

An Uncertain Glory of Bangladesh: Development as Freedom and
Bangladesh under the Awami Regime (2009-2020)

by

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Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
List of Abbreviations Used.....	v
Acknowledgments.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Purpose of the Study.....	4
1.2 Scope of the Study.....	6
1.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis.....	8
1.4 The Dilemmas of Evaluating Development.....	12
Chapter 2: Development as Freedom.....	28
2.1 Development as Freedom.....	28
2.2 The Case for Development as Freedom.....	34
2.3 An Uncertain Glory.....	57
Chapter 3: Economic Facilities under the Awami Regime (2009-2020).....	60
3.1 Indices, and Numerical Representations.....	60
3.2 Public Action.....	68
3.3 Economic Growth without Business Freedom.....	75
Chapter 4: Social Opportunities and Protective Security under the Awami Regime (2009-2020).....	77
4.1 Indices, and Numerical Representations.....	77
4.2 Public Action.....	88
4.3 Social Protection without Environmentalism.....	101
Chapter 5: Political Freedoms and Transparency Guarantees under the Awami Regime (2009-2020).....	114
5.1 Indices, and Numerical Representations.....	104
5.2 Public Action.....	108
5.3 Participation in Policymaking?.....	122
Chapter 6: Conclusion: An Uncertain Glory of Bangladesh.....	125
References.....	129

List of Tables

Table 1.1: Growth Rates of Bangladesh's GDP at Constant Prices (% Per Year).....	62
Table 1.2: Bangladesh in Some Economic Indicators.....	63
Table 1.3: Poverty Headcount Ratio in Bangladesh	64
Table 1.4: Income Inequality in Bangladesh	64
Table 1.5: Bangladesh in the Index of Economic Freedom.....	67
Table 1.6: Professions of Parliament Members in the Bangladesh National Parliament (%).....	68
Table 2.1: Bangladesh in Some Social Indicators.....	80
Table 2.2: Unemployment Rate of Bangladesh.....	84
Table 2.3: Bangladesh in the Social Indices.....	85
Table 2.4: Government Expenditures on Different Sectors of Bangladesh (% of GDP).	85
Table 2.5: Food Security and Bangladesh.....	88
Table 3.1: Bangladesh in the Political Indices.....	105
Table 3.2: Bangladesh in the Freedom in the World Report.....	105

Abstract

This study explores whether Bangladesh has been able to translate its achievements in the economic and social aspects of development to the political aspects of development under the Awami League (2009-2020). Contemporary evaluation methods of development often consider only the two aspects of development – economic and social. The other one – political aspect of development is often left outside the evaluation methods. Through the lens of Development as Freedom, this study explores that most achievements of Bangladesh in the social and economic aspects are indeed valid, but these achievements have not been translated to the political aspects. It concludes that these achievements have created “an uncertain glory” for Bangladesh by using Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen’s evaluation of India through their concept Development as Freedom. While Indian achievements were flawed by inequalities and the slow social advancement, the achievements of Bangladesh are mainly flawed by the deficits in political freedoms.

List of Abbreviations Used

ACC – Anti-Corruption Commission

AL – Awami League

BBS – Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics

BCL – Bangladesh Chhatra League

BJI – Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami

BNP – Bangladesh National Party

BTRC – Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission

CBN – Cost of Basic Needs

CDP – Capacity Development and Professionalization

CEGIS – Center for Environmental and Geographic Information Services

CFPR-TUP – Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction – Targeting the Ultra Poor

CNG – Compressed Natural Gas

CSO – Civil Society Organization

CSO – Civil Society Organization

DIFE – Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishment

DIMAPPP – Digitizing Implementation Monitoring and Public Procurement Project

DPT – Diphtheria Pertussis Tetanus

DSA – Digital Security Act

EGPP – Employment Guarantee Program for the Poorest

EIA – Environmental Impact Assessment

EII – Employment Injury Insurance

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization

FM – Frequency Modulation

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GFSI – Global Food Security Index

GII – Gender Inequality Index

GNI – Gross National Income

GOB – Government of Bangladesh
HDI – Human Development Index
HEQEP – Higher Education Quality Enhancement Program
HIES – Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HSC – Higher Secondary School Certificate
ICT – International Crimes Tribunal
IDI – Inclusive Development Index
IHDI – Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index
ILO – International Labor Organization
INGO – International Non-Governmental Organization
JSC – Junior School Certificate
KII – Key Informant Interview
KII – Key Informant Interview
LFS – Labor Force Surveys
LNG – Liquefied Natural Gas
MDGs – Millennium Development Goals
MFS – Mobile Financial Services
MIC – Middle-Income Country
MPI – Multidimensional Poverty Index
N/A – Not Available
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
NREGA – National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NTPA – National Tripartite Plan of Action
NTPA – National Tripartite Plan of Action
NTPC – National Thermal Power Corporation
OPHI – Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
PCJSS – Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti
PDS – Public Distribution System

PEC – Primary Education Completion

PFI – Press Freedom Index

PISA – Program for International Student Assessment

PPP – Purchasing Power Parity

QRPP – Quick Rental Power Plant

RCC – Remediation Coordination Cell

RMG – Ready-Made Garments

RSF – Reporters sans Frontières (Reporters without Borders)

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

SESDP – Secondary Education Sector Development Project

SSC – Secondary School Certificate

SSN – Social Safety Net

UN – United Nations

UNCTAD – United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHDR – United Nations Human Development Report

UPG – Ultra-Poor Graduation

VAT – Value Added Tax

VGD – Vulnerable Group Development

VGf – Vulnerable Group Feeding

WB – World Bank

WB – World Bank

WEF – World Economic Forum

WNISR – World Nuclear Industry Status Report

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Similar to most other countries of the world, Bangladesh has aimed to achieve high economic growth and reduce poverty since its start as an independent state (Khatun, 2016, p. 131). Its primary goal of achieving economic growth has been outstanding after the 2000s (UNCTAD, 2014). At the same time, it has developed remarkably throughout the years in terms of social aspects such as – child mortality, education, and life expectancy (Khatun, 2016, p. 131). But as always, political uncertainties have remained a big challenge for the country (Khatun, 2016, p. 131).

Despite being marred by the experience of several dictatorships, democracy was established in Bangladesh in 1991 through a fair election (Riaz, 2013). The current ruling party Awami League (AL) has been in power for almost thirteen years since 2008 (Riaz, 2015). As a matter of fact, this is the first time Bangladesh is experiencing a democratically elected party in power for more than five years.

Development has often been defined in economic terms, particularly focusing on economic growth and poverty reduction, which is evident in Bangladesh's formulation of development goal immediately after independence. Such interpretation is still prevalent in the speeches of ruling party ministers, leaders, and policies. For example, construction of the Dhaka metro-rail project (Kamruzzaman, 2019), the Rampal power plant (Joshi, 2016), the Rooppur nuclear power plant (WNISR, 2017) and the Padma Bridge (Al-Mahmood, 2012) – all center on narratives of economic growth and infrastructural development. The country is also on the way to become a higher middle-income country, a narrative which has prevailed in recent narratives by ministers and ruling party leaders (Dhaka Tribune, 2019b).

Social indicators have also become important in recent times for the purpose of evaluating a state's development in general. Inspired by the Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Human Development Report (UNHDR), life expectancy, gender empowerment, healthcare, and education services are now incorporated into the definition of development (Elliott, 2014).

Surprisingly, political aspects have been ignored in the definition and the evaluation of development throughout the years. Many development scholars have argued for political freedoms and democracy to be a part of the definition of development. But in terms of praxis and analysis, this has been followed infrequently. For instance, transparency and accountability is considered in the Human Development Index (HDI), but there is no consideration of political freedoms in the analysis. Singapore and Sri Lanka offer us two great examples of this problem. Singapore recorded 0.938 out of 1.000 in the 2020 HDI – the latest edition of the Human Development Report (UNDP, 2020). The Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) for Singapore was 0.813. Although it earned the 11th spot in the ranking of HDI, the Freedom in the World report by the Freedom House recorded a score of 50 out of 100 for Singapore and termed it as a 'partly free' country for the same year (Freedom House, 2020). Similarly, Sri Lanka has been widely lauded for its high achievements in education and health services (Ramakrishnan, 2016). It is often identified as an exceptional South Asian country since its comparisons in the HDI is far better than its South Asian neighbors like India or Bangladesh. Sri Lanka recorded an HDI score of 0.754 in the HDI which considered the records from 2009 (UNDP, 2010). Interestingly, this is the year when the Sri Lankan government launched an aggressive military assault against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) without any

consideration of mass civilian casualties (Human Rights Watch, 2009). The different weights of each element in the index is a flaw in the measurement of development since it establishes a superiority and inferiority among those elements. Additionally, no consideration of political freedoms and human rights is another serious flaw in terms of the definition, the interpretation, and the evaluation of a state's development. Saudi Arabia (0.854), Bahrain (0.852), Qatar (0.848), Brunei (0.838), Kazakhstan (0.825), Russia (0.824), Belarus (0.823) and Oman (0.813) are some countries who have recorded a score higher than 0.8 in the 2019 Human Development Index (UNDP, 2020), but all of them have a score lower than 30 out of 100 in the 2020 Freedom in the World report (Freedom House, 2020). It is tempting to argue that all these countries are well-developed based on their economic and social achievements. But overlooking political freedoms marks a serious flaw in evaluating a state's development.

As pointed above, Bangladesh has received some popular acclaim for its economic and social advancements in the recent years. The Awami regime of Bangladesh has claimed the majority credit for these advancements. For instance, "Only Awami League thinks about the country and its development. The nation can see development when the Awami League is in power," were the sentences uttered by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina when she unveiled the election manifesto of the Awami League for the 2018 general elections (Raju, 2018). There is no doubt that the government should claim the credit for these advancements if it has brought about such advancements through its policymaking. But it is necessary to scrutinize if there indeed has been significant advancements, and if the government has really been responsible for the advancements through its policymaking.

It is the thirteenth year of the Awami regime in Bangladesh after starting its journey in 2009. Twelve years is a long time to reflect on successes, failures, limitations, and shortcomings. Therefore, it seems necessary to analyze the trajectory of Bangladesh's development under the Awami regime. I have attempted to evaluate the state's development from a macro perspective in this study. I have also aimed to evaluate the state's development in the last twelve years under the auspices of the Awami regime measuring the economic, the social, and the political aspects of development in this study. In doing so, I have used Amartya Sen's analytical framework of 'Development as Freedom' in my evaluation which is a variant of the Capability theories of development. I elaborate this in the second chapter of the study.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

It is a serious mistake to consider only the social and the economic aspects while evaluating a state's progress of development. As Sen (2000) has explored in his study, all three aspects of development (social, economic, and political) are interrelated in and they facilitate each other. For instance, the fruits of economic growth can be utilized to invest more resources to improve health facilities and education services (Sen, 2000, p. 11). On the other hand, more highly educated individuals are can more easily contribute to an increasingly specialized economy. Similarly, political freedoms help individuals address the issues of economic inequality and any restraints to participate in economic activities whereas the removal of economic inequality eventually decreases the inequality in power-share. More educated individuals can also more easily contribute to political participation by utilizing their knowledge of how democracy can be strengthened. Simultaneously, political

freedoms allow individuals to address the need of education. Therefore, the progress of development has to be evaluated considering all three aspects of development.

I have based the premise of this research on the political claims that Bangladesh has achieved high economic and social advancements under the Awami regime from 2009 to 2020. Although the Awami League became victorious in the 2008 general election, it technically started its rule from 2009. Thus, I have covered records from 2009 to 2020 for the purpose of analysis.

I have attempted to answer the following central research question in this study – “Has Bangladesh been able to translate its achievements in the economic and the social aspects to the political aspects of development under the auspices of the Awami regime?”. I have also tried to answer a supplementary question – “Have the citizens of Bangladesh had the opportunity to participate in dictating the pathways of development under the Awami regime?”.

The primary objective of this study is to explore whether the Awami regime has been able to translate its achievements in the economic and the social aspects of development to the political aspects of development. This will enable us to explore the following secondary objectives –

- a) Whether the citizens of Bangladesh have had the opportunity to participate in the development policymaking of Bangladesh, and if they have had the opportunity to dictate the pathways of development.
- b) The areas of development where the Awami regime has put greater emphasis and the majority of projects or policies have been introduced.

- c) The aspects of development that require attention from the government in the future for further development.
- d) The validity of claims of economic and social advancement under the Awami regime.
- e) The successes, the failures, the lacking, and the shortcomings of the Awami regime's development policymaking

1.2 Scope of the Study

Development is defined for this study considering the three aspects of development – economic, social, and political. Gender, indigenous, and environmental issues are integrated under the umbrella of social aspects of development and following the framework of Development as Freedom by Amartya Sen, they are incorporated in my analysis.

The focus of evaluation is the state, which makes it a study approached from a macro perspective. For the purpose of evaluation, I consider only the contribution of the state or the government in terms of development policymaking and projects. For instance, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Microcredit institutions have contributed significantly to the social and economic advancement of the rural areas of Bangladesh (Drèze & Sen, 2013, pp. 59-64). But it will be a mistake to credit the government for a work done by the NGOs. The government can claim its credit for allowing NGO and microcredit activities, and for not hindering their initiatives. As Drèze & Sen (2013, p. 59) have argued, the actors and the factors behind these significant social advancements require serious scrutiny. Therefore, I will evaluate only the projects, the initiatives, and the policies that the government has pursued on a macro level in order to capture the contribution of

the government. I will also consider joint initiatives by the government, but initiatives that have been pursued solely by an NGO or a private actor will be discarded.

Evaluation of development in this study will not include individual voices and perspectives since it would require examining all three aspects with deeper understanding of each element residing within these aspects. The same applies for economic and social aspects i.e.- wealth inequality, economic freedom, bribe, and health services. It is, therefore, not under the scope of this study to capture individual voices and delve deeper into each element of the three aspects. In simple words, I will only the cases and the elements that represent the overall conditions of the state in this study. I will not consider geographically particular cases in the evaluation.

Some might criticize the macro scope of this study as not being completely reflective because it is unable to delve deeper into the elements of the three aspects. However, deriving from the Critical Realist paradigm (Benton & Craib, 2011), I argue that the macro perspective of this study is supposed to deliver the first layer of reality. The overall scenario of economic or political aspects would help further studies to focus on issues or elements that require more attention. For example, the advancements and limitations of public health services in Bangladesh should be separately studied to explore the successes, inequalities, and injustices lying beneath the macro picture. But this does not mean that an overall measurement of the public health services of Bangladesh is useless.

As mentioned above, it is the first time Bangladesh is experiencing a democratically elected party in power for a consecutive thirteen years. All earlier democratically elected regimes of the country had been able to stay in power for five years only (Riaz, 2016). The Ershad regime from 1981 to 1990 was the longest-serving regime of the state (Riaz, 2016) before

the Awami regime surpassed it in 2019. Politicians of the ruling party have often emphasized the economic growth that has been achieved under the regime. Considering this regime has remained longer in power than any other democratic regimes of the past, it is now necessary to evaluate the state's development progress under this regime. Previous regimes have only lasted for only five years, and compared to this regime, they had much less opportunities to contribute to the development of the state.

Besides, taking a different stance than the mainstream evaluation of development, this study intends to evaluate development incorporating political aspects. The overall evaluation of the state from a macro perspective can also help us to have a guideline for future research by specifying issues where a state is lacking and where more attention is required. The incorporation of political aspects enables us to explore whether the citizens have been able to participate in dictating development policies in Bangladesh. If we can know the condition of political freedoms in Bangladesh, the question of whether the citizens are educated enough to utilize the existing political freedoms and reason to dictate policies can be explored. Moreover, reflection on the development policies and projects pursued by the Awami regime enables us to see if the regime has prioritized any one or two of the aspects. This is particularly helpful in exploring any bias in the policymaking.

1.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

I have used both primary and secondary sources for data collection. In between January 2020 to April 2020, I conducted six Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with six different researchers employed in different research organizations of Bangladesh. The researchers were employed in different research organizations that specifically focus on Bangladesh's development. These KIIs have been crucial in shaping the focus of the study. All six

participants of the interview were employed in specifically research-related roles such as Research Associate, Research Director, and Research Officer.

Questions of the interviews were focused on exploring how the participants interpret development, the priority areas of development policymaking under the Awami regime, their perspective on the country's progress, and the potential future challenges of development for the country under the regime. I had originally intended to interview around twenty participants. However, the restraints in place because of Covid-19 and my central focus on political freedoms have resulted in the low number of participants. As such, I have had to be satisfied with only six KIIs.

I have relied on mostly secondary sources for data collection. The KII participants have suggested me some indices and projects that should be used in the evaluation, but in order to have a better idea about them, I have had to resort to secondary sources. Books written on both the overall and the specific aspects of development in Bangladesh have been significantly helpful for my data collection. Newspaper articles of Bangladeshi and Bengali newspapers have been the most important source for data collection. Articles of globally renowned newspapers or news agencies such as the Guardian or Al Jazeera and journal articles have also been useful. Different independent global research organizations such as the Freedom House or the Reporters sans Frontières (RSF), and international organizations such as the UN and the World Bank (WB) have also been important sources for collection of numerical data. In fact, each index is generally prepared by one or two organizations in single or joint efforts. For consulting indices, I have used websites and other resources of those organizations. For instance, the World Press Freedom Index (PFI) is prepared by the RSF (Reporters without Borders) and I have consulted the website of RSF to collect the

data of Bangladesh in the PFI. Besides, the WB has been a great source of numerical measures. I have also consulted websites and reports of local NGOs and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Reports and websites of different ministries and organs of Government of Bangladesh (GOB) have also been good resources for data collection.

I have focused on the time between 2008 and 2020 for data collection. In order to explore the record of Bangladesh in a certain element before the ascension of the Awami regime to power, I have used the data available from either 2008 or 2009. As the Covid-19 has shattered health services and economies of countries worldwide, I have not considered numerical measurements produced after Covid-19 had hit Bangladesh in March 2020. However, I have included public action irrelevant to Covid-19 after it hit Bangladesh last year in this analysis.

I have conducted data analysis for evaluating the overall condition of Bangladesh in the three different aspects of development by following Sen's framework of Development as Freedom (Sen, 2000). Along with Sen (2000), Drèze & Sen (2013) have been the guidelines for this study in the question of what elements have to be covered in the evaluation. I have used deductive coding (Bernard, 2006, p. 493) to align the collected data according to the five categories of freedoms identified by the analytical framework of Development as Freedom. The chapters in this study are thus organized based on the three different aspects of development. Chapter 3, 4, and 5 therefore respectively contain the evaluation of the economic, the social, and the political aspects. Constructing or identifying emerging categories for organizing data and coding has not been required here as the categories have already been identified by Sen (2000). Collected data from both secondary and primary sources have been coded according to these categories of freedoms.

I have used both qualitative/verbal and quantitative/numerical data in this study following Sen (2000), Deneulin (2006, pp. 120-170) and Drèze & Sen (2013). I have divided the data analysis of this study in two sections. First, I have examined indices and numerical or numerical representations relevant to each of type of freedoms such as GDP, HDI, PFI, life expectancy, Gini index, mortality rate, literacy rate. I have followed simple qualitative analysis in interpreting these empirical material or numerical representations. Even the minimal change in the numbers have been interpreted as a change. I have based the interpretation of positive and negative changes on the general interpretation of respective indices. The indices and numerical representations offer us a good picture of the overall condition. Thus, I have integrated them first into the analysis. I have seen the Awami regime as a competitor to its own self by comparing the present and its start as a regime by including data from 2009 to 2021.

Second, I have examined public action pursued by the Awami regime from 2009 to 2020. Although public action has been interpreted in a different meaning by Sen (2000), Deneulin (2006), and Drèze & Sen (2013), I have used it here as the government actions, policies, initiatives, and projects as a positive public action here. Public action such as public protests have been included in the analysis of political freedoms with the term of citizen action or politics. If the demands have been acceded or addressed by the government, I have interpreted it as a positive outcome. If the government has acted in opposition to the citizen action, I have interpreted it as a negative outcome in the evaluation. I have focused on only the intended consequences in terms of evaluating public action. Sen (2000, p. 255) has dedicated a significant amount of space to assert the necessity of examining intended and unintended consequences of a public action. Unintended consequences require a

deeper analysis of the merits of each public action, and I agree with Sen (2000, p. 257) that unintended consequences do not mean unpredictable consequences. I have only considered the intended consequences of a public action in this study. Intended consequences also involve an evaluation of merits, although comparatively brief. Following the evaluation, I have compared the summary of findings to the central arguments by Drèze & Sen (2013).

There is a considerable controversy regarding the inclusion of quantitative data in qualitative analysis and mixed-methods research (Maxwell, 2010, p. 475), however, not all agree on this as a controversy (Bernard 2018) and instead advocate for the approach since it leads to higher validity and reliability. My study is primarily qualitative, as my sample for original data collection is below 50, which is normal for qualitative studies (Bernard, 2018). I would like to argue that I have, therefore, followed a mixed-methods approach in this study since I have incorporated some statistical data but analyzed it qualitatively and against my qualitative sample materials (See Bernard, 2018).

I have also coded data to each type of freedom according to my preference as neither Sen (2000) nor Drèze & Sen (2013) have conducted their analysis by specifically considering each of the freedoms. The elements included under each freedom is thus based on my personal perspective. There are definitely some overlapping elements. Including them under any of the freedoms should not create any serious complication in analysis and evaluation.

1.4 The Dilemmas of Evaluating Development

Development has often been evaluated in terms of economic growth, which is evident in the discourse of Modernization and Dependency theorists (Peet & Hartwick, 2009;

Thirlwall, 2014). Hence, measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Income Inequality Gini Coefficient, Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) have been used in many studies to evaluate a state's development from a macro perspective or aggregate level. Although the practice has become less common in the last thirty years, Sen (2008, p. 100) has argued that it is a problem of most countries or the governments that higher GDP is considered as “the only worthwhile achievement one should go after”.

Through initiatives by the UN in the 1990s, social indicators such as life expectancy, health services, social protection, education became incorporated into development (Elliott, 2014). Particularly the HDI popularized social aspects of development and broadened the definition of development (Elliott, 2014). Thus, development has eventually come to constitute two aspects afterwards – the economic and the social. In 2010, the UN introduced the IHDI based on the premises of the HDI (Elliott, 2014, p. 31). Attempts to conceptualize development was not limited within these efforts only. The UN initiated its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) prospects to ascertain universal aspects of development. Interestingly, political liberties made a brief and controversial debut between the 1991 and 1993 UNHDR (Àlvarez, 2020). However, political liberties were removed from the agenda after the controversy and debate arose regarding the “technical difficulties in measurements” of political liberties.

