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Two Bengals Two Entities: Construction of Their Development Narratives

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1.1 Introduction

The province of Bengal was divided between two countries, viz. India and Pakistan, based on the two-nation theory¹ with the end of British rule in India in 1947. Before that, along with their geographic singularity, both Bengals were under a single political entity. Nevertheless, a physical boundary between the identity of East Bengal and West Bengal

¹ Syed Ahmad Khan, the pioneer of Muslim nationalism in South Asia, is widely credited as the father of the two-nation theory. The theory that religion is the determining factor in defining the nationality of Indian Muslims was promoted by Muhammad Ali Jinnah and became the basis of the Pakistan Movement. The two-nation theory is based on the hypothesis that Muslims differ from Hindus regarding religious, cultural, social, and daily life and that they must establish an independent Muslim state in which they can freely live their identities.

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got entrenched because of the mess up by the Britishers to divide it into two in 1905. The Radcliff Line that bisected Bengal kept its Western and Northern districts in West Bengal in independent India. Also, the division was done in such a way that the more industrial belt of Bengal remained with West Bengal. Kolkata, Bengal’s great urban centre and leading port remained its capital (Fig. 1.1).

On the other hand, the eastern districts, which were fertile, agriculturally rich, and densely populated, became East Bengal (later renamed East Pakistan), with Dhaka as its capital. However, the stay of East Pakistan with West Pakistan did not last long because of the sea of differences that emerged between them within a short time. The Bengalis have been exploited socially, economically, and politically since 1947 by the West

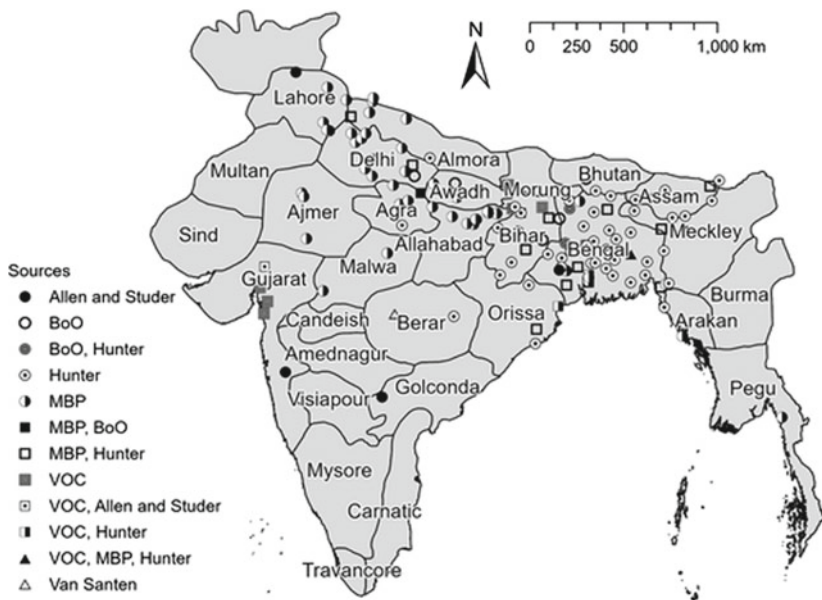


Fig. 1.1 Map of the Indian Subcontinent and Burma under the British Rule (Source Zwart and Lucasssen [2020])

Pakistanis. This ultimately led East Pakistan to fight a nine-month war and win Independence from West Pakistan in 1971 with a progressive political agenda. Even during the Independence War, the most significant source of help to refugees came from West Bengal. More than 10 million people crossed to India to save their lives from the carnage unleashed by the West Pakistani military and their leadership. Most of them were sheltered in West Bengal.

Though Bangladesh and West Bengal got divided into two nation-state identities in 1947, they still have much in common, including the Bengali language as their mother tongue and, to a large extent, common culture, notwithstanding the Hindu–Muslim differences that triggered the separation. Banerjee and Samaddar (2020: 341) put the similarities between the two Bengals in this way, “Despite the separation, there is always having a similar culture, lifestyles, and food habits, particularly among the people of West Bengal and Bangladesh. The similarity between Bangladesh and Bengal is that everyone likes typical Bengali music, dance, drama, cinema, reading various novels and diverse literature, arts, painting, and sculpturing. Nurturing the culture is almost every family’s tradition, whether as an extra-curriculum activity for a student or self-interest for an adult member. Bengalis understand, feel, interact, argue, and at last express their cultures in their daily activities”.

Table 1.1 reveals an exciting picture of the two Bengals based on some select indicators. In 2021, the combined population of Bangladesh and West Bengal was around 269 million, with Bangladesh’s population standing at 167 million and West Bengal’s population at 102 million. Bangladesh and West Bengal, respectively, are home to some of the most fertile terrain in the world because they are situated near the confluence of three of the world’s most important rivers—the *Ganges* (known as the *Padma* in Bangladesh), the *Brahmaputra*, and the *Meghna*.

The Bengals bear a favourable climate for agriculture, provided by abundant rainfall, consistently warm temperatures throughout the year, and a dense population. The high population density in this area stood at 1,145 people per square kilometre in Bangladesh and 1,028 people per square kilometre in West Bengal in 2021. This provides evidence that the land in this area is both fertile and productive. Experts believe that the

Table 1.1 Statistical profile of Bangladesh and West Bengal, 2021

Select indicators	Bangladesh	West Bengal
Population (million)	167	102
(a) Population density (persons per square km)	1,145	1,028
(b) Percentage of the labour force in agriculture	38	43
<i>Share of GDP/GSDP (%)</i>		
(a) Agriculture	11.50	17.19
(b) Service	51.43	52.85
(c) Manufacturing	37.07	29.96
Annual per capita income in US\$ (PPP)	6,960	5,601

Note GDP Domestic Product; GSDP Gross State Domestic Product

Source Various Statistics published by the Government of Bangladesh, the Government of India, the Government of West Bengal and the World Bank

abundance of farmland could have led to early marriage contributing to the dense population in the Bengal delta.

