

**A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS ON BANGLADESH RURAL ADVANCEMENT
COMMITTEE (BRAC) AND ABED'S RECEPTION OF PAULO FREIRE'S
CRITICAL LITERACY IN DESIGNING BRAC'S FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION
CURRICULUM IN BANGLADESH FROM 1972 TO 1981.**

Thesis

by

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Abstract

In this study, I examine the characteristics of the reception of Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire's critical literacy by Building Resources Across Communities in Bangladesh (BRAC) from 1972 to 1981. The central questions of this study are: (1) how Dr. Fazle Hasan Abed, founding member of BRAC, read Freire within the context of his political intentionality and what he perceived were BRAC's needs; and, (2) how Freire's adult literacy theory was integrated in BRAC's functional education curriculum design and practice. I argue that Abed was inspired by Paulo Freire's pedagogical tenets in the planning and enactment of BRAC's development initiatives to help the rural poor; however, Abed depoliticized and de-radicalized Freirean concepts when designing its functional education curriculum. Furthermore, his efforts at organizing the rural poor to generate income opportunities may have helped make the rural poor naïvely conscious. I also argue that although BRAC adapted Freire in its adult literacy curriculum, the program did not aim at the conscientization of its learners to challenge the oppressive social structure. Abed considered education as a tool of development within the frame of capitalism, not as an instrument for radical social transformation as Freire did. The political and social implications of specific processes of reception are illustrated through this comprehensive study on why and how Freire's pedagogical principles were adopted and adapted by BRAC to develop their functional literacy curriculum. Development educators as well as popular educators, social reformers and social business entrepreneurs may gain a new perspective on the reception of Freirean pedagogical ideas.

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List of Acronyms

- ASA: Association for Social Advancement
- BAKSAL: Bangladesh Krishak (farmer) Sramik (labour) Awami League
- BAL: Bangladesh Awami League
- BARD: Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development
- BCS: Bangladesh Civil Service
- BLC: BRAC Learning Centre
- BRAC: Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
- BRDB: Bangladesh Rural Development Board
- CARE: Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
- CHW: Community Health Worker
- CORR: Christian Organisation for Relief and Rehabilitation
- CUSO: Canadian University Students' Organization
- FE: Functional Education
- GSK: Gono Shasthay Kendra (Public Health Centre)
- GSS: Gono-Shahajjo Sangstha (People-help Organization)
- GUP: Gono Unnayan Prochesta (Peoples Development Efforts)
- NFE: Non Formal Education
- NFPE: Non Formal Primary Education
- NGO: Non Government Organizations
- NK: Nijera Kori (We do it ourselves)
- OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PPP: Pakistan People's Party

RDP: Rural Development Program

RDRS: Rangpur Dinajpur Rehabilitation Services

PROSHIKA: Proshikkhan (training), Shikkha (education) and Kaj (action)

REFLECT: Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques

UNESCO: United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

VO: Village Organization

WISE: World Innovation Summit for Education

Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to historically examine the characteristics of the reception of Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire's critical literacy by Building Resources Across Communities in Bangladesh (BRAC) from 1972 to 1981. Among a few Bangladeshi social organizations, BRAC adopted Freirean philosophy in designing its strategy to fight poverty in the 1970s and is now the world's largest non-governmental organization (Ellis, 2016). BRAC's founding member, Dr. Fazle Hasan Abed, brought Freire to BRAC's initiatives, and has been awarded the World Innovation Summit for Education prize in recognition of his contribution to poverty alleviation through education (BRAC, 2011). This comprehensive study on why and how Freire's pedagogical principles were adopted and adapted by BRAC to develop their functional literacy curriculum unveils the political and social implications of specific processes of reception. It will be useful to development and popular educators, and social reformers and activists to design development strategy and bring positive social changes through education.

Although Freire's work was known in Bangladesh in the 1970s and a few organizations applied his adult literacy method and philosophy, I focus on the initiatives by BRAC in Bangladesh from the 1970s to the early 1980s in this study. The Freirean discourse was explicit in BRAC's approach more than in any other non-governmental or government organizations in Bangladesh in terms of theory, policy, pedagogy, and practice. I have selected the period from 1972 to 1981 because BRAC's literacy programs had failed in the early 1970s before implementing Freirean principles, and succeeded in the late 1970s after adapting Freirean

principles in its functional education curriculum. The central questions of this study are: (1) how Dr. Fazle Hasan Abed, founding member of BRAC, read Freire within the context of his political intentionality and what he perceived were BRAC's needs; and, (2) how Freire's adult literacy theory was integrated in BRAC's functional education curriculum design and practice.

To do historical analysis, it is important to attribute meaningful significance to the time, place, and culture of a given historical event. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the basic intellectual task of a historian is to discover and make sense of the available archival information about a given event or time in the past. The historian also has to interpret and connect different pieces of available information and circumstances of the past to decode a historical event (Little, 2016). Historians outline and summarize actions, incidents and events, account for and interpret important outcomes, and ground their findings on evidence in the present to connect the facts about the past. In my analysis, in order to provide answers to the central questions, I examine some internal pedagogical sources such as discussion topics, themes, context, teacher selection process, teachers' training, teachers' roles, and in-class activities related to BRAC's literacy programs connecting Freirean pedagogy. I investigate BRAC's documents and publications such as annual reports, project proposals, and education magazines. I also examine BRAC's founder Fazle Hasan Abed's interviews and statements in print and electronic media as he acknowledged that he was influenced by Freire's educational philosophy and adopted and adapted some of his ideas in BRAC's education programs.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical and methodological framework I use to guide my study. In Chapter 3, I focus on the review of the literature with emphasis on BRAC. Chapter 4 introduces the historical background of Bangladesh to contextualize my examination. Chapter 5 includes a brief overview of NGOs in Bangladesh before and after independence to situate the

particularities of the discussion of BRAC. Chapter 6 explains who Fazle Hasan Abed is and follows his creation and evolution of BRAC over almost a decade from the early 1970s to the early 1980s. In Chapter 7, I briefly discuss approaches to adult education and Paulo Freire's critical literacy approach to pedagogy. In Chapter 8, I discuss BRAC's journey from relief to functional education and explain each of these in relation to one another. Chapter 9 expands the discussion of functional education to the specifics of BRAC's early initiative. Chapter 10 focuses on Freire's concepts in BRAC's functional education curriculum and within the context of BRAC's projects. In Chapter 11, I discuss the visible changes among the rural poor in BRAC's project area after implementing functional education curriculum. Finally, in Chapter 12, the thesis concludes the discussion with a summary of the analysis and synthesizes the findings of this study.

I want to disclose here that I was born in Bangladesh in late 1970s and saw BRAC's activities closely in my neighbourhood. I also witnessed a few major political movements in Bangladesh after its independence in 1971. My sister was a teacher of BRAC's NFPE program, I saw her working for BRAC for a few years and assisted her in classroom activities. On the other hand, I grew up in a neighbourhood where inequality, poverty, and oppression were evident. I was an activist and also worked voluntarily for an NGO. Therefore, I attended workshops and training events, experienced how NGOs worked in Bangladesh, managed funding and operated their activities in the field.

Chapter 2

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

In this study, I use Quentin Skinner's theoretical and methodological framework. Skinner in his works, *Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas* (1969) made it clear that the understanding of meaning cannot be achieved by studying only the text. The societal context, intentionality of the author, and its complex nature are relevant to examine the meaning and understanding of the text. Skinner's theoretical framework is used precisely to examine the documents produced by BRAC and statements from Abed.

Skinner (1969) argued that two common strategies "contextual reading" and "textual reading" used by historians in their attempts to understand the works of literature, philosophy, politics, and religion, are inadequate to comprehend the meaning of any given work. In contextual reading strategy, understanding the meaning of a given text depends on economic, political and religious aspects of a society and provides an essential framework to interpret and understand it (Skinner, 1969). In this strategy, social context is the most essential aspect to interpret any piece of work. Skinner argued that such assumptions affect the nature of the relations between actions and circumstances by failing to properly constitute the *intentions* behind the performance of the actions. He was doubtful whether a knowledge of the context or the causal conditions is equivalent to an understanding of the work itself or not and argued that there is always an intention in doing something which is not "contingently but instead necessarily related with the action at all. This second form of intention characterizes the *point of the action*" (Skinner, 1969, p. 45). On the other hand, in textual reading strategy, text is the sole necessary feature in interpreting and understanding any piece of intellectual work or

text. Skinner argued that to interpret and understand the meaning of any given text, only text itself is not sufficient to understand literature or philosophy, where the main object is to analyze, interpret, and understand its history. He also added that although textual reading strategy occasionally produces distinguished results, it often slips into historical irrationalities and ends up creating mythologies contrary to histories. Both methodologies are inadequate on their own, and assume incorrect conditions of understanding, meaning that “the result of accepting either orthodoxy has been to fill the current literature in the history of ideas with a series of conceptual muddles and mistaken empirical claims” (Skinner, 1969, p. 4). Ultimately, he asserted that neither of the common strategies is adequate to discover the understanding and meaning of the history of thoughts. Skinner (1969) said:

To demand from the history of thought a solution to our own immediate problems is ... to commit not merely a methodological fallacy, but something like a moral error. But to learn from the past ... the distinction between what is necessary and what is the product merely of our own contingent arrangements is to learn the key to self-awareness itself. (p. 53)

I also use Martyn Thompson’s theory (1993) to interpret the reception of Freire’s philosophy by Abed and BRAC. In his article “Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning,” Thompson (1993) argued that there are two primary modes of interpreting historical meaning. Firstly, “readers create meaning”, suggested specially by German theorists of *Rezeptionsgeschichte*; and secondly, “authorial intended meanings” as advanced by Anglo-American theorists, mainly Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock, of the “new” history of political thought. As Thompson pointed out, both are inadequate to interpret and understand the historical meaning of literary reception. Thompson (1979) concluded:

Both understandings of what is involved in interpreting historical meanings are one-sided. In the history of political thought, this one-sidedness has led to the neglect of important research strategies. In theories of literary history, the one-sidedness expresses a fundamental theoretical incoherence. (p. 248)

He claims that differences between them arise due to varied perspectives on the character of a text and both of these insights are valuable and required to understand the historical meaning. He contemplates both the reader as creator of meaning and the author and their authorial meaning. Thompson (1979) said:

By examining the incoherences of literary reception theory when viewed from the perspective of the intentionalists, and by examining the one-sidedness of intentionalists theory in the light of a modified version of the reception perspective, it is shown that an understanding of historical meaning requires both insights. (p. 248)

In understanding history, there is a textual gap between past meaning and present significance and past and present interpretations of texts. Thus, he suggested that in understanding the meaning of history, researchers should be self-aware and conscious in their present interpretations to know what those gaps are and the ways in which they have been created.

In addition to Skinner and Thompson, I also use Glenn A. Bowen's (2009) approach to examine the documents interconnected to Freire, BRAC and Abed. In his article "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," Bowen examined the function and place of documents in qualitative study and demonstrated the application of document analysis to grounded theory research. According to Bowen (2009), documents that might be used in a study can be of diverse types and forms. He also illustrated document analysis as a distinct procedure for specific forms of qualitative research that can be used in historical research—particularly

cross-cultural—and “within an interpretive paradigm” (Bowen, 2009, p. 29). In this process, Bowen asserted, the analyst needs to commit to and balance sensitivity and objectivity. Bowen (2009) built on Skinner (1969) and Thompson (1979) and argued that:

The researcher/analyst needs to determine not only the existence and accessibility but also the authenticity and usefulness of particular documents, taking into account the original purpose of each document, the context in which it was produced, and the intended audience. As the subjective interpreter of data contained in documents, the researcher should make the process of analysis as rigorous and as transparent as possible. Qualitative inquiry demands no less. (p. 38)

I integrate Bowen’s analysis with the insights of Skinner and Thompson since Abed’s intentionality, literature of BRAC’s education programs, and the Bangladeshi historical and social context are relevant to understand and interpret the aspects regarding how, when and why Freirean principles were received in BRAC’s functional education programs. As all of these aspects are critical in document analysis in the process of historical research, I follow Bowen’s approach informed by Skinner and Thompson’s theories to analyze Abed’s writings, speeches, interviews, BRAC’s education literature (i.e., curriculum, curriculum reports), annual reports, projects proposals, projects evaluation reports, newspaper articles, blogs, academic research papers and books about BRAC’s education program to conscientize people and reduce poverty.

As this study will explore Abed and BRAC’s firsthand experience and initiatives in dealing with poverty and oppression through functional education in war-torn, newly-liberated, poor and politically unstable Bangladesh, findings of this study will help and encourage social reformers and educators, specifically in the developing world, to relate the experience of Abed

and BRAC. It will hopefully inspire those who want to take initiatives to alleviate poverty and oppression through designing effective functional education curriculum for their social contexts.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

I include literature about Freire specific to the Bangladeshi context in order to historicize this research. More importantly, as Abed and BRAC are in the center of this study, I review the literature about BRAC and its connection to Paulo Freire. I also review the literature about the reception of Freire's methodology in some Asian countries like India, Pakistan and Indonesia to show a comparison to the reception of Freirean educational philosophy in Bangladesh.

In his work on education and social transformation, Muhammad Agus Nuryatno (2006, p. 1) stated, "the bibliography of Paulo Freire has evolved over the last two decades in line with interest in reinventing his educational philosophy according to different contexts." He went on to state that the literature on Paulo Freire and his educational principles can be divided into several categories, including "texts written to demonstrate the influence of Freire in certain social contexts, or to apply his theory or methodology in different social contexts" (Nuryatno, 2006, p. 1). Thus, I largely focus on Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) in Bangladesh in relation to Abed and his organization BRAC in this chapter.

Freirean educational philosophy has been adopted, modified and implemented in many countries in the world, especially in developing countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Rugut & Osman, 2013). Freire's educational and methodological principles like conscientization, praxis, generative themes, banking education, codification and dialogue are widely recognized and have prompted fieldwork and scholarly research in many parts of the world. His philosophy is based on the principles that human beings are capable to think critically

about their situation, can be trusted to take control of their lives, and can collectively transform their views of the world and how they relate to it (Schenck, Nel & Louw, 2010).

Freire developed an educational theory of “conscientization” within the framework of a theory of radical social change and expressed it in a literacy training program. According to John Elias (1994), Freire’s literacy method can be summarized into three stages. These three stages are: (1) the study of the context; (2) the selection of words from the discovered vocabulary (codification); and, (3) the actual literacy training (de-codification). Reading is not merely transferring information but touches the world around the words. Reading should connect learners’ living experiences so they can act and reflect upon reading and connect it with the real world. Freire (1973, p. 48) argued that “acquiring literacy does not involve memorizing sentences, words and syllables lifeless objects unconnected to an existential universe ... but rather an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self transformation producing a stance on intervention in one’s context.”