Development has often been connected to governance (the term used for denoting political aspect of a state), as evident in the edited book by Alauddin & Hasan (1999) in their treatment of development-governance-environment nexus in Bangladesh. More interestingly, the political aspects of development are often interpreted as a completely different concept with the initiation of a debate on the relationship between development

and democracy. Development in this case is unchallengedly interpreted as economic growth, and liberal democracy is interpreted as the aspired political system. Numerous literatures have analyzed whether there is a correlation between these two concepts. The Lee thesis, known after the name of Singapore's strongman Lee Kuan Yew, has asserted that political freedoms or democracy hampers economic growth (Sen, 2000, p. 148). Based on the concept of 'Asian values', the Lee thesis has argued for authoritarianism or strong government as a conducive mean towards the economic advancement of a state. According to the notion of the Lee thesis, governance and politics is the method of pursuing development projects. But the political aspects of development are not included in the definition of development here.

Leftwich (1993, p. 620) has argued that a developmental state is required rather than a democratic state where the state will have strong "political and bureaucratic elite" with "the genuine developmental determination and autonomous capacity to define, pursue and implement developmental goals". For him, if a democratic state is not stable or strong enough to implement its developmental goals, economic growth will not come. This claim by Leftwich (1993) asserts the importance of political stability and the necessary existence of an elite with genuinely ethical concerns regarding advancement. Bardhan (1999) has asserted that the opportunity for political mobilization of different ethnic communities facilitated by democracy can lead to further division and result in a hindered progress of economic growth. In this case, political freedom results in an overall negative outcome. However, both Leftwich (1993) and Bardhan (1999) have argued that it is inconclusive whether there is an explicitly observable correlation between development (economic growth) and democracy. Eriksen (2001) has reverberated their claims by analyzing Nicolas

van der Walle's study on the absence of a connection between economic growth and democracy in Africa. Leftwich (1993) has made an important claim in this regard that the debate should not be about the primacy of democracy or development, rather about the creation of a developmental state, where economic growth would be pursued with politics which is "negotiation and cooperation over the use of resources and production". Ferguson (1990) and Escobar (1995) have debunked the misconception about development as they have argued that development is not modernization, and politics is an integral part of development. They have approached the issue with a poststructuralist approach in capturing the connection between politics and development. Acemoglu & Robinson (2006) have explored the economic origins of dictatorship and democracy, and they have argued that an unequal society in terms of wealth and income where the power is concentrated to the elites tend to be dictatorships. Democracy comes to existence only when the inequality is lessened, and the elite lose their concentrated power in the state. Acemoglu & Robinson (2013) have also emphasized the importance of "inclusive institutions" in sustaining the development of a state. In doing so, they have treated development as the economic advancement of a state, and governance or institutions as the means through which sustainable growth and development is achieved. Capability theorists such as Nussbaum (1995; 1997), Sen (2000), Alkire (2002; 2005), Deneulin (2006), Green (2008) and Drèze & Sen (2013) have also emphasized the role of political freedoms and the removal of substantial unfreedoms as an integral part of development. For them, development is not about primacy of any one aspect, rather the consideration of all.

All six Key Informant Interview (KII) participants of this study have defined development as the advancement of political, economic, social, gender, environmental, and

sustainability aspects. All of them have also defined that development entails advancement of all elements that contribute not merely to the economic well-being of an individual, but to the overall human well-being. For instance, Participant 1 has defined development as “raising the well-being of the people in a way which is socially and politically inclusive and economically and environmentally sustainable”. According to Participant 2, development means “allowing the people to have the necessary economic, social, and political opportunities that are required to utilize their inherent potentials”. For Participant 3, development entails the “improvement of a state’s economic, political and social systems to offer the inclusivity, transparency and psychosocial support required for every citizen’s well-being”. Participant 4 has defined development as the “existence and simultaneous improvement of health services, economic growth, academic essentials, ease of doing business, meaningful work opportunities, functioning institutions and democratic rights”. For Participant 5, development is about “simultaneously ensuring economic growth, equality, and equity”. She further elaborated that “an economy which has a good redistribution policy and which channels redistribution properly without a minimum leakage, can be called an economy which is achieving development”. According to Participant 6, development means “to have freedom of expression, good governance, tolerance to opposing views, balanced standard of living, food security, strong judiciary system and quality education in a society to help one become self-reliant and adaptable to any type of challenging situation”.

Considering their definitions and the scholarly literatures on the definition and the evaluation of a state’s development, the concern related to the overemphasis on economic growth is not a scholarly problem in terms of defining or interpreting development. An

analysis of the definitions given by the KII participants shows us that it is neither an academic problem, nor it is a problem that is accentuated by their theoretical underpinnings. A good number of theoretical writings have also emphasized that political aspects should be considered in the evaluation of development along with the social and the economic aspects. As Sen (2008) has argued, it is indeed a problem of most governments of the world since they highlight higher GDP as the mostly used measurement of evaluating overall development of a state. This is certainly the most serious problem we encounter in the studies that attempt to evaluate a state's progress of development.

The UN MDGs and SDGs have clearly ignored the importance of political aspects in development as the MDGs never included a goal related to the political aspects and the SDGs have only Goal 16, which can be distantly related to politics by its emphasis on transparency and justice. As such, civil liberty and political rights remain marginal issues in the articulation of these goals. Álvarez (2020) has identified this as a serious limitation of the HDI, and she has called for political freedoms to be included in the measurement of the HDI. The Inclusive Development Index (IDI) prepared by the World Economic Forum (WEF) measures the index considering a country's economic progress only (World Economic Forum, 2018b, p. 2). The IDI has been designed as an alternative to GDP, but the name 'Inclusive Development' is surely misleading since it clearly ignores political aspects in the evaluation. The twelve factors considered in the index do not even include a single factor pertaining to the political aspects of development. This is a persisting flaw in the various evaluation measurements of development. There are definitely some controversies and debates regarding the technical difficulties of measuring democracy, but this should not prevent us from considering political factors in the evaluation.

Measurements such as GDP, HDI, IDI and all others have flaws within them, and it is not necessary to consider only one index as the indicator of development. Rather, development should be evaluated considering all possible measurements to minimize the errors in measurement (Sen, 2000). An overall analysis is what we require while evaluating a state's progress of development.

Sen (2000, pp. 231-246) has debunked the concern regarding 'Asian values' versus 'Western democracy' as authoritarian rulers of China, Singapore and other Asian states have often emphasized that democracy is inherently a western construct, and it is not applicable to the Asian states. This is a mistaken conception as the concept of 'Asian values' is based on a very partial and selective reading of Confucius' writings. Besides, the democracy in Ancient Greece was significantly restrictive and discriminatory. Contrarily, many writers belonging to the Islamic, the Sinic, and the Indian civilization have uttered similar democratic values as Plato and other Western thinkers. It is therefore a fallacy to claim democracy as a Western construct. The universality of political freedoms, therefore, should not be ignored. The political aspects should also comprise an important part of evaluation.

It can be said by following Sen (2008) that the problem lies with the government and the people working for the government as they are the ones who play the GDP and such other economic records to overplay the development of a state. Political leaders and representatives comprise a major part of the government who often interpret development based on only economic advancement. Whether they do it deliberately or unknowingly requires rigorous analysis, but it is a recurring problem of the political leaders pertaining to the Awami regime. They have often argued that Bangladesh has become developed

using notions that buttress the economic aspects of development. For instance, the Minister of Planning M. A. Mannan uttered in 2019 that the people of Bangladesh are entitled to 3 meals a day, and around 95 to 96 percent households have access to electricity nowadays, which is the credit of the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (Somoyer Konthosor, 2019). He even added that she will go to heaven just for leading Bangladesh to these significant advancements. In 2020, he highlighted the Padma Bridge, the Karnaphuli River Tunnel, and the Bangabandhu Satellite as the major indicators of Bangladesh's development (Bhadra, 2020). The Minister of Information and Broadcasting Dr. Hasan Mahmud stated that the expatriates of Bangladesh are having a hard time to recognize their native cities, towns, and villages after returning home since the government has implemented massive development projects of modernization, and urbanization (BSS, 2020). It is perhaps compelling to measure development by considering only infrastructural and economic aspects since these are the tangible elements of development. For instance, when I had gone to Singapore in 2016 to attend a Model United Nations conference, I was astonished by the surveillance, the security, and the infrastructural aspects of the country. However, a tourist perspective is completely different from a citizen perspective. Citizens can thoroughly experience the measurement of economic, social, and political development. It is tempting to evaluate a state's development after seeing its highly efficient metro rail, other means of public transportation, or the police surveillance system when you are staying there for five or six days as you are not living your whole life under scrutiny and devoid of freedoms. But it is a major flaw to consider these as the only elements of development. Participant 5 of this study affirmed that the tangible elements of development have been mostly

highlighted by political leaders, and this offers a serious flaw in the consideration of development policies and projects in Bangladesh. According to her –

“The improvement of quality of education is something intangible. Thus, if I say the quality of education has improved, the indicators of such improvement are not very clear. Suppose, if someone is arranging for exams without any leakage of the question papers, it is not really a visible indicator of development because this is what is supposed to happen. From this perspective, it is difficult to count this as a part of the measurement of development. Simultaneously, if we are saying that the universities are publishing a good number of journal papers, the public will not understand this message. But the public can see the benefits of bridges as they are able to connect with different places and bridges ease movement options for them. Construction of the Metro Rail and how it helps to reduce the time of commuting for them is also easy to convey. Regimes that want to stay longer in power put high emphasis on these aspects of development and invest a huge amount of money for this purpose every year.”

Meghna Guhathakurta has aptly put this concern in her back cover review of the edited book by M. T. Khan & Rahman (2020) – “Bangladesh is at a critical juncture where much optimism reigns in official circles with regard to its consistent high pattern of growth. But at the same time critical reports unearth the dismal stories that lurk behind the neo-liberal framework of success.”

Although the problem of ignoring political aspects and overemphasizing economic and social aspects is not an academic or scholarly problem, most scholarly analysis on the evaluation of Bangladesh’s development has interpreted and evaluated development in terms of only economic and social aspects. For example, the ‘Economy and Development’

section of the ‘Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Bangladesh’ (Riaz & Rahman, 2016) does not include even a single chapter dedicated to political aspects. Political aspects are never discussed in any of the chapters under the section. The edited volume ‘Development: Constraints and Realizations’ by Mustafa K. Mujeri (2014) does not have a separate chapter on political aspects either.

Similarly, Khatun (2016, p. 138) in her evaluation of “development performance of Bangladesh”, has discussed only economic growth and social aspects, and she regards social indicators as the only non-economic aspects of development. Guhathakurta & van Schendel (2013, p. 411) have reinforced this notion by affirming that the outside world as well as the local development practitioners see Bangladesh through the “development-tinted glasses” where only mass poverty and inequality prevails. They have also regarded the transition of Bangladesh into a middle-income country as an important milestone for the country’s development progress.

Although Naher (2013) analyzes some political aspects of development in Bangladesh, her study is specifically focused on microfinance, and it engages only within the individual level. A. Chowdhury (2013) has drawn attention to the concept of development without the consent and the participation of people, which is an analysis of the individual level, but it has emphasized liberty and rights for the people to ascertain their development. Most other studies on development issues related to Bangladesh similarly interpret development in terms of economic and social aspects. Neusiedl (2016), N. Hossain (2017), T. Chowdhury & Mukhopadhaya (2014) and Momen, Hossain & Begum (2005) are some such examples.

Studies on Bangladesh's politics are huge in number but most of them deal with specific issues. Riaz (2013; 2015; 2016) has published extensively on the political evolution and contemporary political aspects of Bangladesh. Chakrabarty (2015) and Ahamed (2015a; 2015b) have regularly contributed columns analyzing different aspects of politics of Bangladesh in the last ten years in newspapers, and they have published compilations of their columns.

However, the edited volume 'Neoliberal Development in Bangladesh: People on the Margins' by M. T. Khan & Rahman (2020) has explored the implications of neoliberal development in Bangladesh considering all three aspects of development. Muhammad (2021) has examined the dynamics of neoliberal development model in Bangladesh, with special consideration on energy, industrial growth and workers' rights, GDP growth, and environment. Both these studies have offered constructive critiques of development in Bangladesh applying the concept of neoliberal development. These two studies have explored some specific cases covering the three aspects of development. But they have not captured an overall macro perspective of development. More importantly, they have scrutinized the neoliberal policies of reform and development, but the aspects that do not fall under the framework of neoliberal policies have remained absent in the analysis. For instance, the specific cases of the garment industry, the quick rental power plants, the higher education reforms, land grabs, tourism, and the Rampal power plant in M. T. Khan & Rahman (2020) have captured some specific scenarios and concerns regarding neoliberal development projects. Muhammad (2021) has also captured some specific scenarios pertaining to the garment industry, the Rampal power plant, and the quick rental power plants. Microfinance has also been covered in both these studies. Both these studies offer

some excellent insights, and the analysis is praiseworthy. But this study has a considerable difference in terms of the main approach. I have criticized the primacy of neoliberal development in the practice of development here, but I have not opted for an approach that completely discards neoliberal development. In fact, following Sen, I have approached this study from a perspective that considers all aspects of development in the evaluation of the progress. Both M. T. Khan & Rahman (2020) and Muhammad (2021) have considered political aspects in their analysis of development, but the scope of the study is different than what I have aimed to achieve in this study. There is certainly a dearth of studies on the overall development of Bangladesh that cover the economic, the social, and the political aspects of development taking aggregate level measurements into consideration. As I have argued earlier, this study captures a macro perspective, and explores the overall advancement of Bangladesh under the Awami regime (2009-2020). The Awami regime has not been specifically subjected to a scrutiny of its achievements, and this study does the same by analyzing the advancement of different elements in the last twelve years on an aggregate level. Besides, chapters included in M. T. Khan & Rahman (2020) have mostly focused on capturing the perspectives of “people on the margins”. Thus, the scope and the focus of this study is entirely different from the book.

For example, the chapter ‘Neoliberal Policies, Development Interventions, Primitive Accumulation and Peasant Resistance: Land Grabs in the Noakhali Chars of Bangladesh’ from M. T. Khan & Rahman (2020) has explored the impacts of a nationally promulgated policy – the Chingri Mahal or the Shrimp Zone Regulations of 1992 in three districts of Bangladesh – namely Noakhali, Lakshmipur, and Feni since it facilitated land grabbing by wealthy individuals in these districts. While this is definitely an important exploration since

it offers us deeper insights into the evaluation of Bangladesh's development, there is not enough evidence or backing to make it a representative study that captures a scenario of the overall conditions. Other rural areas might have experienced something different, and there might have been some positive outcomes of this intervention. The Rampal Power Plant is such an example since the nefarious impacts of the destruction of Sundarbans following its construction is a concern that affects everyone in Bangladesh. For a state which is continually affected by cyclones, floods, and other natural calamities, the Rampal Power Plant represents a case that captures the overall conditions.

In this first chapter, I have introduced the reader to the purpose, the scope, the significance, the research questions, the objectives, the premises, and the methodology of this study. I have also elaborately discussed the dilemmas of evaluating development encountered in literatures that grapple with theoretical perspectives, cases of different states, and Bangladesh. Although some scholars have evaluated the development of Bangladesh considering the political aspects of development against the background of its economic achievements, this study contributes to the existing literature by capturing an overall scenario of Bangladesh's development in the last twelve years. Besides, none of the studies have attempted to evaluate the achievements and the failures of the Awami regime in terms of development. I have explored here that it is time to conduct a study evaluating Bangladesh's development under the Awami regime and examining whether the regime has been able to translate its claimed economic and social advancements to the political aspects of development. Given its focus on the regime, I have explored a perspective of what the state has been able to do, and what it has failed to address in the last twelve years in this study.

In the second chapter, I discuss the analytical framework of ‘Development as Freedom’ by Amartya Sen (2000) used in this study. First, I outline Sen’s framework, his core arguments, and the use of his framework and concept in contemporary scholarly engagements. Second, I discuss it against other alternative frameworks, and capability theories such as that of Deneulin (2006) and Nussbaum (2013). By Contrasting Sen’s framework with these two frameworks, I explain my rationale of using Sen as the most suitable framework for the scope and fulfilling the objectives of the study. Third, I discuss the application of Development as Freedom by Drèze & Sen (2013) in their book ‘An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions’.

In the third chapter, I evaluate the economic aspects of development under the Awami regime following Sen’s framework. Evaluating economic aspects is a crucial component of this study to explore whether the claims of economic development by the political leaders have indeed been true. I evaluate the social aspects of development under the Awami regime in the fourth chapter to explore the same. In the fifth chapter, I evaluate the political aspects of development under the Awami regime.

Drawing from the findings of the fifth chapter, I analyze whether the citizens of Bangladesh have had the opportunity to participate and dictate the development policymaking in Bangladesh under the Awami regime. In doing so, I have revisited the analysis of Drèze & Sen (2013) with regards to India by contrasting it with the Bangladeshi experience. Drèze & Sen (2013) have focused on India’s failure in health services, and the deeper inequalities in their book since India was a well-functioning democracy at the time of the publication of the book. Of course, there were concerns with transparency and accountability in India, but Drèze & Sen (2013) were definitely satisfied with the electoral practices, voting

opportunities, number of political parties and other aspects of political freedoms in India. I have argued in this chapter that the development of Bangladesh reflects an uncertain glory of a different kind. While inequalities persist there, social and economic advancements have been remarkable for Bangladesh. In fact, Drèze & Sen (2013) have highly praised Bangladesh's achievements in terms of the economic and the social aspects of development in the book. But the contradiction of Bangladesh's development lies in its failure in the political aspects. More specifically, Bangladesh has failed to develop and address its concerns related to political freedoms. Thus, I have revisited the argument of an uncertain glory through the lens of Bangladesh, and I have applied it to capture the contradictions of Bangladesh, in a similar fashion of Drèze & Sen's analysis of India's contradictions.

In the seventh and the final chapter of this study, I have summarized the concluding arguments based on the findings and the analysis in Chapter 3, 4, 5 and 6. In concluding remarks, I have argued that Bangladesh needs to address its meagre standing in terms of political freedoms to become a better developed state. While its economic and social advancement has indeed been praiseworthy, the poor condition of political freedoms marks a significant failure in its progress under the Awami regime. This certainly undermines the glory which the regime wants to highlight.

The Dilemmas of evaluating development of a state mainly entail the priority of either economic growth or political freedoms. However, this dilemma should be non-existent as it is a serious mistake to see economic growth and political freedoms adversaries to each other. Instead, evaluating development should entail the economic, the social, and the political aspects of development, and this should be pursued simultaneously. It is meaningless to conduct an evaluation of a state's overall development by specifically

focusing on one of these aspects. Development is a process which involves simultaneous economic, social, and political advancement.

Chapter 2: Development as Freedom

I have used the analytical framework of Development as Freedom by Sen (2000) in this study. In this chapter, I outline the framework in the first section. In the second section, I engage with possible alternative frameworks and explain why this is the most suitable framework for this study. I briefly outline the application of this framework in Drèze & Sen (2013) which offers us a more specific guideline for analysis in the third and the last section.

2.1 Development as Freedom

Marginalization of political freedoms in the evaluation of a state's development has been one of the persisting dilemmas of evaluating development. Álvarez (2020) has written in this regard, and she has argued that political liberties are essential in the evaluation of a state's development based on Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's capability approach. I have used Amartya Sen's capability framework of 'Development as Freedom' in this study as my analytical framework. But first, I have outlined Sen's framework here.

Amartya Sen (2000) has attempted to come out of the confinement of evaluating development based on only economic and social aspects through his framework of 'Development as Freedom'. For him, development of a state requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom (Sen, 2000, p. 5). These sources of unfreedom are exemplified as poverty, tyranny, systematic social deprivation, poor economic opportunities, neglect of public facilities, intolerance, or overactivity of repressive states (Sen, 2000, p. 5). As Sen (2000, p. 9) asserts, for the purpose of evaluation of development, we have to integrate economic, social and political considerations. Evaluation of development, therefore, has to

include a “simultaneous appreciation of the vital roles of markets, market-related organizations, governments, local authorities, political parties, other civic institutions, educational arrangements, opportunities of open dialogue and debate, media and other means of communication” (Sen, 2000, p. 9). “The success of a society” – according to him, depends on the “substantive freedoms that the members enjoy, rather than traditional normative approaches which focus on other variable – utility, procedural liberty or real income” (Sen, 2000, p. 18). This framework particularly focuses on freedom, and it does not ignore the importance of economic growth, rather it intends to look well beyond economic growth (Sen, 2000, p. 14).

For the purpose of evaluation, Sen (2000, pp. 38-41) has identified five broad distinct types of freedom which needs scrutiny –

- a) **Economic Facilities** – This includes economic entitlements of the population and the families/individuals. Some key elements of this evaluation are GDP, inequality, income, wealth, production, unemployment rate, and wage rates.
- b) **Social Opportunities** – This includes education and health care. Some key elements are life expectancy, avoiding preventable morbidity, premature mortality, illiteracy, and fertility rate.
- c) **Protective Security** – This is defined as providing a social safety net for preventing the affected population from being reduced to abject misery. Some key elements are unemployment benefits, famine relief, emergency public employment, elderly benefits, and bereavement benefits.
- d) **Political Freedoms** – This includes civil rights. It is defined as the opportunities that people have to determine who should govern and on what principles and the possibility

to scrutinize and criticize authorities. Some key elements include freedom of political expression and an uncensored press, freedom to choose between different political parties, political dialogue, dissent and critique, voting rights, and participatory selection of legislators and executives.

- e) **Transparency Guarantees** – This is defined as the freedom to deal with one another under guarantees of disclosure and lucidity. Some key elements are corruption, financial irresponsibility, opportunity of justice, and underhand dealings.

Through the first three types of freedom, this framework incorporates economic and social aspects of development. Its novelty becomes prevalent in the last two types of freedom as they cover political aspects, which had remained comparatively ignored in the existing studies of evaluating development. Besides, it is concerned with evaluating the environmental and gendered aspects of the society in too. Although no specific type of freedom regarding these two broad issues have not been formulated by Sen (2000), he has analyzed, and covered them in his book.