Regarding sector-wise contributions, the services sector was the largest in the two Bengals, contributing 57% in West Bengal (PRS Legislative Research 2022) and 55.70% in Bangladesh. The manufacturing industry comes second, generating 30.82% of Bangladesh's GDP. Agriculture was in the third spot in Bangladesh, contributing only 13.48% (BBS 2021; all figures are for Financial Year 2020). In West Bengal, the share of agriculture was 21%, followed by manufacturing at 22%. In 2017, about 40.6% of the total labour force was active in the agricultural sector in Bangladesh (BBS 2018). In contrast, the figure is as high as 43% in West Bengal. The average annual income per capita in nominal terms is estimated to be \$2,734 for Bangladesh in 2022 (IMF 2022), and it is US \$1,700 in West Bengal (PRS Legislative Research, 2022).

1.2 A Brief Walk Over the History of Bengal and Its Partition

Before dealing with the underlying socioeconomic factors of Bangladesh and West Bengal, we need to go back several centuries to understand how this once-rich region turned into a poor area over time. The geographic

zone under the present two Bengals was recognized as having the most cultural diversity and economic success in the world during the *Pal* and *Sen* dynasties, lasting between the eighth century AD and twelfth century AD. Bengal was always on the radar of invading forces from other parts of the world because of its fertile land and strategic location. Making a land link between South Asia, Southeast Asia, and China also offered access to and from the Bay of Bengal. These enticed many to come to Bengal, including the colonialists who sought to extort wealth from the region through trade and taxation. The list includes a company called the British East India Company (EIC) that came to India in 1608 and eventually bought the whole of India under the control of the British Empire.

It is helpful to look at this extensive colonization that began in the then-Bengal of *Bharatbarsha*, *aka* India. With its economic prosperity, Bengal seemed to be a place of attraction for the nations with more naval and shipping powers. Many entry points from the Bengal region to the Bay of Bengal served as a maritime channel for trade and the return of pillaged goods. Resources were extracted along the trade route in a pattern that started with the silk trade and subsequently moved on to the trade in textiles.

Indeed, the first ship from EIC docked in the Indian port at Surat in 1608. Sir Thomas Roe met the Mughal Emperor Jahangir in 1615 as an emissary for King James I and secured the right for the British to establish a factory at Surat. The British soon overtook the Portuguese, gradually increasing and expanding their economic activities in India. English-speaking communities grew significantly in the three presidential cities of Calcutta (Kolkata), Bombay (Mumbai), and Chennai (Madras). In 1717, EIC obtained a *firman*, or royal dictate, from the Mughal Emperor, exempting the company from paying customs charges in Bengal. That helped the company's fortune soar. It became a dominating business house when one of its military commanders, Robert Clive, beat Siraj-ud-daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, in the Battle of Plassey in 1757. During the first few years of the Company's administration, the Bengali people endured considerable suffering. This was enhanced further in 1765 when the company was given the right to levy taxes on behalf of the Mughal

Emperor (ULCA 2022). That is, collecting Mughal taxes was subcontracted to a robust business house. As a result, Robert Clive, the first British Governor of Bengal, and the directors of the EIC recruited English traders and replaced Mughal revenue officers in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. In that way, the East India Company, which had previously traded silks and spices, changed into something more unusual. The outcome of this move was that, within a few years, 250 company clerks supported by 20,000 locally recruited Indian soldiers had effectively taken control of Bengal (Dalrymple 2015).

EIC's first significant territorial conquests in India started in Bengal, and 47 years later, its influence reached North India through the mastery of Delhi, the capital of the Mughals. With that conquest, nearly all of India was under the company's rule from a boardroom in the City of London. "What honour is left to us?" asked a Mughal official named Narayan Singh shortly after 1765, "when we have to take orders from a handful of traders who have not yet learned to wash their bottoms?" (Dalrymple 2015). The historical irony is that a company that crept into India to do business ultimately transformed itself into a powerful colonizing entity, thanks to the largesse of the Mughal rulers, who also came from other distant lands.

The conquest of Bengal by EIC opened the gate for the plundering of Bengal itself and, subsequently, the whole of India. Dalrymple amply describes this (2015), "Bengal's wealth rapidly drained into Britain, while its prosperous weavers and artisans were coerced like so many slaves" by their new masters, and its markets flooded with British products. A proportion of the pillage of Bengal went directly into Clive's pocket. He returned to Britain with a fortune valued at £234,000, making him the wealthiest self-made in Europe. After the Battle of Plassey in 1757, a victory that owed more to treachery, forged contracts, bankers, and bribes than military prowess, he transferred to the EIC treasury no less than £2.5 m seized from the defeated rulers of Bengal—in today's currency, around £23 m for Clive and £250 m for the company. -No great sophistication was required. The entire contents of the Bengal treasury were loaded into 100 boats and punted down the Ganges from the Nawab of Bengal's palace to Fort William, the company's Calcutta

headquarters. A portion of the proceeds was later spent rebuilding Powis.²

Unsurprisingly, the British colonial masters chose Kolkata as their capital because of the region's economic and political importance. Soon the economic and political landscape of Bengal started changing fast under Company Rule. This is reflected by the history of Britannica, "Under Governor-General Charles Cornwallis (served 1786–93), a permanent settlement system was established in the territory—now called the Bengal Presidency—whereby property rights were granted perpetually to local *zamindars* (landlords). This property policy indirectly stimulated the growth of a new landed middle class—especially in Calcutta—called the *bhandralok*. Initially, the *bhandralok* was dominated by upper-caste Hindus, but the Muslim presence began to increase toward the end of the nineteenth century. In time, this middle class emerged as the most active advocate of Indian self-government".³

