieu (1984) elucidated that the possession of economic capital single-handedly could not be applied as a sole indicator of class distinction. But cultural, social and economic capital measures equalled together provided a richer construct of class. Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation of cultural capital, constructed on the dominant cultural norms, was never elucidated in explicit concrete terms and consequently remains undefended to a varied number of operational interpretations.

According to Bourdieu (1986) cultural capital could exist in the embodied, objectified and institutionalised state. Bourdieu (1990) referred to the embodiment of cultural capital as the habitus of the individual claiming its physical embodiment was a disposition of the mind and body and non-transmissible. Bourdieu (1990) argued cultural capital could be inculcated early in the socialisation of the individual long before entrance into the pedagogy system.

The application of Bourdieu's conceptual framework suggests that these privileged Indian groups as skilled and strategic social actors recognised the colonial pedagogic system as a complex structure that venerated their social arrangement in social class position so sought through manipulation of the deltas preliterate forest population to maintain collectively their social order and so promoted the education of incumbent peasant workers in madrasah institutions as legitimate to their needs where only a theological curriculum in the form of Qur'anic education was on offer in Arabic and Urdu lexicon (Eaton, 2002), understood by less than 5 per cent of the Bengali population (Robinson, 1989).

A Dialectic Conservatism

Expounded by the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, conservative community elders and spiritual administrators articulated British territorial jurisdiction as '*dar-al-harb'* [territory of

war] its colonial curriculum as inimical to the socio-religious life of local Muslim communities. The 'real leaders of the rural society' ambivalent of the social utility of a secular education refused to establish a dialectical relationship between their village based Islamic habitus and the secular capitals afforded through a foreign British pedagogical system, many situated largely in urban areas. With the power to persuade, these nodes of authority 'acted as arbiters in religious and social matters' prescribing their rural Bengali Muslims and rural *Ashraf* gentry to Deobandi aligned Islamic instructions, dispensed through the rural Qawmi madrasa institutions promoting a scriptural mode of study in the religious and social instruction of their rural communities (Ahmed, 1981, p.31).

Bowen (2014, p11) argued 'Deobandi Islam is the dominant branch of Islam in the UK with 44 percent of British mosques following its teaching'. This orthodox spiritual schooling and Urdu/Arabic allegorical linguistic mode of interpretation 'was no longer in demand' throughout imperial rule and reduced in social utility (Peers, 2015, p.59), creating a habitus trap for the indigenous rural Bengalis. The action would deny the subordinate class Bengalis the secular credentials valued for access to employment in the colonial administration and upward social mobility. The rural relationship in power in turn would help produce orthodoxy and reproduce the regulated respect of the status-quo within the existing structure, a relation of prescribed practices that Asad (1986, p.14) characterised as a lived 'discursive tradition' that had history and a circulatory charge of its own.

In comparison to wider Bengal, the north eastern corner of Bengal: Sylhet, remained distinct in its historical, cultural, religious, and linguistic mode of production. Fundamental to this was 'Arabic trade and commerce in the region, a product of migration, as well as the arrival of an external agency, a charismatic Yemeni immigrant embodying significant sacred cultural capital, Shah Jalal in 1303 (Aziz, 2017, p.5). Shah Jalal is celebrated by Bangladeshis for both integrating Islam and promulgating a distinctively Bengali Islamic culture and identity

into what was then a medieval Sylheti society, consisting of largely jungle dwelling Hindu peasant cultivators. Shah Jalal would go on to define the Sylheti field. The transformation Uddin (2006, p.8) argued, led to the creation of a unique cultural enrichment bespoke to Bengalis with Islam and Bengali culture companionably yoked to become 'Bengali Islam'.

Colonial Capital

In India under British rule, the English Education Act 1835 established English as the language of instruction, a new legitimated linguistic habitus for the consumption of the colonial curriculum as cultural capital. Under Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah's reign from 1494 to 1519 creative activities centred on the Bengali language, literature and culture had flourished. Three hundred and fifteen years later the British education system had innovated vast swathes of the modes of literary expression and mediums of knowledge transfer by replacing the construction of literature in verses to other modes of knowledge and literature production and consumption such as essay writing, novels, biography, written short story format writing (Subir, 2020). Eaton (2002, p.265) argued that the paper making technology in the delta region 'fostered attitudes that endowed the written word with an authority qualitatively different from oral authority' The British colonial pedagogical system had in fact cultivated a new literary field of production by eroding away the indigenous pedagogical system and its corpus of documentation centred around oral and scriptural interpretation in mosques and temples to a new habitus with a new framework, a new curriculum and new modes of pedagogical transmission, in a new language of legitimacy in the form of English reading, writing and arithmetic rather than a heavy emphasis on committing scripture and scriptural decoding to memory (Gosh, 1993).