Sen's framework has also debunked the debate over the primacy of these three aspects by astutely analyzing their interrelation. For example, economic growth supposedly creates inequality, and this inequality is reflected in the arena of political freedoms and transparency guarantees as the elites are able to concentrate their power on the government, and they unjustly influence governance of the state. Sen (2000, p. 187) has asserted in this regard that the lack of democracy entails a lack of political rights and powers for the marginalized. On the other side, without political freedoms, you cannot address these issues of inequality and the persisting problems in the society related to healthcare or education (social opportunities). Similarly, Sen (2000, p. 144) has argued that high fertility hinders

the prospects and opportunities for a woman since she is left busy with the recurrent rearing of children. As a result, she loses the opportunity of being educated, and pursuing an employment to bolster her decision-making powers in the household. However, literacy and education can make a woman aware of the problems of rearing children, and an ability to see her prospects can lead to low fertility rate. Morbidity of children and good health care services also prevent the households from conceiving too many children and burdening the woman of the household with this daunting task of rearing children (Sen, 2000, pp. 189-203). All these freedoms are interrelated, and a plurality of institutions is aspired for the governance of the state (Sen, 2000, p. 53). Paying attention to each is therefore necessary, and there is no primacy of one.

The evaluation of a state's development has to focus on the analysis of all existing institutions in the state (Sen, 2000, p. 142). As individuals "operate in a world of institutions", it is a serious flaw of evaluation to emphasize the weight on particular institutions. Rather we have to evaluate the institutions based on what they can do together, and Sen (2000) draws a picture of their roles and importance as working together for a state's development in an organized fashion through this framework.

Some of the elements are overlapping between certain freedoms. For instance, unemployment can be tackled by unemployment benefits as a social security measure, but this redistributive effort does not address the social stigma that one suffers because of their unemployment (Sen, 2000, p. 2). Therefore, it is not enough to evaluate a country based on its unemployment benefits measurements only, the rate of unemployment has to be analyzed to evaluate the country's progress and also to denote an area which needs further attention for improvement.

Another important part of this framework is that it does not advocate a ranking or social ordering among states or countries, rather it is only intended for evaluation (Sen, 2000, p. 286). It can be used to evaluate a state's progress of development considering these three aspects, and what might be an overall condition of a state in terms of the five freedoms. Based on this evaluation of five freedoms, further and deeper research into each element of the three aspects can be pursued. Therefore, he has not dismissed the importance of mechanical indices as a method of evaluation. Rather, he argues for both mechanical indices and qualitative issues such as policies and projects to be simultaneously analyzed. For Sen, it has been a serious flaw of the existing development literatures that they have allowed the ignorance of people's freedoms (Sen, 2000, p. 33).

It is important to note that Sen (2000, p. 286) has not argued for a magic formula of pursuing development policies. For him, the evaluation of a state's development has to be done considering every possible element of these three aspects, and there is no simple magic formula of evaluation. He has instead emphasized the consideration of each element while pursuing and evaluating development policies. Advancement of a state, therefore, covers both "aggregative and distributive concerns", not only one of them. While he has promulgated some universal elements for the purpose of evaluation, he has also kept his analysis open to criticism (Sen, 2000, p xiii-xiv). His framework has been particularly concerned about the primacy of education and political freedoms (Sen, 2000, p. 242) since these are the platforms of voicing individual's concerns. The key focus of Sen's capability approach is to entitle individuals to the opportunities, and the freedoms they have reason to value. However, he has denied the option of rejecting the argument for political freedoms based on the notion of the 'Lee Thesis' or the importance of cultural values (Sen, 2000, p.

246). The concern about ill-equipped individuals to ascertain their rights is a secondary concern, and this concern can only come when the individual has the political freedoms to pursue that. The notion of lack of knowledge and expertise of individuals to utilize the platform of political freedoms, and the argument that Asian values do not entertain western liberal values cannot be the bases of argument for rejecting political freedoms. For Sen (2000, p. 247), “The need for popular participation is not just rubbish, and the idea of development cannot be dissociated from it”.

This does not entail that we have to establish political freedoms first to determine that a state is developing. Rather, development should entail the simultaneous implementation of projects that address the economic, the social, and the political concerns. Economic expansion such as GDP growth is essential since it helps to mitigate the problem of entitlement protection, and political freedoms without economic growth and social services is as meaningless as the attainment of economic growth without any advancement in social services and political freedoms. The evaluation of a state’s development should entail a consideration of all three aspects.

Sen has also argued for both individual and aggregate level to be considered in evaluation (Sen, 2000, p. 286). It is a daunting task to simultaneously produce an analysis of both levels, and I have specifically focused on the aggregate level of considerations in this study. Analysis of individual perspectives and considerations is extremely complex, and this has to be done on a case-by-case basis. Chapters included in the edited book by M. T. Khan & Rahman (2020) has captured them altogether, but there is a lack of application of a coherent analytical framework. In the next section, I have explained why this is the most suitable framework for my study exploring the different implications and arguments by capability

scholars, and writings that have engaged with Sen's framework of 'Development as Freedom'.

2.2 The Case for Development as Freedom

Sen (2000) has drawn a significant number of scholars engaging with his framework. For instance, Tungodden (2001) has agreed with Sen that the evaluation should be conducted on two levels – a) the individual and b) the aggregate. Hill (2003) and Deneulin (2005) has applied the framework on individual level as the former focuses on social power and institutions while the latter emphasizes on capturing collective and historical dimensions of individual agency in evaluating development through this framework. Despite being applicable for both levels, Sen's framework has been limitedly used in an aggregate level of evaluation. One key example of applying Sen's framework on the macro level has been done by Drèze & Sen (2013). Drèze & Sen (2013) have analyzed the advancement of India since independence considering the three aspects of development. They have explored through their analysis that India has achieved significant economic advancement since the 1990s. Its well-functioning democracy as well as new measures for ensuring transparency has turned it into a stage of good advancement. But the lack of social advancement and the persisting inequalities between elites and marginalized communities including castes have ensured the glory of advancement in those two aspects have been scarred by the dark clouds of persisting inequality and derailed social progress.

Qizilbash (2010) and Deb (2006) has criticized the framework for being anthropocentric which Deb (2006) has also echoed by regarding environment as a separate issue that needs specific research. On the other hand, McDonald (2006) has argued that Sen's framework is "the appropriate theoretical framework for understanding sustainable development". He

has extended his argument by calling for the environmentalists to term their goal as “Sustainable Development as Freedom’.

Shilliam (2012) has praised Sen for providing a small decolonial opening, although he focuses on deconstructing development to a decolonial alternative rather than redefining it. He has criticized Sen for being negligent towards the injustices created by the market system. The market creates a system of slavery, and he offers the decolonial alternative of ‘Rastafari’ to come out of the implications of the market system. His criticism lies in Sen’s acknowledgment of the market system as a positive force towards the attainment of substantive freedoms for individuals. The criticism by Shilliam (2012) should be praiseworthy, but his decolonial alternative does not offer us any method of evaluating development. In his concluding remarks, he uses the famous Guyanese activist and academic – Walter Rodney’s words to assert that the Rasta have attained significant advancement in certain aspects of development such as harmoniously living as a community and being physically fit. However, Shilliam (2012) has not offered any evaluation of the advancement of the Rasta. The exploration of the problems of the market system and the slavery it implies on individuals offers a decolonial alternative of the suppressive market system, but Sen’s compelling argument about education, healthcare, political freedoms, and all other elements used in the evaluation do not get dismissed by this alternative. These elements should be considered in the evaluation of a state or community’s development. Moreover, the decolonial alternative of the market system is not more suitable to answer the research questions of this study.

Deneulin (2005; 2006) has emphasized the consideration of particular historical and collective narratives of a society in the analysis of development as freedom. Her critique

of Sen (2000) and Nussbaum (1992) analyzes their distinct conceptualizations of the capability approach. At the core of her study is the capability approach of Sen (2000), and she offers vehement critiques of Sen's conceptualization. I have used Deneulin (2006) as a crucial guideline for the purpose of my data analysis, and I have elaborately discussed it later. Here, I have elaborately discussed my agreements and disagreements with Deneulin (2006). It is important to note here that Deneulin (2006) has offered us an excellent insight on how the framework of Sen (2000) can be applied to empirical studies.

Depicting the case studies of Costa Rica and Dominican Republic, Deneulin (2006) has shown how the framework by Sen (2000) can be improved better to serve as a guideline for evaluation and analysis of a state's development. The scope of her study has covered an overall consideration of Costa Rica and Dominican Republic, and it has not specifically focused on incorporating individual perspectives. However, her main criticism lies in the central role Sen accedes to political freedoms (Deneulin, 2006, p. 212). She has pointed to the central role of individual agency that Sen emphasizes, and she has shown that individual agency had little contribution to promote social arrangements of Dominican Republic. Therefore, she has argued for Sen's framework to consider "socio-historical narratives" in terms of evaluation and analysis of a state's development. According to her, the pathways of development in Costa Rica and Dominican Republic was laid by the individuals in the way they had chosen their representatives, and political parties for governance. This is an excellent insight, and it seems applicable to the overall understanding of a state's condition of development. But this is less suitable for my study since she has answered the question of why Costa Rica and Dominican Republic have journeyed in this trajectory of development whereas my central concern is about the trajectory of development in

Bangladesh for the last twelve years under the Awami regime. Nonetheless, I have found her critique insightful, and she has evaluated the development of Costa Rica and Dominican Republic considering the similar elements as Sen (2000) and Drèze & Sen (2013).

What I have found more useful in her study is the points that have reverberated my thoughts on Sen (2000) and her concerns that I have disagreed with. First, Deneulin (2006, p. 3) has argued that Sen (2000) has argued against sum-ranking, and that improvement in one element of development cannot serve as a substitute to the downgrade of another element of development. It is true that an increase in healthcare cannot fulfill the deficit of a decrease in educational achievements. As Sen (2000, p. 286) has argued that there is no magic formula or shortcut towards development, he has discarded “incommensurability” or the substitution power of each substantive freedoms. He has rather emphasized the complementarity of each, and thus, he has called for an overall analysis considering all elements. However, aggregate level measurements have been considered both in the analysis of Sen (2000) and Drèze & Sen (2013). This shows his stance on the side of sum-ranking. He has argued against considering aggregate level measurements as the only indicators of development, but he has not discarded the importance of evaluation of overall conditions. In fact, Deneulin (2006, pp. 140-207) herself has captured an overall evaluation of Costa Rica and Dominican Republic in her analysis.

Second, Deneulin (2006, p. 5) has asserted that Sen (2000) has been very reluctant to draw a “comprehensive conception of the good”. In simple words, Sen has not provided a specific guidebook containing all elements of development that has to be taken into consideration for evaluating development. It is technically true that Sen (2000, p. xiii-xiv)

has refrained from claiming his five types of freedoms as a universal framework for evaluating development as he has kept it open for further scrutiny and modification by other through value and reason. But it is not true that he has not shared his perspective on the capabilities that are valuable to promote. His identification of the five types of substantive freedoms is his guideline for development based on “universalist assumptions” which I have outlined earlier in this study (Sen, 2000, p. 246). It is important to note that his list of freedoms is not an exhaustive one, and he has kept the door open for other scholars to contribute to his conceptualization of the substantive freedoms.

Sen (2000) and Drèze & Sen (2013) have not explicitly used the five types of freedoms in evaluation possibly because of the overlapping nature of the elements considered under the three aspects of development. For example, it is difficult to incorporate ‘market freedom’ under the umbrella of only one type of freedom. Considering its economic nature, there can be good reasons for keeping it under the umbrella of ‘Economic Facilities’. But then again, the powerful interest groups and the influence of political leaders in the market can also be considered under either ‘Political Freedoms’ or ‘Transparency Guarantees’. Perhaps for this purpose Sen (2000) and Drèze & Sen (2013) have divided their chapters specifically based on different interrelated elements rather than the five types of freedoms. But this does not mean Sen (2000) has not identified a list of elements. Although his outline of five types of freedoms (Sen, 2000, pp. 38-41) does not offer a complete list of the elements he has analyzed, a thorough reading of his book and its offshoot Drèze & Sen (2013) has provided us the elements he has considered in his evaluation of development. In a related point, Deneulin (2006, p. 6) has referred to an earlier writing by Sen (1992) that the incompleteness of the capability approach is the problem of identifying “what

constitutes human well-being” in practice. Sen (2000, p. 86) has affirmed that the chances of applying his freedom-oriented approach may be comparatively narrow in many real-world practical problems. Nonetheless, I would like to argue that he has attempted to outline a framework for evaluation through his study, and his attempt has been repeated with a renewed interest in Drèze & Sen (2013). His reverberation can be found in the articulation of “Now is not the time” (Sen, 2000, p. 48). It is a fallacy to refrain from pursuing an effort of evaluating development based on the rationale that we do not have the perfectly workable formula yet. Alike the Critical Realist perspective of philosophy (Benton & Craib, 2011), Sen (2000) has advocated for attempts as a progress towards finding out the perfect formula. There is no chance of attaining such without any attempts. Besides, he has kept his formula open for scrutiny to make it better and improve it further.

Moreover, Deneulin (2006, p. 6) has argued that according to Sen’s capability approach, the freedom of a person is not degraded if one has a freedom that he would have chosen to have anyway by reading Sen (1983; 1993). She has used the example of a malaria-free environment and I have found this contradictory to what Sen (2000) has argued for in his framework. According to Deneulin (2006, p. 6), if someone can live in a malaria-free environment, and she have not had a say in the policy of eradicating malaria, the freedom of that person remains the same because she is entitled to a malaria-free environment. However, my reading of Sen (2000) goes against this perspective. Sen (2000) has argued for the cumulative or aggregate consideration of all substantive freedoms. If someone is entitled to a malaria-free environment, she has the freedom considering that element only. If she does not have the political rights to have a say in the policymaking of a state, it is a restraint to her overall freedom, not to her freedom to be free from malaria. This would

eventually result in the downgrading of cumulative freedom for that person. Therefore, in terms of evaluation, it is not ideal to consider only one or two aspects of development. All three aspects have to be analyzed to explore the true state of advancement.

When we are considering the aggregate or overall level of measurements in evaluating development of a state, this is a crucial concept of measuring freedoms which has been upheld by Sen (2000). The right to participate in public debate and democratic decision-making is a core concern of Sen (2000), and this serves a crucial role in dictating the state to invest its resources in the way that focuses on advancing all elements, preferably based on the citizen's choices. When the citizens agree with it, the state can move forward with its implementation. But when the citizens oppose its implementation, the state has to address this concern and come up with a better solution addressing the citizens' needs. However, this does not mean that Sen (2000) advocates for an unhinged freedom of citizens. The five types of freedoms and their elements are central to human well-being based on Sen's reasoning. But all elements of substantial freedoms are not covered by these five types of freedoms. There can be more in addition to these five, but the other ones cannot refute the essentiality of these five.

Deneulin (2006, p. 9) has analyzed two cases that involved the existence of political freedoms, which is not applicable for my study. The question of whether the citizens are equipped enough can be asked only when the political freedoms exist in the society. If they are not well-equipped, concerns regarding education and formulating policies to improve the informational and reasoning capability of citizens can be addressed later. But it is a flawed idea to be concerned with the ability and reasoning of the citizens if there is no existence of political freedoms. The knowledge and ability of the citizens to properly use

the benefits of the political freedoms is a valid concern, and it can only be questioned when you have evaluated that political freedoms exist in good conditions in a society. Without a determination of the conditions of political freedoms, there is no meaning of attempting to deliberate whether the citizens are able enough to participate in the decision-making. Even if they are not able enough, this cannot be a ground for rejecting political freedoms to the citizens. Through education and formulating better policies, this has to be tackled. I would like to see the issue in this way – the evaluation of political freedoms in a society is the layer of reality that has to be explored first, and then when you have a final knowledge of the political freedoms, you can ask the question of whether the citizens have enough knowledge and information to make the best use of the practices of political freedoms and democracy. If the findings show that the citizens do not possess enough knowledge and ability to do so, you can delve deeper into exploring how they can be made more knowledgeable in order to utilize their political freedoms in the best possible way. But the logic of their inability cannot be used as a ground for stripping off their political freedoms and civil rights.

The findings from the Costa Rican and the Dominican Republic by Deneulin (2006) are highly insightful, but those constitute the second layer of reality. In order to explore the way citizens have used their knowledge and information to dictate policymaking, the condition of political freedoms on an aggregate or overall level has to be explored first, which constitute the first layer of reality. Thus, I have not engaged with the socio-historical narratives in democratic decision-making here. Rather, I have evaluated the condition of political freedoms in Bangladesh.

Deneulin (2006, p. 11) has discussed the centrality of political freedom as the only procedure involved in the capability approach. This is technically true in one sense that the political freedoms of citizens serve as the platform for the individuals to redirect the swayed pathway of development. It is central in directing the proper use of resources when actors such as the government, NGOs, private enterprises sway from the goal of improving the substantive freedoms. However, this does not mean that political freedom submerges the importance of others. As I have discussed earlier, education plays a key role in making the citizens more capable to make democratic decision-making function better. It is tempting to argue that political freedoms form the crux of the capability approach, but it will be a simplistic analysis which hides the complex issues underneath.

Deneulin (2006, p. 12) has correctly pointed out that Sen (2000) proposes “a new way of evaluating and conceiving development” but it does not offer “a complete theory of development”. It is quite overambitious to argue that we have a complete theory of development since we are always in a motion of exploring new layers of reality. It was a fallacy back when the modernization theory was regarded as a complete theory of development (Deneulin, 2006, p. 12), and it will still be the same fallacy to claim that we have a complete theory of development in hand. It is also correct that Sen (2000) does not delve much deeper into individual perspectives and it does not offer us any ways of identifying “what people might have reason to value and choose”. Sen (2000) offers an overall analysis, and it is concerned with mostly the overall condition of a society in its analysis. It calls for individual voices to be heard, and it agrees with the perspective of citizens as active participants in the society. But it does not specify any plausible way of doing it.

However, the contention that ‘Development as Freedom’ is indeed a framework which suggests us the ways a society should be arranged (Deneulin, 2006, p. 13). The outline of five substantive freedoms validates this assumption. As Deneulin (2006, p. 13) has put it, “the capability approach defines certain frameworks of action which will be ethically acceptable given the overall objective of promoting the freedoms that people have reason to choose and value. In other words, the capability approach is a development theory which is called, by its very essence, to be development praxis”. The use of the word ‘praxis’ does not entail any Marxist connotation here as Deneulin (2006, p. 14) has explained. Rather, it is based on its Aristotelian roots since it is conceptualized as “ethical action”. The term praxis entails the actions pursued by a political community. Development praxis involves all actions that aim to promote human well-being in a society. This includes actions undertaken by all actors – NGOs, INGOs, the government, private enterprises, and all other actors. In summary, it entails “the ethically laden actions taken by individuals and institutions for the sake of the well-being of the members of a community”.

I have found the conceptualization of “development policy” by Deneulin (2006, p. 15) useful to my understanding of development policy for this study. She has conceptualized development policy as “public action” based on the interpretation of the capability approach. Public action refers to “policy and governance on one side, and cooperation, disagreement and public protest on the other” (Drèze & Sen, 2002, p. v). More importantly, public action entails the actions taken by the government as well as the citizens. These include both collaborative and adversarial actions between these two actors. Sen (2000) and Drèze & Sen (2013) both have analyzed government policies and citizen action in the evaluation of different states. Some examples of this include the ban on hunting of Royal

Bengal Tigers in India (Sen, 2000, p. 146), the healthcare policy in pre-reform China (Sen, 2000, pp. 45-46), the coercive family planning policy of China (Sen, 2000, p. 219), and the emergency employment policy in 1973 Maharashtra to prevent a famine (Sen, 2000, p. 180). The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in India is an example of this from Drèze & Sen (2013, p. 29).

Since I focus on the Awami regime's contribution to the development of Bangladesh in the last twelve years, I have considered only the policies, the projects, and the initiatives undertaken by the government under the umbrella of public action. Public protests and movements against the government initiatives are adversarial actions, and I have considered them under the umbrella of political freedoms and its overall evaluation. Initiatives by the government that engage the citizens (collaborative actions) and joint initiatives with NGOs and other international and private actors have been considered under the umbrella of public action. Government intervention to prevent or hinder other actors' initiatives have been regarded as an adversarial action falling under the umbrella of political freedoms and its overall evaluation.

Deneulin (2006, pp. 19-23) has also discussed the important aspect of Sen's framework between the concerns of the two ways of conceiving human well-being – namely perfectionism and liberalism. Liberalism accedes the people to pursue their self-conception of the good, and it focuses on the perspective of individual freedom in pursuing the goals. Perfectionism imposes certain elements on the well-being of individuals since these elements are considered good for human well-being irrespective of personal choices. Perfectionism entails that the government is responsible for establishing institutions and initiating policies that will bring about the advancement of certain elements considered

necessary for the human well-being. The primacy of political freedoms and the central focus on democratic decision-making marks the presence of liberalism in Sen's framework. The perspective of incorporating individual voices in decision-making is indeed the essence of liberalism (Deneulin, 2006, p. 19). However, Development as Freedom is more perfectionist and less liberal in its capacity. The outline of five substantive freedoms by Sen (2000) is definitely a practice of perfectionism. These five types of freedoms are universally applicable for all societies. This marks a perfectionist departure for Sen's framework. Interestingly, Deneulin (2006, p. 211) has argued that the capability approach has to be thickened with a substantial conception of human well-being. This is a problematic point since Development as Freedom espouses the five universally applicable substantive freedoms and the central role of political freedoms as the driver of expansion of the political freedoms. In this sense, it has a striking balance between perfectionism and liberalism. On one side, it calls for considering all five types of freedoms as the important elements of human well-being. On the other side, it puts an additional emphasis on the rights of citizens to dictate the pathway of their societies' development.

In the concluding remarks, Deneulin (2006, p. 210) has outlined the "three building blocks of the capability approach" of Sen (2000). First, the end of development can be achieved by the expansion of substantive freedoms and the removal of unfreedoms. Second, individuals should not only be passive recipients of development policies undertaken by the state, rather they should be active agents in the initiation and implementation of public action. Third and the most important one, the only way of removing unfreedoms is the proper functioning of democratic practice and political freedoms.

Nussbaum (2013) can be another possible alternative framework other than Sen (2000) or Deneulin (2006) for this study. Since the evaluation of development in this study must incorporate all three aspects of development – economic, social, and political, the capability theories are the most relevant ones as they place a significant emphasis on the role of human freedoms. The frameworks of Nussbaum (2013) and Sen (2000) share similarities as they emphasize enhancing capabilities of individuals. While Development as Freedom can be operationalized at both the individual and aggregate (overall) levels, Nussbaum’s capability approach can only be operationalized at the individual level (Sen, 2000, p. 286).