But the Britishers soon found that ruling Bengal was not easy and their administrative and ruling philosophy of "divide and rule" helped it get a foothold in Bengal. Their first move was to make Assam a separate province in 1874. Then in 1905, the viceroy George Nathaniel Curzon created two new provinces, ostensibly on a geopolitical basis; these provinces were Western Bengal, including Bihar and Orissa, and Eastern Bengal and Assam, with Kolkata and Dhaka as their capitals, respectively. "Aside from increasing administrative efficiency, Curzon's move was intended to position the Muslims as a counterweight to the Hindus".⁴

But the partition of Bengal elicited vociferous protest in Western Bengal, especially in Calcutta, where the Indian National Congress⁵ played a prominent role. Indian Muslim leaders, however, mainly supported the partition, and in 1906 they gathered at Dhaka under the patronage of Nawab Salimullah and set up the All-India Muslim League. Their efforts secured separate electorates and

² The British Castle Powis was built in the thirteenth century. This medieval castle, fortress, and grand country house are near Welshpool in Powys, the UK.

³ <https://www.britannica.com>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Also called the Congress Party; formed in 1885.

separate constituencies for the Muslims under the constitutional reforms of 1909, but they could not save the partition. In 1911, Governor Lord Hardinge annulled the partition after the Swadeshi mass movement in Bengal. However, Bihar and Orissa were constituted into a new province, Assam reverted to its separate status, and the Indian capital was moved to Delhi from Kolkata.

The decision to relocate the capital to Delhi can be seen as a response to the growing influence of Kolkata and the government's desire to safeguard British power against prospective revolutionaries. Rulers, the bulk of whom were foreigners, were likewise annoyed by the revolutionary zeal and educational enlightenment of Bengal's elite class. Maybe this can explain Bengal's initial separation in 1905, then its reunion in 1911 and the shifting of the capital. But the ultimate division of Bengal came in 1947 when they were separated to become parts of two independent countries. Historically, however, Bengal was divided by the British Radcliffe Line.⁶ One notable fact was that the partition was all against the wishes of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and Sarat Chandra Bose, two prominent political figures of Bengal at that point in time.

The pre-partition developments and post-partition realities indeed have affected the development narrative of both Bengals. For Bangladesh, the years between 1947 and 1971 constituted another colonial phase that impacted its socioeconomic progress as West Pakistan always looked down upon them in a subjugated order. The colonial memory of deprivation, exploitation, oppression, torture, and movement for independence, both non-violent and violent methods, shaped the post-independence development narrative of both parts of Bengal. While pro-socialist economic and political ideologies got firm ground in West Bengal, the independence movement in East Bengal (or East Pakistan) started with a language-based identity that went into the economic and social spheres over time. The movement led to the war of Independence in 1971.

⁶ The Radcliffe Line was the boundary demarcated between the Indian and Pakistani portions of the Punjab Province and the Bengal Presidency of British India. It was named after Cyril Radcliffe, who, as the joint chairman of the two boundary commissions for the two provinces, had the ultimate responsibility to divide 175,000 square miles (450,000 km²) of territory with 88 million people.

The sufferings and massive killings of civilians, destruction of infrastructure and properties, etc., have permanently influenced the political and economic paths Bangladesh has been following since. All these factors influenced the construction of a development narrative for the country.

1.3 Emergence of Bangladesh

Initially, people in both parts of Pakistan felt united by their religious identities as the bonding link for forming a single nation. However, the perceived bond of religion did not last among them for long, and the entire project proved to be an inept union as they were not only separated by 1600 kilometres of Indian territory but also by language, culture, and societal diversity. This was because of the West Pakistanis' blatant "show of supremacy". The first attack on the language came in 1948 when Urdu was declared Pakistan's state language. That was the beginning of a bitter struggle between the two parts of Pakistan that ran into economic, social, cultural, and strategic areas as time passed.

A few words need to be dedicated to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who led the freedom movement in Bangladesh from Pakistan. Indeed, he was in Kolkata during the partition of Bengal. After 1947, he relocated from Kolkata to Dhaka and focused on Bangladesh as his preferred nation. In June 1949, at a convention of the leaders and workers known to be a faction of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League headed by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim established a new party named East Pakistan Awami Muslim League. In the new party, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani became the President, Ataur Rahman Khan, Sakhawat Hossain, and Ali Ahmed Khan as vice presidents, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was elected as one of its general secretaries. The Awami League has been a secular and non-communal party since its inception. As a mark of its secular posture, the term "Muslim" was deleted from the party's name at its third council meeting held on 21–23 October 1955. The party believes in a welfare economy. It has front organizations among the students, labourers, peasants, youths, and women.

