

Shaping Minds through 'Ignorance': Politics in Bangladeshi School Textbooks

Farhana Islam

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Department of English

East West University

*Shaping Minds through 'Ignorance': Politics in Bangladeshi School Textbooks*

A Thesis Submitted

To

Dr. Afrin Zeenat

Assistant Professor

Department of English

East West University

&

Assistant Professor

Department of English

University of Dhaka

By

Farhana Islam

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### **Declaration**

I, hereby, declare that this work has been written entirely by me except for the references and quotations which I have acknowledged duly. Additionally, I have maintained all academic ethics and integrity while preparing this research.

Farhana Islam

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## **Approval of Supervisor**

I certify that this dissertation satisfies all the requirements as a dissertation for the degree of Masters of Arts in English.

*Afrin Zeenat*

Dr. Afrin Zeenat

Assistant Professor

Department of English

East West University

Dhaka, Bangladesh

&

Assistant Professor

Department of English

University of Dhaka

Dhaka, Bangladesh

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## Abstract

School textbooks are assumed correct and unbiased in their narrative, and most often prescribed to the young minds without questioning. However, due to the increasing interference of political parties in the government funded public education sector, the school textbooks must be critically analyzed before being considered as rightful sources of knowledge. Hence, this study posed two questions: i) how politics influences the narrative of the textbooks in Bangladesh, and ii) how these books produce 'ignorance' by excluding crucial facts regarding history and rights of the citizens. To seek the answers, the research evaluated NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board) authorized books in Bangladesh, *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.) and *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.), followed in class 6 and 7 from 1996-2017, and education policies adapted during the period. Furthermore, in two subsequent chapters, it is observed, how in Bangladesh's context politically engineered 'ignorance' helps the powerful political parties to keep the citizens ignorant about their religious history and current human rights, and allows to push forward a Muslim majoritarian narrative for winning maximum number of votes. The findings of this research, in two subsequent chapters, calls for teachers and general people alike to recognize 'ignorance' as an active tool of political power embedded in the school textbooks.

## Introduction

When Karl Marx reckoned, “ignorance never yet helped anybody” (qtd. in McLellan 155), he did not identify ‘ignorance’ as an instrument of power exercised by the authoritative class, rather he perceived ‘ignorance’ as a mental state of the proletariats. However, ignorance is both a mental state and a tool of manipulation; “a multidimensional phenomenon” (Piso et al. 658). Ignorance is, like knowledge, “socially constructed” (Smithson 212), and systematically “produced and sustained” (Sullivan and Tuana 1) by the powerful parties in our socio-political paradigm. Especially, when it comes to control of the identity and the consciousness of a population, ‘ignorance’ becomes a lethal tool in the hands of those in power. Since knowledge of the past affects individuals, as much as ignorance does, by employing ‘ignorance’ in people’s mind regarding history and basic rights, the ruling class can essentially subjugate the subordinate class. Hence, this research examines different types of systematically produced ‘ignorance’ in the primary school textbooks of Bangladesh, and finds out how ‘ignorance’ is helping the political parties to spread their ideologies among the citizens.

School textbooks are one of the chief sources of knowledge. They directly affect the children’s minds, and to a great extent have an impact on the adults surrounding them. As a result, political parties use school textbooks to establish their biased narratives of history, religion, and statehood that help them achieve legitimacy for their ideologies in the society. In fact, the process of inciting biasness in people’s mind in a society always depends on ‘ignorance’; the purposeful omission of historical facts from school textbooks. Public ignorance which is engineered for political gain always coincides with prejudiced, majoritarian knowledge, and causes the marginalization of minorities and gender groups in



society. In the recent times, especially, with the formation of states in the past two centuries, the politics of historical narration has become acute. As the new nations were formed, the opportunities to write official history of these nations emerged, and state authorities quickly hegemonized this prospect. Politicians in power used this opportunity of officiating history in textbooks to promote their own agenda of nationalism, religion, and ethnicity. This process of deciding a nation's history involved not only creation of historical knowledge, but also 'ignorance' in school textbooks, that were widely disseminated.

Therefore, this research focuses on NCTB school textbooks in Bangladesh, because despite the country's secular aspirations in 1971, certain self-serving political parties aim to influence the votes of the majority Muslims by setting a Muslim majoritarian narrative for the country through the school textbooks. In Bangladesh, National Curriculum Textbooks Board or NCTB is the government institute responsible for producing all textbooks of primary, secondary and higher secondary levels. Every year, NCTB authorizes and distributes millions of books nationwide. In 2017 alone, it has circulated "some 36.21 crore copies of textbooks among 4.26 crore students of pre-primary, primary and secondary students on January 1", according to the report "Under Fire, NCTB Moves to Fix Textbook Errors" in *the Daily Star*. Hence, the capability of NCTB books to reach nationwide young learners, and subsequently their teachers and parents is unquestionable. Moreover, it is from NCTB books, history is taught to all students from class 6 as a part of Social Science, and they receive a particular textbook of Social Science containing History and Civics lessons, along with other Sociology, Economics, Geography and Disaster Management lessons in each class. Therefore, in this research, the focus is given on Social Science textbooks of class 6 and class 7, the first two years, where history is introduced to the learners as a separate subject for the

first time. According to the findings, the systematically produced 'ignorance' in these books is categorized in two distinct categories, a) 'Historical Ignorance' regarding the development of religions in the South Asian region, and b) Ignorance regarding Civics, Human Rights, and Constitutional rights in Bangladesh.

Furthermore, it is seen that biased narratives always include some 'ignorance' that are purposefully produced to influence the public conscious according to the political parties' needs. For instance, Bangladesh's two major political parties, Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh National Party (BNP), both have treated 'ignorance' as an apparatus to exercise power through the NCTB textbooks: *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.) which was followed in the classrooms from 1996 to 2011, and *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.), which replaced the previous *Social Science* textbook in the national curriculum from 2012 to 2017. It is observed that even a dominant political party, such as Awami League, who led the country in 1971 to its independence upon secular ambitions, later worked to reinforce a religiously biased narrative by breeding 'ignorance' in the public mind through education. From 1996 to 2001, AL has actively tried to push Islamic agenda to compete with the major opposition party, BNP, who was in electoral alliance with Islamic groups such as Jamaat e Islam (Kabir 23). However, AL lost the election in 2001, as they failed to compete with other more popular religious-political parties. Also, as AL's prominent leaders came under Islamic terrorist grenade attack in 2004 and the country witnessed a series of 459 blasts in 63 districts in 2005 by Islamic extremists, they changed their tone of narration timely from pro-Islamic to pro-secular again for coming to power in 2008. The new book *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.) reflects AL's renewed secular views.

Moreover, the Social Science books have been chosen for inspection, because there is no separate History or Civics Studies textbook in Bangladesh's primary school system. Both History and Civics lessons are included in the Social Science books from class 6 to class 12. For the purpose of this research, Chapter-1 focuses on class 6 history lessons, which were conveyed in the two books of Social Science: the old, pro-Islamic book *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.) followed from 1996-2011, and the new, pro-secular book *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.) that replaced the earlier from 2012. The chapter also analyzes how 'historical ignorance' regarding the role of different religious groups in the South Asian subcontinent are treated in these books.

Next, in chapter 2, the focus shifts to the Civics lessons provided in these same two books of class 6 and class 7, and scrutinizes how based on the changing political agenda, AL government first tried to keep the citizens 'ignorant' and then later 'enlightens' them about their Human Rights and constitutional rights. The overarching aim of this research has been to conduct a comparative study of these books from two political periods, and to outline the politics of 'ignorance' in Bangladeshi school textbooks. In chapter 2, the questions have been posed, such as why despite the existing laws ensuring the equal rights for women, children, and minority groups in Bangladesh, so many people are in dark about their basic Human Rights, and what role the country's religious-nationalists are playing in such situation. The ignorance among people regarding their own rights is certainly allowing more injustices to take place. Among many others problems, the fact that people do not know about their rights is also stopping them from asking for their rights according to the laws of the country and the International laws of Human Rights. The study remains focused to determine how

‘ignorance’ regarding human rights is managed in the school textbooks in Bangladesh from 1996-2017 and the complex politics behind them.

However, before elaborating my findings of these two categories of ‘ignorance’ in chapter 1 and chapter 2, it must be explained how ‘ignorance’ is understood in this research. The understanding of ‘what is ignorance’ is crucial here, as it is essential to comprehend how in societies power hungry political parties depend on manufacturing ‘ignorance’. The concept of ‘nationalism’, and its relationship with ‘religion’ in politics will also be elaborated. Religion and nationalism are undoubtedly two most targeted issues by politicians today for devising ‘ignorance’, a term which covers “both false belief and absence of true belief” (Mills 232) among the citizens, which helps them gain and stay in power in the long run.

Ignorance is fundamentally of two types. In the first category, the state of our ignorance is known to us. It is known what we do not know. The area of ignorance is identified, for example, a general lack, such as the complete knowledge of the origin of human beings, which is still relentlessly attempted to be fully understood by the many branches of science and sociology. However, in the second category, the very area of what we do not know is unknown to us, so there can be almost no attempt to cure it. In unknown number of cases, our hopeless ignorance of the fact that we do not even know about what we do not know makes it impossible for us to take any action to ‘know’ the unknown. However, the second type of ignorance might also derive from acceptance of a false knowledge as an answer to what we do not know, such as our history. If we completely accept a biased history, our ignorance regarding the true and correct history may remain forever. Parallel of such ignorance due to acceptance of false, incomplete and biased body of knowledge is often found in the cases of the school textbooks.

In general, as students learn about the history of nation, religion, and social identities from school textbooks, they come “to accept all information provided by the text as truth and, to an extent, believe that everything that is important to know about history has been included” (Giarrizzo 3), and are ignorant of hidden biases and hidden political agendas in those texts. In fact, this common, naïve perception towards the school texts is always exploited by the political parties in power to device ‘ignorance’ in society. Hence, “it becomes very important to know what the textbooks contain,” or do not contain (Romanish 1), because the absence of true historical content creates ‘historical ignorance’ among the students, which ultimately shapes the identity and perception of both the majority and the minority students. Such ignorance regarding the minorities in society, also leads the dominant group of students to be prejudiced against the minorities.

To understand ‘ignorance’ more elaborately, this research utilizes the theory of ignorance, from *Agnology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Proctor and Schiebinger), where Robert Proctor urges us to “think of ignorance generated by failures of the body, or failures to fund education, or free access to bogus information, or practices and policies that enlarge secrecy or prevarication or compartmentalization” (26). Proctor emphasizes on understanding of ‘ignorance’ as an element of politics, he “recognizes that ignorance, like knowledge, has a political geography, prompting us to ask: Who knows not? And why not? Where is there ignorance and why?” (Proctor 13) He characterizes ignorance as a) a native state, b) a lost realm, a selective choice, and c) a strategic ploy and active construction.