Freire’s adult literacy method was first used for educating 300 sugarcane workers in a poor neighbourhood in Angicos in the state of Rio Grande do Norte in Brazil in 1962 (Mies, 1973). He successfully taught the adult learners of the program to read and write in just 45 days. After the success of this project, Freire’s adult literacy method and pedagogical concepts were well embraced and became popular in empowering poor and illiterate people (Mies, 1973). Soon after this success, the Brazilian government became interested in implementing Freire’s methodology to increase adult literacy all over the country. In 1964, the Brazilian government designed a program to create 20,000 cultural circles to reach two million people with literacy education. In the plan, each cultural circle consisted of 30 adult learners and worked together for two months (Mies, 1973). Nuryatno (2006) reported that Freire promoted cultural circles instead

of traditional classroom schooling to educate the adult learners. Freire proposed the formation of cultural circles, managed by a coordinator, where dialogue was used in the process of teaching and learning. He criticized the conventional lecture format that considered the learners as empty objects and the teacher/coordinator as a propagator of knowledge. This kind of traditional teaching-learning process that regarded learners as depositories and the teachers as depositors was described as “banking education.” Freire further stated that this kind of education suffers from narrative sickness and is an instrument of oppression (Freire, 1970). For Freire, literacy was not only mere training of learning how to read or write, but aimed to shape the consciousness of the learners and engage them to act and reflect in their social context (Nuryatno (2006). Freire (1973) argued, “acquiring literacy does not involve memorizing sentences, words or syllables—lifeless objects unconnected to an existential universe—but rather an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance on intervention in one’s context” (p. 48). In response to conventional banking education, Freire proposed problem-posing education. His literacy pedagogy acted as a method of raising critical consciousness and conscientization because of its connection to social and political issues (Elias, 1975). Elias (1975) further argued:

Freire’s philosophy includes, as one of its most essential elements, a theory of human consciousness and of knowing. He is indebted to the phenomenological view of knowledge which attempts to avoid the extremes of materialism and idealism by positing a third way and he tries to explain knowledge as the process in which man becomes aware of objective reality and of his own knowledge of objective reality. (p. 212)

However, although Freire did not introduce the term conscientization, he used the word to explain his proposed pedagogical theory and practice (Elias, 1975). According to Elias (1975),

Freire best defined his ‘conscientization’ in a footnote in *Cultural Action for Freedom*. Freire (1972, p. 27) described conscientization as “The process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives, and of their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it.”

Arthur S. Lloyd (1972) in his article “Freire, Conscientization, and Adult Education” argued that the word most closely associated with Freire is ‘conscientization’. Conscientization (conscientização in Portuguese; Samālōcanāmūlaka-cētanā/ সমালোচনামূলক-চেতনা in Bengali) simply means “to make aware” or “awakening of critical awareness” (Madero, 2017, p. 22).

Freire was influenced by Marxist philosophy, which is reflected in his radical critical pedagogy. Thus, Freire’s conscientization focuses on achieving an in-depth understanding of the world to allow people to critically perceive social and political contradictions. Freire’s critical consciousness intended to stimulate action against the oppressive elements in the society by making the learners aware of their exploitative situations. Lloyd (1972) further stated that Freire’s conscientization is a social process in which human beings gain a critical understanding as knowing subjects of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and capacity to transform that reality. According to Lloyd (1972), Freire’s conscientization activates and promotes a process by which people gain awareness of the contradictions in the social structures and status quo in which they live, in order to change such structures or situations.

Peter L. McLaren and Colin Lankshear (1994) argued that Freire’s work has been cited all over the world by academicians and scholars and has had a significant contribution to critical pedagogy because of its theoretical refinement and practical success in implementation. Similar to many South American countries, Freire’s adult literacy method was also used in India and influenced the National Adult Education Program (NAEP). The NAEP was launched in 1978 by

the Indian government. Geeta Ram's *Adult Education: Literacy to Liberation* (1991) analyzed this project and found that the NAEP project followed Freirean principles as a source of inspiration, specifically his idea of "conscientization" aimed at rural poor. However, in Ram's (1991) view, the NAEP failed to achieve the expected results because the literacy materials were highly artificial and portrayed "poverty" as the point of departure instead of considering "oppression" as the central problem as Freire's model did. Therefore, the program focused more on transforming cultural behavior via the transmission of information and skills, rather than on raising critical consciousness through literacy among rural people. He further argued that the NAEP did not bring the expected outcome because poverty was considered an "inner" problem, not a structural one. Although it coopted Freirean elements, because of the misalignment of core frameworks the means of literacy acquisition did not have political consequences in India. The program was unsuccessful because it was not particularly designed nor implemented for the targeted rural people, rather it was developed and organized for the people following a top-down approach unlike Freire's bottom-up approach. The NAEP was replaced by the National Literacy Mission in 1988. Ram (1991) stated that to achieve the maximum results, there was no alternative other than to employ Freirean critical literacy in the real sense, both philosophical and methodological. He also added that the literacy acquisition materials used in such programs must always be based on thematic investigation and to achieve this goal it is necessary to develop Freirean facilitators who are committed to empowering the deprived (Ram, 1991).

Khan, Khurshid, Malik and Hameed (2017) analyzed the education system in Pakistani universities and identified narrative teaching method as the key pedagogical issue that made university learners incapable of critically thinking. They further stated that the narrative teaching method used by university teachers caused its learners to memorize the contents of their lessons

like human machines to imitate their teachers and general claims without critical thought.

Connecting to larger socio-political issues in the region, Khan, et al. (2017) argued that this helps promote terrorism, unbeknownst to Pakistanis. Therefore, they suggested that teachers should follow Freirean concepts of education to make the learners able to be involved in the teaching-learning process and to think critically. Following Freire's philosophy through developing critical consciousness, education can serve its basic purpose of humanizing people and helping develop more critical engaged learners in the Pakistani education system.

Raja (2005) argued that high literacy rate alone cannot ensure peace, progress and social justice in any country; although literacy is crucially important to address prevalent social, political, economic and religious issues. He further argued that humanization of education through Freire's educational concept of literacy can address various issues in Pakistan. Raja asserted that Pakistan is one of the underdeveloped countries in the world with a low rate of literacy due to a number of reasons, including poverty, oppression, gender inequality, religious sectarianism, and racial and tribal issues. He further emphasized that Pakistan's literacy rate can be improved significantly if the teachers and students actively participate in the teaching-learning process, become aware of their existential realities, and realize the essence of critical thinking in their lives and education. Raja also stated that religious sectarian intolerance is one of the worst problems in Pakistani societies and Freire is relevant here too, as Freire condemned religious sectarianism and criticized it as 'necrophilic.' Freire stated that: "[s]ectarianism mythicizes and thereby alienates; radicalization criticizes and thereby liberates ... sectarianism, because it is mythicizing and irrational, turns reality into a false (and therefore unchangeable) 'reality'" (1970, p. 22). To Freire, sectarianism is a hindrance to human liberation, and he voiced strongly against it. Raja (2005) also analyzed the need for Freire's educational principles in the Pakistani

context and stated that the educational system and by extension, social environment, in Pakistan could benefit from Freire's theoretical assumptions and practical experience concerning the value of literacy.

Yeasmin and Rahman (2012) analyzed Freire's educational principles and looked at his theoretical innovations, its impact on the development of educational practice and critical pedagogy in the Bangladeshi context. They stated that the Bangladeshi education system uses too much lecturing and memorizing ('banking education' in Freire's term) and serves the interests of the ruling class by directing learners to accept the prevailing social conditions. This education system made people passive and propagated social adjustment, rather than social transformation of unjust conditions. Therefore, the authors argued that Freire's theories are relevant to make people aware to become active agents in transforming society. They also argued that if the country wants to utilize the full potential of its people and make them democratic and aware of their human rights, the education system must be overhauled to receive Freirean education theories. They stated that Bangladesh should embrace an education system that would consider the people not as mere receptive objects but as subjects to make real social changes, connecting Freirean pedagogy to Bangladeshi socio-economic perspectives. Finally, they stated that Bangladeshi education system has to accept the philosophy of "openness" to other perspectives (Yeasmin and Rahman, 2012, p. 14)

Co-option of Freire's conscientization is evident in BRAC's development strategies. BRAC's adoption of Freire's conscientization in its functional education program is acknowledged by Mahmood Aminul Islam (1980) in his paper "Learning from real life problems functional education in Bangladesh." Islam (1980) stated that although the motivational efforts to change the fertility behaviour of the people by government family planning programs failed

(Bangladesh Janasamkhyā Niyāntraṇa o Paribāra Parikalpanā Bibhāga & World Fertility Survey, 1978), BRAC's innovative approach of rural conscientization was effective and brought an attitudinal change among women. BRAC used functional education as a vehicle to bring in conscientization to the rural poor. For Islam (1980), BRAC's "conscientization" can be broadly outlined as non-formal education with a psychosocial approach to raise consciousness among the rural poor to change their situations and the program had better possibilities to succeed. He further suggested that if this conscientization strategy is genuinely implemented among the rural population, it would benefit the rural population by changing their attitudes to current socioeconomic issues. The program was also expected to shape the self-confidence of the rural population and make rural development attempts more rewarding.

Since the inception of BRAC's development activities in 1972, empowering women in fighting poverty has been one of BRAC's main development strategies. For BRAC, in the early 1970s, an integrated approach to empower women was important to achieve sustainable development. BRAC was concerned that rural women were conditioned by various social, economic, religious, and cultural factors, and in this context, women and children are the most disadvantaged people. Thus, the Rural Development Program (RDP) was the result of BRAC's learning experience that targets very poor people, focusing more on women and children. RDP was an integrated poverty alleviation program based on mobilization of the poor with a provision of non-formal education and skill training aimed at women and landless poor (Bhuiya & Chowdhury, 1995). Bhuiya and Chowdhury (1995) commented on this approach of BRAC's women empowerment and stated:

Considering the central role of women in family health, perhaps the most effective way would be to empower the women so that they become aware of the problems of their own

and other family members and equipped to participate in household decision making. They must also be empowered to shape their reproductive life. They must be informed sufficiently to bring about necessary behavioural changes to avoid the burden of diseases. (p. 1)

Beside an integrated development approach, another method used by BRAC was Target Approach (TA) based on Freire's philosophy and critical literacy. Target Approach was initiated in 1976 to organize the poor into *samity* or small co-operatives and provided them welfare services (Chowdhury, 1989). In his article, "Bangladesh: A Large NGO Sector Supported by Foreign Donors", Nobusue (2002) stated that in implementing TA, BRAC used the perspectives of the poor, helped them become independent, motivated them to take part in cooperatives voluntarily and raised their awareness about human rights. He also noted that BRAC produced various goods, provided many services and preferred the empowerment of women, understanding the limitations of government and private organizations in alleviating poverty. BRAC also recognized that Bangladeshi women suffer from *pardah* (religious obligation) and traditional obligation (Nobusue, 2002). Largely, women's participation from public life through employment is disallowed. Connected to this are challenges in obtaining formal education from schools. Early marriage and raising children at home become their primary concern. In the male dominated society, supported by religious traditionalism, women are restricted in social participation and they have less power than men in familial structures. Gender discrimination and oppression of women is evident in many facets. So, to achieve equality, BRAC served women first (Lovell, 1992).

From the very beginning, beside developing program for men and women, BRAC also designed separate programs only for women. BRAC's Jamalpur Women's Program was

exclusively designed for and implemented by women to help them fight poverty through functionally educating them on agriculture. Among many others, Manikganj Integrated Project was another BRAC initiative that showed its focus on women empowerment through functional education. Through the Manikganj Project, BRAC trained 95 female teachers in functional education, of which 14 were given mixed training on leadership. They also built 33 female centers, organized 14 women's cooperatives, and gave poultry and provided loans to its female members (BRAC, 1977). The BRAC report on the project also stated that BRAC emphasized its functional education program to conscientize the rural poor in Manikganj.

Ian Smillie (2009) in his book *Freedom from Want* wrote that Abed emphasized education programs in BRAC's strategies for sustainable development for the rural poor almost from the beginning. For Abed, education was the most important tool to development. Therefore, after the relief work was over, BRAC's first development plan was to make the entire adult population in Sulla literate and build 125 community centres (*Gonokendras*) for its adult learners. In BRAC's Sulla: Phase 2 proposal to Oxfam, Abed noted that 80 percent of the adult people in Sulla were illiterate and "without education, development efforts were doomed from the start" (Smillie, 2009, p. 29). Abed also wrote that adult literacy must be functionally related to the development of the work-related skills to its learners. Smillie (2009) noted how BRAC's functional education was divided into two parts: raising awareness and providing numeracy and literacy skills. The objective of this structure was to create a feeling of solidarity for the group and prepare the rural poor to take part in income-generation projects (Smillie, 2009).

BRAC's vice chairperson Mushtaque Chowdhury and executive director Mahabub Hossain talked about Freire's influence on BRAC's development and strategic initiatives in the seminar "Paulo Freire and Subaltern Consciousness" (BRAC, 2013). In the seminar, key speaker was

Professor Larry Simon (Director of Graduate Programmes in Sustainable International Development at Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy) and interpreted Freire's seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He further discussed how BRAC's development activities was influenced by Freire's ideas and how the oppressed can be served with different development models. In line with Larry Simon, Mushtaque Chowdhury and Mahabub Hossain talked about how Paulo Freire's concepts helped BRAC work in its early initiatives to support the rural poor in Bangladesh. Both of the speakers talked about how Freire's ideas guided BRAC's founder Abed to devise strategy to help the poor people in its development programs. Echoing Freire's philosophy, Hossain said "It is not only the poor who need opportunities for 'conscientisation' but every individual" (BRAC, 2013). Although Abed and his team members acknowledged Freire's influence in designing BRAC's development programs, it is also evident that BRAC modified some of Freire's principles in the Bangladeshi context in its early conscientization programs (Rafi, 2003). Rafi stated that BRAC's "functional education was highly structured and contained passive experiences" (2003, p. 3909) contrary to Freire's highly pedagogical and didactic method. Rafi (2003) also pointed out that Freire developed the educational formula in Portuguese, but BRAC made changes to pick up dialogues conveniently in classrooms, reflecting that every part of a Bangla word does not have a meaning.

Providing adult education was one of BRAC's most significant attempts to fight poverty. Imam (1982) discussed what needs were faced by BRAC in designing its functional education curriculum and how BRAC developed the responses to address those needs for sustainable rural development. For Imam (1982), one major distinctive strategy developed by BRAC was its conscientization approach for the rural poor through functional education. From its early experience (November 1972 to April 1974) BRAC learned that such a strategy had little

significance to the rural poor if the lessons are not connected to the lives of the learners.

According to Imam (1982), Abed and his team realized that to attract the poor villagers to have functional education at community centres (*Gonokendras*) would not be easy if the contents of the lessons were not related to the learners' perspectives and had no immediate visible effects or benefits. BRAC also recognized that functional literacy should lead the learners to such materials or information that would be important or meaningful to its learners to solve their real-life problems. Because the costs in time, efforts, and opportunities were too great and the benefits were unrecognizable for the average illiterate agricultural labourer, the development of functional education was essential (Imam, 1982). BRAC's subject matters were designed based on the feedback of the potential participants of the program area and the topics were covered from areas like agriculture, family planning, health, nutrition, exploitation, capacity building, social problems, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Imam (1982, p. 264) wrote, "The essential content of the course was developed on the basis of an identification of the topics that were of greatest concern to the target population." Imam (1982) further stated that centre of BRAC's strategy for the development of the rural poor was the development of their human potential and this process was equipped by its functional education approach.