Under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Awami League proposed the six points to demand a greater autonomy for Pakistan's provinces to General Ayub Khan's military government. The people of East Pakistan widely supported the six points, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman emerged as the undisputed leader of the people of East Pakistan. However, the non-acceptance of the six-point demand and other differences led to civil unrest. The final nail in the coffin of an independent Pakistan was the denial of power to the Awami League following the 1970 elections, which the party won by a landslide. That proved fatal for a united nation, and they disintegrated in 1971, when a nine-month independence war gave birth to the new nation of Bangladesh, "the land of Bengalees". It should be mentioned that though the Independence War of Bangladesh in 1971 was led by military and most political leaders of Awami League on the battlefield and political front, in the true sense, it was people's war as most of the population participated in the war irrespective of their political affiliations, religious faiths, and regional connections.⁷

As a result of the war's devastation, Bangladesh's journey to independence became a herculean task fraught with difficulties. Ahsan (2018) summed up the post-liberation condition in the following way: "In the wake of widespread devastation after nine months of the war, odds were stacked against Bangladesh. The war had destroyed thousands of roads, bridges, and culverts, while Chittagong port—the lifeline to the world—lay blocked by mines and sunken ships. Ten million displaced individuals returned from India, often to destroyed homes". Bangladesh was a picture of desolate terrain, with burned-out schools, universities, and markets, no functioning transportation or distribution systems, and a destroyed economy. Rapid population expansion, widespread poverty, and hunger were among the formidable new challenges it soon confronted, and the resources at its disposal to deal with them were woefully inadequate. Nevertheless, Bangladesh made the most of its meagre resources to dispel the "bottomless basket" label and make striking socioeconomic progress.

⁷ It should be noted that some segments of the inhabitants of former East Pakistan formed Razakar, Al Badar, and Al Sams groups to assist the West Pakistani army in the war.

1.4 Construction of “Development Narratives” for Bangladesh and West Bengal

1.4.1 Bangladesh

Indeed, Bangladesh’s development strategy has evolved through time, just like the nation itself. It began embracing socialism from the outset of its independence by nationalizing industries, including manufacturing, finance, and public utilities. Then, in the 1980s and 1990s, it turned to the neo-classical counter-revolution model.⁸

While studying the economy of Bangladesh, we uncover the presence of the government, the commercial sector, non-profit organizations, and families with regular citizens as the four economic entities in the environment. Although international organizations, agencies, and governments may be involved in Bangladesh’s development process, we assume that one or more of the four entities we have already considered are acting by the intentions and views of one or more of these international bodies, agencies, or governments.

As a result, from the perspective of the theory of growth and coordination failure, Bangladesh appears to have evolved in the direction of a “Solidarity Development Model”, in which all entities are actively and passively pursuing their own personal and national development objectives. Notably, both supply- and demand-side actors were present at the same time.

Figure 1.2 depicts a network (the SEDM, or Solidarity Economic Development Model) connecting each agent to a significant development issue. We are working on compiling a list of the exact issues to which each agent is related. It must be emphasized that the relationships

⁸ The central claim is that failure to develop is primarily the result of too much government intervention and regulation of the economy. The neoclassical theory emphasizes the beneficial role of free markets, open economies, and the privatization of inefficient public enterprises. During the 1980s, many developed world governments adopted a free-market economics theory. This viewpoint has been referred to as the Neoclassical Counter-revolution. The theory supported freer markets, private ownership, statist planning, and government regulation of economic activities. See also Barai (2020).

between the entities and the main problems involve both demand and supply agents. Like the government, families and the general populace participate in the country's developmental operations as buyers or sellers. In addition, most of the general populace has taken part in the development initiatives that the government has launched, except for a few projects that have been met with opposition from the locals and some members of the intelligentsia and political parties.⁹

We may mention some of the topics where they play a significant role, such as poverty reduction, the development of soft infrastructure (education, health, and human capital), the advancement of agriculture, population management, and urbanization. They have participated in the development process through widespread consumption, the provision of endogenous factors, migration, and remittances.

Asadullah et al. (2014) empirically examined several potential variables, including trends in public spending for health and education; the development of physical infrastructures, such as roads, bridges, and culverts; foreign aid, economic growth, public infrastructure, and more, to identify Bangladesh's development pathways. In the 1980s, they saw public investment in soft and hard infrastructure receive comparatively little attention, but that changed in the 1990s.

Limited evidence was identified in their analysis to support income-mediated and/or public expenditure (such as foreign assistance and government spending)-led routes for social development in Bangladesh. However, their research emphasized how several events must coincide for a development to be unexpected. One of these is an inclusive development plan implemented in collaboration with different non-governmental parties, particularly non-government organizations (NGOs). They believed this was critical to Bangladesh's societal advancement. Some factors include reducing fertility and infant mortality, finding affordable solutions to various socioeconomic issues, fostering social awareness, coaction between various social indicators, promoting gender parity in education because of the introduction of demand-side incentive programmes, etc., playing a contributory role. Another group

⁹ For example, two projects, viz., the Rampal power station (a proposed 1320-megawatt [MW] coal-fired power station at Rampal in Khulna division), and the Phulbari Coal Project, an open-pit coal mine project, in Dinajpur district faced protests against their implementation.