Secular educational opportunities became available only after 1871 when the colonial administration having supplanted Arabic and Urdu from all legitimate spheres of

governmental power; the legal courts and social institutions, distilled English and a colonial pedagogical system tailored to the needs of the imperial labour market producing western educated Indian consumers of British goods and services (Mann, 2004). Around the same time, conscious of the evolving cultural dislocation of Muslims from the emergent dominant colonial pedagogic field of production, another prominent Islamic reformist, Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) sought to amalgamate western knowledge with his modernist interpretation of Islam as a countermovement to the more austere interpretations dispensed in the pedagogical institutions of cultural capital accreditations. In 1875, educationalist Syed Ahmed Khan founded the Mohammedan Anglo – Oriental College which later became the Aligarh Muslim University. Overall, early educational interest and uptake from those able to afford an education in the delta region and surrounding states of India rose by two thirds to 74 per cent. A concurrence controlled and limited and 'retained by symbolic power and cultural capital' (Faubion, 2001, p.103). The opulence of the Indian nabobs had given way to a new breed of British Indians inoculated through their admittance into the British pedagogical system in demonstrating their cultural competencies in the cultural superiority of their civilising colonisers and encouraged to demonstrate their Britishness. Tharoor (2018, p.199) argued this distortion of cultural self-perception 'misappropriated and reshaped the ways in which a subject people saw its history and even its cultural self-definition'.

Symbolic Violence in Bengali Pedagogy

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, p.4) contended that 'to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force' amounted to what Bourdieu (1984, p.358) famously termed as 'symbolic violence'. Guillory (1995) added that pedagogical institutions which appear to democratically distribute cultural capital, maintained power in possession within a certain social class of people, through the elimination of a classless curriculum via the production of a dominant curriculum. The social

function of these institutions appeared not to just regulate cultural capital unequally but as Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, p.16) argued 'legitimate mode of producing cultural arbitrariness' and sustain modes of differentiation within society; the pedagogical system of western societies produced cultural reproduction of class inequalities .

Post-colonial, rule changes in policy limiting land holdings coupled with the forces of globalization and outward immigration had eroded the symbolic capital and social mechanisms by which these higher status groups maintained their economic interests. The rule of these privileged groups continued within the agrarian society up until 1950. In east Bengal, the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act 1950 formally abolished the *Zamindari* systems [landlords obliged to pay land tax to the government] created by the British in 1793 [this system in assam was a Ryotwari settlement where peasants paid taxes to retain nominal ownership of their land] which middle class *zamindars* [tax farmers] under imperial rule collected tithes and adapted to venerate their social position (Akash, 2019).

While the symbolic power of these groups may not be protuberant today, their coup d'état on the cultural and human capital institutions of the delta region is a manifest that has left a lasting legacy of severe underrepresentation of university educated Bengali Muslims in employment from Bangladesh. These arbitrary practices of the most symbolically powerful institutions and agents who wield power i.e., the instrumental social action of the *Ashrafs* and *Bhadrolocks* in the region, amounted to an imposition of what Bourdieu's (1977, 1991) sociology characterised as symbolic violence, underlining how admittance into the institutions of human capital dispensation may appear explicitly based on merit but tacitly cultural upbringing would have also played a part. A mechanism masked in symbolic power where admission was only open to a small assemblage of privileged agents displaying the most premier posits of cultural capital and when coupled with social capital as well as

economic capital and transmitted through symbolic capital formed a compelling concoction of accumulated advantages (Bourdieu, 1984).

Wagner, (2010, p.70) argued that 'Bourdieu's intent with cultural capital, and his work more generally, was to expose the way in which social stratification, particularly class-based inequality, was acquired, perpetuated, and reinforced', by 'smashing the shared illusion of the 'liberating' effect of the school' (Wacquant, 2005, p.113). Applying Bourdieu's (1986) framework as a critical lens, it could be argued these accrued advantages authorised the *Ashraf's* and *Bhadrolock* groups with the capitals of economic growth and social mobility with their ability to enter the imperial labour market field with their reinforced and reproduced privileges and quickly assimilate roles that aided their preconditioned social constructs of legitimate power and spiritual sense of entitlement instilled early on as a consequence of their social position and admittance through the imperial pedagogical system.