A survey of the ten capabilities identified by Nussbaum (2000, pp. 78-80) helps us to understand better its limitations as an evaluative approach. These ten central capabilities are -

1. Life – Being able to lead the human life of a normal length and avoiding premature death.
2. Bodily Health – Being able to possess good health, proper nourishment, good reproductive health, and shelter.
3. Bodily Integrity – Freedom of movement, security against sexual assault and domestic violence, sexual satisfaction, and freedom in the choice of reproduction.
4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought – The ability to use the senses, imagination, thought, and reasoning, freedom of expression in using one’s mind, freedom of political and artistic speech, freedom of religious exercise, avoiding non-beneficial pain, and the option to have pleasurable experiences.

5. Emotions – Having the option to love, grieve, longing, gratitude, and justified anger while facing no fear and anxiety.
6. Practical Reason – The ability to form a conception of good by self, and to have the option to dictate the pathways of one’s own life, including conscience and religious observance.
7. Affiliation – Having the option to live with and toward others, the option to address and express concern for fellow human beings, the freedom of engaging in various forms of social interactions, the ability to understand the conditions of other human beings (including freedom of political speech and assembly), the opportunity to enjoy the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation, being treated as an equally dignified human being as others, and the experience of non-discrimination.
8. Other Species – The choice to have an atmosphere where concerns for plants, animals, and the nature can be addressed freely.
9. Play – The ability to enjoy recreational activities including laughing and playing.
10. Control over One’s Environment – the right of political participation, freedom to effectively dictate in the pathways of development that involve their own lives, freedom of speech and association, equal property rights, equal employment opportunities, freedom from unwarranted search and seizure, and the ability to exercise practical reasoning and to engage in mutually constitutive relations with other workers.

An analysis of all these central capabilities shows us that it will require a number of nuanced studies to capture the overall scenario of development following Nussbaum’s framework. For instance, the third capability – Bodily Integrity, is a gravely complex issue

and an evaluation of the elements under this category (freedom of movement, sexual satisfaction, sexual assault etc.) would have to be completed in one separate study. Nussbaum's categories are more holistic than Sen as she has included 'Other species' as one category of capability. But at the same time, an inclusive evaluation of environment and other species require separate studies. Besides, the elements such as non-discrimination, self-respect, ability to laugh, and freedom of imagination are so broad and complex that this framework is barely applicable for a study which seeks to evaluate the overall condition of development of a state. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of this study as it is focused on evaluating the development of a state from a macro perspective on the criteria that we have identified. Olsaretti (2014) has also acclaimed Sen's framework for being pluralist by incorporating three aspects, rather than focusing on any single aspect in an overall evaluation of development.

Considering all the facts and possible alternative frameworks, it seems 'Development as Freedom' by Sen (2000) is the most suitable analytical framework for this study. The implementation of the framework by Drèze & Sen (2013) makes it more operationalizable. An overall analysis of the possible alternatives and Development as Freedom can help us explore the reasons of choosing Development as Freedom as the framework for this study. First, it includes the elements of gender, environment and the economic, the social, and the political aspects of development (Sen, 2000; Drèze & Sen, 2013; Gasper & van Staveren, 2003; McDonald, 2006). For instance, the elements analyzed in his studies as a part of evaluating development include a broad range of elements such as GDP, GDP growth, life expectancy, child mortality, undernourishment, air quality index, income inequality, gender inequality, fertility rate, female literacy, unemployment, meeting energy demands

and many more. Through the conceptualization of the five types of freedoms and the integrated analysis in Sen (2000) and Drèze & Sen (2013), Development as Freedom covers almost every necessary element required for human well-being. While the list is not an exhaustive one as Sen has kept the chance of criticism open for the framework to be better and more inclusive of all aspects. Ferguson (1990) has highlighted the dangers of treating policy as depoliticized, and the problems of ignoring the political aspects of development. With the analysis of political freedoms, Sen (2000) has addressed this concern too.

Second, the analysis of policies, projects, initiatives undertaken by the government either jointly or on their own makes it a more suitable framework to reach the objective I have sought to meet by completing this study. Sen (2000, p. 33) has quite aptly pointed out the limitations of mechanical indices, and he has argued for an evaluation that does not disregard the indices, rather supplements the outcomes of indices with an analysis of policies, projects, and initiatives.

Third, Sen (2000, p. 246) has vehemently argued for the accommodation of cultural values in policymaking. While arguments that uphold cultural values and reject a universalist understanding of societies such as the 'Asian Values' can be deployed for the purpose of invalidating the universalist assumptions of five substantive freedoms, Sen has explained that cultural values cannot be the reason for rejecting his universalist assumptions of the five types of freedoms. He has located culture as a volatile element since cultures of different communities have been mixed for years (Sen, 2000, pp. 242-243). He has exemplified his argument by the example of chili, which never existed in India before the Portuguese brought it there. Pepper was used earlier in India, but now we have come to a

point where chili has become an integral part of Indian culinary. Moreover, even if cultural preservation and cultural values have to be decided, this should not be a monopolistic venture for the elites and the government. Through nationalist arguments, the government and its leaders often monopolize the claim of a nation. If cultural values have to be specified, this has to be done under the auspices of the people so that they can decide what they would like to preserve and what they would like to let go. The substantive freedoms such as being able to live longer, being able to read, being able to participate in policymaking etc. are the freedoms that provide us with opportunities for our improved well-being. This is why they are central to Development as Freedom and they are recommended by Sen (2000) for every individual. More importantly, Sen has not argued for a single way of achieving development. He has merely offered a framework for evaluating the conditions of a state considering the three aspects. If a traditional community has proper healthcare, literacy, education, political freedoms, economic freedom, income and gender equality, and employment opportunities, there is no way to criticize the lifestyle and the policies of such a traditional community. It is the conditions of a community that are under scrutiny here, not the lifestyle. It is true that Sen (2000, p. 152) makes a negative remark about the tribal communities by calling them 'primitive'. It is a mistake to regard any community underdeveloped without any proper evaluation. However, this remark does not discard the possibilities of Sen's framework and the way it helps us to conceptualize a method of evaluating development.

Fourth, Sen's framework offers us a method of evaluating the overall conditions of a state or a community. As we encounter growing complex issues relevant to inequality, gender, environment, and political freedoms, it becomes difficult to consider an evaluation of

overall conditions or aggregate measurements of a state to capture its progress of development. However, the evaluation of overall conditions is as important as the analysis of specific case studies. In fact, the example of an alternative political arrangement in a village of Bangladesh cannot be representative of the whole country. In order to make it more representative, it has to be explored if other villages of Bangladesh have also adopted the alternative arrangement. On the other hand, the evaluation of overall conditions provides us a more representative picture than a specific case study. Inequalities lie beneath the evaluation of overall conditions, but such an evaluation is still essential. In a policy case of targeting by the government to assist discriminated individuals, such an evaluation is the only way to explore the merits of the targeting policy. A specific case study from a village capturing the successful alternative political and social arrangements is useful in helping the government introduce a policy or an initiative to establish such political and social arrangements in other villages. Then again, the success of this initiative will require an overall or aggregate evaluation of all the involved villages. Besides, there is no understanding of whether those villages are experiencing difficulties without an evaluation of the overall conditions of a state. Lastly, the government involves the whole state. Thus, its policies have to be evaluated on an aggregate level.

Fifth, the central concern of political freedoms offers a different perspective in the evaluation. An evaluation of political freedoms helps us explore whether the citizens have had the opportunity to dictate the policies initiated by the government. Sen (2000, pp. 110-115) has argued that “the work of public evaluation cannot be replaced by some cunningly clever assumption”. For a country like Bangladesh which has experienced a gradual decline in its political freedoms, it is an important argument to be considered in the evaluation.

Previous applications of Sen (2000), such as Deneulin (2006) and Drèze & Sen (2013) have analyzed states that had functioning political freedoms at the time of evaluation. India has recently fallen in the category of ‘partly free’ country after the government’s massive repressive actions in the last year (Freedom House, 2020). Nonetheless, India has a score of 67 out of 100 in the recent Freedom in the World report. Similarly, Dominican Republic and Costa Rica had a functioning democracy too. For Bangladesh, it is a similar case of Álvarez (2020) who has focused on the dictatorship of Chile in her application of Development as Freedom. An overall evaluation following Sen’s framework not only allows us to capture the overall conditions in each of the three aspects, but also leads us to the outcomes showing whether the citizens of Bangladesh have had the opportunity to dictate the pathways of development. This has allowed me to produce the crucial analysis of limited political freedoms in Bangladesh to be used for revisiting the argument of ‘An Uncertain Glory’ by Drèze & Sen (2013).

Sixth, the perfectionist base of Development as Freedom makes it a more desired analytical framework. It can be argued that by keeping the option of criticism open, Sen has instead prioritized the liberalism of individuals in deciding the substantive freedoms they have reason to choose and value. Even if all other substantive freedoms are regarded as open for replacement by any other substantive freedoms, the primacy of political freedoms makes the framework a perfectionist one. However, the idea that it does not provide an exhaustive list of elements in the outline and the analysis does not mean that all other freedoms except the political freedoms are replaceable. Instead, the freedoms that should be added to Sen’s list after scrutiny will serve a supplementary role to this list. In this sense, the five substantive freedoms and its elements covered in the framework of Development as

Freedom have to be included in any evaluation of the overall condition of a state. The new elements can be added, but the old ones cannot be removed. Thus, Development as Freedom serves as a proper guideline for evaluation of the overall condition of a state. It is not a mere theoretical discussion, rather its scope is much broader. Given the focus of this study is on exploring the validity of economic and social advancement and the translation of this advancement to the political aspects of development in Bangladesh under the Awami regime, Development as Freedom offers the most suitable framework for analysis with a definite guideline of the five types of freedoms and the analysis of possible elements covered within these five types of freedoms. The application of this framework in Drèze & Sen (2013) has strengthened the use of these elements in evaluation. It has also broadened the range of elements covered under the five categories by adding some new elements. Sen (2000, p. 213-214) has also addressed the concern regarding rationally unfit citizens and the use of political participation, rather than escaping from it. In the question of how to ensure that citizens can utilize their political freedoms in the right way, he has referred to the French mathematician and Enlightenment thinker Condorcet. Condorcet has emphasized the value and contribution of education in making the citizens capable of better human reasoning. This adds the quality of education in a state as another central concern of the framework. More importantly, the evaluation of political freedoms based on the framework can offer the exploration of whether the citizens have had the opportunity to participate in the policymaking. A functioning democracy ensures that the government can be restrained from pursuing policies that do not address the concerns of the citizens. Political freedoms are crucial to “draw attention to the general needs and to demand

appropriate public action” (Sen, 2000, pp. 150-151). Participatory freedoms must be “central to public policy analysis” (Sen, 2000, p. 110).

Seventh, Development as freedom identifies the limitations of the current approaches as they are indifferent to the “excluded information” (Sen, 2000, p. 56). The five substantive freedoms include all basic elements that are deemed good for human well-being. Referring to W. S. Jevons, Sen (2000, p. 67) has argued that it is difficult to identify the common denominators that people have reason to choose and value based on individual preferences since “every mind is inscrutable to every other mind”. The problem of leaving the option of deciding the elements that are good for human well-being to different individuals is therefore problematic. The outlined categories of Sen (2000) do not entail a coercive notion too. It is about providing the citizens with the opportunities that guarantee a human life everyone has reason to value, known as the functionings (Sen, 2000, p. 75). Capabilities or the option to choose entails the liberal notion here that allows a human to choose if he would like to avail it or not. For instance, a high life expectancy allows a person to lead a comparatively long life. But he wants to commit suicide and end his life much earlier than the time his life was generally supposed to end, it is up to the individual’s choice. Sen (2000, p. 75) has illustrated this great differentiation by the example of fasting and starving. A person who fasts has the option to eat, whereas a person who starves is deprived of that option. Thus, a good condition of a state allows a person to lead a life they have reason to value. It is up to them whether they would like to lead it this way. There is no involvement of coercion here. As Sen (2000, p. 288) has argued, “Responsible adults must be in charge of their own well-being. It is for them to decide how to use their capabilities”. The state cannot escape its responsibility in ensuring the existence of the five types of freedoms (Sen,

2000, p. 288), and this is an argument which is inherently related to the premises of this study.

Eighth, Development as Freedom entails the establishment of a “plurality of institutions including democratic institutions, legal mechanisms, market structures, educational and health provisions, media and other communication facilities” (Sen, 2000, p. 53). Thus, the framework advocates “an integrated and multifaceted approach” which would aim to fulfill the goal of “making simultaneous progress on different fronts, including different institutions which reinforce each other” (Sen, 2000, p. 126-127). Peter Bauer’s argument (Bauer, 1957, pp. 113-114) of broadening the available choices to individuals has been used by Sen (2000, pp. 289-290) in this regard. How the elements included in his analysis reinforce each other has been elaborately explained by Sen (2000). I have not repeated that discussion here owing to space limitation.

Ninth, Development as Freedom rejects the naturalist perspective of humans. Rather, it adopts the nurturist view espoused by Adam Smith (Sen, 2000, p. 294). This means that individuals are born equal, it is the available opportunities that makes the difference in the trajectory of every human’s life. A person is not born naturally as more talented or skillful than another person. Education, and the five types of freedoms helps individuals achieve their goals.

This is not to argue that Development as Freedom is a flawless framework. Similar to Sen’s use of the term ‘primitive’, his explanation of why policymakers and the government in power will be ethically inclined to contribute to human well-being is vague and insufficient (Sen, 2000, p. 274). The only logical reason he has been able to show is that political freedoms work as a balancer to the unrestricted government power (Sen, 2000, p. 181).

Policymakers are supposed to be responsive towards the concern that they will not be elected again in the next election. It is vague to argue that the goal of public policy serving justice which would incline the policymakers. Public policy is not always shaped by the values of the public. If the policymakers decide to ignore the threat of removal, an undesired policy can be there, and the citizens would have to redress that.

Last but not the least, Development as Freedom debunks the debate regarding the relationship between economic growth and democracy. With the expansion of development's reach to all the three aspects - economic, social, and political aspects, it offers us an alternative framework of conceptualizing and evaluating development. In doing so, it rectifies the problem of defining development only as the advancement of the economic and the social aspects. More importantly, it establishes that there can be no logical rationale for discarding the importance of political freedoms in a society. It is a mistake to engage in the debate of prioritizing either economic growth or democratic practices. Development cannot be achieved when either of them are hampered.

Nonetheless, Development as Freedom offers the most suitable framework for evaluating the development of a state. Sen (2000) has used his outlined framework to evaluate change in a society. While his framework has also described and predicted the role of the substantive freedoms in generating rapid change and their implications for policy analysis (Sen, 2000, p. 297), I have used his way of evaluating change in this study for I have attempted to evaluate the change in Bangladesh under the Awami regime in terms of the economic, the social, and the political aspects.

2.3 An Uncertain Glory

Drèze & Sen (2013) have applied Sen's framework of Development as Freedom in the book 'An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions'. Since Sen (2000) had to invest much of the space and words in his book 'Development as Freedom' to draw the outline of his framework and explain the rationale behind their roles in human well-being, Drèze & Sen (2013) serves as an expanded version of the elements that can be found in the evaluation of India. It is indeed an elaborate application of Development as Freedom and it serves as a guideline of how to conduct the evaluation by applying the framework.

Drèze & Sen (2013) has evaluated the advancement of India since its independence. The examined timeline of the study is thus quite extensive. The theme of the book is "contingently optimistic", as the evaluation captures the achievements and the failures of India with the focus of exploring issues that needs attention. It is a reverberation of Sen (2000, p. 255) as he has argued that "Lessons can be learnt from what went wrong in order to do things better next time. Learning by doing is a great ally of the rationalist reformer". The core argument of the study is that India has attained an uncertain glory, which is mainly marked by a good record of economic growth and deep-lying inequality. India's birth was marked by violence, and there were concerns whether India would be able to sustain it with such intense communal violence (Drèze & Sen, 2013, p. 1). But India had become "the second fastest-growing largest economy of the world" in 2013 when the book was being written. Despite the high economic achievement, India has been marked by deep social inequalities. This has made India's glory an uncertain one. In their words, the uncertainty of India has not been because "an unblemished sunny day stands in danger of being ruined by a freshly arriving shower, as was feared by Proteus of Verona" (Drèze & Sen, 2013, p.

1). Rather, the uncertainty of India's glory has arisen "from the fact that together with the sunshine, there are dark clouds and drenching showers already on the scene" (Drèze & Sen, 2013, p. 1).

Therefore, they have evaluated both the achievements and the failures of India. In doing so, they have sought the answer to these questions – a) To what extent have India's old problems been eradicated? b) What remains to be done? and c) Are there new problems that India has to address? In order to answer these questions, Drèze & Sen (2013) has used empirical material such as indices and numerical representations. Along with the empirical material, they have also evaluated policies undertaken by the government in their study such as the NREGA (Drèze & Sen, 2013, p. 29) and the Right to Information Act (Drèze & Sen, 2013, p. 100).

A wide range of elements have been analyzed by Drèze & Sen (2013) such as reliable modern medicine, life expectancy, Information Communication and Technology, infant mortality, female literacy rate, GDP, per capita net income at constant prices, percentage of population living below the poverty line (p. 5), governmental censorship, circulation of newspapers (p. 7), production of power and meeting energy demands (p. 10), democratic structure (p. 12), education (p. 35), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (p. 42), Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, construction of nuclear power plants (pp. 92-93), corruption (p. 96), caste stratification and its implications (p. 213), gender and women issues (pp. 226-228), voter turnout rates (p. 249), number of newspapers, private satellite television channels, and FM radio corporations (p. 262) as well as democracy (pp. 265-268).

As we can see, Drèze & Sen (2013) plays a supplementary role to the elements covered by Sen (2000). As such, I have used the elements covered in these two books in my data analysis. Drèze & Sen (2013) has served as a better guideline since it also evaluates the advancement of India by applying the framework. I have used indices, numerical representations as well as government policies similar to Drèze & Sen (2013) in my evaluation. I have also made significant departures from their method of evaluation in certain cases. For instance, Drèze & Sen (2013) has evaluated policies based on both “intended and unintended consequences” whereas I have covered only the intended consequences. The analysis of unintended consequences requires deeper reflection and extensive coverage of one element. Thus, I have focused on intended consequences of policies only instead. Drèze & Sen (2013) have reflected on Bangladesh to explain the meagre numbers of India in certain cases. I have used these data in my analysis.

Most importantly, I have used the central theme of the term ‘An Uncertain Glory’ here to define my concluding remarks. India’s unmatching progress in the economic and the social aspects has been regarded as an uncertain glory of India by Drèze & Sen (2013). In fact, their amazement with India’s democracy and politically free society (based on the record of Freedom House, 2014) has bolstered the meagre numbers in the social aspects of India. In the next three chapters, I analyze the advancement of Bangladesh in terms of economic, social and political aspects in the way how Drèze & Sen (2013) have conducted their analysis.

Chapter 3: Economic Facilities under the Awami Regime (2009-2020)

As I have identified in the outline of the development as freedom approach, economic facilities is the only freedom that should be considered for evaluating the economic aspects of development. Previously, I have explored that Bangladesh has been popularly acclaimed for its economic advancement. The central purpose of this chapter is to explore whether the claims of economic advancement under the Awami regime are indeed valid. As Sen (2000, p. 14) has argued, the framework does not disregard the role of economic growth in development, rather it appreciates it as a measurement of a state's positive advancement. In the first section, I analyze mechanical indices and numerical representations capturing the overall conditions of economic facilities in Bangladesh. I explore the possible public action relevant to economic facilities in the second section. Drawing from the data included in these two sections, I conclude in the third section that the claims of overall economic advancement of Bangladesh are indeed valid and Bangladesh has achieved such advancement owing to the government's deliberate policymaking.

3.1 Indices and Numerical Representations

I have mostly resorted to the indices and numerical representations Drèze & Sen (2013, p. 4) have used for evaluating economic growth here. The Index of Economic Freedom was not covered by Drèze & Sen (2013), but I have used it since it forms an important part of Sen (2000, p. 122). The Index of Economic Freedom draws our attention to the "political power of the groups that obtain substantial material benefits from restricting trade and

exchange” (Sen, 2000, p. 122). I have studied poverty in a slightly different way than Drèze & Sen (2013, pp. 73-74).

Although the first two years under the regime (2010 and 2011) experienced a GDP growth of less than 6 percent, the growth has been greater than 6 in every other year (Table 1.1). While the regime was able to sustain a GDP growth of more than 6 percent per year, the last three years saw a growth greater than 7.2. The growth went down from the earlier regimes in 2009 as the Awami League took power. Since then, there has been a constant increase in the GDP growth of Bangladesh.

In all other general economic indicators such as Gross National Income (GNI) Per Capita, Per Capita GDP (PPP), and Foreign Exchange Reserves, the growth of Bangladesh has been more than twofold. For example, the Foreign Exchange Reserves of Bangladesh stood at 5.787 Billion US\$ in 2008 (Table 1.2). By 2019, it had grown massively to the huge figure of 32.697 Billion USD within the span of only ten years.

Against the background of massive economic growth, Bangladesh has experienced a slight increase in wealth inequality in these years. The worst possible year in terms of wealth inequality is 2016. Bangladesh experienced a significant increase in wealth inequality that year, but it was successful in balancing it in the successive year by recording the lowest record of wealth inequality in the last eleven years (Table 1.2). Overall, inequality has remained the same. The Awami regime has neither been able to reduce much of it, nor it has let inequality rise higher at a steep rate. Income inequality has also remained almost the same in the last eleven years (Table 1.3).