This research, also relies on the study conducted by Sullivan and Tuana, in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, who borrow Proctor’s ideas in their study and observe: in

imbalanced, corrupted societies, especially “in the case of racial oppression, a lack of knowledge or an unlearning of something previously known often is actively produced for purposes of domination and exploitation” (1). Inspired by Sullivan and Tuana, this research attempts to take one more step ahead in the study of ignorance, and analyzes ‘ignorance’ in the context of Bangladesh. The concentrate is given on the third category of ignorance identified by Proctor, which views ignorance produced as a “strategic ploy” (Proctor 8), and links his idea with state politics and its education sector. In this research, ‘ignorance’ is identified as a “strategic ploy” (Proctor 8) in the bodies of Bangladesh’s school textbooks, which are always actively built and rebuilt by the political parties.

After all, it is state that determines what we know and what we do not know today, academic studies must discuss this politics of ignorance. China, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and several other countries today are notoriously known for regulating mass censorship among its citizens, and one of the area of controlling and disseminating manipulated information for governments is the school textbooks. A substantial number of researchers, such as Romanowski, Romanish, Giarrizzo and others have been even critical of American schools’ History books. Many critics have identified that, when it comes to the issues of slavery and accounting of the contribution of the natives and Asian Americans, “the textbooks are not doing a sufficient job portraying the minorities” (73). The textbooks lack information about the minorities, thus creating an ‘ignorance’, which is leading the dominant group to stereotype and undermine the identity and importance of those who belong to minority groups. In fact, specifically, in Texas, the educators had to teach history to Texas’ children without challenging conservative political views that are at odds with history” (Rockmore A31). The history books published under 2010 policy in Texas are known for severely underplaying the cruel nature of slavery.

In Bangladesh, too, governments frequently and systematically manipulate school textbooks to patron an Islam-centric, majoritarian narrative, which officiates their biased version of history to win the support of the majority Muslim population. It must be clarified that majoritarian narratives aim to over glorify the role of the majority group, and it breeds ‘ignorance’ about the true role and contribution of the minorities in historical events, and often at present societies. Hence, Tuana identifies the purpose of studying ignorance, which is “not only [to] trace what is not known, and what was once known and lost, but also attend to the politics of such [produced] ignorance” (9). We must ask *why* we do not know certain things, and more specifically, what is made unknown to us. Similar questions are asked in this study while examining the portrayal of history in Bangladeshi textbooks. Theoretical inspiration is also drawn from Alcoff, who does not simply count ‘ignorance’ as “a *lack*—a lack of motivation or experience as the result of social location” rather she points to the politics of the social arena where ignorance functions “as a substantive epistemic practice that differentiates the dominant group” (47). In other words, purposefully created ‘ignorance’ are devised in societies to favor the dominant or the powerful ones. For example, in *The Politics of Reality* (1983), Frye expresses similar opinion, when he observes ‘ignorance’ in American societies regarding minorities,

Ignorance is not something simple: it is not a simple lack, absence or emptiness, and it is not a passive state. Ignorance of this sort—the determined ignorance most white Americans have of American Indian tribes and clans, the ostrich like ignorance most white Americans have of the histories of Asian peoples in this country, the impoverishing ignorance most white Americans have of Black language—ignorance of these sorts is a complex result of many acts and many negligence. (118)

His observation of the American society and its ongoing racial conflicts can be easily applied to any other society, such as Bangladesh's, where there are discrimination and regular delinquency against the rights of ethnic and religious minorities. My aim is to examine how the 'ignorance' that leads to racial conflicts and discriminations in society is perpetuated through the school textbooks due to political policies.

In this thesis, another important element is nationalism, which is considered as a relatively modern phenomenon developed around 1800's, when large groups of people, due to various cultural and socio-economic issues, aspired to be separated from each other and to achieve complete autonomy over their geographic territories. Nationalism at its advent also allowed certain group of people to have independent economy, military and freedom to choose their own rulers. As a critic of Nationalism, Benedict Anderson analyzes nationality as a socio-cultural concept, "in the modern world where everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a gender" (49). Anderson called the people under nationality to be part of an "imagined political community" (49), where, regardless of being not from same age group, social class, ethnicity and religious belief, they come under one umbrella of 'nationality' to live and work for a country. It is a shared communal identification within one's nation. It is expressed as a political ideology oriented towards achieving and maintaining communal autonomy, and sometimes sovereignty over a territory of historical significance to the group.

In fact, Anderson traces its root further back in 1500's during the rise of capitalism and printing technology. He insists that the mass production of books and development of language and European intellectual as a result of these advancements "created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation" (58). He observes the close connectedness between print-languages, national



consciousness, and nation-states, and insists, “it is necessary to turn to the large cluster of new political entities that sprang up in the Western hemisphere between 1776 and 1838, all of which self-consciously defined themselves as nations” (58). However, critics such as Azhar Gat and Alexander Yakobson oppose this modern origin of nationalism, they argue for an even more pre-modern origin. Gat strongly suggests that nationalism is “rooted in primordial human sentiments of kin-culture affinity, solidarity and mutual cooperation, evolutionarily engraved in human nature” (33). According to Gat, even when pre-modern people living in tribes and villages could not write properly, or document the stories, they shared language; and “the main bonding elements of premodern peoples and a major instrument of state- and nation-building were the pre-modern mass cultural forms of epos, ritual and religion” (33). Their shared cultural, oral tradition of storytelling from generation to generation, and religious practices were, in fact, often more widely spread by the systematic clerical network working throughout the countryside and in every town and village than most modern critics would assume. Hence, Gat recognizes these shared cultural elements as the first collective consciousness of people that eventually lead to nationalism. However, Anderson’s idea that the rapid advancement of print technology played a role of as incentive to development of nationalism and patriotic sentiments is equally important. Indeed, mass printing and their distribution helped people to form the “imaginary communities” based on their common ethnicity, religion, and later nationality.

Regardless of the unresolved debates regarding nationalism’s origin, nationalism as an ideology is always in dialogue with religion and ethnicity. Nationalism should ideally be secular; a modern phenomenon that rises above religion and ethnicity to establish the supremacy of all humans at least within some specific geographical territories. Nevertheless,

the reality of nationalism remains as far from it as it could be. Even if nationalism as an ideology can be secular and egalitarian, in practice it is always exploited as otherwise. As an ideology, it is easily picked up by the politicians and used to accumulate 'religion' within its narration. Anderson rightfully points that nationalism belongs, "more with 'kinship' and 'religion', rather than on the side of 'liberalism' or 'fascism' (49). Carlton J. H. Hayes, too, in his essay "Nationalism as a Religion" (1926), saw nationalism not as a secular, liberating phenomena, rather he saw it as a new religion that ultimately requires human beings' undying devotion and sacrifice, rather than offering 'freedom'. In fact, Anthony D Smith, in *Nationalism and Modernism* (1998), describes nationalism more comprehensively both for its capability to unite and divide people, he identifies nationalism as "the central thread binding, and dividing, the peoples of the modern world" (1). He calls nationalism as a force, less unifying and more dividing, that spread "first in Europe, then across the world, the rampant red line of nationalism blended with the darker forces of fascism, racism and anti-Semitism" (2) to give birth to horrors such as Holocaust, Hiroshima, and countries based on religious-inclusivity such as India and Pakistan who are still in contention with each other today.

Nationalism exclusively becomes extreme and dangerous in countries with corrupted political system. They do not uphold state law as the most powerful, which is bound to provide everyone serving under it with equal rights and protections under the International Human Rights law. They exploit nationalism to intensify 'ignorance,' highlights religious and ethnic differences among groups in society, which allows politicians to win over the major population's votes. Corrupt politicians too often set the religious and ethnic minorities as 'the others', who are less deserving and have less rights, in front of the majority group through their narrative. Barbara-Ann J. Rieffer, in fact, identifies the effects of religion as one of the

most corrupting forces of nationalism; she notes in her study. “[in societies] the stronger the degree of religious influence on a national movement, the greater the probability that there will be violence, discrimination, intolerance and exclusionary policies in the nation state” (217). Inspired by her views, ‘religious-nationalism’ is analyzed in Bangladesh through this study, and shown that, religious-nationalists infuse nationalism with religion in the state narrative that ensures supremacy of one religion over others and the process moves the state away from its secularity and humanitarian laws by producing mass ‘ignorance’ among its citizens regarding the true history and rights of the minorities groups, women and children.

In chapter-1, “Ignorance of Religious History: Legitimizing the Majority”, it is scrutinized how ‘religion’, ‘nationalism’ and ‘historical ignorance’ become intricately connected in politics, and how Bangladesh’s governments decide the narrative of the country’s history in school textbooks according to their own ideological needs to gain maximum number of votes. Bangladesh has a largely imbalanced demography, where at present 90.4% inhabitants are Muslims, 8.2% are Hindus, 0.6% are Christians, 0.3% are Buddhists, and the rest consists of other believers, such as Quadiannis, Bahais, and non-believers. As a result, when it comes to democratic elections, the politicians always aim to gain the support of the majority, and they target to stimulate the sentiment of the 90.4% of the people who have their religious faith in common, because it can assure the majority’s votes and the parliamentary win. Also, though Bangladesh’s economy is developing fast, at the crux of its society, religion still remains a delicate issue. Perhaps, a fraction of the elite class, and some urban places are suited for secular conversations, but the country at vast is still not prepared for truly secular life style. So, one must ask, despite the First Constitution’s declaration of ‘secularism’ as the country’s first principle as early as in 1972, why

Bangladesh has moved far from its secular aims, and why the violence against religious minorities, ethnic minorities, women, and children have increased so alarmingly.

There have been many cases of hacking of secularist bloggers by the Islamic militants from 2012-2016. In fact, in 2016, according United States Peace Report, groups claiming affiliation with transnational terrorist organizations claimed to have killed 39 individuals, including members of religious minorities, academics, foreigners, LGBT activists, and members of security forces. Members of the Hindu minority population constituted a significant portion of the victims (3). On October 30, “150-200 people vandalized 200 homes and at least five temples in the eastern Bangladesh sub district of Nasirnagar, reportedly injuring 150 people” (42). On February 19, 2010, ethnic Bengali settlers attacked ethnic minorities in Baghaichhari Upazila, beating people and setting fire to approximately 500 minority homesteads and a Buddhist pagoda.

However, despite regular occurrences of these incidents, which are substantially reported on news channels, newspaper, and social media, “when asked to identify the problems facing religious minorities in Bangladesh, Muslims were likely to answer that they face no problem at all, at 45%” (“Perceptions, Attitudes and Understanding” 16) in a baseline survey by National Human Rights Commission. Hence, in the subsequent chapters, this silence of the majority Muslims toward the violence taking place against religious minorities, ethnic minorities, women and children is critically analyzed in relationship with politics of the school textbooks, which certainly play an important role in molding people’s perceptions regarding the religious minorities living in the society. This growing intolerance and Muslim supremacist attitude among the majority in Bangladesh have a deep root in the country’s education system and the historical narrative of the school textbooks.