Abed in his speech at the 2011 WISE Summit acknowledged the reception of Freire's philosophy in BRAC's education program to fight poverty. Abed stated that education is a great equalizer and he started to fight poverty with education since the inception of BRAC forty years ago in a marginalized rural village in Bangladesh. Although Abed believed that education was the strongest means to transform society, BRAC's literacy programs faced challenges linked to gender, proximity, affordability and the flexibility that was required for children from poor, illiterate households. To address these problems, Abed said that there was a greater concentration

on devising a low cost, innovative, learner-centred curriculum, materials and methodologies, rather than focusing on physical infrastructure and facilities. Abed stated that BRAC utilized Freirean principles in designing its curriculum, which became the basis of all of BRAC's community and capacity development activities. Abed stated:

We therefore put into practice Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's principles on conscientization, enunciated in his Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Freire believed that the confluence of action and reflection created new knowledge and that, through reflection, learners became actors, not mere observers, and authors of their own decisions. Subsequently, all of BRAC's community and capacity development activities have been based on these principles. (BRAC, 2011)

Freire's education model has significant possibilities for spreading out non-formal and formal education in Bangladesh (Khan, 2006). Khan (2006) pointed out that as Freire considered literacy and continuing education as means for the democratization of culture among the rural and non-literate urban people, they have significant impact for sustainable democracy in Bangladesh. As the government of Bangladesh persevered to eliminate illiteracy through the popular education movement, Khan (2006) suggested the implementation of Freire's educational principles in Bangladesh. He argued that:

If the popular education model of Paulo Freire is adopted and adapted in the literacy campaign, the future literate people of the country will develop capacity for critical thought to work democratically within popular organisations. More importantly, practice of three ethical values in the education arena, viz. freedom and human rights, critical dialogue (not polemics), and respect for creativity can make up a democratic culture in

the organizations that are promoting and want to promote non-formal participatory education in Bangladesh. (Khan, 2006).

In the same context, he also recommended that non-government organizations (NGOs) and the government of Bangladesh do in-depth research on Paulo Freire's work and relate his educational approach for Bangladesh.

Rafi (2003) stated that Abed's inspiration by Freire's "liberating education" and Andre Gunder Frank's "dependency theory" is reflected in BRAC's conscientization and development initiatives. Andre Gunder Frank (1966) promoted the notion that resources from the poor and underdeveloped states drift or flow to wealthy and powerful states, and this flow of resources enriches the wealthy states more at the cost of the poor states. As a result, poor states remain poor and dependent on the wealthy states. Thus, BRAC recognized that without making the poor conscious of the basic causes of their poverty and the mode of their exploitation, no development initiative would be effective to change their impoverished situation. Rafi (2003) also stated that BRAC believed that the poor can be made aware of their insolvent situation and mobilized for social justice through Village Organizations (VO), as reflected by their deliberate programing from 1978 onwards. Therefore, BRAC implemented the strategy that its members should be methodically conscientized as soon as they form their village organizations (Chowdhury, 1989).

Pandey (2005), stated that although many organizations introduced literacy programs in 1970s, they failed to achieve success as there was high drop-out among the participants. He stated that BRAC's functional literacy materials (implemented since May 1974) based on Freire's conscientization reduced the drop-out rates and increased learners' awareness

significantly. As BRAC was successful in its initiatives, functional literacy materials were used by other organizations over the years (Pandey, 2005).

A major gap identified in the current literature is how Abed read Freire within the context of his political intentionality and what he perceived were BRAC's needs. Other authors have also neglected to address how Freire's adult literacy theory was integrated in BRAC's functional education curriculum design and practice. Therefore, the reading of the literature about BRAC led me to an awareness of the lack of a critical approach to BRAC's reception of Freire's ideas and praxis.

Chapter 4

Bangladesh: A Look Back in History

Before independence, the history of Bangladesh is a part of the history of the Indian subcontinent, particularly of British India and then of Pakistan from 1947 to 1971. Although the Arab merchants had come to Bengal long before the Muslim conquest in 1199, the Dutch, French, and English all came in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The history of colonial invasion by the Europeans in the Indian subcontinent began with the arrival of the British East India Company at the start of the sixteenth century, signaling an economic decline after the collapse of Mughal rule (Smillie, 2009; Dani, 1962).

When the British departed in 1947, greater India was partitioned between India and Pakistan. Until August 14, 1947, Bangladesh was known as East Bengal and then as East Pakistan from 1947–1971. East Pakistan was subject to military rule as a part of united Pakistan but did not have equal access to development resources and central administrative positions. As power was centralized in West Pakistan, East Pakistanis were subject to poverty, political oppression, and diminished civil and citizenship rights. The central Pakistani government was also reluctant to invest in modernizing the infrastructure and human resources in East Pakistan. All of these social, political and economic oppressive elements led to a war of liberation for East Pakistanis in 1971 and the birth of the new sovereign country Bangladesh. As soon as Bangladesh gained independence, it was affected by a series of cyclones, floods, famine, and extreme poverty. It also became subject to authoritative political rule and oppression again, similar to when it was a part of united Pakistan. The newly independent country sought

participatory development for growth and prosperity, but bureaucrats and politicians neglected development processes, despite them being the responsibility of government (Stalker, 1996).

Although Pakistan (East and West united together) achieved independence in 1947 from the British colonizers, it was still in the shadow of the British rule due to its inherent colonial mechanism and facets in the government and society. Influence of British colonialism was present in all aspects of life for native Pakistanis as they were ruled by the British colonizers for the previous two centuries. From the very beginning of the united Pakistan since August 1947, the relations between the East and West Pakistan were weak, and the former faced issues in terms of political, social, economic inequity and oppression. Relations worsened and conflict was obvious when West Pakistan leader Mohammed Ali Jinnah strongly started promoting Urdu as the state language of united Pakistan even though it was spoken by less than 8 percent of the country's total population and almost nobody in East Pakistan. Finally, in 1952, Urdu was declared as the one and only national language of Pakistan and signaled a specific intention of power centralization. Jinnah's repressive declaration caused a fierce resistance in Bangla-speaking East Pakistan. To make matters worse, the Pakistani government ordered its police force to open fire on protesters and killed and injured many people, including university students, in Dhaka on February 21, 1952. This incident set off an intense demonstration by public throughout East Pakistan.

These events contributed to understandings of new impositions of colonial era politics and oppression and sparked movement for independence in East Pakistan. In his work, *Bangladesh, Emergence of a Nation*, economist A.M.A. Muhith (1978) traced the roots of this conflict beyond language grievances. The considerable poverty and economic underdevelopment in the East were not met with appropriate revenue spending or foreign aid distribution by the

central government. West Pakistan dominated the economy, all aspects of government, and continued to grow in GNP and per capita income. Economic growth was stagnant in the East and income disparities continues to grow with the West. This was exacerbated by the West's military takeover of the united government in 1958 (Muhith, 1978). Smillie (2009) similarly noted the political instability and military coup that marred united Pakistan's first decade. However, a return to civilian rule became likely during 1960s, and East Pakistan's vocal and clear proposals for a federal system would allow both East and West greater economic autonomy. Later, these proposals were opposed in West Pakistan. Consequently, the Bengali nationalists suffered, were arrested and jailed by the ruling government. In course of time, all forms of oppression, discrimination and exploitation mounted up. Therefore, massive resistance in protest emerged under the leadership of political activist Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in East Pakistan at the end of 1960s.

Another major event that created substantial mistrust and conflict between East and West Pakistan was the Indo-Pakistani war in 1965. This war between India and Pakistan was an eye-opening incident for East Pakistanis, as the region was absolutely unprotected in terms of military defence and security. On the other hand, the united Pakistani rulers were unjustly biased towards West Pakistan, accumulated assets and piled up all their strength to defend the West Pakistani frontiers. In this context, after the 1965 war between India and united Pakistan, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared the historic 6-point demand, which was a charter of economic freedom for the East Pakistanis from the oppressive and exploitative colonial state-system introduced by the West Pakistanis. It aimed to directly address the exploitation of the East by separating currencies, militaries, and foreign exchange, while centralizing a parliamentary federal government (Ahsan, 2013). After that, Mujib was jailed several times by the military

government while campaigning for East Pakistan's autonomy. Another incident that made 'Bangalees' (meaning Bengali language speaking people) more discontent was the devastating cyclone in East Pakistan in November 1970. The ensuing floods and famine ravaged the country and killed thousands of people. It caused a major humanitarian disaster and West Pakistan was unsympathetic and slow to respond. The attitudes of West Pakistani rulers towards the East strengthened the perception of East Pakistanis that they were neglected by the West Pakistanis and their oppressive government.

In this time, for a variety of political reasons, military dictator General Ayub Khan lost his power. General Yahya Khan, after succeeding Ayub Khan as the President in 1969, announced a long-awaited Pakistani general election. In December 1970, the general election was held and Mujib's political party Awami League won 160 of 162 seats in East Pakistan but no seat in West Pakistan. The socialist Pakistan People's Party (PPP) got the peoples' mandate in West Pakistan with 81 seats but none in East Pakistan. The result of the Pakistan general election reflected that the nation was divided between East and West Pakistan. However, although Sheikh Mujib's Awami League got the people's mandate to form the government of united Pakistan, the PPP led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the Pakistani military did not let it happen. In March 1971, martial law authorities led by West Pakistanis postponed the convening of the National Assembly indefinitely (Smillie, 2009).

In response to this unconstitutional announcement, the reaction in East Pakistan was quick and massive. Banglaee nationalists, led by Awami League, called for strikes and crippled the country. Therefore, to resolve this political crisis, a series of bilateral meetings were held between PPP and Awami League. However, these two parties were unable to come to an

agreement of transferring power to East Pakistan's representatives on the basis of the Six Point Movement. During negotiations, West Pakistan's army launched a brutal genocidal attack 'Operation Search Light' in East Pakistan on March 25, 1971, murdered thousands of people and arrested Sheikh Mujib. Following the brutal attack and Sheikh Mujib's arrest, declaration of independence of East Pakistan was inevitable. Although there were controversies around the declaration of independence, the then army officer major—and later president of Bangladesh—Zia's announcement on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was widely heard on the radios on March 26, 1971 by the people of East Pakistan. After Zia's declaration of independence, the process of liberating Bangladesh got strong momentum. Meanwhile, Awami League leaders formed a temporary Bangladeshi government in India and declared the arrested Sheikh Mujib as the president of the new country Bangladesh. After a nine-month long liberation war, Bangladeshi freedom-fighters known as '*Muktijoddhas*' (মুক্তিযুদ্ধ) with the support of the Indian army defeated Pakistani forces in December 1971 and achieved independence. Although there is controversy about the numbers, it is believed by some that the victory of Bangladesh came at the cost of three million lives and an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 rape victims (Brownmiller, 1975).

At independence, Bangladesh was one of the poorest countries in the world on almost every socio-economic indicator and inherited an international debt of US\$ 500 million. Before independence, the average per capita income in Bangladesh was US\$ 70. The cyclone in 1970 and war in 1971 accounted for a damage of US\$ 1.2 billion (Smillie, 2009). Although only a little infrastructure was developed from 1947 to 1971 in East Pakistan, everything from transportation, communication, housing, power transmission, public utilities, bridges, railways, academic and hospital infrastructures were seriously damaged (Faaland & Parkinson, 1976).

Education and health services were mainly basic level or absent, and 80 percent of the total population was illiterate. Water and sanitation facilities were extremely terrible.

Independence brought other challenges for the new country. The killing of intellectuals by the Pakistani military in December 1971 left a considerable vacuum in the field of thinkers, scholars and philosophers. The withdrawal of West Pakistani senior civil servants and professionals from the East meant that the new country was abandoned with few experienced people in government and administration. Before 1971, most Bengali civil servants were posted in Pakistan's capital Islamabad and at the outset of the war they were either imprisoned or put under house arrest. Due to political and bureaucratic difficulties, many Bangladeshi civil servants could not return to Bangladesh until 1973 or as late as 1974. Therefore, a vacuum was created in government's administration and affected the pace of development of Bangladesh in its early years. However, after the return of the bureaucrats, when it eventually established itself, contemporary civil society, citizens and scholars have suggested that the newly created Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) employees were highly vulnerable to political corruption (Mukherjee, et al., 2001).

In Bangladesh, overpopulation and scarcity of food remained the two most important problems along with other major challenges through the 1970s. The Harvard Center for Population Studies projected that if the population growth followed the 1972 growth rate and family planning strategy was not strongly implemented, the country's population would be as much as 229 million by 2000 (Faaland & Parkinson, 1976). However, the government's initiatives along with the help of NGOs were largely successful to implement the family planning strategy and now at present in 2019 the population of Bangladesh is nearly 165 million (World

Population Review, 2019). Bangladesh is a small country and had 70 million people in the early 1970s, making it one of the mostly densely populated countries in the world during at that time. Before independence, Bangladesh was already importing 1.3 million tons of grain every year and the situation worsened after independence. Thus, food intake in the 1970s became a standard mean of defining poverty. During that time, most of the rural poor were struggling to manage food for their families, could not consume the required amount of daily calories, and remained concerned almost always about food and hunger (Smillie, 2009). And for the poorest in the rural areas situation was much worse. Referring to such conditions of the rural poor, Smillie (2009, p. 37) stated that “in the rural areas, almost three-fourths of the income of a rural family was devoted to food and poorer the family, the greater the the level of effort required to obtain it”. In 1974, more than three quarters of Bangladeshis lived in absolute poverty and almost half in extreme poverty (Hye, 1996). Though these numbers reflected the dire poverty situations of the then Bangladesh, the truth was more shocking. Outsiders misunderstood the real situation as they had different perspectives and diverse ways to understand a poor rural society. Behind this poverty, there existed a lot of social, political and economic factors. Regarding this, Chambers (1983, p. 25) said, “poor people on disaster courses may not be recognized.”

Not long after the independence, Awami League legislators and politicians demanded preferential treatment for themselves and their families in securing money-making government positions and access to beneficial means of profit through the allocation of licenses to import (Smillie, 2009). Further, although Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was elected prime minister in March 1973 and committed to promote multi-party democracy, he suspended Bangladeshi constitutional rights in December 1974, banned all political parties except his own party the Awami League and appointed himself as the president of Bangladesh for a five-year term in January 1975

(Anderson, 1976). Soon after independence, the Mujib government started to rapidly lose its popularity. During the unexpected plunge of Mujib's popularity, a devastating famine killed 50,000 people in 1974, putting the country in a more turmoil situation. The famine caused a massive influx of foreign aid and relief to the country. However, the Mujib government failed to serve its people at this time of devastation, good governance plummeted, corruption reached its maximum level, intolerance among the political opponents amplified, political killings took place and freedom of the press was significantly affected during this time. With the ever-growing public dissatisfaction, political unrest and tumultuous situations in the country, Mujib wanted to practice dictatorial power and formed Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League 'BAKSAL' ("Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League," 2015). There was a growing dissatisfaction in many people and internal and external groups took the advantage of the situations. Shortly after BAKSAL was formed, Mujib and his family members were assassinated by some young right-wing army officers in 1975, allegedly with covert US backing. After Mujib was killed, through some complex situations and bloodshed, Lt. General Ziaur Rahman rose to the power. Zia reinstated the free market and outlined socialism as economic and social justice in the constitution. During Zia's reign, Bangladesh saw rapid economic and industrial growth. However, Zia's reign (1975–1981) was opposed by many groups, especially within the military. A series of military coups took place and finally President Zia was assassinated in 1981. After Zia was killed, Lt. General Hossain Mohammad Ershad emerged as a dictator who stayed in power through the 1980s (he eventually resigned after weeks of violent demonstrations demanding democracy in December 1990).