Table 1.1

Growth Rates of Bangladesh's GDP at Constant Prices (% Per Year)

Year	GDP	Per Capita GDP
2003	4.74	2.942
2004	5.24	3.553
2005	6.536	4.966
2006	6.672	5.245
2007	7.059	5.753
2008	6.014	4.806
2009	5.045	3.879
2010	5.572	4.391
2011	6.464	5.254
2012	6.521	5.299
2013	6.014	4.795
2014	6.061	4.856
2015	6.553	5.367
2016	7.113	5.947
2017	7.284	6.136
2018	7.864	6.733
2019	8.153	7.045

Source: The World Bank (2021e; 2021f)

Table 1.2

Bangladesh in Some Economic Indicators

Year	GDP (constant 2010 US\$, Billion)	GNI Per Capita (Atlas Method, Current US\$)	Per Capita GDP (PPP) (current international US\$)	Foreign Exchange Reserves (Current US\$, Billion, Includes Golds)	Wealth Inequality Gini Coefficient (out of 1)
2008	103.951	660	2206.510	5.787	N/A
2009	109.195	730	2309.564	10.342	N/A
2010	115.279	800	2439.070	11.175	0.656
2011	122.731	890	2620.834	9.175	0.650
2012	130.735	970	2937.629	12.754	0.647
2013	138.597	1040	3143.586	18.088	0.646
2014	146.997	1110	3368.056	22.32	0.678
2015	156.630	1220	3555.505	27.493	0.630
2016	167.771	1370	3848.958	32.284	0.786
2017	179.992	1520	4160.703	33.431	0.579
2018	194.146	1750	4547.480	32.028	0.671
2019	209.974	1940	4954.761	32.697	0.678

Source: The World Bank (2021d; 2021g; 2021h; 2021ag) and Credit Suisse Research Institute (2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019)

Proportion of population living under the national poverty lines, under 1.90 US\$ a day, and under 3.20 US\$ has decreased by around 20 percent and more in the last fifteen years (Table 1.4). However, the proportion of population living under 5.50 US\$ has decreased by only 7 percent. The proportion of population living under 5.50 US\$ needs to be addressed and this has to be decreased at a greater pace.

Table 1.3
Income Inequality in Bangladesh

Year	Gini Coefficient of Income Inequality (out of 1)	Gini Coefficient of Income Inequality in Rural Areas (out of 1)	Gini Coefficient of Income Inequality in Urban Areas (out of 1)	Theil Index of Income Inequality (out of ∞ , where $\infty = 1$)	Theil Index of Income Inequality in Rural Areas (out of ∞ , where $\infty = 1$)	Theil Index of Income Inequality in Urban Areas (out of ∞ , where $\infty = 1$)
2000	0.31	0.27	0.37	0.18	0.13	0.26
2005	0.31	0.28	0.35	0.19	0.15	0.22
2010	0.30	0.27	0.33	0.17	0.14	0.21
2016	0.31	0.29	0.32	0.19	0.18	0.19

Source: The World Bank (2018)

Table 1.4
Poverty Headcount Ratio in Bangladesh

	2000	2005	2010	2016	2018	2019
Poverty Headcount Ratio at National	48.9	40.0	31.5	24.3	21.8	20.5
Poverty Lines (% of Population)						
Poverty Headcount Ratio at \$1.90 a Day (2011 PPP, % of Population)	34.2	25.1	18.5	14.8	N/A	N/A
Poverty Headcount Ratio at \$3.20 a Day (2011 PPP, % of Population)	72.3	65.8	60	52.3	N/A	N/A
Poverty Headcount Ratio at \$5.50 a Day (2011 PPP, % of Population)	91.5	89.2	87.6	84.2	N/A	N/A

Source: The World Bank (2021w; 2021x; 2021y; 2021z); Asian Development Bank (2020; 2021)

There has been a sharp increase in the overall score for Bangladesh (Table 1.5) in the Index of Economic Freedom. Almost all elements considered in the index have improved. However, there are concerns regarding certain areas. The first is Tax Burden which has remained almost the same with a decrease of 0.1 score over the last eleven years. Fiscal Health has also been slightly shaken under the regime with a slight decrease in the score. The element of business freedom has experienced a downfall from 62.9 to 50.9 under the regime. The situation has worsened in the last five years as Bangladesh had significantly improved its score by 2014, progressing from 62.9 to 70.8. Since then, the score has degraded to 50.9 within an extremely short period of time. The score of investment freedom has also experienced occasional hiccups. While the regime made an outstanding progress within only one year by improving the score from 20.0 to 45.0 in 2010, no progress has been made in this element since 2011.

After having a deadlock score of 20.0 for consecutive eight years, the score boomed directly to 34.9 in 2017. Monetary freedom has slightly improved and trade freedom has seen a notable improvement. From a score of 40.2 in 2009, it jumped to 58.0 in the successive year. Although the next two years saw a slight decrease, the regime has been able to maintain a score above 60 since 2016.

However, after the general election of 2018, 182 businessmen were elected in the parliament out of the 300 seats (Prothom Alo, 2019a; Table 1.6). This is interrelated to the decreasing business freedom in Bangladesh. As Sen (2000, pp. 116-122) has pointed out, the political power of interest groups has to be examined to determine the existence of market freedom. In order to secure one's own economic and business interests, exercising political influence is a very common practice (Sen, 2000, p. 126). When it becomes a

businessmen's parliament, the business freedom is supposed to sharply go down. The same has happened in Bangladesh. In many cases, there are influential and power interest groups who try to influence political decisions in order to serve their own interests. Needless to say, business freedom has spiraled downwards for this reason.

The fact gets more interesting when it is explored that 174 businessmen lawmakers out of the 182 belong to the ruling Awami regime (Prothom Alo, 2019a). But it is necessary to say here that the very low number of parliament members from opposition parties and the artificial construction of an opposition party does not make any difference to the percentage of businessmen parliament members belonging to the ruling regime. After significantly sidelining its main opposition the BNP and the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI) by 2013, the Awami regime took the chance of creating an artificial opposition party from its own pool of coalition members. As the BNP had refused to participate in the 2014 general elections, the Jatiya Party split from the Grand Alliance coalition of the Awami regime. Instead, the percentage of businessmen among all parliament members is important which stands at 61.07% in the current parliament. This has been a constant trend in the politics of Bangladesh that more than half of the parliament members were businessmen. The last time the percentage was less than fifty (47.8) was when Awami League became victorious in the 1996 general election. The percentage of lawyers have remained the same, and the percentage of landlords have decreased from 5 to 4 between the general elections of 2014 and 2018. But in the last two general elections, the percentage has significantly increased as the 2014 election had elected 59.0% businessmen parliament members whereas it was 53.5% in the 2009 election. The absence of politicians in profession is another significant drawback.

The dominant structural power of the businesspeople has resulted in several loan defaults, poor debt recovery, and various irregularities in public and private banks (Ahmed, 2019). The structural power has come at the cost of diminished organizational power of workers (Ahmed, 2019). The opportunities of workers' protests and demonstrations has experienced a significant decline.

Table 1.5

Bangladesh in the Index of Economic Freedom											
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Overall Score	47.5	51.1	53.0	53.2	52.6	54.1	53.9	53.3	55.0	55.1	55.6
Property Rights	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	34.9	32.4	36.1
Government Integrity	21.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	27.0	23.3	27.0	25.0	19.1	21.2	24.4
Judicial Effectiveness	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	26.0	32.6	34.5
Tax Burden	72.8	72.8	72.7	72.8	72.7	72.5	72.7	72.7	72.8	72.7	72.7
Government Spending	94.2	93.9	92.4	93.9	92.1	92.3	92.0	93.6	94.0	94.2	94.5
Fiscal Health	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	78.7	78.9	77.6
Business Freedom	62.9	59.4	65.0	68.5	68.0	70.8	62.2	52.6	53.4	52.1	50.9
Labor Freedom	52.3	53.8	54.3	55.9	51.9	51.9	63.7	62.5	68.7	66.4	68.2
Monetary Freedom	67.3	66.6	68.6	67.5	65.4	65.9	67.7	68.2	68.6	69.0	69.9
Trade Freedom	40.2	58.0	58.0	54.0	54.0	59.0	59.0	63.6	63.6	61.2	63.6
Investment Freedom	20.0	45.0	55.0	55.0	55.0	55.0	45.0	45.0	50.0	50.0	45.0
Financial Freedom	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	30.0	30.0	30.0	30.0	30.0	30.0

Source: The Heritage Foundation (2021)

Table 1.6
Professions of Parliament Members in the Bangladesh National Parliament (%)

	Businessman	Lawyer	Professionals	Landlords	Politics	Other
1973-1975	23.7	26.5	30.7*	2.8	12.7	3.6
1991-1995	59.4	18.8	15.5	3.9	2.0	0.4
1996-2001	47.8	14.8	8.5	6.9	3.1	18.9
2001-2006	52.1	8.7	8.4	8.4	2.1	20.3
2009-2013	53.5	13.1	6.4	7.5	6.1	13.4
2014-2018	59.0	13.0	–	5.0	–	23.0
2019-Present	61.0	13.0	5.0	4.0	–	17.0

Source: Firoj (2013) and F. Ahmed (2019)

* Professionals includes farmers (14.8%), services (0.7%), teachers (9.9%) and doctors (5.3%)

3.2 Public Action

The crux of development policymaking under the Awami regime has been formed by the ten fast-track projects. Participant 6 has specifically emphasized the term ‘fast-track’ projects, while Participant 5 has drawn attention to some of these fast-track projects including the Metro Rail project, the Padma Bridge, and the Rampal Power Plant. According to her –

“Aspects of structural development have been emphasized a lot under the Awami regime. We can count it under the umbrella of economic development, as structural development is one of the components of economic development. In terms of structural development, the government has attempted to construct many bridges and infrastructures where a large amount of money has been involved. One of the common examples of this is the Padma

Bridge which is a huge project, involving nearly 400 billion BDT. Another example is the Metro Rail project which has an approximate budget of 220 billion BDT”

These fast-track projects are the top priority projects for Bangladesh, and these projects have been emphasized by the Awami regime based on the argument that these will bring about positive changes in people’s livelihood and bolster the economic growth (Zakaria, 2020). Initially, these fast-track projects were – the Padma Bridge, the Dhaka City Metro Rail, the 1000 MW Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, 1320 MW Rampal Coal Power Plant, the Sonadia Deep Sea port, and the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Gas Terminal for Importing Liquid Gas as the regime set the priority of these projects in 2014 and ordered the government to work accordingly (Bangladesh Awami League, 2014). Later in 2016, the government budget allocated no money to the LNG Gas Terminal project and the Sonadia Deep Sea port (Tusher, 2016). Instead, they were replaced by four other projects – the Padma Bridge Rail Link, the Payra Sea Port, the Matarbari Coal Power Plant, and the Dohazari-Cox’s Bazar-Gundum Rail Line. As per the words of the Bangladesh Minister of Road Transport and Bridges – Obaidul Quader, the Karnaphuli Tunnel and some flyovers are also included in the list of fast-track projects (BSS, 2021). The rationale behind pursuing these projects have been mostly economic. Saif (2021) has written that the implementation of all fast-track projects is supposed to add 2% to the GDP of Bangladesh whereas BSS (2021) has noted that the construction of the Padma Bridge only is supposed to boost the country’s GDP to 1.5-2% according to the experts. It is not entirely certain what the exact contribution of these fast-track projects will be. However, the rationale and the intention behind implementing these projects has been mainly the advancement of economic growth. GDP growth has prevailed in the backing behind these projects.

The construction of the two power plants have been extensively debated, but the concerns behind these two projects have been sidelined by the argument that Bangladesh requires more power to sustain its economic growth (The Financial Express, 2021). The Awami regime has made significant progress in the sector of electricity and power since 2009. As Imam (2021) has noted, the capacity of power generation was extremely little back in 2009, when the regime took control of the government. The years of 2008-2010 was marred with an extreme level of power crisis (Mirza, 2020, p. 120), and load-shedding was an inherent part of everyday human lives. Starting from a capacity of 5,500 MW for 150 million population in 2009, the regime made a remarkable progress of supplying around 8,300 MW power in 2016 (S. Khan, 2016). The progress seems more remarkable with the fact that Bangladesh was able to avail only 3,500 MW power of its 5,500 MW capacity back in 2009. The result of this has been extra ordinary. Based on personal experiences, the urban areas have forgotten what chronic load-shedding felt like during the heat waves of summer. Power generation should be regarded as an area that has been significantly improved under the Awami regime. While it has constructed new power plants such as the Siddhirganj Power Plant to boost its capacity (World Bank, 2019), the increasingly high demands for supplying power have been mostly met by contracting with Quick Rental Power Plants (QRPPs) (Mujeri & Chowdhury, 2013). The major strategy of the regime has been focused on the costly QRPPs, and this has contributed significantly to avert the energy crisis of 2017-2018. Although there have been discussions about alternative options other than the QRPPs (Mirza, 2020, pp. 128-130), the policy undertaken by the regime has worked pretty well, and this has been a significant achievement.

However, the power utilization under the regime has been criticized as the government has paid penalty amounts to the producers for keeping their plants unused (Imam, 2021). In order to meet the high demands and reduce load-shedding, the regime has now come to a point where there is additional power supply for the government to distribute. But unless there is a potential customer who needs such amount of power, the government is losing a significant amount of money in penalty payments to the QRPPs. In order to address this under-utilization, the regime has decided to close the QRPPs by 2024 (Dhaka Tribune, 2021b).

The Dhaka Metro Rail Project is supposed to save 2.4 billion US\$ (200 billion BDT) a year for the Bangladesh economy, which would entail around 1.5% of the GDP and 17% of the tax revenue being saved every year (Kamruzzaman, 2019). In fact, traffic jam and extremely poor public transit services have been an issue of objection by citizens for a long time. As Kamruzzaman (2019) has noted, traffic jam causes a massive loss of 4.4 billion US\$ every year, which forms around 11% of the national budget. For a long time, the Dhaka city have had no mass rapid transit system (Sultana, 2013). The citizens would have to largely depend on rickshaws for short-distance commuting, and long-distance commuting will often involve bus, minibus, or autorickshaws (usually called CNGs owing to its Compressed Natural Gas (CNG)-run engine) (Antara, 2021). The use of rickshaws and private cars in Dhaka is mostly prevalent owing to the scarcity of public transports (Antara, 2021). Considering the prevalence of huge traffic jam, and the lack of public transport services in Dhaka, construction of the Metro Rail seems to be a timely project. Although the project entails improving the social and everyday conditions of human lives, its economic impact has been highlighted the most in government speeches. This has not

been the only policy undertaken by the regime to address the needs of the broken transport system in Dhaka (S. Mamun, 2018a; S. Mamun, 2018b). A 1997 policy of enfranchising the public transport system was returned by the Awami League's Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Anisul Haque in 2015 (The Daily Star, 2016; Akhter, 2020), but his sudden demise left its implementation on hold. This policy has been lauded as a measure to restrain the unregulated independent private bus services in Dhaka that are mainly run by small companies (Mithu, 2020). There has been opposition from small companies on the grounds that the franchising policy is an oligopolistic venture to seize the megacity transport business (Akhter, 2020). Nonetheless, the government has tried to improve the inadequate public transport.

The other fast-track projects undertaken by the Awami regime mostly involve infrastructural development. The Padma Bridge Rail Link, the Matarbari Coal Power Plant, the Karnaphuli Tunnel, the Elevated Expressway in Dhaka, and the Payra Sea Port, all these projects have been allocated a huge amount of money (Saif, 2021). These projects and the prioritization of them over other projects as 'fast-track' signifies the preference of economic and infrastructural development under the Awami regime. Participant 1, Participant 5 (see pp. 62-63), and Participant 6 have highlighted the core agenda of these projects as purely economic and infrastructural. In response to the question of whether the Awami regime has prioritized any of the three aspects in its policymaking, Participant 1 answered that, "The most emphasis has been put on the economic aspects. This is possibly owing to an understanding that stagnation in the economic aspects is the major challenge for the people. These projects have been implemented to avert possible stagnation." According to Participant 6 –

“The government has put an extensive focus on economic growth or GDP growth. The fast-track projects represent this focus. The highly publicized Padma Bridge, the Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit, the Elevated Expressway, the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, the Rampal Coal Power Plant, and the Karnaphuli Tunnel – all of them show us that the government has prioritized economic aspects more than the other two aspects.”

Bangladesh Bank – the national bank of Bangladesh has contributed to the financial sector by a 2011 Mobile Financial Services (MFS) reform (Mahmood, 2021; Alliance for Financial Inclusion, 2020). The reform has increased the value of monetary transactions in Bangladesh fifteen times between 2013 and 2020. This has also eased the transaction opportunities between distantly situated individuals, and the rural population (Alliance for Financial Inclusion, 2020). The regime has also opened up some previously entirely public sectors to the private sectors – such as banking, health, and higher education (S. Rahman, 2019).

The measurement of national poverty line in Bangladesh has also been debated (M. Ahmed, 2020). The country has continued to use its mathematically complex national poverty line by defining an upper and a lower poverty lines based on two levels of consumption expenditures of households (M. Ahmed 2020). This is known as the ‘Cost of Basic Needs’ (CBN) approach of measuring poverty which has been conducted by The Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) for a long time but the Awami regime has not introduced any new measures regarding this. As Mahmud has argued, the “poverty line needs to be redefined” since the real estimation of people living under poverty would be significantly higher if international standards were the basis of evaluation (The Daily Star, 2018a). Table 1.4 has shown us that it is indeed true. The poverty headcount of population

living under 1.90US\$ a day is lower than the proportion of people living under national poverty lines depicts that the national poverty line is better than this measurement. But the national poverty line measurement becomes significantly problematic when the other international standards such as living under 3.20US\$ or under 5.50US\$ are considered as the basis of measurement. The record of Bangladesh has been meagre under these two standards, and this needs to be addressed by the government in its own measurement of poverty.

The government adopted the National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA) to improve the governance of the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector after the Rana Plaza incident in 2013 (S. Rahman, 2020, p. 107). The Rana Plaza was an RMG factory which collapsed on April 24, 2013 causing at least 1,134 deaths (Hoskins, 2015). The noncompliance of building standards and the shattering effects on the lives of garment laborers led to public and international outcry about the RMG sector in Bangladesh. The government immediately responded to the outcry and adopted the NTPA on July 25, 2013. The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishment (DIFE) was strengthened as per the NTPA and it was upgraded from a directorate to a department under the Ministry of Labor and Employment on January 24, 2014 (Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishment, 2021). The initiation of the 'National Initiative' for inspecting 1,549 factories by the government has also been a positive move towards addressing the concern (S. Rahman, 2020, p. 108). The government has also collaborated with the International Labor Organization (ILO) program of 'Better Work Bangladesh' to improve labor law and standards (Better Work, 2021). The Remediation Coordination Cell (RCC) has also been

formed by the government in collaboration with the ILO to offer technical support in the improvement of structural compliance and integrity of factories (S. Rahman, 2020, p. 108).

3.3 Economic Growth without Business Freedom

The Awami regime has made significant progress in terms of economic advancement. The high achievements of GDP growth, Per Capita GDP growth, high foreign exchange reserves, and the effort to meet the demands of power suggest that Bangladesh has attained significant progress in these elements. Drèze & Sen (2013, p. 1-16) have argued that the significant economic progress of India after the 1990s have resulted in a new India, which is much different and highly prosperous than the old India. The achievements have been even better than what they have acclaimed India for. For instance, the incidence of countrywide blackout on July 30-31, 2012 have been a serious drawback for India despite having good records in the economic indicators. But Bangladesh has never experienced a blackout under the Awami regime, whereas the formerly hampering load-shedding has vanished in the last few years.

The controversies about the standard national method of measuring inequality remains a problem that needs to be addressed in the arena of public action. The government has responded to the globally infamous Rana Plaza incident immediately, and it has implemented changes to enact the governance of RMG factories. It can be questioned whether this has happened without the efforts of the international actors involved in the process of RMG purchases and ethics. But it is not easy to enact new changes, especially when the interests of businesspeople are put at stake. The regime has surely acted as a response to the huge pressure and criticism it had faced at that time, but it has tried to

address this concern, and find ways of averting horrendous incidents like the collapse of Rana Plaza.

The massive growth of GDP, GNI per capita, capture some great highlight of the economic advancement it has achieved under the Awami regime. Although until 2015, the economic growth of Bangladesh was not higher than what the last BNP regime had achieved during its rule from 2001 till 2006, Bangladesh is currently in a position where it can also be regarded as embarking on the journey to become a ‘new Bangladesh’. However, the growth has to be sustained in order to fulfill this journey.

The lack of business freedom and its implications on the organization power of workers is another highlight of the economic aspects of development under the Awami regime. A power imbalance has been created throughout these years, and the well-connected industries and businessperson have now become stronger than ever. Coupled with political power, the economic power of money has pushed them further towards corruption such as defaulting loans. As Ahmed (2019) has put, “the process of effective electoral management has become severely endangered” owing to this.

Chapter 4: Social Opportunities and Protective Security under the Awami Regime (2009-2020)

I analyze relevant indices and numerical representations pertaining to the substantial freedoms of ‘Social Opportunities’ and ‘Protective Security’ here. In the last chapter, I have analyzed the indices, numerical representations, and policymaking of Bangladesh in terms of economic development. Some elements of the public action can be overlapping as the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant and the Rampal Coal Power Plant involve both the concerns of serious environmental damages and the prospects of meeting high energy demands.

The central concern of this chapter is to explore whether the claims of social advancement under the Awami regime are valid. Another focus of this chapter is to explore what parts of the social advancement have been brought about by the government in particular. As Drèze & Sen (2013, p. 59) has argued, many major social advancements of Bangladesh have happened because of the great effort put up by different NGOs and microfinance institutions. Based on Sen’s framework, it is necessary to appraise the overall conditions of Bangladesh in terms of all three aspects of development. This chapter deals with the overall conditions of social advancement in Bangladesh.

4.1 Indices and Numerical Representations

Drèze & Sen (2013, pp. 51-56) has offered a definitive guideline of the elements that has to be included in the evaluation of a state’s social advancement. In fact, their coverage of elements belonging to the social aspects is much more definitive than their coverage of

elements belonging to the economic aspects. Perhaps the wide-ranging numerical data belonging to the economic aspects of development is a major challenge in this case. It seems there is a consensus or common ground of relevant social indicators. But the wide variation of economic indicators and the variation of their uses poses the problem of having a common ground. As such, numerical data collection for the relevant social indicators has been easier. However, numerical data for some economic indicators such as the government expenditure on health services as a percent of the whole government expenditure was unavailable. I have had to rely on the data showing the government expenditure on education, health services, social protection, and military as a percent of GDP, rather than as a percent of government expenditure to have a common ground for comparison.

The growth of life expectancy at birth in Bangladesh has been remarkable. Even at an average life expectancy of 69.49 years, the growth percentage per year remained about 0.56 for five years until 2013 (Table 2.1). Even after 2013, life expectancy has grown at the steady pace of 0.38 percent per year. Besides, Bangladesh has significantly decreased both infant and under-5 mortality rate. Its fairly effective noncoercive family planning program (Drèze & Sen, 2013, p. 64) has been successful in continuing the downgrade of fertility rate. It has improved the percentage of population using at least basic sanitation services. However, the percentage of population using safely managed drinking water has seen a slight decrease which should be a worrying issue amidst all these social advancements.