## Chapter 1

### Ignorance of Religious History: Legitimizing the Majority

“Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance” stated Will Durant (qtd. in Banks 89), but what if it is education that is systematically producing ignorance in societies instead? This chapter investigates this question in context of Bangladesh, and particularly focuses on ‘historical ignorance’ formed among generations through the biased narration of history in school textbooks. It studies how despite Bangladesh’s secular aims as a state, Bangladeshi political parties use the school textbooks as their regular arena of constructing ‘historical ignorance’ regarding the development of various religions in South Asian subcontinent, which allows them to marginalize the country’s religious minorities and acquire an ideological legitimacy for a Muslim nation for the Muslim majority of population.

For the purpose of this study, two NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board) authorized books have been examined; firstly, *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.), followed in the classrooms from 1996-2011, and secondly, *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.), which replaced the previous book in National Curriculum from 2012 in Bangla Medium and English version education system all over the country. These books were chosen from class 6, because it is the first level where history lessons are introduced in the books to the young learners in the national education curriculum. Also, these books were followed in the classrooms from 1996-2017; a time when the manipulation of the historical narration in these textbooks to fit the political parties’ need becomes the most evident. In fact, Ali Riaz, a Bangladeshi American political scientist, records: “the influence of the Islamists over the content of education is most dramatically demonstrated in the textbooks produced by the

NCTB” (Riaz, “Islamist politics and Education” 121). The content of NCTB books have been a constant issue of contention among political parties and Islamic groups.

It is undeniable that recognizing the power of education to influence people, Bangladesh’s politicians always attempt to shape the NCTB textbooks’ narrative of history according to their ideological needs to ensure their future interest by hegemonizing the country’s young minds. Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam, a former Dhaka University teacher, describes NCTB as an organization with political influences where, among good academics, there are some “politically influential people and sycophants” (qtd. in “Under fire, NCTB moves to fix textbook errors”) controlling the institute’s actions. However, despite the criticism, it must be mentioned that in our societies, people and students consider textbooks as “a trustworthy source, when it comes to history” (Hickman and Porfillo 316). More importantly, because the textbooks are written by a group of authors and editors, they are viewed “more truthful about the past” (Hickman and Porfillo 316). Such existing naïve social perceptions regarding the textbooks, certainly, undermine the political potential of textbooks, and allow the textbooks to become open grounds for the political parties to battle over the country’s historical narrative. Therefore, these books are examined to reveal the embedded political discourses and produced ‘historical ignorance’ in their narration.

In post-independent Bangladesh, after the brutal assassination of Sheikh Mujib, religion and nationalism frequently appeared as two intertwined forces in the country’s politics, and these two ideologies together continue to manufacture ‘historical ignorance’ for attaining political power even today. From 1975 to 1979, the country quickly moved away from its secular and humanist ideals that characterized the country’s independence struggle, and turned to ‘Islam’ to stimulate ‘nationalism’ among its vast Muslim population. In the

1970s, when the country experienced military regimes for the first time, and the regime used religion to quickly win over the public consent. The regime's effort to Islamization is exclusively reflected in the changes brought in the Constitution and education policy. The aim was to construct a new pseudo religion-centric 'national identity' for the young generation based on 'historical ignorance', which will allow people to feel united and work collectively in the post-war scenario under the leadership of President Ziaur Rahman.

In 1979, through the Fifth Amendment, President Zia officially turned the country away from its First Constitution, which was adopted on November 4, 1972 and in paragraph 2 of the Preamble declared 'secularism', 'nationalism', 'socialism', and 'democracy' as the four fundamental principles of the state and especially aimed to provide 'secular' education. In the Fifth Amendment, one of four major fundamental principles of state policy 'secularism' was omitted and in its place a new one 'The principle of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah' was inserted in Article-8(Alam 2). Also, religious words: Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim (In the name of Almighty, most merciful) were inserted in the beginning of the Constitution, above the preamble. Undoubtedly, "this was done necessarily with a political end" (Halim 160). Also, a new clause (1A) was inserted to emphasize that "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah" should be "the basis of all actions" (Riaz, "The politics of Islamization in Bangladesh" 48). These steps taken by President Zia pleased the Islamists, who have remained by his political party's side since then.

In fact, during this time, the regime exercised its authoritarian power to Islamize the education sector in a way that would lead the country further away from Sheikh Mujib's secular-nationalist ideology. In 1977, the military regime of Ziaur Rahman established an Education Committee on curricula and syllabi for schools which declared that "Islam is a code of life, not just the sum of rituals" (qtd. in "Islamist Politics and Education" (Riaz,

“Islamist Politics and Education” 121). Also, for Madrassah education, the government established a separate directorate within the education ministry and created the “Madrassah Education Board” to guide the Islamic line of education in the country, which directly went against the country’s First Constitution’s secular aims and “the education policy formulated in 1974, [which] viewed education as a means to instill nationalist ideas, particularly secular Bengali nationalism” (Riaz, “Islamist Politics and Education” 121). The prescribed books of the then School Textbook Board reflected these political aims, “particularly the history books demonstrated this focus” (Riaz, “Islamist Politics and Education” 118).

In fact, turning away from Mujib’s principle of secularism in a war-devastated country, like President Zia, Hossain Ershad too realized and exploited the idea that “nationalist politics can accommodate the claims of religion, and nationalist rhetoric often deploys religious language, imagery, and symbolism” (Brubaker 24). Hence, Ershad too considered nationalism in relationship with religion, not in isolation from religion like Sheikh Mujib did. To advance the work of eradicating secularism further, “Hussain Muhammad Ershad (1982-90), declared ‘Islam’ as the state religion in 1988, and emphasized on Islamic education was stepped up at various levels (Riaz, “Islamist Politics in Bangladesh and Education” 121). Furthermore, the observation of gradual Islamization of Bangladeshi politics reveals that in order to gain votes political parties such as BNP (Bangladesh National Party) in their alliance with Islamic parties like Jamaat-e- Islam have long used ‘Islam’ to raise ‘nationalism’ in the country’s historical narration. Riaz documents that in order to indoctrinate even more religious values in the general populace, in 1991 the BNP government extended religious education to grades one and two (“Islamist Politics and Education” 122). Also, later, the policy for primary education in 2002 under the BNP, they continued the 22



objectives previously outlined by Awami League in 2000, the first of which was:

“indoctrination of students in the loyalty to and belief in the Almighty Allah, so that the belief inspires the students in their thought and work, and helps shape their spiritual, . . . life” (qtd. in Riaz, “Islamist Politics and Education” 124). Such objectives added by AL back in 2000, right before the election of 2001, expressed their role in Islamization of education in Bangladesh.

The AL party was desperate to win against BNP and Jamaat-e-Islam and win over the Muslims, who viewed AL somehow less ‘Islamic’ due to its history of advocating for secularism. In fact, in Election Manifesto of Awami League, 2001, it announced that if the party returned to power, “no law will be enacted, which will be inconsistent with the dictates of the Qur’an and Hadith” (qtd. in Kabir 25) in competition to BNP and Jamaat’s promise of converting Bangladesh into an Islamic State and implement Sharia law. However, AL lost the election despite all the efforts it put in both education sector and public statements to prove its religious faithfulness. BNP and Jamaat -e-Islam came to power and ruled till 2006.

In fact, interestingly, later during their tenure, BNP and Jamaat-e-Islam did not change the education objectives previously adopted by AL, because the education commission found it “unnecessary to bring any changes- or amendments to the ‘objectives’ of primary education” (qtd in Kabir 25), because they already mirrored their motive to indoctrinate people with religious values, rather than secular beliefs. For “religious teaching[is]—an unfailing ideological instrument of producing and reproducing unthinking citizens that help to peacefully perpetuate undemocratic governance” (Kabir 25), Islamization of education sector was pursued by both Awami League and BNP. In fact, though Awami League later became vocal about secularism in politics, and introduced the new book

*Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.) in 2012, they are often seen to try to win favor with Islamic political groups, who can assure a vote bank. In recent years, AL has been even seen to allow religious biases in the textbooks of Bangla Literature, Home Economics, and Physical Activities and Sports. For instance, “this year [2017], the authorities introduced religious content even in disciplines that have nothing to do with religious studies” (Choudhury qtd. in [www.dw.com](http://www.dw.com)) to appease the Islamist parties to secure their votes in the country’s upcoming election in 2018. Reportedly, as Bangladesh’s Education Ministry was preparing to print the 2017 edition of its standard Bangla textbooks, a group of conservative Islamic religious scholars demanded the removal of 17 Bangla poems and stories which they deemed atheistic and “by the time the books were distributed to schools on January 1, the 17 poems and stories were gone, with no explanation from the government” (Barry and Manik A1). Such decisions by AL, certainly, goes against their claimed loyalty for secularism. It is, indeed, distressing for Bangladesh’s already turbulent society, because such “. . .alliances between state and religion are the most obvious avenues for increasing religious restrictions for minorities. . .” (Finky and Martin 690). Religious and majoritarian biases in textbooks are especially dangerous, because they have the power to influence people deeply.

Barbabra-Ann J. Rieffer concentrates on the existing deep bond between religion and nationalism in various societies, and comprehends ‘nationalism’ not simply as a secular phenomenon. Her insight stands true, as nationalism today can hardly be observed as a secular phenomenon in practice around the world. In fact, since the advent of nationalism in 1800s, even though scholars such as Abbe Raynal declared, “state is not made for religion, but religion is made for the state. . . The state has supremacy in everything . . .” (qtd. in Hayes), most modern scholars have failed to foresee the future upraise of religion within the politics of the state-fare. A twentieth century scholar Friedland records the comeback of

religion in the politics of modern day, “religious nationalisms that have sprung up around the world – in Egypt, Algeria, Palestine, Israel, India and the United States – [are] seeking to fuse two ontologies, two logics of action, that of divinity and of the nation-state” (1). Brubaker also compiles authors and scholars who have outlined this phenomenon of religious nationalism in significant number of states:

Scholars have traced the influence of Puritanism (and Protestantism more generally) on English nationalism (Kohn 1940, Greenfeld 1992), of Pietism on German nationalism (Lehmann 1982), of Catholicism on Polish nationalism (see for a critical review Zubrzycki 2006), of Orthodoxy on nationalism in the Balkans (Leustean 2008), of Shinto on Japanese nationalism (Fukase-Indergaard and Indergaard 2008), of Buddhism on Sinhalese nationalism (Kapferer 1988), and of the Hebraic idea of covenant of Northern Irish, Afrikaaner, and Israeli nationalism (Akenson 1992). (5)

The empirical data proves the presence of religious nationalist forces at work in making of various nations is certainly astonishing, though the record is incomplete without the accounting of the South Asian countries’ history where ‘religion’ is an active stakeholder in politics. Nations such as India and Pakistan were established based on religious interests. Hence, intrigued by these examples of religious-centric nationalism, the watch is expanded over the education sector of Bangladesh, where ‘religion’ too relentlessly attempts to monopolize ‘nationalism’, which is supposed to be a secular ideology to ensure the equal rights of all its citizens regardless of their religious faith under the state law.