Chapter 5

NGOs in Bangladesh: Before and After Independence in 1971

Although Bangladesh was known internationally as a country that suffered from poverty in the 1970s, it had been known in the past as a rich country. Bengal (now Bangladesh) was one of the wealthiest provinces of the Mughal Empire (1526–1857), and attracted international trade to its agricultural produce, woven cloth and handcrafts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Colonial traders were interested in Bengal for its fine quality cotton cloth production in exchange for spices in the East Indies (Chaudhury, 2002). However, by the time of Pakistan's independence from Britain in 1947, the once rich land of united Bengal had become better known for famine and poverty than fine cloth and international business.

Activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) committed to social aid and development were relatively unknown in Bengal during 1940s. However, charitable and voluntary activities took place in Bengal through many organizations. For example, the Muslim community has long used institutions of *zakat* (a form of alms-giving treated in Islam as a religious obligation or tax) and *chanda* (contribution, donation of voluntary gift to a worthwhile cause) for both social welfare and cooperative development of public infrastructure such as roads, *madrassas* (মাদ্রাসা, a school/college for Islamic instruction) and mosques. Sometimes, Village Welfare Societies were also established by public figures or wealthy social elites (Hasan, 1993). From before the colonial era, foreign organizations were also involved in social welfare in Bengal. For example, foreign Christian missionaries had been active in the country since the late seventeenth century (Hasan, 1993). In addition to religious activities, missionary organizations also provided medical services and general education to the rural poor. In this chapter, I survey

the various NGOs and their activities in East Pakistan and independent Bangladesh, while situating the discussion within the historical context of war and natural disasters faced by the area.

NGOs in East Pakistan

Although East Pakistan had ample natural resources, it also had inherited problems in many other areas. There were ten severe tidal waves in the coastal area of Noakhali between 1960 and 1970 (McKinley, 1979). Natural disasters like floods and cyclones were common phenomena. This resulted in increased inequality between the poorest and those who profited from the natural resources with every natural disaster, even though the government took some development initiatives to help the rural poor. Now known as the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), the then Pakistan Academy for Rural Development was established in Comilla district in 1959 and acted as one of the East's primary institutions for rural development. Small co-operatives for farmers from that 'Comilla Model' were created and played a significant role in rural development in East Pakistan and then in Bangladesh after 1971. The success of such farmer cooperatives with small landholding encouraged the Bangladesh Rural Development Board to devise a national model that ultimately resulted in the Bangladesh Krishi (Agriculture) Bank in 1973.

Another major non-governmental organization CARE (Bangladesh) started its activities in East Pakistan in 1949 after the second World War. Like its efforts in post-war Europe, it also distributed food in East Pakistan in 1949. Making use of the agricultural surplus of America, CARE started to provide more food assistance to the poor like many other NGOs in other developing countries. In East Pakistan, CARE provided powdered milk and lunches for schools. (Davis, 2006). About CARE's early aid and relief activities in East Pakistan, Davis (2006) stated

that CARE in Bangladesh largely focused on education, food for school-aged children and providing disaster relief, particularly after the 1970 tidal wave.

The Catholic CARITAS-Pakistan was another major NGO. CARITAS-Pakistan established its branch in East Pakistan in 1967 (Davis, 2006). Later, it was restructured as a national organization with the new name Christian Organization for Relief and Rehabilitation (CORR) in January 1971 and initiated a few projects to rehabilitate the cyclone affected people. Then with the start Bangladesh's war of independence on March 25, 1971, CORR provided shelter to war affected people, particularly Hindus (although the majority of Bangladeshis were Muslims). CORR undertook the task to rehabilitate 200,000 families at the end of the Bangladesh's liberation war in 1971 (Davis, 2006). Having noted the early activities of CARE and CARITAS in Bangladesh, Davis (2006) stated that the changing economic and social landscape brought international attention to crises in the country, and indicated "the way NGOs adapted to the changing environment in which they found themselves" (p. 4).

NGOs in the New Nation of Bangladesh

After the liberation war was over in 1971, devastating natural disasters, political turmoil, corruption, bad governance, poor economy and wracked infrastructure caused severe suffering to Bangladeshis. In 1972, the average income of a Bangladeshi was about US\$ 0.17 per day and Bangladesh was one of the poorest countries in the world. The living conditions of the extremely poor people were much worse. In 1974, 78 percent people were in absolute poverty and 43 percent lived in extreme poverty (Jolliffe, Sharif, Gimenez & Ahmed, 2013). In international forums, the poverty and sufferings of Bangladesh were discussed, and the country was considered an 'international basket case' (Smillie, 2009). In early the 1970s, scarcity of food was usual, calorie intake was less than the standard, and water and sanitary conditions were awfully

inadequate. Education and health facilities were appalling or non-existent, specifically in rural areas and around 80 percent people were illiterate (Smillie, 2009). However, Sheikh Mujib's government failed to address the harsh reality and took strong initiatives to establish the rule of law. Government institutions were largely corrupted and sufferings were evident in all aspects of life, with poor people unconnected to government politics suffering miserably. As the government was inefficient and villages were the epicenters of sufferings, initiatives of social changes from rural villages were necessary. Civil society and international organizations understood that the Bangladesh government would not be able to serve the people, especially in the villages. Thus, they felt that people should not expect more from the government and a social change was necessary that should be initiated from the remote neighborhoods and villages first (Faaland & Parkinson, 1976).

Genocide and systematic rape during the liberation war prompted massive foreign government and non-governmental aid to Bangladesh. Aside from international humanitarian organizations, many local organizations were also formed to help war affected people, orphans, widows and assist the returning refugees from neighbouring India after the war was over. One of the largest Bangladeshi NGOs *Gono Shasthay Kendra* (People's Health Centre), started its mobile medical unit in 1971 with an objective to provide medical support to the freedom fighters of Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, popularly known as BRAC was also founded during that critical period. BRAC started its relief and rehabilitation services to rural communities in north-east Bangladesh in 1972. Rangpur Dinajpur Rehabilitation Services (RDRS), then a field program of the Lutheran World Federation in India, began providing relief to the thousands of refugees returning home after the nine-month War of Independence. For RDRS, providing food, shelter and healthcare were the priorities (RDRS, 2005). Later, RDRS

also worked for the rehabilitation of the farms, schools, and hospitals. With one disaster following quickly after another, RDRS started providing emergency relief to affected by the famines (RDRS, 2005). RDRS also provided post war rehabilitation and infrastructure development services in the north-west region of Bangladesh (Zohir, 2004). During the first years of Bangladesh's independence, humanitarian agencies and media focused on the apparently overwhelming needs of a mainly rural population living on the edge of subsistence in a "disaster prone" environment while the national infrastructure was still being reconstructed from the destruction of guerrilla warfare during the struggle for independence (Davis, 2006). Unlike some NGOs that were established to help and rehabilitate the war and natural disaster affected people, *Swanirvar Bangladesh* (Self-dependent Bangladesh) was founded to boost up the food and agricultural production with an aim to make Bangladesh a self-sufficient country. *Swanirvar Bangladesh* also initiated activities to organize the young people in small towns, villages and remote areas to reduce theft and misuse of government relief and services (Zohir, 2004). Among other early NGOs in Bangladesh, *Terre des Hommes* started their rehabilitation work for vulnerable babies and 'unwanted' children of the war in Kurigram district after 1971. After 1971 liberation, non-Bengali communities were also vulnerable in Bangladesh as they did not support the country's independence and worked in favour of West Pakistani during the war. Action Aid provided them shelter and protection and provided relief after the 1974 famine in the north-west part of Bangladesh (Zohir, 2004). Unlike the NGOs that largely worked on relief and rehabilitation, Canadian University Students' Organization (CUSO) started its work in Bangladesh being influenced by Paulo Freire's 'subaltern philosophy' in after 1971. CUSO closed its activities in 1976 helped creating a local NGO called PROSHIKA. CUSO also handed over some training centers to BRAC (Zohir, 2004).

Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, NGOs were different in their functions and activities. At that time 'NGO sectors' were considered a distinct entity and often referred as an institutional space. However, in course of time the characteristics of NGOs evolved and they were no longer regarded as single functional spaces. NGOs participatory and collective style to work in the communities and ownership structure made them different from traditional governmental and private organizations (Zohir, 2004). This history helped shape the landscape for the development of BRAC and its later functional education curriculum.

Chapter 6

Fazle Hasan Abed, Creation of BRAC and Its Evolution from the 1970s to the Early 1980s

Sir Fazle Hasan Abed (Bengali: ফজলে হাসান আবেদ) is a prominent Bangladeshi social worker. He is internationally acclaimed and known for his innovative contributions as one of the pioneers who thought about providing microfinance to the poor to alleviate poverty. Abed is the founder of Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC), the world's largest non-governmental organization with over 120,000 employees in eleven countries. Abed has been awarded many prestigious awards and honorary degrees for his innovative contributions and dedication to fighting poverty.

Abed was born in a wealthy Muslim family in Bangladesh on April 27, 1936. At the time of his birth Bangladesh was a part of British India. Abed's family was influential and well regarded in Baniachong, as they were highly educated and served in the top positions of government including in the parliament. Abed passed his secondary school examination from Pabna Zilla School and left Habiganj for Dhaka to complete his higher secondary studies at Notre Dame College that was known as a Christian missionary college. After completing his higher secondary examination, Abed went to the UK at the age of 18 to study naval architecture. However, thinking about his career prospects, Abed changed his mind and joined the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants in London. He completed his professional education in 1962 and returned to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), where he took a job at Shell Oil Company and quickly got promoted to lead its finance division. Through his employment at the multinational company Shell Oil, Abed was exposed to corporate culture and learned first-hand

how conglomerates function, including their modern, dynamic, and goal oriented corporate management. Abed's experience and understanding at Shell Oil helped him to operate BRAC and add value to his organization since its inception in 1972. Abed is now 83 years old and has recently retired from his role as the Chairperson of BRAC Bangladesh and BRAC International. As of November 2019, he is now the Chair Emeritus of BRAC.

The Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee (BRAC) was established by Abed and his associates in Bangladesh in 1972 just after the independence of Bangladesh in December 1971. BRAC started as a relief organization to help the poor and war-affected people. In a report, BRAC stated that its "early objective was to provide relief and rehabilitation assistance to the refugees returning from India to resettle in Bangladesh" (BRAC, 2004, p. 9). Although BRAC came into existence in 1972, its history is rooted in another voluntary organization called HELP that was also established by Abed and his associates in 1970 to support cyclone-affected people in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). One of the most devastating cyclones in the recorded history, the 'Bhola Cyclone' struck Bangladesh on November 12, 1970 and killed between 300,000 to 500,000 people, and half of the deaths were children (Smillie, 2009). The primary objective of HELP was to give relief and rehabilitation support to the worst cyclone affected people in the island of Manpura, a remote, rural and underdeveloped area in Bangladesh (Smillie, 2009).

Not long after the devastating Bhola cyclone that ravaged the country in 1970, Bangladesh's war of independence started on March 26, 1971. Soon after the war broke at, Abed went to London, lobbied in favour of Bangladesh, and raised funds. Abed also sold his London property and returned home to establish BRAC to help the war-affected Hindu populated area in Sulla, Sylhet. I argue that Abed choose Sulla because it was a stranded remote area close to his home town Baniachong, so it was known to him, and Hindus were the most affected people by

the Pakistani military during the war. After working with refugees to rebuild their livelihoods, BRAC was renamed Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee to reflect its new focus on long term rural community development. From 1973, BRAC broadened its focus to include projects to promote long term and sustainable poverty reduction. BRAC's holistic approach to poverty alleviation and the empowerment of the poor, especially women, included programs in economic and social development. BRAC's major focus was poverty alleviation and gave its first loans to 300 members in 1974. BRAC's microcredit program rapidly became popular among the rural poor and began to expand beyond Sulla. In 1975, BRAC set up its first Research and Evaluation Division and started experimenting with different approaches to rural development in Jamalpur and Manikganj. BRAC's innovative member-based Village Organisations (VO) were set up in 1977 as a part of community-based development to stimulate community empowerment among the rural poor. A retail outlet called 'Aarong' (Bengali: আড়ং; meaning Village Fair) was opened in 1977 to sell and distribute items mainly produced by village women and indigenous people. BRAC also pioneered the use of female volunteer Community Health Workers (CHWs), popularly known as *Shasthya Shebika* (স্বাস্থ্য সেবিকা) in 1977. To provide basic healthcare services, BRAC recruited and trained female CHWs who served as the first point of contact between community members and BRAC (BRAC, 2004). The first training centre known as BLC (BRAC Learning Centre) for staff and members was established in Savar, Dhaka in 1978. Following the success of the first BLC, BRAC opened more learning centers in other districts and these BLCs became a source of revenue for BRAC programs as they trained staff and members from other NGOs and organizations working in social development. Later, BRAC also introduced poultry and livestock activities at a large scale in 1978 to help generate income for its members to alleviate poverty. In 1979, BRAC developed its oral therapy extension program (oral saline) and

it was successfully implemented largely by rural poor and illiterate women. BRAC introduced business ventures to support its programs and add value to its enterprises. By 1980, it had invested in a cold storage facility, printing press, iodised salt factory, tissue culture laboratory, and cattle breeding station. Although BRAC started its journey as a small relief organization in 1972, it became the world's largest enterprise for social experiments and business with a stated focus to help poor people through providing support in areas like education, health, microfinance, human rights and women's empowerment.

Chapter 7

Adult Education and Freire's Critical Literacy Approach

Before examining what functional education was at BRAC in the early 1970s and how Freire's adult literacy theory was integrated in BRAC's functional education curriculum design and practice, I will briefly discuss two major common approaches to adult education in 1970s. I focus on the evolution of adult education, perspectives of adult education by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), non-formal education (NFE) and functional education (FE). I will also include Freire's critical literacy and popular education in this discussion, as the adaptation of these approaches are critical to examine BRAC's functional education curriculum design and practice.

Development of Adult Education

Development of adult education in the twentieth century is rooted in the discourse of capitalist structure of development. After the end of Second World War in 1945, there was a shortage of skilled labour and a gap between younger and older generations was increasingly evident. Therefore, the driving force for the development of adult education during the post-war era was based on economic growth and the attempt to promote social equity and equality. The lack of skilled manpower has been one of the historical reasons for initiatives to raise the competence level of the adult population.

With the end of the second world war, there emerged a new world order and imperialists started to lose their strong hold over the colonies. There was also a growing consensus against colonialism in the world. Consequently, between 1945 and 1960, thirty-six new states and countries were given autonomy or achieved absolute freedom. These newly independent

countries of the world were largely politically committed to rebuilding and consolidating their national identities. Primarily, the major concern of these countries at that time was to regain their economic strength after being exploited by the imperial colonists for decades. Education was conceived by many as the most essential tool to modernization and development. Although education for children received greater emphasis during this period, this was considered a long-term investment because it would not meet the immediate needs of the labour market. Thus, adult education was promoted worldwide due to its immediate impact on socio-economic development.