The mean years of schooling for people aged over 25 years have considerably improved. While the mean years of schooling for both male and female have improved, it would take

time for women to catch up with men in terms of schooling. Women have sustained a surprisingly high literacy rate, and they are well ahead than men in this aspect (Table 2.1). Despite the prevalence of patriarchal social values, the excellent record of female literacy is definitely one of the most positive signs of social advancement in Bangladesh. Both male and female literacy rate have increased, so has the average literacy rate. Advancement of these social elements in Bangladesh have been remarkable, and this still has to be praised as Drèze & Sen (2013, p. 59) had argued seven years earlier.

The prevalence of underweight children has decreased significantly in the last eleven years. The most significant advancement has been the decrease in the percentage of underweight female children. The percentage of underweight female children was 42.0 in 2011 compared to the 40.6 percent underweight male children. The percentage came down to 27.9 in 2019 compared to the 28.0 percent underweight male children. The government has been able to sustain the high percentage of 12-23 months old children's immunization of Diphtheria Pertussis Tetanus (DPT). The 93 percent immunization of DPT in 12-23 months children in 2009 has improved to 97 percent in 2019.

Unemployment rate in Bangladesh has had a very sluggish improvement over the years (Table 2.2). Starting at the rate of 4.29 in 2008, it came down to only 4.22 over the course of twelve years in 2019. Unemployment rate were the best during the 2010 and 2011 as it had fallen down to nearby 3.5. The deprivation of females and the inequality of employment that women experience have been sharp as mostly women have been unemployed. While female unemployment rate was 6.78 in 2008, it has come down to 6.65 only in 2019. Female unemployment rate had significantly improved in 2010 as it drastically came down to 4.4 from 7.39 in the previous year. The record of female

Table 2.1

Bangladesh in Some Social Indicators

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Life Expectancy at Birth (Years)	69.49	69.88	70.26	70.61	70.93	71.23	71.51	71.79	72.05	72.32	72.59
Growth in Life Expectancy (%)	0.57	0.57	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.39
Life Expectancy at Birth (Years for Female)	70.77	71.26	71.72	72.16	72.57	72.96	73.32	73.66	73.98	74.29	74.60
Life Expectancy at Birth (Years for Male)	68.37	68.69	69.00	69.27	69.53	69.76	69.98	70.19	70.41	70.64	70.88
Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births)	40.5	38.6	36.8	35.1	33.5	32.1	30.6	29.3	28.0	26.7	25.6
Under-5 Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births)	51.5	48.7	46.1	43.8	41.6	39.5	37.5	35.7	33.9	32.3	30.8
Total Fertility Rate (Children per woman)	2.38	2.32	2.27	2.23	2.19	2.15	2.12	2.09	2.06	2.04	2.01

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Population Using at least Basic Sanitation Services (%)	37.86	39.21	40.54	41.86	43.17	44.46	45.74	47.00	48.23	N/A	N/A
Population Using Safely Managed Drinking Water Services (%)	55.78	55.75	55.71	55.67	55.63	55.59	55.54	55.49	55.44	N/A	N/A
Mean Years of Schooling, age 25+	4.8	5.3	5.7	5.8	5.5	5.2	5.8	5.9	6.1	6.1	6.2
Mean Years of Schooling (Female), age 25+	N/A	4.5	4.8	4.9	4.7	4.4	5.1	5.2	5.2	5.3	5.7
Mean Years of Schooling (Male), age 25+	N/A	5.5	6.6	6.7	6.3	5.6	6.5	6.6	6.7	6.8	6.9
Literacy Rate, Age 15-24 (%)	N/A	N/A	77.99	77.83	85.53	85.56	87.89	92.24	92.95	93.80	94.86
Literacy Rate, Age 15-24, Female (%)	N/A	N/A	79.54	79.37	86.93	86.48	89.54	93.54	94.38	94.91	96.09

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Literacy Rate, Age 15-24, Male (%)	N/A	N/A	76.40	76.28	84.09	84.63	86.19	90.91	91.54	91.80	93.71
Prevalence of Underweight Children (% of children under 5)	N/A	N/A	36.7	N/A	35.1	32.8	N/A	N/A	N/A	21.9	22.6
Prevalence of Underweight Male Children (% of children under 5)	N/A	N/A	34.8	N/A	33.4	32.3	N/A	N/A	N/A	21.7	22.4
Prevalence of Underweight Female Children (% of children under 5)	N/A	N/A	38.6	N/A	36.9	33.4	N/A	N/A	N/A	22.1	22.9
Prevalence of Stunting (% of Children under 5)	N/A	N/A	41.3	N/A	38.7	36.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	30.9	28.0

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Pre- valence of Stunting – Male Children (% of children under 5)	N/A	N/A	40.6	N/A	39.6	36.8	N/A	N/A	N/A	30.8	28.0
Pre- valence of Stunting Female Children (% of children under 5)	N/A	N/A	42.0	N/A	37.8	35.5	N/A	N/A	N/A	30.9	27.9
Immuniz ation, DPT (% of 12-23 months children)	97	94	96	94	96	97	98	98	98	98	98
Immuniz ation, Measles (% of 12- 23 months children)	93	88	93	88	91	94	97	97	97	97	97

Source: The World Bank (2021aa; 2021ab; 2021ac; 2021ad; 2021ae; 2021af; 2021b; 2021j; 2021k; 2021l; 2021m; 2021n; 2021o; 2021p; 2021q; 2021s; 2021t; 2021u; 2021v)

unemployment rate in Bangladesh has been meagre over the years, and there has been no significant improvement. Although the overall unemployment rate has not been as meagre as the rate of female unemployment, there has been nothing to be happy about this. Overall, it can be said that there has been no significant improvement in this area. The government

needs to address this issue and try to ameliorate the recurring unemployment problem in order to achieve better records of social advancement.

Table 2.2

Unemployment Rate of Bangladesh

Year	Unemployment Rate (% of total labor force)	Unemployment Rate (% of female labor force)	Unemployment Rate (% of male labor force)
2008	4.29	6.78	3.47
2009	5.00	7.39	4.19
2010	3.38	4.44	3.01
2011	3.71	5.41	3.10
2012	4.06	6.45	3.18
2013	4.43	7.61	3.23
2014	4.39	7.51	3.20
2015	4.38	7.46	3.17
2016	4.35	7.38	3.13
2017	4.37	6.75	3.35
2018	4.29	6.65	3.26
2019	4.22	6.65	3.20

Source: The World Bank (2021ah; 2021ai; 2021aj)

Bangladesh has made significant improvements in different social indices such as the HDI and the Global Gender Gap Index (Table 2.3). With a score of 0.543, the position of Bangladesh was not at all good in 2009. Over the eleven years, the state has made significant progress in the HDI with the latest score of 0.632 in 2019. Bangladesh has also been able to close its gender gap down according to its record in the Global Gender Gap

Table 2.3

Bangladesh in the Social Indices

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
HDI	0.543	0.557	0.566	0.575	0.579	0.579	0.595	0.599	0.616	0.625	0.632
Global Gender Gap Index	0.65	0.670	0.681	0.668	0.685	0.697	0.704	0.698	0.719	0.721	0.726

Source: UNDP (2009; 2010; 2011; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2018; 2019; 2020); Hausman, Tyson &

Zahidi (2009; 2010; 2012) World Economic Forum (2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018a; 2019)

Table 2.4

Government Expenditure on Different Sectors of Bangladesh (% of GDP)

Year	Education	Health Services	Social Protection	Military
2009	1.939	2.403	2.25	1.157
2010	N/A	2.496	2.42	1.321
2011	2.133	2.566	2.64	1.356
2012	2.175	2.573	2.40	1.324
2013	1.966	2.503	2.23	1.258
2014	N/A	2.496	2.26	1.279
2015	N/A	2.463	2.02	1.351
2016	1.536	2.312	2.08	1.372
2017	N/A	2.275	2.09	1.243
2018	N/A	2.343	2.17	1.282
2019	1.326	N/A	2.54	1.344

Source: The World Bank (2021a; 2021i; 2021r) and Social Security Policy Support Program (2021)

Index. It had a score of 0.73 out of 1 in the Global Gender Gap Index in 2019 compared to its score of 0.65 in 2009, and 0.70 in 2014. It is important to note here that the inequality measurement of the Global Gender Gap Index is opposite to the way Gini Coefficient calculates inequality. For instance, 0 represents perfect equality in the Gini Coefficient and 1 represents perfect inequality. But 1 represents maximum equality and 0 represents maximum inequality in the Global Gender Gap Index.

However, government expenditure on different sectors in the last eleven years deserves some criticism (Table 2.4). Despite achieving high economic growth, the government has significantly decreased its expenditure on education. Its expenditure on health services has also slightly decreased, but not as high as the percentage of decrease on education. Military has received an increased amount of allocation from the government over the last eleven years. Expenditure on social security has also slightly increased. But the neglect of education is visible in the numerical representations. Although the expenditure on education had slightly increased in 2011 and 2012, the number has fallen down from 1.939 in 2009 to 1.326 in 2019.

Last but not the least, Bangladesh has advanced in terms of overall food production according to the Food Production Index, prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (Table 2.5). Sen (2000) has invested a large amount of discussion to emphasize the importance of famine and how famine can be prevented. While he acknowledges that famine is “a highly divisive issue” (2000, p. 168), the analysis of famine requires a measurement of food production and food security in order to determine whether there are any possible chances of famine in the upcoming days. We need to take the necessary measures to tackle famine only when we know that the food production and food

security conditions are poor in a state. For instance, the Maharashtra government took emergency employment measures in 1973 to tackle the problem of a decline in per capita food output in order to prevent a possible famine (Sen, 2000, p. 180). Since the conditions have been very good in Bangladesh, such public action have not been required so far. The Awami regime's emphasis on food production has been evident in the five-year plans announced by the governments, where "raising agricultural productivity, fostering diversification, ensuring food and nutritional security, sustainable intensification and desertification of climate resilient agricultural production" have received significant priority (Centre for Research and Information, 2019, p. 4). Being the 10th largest tropical fruit producer and the highest rate of increase in fruit production among the world's producing countries has been a highlight of Bangladesh's achievements in terms of food production.

The Food Production Index does not consider coffee and tea as food. Instead, the index covers food crops that are edible and contain nutrients. Food Production Index offers us an overall picture of food production of a state. Starting from the score of 84.7 in 2008, Bangladesh has been able to increase its score to 109.1 in 2019. This signs that the country has been able to achieve significant growth in food production.

One of the most important indices of calculating food security is the Global Food Security Index (GFSI) (Table 2.5) by the Economist Intelligence Unit. Bangladesh has constantly increased its score in the index except the year of 2016 when its score experienced a downfall of 0.6 from its score in 2015. The Global Food Security Index measures the score out of 100, where 100 represents the most favorable score.

Bangladesh boosted its score to 53.2 in 2019 from the previous year's 43.3, which represents a remarkable growth. Prior to 2018, the growth of food security in Bangladesh has been extremely slow. The index considers nutritional standards, food consumption as a share of household expenditure, food loss, protein quality, corruption, diet diversification, and food safety among the 59 unique indicators that measure the drivers of food security (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019).

Table 2.5

Food Security and Bangladesh

Year	Global Food Security Index	Food Production Index	Year	Global Food Security Index	Food Production Index
2008	N/A	84.7	2014	36.3	98.7
2009	N/A	85.1	2015	37.4	101.0
2010	N/A	90.2	2016	36.8	100.3
2011	N/A	92.4	2017	39.7	107.5
2012	34.6	93.3	2018	43.3	109.1
2013	35.3	95.8	2019	53.2	N/A

Source: The World Bank (2021c) and Economist Intelligence Unit (2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019)

4.2 Public Action

In the previous chapter, I have analyzed the necessity of the power plants and their contribution in helping Bangladesh meet its high demands of electricity. Since I have considered environmental advancement under the social aspect of development, I have analyzed the environmental impact of power plants here in this chapter.

As I have pointed out earlier, the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant and the Rampal Coal Power Plant are two of the fast-track projects of the Awami government. Drèze & Sen (2013, p. 91) have highlighted the environmental concerns regarding the adverse impacts of nuclear and coal power plants in India. There have been similar concerns here in Bangladesh, but the concerns have been overshadowed by the priority of economic growth. Similar to India, Bangladesh has reached a stage at this moment where it is “ethically unacceptable” (Drèze & Sen, 2013, p. 91) for Bangladesh “to worry about the damage to its own local environment, bad enough it is”.

The central concern about Rampal is that it is being constructed within a 14-km radius of the Sundarbans (Nazrul, 2016). The fact that Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries to the adverse effects of climate change deepens the worries (Sattar, 2011). While the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) of India is assisting Bangladesh in setting up the project, it was in 2010 when the Indian government introduced regulations against constructing environmentally harmful coal-based power plants within “25-km radius of forests and environmentally sensitive sites” (Nazrul, 2016). The government and bureaucratic agents have tried to evade public concerns regarding the harmful effect of Rampal on the environment (Khan, 2020, p. 297). Interestingly, they have constantly changed their responses to the concerns throughout time. The Bangladesh Environment Conservation (Amendment) Act of 2010 prohibits any environmentally harmful site within 10-km radius of the Sundarbans forest boundary. The 2010 amendment lacks any validity since the 10-km radius is deemed insufficient. Besides, the independently conducted EIA by two environmental scientists –M. A. Sattar (2011) and A. H. Chowdhury (2017), have been discarded by the government (Khan, 2020, p. 297).

It is important to note here that the Sundarbans is regarded as the ‘Protector of Bangladesh’ from adverse natural disasters (H. Mamun, 2019). The Sundarbans served as a natural shield that attenuated the force of Sidr when it had hit Bangladesh in 2007 (S. Islam, 2007). Thanks to this mangrove forest, Bangladesh had to deal with a significantly less amount of destruction (Roy, 2019). The EIA prepared by Center for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS) – the government-assigned agency responsible for the EIA had major flaws in its evaluation process (Khan, 2020, p. 307). The largest mangrove forest of the world was treated as any other terrestrial forest, without any special consideration to saltwater. According to Khan (2020, p. 314), “a GDP growth-oriented development perspective with an exclusive reliance on the power and energy sector and its bureaucracy for policy implementation has led to the formulation of a flawed and controversial EIA, sidelining the ecological significance of the Sundarbans, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)-declared world heritage site and Ramsar-declared Ramsar site, in setting up the joint-ventured power plant at Rampal”. The Rampal Power Plant has been a highlight of the “development-environment conflict” in a developing country like Bangladesh, where the “environmentalism of the poor” has been eclipsed by the government preference of achieving economic advancement (M. Islam & Al-Amin, 2019, p. 13).

Drèze & Sen (2013, pp. 92-93) have also highlighted the adverse impacts of a nuclear power plant under the analysis of environmental assessment. The shortage of primary fuel, the need to meet the high electricity demands, and the fact that nuclear technology is “one of the finest and most sophisticated sources of clean energy” have driven the Bangladesh government to pursue the project of constructing its first nuclear power plant (Ashraf &

Islam, 2018, p. 504). After observing the massive impacts of the Fukushima disaster, countries such as Germany, Italy, and Switzerland have sought a rethinking of their energy policy in order to revert from nuclear power plants. The governmental decision of pursuing a nuclear power plant has therefore been puzzling given the security and potential environmental concerns of a nuclear power plant. Siddiky (2012, p. 171) has argued that Bangladesh does not have the expertise and the capacity to construct and run a nuclear power plant. He has mentioned “the lack of properly trained manpower and engineers, suitability of the site, safety record of the VVER-1000 nuclear reactors, and nuclear disaster management” among the reasons to establish his argument (Siddiky, 2012, p. 173). The suitability of the site is definitely one of the main environmental concerns of the nuclear power plant. It was chosen by the Pakistan government in 1961 (Ashraf & Islam, 2018, p. 506). The feasibility of the project was evaluated last in 1988 (Siddiky, 2012, p. 172). This has been a major criticism of the project that it has been implemented without the valuation of an EIA or feasibility study. The Awami regime moved on with this project without conducting any evaluation of the suitability of the site. One of my personal concerns regarding the project is that it is situated near the region which is famous for producing majority of mangoes and lychees in Bangladesh. I have been unable to find any information regarding the possible impact of this project on the crop or food production in that area. Even if there is no adverse impact of the project on these, the 75% silted water of the Padma river makes it complicated for the river to meet the cooling requirement of a 1000 MW nuclear power plant (Siddiky, 2012, p. 174). Besides, the purchased model of VVER-1000 nuclear reactors has been rejected by countries like Germany, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Ukraine on the grounds that it does not meet the European safety standards. In fact,

Matin (2017) has also articulated this in his writing that VVER-1200 model nuclear reactors possess better safety features than the VVER-1000 reactors. Moreover, the government paid no “attention to the technical issues relevant to transportation, storage, and the disposal of radioactive material and waste” (Siddiky, 2012, p. 174).

The decreasing percentage of government expenditure on education in every year’s budget has been another central concern in the social development policymaking of the last eleven years. As I have argued earlier, Sen (2000, p. 242) has emphasized the role of education in making individuals more capable of reasoning. This entitles a very special role to education along with political freedom in Sen’s framework as a requirement to remove the unfreedoms that an individual experience in his life. Sen (2000, p. 129) has also addressed the problematic issue of “parsimony” in the government expenditure on education.

The immense amount of question papers leakage of centrally organized national exams in the last eleven years depict the poor scenario of secondary education in Bangladesh. One of the most notorious leakage of question papers happened in 2014, when questions papers of almost all subjects of the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) Exam were leaked (F. Ahmed, 2014; Pathan, 2014; M. Hossain, 2014; Sajib, 2014). This is a mandatory national exam, which is supervised by the Ministry of Education and the nine national education boards under the ministry. Question papers have been regularly leaked for other national board examinations such as the Junior School Certificate (JSC) and Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exams (The Daily Star, 2014; Prothom Alo, 2014; M. Ahmed & Asaduzzaman, 2017; Prothom Alo, 2018). Even the Primary Education Certificate (PEC) exam also had its questions leaked several times, which is supervised by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (M. Hossain, 2014; Dhaka Tribune, 2014). As the USAID

(2021) has noted, the quality of education in Bangladesh remains highly questionable. Asaduzzaman & Shams (2019) have also reflected on the poor quality of education as a major barrier in improving the human capital. Mahtab (2017) has referred to the “intellectual crippling” of a generation with the poor quality of education and the question paper leaks. All this has happened against the background of a festive first day of each year when the students are supplied with free books from the government since 2010 (Dhaka Tribune, 2021a; Daily Bangladesh 2021). Participant 5 has specifically reflected on the question paper leaks saying the problem has intensified further in the form of denial from the government. According to her, rather than acknowledging it and trying to prevent it from happening in the future, they have tried to escape it. While the government has attempted to arrest a number of people for their involvement with question paper leaks (Asaduzzaman & Shams, 2019), the widespread nature of this and its continuity has made a whole generation’s educational capacity curtailed.

Question paper leaks have happened not only in centrally organized government/national board exams. Question paper leaks of Entrance exams for higher education institutions such as the Medical Colleges and the University of Dhaka have also been an issue in the limelight for years (Morol & Asaduzzaman, 2017; A. Rahman, 2017). In another incidence, 15 University of Dhaka students were arrested in 2017 for “illegally making their way into the university by adopting unfair means” (M. Ahmed & Asaduzzaman, 2017). The meaning of “unfair means” is grey, but it suggests that the fraud was made in the admission process or system, and someone from the inside must have been involved in the process of doing so. two Bangladesh Chhatra League leaders (the student wing of the ruling Awami League) were also arrested for their involvement in question paper leaks that year. In terms of social

prestige of being the top public university and its long history as the oldest university of Bangladesh, the University of Dhaka and its students take huge pride in aligning themselves with the institution (Aiman, 2021). The alignment often results in social media shaming of others who could not get admitted into the university through the entrance exam (S. A. K. Mamun, 2018; Aiman, 2021). The incidences of leaks for entrance into the Medical College have also created concerns regarding the potential quality of medical doctors. The regularity of question paper leaks shows that more is needed from the government to avert this shameful activity.

The Awami government has, however, decided to increase the number of public universities in Bangladesh. After starting its rule, four full-fledged universities, four medical universities, seven science and technology universities, three specialized universities, and two agricultural universities have been established by the government in order to spread the reach of higher education among the people (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, 2021). This has been a praiseworthy move by the government as seats in the existing public universities were limited and this provides greater opportunity for people to attain higher education. The increasing demands of higher education should also be met by these initiatives and the government has continued its effort in establishing new universities. While the initiatives of establishing new universities have been lauded, experts have highlighted the importance of improving the quality of education from time to time (The Business Standard, 2020a). The government initiated the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Program (HEQEP) in 2009 with the goal of improving the quality of teaching and research in higher education institutions. Under its first component of “promoting academic innovation”, “around 337 sub-projects were

implemented in twenty public and nine private universities between 2009 and 2015” (A. H. Kabir, 2020, p. 155). These sub-projects included a varying range of additions, including new labs, renovation of existing labs, classroom, library, seminar and conference room digitalization, internet connectivity improvement, updated course curricula, and faculty and staff capacity building. The HEQEP was pursued until 2018 (Riyasad, 2019), and its impact on the quality of higher education needs to be assessed in a separate study.

In another initiative, the government initiated a new Public-Private Partnership scheme which connected the industrial sector with the public universities for the purpose of boosting innovation. Under this scheme, the industrial sector can help the market-oriented departments of universities to improve their academic facilities, including laboratories (A. H. Kabir, 2020, p. 154). This has been a great initiative to close down the existing gap between university laboratories and funding. While the government of Bangladesh subsidizes all public universities, increased demand for funding research and academic innovation in the universities have posed a serious challenge for the government (M. Rahman, 2016). The approval of evening programs to public universities have been criticized by some authors such as A. H. Kabir (2020, p. 154) as being a money-making machine. Calling them programs designed in the neoliberal way, he has referred to the fact that the administrative cost and tuition fees of these evening programs have to be born by the student herself. However, if the profit-oriented mechanism of the universities can bring about money for conducting quality research and academic innovation, there should not be any problem in them as business and non-business professional executives mostly get enrolled in these programs to improve the prospects of their careers (A. H. Kabir, 2020, p. 154).