However, before entering the analysis of the high-school text books for tracing the ‘historical ignorance’, a question must be dealt with that how in a country that fought so bravely for human rights, democracy and secularism, such biased religious sentiments can thrive just after few years of its Liberation? The answer is complex and multi layered. The first answer must derive from the country’s composition of demography and its post-war economic conditions. In 1975, about 82% of the Muslims made the largest population in the country, while Hindus consisted 13%, Buddhists about 5% and Christians and other minorities only 2%, and in the country’s post war peasant economy, majority of the Muslims sought aspiration to live a new life influenced by religion, and they were prone to take the advantages of being Muslims that were offered by the army regime government and other Islamic groups. Education also played a crucial role in Islamization. As 70% of the overall population was still illiterate, the majority of people actually could not relate with the idea of secularism. Instead, they were easily persuaded by the politicians in the name of religion. The second answer of the question must be dealt on the philosophical level; the reason Bangladeshi politicians could so easily blend ‘religion’ with ‘nationalism’, because as a principle element of the social paradigm, “religion too provides a way of identifying and naming fundamental social groups, a powerful framework for imagining community, and a set of schemas, templates, and metaphors for making sense of the social world” (Brubaker 4). However, the nation’s father Sheikh Mujib, like most secular, modern nationalists, underweighted the power of religion in the state politics of South Asian region.

There are many arguments, emphasizing socioeconomic and cultural modernity of nationalism, but they often oversight religion as a powerful element of nationalism, and examples in the Middle East, European case of Northern Ireland, and South Asian countries

like Pakistan, India and Bangladesh (the last three countries' names are newly added to the ongoing list)(Brubaker 22). The truth remains that the politics in these countries replaced nationalism as a secular ideology with a religious-nationalism structure for power, to quickly bring maximum number of people under one citizenship based on religious identity, who were desperate to be benefited by their state in beleaguered economy. To focus on how, by targeting and controlling the school text books, the political parties Islam-sympathizing narration regularly exploited “the link between religion and identity formation especially with reference to youth’s religiousness and search for identity” (Oppong 15). The old book *Social Science* consisted a writers’ board, which included no Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian, or any other representative of religious and ethnic minorities. The book was first published in 1996 under Awami League, but in 2000, the book, nevertheless, was edited and authorized again along with a new education policy keeping Islam at the center rather hastily by Awami League.

The book consists fourteen chapters in total, and focus of this study has been narrowed down to the chapters presenting history, specifically on the third chapter, “Ancient Indian Subcontinent” (19), and the fourth chapter “Bangladesh in Ancient Times”, as they contain history lessons and cultivate ‘historical ignorance’ regarding different religions and their developments in Indian subcontinent in the historical narration. The third chapter consists five sub-chapters, 1) Civilization of Sindh, 2) The Arrival of the Aryans and Rise of Buddhism 3) Maurya Dynasty, 4) Gupta Dynasty, 5) After the End of Gupta Dynasty, through which the history of the ancient South-East Asian region is discussed from page 19-34. The book makes an open effort to make Islam known as a religion in the layers of history. In the subchapter, “After the End of Gupta Dynasty” (32), a sub-title of “Arrivals of the

Muslims in the sub-continent” is found, under which no relevant history of the Afghan-Muslims is described. Rather, an abridged biography of Muslim prophet Mohammed is documented under a further sub-title “Origin of Islam and the political Rise of the Muslims”, which has no relationship with the history of the Indian subcontinent, though it would make a rather suitable part of “Islamic Education” textbook. This misplaced part of prose starts at page 32 and ends at page 33. Furthermore, this part of the history book, in fact, repeats Muhammad’s religious call for “Allah is One and Only, and there is no other god worth worshipping” (Choudhury et al. 33). It even features Muhammad’s call for “abandoning idol worshipping” (33), a message completely unfit for the textbooks of a country like Bangladesh that consists several religious minority groups, such as Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Ahmadiyyas, etc. The narration of the old book of Social Science makes it clear that its target audience is the majority of Muslims, and it shows little sensitivity towards others’ religious sentiments.

In addition, the book makes references to the war-devoted history of Arab-Muslims from not an objective point of view, rather from a point of religious inclination. It mentions, the war of “Quraysh” under the title of “Ancient Indian Subcontinent” (32-33), even though it is not related to the South-East Asian subcontinent. The prose blatantly exalts Arabs conquest of the Middle East, and later some parts of Europe in its narration, and unsurprisingly, mentions none of the violence, subjugation and taking of slaves by the Muslims conquerors in those regions. It might be argued that the young learners of class 6 do not need to know about brutality of war. However, while the book omits the oppressions committed by the Muslim side, it addresses the violence committed by the other religious parties. For example, the line, “Due to the extreme hostilities and brutal tortures inflicted upon the prophet Hazrat

Muhammad (Peace be upon him) by the Quraysh and other religious groups, he at last left Mecca and went to ‘Hijrat’ at Medina with his followers after receiving instructions from Allah” (33). In the same page, *Social Science* (Choudrury et al.) book also portrays the continuity of Muslim invasions in Asia, Africa and parts of Europe as a non-violent, bloodless, and rightful conquest after the death of the Muhammed, which perpetuates a ‘historical ignorance’ regarding the nature of Islamic Rule around the world:

After the death of prophet Muhammed (PBH), under the leaderships of ‘the Rashudin’ the rule of Islam and Muslims continued to be widespread. Especially, during the rule of the second caliph Omar the rule of Islam grew. The kingdom became massive. Afterwards, with Umayyad and Abbasi’s caliphate the empires expanded to parts of Asia, Africa and Europe. (33)

The passage portrays no detail of any conflict, violence, or any sign of resistance of the locals of the invaded areas to the Muslim rulers or the religion itself. There are even produced ‘historical ignorance’ in *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.), class 6, from year 2000-2011, about how Islam developed and spread across the South Asian geography. Through its biased narration of the Islamic Rule and history of spread of the religion, it displays its direct aims to create an Islam-centric national identity that would favor the Muslim majority, and isolate the minorities. The book does not provide any historical account of forceful conversions of Hindus and Buddhists by the Muslim conquerors, which creates a ‘historical ignorance’ about the true origin of converted Muslims, and Islam’s development in the Indian continent. It never mentions, in the Indian subcontinent, the Muslim invaders’ involvement with “the enslavement of non-Muslim subjects [which] appears to have been a significant factor in the conversion to Islam” (Wink 3). The implication of such a selective

representation of history in the book is not only that it hides the part of Muslim invaders' brutality or any record of the resistance by the Hindus and Buddhists, but also that it sets the Muslim invaders and settlers in the subcontinent in the role of 'the saviors' of the lower caste Hindus. The book's overlooking of crimes committed by the Muslim rulers in this subcontinent has further predicament, because such history perpetuates the sense of Muslim supremacy in the Muslim students. In the subchapter "After the End of Gupta Dynasty", under a title "The Victory in Sindh", the book features lines such as:

After the conquering of Sindh by the Muslim invaders, the impact of Islam became widespread in the Indian continent. Hindus were extremes in following caste system. The Buddhists were under great oppression by the Hindu rulers. On the other hand, Islam represented unity, equality and brotherhood. As a result, Buddhists and lower caste Hindus started to accept Islam as a religion in large groups. (Choudhury et al. 33)

These lines represent the truth only partially; they identify the Hindu upper class in the role of the despots, who oppressed the lower-class Hindus and Buddhists alike. It also implies the Hindu religion as a religion of discrimination. Nevertheless, it completely hides the fact that Muslim invaders, too, oppressed the people in this subcontinent, and vast forceful conversion to Islam took place. In fact, the lines create 'historical ignorance', which keeps the large population of Muslims who converted to Islam in the South Asian continent still ignorant about their true and complete history of conversation. In the book of *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.), class-6, a sub-point of "Sultan Muhammad's Conquest of India" can be found, where Ghazni Mahmud who attacked India for total 17 times is documented as another glorious Muslim figure in history, who "helped to weaken the great Indian rulers for



the advancement of Muslims” (34). The book, however, once again ignores his role as a ruthless looter, and in desecrating Hindu temples and idols. For example, his loot campaign on Mathura which is estimated at 3 million rupees and over 5,000 slaves (Growse 51) is not a part of the book’s narrative. The book fails to be impartial and present History from objective point of view. Historian such as Growse noted that during Ghajini Mahmud’s expedition in Indian subcontinent, “orders were given that all the temples should be burnt with naphthalene and fire and levelled with the ground. The city was given up to plunder for twenty days.” (51), whereas, in the previous history textbook of Bangladesh, *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.), Ghazni Mahmud is upheld as a glorious figure, who should be known by all the young Muslim, Hindu, Christian and Buddhist and other learners of Bangladesh. The implication of such type of Islam-centric narration is that it not only ingrains a sense of superiority in the mind of all Muslims, but also it puts the minorities in an inferior position in society both in the realm of past and present.

The issue of Muslim invaders is furthered discussed in the sixth chapter of the book, “Sena Dynasty in Bengal and the Arrivals of the Muslims,” (Choudhury et al. 49-50) in a short and inadequate manner. It very briefly describes the last three successful kings of Bengal: Bijay Sena (1098-1160). Ballal Sena (1160-1178), and Lakshman Sena (1178-1205) within the space of one page. In fact, as chapter cuts short the information about the Hindu kings, under the sub point of “Lakhsman Sena,” the book generously describes the Muslim conqueror Bakhtiyar Khilji and uses the words ‘won’ and ‘conquered’ to glorify Khilji’s over-taking of “Uttar-Bharat”. On the contrary, the book does not mention about Khilji’s destruction of temples, and burning of Nalanda University’s Library in Bihar (Scott 141), perpetuating a non-violent, superior image of the Muslim rulers among the students. Such

denial of history in textbook narrations also parallels with the existing denial among a large portion of adult Muslims in the country, who choose to turn a blind eye to these issues. The narration of the book thoroughly legitimizes Muslims' domination over the other religious believers, specially Hindus and Buddhists.

Nevertheless, against these visible historical misrepresentations, it might be argued, often the historians find it hard to include details of an event. McCullagh expresses his view to address this crisis in recording of history: "it might be justified and credible but the account might omit significant facts about the subject so that it is unbalanced, or what I call unfair. For instance, it might elaborate upon people's virtues but ignore their vices, giving an unfair impression of their character" (40). For example, *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.) book most frequently does mention the oppressions of lower class Hindus and Buddhists by the Hindu upper class (33), and points out "a number of the oppressed people accepted Islam as a religion from Muslim Sufis" (50). The complication of such one-sided story telling is that the book paints all the Muslims who settled here, with one brush of sainthood who only brought the light of Islam in the subcontinent. The narration sanitizes the history of Islam in Indian subcontinent, and most importantly, denies the Hindu minorities of the country of their true history

In fact, *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.) book, followed from 2000-2011, does not even properly document the nomadic origin of the Arab-Muslims, whereas, scholars such as Andrew Wink notes that in the fertile land of 'Al-hind', it was "[Muslim]immigrant individuals and groups of warriors who left their herds and their pastoral-nomadic lifestyle behind forever" (126). The textbook treats the Muslim settlers as a homogenous body, where else the truth is Muslims came from various ethnic origins to this land. The learners acquire

no knowledge that the Muslims invaders were from different locations such as Afghanistan and Turkey, and they all had their own unique languages and cultures. If analyzed critically, the book injects the young learners with ‘historical ignorance’ that creates a pseudo consciousness of a Muslim brotherhood among them, where the Muslims in Bangladesh at present are same as the Arab, Turkish or Afghani Muslims in culture and practice, who came to the Indian Subcontinent. The narrated history perceives Muslims are synonymous everywhere, at any point of time, and positions the non-believers automatically as the Others.