At a more institutional level, adult and community education (ACE) sponsored by organizations such as the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the OECD (Dave, 1976; Faure, 1972; Lengrand, 1970) acted as a counterbalance to the emphasis on formal schooling and also influenced ACE policy and practice (Benseman, 2005; Tobias, 2004). Internationally the third UNESCO World Conference on Adult Education held in Tokyo in 1972 highlighted the fact that “experience shows that the provision of more education in most communities tends to favour most the already well educated; the educationally underprivileged have yet to claim their rights” and called on adult educators to seek out and serve “the forgotten people” (UNESCO, 1972, p. 9). This conference was followed four years later by UNESCO in Nairobi. Among other things, this conference called on member states to consider adult education as a necessary component for social, cultural and economic development, integrate adult education in its development strategy, and create infrastructure (UNESCO, 1976).

It also clearly stated the need for adult education to contribute to the task of reducing inequalities of all kinds. The UNESCO Committee was specific in several recommendations and the General Assembly (GA) in Nairobi defined adult education as “the entire body of organized

educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise”, including various roles, functions and levels (UNESCO, 1976, p.2). Further in the report, UNESCO (1976, p. 5) also stated that concept of adult education has been impacted by the terms and theories like *lifelong education*, *éducation permanente*, *recurrent education* and *lifelong learning* from the nineteen seventies, “whereby the last one has almost replaced adult education, especially in Europe” (UNESCO, 1976, p. 5).

Malcolm S. Knowles (1973) was one of the first proponents of adult learning theory that offered a framework for educators and trainers to instruct adults. In his famous book, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (1973), he used the term ‘andragogy’—popular in German education circles in the early 1800s—to describe his attempt to create a unified theory of adult learning. Knowles' arguments were based on four assumptions that adults prefer self-direction, their experiences are resourceful for learning, they are aware of real-life learning needs and they are competency-based learners.

Non-formal Education (NFE)

Although the idea of non-formal education appeared in the 1960s, more attention and focus was given to it in 1970s (Hamadache, 1991). In the early 1970s, non- formal education emerged as a substitute of formal school system and provided out-of-school form of education to support social and cultural development. According to Gassama-Mbaye (2004, p.1) “non-formal education was developed in The Third World countries in the 1970s to face the increasing demand for formal education, the limitation of the state resources, and the lack of adaptation of formal school graduates to development needs”. Non-formal education is concerned with “man’s [sic] emancipation from the structures which limit and stunt his potential for development”

(Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 17). Among many other radical theorists, non-formal education in 1970s were influenced by Ivan Illich's, (1971) de-schooling movement, and Paulo Freire's (1970) liberatory education. From such radical perspectives, non-formal education should also be used as a tool for raising political consciousness. It should also be used to stimulate learners and participants to be responsible for their own learning process (Evans, 1981). In non-formal education, students are encouraged to develop their critical thinking ability and focus on the process rather than their grades. According to Gassama-Mbaye (2004) the teaching method of non-formal education is based on problem-posing and collective response that gives a relevant context of learning and connects school and community together in the process teaching and learning. This method is learner centered and promotes peer tutoring approach to engage the learners in the classroom. Non-formal education directs students to be responsible for their own learning and follows their pace of progress and understanding. Main objective of the NFE model is to develop skills that the learners needed in their daily lives and curriculum is also designed to address their immediate and local needs (Schiefelbein, 1992)

Non-formal education is typically connected to the field of development and is more extensively used by international donor agencies, developmental organizations like UNESCO, Council of Europe, third sectors and local NGOs. After 1965, the term first appeared and focused on educational initiatives in developing countries. Rogers (2005) stated that Coombs and Ahmed defined non-formal education as “any organized educational activity outside the established formal system-whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity-that is intended to serve identified learning clienteles and learning objectives” (p. 78).

Functional Education

Zeilberger is one of the earliest people who defined functional education (Agbo, 2014). To him, functional education is rooted in the close and instant environment of the learners that is connected to their daily living experiences (Zeilberger, 1999). Ocho (2005) views functional education as a learning process that transforms learners into agents for economic and social development of their society. In line with Ocho's (2005) view, Unachukwu (2009) states that "a functional educational system takes cognizance of the dynamics of the labor market, equips its graduates with occupational skills and competencies to enable them be self-reliant" (pp. 213–214). According to Zeilberger (1999) and Obanya (2003), the goal of functional education is to develop the learners' thinking habits, practical and technical knowledge that are required to solve their real-life problems. It equips individuals with the required skills to contribute to the intended cultural, social and economic transformation of their society (Ocho, 2005). Functional literacy method is selective to match different environments, context and culture and is a form of community development. According to Zeilberger (1999), functional education has several meanings and connotations in different contexts. In the United States and Germany, functional education is considered to result from the undirected and spontaneous influence of the learning environment, without planning or goal-orientation. In Western Europe, functional education is referred to as the outcome of learners' interests and needs. It stimulates desirable activities and mechanism among the learners for the development of their minds and organic life in relation to present and future.

Functional education gained momentum as a major tool associated with the development approach in underdeveloped or developing countries and their attempt to transform rural areas after 1965. Governments, non-governmental and international organizations were attempting to

link literacy skills in a meaningful way to socio-economic development. At the World Congress of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy in Tehran 1965, new perceptions of literacy were first defined. It was suggested in the conference that literacy should be considered as a medium to prepare people for better social, economic and civic involvement and should not be limited in mere reading and writing only (Yousif, 2003). Between the 1960s and 1970s, most international organizations shifted their focus from mass literacy campaigns to functional literacy seen as relevant to economic and national growth. International organizations started to view functional literacy as an instrument of social and economic development and “embraced the human capital models of development” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 153). In 1978, UNESCO adopted a definition of functional literacy in its General Conference and stated that “a person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community’s development” (cited in Yousif, 2003). They further stated that the learners who cannot engage themselves functionally for their own, and for the development of their communities through required literacy activities are functionally illiterate (UNESCO, 1978). During the 1970s, Freire’s “conscientization” theory also gained considerable popularity in international forums of education and development, especially in developing countries, for its critical approach to social change (UNESCO, 2005). Freire’s influence was reflected in UNESCO’s Persepolis Declaration in Iran (UNESCO, 1975) where it stated that literacy must contribute to the liberation of human beings and their complete development going beyond the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic.

Freire's Critical Literacy Approach

Paulo Freire (1921–1997) developed a radical method of literacy training among the poorest people in the poverty-stricken Northeast of Brazil in the early 1960s. He has been called the greatest living educator, a master and a teacher (Taylor, 1993) and was a cosmopolitan intellectual who always noted the details in everyday life of ordinary people and the connections these had to the broader and global world. Freire is mostly known for his literacy campaigns in Latin America and Africa and his influential work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). He was involved and inspired numerous literacy movements first in his home country Brazil, then in Chile, Guinea Bissau, Nicaragua and Tanzania (Allamn,1994; Gadotti, 1994, as cited in Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). His revolutionary theory of pedagogy has influenced progressive educational practice and inspired educational activism around the world. Many contemporary non-formal educational efforts are deeply influenced by his work, and his name has become synonymous with the very concept and practice of ‘critical’ literacy. Freire’s critical literacy motivated the learner to reflect on their existential circumstances and analyze the power structure at the basis of social injustice and poverty. It also directed them to discover the less obvious meaning and power structure of the society. Freire held the belief that raising critical consciousness or ‘conscientization’ among learners is a precondition to bring social change. Freire realized that if learners can be made critically conscious and aware of their oppressive social conditions, they would be able to mobilize themselves to fight against all sorts of social exploitations and thereby liberated from the unjust social structures. In Latin America, teaching approaches based on Freire’s pedagogy is broadly known as ‘popular education;’ while in the North America these are more frequently described as ‘critical pedagogy.’ In Bangladesh, BRAC modified the approach and termed it as ‘functional education’ within the context of BRAC’s needs. Freire’s ideas on

education contribute to an understanding of the processes of education and social change, making them worthy and relevant to contemporary Bangladesh.

For Freire, all learning is interpersonal or social, and knowledge is produced in interaction. In his pedagogical model, the individual learns to cultivate their own growth through situations from daily life that provide useful learning experiences. He believed in the liberating potential of education. By employing visual aids based on local realities, his work helped illiterate people from marginalized communities tell their personal histories and claim political rights. The texts that individuals create encouraged reflection and analysis of the surrounding world, rather than forcing an adaptation to that world. It required that they create their own words that allowed them to become aware of reality to fight for their own emancipation.

For Freire, education was not neutral, making politics and pedagogy inseparable. Traditional education was designed to serve social and political agendas, whereas critical pedagogy was aimed at liberation. For him, learners should not be educated for employment that merely supports the production system of the society, but in preparation for self-management of their lives. Aronowitz (2009) analyzed Freirean pedagogy and commented that the goals of education are self-reflection for understanding the economic, political, and psychological dimensions of the world, and to aid in the production of a new life through transformation of the social world.

Critical literacy, a largely overlapping concept with critical pedagogy, is an instructional approach that advocates the adoption of 'critical' perspectives towards text and the world. Freire developed a literacy method to critically engage adults in their literacy process through a participatory approach. This must be a bottom-up process and empower the learners through knowledge. Critical literacy challenges the status quo to discover alternative paths for self and

social development. Because Freire believed that education and politics were connected, teaching and learning were thereby profoundly political. Freire described this relationship between education and politics as the main principle of his critical pedagogy and emphasized that teachers and students should be made aware of the politics that surround education. He also stated how low-income students were rationalized through education with an objective of becoming obedient workers who would enter the workforce as passive labourers. Freire opposed that type of oppressive education and urged learners to act to be liberated, as freedom would not be bestowed on them by the oppressor automatically. The 'oppressed' learners should take the responsibility of their own learning and struggle to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well.

Chapter 8

BRAC's Journey from Relief to Functional Education

BRAC's functional education was first initiated at Sulla, a remote part of Sylhet district in Bangladesh in early 1973. BRAC realized that temporary relief work would not really help the poor villagers in the long run as poverty is a complicated issue. Abed wrote to its donor agent that BRAC was fully aware of the outcome of the relief program and stated that this would promote dependency and weaken morale of the rural poor (BRAC, 1980). Abed was also aware of the importance of education and its correlation with sustainable socio-economic growth as well as with change as he had read about liberatory education of Freire and dependency theories of Andre Gunder Frank in the mid-1970s (Chowdhury, 1989). Thus, Abed could relate that poverty in the villages was the result of neo-colonial social structure of the rural elites and if the poor people remain dependent on the rural elites, their ultimate freedom from poverty would never come. Influenced by these readings but in the line of development, Abed believed that unless deprived people realized that they belonged to an exploited group and had to do something for their own betterment, all economic supports provided to them would be misappropriated by the elite class within the society. Abed saw education as an integral part of development and understood that no sustainable growth was possible without education. Abed also noticed that development initiatives taken by the Bangladeshi government failed to bring satisfactory outcomes in the early 1970s and identified the absence of literacy as a reason for this failure. Abed considered illiteracy an obstruction in the path of socio-economic development in Sulla, particularly with 90 percent of the population illiterate (Smillie, 2009). Abed focused on individual initiatives targeted at the social development of Sulla and wrote a new proposal to

start a long-term development project for funding to its donor agency Oxfam for Sulla: Phase 2 in October 1972. An integral part of this project proposal was to deal with illiteracy in the Sulla region. Abed stated in the proposal to Oxfam: “We believe that an adult literacy program is critical to the success of all development efforts and that it must be functionally related to the improvement of the occupational skills of the people so that literacy can directly contribute to higher productivity” (BRAC, 1980, p. 1). Thus, BRAC initiated an integrated development program in the Sulla Project: Phase 2 for poor villagers to provide literacy education, agricultural support, and health care. For the literacy drive, BRAC developed a curriculum that consisted of three textbooks, one numeracy skills book designed as an account book, constructed 255 literacy centers in 220 villages, and trained 293 local men and women to be teachers to provide free lessons. BRAC planned to deliver lessons to 84,000 illiterate people in the evenings, complete two courses per year, and remove adult illiteracy from the region within three years. Abed’s team was confident and expected to succeed with BRAC’s concentration of a large part of its efforts towards these goals (BRAC, 1977). However, BRAC’s first initiative to educate the adults in Sulla: Phase 2 (till April 1974) was unsuccessful. After 18 months since the project was launched in November 1972, only 5 percent were still attending even though 5,000 villagers had signed up for the program. As most participants left the program, at least one third of the centers were shut down and classes were discontinued. After seventeenth months of the project, BRAC wrote a report to Oxfam and stated that poor law and order situation in the country, inflation (70 percent in 18 months) and “wanting in leadership qualities and mental discipline” of its Field Assistants were some of the main reasons of the failure of this literacy phase (Smillie, 2009, p. 30). BRAC also pointed out that the teachers they hired to run the program were disappointing, as “Most of the teachers were unable to impart functional education to the learners as they concentrated more

on alphabetization” (Smilie, 2009, p. 30). In Freire’s critical pedagogy, learning is a process that presents knowledge to learners and is then shaped through understanding, discussion and reflection. Liberating education was a mutual process where teachers learn in the act of teaching and learners teach in the act of learning (Freire, 1970). Abed also attempted to translate this approach into BRAC’s functional education program as accommodating mutual learning where the teachers also learned. Before implementing Freire’s pedagogy, the process of teaching and learning in BRAC’s program was unidirectional and had a top-down approach, and failure of its first adult literacy project in Sulla: Phase 2 is connected to this approach. BRAC also reported that the teaching materials and methodology failed to retain the learners’ interest as they were designed to teach only literacy and numeracy and had no immediate benefit for the learners. However, Nobusue (2002) stated that the technical errors and the social power structure were the main two reasons for the project’s failure. The first one was caused by boring textbooks and vocational training unsuitable to the rural economy and the second one was BRAC’s services passed into the hands of wealthy farmers. BRAC’s approach did not involve the villagers’ lived experiences or opinions in designing the curriculum, which was instead designed with a top-down approach. Therefore, the subject contents, themes, and texts could not connect to the villagers’ lives, nature, surrounding and reality.

In an interview, Abed reflected on the project’s failure and noted how the community centres were his idea that unfortunately disregarded the learners’ needs in the initial program design (Macmillian, 2015). As a result, the curriculum had minimal interest for the villagers and consequently the project failed to bring satisfactory outcomes. Abed agreed BRAC’s failure in this regard, and said, “After a hard day’s work who wants to go to a community centre to read and write? Something that will never come to any use for them” (Macmillan, 2015). Regarding

situations like this Freire said, “authentic education is not carried on by ‘A’ *for* ‘B’ or by ‘A’ *about* ‘B,’ but rather by ‘A’ *with* ‘B,’ mediated by the world—a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it” (Freire, 1970, p. 93). Freire believed that learners’ views, ideas, doubts, hopes, anxieties, existence and present situation should be considered in designing the content of education. He criticized any kind of authoritative approach and emphasized dialogue and mutual respect in formulating curriculum content which was notably absent in BRAC’s first functional education initiative to educate the poor adults in Sulla project area. Freire (1970) further stated:

We simply cannot go to the laborers—urban or peasant—in the banking style, to give them “knowledge” or to impose upon them the model of the “good man” contained in a program whose content we have ourselves organized. Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the *men-in-a-situation* to whom their program was ostensibly directed. (p. 94)

From this disappointing Sulla: Phase 2 (November 1972 to April 1974), BRAC learned many things (BRAC, 1980). Firstly, traditional teaching curriculum based on fixed and predetermined ideas has no relevance to the immediate need and meaningful solution to the real problems of the learners. Secondly, the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills required considerable effort and time that the learners could not afford at the cost of their hunger and hardships. Thirdly, the methodology of teaching with traditional vertical technique undermined the human dignity in adults and made learners’ interest wane quickly. Fourthly, the learners failed to retain the skills of literacy and numeracy for very long when it was the end goal, rather

than a functional strategy for other outcomes. Fifthly, effective participation demands people's awareness about their needs, problems, conditions and resources. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, real rural development can only take place through drawing out human potential with the proper utilization of available resources for generating their own emancipation and self-improvement.