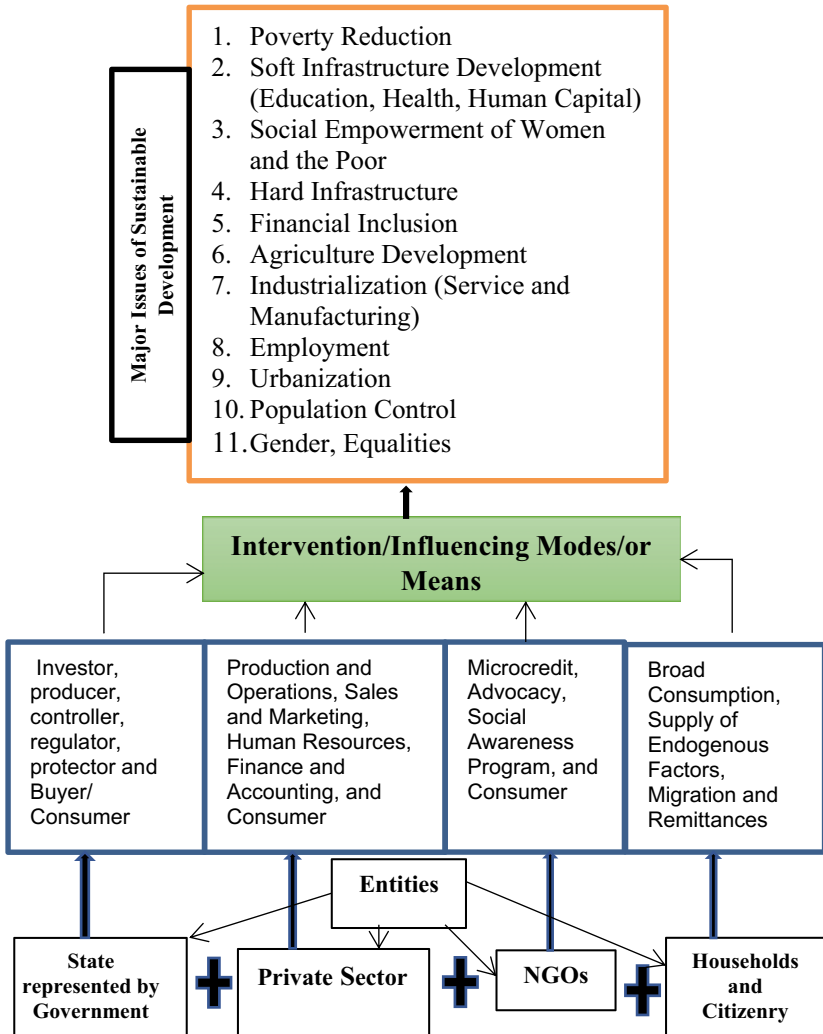


Fig. 1.2 Solidarity Economic Development Model (SEDM) (Source Author Barai [2020])

of “contextual elements” that are thought to have influenced Bangladesh’s development setting include history, demographics, cultural heritage, and geography. Putting women first, scaling up ideas, and preparedness for natural disasters were all critical (Asadullah *ibid.*, 2014).

Some authors¹⁰ approach development from a political-economic viewpoint. They argue that “the secret to Bangladesh’s development achievement rests in understanding why a strong political agreement arose to pursue such a pro-poor development strategy across governments and regimes”. According to them, the state plays a key role by pursuing a six-point plan: making sound macroeconomic policies, improving disaster management, smart investments in public health and education, working with NGOs, supporting family planning, and encouraging labour migration.

The process of identifying and outlining the routes for growth in Bangladesh appears to have taken place up to the 2000s. Since then, life expectancy has continued to rise, the literacy rate has improved, and the economy is almost at the 8% growth threshold. Therefore, by examining the prior growth trajectory and the recent uptick in economic and social indicators, one can get the impression that some other elements haven’t yet been looked at for their potential involvement in Bangladesh’s development debate. Their help could be a big part of speeding up and adding to social and economic progress.

We decided to address them in this part since it frequently happens that potential growth roles for some aspects are overlooked. Here, we are bringing out a few concerns researchers have overlooked. By adequately evaluating their contribution, it may be easier to untangle all the elements that contributed to Bangladesh’s progress in an unnoticed and undiscovered way. Barai (2020), in this context, discussed the importance of migrants returning home, having access to production and information technology, sharing information quickly and for little or no cost, the “Big Push” investment in megaprojects, and other factors for the construction of development for Bangladesh.

The “Big Push” Theory of Rosenstein-Rodan (1943) seems to be objectively relevant in light of the investment push in big projects

¹⁰ For example, Hossain (2017) and Tudor (2018).

in Bangladesh. The idea contends that, for economic development, a strong push may be used to overcome the early inertia of the stagnating economy rather than depending on the concept of economic gradualism. Building social overhead capital may be the method for such a push on the supply side. Social overhead capital includes all the fundamental sectors, including transportation, energy, communications, and other public utilities. According to the notion, their appearance will stimulate demand and economic growth. As explained by UNDP (2005), developing countries that want to break out of the cycle of poverty should use the “big push” method in public administration, human capital, and basic infrastructure.

To sum up, Bangladesh is going through a historical transition, and economic and social activities reflect developmental changes. We may compile a lengthy list of elements that may have aided its development. Some of these have been quite important in achieving this level of transformation. Others, in contrast, could have contributed achievements that, while modest individually, have continually multiplied across the country’s social and economic life. Bangladesh has benefited from the tremendous coaction of complementarities in terms of growth.

1.4.2 West Bengal

Since 1947, India has turned itself into one of the largest democracies in the world and has followed a sustainable parliamentary democracy. West Bengal, being a part of it, followed the system known as the federal system, while erstwhile East Pakistan was also a part of the Pakistani federal union. Interestingly, since Marxists’ and Leninists’ political and economic ideologies started influencing other parts of the world, Bengal became a hotbed of ideology even during the time of the British Raj. After the partition of Bengal, the ideology continued to be on a solid footing in West Bengal. The leftist parties eventually won a resounding election victory to take control of West Bengal in 1977. Before that, the Indian National Congress hold power in the state during periods 1947–1962 and 1972–1977. During Bidhan Chandra Roy’s Chief Ministership (1947–1962), a number of manufacturing industries were set up in the

state. He is often considered “The Maker of Modern West Bengal” due to his key role in founding several institutions and five eminent cities in the state: Durgapur, Kalyani, Bidhannagar, Ashokenagar, and Habra. Jyoti Basu, a leader whose ancestors were from Bangladesh, led the Left Front to victory in 1977. The left parties continued to rule West Bengal for the next 34 years, from 1977 until 2011, when the left alliance lost the elections to the Trinamul Congress led by Mamata Banerjee. She has remained in power since then.