The rise of religious nationalism in a state and production of ‘historical ignorance’ in High-school text books go hand in hand. Undoubtedly, controlling the High-School History textbooks is one of the quickest ways to create and officiate a religiously prejudiced history that will be followed and remembered by the generations to come. The young minds are easily influenced and thus are the prime targets for the power-hungry politicians to implant religious bias, as “the strength of the linkage between religion and identity is more likely to be stronger for younger individuals compared to mature adults” (Oppong 10). It is an alarming issue, because “content which is taught to students becomes viewed as truth to them and as these students grow up and become part of society, they bring these perceptions with them” (Giarrizzo 5). Also, if the biased portrayal of minorities is a part of daily education in Social Science classrooms through textbooks, it will be nearly impossible for religious prejudices and misunderstandings to come to an end in a society. Biased narrative that sets the majority as superior to the rest is bound to lead to eventual extremism and oppression in the society.

However, in Bangladesh, ‘historical ignorance’ regarding religion is given less importance by the secular nationalists, who always dominantly focus on the debate of 1971

and the subject of democracy, while refusing to recognize the politically produced and established 'historical ignorance' regarding different religions in the country's history textbooks, which have been greatly influencing the country's young minds, and fueling the growing Islamic extremist sentiments. Such allowing of cultivation of 'historical ignorance' is hazardous for any society, as Giarrizzo confirms through his research that biased presentation "of events, racial stereotypes, and the lack of critical details can all potentially affect the ways in which students create their own understandings and opinions of a race" (3). Indeed, it is crucial to be watchful of the propagated 'ignorance' in textbooks, because "the failure of schools to teach history has helped create a wider crisis of identity" (McCartney 1). This issue has remained long untreated in Bangladesh.

In fact, this change in Bangladesh's principle, from 'secularism' to 'Islamism', occurred in its history as early as 1977 (only after the six years of Independence War) in the constitution. However, even if it is common in the state's politics to use one, dominating 'religion' to bring maximum people under the overarching umbrella of 'nationalism' to rebuild post-war countries, because "identity achievement is highly related with internalization of religious commitment" (Oppong 15), the process must be scrutinized, because it operates on the principle of discrimination, and neglects the minorities' rights and their part of the history. In Bangladesh, since 1991, while the relative composition of Christian and Buddhist population did not change, and the Hindu population declined to 8.2 percent from 33% in the country. It is also predicted that by 2051 the share of Hindu population will decline to 3.7 percent (Mohapatra, et al. n.p).

So, it is necessary to examine the narration of history in Textbooks at present, because in the heterogeneous, multicultural societies, such as Bangladesh's, "barriers are formed and

tensions are created as a partial result of what is being taught through the textbooks” (Giarrizzo 4). For example, in American History books, the history of native Americans is often neglected, and history of the non-white settlers or immigrants such as American-Chinese, American-Indians, American-Mexicans, American-Spanish, American Japanese are abridged and in many cases not included at all. As a result, the minority students do not find sufficient representation of themselves in the history, and feel isolated from the dominant narration, where else, the majority of the white students feel more worthy and patriotic. Because to both the majority of the white students and the multi-racial minority group of students, “by not including minorities, the message that these textbooks are sending to students is that minorities are not important enough to be included. Students are not being presented with an accurate description of society and their knowledge of others becomes skewed” (Giarrizzo 4). Similarly, in Bangladesh, the representation of minority groups in textbooks is insufficient and erroneous, it aims to serve the majority of Muslims.

The present textbook *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.), which replaced the previous book of *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.) in 2012, presents a much more balanced and objective history of Bangladesh to the young students about coexistence of different religious communities. The book *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.), in fact, clarifies some of the misrepresentations of the previous book. For example, at the very beginning, in chapter 1, “History of Bangladesh”, it sheds lights on the origins of Muslim invaders in the Indian subcontinent. It identifies the Muslim settlers, as “Turkish Muslims” (9), “Mughals” (9), and “Afghan-Muslims” (9), which distinguishes their origins as foreigners to the land, who came here from different areas; a fact which the previous books tried to hide in attempt to not portray them as foreign invaders, but a homogenous body of

Muslims. Then it quickly goes on describing the “Bangladesh in the Modern Age,” (10) and explains the history of British Rule in Bengal briefly and then East Bengal’s transition to East Pakistan and later Bangladesh.

Also, the new book devotes chapter 6, titled “Cultures of Bangladesh”, for explaining and elaborating the multicultural history of Bangladesh. It states clearly that for hundreds of years “Hindu, Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians have been co-existing on this land” (Patwari et al. 50). It does not elaborate on any religion’s history. It equally distributes one line for each religion's origin in the subcontinent: “beside the ancient Hindu religion, Buddhism in the Pala Era, Islam through Sufi saints and Christianity through the colonial rulers, thrived in this country” (Patwari et al. 50). It does not attempt to set the Muslims as a light bearers or the upper caste Hindus as the oppressors. Though it too creates certain ignorance in its narration, but it does not present a biased history that can contribute to religious intolerance or Islamic extremist sentiments.

Contrasting with the previous book, which promoted religious information in layers of written history, *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.) remains loyal to its title in narration and introduces the history of Bangladesh as a state and its people’s multicultural and ethnical background, along with World’s major ancient lost civilizations. It aims to give the students a larger view of the world and civilizations. It introduces anthropological history of Pyramids in Egypt, ruins of Babylon’s and Mesopotamia, and opens a broader horizon to the young learners. The book also has a larger panel of writers, containing more professors, including a Hindu representative (unlike the previous time): Dr Mumtaz Patwari, Dr Uttam Kumar Das, Dr Abu Md Delwar Hossain, Dr A K M Shahnawaj, Dr Selina Aktar, Fahmida Hoq, Anwarul Hoq, Syeda Sangita Imam, and Dr khondokar MokkaDEM.

Furthermore, the book *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.) emphasizes heavily on the core values such as secularism, equal rights, and democracy promoted by its patron government Awami League. The book has twelve chapters in total, among five of them deals with history. The book's first chapter is: "History of Bangladesh", which begins by tracing the country's history back to the partition of 1947. It elaborately presents the history and movements prior to 1971's Liberation war. It discusses the Language movement, the geographical distances between West Pakistan and East Pakistan, their cultural clashes, and economical differences. In the chapter, under a title "Genocide committed by Pakistani Army and Our Victory against them", it discusses about the horrors of our Independence war and India's role as a neighboring in the war. In contrast, the previous class-6 history book, *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.) did not include any history of 1971 at all; it had no dedicated chapter, not even a paragraph.

Nevertheless, NCTB books from both the BNP political era, and even in Awami League era both insufficiently acknowledged the existing Christian community of the country, who consists 0.6% of the total population, according to World Population Review 2014. In both analyzed books of class 6, *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.) textbook from 2000-2011, and which was later replaced with *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (2012-2017), not a single mention of the history of early Church establishment, or the spread of Christianity in Bangladesh, or in the South-Asian region is found to be documented. The books ignore their general participation in society, as well, where truth remains the Christian community of Bangladesh has a 100% literacy rate (Ali and Miah 130). The community is small, but they are mostly highly educated. They are regularly recruited by multinational companies, NGOs and English medium schools for their fluency in English. (Ali and Miah 133). Even in the

new Social Science book their distinction as Catholic Christians and Protestant Christians is ignored. They are mentioned in a passing manner and treated as faceless body of people with no exclusive features. Students reading these books will gain no significant knowledge of the Christian community existing in Bangladeshi society.

Nevertheless, the old and the new books both contain elaborate and biased documentation of history of Islam which allows the vast majority of the Muslims, who consist 90.4% percent of the total population, to feel more united as a community who has more rights and monopoly on the soil of Bangladesh and its past. After the Muslims, the Hindus, who represent 8.2 percent of the total population, are the second most represented in the textbooks, their history as the original natives of the land is though misrepresented, is written more elaborately compared to the history of other religious minorities, such as Christians, Buddhists, Ahmadiyyas and others, and ethnic groups of natives of the land, such as Chakma, Shaotal and Garo whose history was not a part of the national curriculum until later in 2012. The natives had to wait about 40 years to become the part of the national curriculum after the establishment of Bangladesh as a secular, democratic country in 1971.

Under the rule of Awami league, indeed, the Adibhashi group first become a substantial part of the national curriculum, but in class 6, even in the new book *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.), the history of Adibhashis is not included. It can be found in the book of class 8. Such procrastination in representation in the education poses serious doubt regarding the importance of indigenous people in Bangladesh. In fact, the implications of such lack of misrepresentation are two folds. First, the Adibhashi students studying these books will find no representation of themselves which might lead them to feel inferior in compare to majority Bengali students who dominate the textbooks narrative. Secondly, the



Muslim students will also come to view the minorities as not worthy enough and identify them as the 'others' in the society.

In class 6, the Buddhists, who are 0.7 percent of the population are also insufficiently represented. They are described mostly in reference to the country's ancient Buddhist heritage sites, such as Buddh Bihar, Pahar pur, etc. Reading the new book of class 6, students would still have no substantial knowledge about the Buddhist groups of the country, except for the fact that they are concentrated in certain geographical locations in Chittagong Hill tracts. Such over-generalization mystifies the image of indigenous people in the eyes of the majority of students, who come to stereotype these people who can only be found in the hills, away from flat lands, villages and urban cities. Whereas, the truth is that many of the indigenous people live in Dhaka, the main city of Bangladesh, and all over Bangladesh, who are often highly educated, working in various professions. The indigenous population of Bangladesh are diverse in both identity and religions. They follow nature-centric pagan religions, Hinduism, and Christianity mostly. However, the majority of students remain largely ignorant about the diverse and matriarchal culture of the indigenous people of Bangladesh.

In essence, there is no doubt, a Bangladeshi citizen refers to a Muslim Bengali in the historical narration of these books (though the message is comparatively subtle in the later book under Awami League's rule), which overall mirrors the country's Islam-centric narration, but does not promote the narrative that it is only the Muslims who own and belong to Bangladesh. The Buddhists, Christians and Ahmadiyyas of Bangladesh are hardly ever recognized by the country's 'grand' narration of history in these books. Their active contribution in the social works and special areas of economy are not recognized. Though the

new book, *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.), makes an effort to correct the previously biased Islamic narration in terms of setting the historical records straight. However, it might be a bit too late, giving the country's decreasing religious tolerance and secularity. The country experiences communal violence, hate crimes against the minority groups on regular basis, though the mass population remains oblivious. It is extremely alarming for a country that claims to be secular, but has a rapidly decreasing minority population. while looking at its rapidly decreasing Hindu population and increasing religious and ethnic hate crimes in Table 1:

Table 1: Percentages of Muslim and Hindu population in Bangladesh

Census Year	Muslim	Hindu
1901	66.1	33.0
1911	67.2	31.5
1921	68.1	30.6
1931	69.5	29.4
1941	70.3	28.0
1951	76.9	22.0
1961	80.4	18.5
1974	85.4	13.5
1981	86.7	12.1
1991	88.3	10.5
2001	89.6	09.3
2011	90.0	08.5

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 2011

In any secular society, people of every religious and belief is supposed to enjoy equal status and freedom. However, the decreasing number of the Hindu population from 33.0% to 8.5% in Bangladesh indicates an undeniable issue of religious intolerance in society.