The government has also made significant education reforms such as the ‘Creative Question System’ which was introduced under the Secondary Education Sector Development Project (SESDP) in 2009. The aim of the Creative Question system was to remove the practice of mindless rote learning and improve the quality of secondary education (Azim, 2018, p. 222). The goal and purpose of the initiative was timely and essential. But after ten years, the system has been criticized as a failure by most (Habib, 2016; Billah, 2017). Back in the early days of its implementation, students were highly apprehensive of the system (Wadud, 2013), and the unfamiliarity of the teachers with the system were identified as the central concerns of the system. Habib (2016) has written that even after seven years, 40 percent secondary school teachers were inept in setting up questions for the creative system. This highlights the inefficacy of the training provided by the education ministry for the teachers to get adopted to this new system. Bangladesh has not participated in any of the tests arranged by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) which makes it problematic to evaluate the quality of education in Bangladesh (Billah, 2014). However, the attempt to address the concern of mindless rote learning should be lauded as the government has tried to seek alternatives to the existing flawed practices. Drèze & Sen (2013, p. 120) has identified mindless rote learning as a problem of Indian education too. While its implementation can be regarded as a failure, but following Sen (2000, p. 255), I would like to argue that failure helps us learn about what went wrong. Failure is therefore, not an entirely negative result. The failure of the present would lay the platform for the success of the future.

In addition to education, a fluctuating unemployment rate has been a central concern for Bangladesh. While the score of female unemployment has been severe, the average

unemployment rate of 4.22 shows us that the overall condition of employment is also not good. Although Rahman (2016, p. 83) has regarded 4.35 in 2013 as a low unemployment rate, I have interpreted the lack of decrease in the unemployment problem as a failure for Bangladesh. Besides, Rushdan Islam Rahman (2016, p. 83) has argued that the measurement of unemployment rate in Bangladesh is flawed since there is definitional inadequacy in the surveys. The definition excludes most unemployed people, and very few fit in the category of unemployment in those surveys. Moreover, the Labor Force Surveys (LFS) conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) counts 'one hour of income earning' as employment which makes the survey and the measurement significantly problematic.

The absence of an unemployment insurance policy in developing countries like Bangladesh has been frequently an issue of debate (Vodopivec, 2013). However, learning from the experiences of the Rana Plaza disaster, the government has initiated a pilot project of Employment Injury Insurance (EII) in collaboration with ILO (International Labor Organization, 2021). The government has also increased the minimum wage for RMG workers by 51% from the amount of 5,300 BDT to the amount of 8,000 BDT in 2018 (The Daily Star, 2018b). Although some trade union leaders have called this amount inadequate referring to the bare minimum living cost in Bangladesh, this has definitely been a positive move towards social protection.

Social protection in Bangladesh has a varying range of schemes including the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Old Age Allowance, Allowance for the Disabled, Allowance for the Widowed, Deserted, and Destitute Women, Stipend for Primary Students, Food for Work, Honorarium for Freedom Fighters,

Secondary Education Stipend Project, and Test Relief (Hulme, Maitrot, Ragno, & Rahman, 2014, p. 13; Tariquzzaman & Rana, 2018, p. 250). Inspired by the Indian government's NREGA, which has been extensively analyzed by Drèze & Sen (2013, pp. 29), the caretaker government of Bangladesh had undertaken the Employment Guarantee Program (formerly known as the Hundred Days Employment Program) in 2008 (Hulme, Maitrot, Ragno, & Rahman, 2014, p. 14). The Awami government modified the program by dividing the hundred days into sixty days of winter and forty days of summer slack season and renamed it as the Employment Guarantee Program for the Poorest (EGPP). The daily wage rate of 100 BDT has also been increased to 120 BDT.

Participant 2 has noted some NGO efforts of social protection such as BRAC's Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction: Targeting the Ultra Poor (CFPR-TUP) program. Although microfinance projects by BRAC and the Grameen bank have been severely criticized as a neoliberal development tool (Muhammad, 2021, pp. 127-150; Uddin, 2020, pp. 29-57), many programs aimed at education, health care, advancement of women have been crucial in advancing the overall social advancement of Bangladesh (T. Chowdhury, Das, Chakraborty & Barai, 2020, pp. 351-380). The excellent record of Bangladesh in social indicators has become a reality, thanks to the efforts of these NGOs.

S. Z. Hossain & Kappestein (2014, p. 210) has reflected on the absence of social protection for the indigenous communities. Referring to a local government (Union Parishad – UP) social safety net distribution program of Eid-UI-Azha, they have explored how the UP office denied rice to the Adivasis – individuals belonging to the indigenous communities. The Awami government has made no progress in this regard as none of the 116 existing

social protection programs are specifically directed at the betterment of the marginalized indigenous communities (Amin, 2019).

However, a remarkable progress in this area has been the recognition of transgender population in Bangladesh in 2013 (S. Ahmed, 2015; Al Jazeera, 2021). The transgender population has been recruited in the traffic police (S. Ahmed, 2015), and the government has announced a tax rebate for companies hiring transgender people (Al Jazeera, 2021). The government has initiated social protections programs for improving the livelihood of Bede communities, tea laborers, and transgender population (Bangladesh Awami League, 2021). In another historical moment of the country, Tashnuva Anan Shishir became the first transgender news reader of the country at the age of 29 in 2021 (Agence France-Presse, 2021).

However, targeting of social protection has remained problematic in certain areas. For example, a significant amount of social protection targets only the government employees who live a better life than the average poor people (Amin, 2019). 24% allocation of the Social Safety Nets (SSN) programs have gone to the 0.5% government employees as pension money. Participant 5 has also addressed the similar concern but there has been no change to this system under the Awami regime.

Drèze & Sen (2013, pp. 226-227) has noted an extremely timely and significant concern regarding the “alarmingly high incidence of rape in India”. They had to analyze the vocal outcry and responses against the highly disturbing December 2012 gang-rape in a closed bus incident in Delhi, where the victim was brutally tortured. The victim eventually died, and this incident led to a public outcry in India. Quite alike India, Bangladesh has also faced an alarming increase of rape incidents in the last few years. The reporting of rape can

be a good sign in terms of advancement as victims often refrain from filing cases fearing social shaming and denial of justice. Around 20,835 cases have been filed on charge of rape since 2014 (Rashid, 2019). Between 2014 and 2018, nearly 10.57 cases have been filed in a day on charge of rape. The tipping point for protests in Bangladesh has probably been the video of assault against a middle-aged woman which went viral in social media (Al Jazeera, 2020). People marched on the streets in demands of justice for violence against women, and the government responded with the introduction of death penalty for proven charges of rape in return. However, it remains to be explored whether the problem lies in the absence of regular and strict judicial punishment for violence against women (Ganguly, 2020). Instead, death penalty can produce negative repercussions. The fear of punishment has often been attributed to the reason leading to murder after rape as the perpetrator then tries to evade punishment after committing the crime. Involvement of eight Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activists and leaders of the Sylhet M. C. College in a gang-rape (M. Islam, 2021) has drawn my attention to the relationship between political power and the apparent impunity from the eyes of the law. While the government has addressed the judicial concern over rapes according to the people's demands, it is not even close to sufficient for mitigating the problem. The government must take a robust approach to deconstruct the patriarchal practices of the society by morally educating people (S. Mamun, 2019). This is a task which is easier to demand in paper, and more difficult than anything else to implement.

The government has undertaken some milestone initiatives of providing free sanitary pads for schoolgirls (AFP, 2019). This is a remarkable departure owing to the taboo characteristics of 'menstrual hygiene' as a topic in Bangladesh. This taboo concept has

negatively affected the education of females as nearly 40 percent females stayed at home during menstruation in 2019 owing to the anxiety and shame surrounding period. Although no national strategy to ensure menstrual hygiene has been initiated, it is definitely the first step towards more positive things.

The Awami regime has also undertaken the National Health Policy 2011 in order to “ensure accessibility of primary health care and emergency care for all” (Murshid & Haque, 2020). Currently, the health system of the country is divided into four sectors – public, for profit private, nongovernmental organizations, and nonprofit and international development organizations (Joarder, Chaudhury & Mannan, 2019, p. 1). The public health care in Bangladesh is not adequate, and it is assisted by the nongovernmental and nonprofit actors in providing services to impoverished population in Bangladesh. The initiation of the National Health Policy is definitely commendable, but similar to what Drèze & Sen (2013, p. 143-181) has observed in India, the for-profit private sector and the profit-oriented thinking of medical service providers is a major drawback of the health services in Bangladesh.

4.3 Social Protection without Environmentalism

The Awami regime has attempted to avert the inequality experienced by marginalized communities in Bangladesh through its broad and big budget social protection programs. Drèze & Sen (2013, pp. 182-212, 221) have focused on castes, other marginalized communities, and social protection systems like the Public Distribution System (PDS) in India. The Awami regime has made some progress to advance the conditions of the transgender, bede, the tea laborer and most other socially discriminated communities. While this progress has to be continued to improve their conditions to such a situation

where they are able to enjoy most of the substantial freedoms. Especially, in terms of the transgender community, the start of this progress by acknowledging them and later trying to integrate them by offering employment opportunities should be lauded as a positive advancement. Before 2013, in the 42 years of Bangladesh as an independent state, no regime had the courage and concerns to address the terrible conditions of the transgender communities in the society. The integration of these communities and specifically targeted social protection programs towards them comprise a major part of accomplishment in terms of public action for social advancement.

Although it is not sure whether the Awami regime can take much credit for the achievements in health services such as life expectancy at birth, fertility rate, infant mortality, and under-5 mortality. Drèze & Sen (2013, pp. 48-60) have highlighted the meagre record of India in these indicators. Despite having a well-functioning democracy and high economic growth, India's failure lay in the social advancements as of 2013. Contrarily, Bangladesh has made significant progress in terms of these, and this is a key highlight of social advancement under the Awami regime.

Much similar to India (Drèze & Sen, 2013, pp. 90-93), the Awami regime has also ignored the environmental concerns to prioritize economic advancement. Based on Development as Freedom, this is a serious flaw in policymaking. In order to meet the rising demands of power generation and energy, the Awami regime has pursued the environmentally disastrous projects of Rampal Coal Power Plant and Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant without any consideration of potential negative implications on the environment.

Along with the environment, social advancement of Bangladesh has also been hindered by the sloth progress of education. Although the regime has taken some highly important steps

and policies, it is yet to be seen whether these policies can bring about positive change. Some of the systems already implemented like the 'Creative Question System' for centrally organized national board exams have not been able to attain much success. The regime has also not arranged for a PISA to assess the quality and credentials of students.

The regime has addressed the concerns over violence against women, and it has tried to come up with a solution by introducing death penalty for the proven charges of rape. In closer scrutiny, this seems like a hasty decision, and more time and resources should be invested to find out a logical solution to this problem. Similar to India (Drèze & Sen, 2013, pp. 226-227), Bangladesh has also been plagued with this serious problem of consistent violence against women.

Considering these, social advancement under the Awami regime has offered some mixed results. The central concern in this case is about the ignorance of environmental concerns in policymaking. The regime has outright ignored and neglected the potential negative consequences of the power plants on the atmosphere of a vulnerable to climate change country. There have been mixed outcomes with regards to violence against women and education as the regime has addressed the concern by initiating policies, but the policies have not been efficient enough. The investment of resources in social protection is definitely a positive outcome in terms of social advancement. Overall, most aspects of social advancement under the Awami regime can be commended, except the lack of environmental concerns.

Chapter 5: Political Freedoms and Transparency

Guarantees under the Awami Regime (2009-2020)

Following the way of the previous two chapters, I have analyzed the relevant indices and numerical representations in the first section of this chapter. Second, I have analyzed the public action relevant to political freedoms and transparency guarantees. I have added a third section in this chapter to explore the question of whether the citizens of Bangladesh have had the right to participate in the development policymaking under the Awami regime. After analyzing the conditions of political freedoms in the second section, I have used the analysis to explore the participation of citizens in policymaking under the auspices of the Awami regime.

5.1 Indices and Numerical Representations

As I have noted earlier, there is a significant amount of controversy over the measurement of democracy and political freedoms. However, I have used a varying range of indices here to analyze the progress of Bangladesh under the Awami regime. Together with the analysis of indices, the analysis of public action provides us a better picture of the overall conditions of a state.

The progress of Bangladesh in press freedom has been in decline in the last eleven years (Table 3.1). Taking over from the authoritarian regime of the military caretaker government, the Awami regime has turned the poor score into even poorer with a downgrade from 37.33 to 50.74 in the Press Freedom Index. It is important to note here that 100 stands for the worst possible score in the Press Freedom Index, and 0 stands for

Table 3.1
Bangladesh in the Political Indices

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Press Freedom Index* (out of 100)	37.33	42.50	N/A	57.00	42.01	42.58	42.95	45.94	48.36	48.62	50.74
Democracy Index (out of 10)	N/A	5.87	5.86	5.86	5.86	5.78	5.73	5.73	5.43	5.57	5.88
Corruption Perceptions Index* (out of 100)	24.0	24.0	27.0	26.00	27.00	25.00	25.00	26.00	28.00	26.00	26.00
Fragile States Index (out of 100)	98.10	96.10	94.40	92.20	92.50	92.80	91.80	90.70	89.10	90.31	87.70

Source: RSF (2021); Economist Intelligence Unit (2010; 2011; 2013a; 2014a; 2015a; 2016a; 2017a; 2018a; 2019a; 2020); Transparency International (2020; 2021); The Fund for Peace (2021)

* The Press Freedom Index and the Corruption Perceptions Index had different measurements systems respectively until 2013 and 2012. The data from the years before the current measurement system was adopted has been aligned.

Table 3.2
Bangladesh in the Freedom in the World Report

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Overall Score (out of 100)	49	47	45	41	39
Political Rights (out of 40)	4*	20	19	17	15
Civil Liberties (out of 60)	4*	27	26	24	24
Classification of Political Regime	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free

Source: Freedom House (2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020)

* Before 2016, the report did not have a scoring system out of 100

the best possible score. The significant downfall in the Press Freedom Index suggests that the Awami regime has significantly curbed press freedom in the last eleven years. Although the regime had the worst score of 57.00 in 2012 suggesting it was the worst year for press freedom. It returned a significant improvement in the later year, but since then the downfall has been constant.

The Human Freedom Index (Table 3.1) represents 10 as the best possible score of human freedom, and 0 as the worst possible score. Bangladesh had improved its score in 2016, but then again, it has been experiencing downfall in the score. Although the downfall has not been very significant, a lack of improvement creates a serious concern for future development policymaking. Personal freedom has remained kind of the same in 2019 compared to the starting year of 2014.

After having a constant downfall for nine years till 2018, Bangladesh returned a significantly improved score of 5.88 in 2019 in the Democracy Index. It has successively remained in the classification of ‘Hybrid regime’, but it has been able to achieve a score better than its old score of 5.87 in 2019 after a nine-year long downfall. There is no explanation in the report why and how this score has improved. Newspaper articles (The Financial Express, 2020; Ayres, 2020; The Financial Express, 2020) have only cited that the ranking and the score of Bangladesh has improved in the index, but there is no explanation either regarding why and how this improvement has come. Ayres (2020, p. 13) has rather argued that the core commitment of the ruling party has been confined to a “scorched-earth political system”. In simple words, despite the improvements in score, the party is not interested in improving or establishing a party-based competitive political system “for the sake of democracy” (Ayres, 2020, p. 12).

The caretaker government of Bangladesh had made significant progress in reducing corruption by establishing a strict and ruthless Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), which took all top leaders of both the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the AL to trial and jail on the grounds of indulging in corruption. Previously from 2001 to 2005, Bangladesh became the champion in corruption for consecutive five years by scoring the lowest in the list (Dhaka Tribune, 2019a; Foyez, 2020). In that perspective, the Awami regime should be praised for retaining the score that the caretaker government had been able to achieve in two years. Compared to the BNP regime of 2001-2006, the Awami regime has not indulged in that extreme level of corruption. However, this should not be the case for evaluation here. Rather, the Awami regime should be evaluated based on whether it has been able to improve the score where it started from. The regime had improved the score of 24.0 to 27.0 in 2011 after being two years in power. Although it was able to improve the score a little in 2017 (28.0), it fell down to 26.0 the next year. Based on the index, its progress in terms of accountability and corruption has been disappointing.

The regime has however, been able to improve its score in the Fragile States Index. Perhaps the military and authoritarian basis of the caretaker government had contributed to the perilous score of 98.10 out of 100. This means that Bangladesh was nearly a fragile state at that time. However, the regime has been able to significantly downgrade its score, which is a positive advancement. While more is required to save Bangladesh from becoming fragile again, this positive growth should be attributed to the Awami regime.

However, Bangladesh has seen a negative growth of political freedoms under the Awami regime according to the Freedom in the World Report (Table 3.2). There has been a constant decrease of political rights since 2016. Civil liberties have also been curtailed, but

they have remained the same in 2018 and 2019. Before 2015, the Freedom in the World did not have a separate scoring measurement for political rights and civil liberties. But since 2016, it has introduced separate measurements for both these indicators. Although Bangladesh has remained a partly free country, it has lost a significant amount of score. From 49 out of 100, the overall score has degraded to 39.

Political freedoms including press freedom has been significantly curtailed. Except stability or the mitigation of fragility, Bangladesh has fared negative growth in the majority of indices that have been studied here.

5.2 Public Action

Let us start from the Rampal Coal Power Plant again. Given the potential nefarious environmental impacts of the coal-based power plant on the ‘natural shield’ Sundarbans, activists and critics had opposed the construction of the power plant (M. T. Khan, 2020, p. 297). However, the environmental and ecological concerns were trumped by developmental centralism of meeting the energy demands. The critics have focused on the 14-km radius of the forest, flaws in the planning of air and water pollution management, fly-ash management, dangers of carrying coal through the waterways, eco-system balance with regards to the Sundarbans as their reasons of criticism. The criticism and opposition of the construction has come from environmentalists, activists, civil society members, citizens, netizens – all parts of the country (M. Islam & Al-Amin, 2019, p. 2). But the government has continuously disregarded their concerns. It has even gone to produce a flawed EIA document to refute the public controversies. On 28 July 2016, the National Committee for the Protection of Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports marched to the Prime Minister’s office to protest the project (Nazrul, 2016). Despite having no

members of opposition such as BNP or Jamaat and no militants in the group, the procession was prevented by the police several times. Eventually, the protesters were disbanded as a result of the confrontation by the police. The police explained the logic of “obstructing smooth flow of traffic on a busy thoroughfare” as the reason behind disbanning the protest (Nazrul, 2016). Interestingly, the government passed a parliamentary bill in 2010 called the ‘Power and Energy Fast Supply Enhancement (Special Provision) Act’ which granted legal impunity to the government to pursue and implement any action for “quick initiation and implementation of any energy and power project” (M. T. Khan, 2020, p. 294). This bill has been a clear violation of people’s rights in having a say over the policymaking.

Protest against the Rampal Coal Power Plant is not the only incidence of a protest which has been disbanded by the police under the eleven years of the Awami regime. One of the most heinous acts committed by the government which curtailed the freedom of the citizens was the ‘Road Safety Protest’ of 2018. Students came to the streets for a peaceful protest demanding new regulations to ensure road safety after a speeding bus killed two teenager school students in the busy streets of the capital city Dhaka (Safi, 2018). The protest lasted for nine days (Press Trust of India, 2018), but the number of charges, arrests, and detainments against civil society members, and students involved with the protest made this a watershed moment in the state’s history (BBC, 2018; Independent, 2018; Safi, 2018). The prominent award-winning photographer and intellectual – Shahidul Alam was arrested for appearing in Al Jazeera and spreading “misinformation” about the protests (Q. Ahmed, 2018; Rabbee, 2018). Bangladeshi actress Quazi Nawshaba Ahmed was arrested for appearing in a live video in Facebook, and disseminating false information (New Age, 2018; Tipu, 2019). She had claimed in the video that the attack on students on the

Dhanmondi-Jigatola intersection had resulted in the killing of two students, and the gouging out of another student's eyes. The police used tear gas and rubber bullets, injuring teenagers during the protest, and the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) also clashed with the protesters in its way of acting for the government (BBC, 2018). At least 100 students were arrested, and 5,000 unnamed were prosecuted with the charge of participating in the Road Safety Protest (Amnesty International, 2018a).

Alam, Nawshaba, and at least 16 other individuals were charged under the section 57 of the Information Communication Technology Act in Bangladesh (Q. Ahmed, 2018; Amnesty International, 2018a; Tipu, 2019). The ICT Act was originally introduced by the last Khaleda Zia regime (2001-2006) (Quadir & Paul, 2018). But the Awami regime toughened the act and made it more repressive by "eliminating the need for arrest warrants" with the 2013 amendment of the Act. The maximum jail term was also increased to 14 years replacing the earlier provision of 10 years. The provision of bail was removed, and its application was made non-bailable. The Act grants an authorization to the state to prosecute anyone who publishes anything that defames the state, or a person related to the ruling regime. Hurting religious beliefs and spreading misinformation or fake news is also included in the list of actions that can be prosecuted. Around 1,271 chargesheets were submitted by the police under this law between 2013 and 2018 (Human Rights Watch, 2018). While people have been prosecuted through a variety of uses of the Act thus far, people have also been detained for simply posting political criticism against the regime, or caricaturing the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her relatives, and colleagues.

The monopolization and power consolidation tactics employed through this Act were further strengthened by the introduction of the Digital Security Act in 2018 (Amnesty

International, 2018b). Similar to its forerunner, it includes non-bailable prosecution, and all other sections of the law have remained equally repressive. In addition to the previous provisions, the new Act allows the state to authorize life imprisonment for engaging in propaganda or campaign against the “spirit of the liberation war”, “the father of the nation – Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman”, the “national anthem” or the “national flag” (Mahmud, 2018; Amnesty International, 2018b). The new Act has already established its repression over the citizens as teenagers, university teachers and students, writers, journalists, and cartoonists have been charged under the Act for social media comments criticizing the Bangladesh government’s actions (IFEX, 2020; Nazeer, 2020; Sakib, 2021). For instance, a ninth-grade student was sent to juvenile correctional facilities on June 20, 2020 after being arrested for “insulting the Prime Minister for taking the decision to impose additional tax on using mobile phones” (IFEX, 2020). The absolute power granted to the Digital Security Agency for initiating investigations and for having the free pass to order the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to remove and block any information or data on the internet (Amnesty International, 2018b).

The journalists and broadcasters have faced even more severe repression from the government. In addition to these two laws, the government has passed the Broadcast Act 2018, which grants the state the power to punish media outlets if they publish or broadcast anything against the public interests (Quadir & Paul, 2018a). The journalists have definitely been in an extremely suppressed situation as it seems two draconian laws manifesting extreme power of the state on individual freedom were not deemed sufficient for the regime. The law allows the government to fine, or even cancel the license of a media

outlet if they publish anything against national interest. A staff responsible for an act against the national interest can be jailed under the provision of this law.