But the economic and social development of West Bengal has been affected by a long list of political and socioeconomic factors. Since 1947, an issue that has influenced the development dynamics of West Bengal is the flow of migrants from East Bengal. Though other states of India, like Tripura and Assam, this is a compassionate issue and has invited debate and discussion as the flow has remained alive since then. When Bengal was partitioned, the first flow began in 1947, then in 1951 (as an aftermath of the Muladi Riot in the Barisal District of the then East Pakistan), in 1965 (because of the India–Pakistan War), and then in 1971 (due to the Independence War of Bangladesh). The time-to-time flare-ups with political and religious overtones in pre- and post-independence periods of Bangladesh have not helped stop the flow. Likewise, the economic fallout of the Enemy (Vested) Property Act has added a different magnitude to the problem.

Though the figures are sketchy, according to widely accepted estimates, three million East Bengalis immigrated to India shortly after partition in 1947, whereas 864,000 Indians immigrated to East Pakistan (Heitzman and Worden 1988). In an estimate by the Indian government, 2.6 million people migrate from East Bengal to India, and 0.7 million people migrate from India to East Pakistan (Elahi 2003). Again, one million more refugees were thought to have entered West Bengal in 1950, notably in the wake of the Noakhali and Barisal riots that year (Chakravarty, 2007). According to the 1951 Indian Census, 27% of Kolkata’s population were East Bengali exiles, primarily Hindu Bengalis, who helped the city’s economy expand in several ways. Up until Bangladesh’s freedom in 1971, there was still a steady flow of people to West Bengal from East Pakistan, with peaks during times of significant

communal riots like the East Pakistan riots in 1964 and the 1965 India-Pakistan War, when it is believed that 600,000 refugees fled to India (Chakravarty 2007). During the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, religious minorities became the main targets of the Pakistani military. They were subjected to systematic mass murders, rapes, looting, and burning. During the early months of the war, about 10 million East Bengalis, mostly Hindus, fled to India.

Interestingly, after Bangladesh gained independence, about 1.5 million may have stayed back.¹¹ There is no reliable figure on the flow of people from Bangladesh to West Bengal and India since 1971. But in a seminal work titled *Inquiry into Causes and Consequences of Deprivation of Hindu Minorities in Bangladesh through the Vested Property Act*, Abul Barkat (2000) estimated that 748,850 households were evicted from their agricultural land as a result of this. The victims were Hindus, and many silently migrated to West Bengal after losing their properties and livelihood. The book estimates that an average of 632 minority people was silently missing from Bangladesh daily due to the Vested Property Act (Barkat et al., *ibid.*). Though the Act has been repealed, it has permanently injured the religious demography of Bangladesh and created the flow of displaced population in India, mainly in West Bengal. The implications of this flow on the economic and social spheres of the state are visible.

West Bengal is one of the two states¹² of India that made serious efforts to implement land reform. Most of the activity is associated with a drive to register tenants and identify ceiling surplus land known as “*Operation Barga*” (Bandyopadhyay 1986; Lieten 1992), which was initiated shortly after the ascent to power of the Left Front in 1977. The first element of the reform was the vesting of any “above-ceiling” land (i.e., land owned more than the ceiling of 12.5 acres) with the government and its subsequent distribution to landless or small landowners, commonly referred to as *pattadars*. A second element was the rapid registration of sharecroppers, village by village, to prevent them from eviction and provide them with permanent and heritable tenancy rights. The amount

¹¹ www.hinduonnet.com.

¹² The other state is Kerala.

of (shared) rent to be paid to landlords was limited to 25% (50% if the landlord provides all non-labour inputs) and land leasing through mechanisms other than share tenancy.¹³ The law also prohibited the transfer of land received via land reform through sale, gift, exchange, or (sub) leases. To prevent elite capture, eligibility for reform benefits is tightly regulated.¹⁴ While there are significant gains, such as the choice of the right target group, namely, small-scale sharecropping tenants and landless agricultural labourers, quasi-property rights bestowed on the sharecroppers increase their incentives, the levels of beneficiary productivity and welfare remain far below average, something that could likely be avoided if land reform beneficiaries would receive full ownership right instead of being recognized as permanent share tenants and if restrictions on transferability of land were abandoned.¹⁵

In addition, West Bengal became a crucible for experimental adventurism in its development model and suffered at the hands of errant policymakers and myopic politicians.¹⁶ The mass level participation of people in the Naxal Bari movement, the extensive use of Bandh as a part of political tool and culture, and the forced relocation of Tata Nano motor plant from Singur in the Hoogly District of West Bengal¹⁷ are some of the examples of anti-development used by various political parties for a long time seemed to have clouded the industrial working environment and development notion of West Bengal as a political and geographic entity.

¹³ Fixed rent, was prohibited by law.

¹⁴ See Klaus et al. (1982).

¹⁵ See Klaus et al. *ibid*.

¹⁶ See Banik and Bhandari (2020).