While BRAC was running its adult literacy campaign in the beginning in Sulla, it was also administering some other projects mainly in agriculture, fisheries, rural crafts, cooperatives, and medical care for sectoral development for the rural poor based on community participation in the same project area. From the experiences of those projects, BRAC learned that effective participation of the rural people was connected to their problems, needs, concerns and resources in their environment. In response to their understanding from adult literacy and sectoral development initiatives, BRAC decided to reduce the quantitative features of the functional education program and started to develop a new teaching method and materials that would be relevant, informative, and address the immediate concerns of the learners (BRAC, 1977). Abed and his team realized the limitations of a purely academic literacy program and agreed to change the approach from teaching only literacy to providing practical knowledge lessons relevant to adult learners' direct concerns and benefits. Therefore, BRAC devised a functional education (based on Freire's critical literacy) curriculum that needed to be practically related to the improvement of the occupational skills of the people and could directly contribute to higher productivity. According to BRAC's report in *Development of Innovative Methodologies in BRAC for Bangladesh* (BRAC, 1977), there were multiple objectives of this new curriculum. It was important to maintain learners' interest and participation in the educational process through the incorporation of the learner-centered content and a horizontal pedagogical relationship. This

helped modify learners' attitudes and behaviors towards newer ideas on health, family planning, and agricultural practices. It also acted to enable learners to read simple texts likely to be of use to them with understanding and to write legibly. Lastly, it aimed to create learners' awareness about their own personality to think, plan, and act on their own behalf for a better life.

In designing this new functional education curriculum, BRAC took assistance from World Education Inc. of New York and largely adapted the ideas of Freire (BRAC, 1977). BRAC acknowledged the reception of Freire's principles in designing its functional education curriculum and stated:

The main steps followed in implementing this new program were assessment of learner's needs and interests, designing of learning materials and methods and training of supervisors and facilitators... Much of the inspiration for this course derived from the ideas of famous Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire. (BRAC, 1980, p. 3)

An early BRAC employee, Khusi Kabir, described how Abed started reading Freire in 1973 and with the staff, started to establish how to use Freire's ideas in BRAC's literacy program by coopting the principles and translating them to the Bangladeshi context (Smillie, 2009). Regarding inspiration from Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Abed said, "We were inspired by Paulo Freire's work on the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which he came out with in 1972" (Interview- Fazle Hasan Abed", 2005)

A report published by BRAC (1975) suggested that its functional literacy approach implemented in Sulla in May 1974 was more successful than its first attempt in Sulla: Phase 2, that started in November 1973 and ended in April 1974. With the new curriculum grounded in

Freire's ideas, the program completion rate rose from 5 percent to 54 percent (BRAC, 1975). Moreover, classes became so popular that adult learners asked BRAC staff to offer education programs to their children. BRAC responded to the adult learners and started its education program for young learners. With its launch in 1985, BRAC developed Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) what has now become the largest non-governmental and secular school system in the world, having graduated over 10 million students (Macmillan, 2015). In my assessment, the integration and adaptation of Freire's pedagogy in BRAC's non-formal adult education curriculum in Sulla Project: Phase 2 initiated much of BRAC's later success, even with its depoliticized approach. BRAC's early failure motivated Abed and his team to change the approach to functional education and to adapt Freirean critical literacy in redesigning its curriculum and pedagogy. Learning from its early failure, BRAC also provided functional education to rural women in Jamalpur and Manikganj districts apart from the Sulla area, based on Freire's pedagogical tenets and literacy method. The program was in contrast with traditional education that in Abed's understanding, undermined human dignity, freedom, and justified abusive social class structure. Freire argued that lack of 'conscientizing' education was also a form of poverty and perceived education as a means for men and women to creatively deal with reality and discover the ways to participate in the transformation of their world. For Freire, education was not neutral, and teachers needed to have political clarity before committing themselves in teaching. However, BRAC did not focus on making or training its teachers to be aware of ongoing political movements and have political clarity. Abed's uptake of Freire's critical pedagogy was largely limited in BRAC's development activities to make the poor conscious about economic activities that could help them to be self-sufficient, not to make them critically conscious to transform the established social structure in the rural villages.

Chapter 9

Functional Education in BRAC's Early Initiatives

As explored in the previous chapter, BRAC's early initiatives of functional education employing traditional teaching methods was launched in Sulla Project: Phase 2 in November 1972, adapted Freirean principles in May 1974 and ended in January 1976. BRAC continued the literacy project for the next twenty-one months and ended the project in January 1976 (BRAC, 1977). With the shift in part two in May 1974, BRAC's adult literacy drive was more functional and had better visible outcomes in terms of attendance, successful completion, attitudinal change. As such, it is important to examine Abed's intentions in adapting Freire's ideas, including the nature of BRAC's functional education in its newly designed curriculum.

Abed realized that bringing money or material resources to the poor would not actually help them in the long run. Changes, in his view, would take place if poor people took responsibility for their own socio-economic development. The key center of change was the poor, not the system. However, for functional education, BRAC targeted the poorest section of the society characterized by low levels of skill, education and organizing capacity with adverse health and nutritional conditions (Imam, 1982). More specifically, BRAC targeted the people who sold manual labours more than hundred days a year and the households that had less than half of an acre land. Since its beginning, BRAC's major concern was to work towards the betterment of the poorest and most disadvantaged sections of the rural villages in terms of earning activities. To help the poor, BRAC's usual role was to provide them with training, institutional infrastructure development, organizational capacity, logistic support and limited

economic support. BRAC's programs did not intend to challenge neoliberal fatalism informed by the market ethics. He did not want to have a conflict with social and political elites or risk government's anger, but aimed at getting continuous support from the donors. For this reason, he did not talk in favour of the poor radically, did not activate them as political agents and did not address the rural poor as oppressed and dehumanized beings in the same way Freire did.

However, after unsatisfactory outcomes of its first education program launched in Sulla in 1972, BRAC discarded its traditional approach to adult literacy and adopted and adapted Freirean methodology of conscientization in 1974 in its functional education curriculum. Abed and his team's purpose was to equip the rural poor with the required awareness and skills to improve their own situations. BRAC adapted Freire's conscientization model in terms of designing its learning and teaching strategy. Rafi (2003) stated that BRAC used a modified version of Freire's conscientization model in Bangladesh. According to Smillie (2009), this adapted model of Freire's 'conscientization' then became the basis of BRAC's strategy to address poverty through education. Therefore, it became fundamental in BRAC's organizing principles from where everything began (Smillie, 2009).

To design functional curriculum based on its objectives, BRAC enlisted for help from international consultants like World Education Inc. based in New York (BRAC, 1977). Although BRAC requested consultation in developing its functional education curriculum and materials, it also took its approach avoiding the mandatory prescription of expert-designed program plans so that local teachers and learners had more flexibility (BRAC, 1980). BRAC primarily involved the local people and analysts from the target group, BRAC's material development team, conducted surveys, and supported the process with institutional and logistic assistance.

According to Imam (1982, p. 91), BRAC's functional education "approach has always been one of allowing felt needs to emerge from the target populations' own analysis of its situation within the overall socio-economic environment." BRAC stated that its functional education was based on learners' participation through dialogue facilitated by the teachers and the curriculum was relevant to their real-life problems and practical solutions (BRAC, 1980). BRAC also recognized that established traditional concepts of education with literacy and numeracy for adults had very little meaning for the rural poor, having experienced this problem in its very early failed initiative at Sulla. Imam (1982) stated that BRAC decided to develop a functional education course to attract greater interest and enthusiasm among its participants in 1974 and for that they included the sorts of issues faced everyday by the potential participants. In order to determine what these issues were, a survey was conducted among the landless villagers within BRAC program areas. According to BRAC, the new methodology to teach illiterate adults was completely redesigned to match the principle that the course would seek to draw the participants into an investigative activity. This methodology was adopted with the help of consultants from World Education Inc., and much of the inspiration for the course was derived from the writings of Freire (BRAC, 1977).

According to BRAC's *Functional Education: An Overview* (1980, pp. 6–7), learning process of a usual functional education class is composed of the following steps:

1. Large group discussions of stimulus (e.g., illustration, story, letter, role-play, game, etc.). Analysis of this stimulus grows through the following questioning sequence:
 - a. Question illicit simple descriptions and observation which deal with obvious facts
 - b. Questions that call for analysis, which try to uncover cause-effect relationship

- c. Questions that deal with attitudes, feelings and values
2. Small group discussion for consolidation of ideas for action.
3. Reports from small groups.
4. Large group discussion on the reports for generalization of the group decision.

As mentioned before, although Freire's pedagogical aspects were adapted to BRAC's functional education, Abed did not intend to instill Freire's political and radical aspects in its curriculum. Abed wanted to raise the consciousness of the rural poors' own personal situation and what they could do but did not want the political or revolutionary conscientization. Although Freire criticized the oppressive capitalist structure and urged the oppressed to encounter it radically, Abed interpreted Freire's ideas with a different meaning and intentionality in BRAC's initiatives. Abed never questioned the capitalist mode of production, as he wanted to mobilize the rural poor to fit into the capitalist system to support their financial activities. Unlike Freire's questioning systemic oppressive structure, Abed went on with the system being carefully politically unengaged.

Chapter 10

Freire's Concept in BRAC's Functional Education Curriculum

The adoption and adaption of Freirean ideas in BRAC's adult functional education curriculum is evident. Abed stated that BRAC "always thought nationally, worked locally and looked for inspiration globally" ("Interview - Fazle Hasan Abed," 2005). They also applied this approach in designing the functional education curriculum for adult learners starting from 1974. Abed appreciated Freire's thoughts about poor people and the assertion that they can become the actors of their own history. Abed stated that Freire made them realize that poor people are also human beings, they can do things for themselves and they are not only submissive instruments to help others ("Interview - Fazle Hasan Abed," 2005). I argue that in the 1970s, Freire was inseparable from BRAC's adult literacy program as it was largely inspired by Freirean ideas and functional education was the base platform of its development discourse. Smillie (2009) said that functional education was vital in BRAC's organizing principles and everything began from there. Even for launching a financial savings program, the basic platform was functional education "on which everything else would be built on" (Smillie, 2009, p. 153). However, although Freire's ideas had profound impact on BRAC's functional education curriculum design, I will only discuss the major ideas of Freire that were adapted and adopted in BRAC's literacy program in this chapter.

The reception of Freire's 'conscientization' in the Bangladeshi context was one of the major aspects in BRAC's development and education approach. Since its past programs in the early 1970s, BRAC attempted to integrate the poor into cooperatives and engage them in economic activities leading to improvement of their material conditions of poverty. BRAC went

through a process of transformation over time, from relief and rehabilitation initiatives in 1972 to community development approach in 1973, and after that, to target group approach of development in 1978 (Rafi, 2003). In terms of the community development phase, BRAC's conscientization activities were mainly divided into two different segments. The first one was to organize village meetings or '*Gram Shobha*' for founding Village Organizations (VOs) and the second one was to provide functional education to its members after the VO was formed. The meetings were aimed at making the poor aware of their situations and included a few topics of discussion related to the social structure of their villages. Abed believed that this would make the poor act, reflect and lead them to occupational and economic improvement. On the other hand, functional education was planned to raise the critical consciousness of the VO members around income generating activities in two phases. In each session of functional education, topics were produced concerning VO members' local issues through a dialogue where problems were presented, discussed and scrutinized in groups. Connected to Freire's pedagogy, BRAC's functional education method was intended to be student-centered, dialogical, and participatory. In the first step, the thirty sessions were mandatory and averaged 2 hours long. The second step sessions were optional and aimed to provide literacy and numeracy education to VO members (Rafi, 2003). To teach the adult learners at VOs, villagers with high school diplomas were selected, trained on functional education methods and curriculum, and provided with teaching-learning materials with thorough guidelines.

In my analysis of BRAC's texts, Freire's politically charged term 'conscientization' was not used in its reports and project proposals to its donors. Rather, BRAC referred to 'critical consciousness' and worked for consciousness building. BRAC also did not use the term 'popular

education' by Freire, and instead used 'functional education' charged by its development discourse and initiatives for adults in its curriculum design, materials and practice (BRAC, 1977). Although functional education was the main tool for BRAC's rural 'conscientization' or 'critical consciousness,' I argue that its intention was largely limited to occupational and economic activities of the rural poor which may be connected to non-formal education with a psychosocial approach to fight poverty (Islam, 1980, p. 29). Beside the functional education campaigns, BRAC also used village workshops and women-only programs to support its consciousness raising approach.

Freire believed that making the oppressed aware of their real situation through a process of education was an important part of fighting poverty and systemic oppression. He considered critical consciousness for the people as the power to "emerge from their submersion and acquire the ability to intervene in reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 109) in order to change it, as it has a strong emotional impact in the learners' daily lives. In this way, individual consciousness helps end the "culture of silence" (Freire, 1972, p. 2) in which the poor and oppressed internalize the negative images of themselves created and propagated by the oppressor in situations of extreme poverty. In my analysis of BRAC's functional education materials, I found that major discussion topics were nutrition, family planning, animal husbandry, fisheries, soil, fertilizer, and poultry, among similar others (BRAC, 1980, p. 4), and there was not enough room for the topics that could bring political consciousness to its participants.