Press and media freedom has never been in any more danger than now. Charged and arrested under the Digital Security Act (DSA) for spreading rumor and misinformation in Facebook, writer Mushtaq Ahmed died in police custody on February 25, 2021 after allegedly being brutally tortured by the police (CPJ, 2021). The law enforcement authority has also violently tortured his colleague, cartoonist Kabir Kishore while they have been under police custody for similar charges (Iftikhar, 2021). Detainment and arrest of journalists under these draconian laws have become a common incident in Bangladesh (CPJ, 2015; Greenslade, 2016; Agence France-Presse, 2019; IFJ, 2021). General citizens have also been subjected to death under police custody, where the police have tried to evade responsibility by blaming the victim as drug addict, or natural causes such as death by stroke, or death by lynching (The Daily Star, 2020; The Business Standard, 2020b; UNB, 2021).

The monopoly of violence of the law enforcement agency has also been manifested in the violence against political oppositions. Opposition leaders and affiliated individuals have been regularly tortured and repressed in the last twelve years (Quadir, 2014; M. Hussain, 2016; McPherson, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2019). Enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of opposition leaders have been a prevalent practice undertaken by the Awami regime. Suppressing opposition or dissent has not been limited to these practices only. Potential critics or threats to the regime have also been subjected to suppression.

The ousting of Muhammad Yunus as the Managing Director of the Grameen Bank is one of the examples of this. During the caretaker government rule which was based on policies of anti-corruption and detainment of corrupted politicians, Yunus made a brief appearance in the political platform (Burke & Hammadi, 2011). The appearance made politicians of both the major parties of the country – BNP, & AL enraged given the popularity of Yunus among the poor of Bangladesh. The central bank of Bangladesh – the Bangladesh Bank removed Yunus from the Managing Director post of the Grameen Bank citing the bank had been running on irregularities since Yunus was 70 years old whereas the legal age limit for holding such a post in Bangladesh was 60 years (Burke, 2011). Immediately after coming into power, Yunus had clashed against the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina over his outspoken criticism of the government and campaign against corruption. Despite citizen protests and international backing, the government remained firm in wiping Yunus out from the scenario.

Another major incident happened in 2017 when the Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha was forcefully resigned when the government became unhappy with Sinha's decision to remove the parliament's authority of impeaching Supreme Court judges (PTI, 2017). The initiative by Sinha should be lauded as it was supposed to balance the monopoly of power vested into the legislature and the Prime Minister of the state. However, it ended very bad for Sinha as he was accused of money laundering and embezzlement after he had resigned from his position and left Bangladesh (Indian Express, 2020; Tipu, 2020). Sinha (2018) has claimed that he was threatened by the military intelligence agency of Bangladesh on behalf of the government after his unpleasant decision to curb the parliament's power, which ultimately led to his resigning. Terming Bangladesh as a country run by state

terrorism, he also compared the regime to the Gestapo and Hitler regime based on its violent measures and practices (Sinha, 2018; Bergman, 2018).

In another bizarre moment in the history of the state, the leader of the BNP Khaleda Zia was unable to participate in a political campaign of her party when lorries filled with sand had been kept at the entrance to her house (A. Hussain, 2015; Dhaka Tribune, 2015). This led to hilarious reactions in the social media, however the joke that it produced for the citizens costed the democratic freedom of citizens. It has remained unexplained how the government or the law enforcement agencies were unable to manage the situation by moving the trucks away. It is hard to find an explanation other than that the government did not want to. Facilitating political participation and keeping it open is a responsibility of the government to guarantee the substantial freedom of political freedoms.

One of the most important elements of democratic decision-making is the arrangement of free and fair elections as Sen (2000, pp. 151-155) has pointed out. The constructive role of opposition in balancing the complacency of the ruling government is another highly important element (Sen, 2000, pp. 155-157). It is shameful that the Awami regime has curbed both these elements in the last eleven years. The last free and fair election in the history of Bangladesh was the 2008 general election where the AL become victorious. The 2014 general election was marred by violence as the police and the BCL used its brute force to prevent the opposition from running political campaigns and participating in a free and fair election (Quadir, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2014a; Human Rights Watch, 2014b). The BNP eventually boycotted the election owing to the pre-election violence against the party leaders and activists (Hassan & Nazneen, 2017, p. 205). Even after the election results came out, the BNP was prevented from demonstrating protests against the

unfair election. Although the BNP participated in the 2018 general election, it was not given any opportunity to pursue its political campaign or create awareness (AFP, 2018; M. Rahman, 2018). More importantly, the two main leaders of the party – Khaleda Zia, and her elder son Tarique Zia were involuntarily absent from the scene as Khaleda was in jail for the allegations of corruption, and Tarique was in London as his return to Bangladesh would mean life imprisonment for him (AFP, 2018). Both their cases were prosecuted under the Awami regime. Campaign deaths and threats against opposition leaders and activists, terrified voters, and a one-sided race with the lack of a level-playing field characterized the 2018 general election (AFP, 2018).

Additionally, the Awami regime has not made any attempt to reform the historically controversial Article 70 of the constitution. The Article 70 of the constitution has a negative implication on democratic decision-making and political freedoms. The article implies that a member of the parliament cannot vote against her own party without prior permission from the party (M. Islam, 2014). It is disgraceful that Bangladesh has retained this in the constitution despite instating democracy in 1991. None of the democratic governments ever cared to remove this. There can be no logic behind retaining this article in the constitution other than serving the purpose of a leader's egoism. This was evident in the introduction of this article after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had felt upset and insulted when K. M. Obaidur Rahman, a lawmaker from his own party, raised a question against him (Hasanuzzaman, 2011). This eventually led to the creation of the law which would prevent a lawmaker from aligning with an oppositional view of the party which she represents except having prior permission from the party. In order to give a lawmaker the right and the option to represent the interests of her electoral area, this law must be changed.

It is not entirely true that the government has not responded to the concerns addressed in public protests. The demands addressed in the Shahbag movement of 2013 led the government to enforce capital punishment for war criminals by revising the previous verdict (Zaman, 2016, p. 341). While it can be regarded as a positive move of the Awami regime since it listened to the popular demands (Sajjad & Härdig, 2017, pp. 1119-1120), the politicized characteristics of the movement and the targeted individuals through the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) for war crimes during the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh makes it complicated to evaluate the positives of this movement (Samad, 2016, pp. 259-260). The ICT delivered a verdict of death sentence in 15 out of the 17 cases that were prosecuted. Majority of the convicts were party leaders of the BNP and the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI), the main opposition of AL in the politics of Bangladesh. Thus, there has been some disputed politicized notions connected to this movement, and its validity as a public protest remains controversial.

Some has noted the success of the 2018 Quota Reform Movement as an improvement under the Awami regime. It is true that the government responded to the public demands. However, instead of implementing the demanded reforms, the government abolished the quota system once and for all (The Daily Star, 2018c; The Daily Star, 2018d). The response of the government in this case, therefore, has remained questionable and ambiguous.

The movement against the proposed Value Added Tax (VAT) on tuition fees of private universities in 2015 has been the only perfect example of a case when the government responded to the demands and agreed to it. The proposed change implied that private university students would have to pay an additional tax on their tuition fees (S. Chowdhury, 2015). In a controversial moment, the then Finance Minister, M. A. Muhith argued that the

students of private universities were significantly wealthy as they were paying a good amount of money on fees (Wadud, 2015). Thus, he concluded that it should be a huge concern for them to pay an additional VAT on tuition fees. The protest was eventually successful as the government reverted its decision of VAT on tuition fees of private universities. The government responded to the public concerns and acted on it.

The Awami regime has also changed the number of reserved seats for women in the national parliament through the 15th constitutional amendment in 2011 (Jahan, 2015; Irani, 2019). Prior to this, the number of reserved seats for women was 45 in addition to the 300 general seats. It was changed to 50 recording a very slight change. However, it can be regarded as a positive initiative undertaken by the regime. Bangladesh has been lauded for its overall condition of gender equality. However, the number of directly elected female parliament members needs to be increased, and it remains an area where more focus is required (Irani, 2019).

The absence of a political party which solely represents the interests of one or more of the indigenous communities is an issue that require our attention. Indigenous communities are minorities of Bangladesh, and their interests have remained marginalized (Gerharz, 2014). The violent history of Bangladesh with the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) has made the relation between the mainstream Bengali communities and the indigenous communities more convoluted (Adnan, 2008, p. 32). There are concerns about the Chakma community being the dominant majority of the minority indigenous communities (Mohsin, 1997; Adnan 2008). But this should not prevent the regime from pursuing policies to accommodate the indigenous communities into the political arena more. Currently, the political leaders from indigenous communities represent the

mainstream political parties (Gerharz, 2014). But this is no healthy practice for the indigenous communities in the long run to address their interests and representation in the state.

In terms of accountability in governance, the Awami regime has not undertaken any policy of removing legal impunity with regards to the existing Right to Information Act (Aminuzzaman & Khair, 2017). India's Right to Information Act has been a central focus of analysis in Drèze & Sen (2013, p. 96). A mechanism like the Right to Information Act is highly important in corruption-ridden countries like Bangladesh and India. The Right to Information Act in India removes the legal impunity attributed to the bureaucratic officials as it binds the official to disclose virtually any government document to a citizen within 30 days (Drèze & Sen, 2013, p. 100). Matters of national security can be kept restricted, but the unrestricted access to general information makes it one of the strongest mechanisms to increase accountability and transparency. Such a mechanism is due in Bangladesh to improve its accountability and transparency in governance. No such policy of removing the legal impunity like this has been undertaken in Bangladesh so far.

Immediately after its start, the Awami regime approved the seventh national pay scale by retaining the former caretaker government's proposal (Mondal, 2009). The improvement of the pay scale was aimed at increasing the salary for lowly paid government officials (Byron, 2021). The eighth national pay scale was approved in 2015 with the same aim of increasing the salary for government officials. The rationale behind increasing the salary was the argument that the low paygrade of the government officials had forced them to indulge in corruption. In order to address the "need" of the officials, pay scales were introduced. The increase of pay scales has not been much successful in deterring

corruption, as S. Rahman (2019) has noted that the incentive structure for indulging in corruption has not been reformed. The lack of judicial and parliamentary scrutiny has made them complacent. Drèze & Sen (2013, p. 96) have highlighted the importance of effective prosecution as a mechanism of tackling corruption. Although the Awami regime has not taken any initiative to bolster the parliamentary and judicial scrutiny system in Bangladesh yet, its double initiative of pay scale increase should be praised.

Another significant concern about petty and bureaucratic corruption is the prosecution agency and their structures. The ACC, which is the government institution responsible for tackling and reducing corruption in Bangladesh, is led by government officials themselves. Drèze & Sen (2013, p. 99) have discussed this as a major driver behind the lack of judicial scrutiny. The official who is responsible for the Anti-Corruption Commission does not intend to dwell with the lives of her colleagues. Besides, there is also the concern of getting transferred elsewhere. This implies a 'Live and Let Live' system among the government officials, which has made the Anti-Corruption Commission a dysfunctional institution. The Awami regime has not addressed this concern in their policymaking.

The centrality of education and the problems of accountability in the education sector has been elaborately analyzed by Drèze & Sen (2013, pp. 130-132). A common problem in the primary education sector of Bangladesh has been that the teachers do not feel motivated to teach (Alamgir, 2019). A lack of accountability is prevalent here. The most contentious issue regarding accountability in teaching has been related to the faculty recruitment in the universities. A large number of public university recruitment and promotion has been influenced by political considerations (New Age, 2021). The politically powerful teachers have cared less about teaching and accountability, and this has resulted in the extremely

low quality of university education in Bangladesh. No progress has been made in this regard. Rather, public university recruitments have increasingly become politicized than before.

Last but not the least, the implementation of construction projects entails a significant issue of accountability. Participant 4 and Participant 5 have discussed this issue in detail. For instance, the deadline of the Padma Bridge has been extended for a consecutive five times so far (Dhaka Tribune, 2021c). This calls for a serious scrutiny of accountability and transparency since it is outrageous to extend the budget and the timeline of a project continuously. The deadline means that the construction has to be completed within that time. Accountability has to be ensured in the timely construction of projects. The Awami regime has not responded to this concern. Rather, it has allocated more time and money by extending the requests. Previously, a loan from the World Bank for the construction of the Padma bridge was canceled on the grounds of corruption and lack of transparency (The World Bank, 2012). Keeping this in mind, the Awami regime should have been more mindful in ensuring the transparency in the construction process of the Padma bridge.

Participant 5 has specifically reflected on the construction of a food preservation storage and the problems of transparency. Around 20 to 30 percent of the total work of the project was completed within its deadline. However, the organization responsible for the construction asked for more money from the government, and the money was approved. Later, an independent review of the budget determined that the primarily allocated 20 million BDT was sufficient for the construction of the project. The additional time and money taken to complete the project required greater scrutiny.

However, the government has addressed the concern regarding construction of infrastructures and the lack of transparency. Participant 6 has specifically reflected on this issue by discussing the Digitizing Implementation Monitoring and Public Procurement Project (DIMAPPP) in detail. Under DIMAPPP, the government has taking a number of construction projects with the introduction of a monitoring system so that each stage of the construction process is completed without any type of corruption. For instance, when a cyclone center is being constructed, the monitoring process includes the procurement of cements, brick, concrete and other necessary elements. This project has been designed in a way to keep a check on the responsible officers, engineers, and contractors. The monitoring process starts from the creation of a small team consisting of members from the local community. Every team is created in a way that ensures participation from both males and females. Then the members are asked to monitor the implementation of the construction project. The team reports if they see any discrepancy or lack of transparency in the project. These reports are reviewed, and the issues are addressed to ensure transparency.

It is worth mentioning that the Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) of the Ministry of Planning has won the World Bank Director's Award for Most Innovative, Collaborative and Impactful Governance Global Practice Operations in 2021 for the success of DIMAPPP (The Daily Star, 2021). It has been really innovative in the way it grooms people from the local community and the way it engages them. The people participate in the process spontaneously, and whenever they see something problematic in the process, they report it to the authority. The DIMAPPP is definitely one of the best policies undertaken by the Awami regime in order to tackle transparency.

5.3 Participation in Policymaking?

The analysis of political freedoms has helped us explore that the people have not had the opportunity to participate in the policymaking of Bangladesh in the last twelve years. The concern of whether the citizens are equipped enough can come only after the existence of political freedoms can be determined. Based on the analysis, I would like to argue that Bangladesh did not have the existence of substantial political freedoms in the last twelve years. This can be validated by referring to the three ways of participation in policymaking – citizen politics, electoral politics and opposition, and civil society and media organizations. Sen (2000, pp. 146-160) has referred to these ways of political participation in his analysis.

First, the space for organizing peaceful political protests has vanished in Bangladesh. This has removed the opportunity for citizens to successfully address their demands. The police crackdown during the Protest against the Rampal Power Plant, the 2018 Road Safety Protests, and the 2018 Quota Reform Movement (Shovon & Salekin, 2018) suggest that police crackdown on peaceful non-partisan citizen movements has become prevalent in Bangladesh. The government has muscled the protests down, and it has not responded to the concerns the people have tried to address. There has been only one rare incident (the VAT on Private University Tuition Fees Protest) where the government has reverted its initially determined policy. The politicized characteristics of the Shahbag movement makes it problematic as it has specifically targeted the leaders of BJI and BNP. Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury (Prothom Alo, 2019b), a 1952 language movement veteran, has vociferously demanded that the list of war criminal in the AL has to be published. The Shahbag movement, therefore, cannot be taken as a positive incident in the political

freedoms. The continuous squeeze of political freedoms reached the nadir through the 2018 Road Safety Protest when numerous activists, students were detained and charged. The implementation of the Digital Security Act and its predecessor ICT Act has curbed the writing freedom and freedom of expression of netizens. Numerous incidences of detainment and arrests based on the act suggest that it has become an essential tool of suppressing dissident voices in the state.

Second, the lack of a free and fair election has guaranteed that the citizens had no chance to determine their preferred political representatives. The inability to delegate your preferred representative suggests that the citizens have had no say in the matters of policymaking. The representation of their interests in the parliament also remained absent. In majoritarian democracies, the person who chooses the defeated delegate loses the chance to have their interests represented. But in Bangladesh, it has been true for every individual. The rigged elections and political violence against oppositions have also removed the available alternative for citizens. As Sen (2000, p. 181) has argued, a free press and an actively functioning political opposition constitute the best way for ensuring the voices of the citizens. The regular persecution of opposition and its currently dismal condition have ensured that citizens receive no option to reject the Awami regime's desired representative. In addition to this, allegations of citizens being stripped off their voting rights have also been there during the general elections (Hölzl & Hossain, 2018). The absence of free and fair elections, a viable alternative option to choose, an active and highly functioning opposition, and the guarantee of voting rights suggest that the citizens had no say in the policymaking of Bangladesh.

Third, the continuous torture and detainment of civil society members have created a culture of fear among the media and civil society members. Death under police custody, extrajudicial killing, arrest and detainment under the Digital Security Act have ensured that the Awami regime has an impenetrable suppression mechanism. The civil society has been nothing more than a show-piece for this reason. Participant 3 has used the analogy of a python to explain this phenomenon. The attacking tactic of a python involves binding the victim in an impenetrable way. Through the binding, the python makes the victim voiceless and kills it. The Awami regime has undertaken a similar tactic here. The civil society organization in Bangladesh are waiting for their imminent death. The situation has come to a point where a simple writeup in the social media can take you to jail and get you killed. The culture of fear has become pervasive.

The absence of these three opportunities suggests that the citizens of Bangladesh have no possible way to participate in the decision-making of Bangladesh. The suppression has grown continuously over the years, and the lack of these opportunities helps us see that the citizens had no option to participate in policymaking.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: An Uncertain Glory of Bangladesh

Bangladesh has experienced massive economic advancement under the Awami regime. Its achievements under the Awami regime are highly commendable. Most elements under the social aspect of development have also advanced in the last twelve years. It is not that there are no areas of improvement for the country in terms of the economic and the social aspects of development. The lack of business freedom is interrelated to political freedoms and political power. The record of business freedom under the Awami regime has been dreadful. The regime has also failed to address the concerns about inequality by trying to find out better measurement mechanisms of evaluating inequality. The proportion of people using safe drinking water has also suggested that it has not improved under the Awami regime. The overall rate of unemployment has remained the same, and the regime has also failed to improve female unemployment.

The government has also failed to address potential environmental and ecological concerns. The construction of the Rampal Coal Power Plant and the Rooppur Power Plant has been implemented without paying any heed to the possible environmental concerns. The quality of education has remained a recurring problem, although the government has attempted to address the issue and improve it. Violence against women has also been addressed by the government, but a more well-thought policy is required for real improvement in this area. Much similar to the environmental concerns, problems and interests of the marginalized indigenous communities have been ignored by the Awami

regime. Inclusion of these communities is highly required for Bangladesh to ensure that every community is growing together.

High economic growth, boosted food production, increased food security, sufficient energy and electricity, high life expectancy (particularly high life expectancy of females), social protection measures for transgender, bede and tea laborers, and the reforms in the RMG sector have been the highlights of significant advancement under the Awami regime. Its focus on the fast-track projects, and social protection suggest that it has attempted to achieve both economic and social development.

But the miserable failure of the Awami regime in the political aspect of development has surpassed everything else. The state has gone a hundred steps back in terms of political freedoms. Despite undertaking some innovative transparency measure, all political aspects of development have reached the nadir. Indices, numerical representations, implementation of new policies, and the priority areas of policymaking suggest that the political aspects of development have been ignored in the last twelve years. The fast-track projects undertaken by the government suggests that economic growth has been prioritized, but social development has also received a good amount of attention from the regime. This suggests that the Awami regime has remained confined to the narrower definition of economic and social development in the last twelve years.

Drèze & Sen (2013) has referred to the social advancement of Bangladesh in order to draw the unusually grim picture of social advancement in India. They have argued that the Indian experience of simultaneous economic advancement and social degradation captures the notion of 'An Uncertain Glory', where the significance of the glory in the economic aspect has been uncertain because of the existing deficits in the social aspect.

For Bangladesh, the deficits in the political aspect have made its glory in the economic and the social aspect uncertain. If the economic and the social advancement has depicted the “unblemished sunny day”, the political degradation has been the dark clouds with drenching showers. Bangladesh has therefore, marched towards an uncertain glory under the Awami regime. In order to bring about real development, the deficits in the political aspect have to be improved immediately. Without political freedoms, the claims of development will remain uncertain.

I have argued here that the unmatching progress in the economic and the political aspects of Bangladesh under the Awami regime is certainly a similar “uncertain glory” for Bangladesh. The conditions of inequality in Bangladesh are quite similar to India, although Bangladesh fares better than India in certain elements. Despite Bangladesh’s high economic growth and advancement in the recent years, political advancement has downgraded. The meagre condition of political freedoms marks the “dark clouds and drenching showers already on the scene” against the “unblemished sunshine” of economic advancement, depicting ‘An Uncertain Glory of Bangladesh’.

Despite attaining significant economic advancement since the 1990s, the Indian experience has been marred by the dismal records in the health services, education, inequality and marginalization of disadvantaged communities, and the caste problem (Drèze & Sen, 2013). Its pride of largest functioning democracy has not been able to mitigate the grim picture of social advancement in India. Even after combining the achievements in the economic and the political aspects of development, the glory of this achievement remains uncertain because of the lacking in social advancement. The framework of Development as Freedom advocates simultaneous appreciation of all three elements where a lacking in

one of the elements cannot be replaced or substituted by another. The success of India in two of the three aspects of development is not able to shadow the deficit in the rest of the aspect.

Similarly, the economic advancement of Bangladesh cannot mitigate the lacking in political freedom even if it is combined with the achievements of Bangladesh in the social aspects of development. The simultaneous appreciation of the three aspects of development according to Development as Freedom suggests that political freedoms have gone through an unimaginable downfall under the Awami regime. Despite investing huge resources and attaining significant advancement in the economic and the social aspects of development, the glory of the Awami regime remains uncertain with the grim picture of political freedoms. The dark clouds of political freedoms darken with the lack of environmental concerns, and this marks the uncertain glory of Bangladesh. An uncertain glory of Bangladesh, is therefore, the significant deficits in political freedoms despite attaining economic and social advancement. Without the advancement of political aspects, Bangladesh cannot become a developed state.

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