Remittance Pressure on Pedagogical Possibilities

Adams (1987, p12) argued 'in Sylhet landholdings remained invested in those who worked them'. In a country where nearly two thirds of the population live on just £1.54 a day, land owning Sylheti families were more affluent than most Bangladeshis (International Institute for Labour Studies (IILS), 2013). In Sylhet, land tenure was organised by the development of a 'talukdar class' [small landowners] and 'minifundium' [smallholdings] system of peasant owner-cultivators (Eade & Smith, 2008, p.149). The hegemony of a small section of Sylheti farmers allowed the formation of higher economic and social status groups who could deploy their economic and social capital for greater accumulation of wealth through the control of land and labour power, creating major land owning groups engaged in capital accumulation in what could be described as a macro Sylheti sphere of commodity accumulation (Islam, 1978). In a process epitomised by Bourdieu's (1984; 1985; 1986) model of cultural

reproduction, they all shared equitable volumes of capitals to operationalise their economic and social capitals through the sale of small land holdings to migrate from Sylhet to London for transnational consumption (Adams, 1987).

The trend of regular remittances quickly followed to individual households. At its peak, Sylhet received an estimated £769,165,000 per year from British Bengali workers pioneering the now familiar diaspora driven transnational networks that have fuelled the Sylheti labour markets allowing the fruition of localised rural micro economies (Hussain, 2013a). A significant proportion of the second generation never pursued education beyond the compulsory standard owing to pressures placed on them by the first generation to remit money to their 'transnational habitus' in Bangladesh that diminished their potential pedagogical zeal (Gardner, 2012, p.84).

The Shifting Logic of the Field

Muslim Bengali workers were left behind in a system of changing dispositions. Their lack of adjustment to their changing habitus and kin pressures to remit money denied structurally and historically the improving instinct of their Indian counterparts and consequently were slower in their adoption and consumption of the secular curriculum of human capital. The rural religious institutions were not well endowed, and Bengalis were confined to Islamic scholarship in 'qur'anic theology' (Gosh, 1993 p.176), and did not readily access urban secular education institutions already dominated by class power. The Bengalis could not sense the opportunities at stake or grasp the changing nature of the economic system and the symbolic capital value and cultural capital power of the British educational system to which the Indian Hindus took to readily. Moreover, flourished as prospect focused social actors who had already renounced their rural social field of their displacement in favour of a new urban

habitus that would advantage their 'highly urbanised and technocratic and administrative skills' (Knott and McLoughlin, 2010, p.236).

In Tower Hamlets, inner city social and economic problems 'compounded by racial discrimination and physical violence' disadvantaged many Bangladeshis (Eade, 1997, p.149). By early 1980s the country was in recession, unemployment then was higher for south Asian men rising to '20 per cent – in comparison to a rise of just 2 per cent for white men' (Eddo-Lodge, 2018, p.36). The shifting logic of the field relegated many Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets into marginalised positions within the labour market, 'the obsolescence in certain jobs created by advancements and investments in knowledge' pooled with the lack of any human capital certifications conferring the skills and knowledge demanded by the growing knowledge economy drastically reduced the agency of many manual workers (Aziz, 2015, p.234). Around 33 per cent of the population have no recognisable qualifications of operable value in the British labour market forcing many into precarious work, illness and long periods of unemployment (ONS, 2014). Of those in employment 53 per cent of Bangladeshi men and 67 per cent of Bangladeshi women are in low skilled manual work and more than half are in part time employment (LEA, 2018).

A Sub Islamic Field of Cultural Capital Reproduction

Many of the second-generation elder male Bengalis that arrived in Tower Hamlets had only a madrassa education in Arabic and Bengali. Abbas (2005 p.199) argued 'Tower Hamlets offered individuals a safe environment in which to express and practise their faith and allowed this type of social reproduction to flourish collectively across the community'. The phonetic pattern of learning the Qur'an ' involving phonic recognition and memory, learned through recitation' is much respected among Bengali Muslims (Gregory and Williams, 2000, p.130). A religious education in classical Arabic confers a credential of symbolic weight

amongst all generations. However, its ability to transfer and function into other forms of capital in secular spheres has been restricted to varying degrees. Bourdieu shared these limitations lamenting that the failure of some religious specialists was predicated on their failure to recognise the complex underlying political dynamics nestled within religious fields (Bourdieu, 1991).