According to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for 2014 published by US government, in Bangladesh, violence against Hindus destroyed 719 homes, 192 businesses,

and 164 temples, monasteries, and statues; one person was killed and 193 injured in a single year (32). Whereas, total 26 cases of rape, kidnapping and killing of indigenous women, and in June, killing and injuring of 42 indigenous people in attempts forcibly to occupy the land of 106 families were reported. In fact, in Bangladesh most of the crimes go unreported. In a survey “Perceptions, Attitudes and Understanding” conducted by National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh, in 2011, among the victims “only 1.1% said they would report a violation to police” (11), which shows a distrust among general people regarding the law enforcement.

While it is true, that the reasons behind the violence against minorities in many cases cannot be traced back to religious intolerance, but rather to some political gangs and groups, a larger problem remains undiscussed, which is the silence of vast majority of Muslim population of the country who do not directly participate in violence against their Hindu, Buddhist, Ahmadi, and Christian neighbors. The survey by National Human Rights Commission detects a high level of denial among the Muslim community of the country. “When asked to identify the problems facing by the religious minorities in Bangladesh, the largest single response, provided by 41.3% was that they face no problems at all”, and a part of this sense of carelessness for the minorities among the Muslims is certainly rooted in the biased Muslim-majoritarian historical narration set in school textbooks, which are followed by millions of students in school, as well as have been accepted as the true history by their parents and teachers. The inadequate representation of the minorities has given birth to a ‘historical ignorance’ that keeps away the majority of the Muslim population from knowing the minorities’ past properly and considering them equally significant as citizens of the country. Though the current book *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.) is imparting

a tolerant and balanced history knowledge, the results cannot be seen anytime soon in the society, because the young students will first have to become adults to bring any substantial change.

In conclusion, setting the history right in the school textbooks is necessary. The problem of religious intolerance may not be solved overnight, but the generations ahead who would grow up reading a secular and unbiased history of their country, race, and religion will certainly be more humane, religiously tolerant and consider the human rights of another human being not simply through the lens of religion or ethnicity. Undoubtedly, history has the great power to humble us, and Garcia explains as a result of his research that, “as students gain a more accurate understanding of one another [in the classrooms], ignorance, misunderstanding, and racial conflict would begin to disappear from classrooms and society” (31). The ‘ignorance’ propagated by the authoritative figures in societies that prevents people from knowing the true history and the others in society must be stopped. Steps must be taken by the educators and policy makers in Bangladesh to present the young learners with an unbiased, secular account of history through education which will reflect the country’s First Constitution’s secular aim and ensure a truly secular future for the country.

## Chapter- 2

### Ignorance of Rights: Religious Sentiments vs Human Rights

Religious values are often in conflict with Human Rights in Bangladesh, though the country is constitutionally secular. Especially, the demands of the country's religious political parties are frequently seen to threaten the principles of Human Rights and Fundamental Rights of its women, children and religious minority groups. Human Rights are universally declared equal rights for every human being by United Nations in 1948, and Fundamental Rights are the number of human rights accepted by the Bangladesh's Constitution for its citizens. Hence, this chapter examines how school books are used by political parties to fulfill their need of appearing 'religious' or 'secular' to satisfy the Islamic groups and gain their votes. The main focus of the study remains to identify 'ignorance' regarding Human Rights and laws in Bangladesh's school textbooks and how it is affecting the society.

There is no doubt, there is an immense 'ignorance' regarding Human Rights and Fundamental Rights existing among the people in Bangladesh. In a survey titled "Perceptions, Attitudes and Understanding" conducted by National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Bangladesh, in 2011, among 3952 household, which consisted 5 members on average, the ignorance of Human Rights is traced and documented. The report revealed that "half of the respondents to the quantitative survey (50.2%) had never heard of the term 'human rights'. . . and those who had heard of it were much more likely to be from an urban area, male, educated or among the least poor" (10). In fact, it was found out that "68% [of the interviewed individuals] had not heard of the NHRC before participating in the survey" (11), and among those who were aware that their rights are protected, only 6.1%

knew they are protected by the Constitution. Most shockingly, “58.4% had not heard of the Constitution” (10-11) in the first place. Such ignorance regarding human rights among the population is not expected, considering the country’s increased literacy rate. If people are receiving the basic education, they ought to be atleast educated or informed about their most basic human rights. A report of literacy rate among the population by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in the year 2008 is shown in table 1.

Table 1, Literacy rate among population of Bangladesh, 2008.

	National			Rural			Urban		
	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both
<b>6. Adult Literacy Rates by Age Groups</b>									
11 to 14	56.7	60.8	58.7	51.5	53.7	52.6	64.7	70.6	67.8
15-19	49.8	47.3	48.6	43.5	45.1	44.3	58.8	50.7	55.0
20-24	50.8	49.9	50.3	46.7	44.4	45.5	56.4	57.1	56.8
25-29	50.1	49.7	49.9	48.2	46.8	47.4	52.8	54.3	53.6
30-34	52.2	53.9	53.1	48.8	48.0	48.4	56.9	62.5	59.8
35-39	50.7	52.0	51.4	47.9	46.2	47.1	54.8	60.8	57.8
40-44	52.1	51.5	51.8	47.4	49.3	48.4	58.4	54.6	56.6
45-49	51.2	51.8	51.5	45.7	48.0	46.8	60.0	57.6	58.8
50-54	48.0	53.8	50.4	42.4	45.8	43.8	55.6	64.5	59.4
55-59	45.2	46.8	45.7	48.9	45.3	47.0	54.1	50.0	52.5
60-64	45.3	43.0	44.0	40.7	53.2	46.4	53.0	52.8	52.9
65-69	44.6	42.0	43.0	43.3	48.8	45.9	52.9	64.2	58.7
70-74	42.0	41.0	41.4	47.1	34.0	41.5	61.9	60.0	61.0
76 and above	40.9	40.5	40.6	43.9	53.5	48.4	65.3	67.4	66.3
<b>7. Literacy rate by wealth-level</b>									
Poorest	28	28	29	25	26	26	32	30	36
Poor	39	38	40	34	34	34	47	46	48
Middle	51	51	51	48	47	49	57	59	55
Rich	64	64	64	58	58	58	71	71	70
Richest	76	76	75	69	68	70	83	83	84

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 2008, table 1.

The report shows a significant literacy rate among children to adults of age range from 11 years to 76 years and above on national level. Undoubtedly, government and non-government organizations alike have worked rigorously in last decades to assure education for both adults and children, males and females in the rural and urban areas of country during the last decade. Nevertheless, a sharp difference between literacy among the poorest (29%)

and the richest groups (75%) is evident. Moreover, the Literacy Assessment Survey, 2011, found overall literacy rate 53.7% for population of age 11 to 44 years. Then the question remains why the literates are not educated about their basic rights as humans and citizens? Where is 'the lack', or 'ignorance' being perpetuated in the education sector? Because "ignorance is not something simple: it is not a simple lack, absence or emptiness, and it is not a passive state" (Fyre 118). Ignorance is almost always there for a reason, placed or engineered by someone at a particular time. Ignorance regarding human rights, constitutional rights and law are also never naïve in a society, and such ignorance must be scrutinized. Anna-Marie Marshall explains that "in order to realize their rights, people need to take the initiative to articulate them" (83) and in order to realize their rights, people first need to know their rights. Rights that in many cases already exist. Imparting basic knowledge of human rights, constitutional rights and law, hence, should be a part of school education and its textbooks. Indeed, the textbooks of Bangladesh consisted ignorance concerning citizens' rights between 1996-2011, which resulted into such ignorant citizens, who were found to be unaware of their most basic rights reported by NHRC in 2011. It is extremely essential to investigate this ignorance regarding human rights and constitutional rights, because at times "low literacy may block people's access to justice" (Council of Canadian Administrative Tribunals 2).

To briefly discuss the International Law on Human Rights adopted in 1948, on the First Declaration of Universal Human Rights, a milestone document in human history, which universally recognizes that basic rights and fundamental freedoms are inherent to all human beings, inalienable and equally applicable to everyone, and "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Article 1). Regardless of one's nationality, place of birth,

gender, national or ethnic origin, color, religious belief, sexual orientation, language, or any other status, human rights entitle a human to freedom, equality and protection of life and property. In total, 48 countries voted in favor of this declaration. Nevertheless, many countries are regularly violating these articles, including those who signed it and those who did not. Many countries have argued against this document's enshrined 'equality' on the basis of religious and cultural values. For example, clashes between human rights and religious nations are common on the issue of providing equal rights to women, children, homosexuals and religious minorities. In UN's Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979, traditional Muslim interpreters argued against equal rights of women. They emphasized on so-called "equity" (Gerle 15) for women, which would essentially never really liberate them, but keep them under men's authority under the Sharia law. On the contentious relationship between human rights and religious and cultural values, James Devereaux notes, "those sympathetic to liberty should then veer away from identity politics, it works against freedom and equality" ("Identity Politics Will Not Lead to Freedom" n.p). Religious nationalist leaders are always exploitative of identity politics based on gender and religion.

On the other hand, as a state, Bangladesh considers itself moderately Muslim in practice due to its overwhelming 90.4% Muslim majority, when it constitutionally remains secular in its core principles. The country has several religious minorities of Hindus (8.2%), Christians (0.6%) and Buddhists (0.7%) and some others represent the rest (census mentioned are according to World Population Review 2014). The Constitution of Bangladesh states in Article 41(b), "every religious community or denomination has the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions," which ensures the lawful practice and



development of every religion in the country. Also, equal rights of employment, owning property and taking part in politics are protected by Bangladesh's constitution, in line with Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In Bangladesh, the female population ratio stood at 49.516% in 2015 (World Population Review 2015), and there were 51.3 million children (ages 0-14 years) living in Bangladesh, of which 24.9 million were girls and 26.4 million are boys (Source: 2008 estimate of CIA World Fact Book). Though "both the Constitution of Bangladesh and the country's premier child rights statute, the Children Act 1974, date back to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC), the Magna Carta for children" (Hoque n.p.), and the constitutional article 10 promises that "the State Shall endeavor to ensure equality of opportunity and participation of women in all spheres of national life" (Part II, article 19(3)), the number of daily violence reported in Bangladesh against women are shocking.

However, despite the recent increase in numbers of violation of human rights, both in the first Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972, article 8, and in today's constitution, article 8, part-II, after the fifteenth amendment (which reestablished the old principles of 1972's original constitution, in 2011), there are four fundamental principles enshrined by the state: 1) Secularism, 2) Nationalism, 3) Democracy, and 4) Socialism. In the preamble, the first Constitution of Bangladesh declared its goal: ". . . it shall be a fundamental aim of the state to realize through the democratic process a socialist society, free from exploitation – a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and free, equality and justice, political, economic and social, will be secured for all citizens" (qtd. in Halim 54).