¹⁷ Land acquisition for a proposed Tata Motors automotive facility at Singur in Hooghly district, West Bengal, India, sparked the Tata Nano Singur dispute. The plant would have produced the Tata Nano tiny automobile. The idea was met with significant criticism from displaced farmers. West Bengal's opposition leader at the time, Mamata Banerjee, provided the farmers with political backing. Environmentalists, leftist activists, and intellectuals backed Banerjee's struggle against the eviction of farmers. The Tatas ultimately opted to leave Singur on October 3, 2008. Ratan Tata criticized Banerjee and her followers for the decision to withdraw. In October 2008, Tata Motors announced it flee the state to establish the Tata Nano facility in Sanand, Gujarat. This dealt with the biggest blow to the entire Tata Nano project of its commercial viability.

In addition, some experts argue that factors such as the uncondusive centre–state relationship may be considered a powerful factor that has remained an important element in shaping the development narrative and path of West Bengal after 1962. This is because of the persistent differences between the centre and the state governments, mainly due to their different political identities. Economic and social policies that are oriented and executed to vote bank politics may lack future development vision and the development narrative that is built up to support policies becomes untenable.

1.5 Summary of the Chapters

On the background effort to construct a development for Bangladesh and West Bengal, the book has included 11 more chapters to find out more discussions on how they have been translated into the development of various economic, social, and cultural sectors. In the following spaces, a brief summary of each chapter has been given so that the readers can get a glimpse of them.

Chapter 2 of the book discusses the “Macroeconomic Development of Bangladesh and West Bengal”. The chapter argues that in 1947, West Bengal was the more opulent Bengal. After then, West Bengal experienced several issues that slowed its economic and social progress. They include the large migration from East Pakistan, which stretched the state’s resources. Subaltern migration hasn’t stopped since. Also, it has a long history of tense and hostile ties with the Indian Federal Government. While not in the federal government, leftists dominated the state for 34 years. It may not be an overstatement to say that West Bengal has been a laboratory for experimental adventurism in its development model and has suffered from misguided policymakers and shortsighted politicians for a long time. The state has experienced several natural disasters. Therefore, Bengalis in West Bengal are still searching for a better life. Ignoring the limits, it encountered, its intended growth route led to its slip from an affluent state to a lesser rank among Indian states. This is obvious when comparing the economic and social data of West Bengal and other Indian states. On the other hand, some critics

were unsure about Bangladesh's sustainability as an independent nation. After its liberation in 1971, the country faced severe disruptions such as famine, natural calamities, military coups, and fanaticism. Despite hurdles, Bangladesh has made tremendous economic and social growth in its 50 years of independence and is now called a "Development Surprise" or even a "Miracle". Bangladesh became a developing nation in February 2021, according to the UNDP. Several economic and social indicators, like GDP growth, per capita GDP, growth of the external sector, increase in life expectancy, literacy rate, decrease in the national poverty rate, etc., have shown real progress. There was a time when policymakers argued against the viability of technology adoption and small farms in developing economies because it may compound the misery of the poor. This is not the case for the two Bengals. Adopting new technology in Bangladesh averted widespread starvation and helped millions of people escape hunger once and for all.

Chapter 3 by Arindam Banik takes up the issue of agricultural sector of two Bengals. The chapter elucidates some of the interesting insights into two Bengals' agriculture and their achievements.

Chapter 4 documents the status of manufacturing sector in the two Bengals. It shows that there has been a general deceleration of manufacturing performance in West Bengal. In contrast, Bangladesh portrays a successful case both in creating employment and foreign exchange earnings. To substantiate, the manufacturing industry, especially readymade garments, now contributes more than four-fifths of Bangladesh's total exports, employs more than four million people, and adds more than one-tenth to the total GDP. Bangladesh's garments sector has also benefited from countries like China because many sunset firms have moved there due to increasing labour costs. West Bengal could have become a strong garment hub in India if only successive state governments and policymakers had the vision and strategies in place to recognize the state's potential. Currently, the textile and apparel sector in West Bengal accounts for about 9% of the state's domestic product and employs around two million people.

Chapter 5 of the book includes *Financial Sectors in Bengals: Towards Development and Inclusion*. The chapter discusses trade liberalization, and financial liberalization measures undertaken in the 1990s in Bangladesh.

West Bengal, on the other hand has also undergone reforms undertaken for the financial sector that were initiated with the new economic policy in 1991. With the deregulation of interest rates, the introduction of prudential norms for banks, and several measures for the development of capital markets, a significant transformation took place in the context of financial markets and institutions in West Bengal as well. The discussion has been extended to include both formal and informal sectors of both entities. This chapter collates some observations about the process of financial liberalization and development in West Bengal and Bangladesh, the role of certain financial institutions, and discusses some key achievements towards financial inclusion in both the Bengals in the recent past.

Chapter 6, with the title “Education in Two Bengals: A Comparative Development Narrative of Bangladesh and West Bengal of India” deals with the education sectors of both Bengal’s, taking a long-term view as it investigates the evolution of education through civilization. The chapter gives the perspective on various forms of education that are in place in Bangladesh. A clear picture of the Madrasa and Sanskrit education in both parts has also been given. The gender-wise breakup education picture is also presented in this chapter. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the amount of interest in obtaining a higher education; as a direct response to this demand, there has been a corresponding growth in the number of educational institutions that provide such a degree throughout the two Bengals. In the most recent few years, Bangladesh and West Bengal have both seen the development of new colleges and universities in their respective regions. Bangladesh and West Bengal governments have enacted a policy allowing private universities to be established in their respective countries.