Although Freire was radical and promoted democratic ideal, I argue that BRAC did not use Freire's radical concept of democracy and his idea of conscientization in designing BRAC's functional curriculum. Abed separated Freire's political and social transformative dimension and also "read copiously about development" (Smillie, 2009, p. 153). His readings were mediated by

his interpretative political positioning. This was also reflected in BRAC's functional education curriculum. The curriculum covered lessons on economic topics like money, mortgages, interest rates, and loans, as well as lessons mainly on development focusing on skills, healthcare, agriculture, infrastructure, and livestock. This indicates that Abed's primary concern was poverty elevation through BRAC's development programs. Instead of fighting the rural elites and systemic oppression, BRAC concentrated more on functional education, Village Organizations (VOs) and workshops to develop occupational skills, formed co-operatives and provided social services to the poor. Like some other NGO organizers and leaders in the 1970s, Abed recognized that the main problem of the rural poor was the power of the rural elites, but BRAC's functional program did not include elements to challenge this structure. While a few other NGOs like Proshika, Nijera Kori (NK) and GSS (Gono Shahajjo Sangstha) in the early 1970s alleged that poverty was structural and exploitation was instilled in the oppressive system, BRAC intentionally reflected on it as scarcity of resources. I argue that BRAC was aware of potential conflicts with the state and the rural power structure and therefore did not want to radicalize its consciousness raising approach. According to Karim (2011, p. 15), "although BRAC followed Paulo Freire's model of 'conscientization', its strategy was more pedagogical (learning about strategies of dealing with oppression through group lessons) than organizational (organizing of the poor to challenge the entrenched rural power structure)." However, the latter is not evident in its functional curriculum design and Karim (2011, p. 15) rightly stated that BRAC "advocated a mainstream theory of scarcity whose explanatory framework was that the poor were poor because they lacked access to resources." Islam (1980) discussed Freire's conscientization in BRAC's functional education and stated that BRAC launched its rural conscientization approach in Sulla to make the poor identify their financial and social problems and to make them

understand that they can “bring about change in their material conditions” (p. 50). Thus, I argue that critical consciousness or ‘conscientizagdo’ in Freire’s term (Freire, 1970, p. 119) in BRAC’s adult literacy program was not intended to be used as a true and creative praxis for a new society for the rural poor. It did not act as a mean to stimulate them “to leave behind the status of objects to assume the status of historical *Subjects*” that was necessary for them (Freire, 1970, p. 160, emphasis in original). Therefore, I argue that BRAC’s critical consciousness did not prepare the rural poor to struggle and revolutionize, rather consequently, it negated their liberation and humanization. After receiving Freire’s ideas, BRAC revised its adult literacy materials and approach since it first launched its adult literacy program in Sulla: Phase 2 in 1973. In a report BRAC also stated (BRAC, 1977) how it planned its classroom sessions and curriculum based on Freire’s ideas:

Initiated as an adult literacy program in December 1974, the course materials were revised several times in the light of the needs and interests of potential learners.

Functional education consisted of 60 two-hour lessons, and the teacher follows problem-posing methodology "in which literacy and numeracy revolved around familiar socio-economic problems. Small groups discussed the various dimensions of the problem for 40–45 minutes, the spokesman of each group reported its view to the class, and further discussion followed. The teacher then showed the key or generative words relating to the problem and each day, the learner received lesson sheets relating to them. Through visual representation of the letters of key words and phonemes, the learners were asked to identify the symbols and repeat them. For example, women learned about mother and child health care, contraceptive use and its side-effects and home management, and received their supply of contraceptives. Simple skills to augment family income were

also taught in the clubs. In village workshops, groups of men and women engaged themselves for 2–3 days in critically analyzing their socioeconomic situation with reference to the structure of the society, but codified to focus attention and stimulate discussion. (p.8)

After adopting a modification of Freire's 'conscientization' in its functional education curriculum, BRAC (1977) noticed that a considerable number of poor villagers could take advantage of the functional education courses for multiple reasons. Field workers were constantly approached to hold similar sessions in surrounding villages. The successful functioning of these institutions largely determined the impact of BRAC activities in Sulla. (BRAC, 1974). Although some studies (Streefland, Ahmed, Nafes, Barman & Arifin, 1986; Hashemi, 1995) showed that BRAC's 'conscientization' initiatives, in particular, the literacy method had positive outcomes, others indicated difficulties with the implementation of Freire's model in the Bangladeshi context. According to Rafi (2003, p. 3909), "some of these problems were inherent in the structure or implementation of functional education but others were related to the consequence of the course." Nandi (1997) asserted that Freire developed his literacy method in Portuguese and unlike Portuguese, not every part of a Bangla word has meaning. So, decoding a randomly chosen word was not always convenient or possible and that in turn affected the process of dialogue in different sessions. On the other hand, although Freire proposed dialogical and participatory lessons, BRAC's functional education sessions were largely teacher centered, didactic, instructive, structured and covered unreceptive experiences (Montgomery, Bhattacharya & Hulme, 1996). VO members also did not always agree with each other on what was preached to them, and decisions taken in functional education classes by the adult learners were not recognized as significant or suitable by the teachers. In addition, teachers

and facilitators were not always communicative enough to convey the course objectives or messages among the participating VO members. Frequent absences and drop-outs of VO members occurred for a number of reasons, including the time value of money, excessively high number of sessions, unnecessary delay in meeting conditions to get loans, lack of motivation, time constraints, illness and weather conditions (Ahmed, 2001). Ultimately, the adult functional education program was not satisfactory, and the offered vocational training was found inappropriate and village-wide co-operative attitude unsatisfactory (Chen, 1991; Lovell, 1992).

Although the outcomes of BRAC's community development awareness initiative were not satisfactory, the rural elites like wealthy farmers, businessmen, money lenders, village leaders, and union representatives considered this as a danger to their long-established dominance and a direct challenge to the status quo serving the power structure in the villages. In a very short period, BRAC's attempts to provide the rural poor with resources through functional education was countered by village power structures (Hashemi, 1995). Since government bureaucrats did not want to challenge the rural elites and were not committed to challenge their interests, the government too was uncomfortable with NGO conscientization programs (Hashemi, 1995). Consequently, most NGOs quit conscientization programs in the late 1980s. BRAC also leaned to credit-based economic developments to fight poverty and expanded its initiatives around market and production. However, I argue that BRAC did not undermine the significance of its own modified version of awareness raising (not like conscientization in Freire's term) for the rural poor in the development process. It continued with its own version of non-radical and depoliticized critical consciousness suitable to its intention and development activities. According to Rafi (2003, p. 3910), BRAC "continued with the holistic approach to

development by making social interventions, and social mobilization and awareness efforts continued to run hand in hand with its microcredit interventions.”

The failure of the integrated community development approach directed BRAC to adopt the alternative method of participatory development programming. It was a system in which people participated in their own environment by actively taking part in the planning of development and its implementation (Ahmed & Rafi, 1999). The failure to unify the whole village under a single interest led BRAC to believe that a village was a conglomeration of groups with different interests (Lovell, 1992). Thus, in 1974 BRAC launched a credit cooperative program for some of the poorer subgroups like the landless, fishermen, and women. The program worked side by side with the participatory development program in some of the villages in which it was already in action. BRAC eventually noticed that due to the existence of fundamental relationships within the rural power structure, the distribution of resources through the community development approach was in fact benefiting the rich at the cost of the poor in the village. According to BRAC’s own public international discourse, the program designed for the poor had to address the rural power structure, and the development of people’s capacities and institutions of the poor would be the means to address those power structures. However, in my analysis I gathered that power structure did not refer here to the prevailing socio-economic unjust order in Bangladesh. In BRAC’s report on functional education curriculum and material development (BRAC, 1977), I found that BRAC maintained a safe distance from challenging the rural power structure in its strategies and functional education materials development. Like Freire, although they intended to maintain students’ interest and participation in the lessons and designed engaging activities, they focused more “to modify students’ attitudes and behavior towards family planning, nutrition, health care and agricultural practices” (BRAC, 1977, p. 2).

They included materials to develop reading, writing, and numeracy skills so the rural poor could keep a record of small credit given by BRAC after the functional education program is over. Therefore, BRAC modified Freire's model of conscientization according to its needs and consequently in 1978, shifted from credit cooperatives for the poor to the concept of organizing groups of the poor. BRAC adopted this target group approach (Chen, 1991) and identified three elements essential for the adapted model of conscientization: (1) awareness; (2) organization; and, (3) self-reliant actions (Rafi, 2003). In the new model, BRAC emphasized VO members who became the subjects of conscientization activities unlike the previous community development approach. BRAC believed that development would be more effective and sustainable if the poor could be united and organized (Khandaker,1998). Therefore, BRAC targeted people from the households who owned less than a half-acre of land and sold manual labour a minimum hundred days a year. BRAC's employees stated that "as soon as an adequate number of the poor (35–45) showed definite interest in organizing themselves, a VO was formed by them under the aegis of BRAC" (Ahmed &Rafi, 1999, p. 3). To mobilize the VO members and ensure participatory activities, VOs or '*Samity*' were divided into management, social action, and law implementation committees to conduct their activities and followed the functioning procedures in the BRAC Development Program (BDP) operations manual (BRAC, 1995). For BRAC, VOs were the main mediums to stimulate and engage the rural poor. Although BRAC supported the VOs with training, credit and logistics, the VO members managed the social and economic activities in the fields by themselves (Ahmed & Rafi,1999. Thus, VOs acted as the platform to support the rural poor to be united and alleviate material poverty, especially by managing two important means: institution building and credit operation. Davis (2006, p. 5) analysed BRAC's VOs and stated that:

The basic groups or *Samity* were comprised of 20-25 poor people, their homogeneity based on land-ownership class. The *Samity* were to eventually be linked “into a federation of the poor” (Chen, 1986, p.13) which would act as a buffer between the poor and the village power structure, which BRAC had shown was the most immediate constraint on mobilising the poor (BRAC, 1983). Subsequently the BRAC approach was adopted by other NGOs working in rural community development. That these ideas were widely adopted within the NGO sector is shown by *Gono Unnayan Prochesta* (GUP or “People’s Development Efforts”) which itself claims to be “...the first non-governmental organization in Bangladesh to build associations of the poor as a core poverty alleviation strategy (Gono Unnayan Prochesta, 1999)”.

About organizing the rural people, Abed also talked about Freirean influence on BRAC’s activities in the interview with Tarun Khanna (2014, p. 18), and said: “We’ll organize the poor. The poor individually are powerless. The poor collectively could have some power and could improve [their condition] if they came together.” Abed regularly referred to Freire in his interviews, but he did not mark the differences with his interpretation and application in the field.

Freire is well known for his strong criticism of conventional ‘banking’ education, and its oppressive and dehumanizing effects. In banking education, the all-knowing teacher considers students as empty objects that know nothing. Freire (1970) further stated that in banking education, teachers choose the content of the lessons without consulting their students, reinforcing teachers as powerful subjects and students as their powerless objects. In banking education, teachers attempt to discipline the students, enforce choices and fill the students with authoritative information, making student compliance and adaptation essential (Freire, 1970). Freire said that banking education created a false understanding among the learners and reduced

them to objects that cannot develop deep connections to life. For Freire, banking education obstructed the creative power of the learners and hindered the emergence of consciousness to intervene in critical reality. Banking education had an immobilizing force that failed to recognize its learners as historical beings, while resisting dialogue and authentic thinking connected to reality. It also limited thinking and action of the learners, making them adapt with the world. This was considered dehumanization by Freire, where learners had no autonomy and therefore no ability to justify and conceptualize knowledge at a personal level. Ultimately, banking education prevented critical thinking (Freire, 1970).

BRAC opposed banking education—at least in theory—and considered teachers as facilitators with mutual respect for learners, not as depositors of knowledge. Freire advocated for dialogical education, where “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is him/herself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (Freire, 1970, p. 80). According to Freire, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (Freire, 1970, p. 70). In analyzing BRAC’s functional education curriculum, I found that although BRAC received Freire’s concepts, it also modified Freire’s ideas according to its intentions and needs. In terms of selecting topics for the lessons and to engage the learners in class discussion, it surveyed and consulted its potential learners and trained its teachers to be dialogical and avoid implementing verbalistic lessons. In designing its functional education curriculum, BRAC also kept room for mutual and reciprocal teaching and learning and tried to avoid the mechanical flaw of depositing knowledge into the empty objects (banking education which considered teachers as only depositors and students and repositories).

In their study, Montgomery, et al. (1996) found that some adult learners could remember only a few lessons or contents and could not explain the relevance of the topics with their lives. They also criticized BRAC's promotion of rote learning in its functional education as VO members had to memorize seventeen promises related to credit rules prescribed by BRAC. They stated that "Once a VO is formed, members begin to save Tk. 2 per week, learn seventeen 'promises' which have to be ritualistically repeated in chorus at every weekly meeting, and are instructed on credit rule" (Montgomery, et al., 1996, p. 104).

From its early experience in Sulla, BRAC realized that students were not only mere empty containers in which the teachers pour knowledge. Thus, learners' feedbacks and interests were given highest preference in producing BRAC's curriculum materials and groups were formed following Freire's 'cultural circle' in the second phase of Sulla literacy drive (launched May 1974). At the same time, after trial and error, BRAC designed an orientation and training course following the implementation of the program to make the role of functional education teachers and program supervisors more participatory, dialogical and effective. After initial trials, training sessions were started in 1974 and evolved into a common pattern by 1980. BRAC adopted Freirean principles in its training module for teachers and depending on the needs and limitations of the trainees, it lasted between 7 to 12 days. According to BRAC (1980) the main aims of the training sessions were: (1) to help the trainees understand the importance of their participation, dynamics of a class, and worth of the individual members in the group; (2) to facilitate mutual learning by disregarding the traditional perceptions of 'experts' and 'teachers' and to show that every individual can contribute in the group; (3) to make the participants understand BRAC's philosophy, materials and delivery methods of functional education curriculum and their roles and tasks as facilitators in the class and group interaction; and (4) to

make the trainees familiar and involved with the BRAC's methods to be used later in the functional education class. One of the reasons why Sulla Phase 2 was not successful in educating the targeted adults was the failure of the teachers in becoming free from the aspects of banking education's authoritarianism. BRAC did not make clear to what extent their facilitators were able to avoid banking education in the functional education initiatives and there was no quantitative study in its report on "Development of Innovative Methodologies in Functional Education for Bangladesh" published by BRAC in 1977. But BRAC reported that there were indications that the course was meeting its objectives with considerable success. Quantitatively, the dropout rate was decreased to about 40 percent on average whereas the conventional adult literacy courses had a dropout rate up to 90 percent (BRAC, 1980). However, although Sulla: Phase 2 was perceived better than the Sulla: Phase 1, there was an approximate 50 percent dropout rate, as banking education was still an issue in the classrooms.

Freire is a strong critique of traditional banking education and therefore, proposes problem-posing education. Freire's problem-posing education is considered as the basis of modern critical pedagogy. Freire proposes problem-posing education as opposed to banking education, a dialogic action to resolve student-teacher contradiction. To Freire, banking education is an instrument of oppression while problem-posing education is an instrument for liberation. To Freire, problem-posing education is education for freedom where teachers work in partnership with students. In problem-posing education, both teachers and learners share their knowledge, and the teachers are ready to accept solutions from the students unlike the traditional banking education. In this approach, teachers see them in a mutual partnership with their students that emphasizes learning for freedom not for mere learning to earn or to enter into economic activities (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Freire's problem-posing education stimulates the

oppressed or the learners to challenge the situations and causes that oppresses and dehumanizes them is Freire believed that through problem-posing education, learners improve their ability to perceive and judge critically, while coming to understand the world as something transforming. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) stated that “the antithesis to the banking model of education is critical pedagogy which Freire calls problem-posing education” (p. 24). They further said that contrary to the banking model of education, Freire considered problem-posing education which allowed the learners to think critically for them about their existing social place in the real world and come to understand the world as something that can be transformed. In his first remarkable initiative, Freire introduced problem-posing education in educating 300 sugarcane workers in a poor area in Brazil. BRAC also recognized the importance of problem-posing education for its poor and landless village learners and adopted problem-posing education in its functional education curriculum. BRAC (1977, p. 7) stated that “problem-posing method was used to teach literacy and numeracy around a problem perceived by the people but codified to focus attention and stimulate discussion.”