Nevertheless, it is astonishing how Bangladesh signed UNICEF treaty in 1993 to protect its citizens' equal rights (including minorities, children, senior citizens and women's

rights), but Bangladesh's commitment to enshrine human rights became part of the national education curriculum only in 2012. For twenty-two years, through the school textbooks, both AL and BNP have never made any attempt to educate people regarding their rights; rights that both the state and the International law promise them. Even Awami League who advocates for women's empowerment at present, between 1996 to 2001, did not make the subject a part of the education curriculum. It is only in 2012, Awami league made the constitutional education a part of the NCTB textbooks to reflect their newly formed, pro-secular, digital Bangladesh narrative. Nevertheless, the constitutional education promoted in the new book, *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari, et al.), which contrasts starkly with the previously created ignorance in textbooks, which will create a public awareness and a more informed future generation. Hence, the best hope for protecting Human rights in Bangladesh always remains with its constitution, which promotes modernity, equality and secularity above everything. Despite losing sight of its original goals, Bangladesh can improve its condition by educating its people about constitutional rights and its nation's four fundamental principles, which are 1) Secularism, 2) Nationalism 3) Socialism, 4) Democracy, and counter the 'ignorance' regarding the citizens equal rights through the previous school textbooks.

However, the condition of Bangladesh remains problematic, as Awami League government is recently again moving to a questionable position in its narration by incorporating Islamic biases in Home Economics, and Bangla Literature school textbooks, which aim to curtail freedom of women according to the demands of Islamic groups. Certainly, the present education focusing on constitutional rights of all citizens will help establish the special rights for women and children. However, Awami League is allowing

changes in Bangla Literature book to fulfill the demands of the Islamists, such as “first graders studying the alphabet were taught that “o” stands for “orna,” a scarf worn by devout Muslim girls starting at puberty, not for “ol,” a type of yam” (Barry and Manik A1) in order to encourage girls to dress modestly. Awami League’s attempt to make the Muslim extremists of the country happy is in contradiction with women’s freedom to choose to dress freely.

*Social Science* (Choudhury et al.) of class 6, edited in 2000 under AL government and followed in the class from 1996-2011, has a total of fourteen chapters in the book, and only one chapter is dedicated to introduce “Civics and its Subjects” (Choudhury et al. 54). It has no chapter dedicated to discuss the rights of children, women and the minority groups, who are vulnerable to violence and discrimination most frequently in society. In fact, chapter 5, “Civics and Its Subjects” (Choudhury et al. 54) consists of three pages only, and it describes the Latin origin of the word ‘civics’, but nothing regarding its history and development in Bangladesh or South Asian geography. In page 55, the book only theoretically elaborates “Subjects of Civics”: a) Citizenship and State, b) Analyzing past, present and future, c) Political and local institutionalization, d) International issues. It ends the section with three short paragraphs, describing “The Necessities of Learning Civics”, and it mentions of Bangladesh for the first time in the last two lines, in relation to the subject of Civics. The book notes: “Bangladesh is an independent and sovereign state. To protect the country’s freedom and to make the country strong and renowned, Bangladeshi citizens must study civics” (Choudhury et al. 56). It does not include any practical knowledge, the law system of Bangladesh, its constitution, or any existing law that can enlighten and benefit the learners in their need. The book makes no attempt to equip the learners with any contextual knowledge

about their rights protected by the state law, nor teaches them any of their duties as citizens. The book creates a visible 'ignorance' which hides the rights of Bangladeshi people; especially, the rights of women, children, and minorities, which are protected in the constitution. The old book delivers no lesson on child's protection, freedom of women, or equal status of the religious minorities in the eyes of the state. In fact, as the book stops from educating the learners about their rights and duties, but it dedicates an entire chapter to explain "Election" (Choudhury et al. 58) and makes its political intention apparent. The book does not aim to create better citizens, but citizens who can only cast votes. After all, being educated about the rights and laws enables the citizens to be aware, self-sufficient and strong; whereas, ignorant and wrongfully indoctrinated citizens are easily manipulated and less likely to hold the government accountable for their due rights.

However, the new book *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.), which replaced *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.), from 2012-2017 in the NCTB curriculum, consists of twelve chapters in total, three of them are dedicated to create awareness regarding the basics of civics duties and human rights of a citizen. The chapters are-- chapter-8: "Bangladesh and Citizens of Bangladesh" (65-73), chapter-10: "Children's Rights in Bangladesh" (79-83), and chapter-11: "Children Growing up in Bangladesh and their obstacles" (84-91). The three chapters are examined to show how they counter the ignorance of the previous textbook. Firstly, in chapter-8, some basic concepts, such as what is a state, what are the elements that constitute a state, are answered. It notes, there are four elements needed to establish a state: 1) Population, 2) Territory, 3) A state government and 4) Sovereignty (65). Then, from page 66-67, more importantly, it contextualizes the definitions according to Bangladesh's context and defines Bangladesh's territory, population,

government and what is sovereignty for Bangladesh. Such contextualized knowledge certainly makes it easy for the students to comprehend these concepts. The chapter finishes with the fair concept of “Citizen's' Role in the Country’s Development” (Patwari et al. 71), but it does not forget to mention that “as citizens of Bangladesh, we [the citizens] enjoy certain rights from our state” (Patwari et al. 71). Between the state and its citizens, it is always a give and take relationship. The book elaborates both side of the statehood. It emphasizes how the state must protect its citizens by providing them with basic rights, such as food, shelter, education and security, and in return, the people shall work for the country. Also, the state must treat all the citizens equally; including children, women and minority groups.

In the chapter-10, the book directly imparts knowledge about the protection of Child Rights under the title “UNICEF Approved Child Rights”. The book mentions, there are total 54 articles announced by UNICEF, on 20th November, 1989. It also recalls that in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has proclaimed that all children are entitled to special care and assistance. The book elaborates UNICEF’s aims to protect every child against hunger, diseases, violence and more. The book further describes 14 important Child Right’s articles. In the first article, it declares, “All children are below 18 years old, though the age limit may vary in other nations” (80), which is extremely necessary, because a baseline survey by Human Rights Commission in Bangladesh shows that “only 0.8% of all respondents believed a boy was a child until age 18, and only 0.9% believed this about girls” (“Perceptions, Attitudes and Understanding” 25). An overwhelming number of Bangladeshis still do not see children age above 6-9 years as children, which might help us understand why the number of child rape has increased so greatly. The second listed article in

the book, in particular is mentionable: “All children are equal. Meaning, no discrimination shall be made against a child, based on the child is a boy or a girl, rich or poor, the child’s nationality, religion, or physical ability” (qtd. in Patwari et al. 80). In fact, the book talks about Bangladesh’s agreement with UNICEF, on 3rd August, 1990, which makes it clear to the learners that Bangladesh’s government is bound to protect their rights. The country has made a promise to work to ensure a safe childhood for all the children. The book also mentions that education is a right of every child.



Fig. 1. Deprived children are receiving education.

The picture shows Bangladesh’s struggle as a poor country to provide education to all its children. In the picture, we see, the classroom has no benches, the children sit on the floor, but they are studying with joy and curiosity in eyes. Assuring education for all children remains a global challenge, especially for countries such as Bangladesh. A total of 59 million children are out of school worldwide, according to a UNICEF report of 2016. And, while child marriage rates are decreasing, each year about 15 million girls are married before the age of 18 (“United Nations Children’s Fund, Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects” 6).

In fact, the book takes a step more to make the children aware of the possible nature of violence against them, where they can expect to be protected by the law. Chapter 11 discusses “different types of child Labor” (86) and states that under the age of 18, any type of child labor is illegal. Child labor is an issue Bangladesh is still fighting to overcome. Despite the laws prohibiting such abuse of children, it is reported that approximately 13.4% (4.7 million) of total children (aged from 5 to 14 years) engage in laborious work in Bangladesh, while 7.3% work and do not go to school (Human Rights Commission Report, 27). The book provides visual illustrations of both physical and verbal abuse of children (see fig. 2).

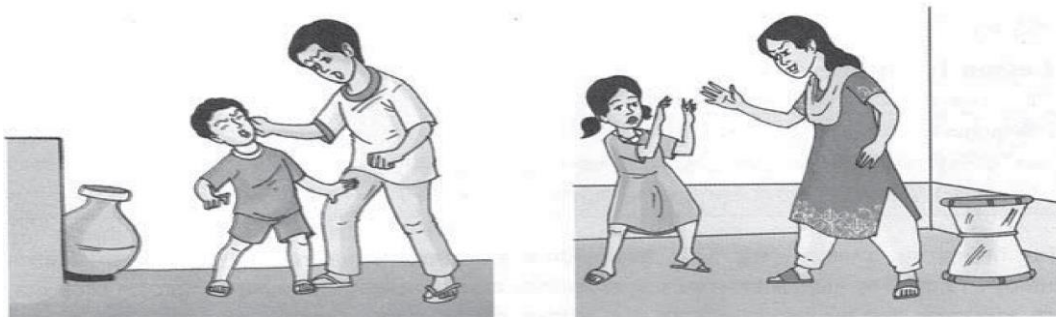


Fig. 2. Children, both a boy and a girl, being physically abused.

These pictures can educate children that physical violence against children is illegal. Being subjected to any abuse, children can inform other adults or report it to a nearby police. Lessons of law at such early age will surely make these learners better citizens of the country. If the previous books have also made such efforts to teach children about laws and rights of individuals, Bangladesh would not have such number of criminalities. It is worth mentioning that in 2009 the International Labor Organization (ILO) and Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) held a survey on commercial sexual exploitation of children. According to the report, among “18,902 child victims of sexual exploitation, 83 percent were girls, nine percent were transgender children, and eight percent were boys” (qtd in “Country Reports on Human

Rights Practices for 2012” 28). So, in consideration of the amount of child abuses and exploitations taking place in Bangladesh, the book makes a significant effort to enlighten young learners and make their families aware of Child Rights protected by both UNICEF, and the Constitution of Bangladesh.

Furthermore, *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.) has twelve chapters and three of them are focused on different issues of statehood, citizenships, Bangladesh’s voting system, and citizen’s rights. The book specially prioritizes the rights of women and senior citizens in chapter 5: “Bangladesh and Bangladesh’s citizens” (Patwari et al. 42) and chapter 9: “Bangladesh’s Senior Citizens and Women Rights” (Patwari et al.). In chapter 5, the relationship between the state and its citizens has been discussed; it describes that “for a country’s true development, good citizens are essential” (43). It acknowledges the practical problems faced by the state’s citizens and provides a list of duties for the young learners to follow to help eradicate the problems. There are six possible steps enlisted that can be adapted by the citizens, and among them number four is “Learn to sympathize with every human being, regardless of one’s religion, sect and ethnicity” (45). Such message vastly deviates from the discriminating approach of the previous book.