Cultural capital accumulation both secular and religious in many ways may share a parallel logic of practice but their transformative advantages in other fields are marshalled by a different logic. For many of the Bangladeshis that had arrived in the 1970s and 1980s their religious cultural capital dispositions contained spiritual intellectualism both in terms of symbolic systems and competencies, but the economic base and symbolic market for production and deployment was and still is a small closed circulated field where only Bengali Muslims recognised its value in the borough. Its wider operational value diminished by a marked absence of a mechanism which could transform into other capitals such as economic or social capital. Moreover, it is overshadowed by the larger economy and fields of power such as education, governed by the logic of the secular cultural capitals that third/fourth generation Bangladeshi Muslims accumulated as legitimate, allowing this generation to operate in ‘more than one habitus which they slip into or deploy at different times’ and location (Zeitlyn, 2015, p.101).

Achieving Cultural Synthesis in Cultural Capital

The UK on average commits around 5.5 per cent of its GDP to education, nearly twice then that of the comparative rate of Bangladesh (Bolton, 2020). Today, set against the framework of increasing marketization of pedagogy and the pervasion of class purchasing power, Janmohamed (2016, p.40) argued that Muslim millennials agency was more visible as they ‘know that education is the key to asserting their status’. British ‘Bangladeshi families have

gradually attuned their children to the benefits of and the importance of an education and its potential in achieving cultural distinction as well as symbolic capital, and access to the growing professional and managerial occupations' (Aziz, 2021, p.3)

The cultivation of a closer hybrid alignment between Muslim student's habitus and pedagogical field and a broader subcultural valuation and acceptance of their identities 'through the provision of halal meals, prayer facilities, uniforms for girls, single sex education and state funding' has led to significant inroads (Abbas, 2005, p.32). For the 2012/13 academic year Key Stage 5 Bengali students in Tower Hamlets performed strongly. They were the eighth highest in London and second highest among all inner London boroughs at 65 per cent (Akash, 2019).

The following year in 2014, against all odds 70 per cent of Bangladeshi children in Tower Hamlets 17 state funded secondary schools achieved five good GCSE's, the exams taken at 16 – higher than the national average of 68 per cent. In 2018 the overall performance for many of the secondary schools in the borough continued to improve with 61.8 percent of secondary school pupils achieving 5 good GCSEs at the end of 2018/2019 academic year (Find and compare schools in England, 2021). Those schools now accommodate the Islamic dispositions of their Muslim students and maintain strong collaborations to local faith groups (LEA, 2018), many of these children were on free school meals with two thirds living in subsidised social housing and in receipt of welfare support (Case, 2006).

British born third generation Bangladeshis have made significant improvements in fulfilling their parents' high expectations and unfulfilled human capital potential, a role for many that has been assigned to them subconsciously that has come to form a distinct part of their collective pedagogical narrative. The geographic area a child was born was traditionally a powerful indicator of achievement but against all odds Bangladeshi children born in

1997/1998 were the best performers, outperforming their local white working-class counterparts (Social Mobility Commission, 2016).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) pointed out how qualifications can change their worth as badges of distinction acquired by different social groups that grant access to powerful positions. Changes in social institutions have led to changes in the social actors. The market reforms of education guided by a capitalist economic system have opened the pedagogic institutions which were once the reserve of the non-working class to all social groups, that has benefitted the next generation of immigrants undeterred from the unnecessary caps imposed on their social mobility through rising university tuition fees.

Summary

Integrated British Bangladeshi families in a liberal field of objective possibilities have modified and shifted their attitudes towards education and accepted the next generation of British Bengali children will not be following in the footsteps of their immigrant elders in maintaining their remittance driven consanguineal family ties to Bangladesh or work in small family businesses of the restaurant and catering industry (over 90 per cent of Indian restaurants are owned by Sylheti Bengalis) (Carey, 2004; Wigmore, 2016).

Second and third generations of Bangladeshi families have been able to deploy their social, economic, and cultural capital in affording their British children assured intergenerational gains by cultivating 'rational modest strategies' between their durable religious dispositions as cultural capital inoculated in the private sphere of the home and madrassa education. Moreover, advantaging their access and attainment of human capital in the secular public sphere of schools, colleges and University (Pollen, 2002, p.59).

The recruitment of local Bengali Muslim teachers and assistants in the borough's schools, the addition of halal school meals and cultural sensitivity in the organisation of school operations have bridged cultural gaps in providing a balanced pedagogical environment overturning the borough's schools' reputation as one of the worst performing local authorities in the late 1990s to a borough with schools performing above the national average and a young educated generation of Bangladeshis with aspirations that extend beyond traditional jobs in the Indian restaurant trade and into multiple overlapping fields of possibilities (Zeitlyn, 2015).

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