Chapter 7 compares the two areas’ health sectors and social development indicators to figure out how well they did as they grew. This chapter notes that there were historic divergences in several vital statistics measures and their explanations. Not only have illness shocks, such as the 1918–1919 influenza pandemic, but also food crises, famine, and economic causes played significant roles in determining crude mortality and birth rates, with long-term implications for both areas’ demographic profiles. Nevertheless, West Bengal (WB) had a higher crude death rate

than East Bengal in the early 1900s. Unhealthiness is still a major factor. The Bengals' mortality rate eventually decreased but never returned to pre-crisis levels. Smallpox, malaria, cholera, etc., were significant disease killers. Malaria, Smallpox, and cholera stopped being the leading causes of death in Bengal at the end of the nineteenth century. Bengal Calcutta and West Bengal became breeding grounds for respiratory illnesses. Air pollution and smoking are to blame. As a result, the evolution of illness loads in both Bengals remains an important statistical topic. East Bengal had a higher death rate per thousand from influenza, but the 1943–1944 famine was the second-biggest cause. But the position has vastly improved, particularly in WB, because of the medical field's advancement and the people's economic well-being. This has happened due to programmes like Universal Health Coverage, increasing health expenditure and health insurance coverage, health infrastructure, etc., in both Bangladesh and West Bengal.

Chapter 8 describes that in the undivided Bengal, there were four different groups of business stakeholders that each stimulated entrepreneurship in their own distinct ways. The colonial rulers found Bengal to be a desirable site due to its thriving economy and abundant natural resources. The EIC's interests in the region primarily focused on exploiting its resources. After the demise of EIC in the early nineteenth century, agency firms began to make inroads in Bengal, establishing the framework for commercial transactions and a corporate mindset. Almost immediately, European mercantile firms (as well as international businesses) began engaging in commercial activity. Manufacturing had begun at the turn of the century at Swadeshi firms, which Bengalis controlled. The Swadeshi companies are the first known examples of native American or indigenous entrepreneurship. After both countries gained their independence, India and Bangladesh both saw a surge in the number of businesses led by micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSME). With these two regions, businesses dealing in textiles, leather, handicrafts, handlooms, and processed foods are excelling at the entrepreneurial level. As a result of political unrest and stringent trade union pirouettes, large firms and corporations in West Bengal have remained a phantom, although smaller and micro businesses continue to thrive in the region. The nation of Bangladesh, which has a history

of fifty years, has maintained its eagerness and activity (through MSME initiatives) in pushing the expansion of the entrepreneurial sector.

Chapter 9 on “Bangladesh and West Bengal: Changing Economic and Social Issues through Literary Perspectives” argues that since 1947, East Pakistan and (later Bangladesh) and the Indian state of West Bengal have both witnessed the birth of literary tendencies that are both similar to one another and distinct from one another, despite the fact that the two countries’ languages are not distinguishable from one another. This chapter looks at the economic, social, and political trends that have inspired the creation of abundant literature in the shape of novels, short tales, poetry, essays, and many other types of writing. The primary focus of this article is on the life stories of two Bengalis before and after 1947, with a primary emphasis on events that took place after 1971. Emphasis has been placed on the part that the middle class and the ethos it represents in both Bengals have played in the world of literature. Additionally, an emphasis has been placed on bringing to light the position of those on the periphery of society within the literary canons of both India and Bangladesh (read West Bengal). This chapter also discusses the formation of a new literary genre known as “Border Literature” in both nations, which is one of the topics covered in this chapter. This again puts the spotlight on a sizable population torn apart by the boundary, crimes, grief, and animosity that have developed along the border since 1947.

Chapter 10 points out that the Bengali language is elevated to the level of only a few other major global languages, including English, Chinese, French, and Spanish, thanks to the two main Bengali cinema industries that are in Kolkata and Dhaka. This chapter examines the inner workings of two film industries that are very similar to one another but are not quite identical. These two film industries were responsible for developing a “national” cinema for independent Bangladesh and a “regional” film culture in the state of West Bengal, which is a part of India. Along the way, we note and analyse significant films, events, entities, characters, and trends that have occurred in the two Bengali film industries over the past 125 years. During our extensive exploration of the developments in the film industries of West Bengal and Bangladesh, we uncovered three unique periods of cinema culture in the two Bengals. When synchronized sound was first used in Bengali films in 1931, this period of silent

film in Bengali cinema was officially ended. We view this time as the beginning of the second phase, which may also be referred to as both businesses' founding and development periods. The 1970s marked the beginning of the third phase, which lasted until the 2000s and was characterized by the consolidation of both Bengali cinemas via the processes of transformation and commercialization.

Chapter 11 is an interesting edition that talks about Bengali cuisine beginning from the agriculture advanced throughout the Vedic period, which began approximately 1600 BCE and persisted for an extended length of time, leading to the discovery of new kinds of food. Buddhism and Jainism, two religions that originated during this time, enacted rules and regulations concerning food and the ways in which it might be used. The preferences of kings, queens, and other members of the aristocracy shifted throughout time as agriculture advanced and society became more stratified, which was reflected in the cuisine of the time. It's possible that the Mughals and the Sultanate brought about considerable changes in the way food was prepared, particularly regarding the kinds of materials that were used, as well as the culinary skills and cooking methods that were employed. Today's cuisines of Bangladesh and West Bengal employ a variety of different methods to prepare food. The primary constituents, as well as the seasonings, are always the same. The demographically diverse populations of West Bengal and Bangladesh contribute to an increase in the breadth of available alternatives and the types of foods available to choose from.

Chapter 12 concludes the book. It also makes some observations and policy recommendations.

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