In fact, the book *Bangladesh and Global Studies* enlists total 16 Fundamental Rights protected by the Constitution of Bangladesh for all its citizens:

- 1) Right to live,
- 2) Right to own property,
- 3) Right to free movement,



- 4) Right to practice religion,
- 5) Right to make agreements,
- 6) Right to think freely,
- 7) Right of free media and newspapers,
- 8) Rights to assemble,
- 9) Right to establish family,
- 10) Right to practice language and culture,
- 11) Right to employment,
- 12) Right health and education,
- 13) Right abide by the law of state,
- 14) Right of social and economic justice,
- 15) Right to freedom of speech,
- 16) Right to participate in the election (Patwari et al. 46).

The book makes an outstanding effort to educate the learners about their own rights and everyone else's rights around them, who are entitled to the same rights as them as citizens of Bangladesh, regardless of the class, religious, and gender. The book functions as a significant step for Bangladesh's future toward a tolerant society, because these learners ought to be more tolerant, active, and conscious as citizens based on their current education.

*Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.) also educates its learners on the issue of women's rights, in chapter 9. The issue of women's right is important in Bangladesh, because despite the laws to protect women against all forms of violence, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) presented a report on *Violence Against Women Survey 2015*, which found out that "80.2 percent of women were abused by a husband or male partner at least once in their lifetime" (qtd. in "Bangladesh 2016 Human Rights Report" 33). In addition, the media reported total 22,386 women and children were treated for rape and other violence at the government-run One Stop Crisis Centers between 2001 to 2015. A Total of 5,003 cases were filed, for which there were total 820 verdicts, and only 101 perpetrators were punished ("Bangladesh 2016 Human Rights Report" 34). The book acknowledges the socio-economic barriers faced by the women in society, as well as conservative cultural values that frequently hinder women's rights to education, freedom and employment, and it states that the Constitution of Bangladesh aims to protect women against those odds. It provided an illustration of women working in garments factory, acknowledging women's contribution in society.

Moreover, the book mentions United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which entitled women as equal as men in every aspect of life, freedom, education and property (Patwari et al. 84). It must be mentioned, the notion of 'equity' instead of 'equality' was upheld by many Muslim states at the UN Women Conference in Beijing 1995. The Vatican and conservative Muslim states were in agreement there (Gerle 15). They oppose equal human rights to women in the name of so-called equity, when they only want to subjugate women. However, Bangladesh as a state has always been in support

for 'equality' for women since its first constitution in 1972. The book provides illustrations of women under the umbrella of development (see fig. 3).



Fig. 3. All women regardless of age, religion and ethnicity under one umbrella of development (Patwari et al. 84)

The book also presents an illustration of an adult education class where women, regardless of age and gender, can receive education side by side with men (see fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Equal rights of education for men and women. (Patwari et al. 85)

The above illustrations, certainly, works to inspire women. The pictures assure women of their equal rights provided by the law. In fact, the constitution of Bangladesh has

enshrined secular Human Rights for its both male and female citizens in every aspect of society. The book also features an illustration (see fig. 5) of women working in an official environment.



Fig. 5. Equal participation of women in workplace. (Patwari et al. 86)

In the picture (figure-5), two young women are seen at an office, promoting social norm, where men and women work side by side. The Islamist parties frequently oppose such freedom for women. There are also several laws that aim to protect women in the society. The book makes ample attempts to promote this secular stance of the Constitution of Bangladesh. It mentions the law passed in 1980 against the social curse of dowry. It also documents, “According to the law to protect women and children, 1983, the punishment for physically abusing women, or attempting to murder is punishable by life time imprisonment or even death sentence” (91). The book counters ignorance produced by the previous books and replaces the lack with new knowledge of empowerment.

The book tries to spread awareness against child marriage and its causes, “because the law recognizes every female below 18 years old and every boy below 21 years old as underaged, according to the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929. Act no XIX of 1929 and Bangladesh officials approve child marriage prevention Act of 2014” (qtd. in Patwari et al.

92). The book promotes the law which sets child marriage as illegal, and attempts to ensure a secure childhood for girls. Nevertheless, the law is poorly enforced, and early forced marriages remain a serious problem in Bangladesh today. According to UNICEF data, 2016, 52 percent of girls were married by the age of 18, and another 18 percent were married by the age of 15. The new book handles this issue elaborately, it identifies the cultural reasons behind child marriage of girls such as the superstitions of old grandparents, then parents sense insecurity for having a young daughter at home due to fear of losing honor by eve-teasers and other predatorily men in society. Girls are mostly married off in poor families for financial securities (Patwari et al. 93). The book establishes women as equal to men in every aspect to fight a harsh reality where women do not enjoy the same legal status and rights as men in family, property, and inheritance law. The book, undoubtedly, educates its learners about these existing laws as necessary civic lessons, because when the citizens know that an act is a crime punishable by law, they may not do it. The book attempts to educate its learners for a future, where men and women both will know about women's equal rights in society and work actively to provide and achieve them.

Hence, despite the regular violence of Human Rights of women, children and minority groups in Bangladesh, the problems can be solved, and a big step for it can be proper education of the population. The more people will know about their equal rights as human beings, the more they will feel deprived of their unachieved rights and raise voices for them. In 2004, a bill was signed in America that made it a law to teach the US Constitution in federally funded schools, which made it a legal obligation of those schools to provide students with programs that open their eyes to the importance of the Constitution in their everyday lives" ("Why We Must Teach the Us Constitution in Schools"). Such initiative of

making Civics education mandatory at school levels should be followed by every country, because they would make people aware and open up new dialogues to bring in the necessary changes in society. After all, ignorance is a problem that must be treated with non-politicized education, which upholds Human Rights above everything in the modern world.

## Conclusion

School textbooks are our primary sources of knowledge. Millions of students subscribe to school textbooks every year, they view them as books, which can provide them with right information. Even the teachers and the parents, who are responsible for the children's education, they read these books to teach them to the young learners. School textbooks, undoubtedly, has the capacity to reach a wide range of population. The young learners who read these books also affect the environment around them, they enact the values that they learn from the books and their educational sphere. Moreover, the young learners make the future generation of the citizens and voters of the state. Bangladesh, as a developing country, has millions of school-going students from different economic levels, all of whom are extremely important for the country's expanding economy and future of politics. Therefore, Bangladeshi political parties always attempt to make an impression on the students, and imprint their political and ideological needs on the young minds through the manipulation of the school textbooks.

This research has analyzed the Social Science textbooks of Bangladesh and their narratives regarding history and civics. The research has been conducted and conclusions are made through the ardent study of ignorance. In two subsequent chapters, Social Science books from two different time periods have been examined to trace the influence of political parties on the narrative of these books and how 'ignorance' functions as an apparatus within the body of these school textbooks. It has been observed and proved that History and Civics lessons imparted in these books have largely depended on the government policies and needs. Being government funded, these textbooks reflected pro-religious values at times, then pro-secular at other times under the same political party rule as the party changed its schema to

win over the public opinion, votes and international support based on circumstances. Between 1996-2017, Awami league has been seen to change its stance several times for votes; while from 1996-2001, the party tried to prove itself in tune with Islamic values, after coming to power in 2008, they started with a fresh narrative and eventually took a position of anti-terrorism, anti-Islamic extremism, and secularism in the country. The proved, politicians do not hesitate to exploit religion as a political element that has a tremendous impact on people's sentiment, and change their voice based on the political atmosphere.

The study demonstrated in chapter 1, "Ignorance of Religious History: Legitimizing the Majority", that Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country, and the politicians regularly use 'Islam' in their rhetoric to appeal to the public for maximum votes. In the book *Social Science* (Choudhury et al), followed in the classrooms from 1996-2011, the production of 'ignorance' is well observed in its narrative of history, which encouraged a Muslim-majoritarian social consciousness, and neglected other religious minorities' rights. It must be remembered, the book was patronized by the same the Awami League government, who later introduced a completely different book *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.) in 2012. The later book enshrined a much secular version of the history lessons for the learners. Though the new book too never really sheds lights upon some crucial historical facts, it reflects Awami league's changed agenda in politics. 2008 onwards, AL gave up on their previous line of religious advocacy, because it did not help them succeed in the election of 2001. The new book reflecting Awami League's current and initial 1971's secularism, presents a more balanced history regarding Hindu-Muslim relationship, though it still fails to incorporate the history and roles of Christians, Buddhists, and Ahmediyyahs in Bangladesh, and perpetuates a 'historical ignorance' regarding these minority groups among the young learners, as well as the wider society surrounding them.



In chapter 2, “Ignorance of Rights: Human Rights Vs Religious Values”, this study examined ‘ignorance’ regarding Human Rights and laws, which protect rights of women, children and minority groups in Social Science textbooks of class 6 and 7 from two different time periods. It is seen again that the school textbooks made these civics and law lessons only when the government supported it. For instance, when Awami League was trying to push forward pro-Islamic values to prove the party as a supporter of religiousness in the public eyes, the textbook *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.) did not incorporate lessons on Human Rights, women’s empowerment, or children's rights as parts of the education. It failed in its duty to educate a generation of students of the equal rights for themselves and others around them. However, from 2012, in the new book *Bangladesh and Global Studies* (Patwari et al.), multiple chapters are dedicated to promote and discuss these issues and laws under Awami League’s power, as the party is trying to invent a new narrative for the fast developing, digital Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the complications remain, as Awami League is seen to allow religious biases into the textbooks from time to time on the demands of Islamic fanatic groups, who do not want girls to receive equal education and freedom as boys, and strongly demand to curtail the rights of other religious groups to practice the religions.

Overall, this research was set to find answers behind massive ignorance regarding historical facts and Human rights laws among the population of Bangladesh. The study wanted to find out the role of Social Science books, which are responsible for imparting necessary history lessons and laws that protect everyone as equal, in regard of spreading ‘ignorance’. The book *Social Science* (Choudhury et al.) ignored many important issues, as well as, intentionally created some ‘ignorance’ regarding issues that might have been politically sensitive or harmful for the government then. Awami League published this book in 1996 and after coming to power BNP government took no step to change the problems in

its lessons as the books supported their explicitly expressed religious-centric politics. From 2012, though Awami League changed the tone of the textbooks and brought many changes to the books to establish secularism, and make the students aware of Human rights and constitutional rights, it cannot be said for sure that Awami League will not change its ideological stance again to remain in power, to get the maximum support of the larger Muslim population at the cost the minorities' rights and security in the country.

In conclusion, this research in its small effort calls for public awareness in Bangladesh against biases in school textbooks, which undermines the roles, the history, and the rights of the minority groups, and those who are vulnerable at the face of religious extremism and the oppression of the majority group. The study, especially, appeals to the teachers to recognize 'ignorance' as an active tool of politics, which can be created, carefully placed, and used to manipulate a population. Also, this understanding is important, because these biases, 'ignorance', and other "distortions will be perpetuated as truth until educators teach otherwise" (Sanchez 311). Education sector should, hence, have autonomy and free of political collusions. Education, certainly, has a superior role in the society and the power to change people's opinion. The political parties well recognize this truth. It is high time, the general citizens should understand it, too, and question the narratives of the school textbooks that impact the young minds so deeply.

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