From its failure in Sulla Project Phase 2 in 1974, BRAC realized that traditional ‘banking education’ treated learners as empty objects whereas Freire’s problem-posing education saw learners as independent beings and involved them with real-life problems and solutions. To Freire, problem-posing education help the oppressed perceive critically about their existing conditions, the way they live in the world and that the world is not a static reality rather, dynamic and transformative (1970, p. 83). Freire said, “problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming” (1970, p. 84). However, BRAC did not design its functional curriculum to mobilize its adult learners to become complete ‘beings’ in the sense of liberating themselves from oppression or questioning beyond their circumstances. BRAC

organized them mostly to understand the social problems that hinder their income generating opportunities and basic social services, although Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed is pedagogy of the people to engage them in the struggle for their own liberation (1970, p. 53).

Dialogue is another important element of Freire's critical literacy that was also adapted in designing BRAC's functional education curriculum. For Freire, dialogue is a human phenomenon and "the essence of dialogue itself: *the word*" (Freire, 1970, p. 87, emphasis in original). To Freire, a true word is a praxis and to communicate a true word means to transform the world and for the existence of the human beings, dialogue is necessary (Freire, 1970). Freire argued that dialogue creates more scopes for students in the process of learning and reflecting. His methodology was dependent on dialogism, with the result of "open[ing] and extend[ing] the conversation without necessarily coming to closure with the final word coming from the more powerful person" (Moriarty, Danaher & Danaher, 2008, p. 432). He asserted that human nature is dialogic, and reciprocal dialogue has a significant role in the daily lives of the human beings. He also believed that human beings are always in dialogue with others, and through the process of dialogue they create and recreate themselves. According to Freire, dialogue is a precondition of a democratic classroom and it requires faith on the learners. For him, the goal of dialogic education is to expose the reality through communication and collaboration with others and the world. In his dialogic theory, Freire distinguishes between dialogical actions that promote understanding, cultural creation, and liberation, and non-dialogic actions, which deny dialogue, distort communication, and reproduce power. As Freire (1972, p. 61) noted "this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person 'depositing' ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the participants in a discussion." So, BRAC designed the curriculum and materials to reject narrative lecturing by their teachers and adopted

participatory format to promote the teacher-student learning in a collaborative process to act on reality. Starting from 1974, after several extensions of the project, the revision, preparation and publication of BRAC's functional education materials was completed in December 1977. In the revised materials, BRAC adapted dialogic method in its functional education curriculum that engaged the students in problem-solving activities with real life considerations which allowed them for multiple and adaptable conclusions. In the lessons, open ended questions and answers resulting from collaborative efforts were presented to analyze the situation and possible alternatives (BRAC, 1977). Therefore, BRAC (1980) claimed that through functional education they provided opportunities for the teachers and learners to become more aware of their social issues and own situations than the other rural residents who did not participate in the functional education program.

Freire was an organic intellectual (as he remained connected to his own social class and was concerned for conditions as a whole not for himself alone) and stated that teachers of the oppressed should come from the same socio-economic background and situation. BRAC also followed this line of practice in designing its functional education curriculum. To deliver lessons to the rural poor, BRAC selected teachers from the targeted villagers, and then trained the teachers to deliver classes following BRAC's strategy and practice. According to BRAC, "a teacher is chosen by the group to lead and initiate the discussion. This person should preferably be from among the target population itself having dropped out from formal schooling ... the person should ... be able to spare time for his people and be committed to the goal of seeking the enhancement of his community" (BRAC, 1980, p. 4). Teachers were also trained on delivering the curriculum to provide the adult learners with opportunities for critical analysis of their environment, understanding their self-perceptions of that environment, and building confidence

in their own creativity and capabilities for action. BRAC did this based on Freire's problem-posing method and inserted a 'feeling' component into every lesson. It worked with open ended questions and answers resulting from a concerted effort to analyze the situation and find alternatives by bringing the learners together. Through this process the individual was able to describe what they saw and felt, and analyze the significance of those experiences by making comparisons with other situations to formulate concrete responses. BRAC believed that free exchange of ideas, information, and suggestions made for a diverse and warm learning environment. In its curriculum, BRAC clearly defined the role of the teacher as facilitator and incorporated 'dialogue' as a feature of a democratic classroom. From the early failure of Sulla Project: Phase 2, BRAC realized that anger, frustration, and resentment are often the outcome of authoritarian teaching. BRAC also instated the use of a guidebook of program instructions in order "to acquaint the teacher-facilitator with the subtleties of each lesson, its objective and the process for molding the discussion. It serves as a useful training aid as well as a handy reference for instructors in the field" (BRAC, 1980, p. 5).

Generative theme was also a major concept of Freire's critical literacy. For Freire, thematic investigation initiated dialogue of education as an instrument for freedom. Freire suggested that methodology of thematic investigation should be dialogical and stimulate both teachers and learners to be conscious connected to their themes and social reality (Freire, 1970). A generative theme should be consistent with its liberating intention, relevant to teachers and learners' language, thought and level of perception of the real world. Freire stated that if generative themes are perceived and comprehended in existing reality, it will form critical thinking in the minds of the people about their real world as they encounter and view the world "fatalistically, dynamically or statically" (Freire, 1970, p. 106). He believed that to stimulate

community action, first, the people must recognize issues about which they have a passion and a willingness to initiate. Freire said that “the concept of a generative theme is neither an arbitrary invention nor a working hypothesis to be proved” (1970, p. 97). For him a generative theme was a cultural or political topic particularly relevant to the learners that allowed them to relate and stimulate a didactic class discussion. In designing functional education curriculum, BRAC also considered generative words and sentences centering on the themes identified as the main concerns of the rural people and recognized that the lesson themes needed to connect the learners’ lives, emotions, and some issues or problems that impacted their existence. In May 1974, BRAC’s functional material development unit was formed and in June 1974 BRAC’s field workers conducted a survey to in 19 villages of Sulla project area to determine the contents of the functional education curriculum (BRAC, 1977). The first round developed by the BRAC’s material development unit included generative words and suggestive short sentences. Large charts with drawings were also used to generate discussions in the lessons. In the end of July 1974, Mr. Leon Clark, material design consultant from World Education Inc. came to help BRAC in developing curriculum and methodology. In its report on searching for generative themes and topics, BRAC (1980) stated that, “the search for relevant topics, generative words and preparation of effective formats for each lesson was done through repeated surveys, discussions, pretesting, and revisions for about 21 months” (p. 5). For imparting lessons in the classroom, BRAC included questions for the learners to elicit their description and observations relevant to their social reality. In the question, they also included stimulus to relate learners’ emotions, feelings, values and attitudes. In the lessons, through generative themes were relevant to agriculture, animal husbandry and poultry, fisheries and pisciculture, co-operatives, nutrition, environmental hygiene, public health, family planning, childcare, cottage industries, rights and

responsibilities of citizens and state, and so on (BRAC, 1980). BRAC claimed that all of the lessons had generative words that sprang from the central concerns of the lessons and were particularly evocative of the issues being discussed in the lesson. Examples of these words were house, hunger, money, cooperative, germ carrier, vegetable cooking, multiple cropping, and self-interest vs. community development. In the classes, words were introduced in written forms along with visuals so the learners could grasp the meanings for later recognition in written contexts and understanding. Diverse types of formats like illustrations, stories, letters, demonstrations, discussions, role play, debates, and workshops were used to introduce the topic and initiate the discussion. BRAC stated that community participation based program facilitation helped them learn that effective participation of the rural adults demanded their “awareness about their needs, problems, condition and resources. Real rural development can only take place through drawing out human potentials in proper utilization of available resources for generating their own emancipation and self-improvement” (BRAC, 1980, p. 3). BRAC (1980) claimed that they tried to provide its learners the opportunity to be aware of their social reality, feel competent about their ability to act, and bring them together. However, I argue that BRAC did not clearly define in their functional curriculum materials and reports what praxis they wanted to generate among the learners to demand, act and react for structural transformation. BRAC also did not include any expected or visible outcome of thematic investigations in its reports or how and to what extent the learners were able to decode the systemic social oppression to raise a radical struggle against it. Certainly, BRAC wanted to include generative themes relevant to its adult learners’ immediate concern to retain their interests in attending the lessons and understand their social issues; but did not intend to use it as a tool of conscientization, humanization and

liberation. I argue that generative themes used in BRAC's functional education curriculum were intended to focus the attention of the rural poor on social adaptation rather than transformation.

In BRAC's functional education curriculum, literacy and numeracy topics were systematically illustrated and recorded in the flip charts and in the workbooks for the future reference and practice of participants. The numeracy content of the course was also included in the discussion and illustrations around relevant topics. BRAC (1980) claimed that the search of relevant literacy and numeracy was supported by its field workers. Preparation of effective formats for each lesson was done through repeated surveys, discussions, pretesting and revision. A guidebook comprising of planned instructions was also prepared to explain the teacher-facilitator with the details of each lesson, its objectives and the process for molding the discussion. BRAC reported about the teacher manual in its report and said, "it served as a useful training aid as well as a handy reference for instructors in the field" (1980, p. 5).

To introduce lessons, BRAC designed the material so that the teachers could first present literacy and numeracy work to the class in visual format followed by written form and phonemes. After that, students were asked to identify symbols presented to them a few times and practice writing those symbols and texts in their workbooks. Once they were done identifying and writing in the workbooks, they were then engaged in discussion. Immediately after discussion the learners were supposed to play games or solve puzzles. According to BRAC's report on functional education, each session required two hours and four to five classes were conducted each week (BRAC, 1980). The lessons were designed to be participatory where teachers and students sat together in a circle and exchanged their information, ideas, experiences, and feelings connected to the theme of the lesson. Later, in a group they were directed to devise

an action plan to solve the discussed issues or problems of their concern. To conduct the classes, teachers were trained to not instruct in a unidirectional way and instead inspire the learners to participate, act, reflect, comment or criticize according to their understandings. Teachers were also supposed to take part in the discussion without being neutral and direct the group discussion to a possible consensus of opinions among the learners. To introduce numeracy and literacy problems to the learners, dramatization was included in the second cycle of material development (BRAC, 1977). Literacy and numeracy materials were supported by charts and pictures and included the problems and issues related to the concept of the lesson. To support the teachers in imparting lessons effectively, self-explanatory teachers' manuals with pictures and charts were also designed. Islam (1980) stated that the teachers used charts and lessons books relevant to their living experiences to introduce topics to a class of 20-25 learners. They also included topics connected to unity, cooperatives, institution building, responsibilities of citizens, human civilization to give the learners a better understanding of social and psychological issues. Islam (1980) also stated that:

The class holds general discussion on the day's topic for a few minutes after which they disperse in topic, and exercise sheets to practice writing of letters and words as well as simple numeracy. Following their exercises, the learners play simulation games or solve puzzles to test their understanding and improve their literacy and numeracy skills. (p.2)

I argue that, BRAC's literacy and numeracy lessons were designed to intervene pedagogically but not to raise an ethical struggle against poverty. Therefore, through the numeracy and literacy curriculum and methodology, adult learners were not able to deconstruct the systemic poverty they faced. As the teachers' manuals were prescriptive, teachers also not did not have a scope to

intervene with political force or analysis of the systemic issues of social poverty. The teachers could not act as effective agents to lead and transform the society along with their students who were subjected to domination, and thus failed to carry out liberating education. I argue that, although BRAC's functional literacy and numeracy lessons provided increased understanding of social reality and of technical skills to the rural poor, they did not intend to social and cultural revolution. In my opinion, the literacy and numeracy lessons were included so that the adult participants can record and track their loan, income, spending, balance and savings.

Chapter 11

Visible Changes After Implementing Functional Education Curriculum

BRAC's journey toward functional education was not smooth in its early stage, especially when it launched its first literacy drive in Sulla in November 1972. It encountered many difficulties such as unequipped teachers, shortage of facilitators from the groups, discouragement by the drop-outs and local influential groups, high absenteeism for natural calamities (cyclone, drought, flood, heavy rain, etc.), lack of sufficient reading materials, discouragement by men members to attend sessions run by women, participants' high demand to start collective economic activity and physical inability and tiredness of the adult learners after hard physical work (BRAC, 1980).

In terms of evaluation and impact assessment, BRAC did not conduct any quantitative evaluation of its functional education programs after adapting Freirean concepts in its curriculum. BRAC acknowledged that any hard data survey might be as inaccurate as observation and subjective evaluation was needed in the field of raising critical consciousness through functional education. BRAC stated that although it was difficult to assess and evaluate the qualitative aspects of its learners' performances, there were indications that the functional education program worked well as an instrument of development initiatives. In its report, "Development of Innovative Methodologies in Functional Education for Bangladesh" (BRAC, 1977), BRAC claimed that its functional curriculum program helped create awareness among its learners to organize, initiate and react for change. Referring to success of its functional education program BRAC cited two examples in the same report. The first example is about Jamalpur Project in Mymensingh and the second one is about Manikganj. At the request of UNICEF,

BRAC started its functional education course for 840 poor women in Jamalpur. At the end of the project when BRAC wanted to withdraw, the program learners and locally recruited teachers approached BRAC to continue the course and go into development activities. The teachers and learners proposed together a village-based women's development project to BRAC. BRAC responded to their proposal and started the project as a direct outcome of its functional education program. Soon after Jamalpur program was launched, BRAC was drawn to Manikganj area by famine at the end of 1975. To run its program in Mankiganj, BRAC transferred some staffs from Sulla project and hired some new ones. First, BRAC started its food-for-work project to provide food assistance to the poor affected by the famine. Immediately after the emergency food assistance was over, BRAC shifted its approach quickly to development programs with the lessons learned from Sulla (Smillie, 2009, p. 60). BRAC entirely focused on the poor and set up functional education centers as a start for other development activities. BRAC organized village health workers, established cooperatives, initiated savings programs and provided loans to groups to start income generating activities. Consequently, these initiatives enabled the people to locate the problem and need to come together in groups. As a result, mother clubs, youth organizations and other associations were formed to deal with problems like health, nutrition, credit, education, family planning, and agriculture, among others. BRAC aimed at developing Village Organizations by the concerted action of the poor people and was successful. BRAC reported that by September 1977, more than 60 functional education groups of men and women were involved in economic activities and “[t]he functional education program was the initial and main thrust” of its work in Manikganj (BRAC, 1977, p. 10).

Another important success of BRAC's functional education is that it led BRAC to create non-formal primary education (NFPE) in Bangladesh for the children of disadvantaged and poor

families to meet the demands from people in the villages. According to Lovell and Fatema (1989, p. 21), “in many villages, after the people became organized and active in various income-generating activities, they began to ask BRAC: ‘What about our children? The existing schools don't meet our children's needs.’” Therefore, BRAC devised strategies, designed materials, trained teachers and experimented with the NFPE program based on its experience of functional education program for the adults.

Referring to its functional education program after adapting Freirean concepts, BRAC also claimed that its own field staffs and other external observers saw a clear change among the learners in terms of awareness and actions related to social, cultural and economic problems (BRAC, 1980). There was a significantly higher level of interest among the learners in attending, participating in and continuing with lessons, unlike in BRAC’s first literacy initiative (BRAC, 1977). At the end of the first cycle in November 1974, the program completion rate was increased to 42 percent and was up to 54 percent at the end of second cycle in June 1975 from the disappointing 5 percent when it was first launched in 1972. In the same report, BRAC stated that “another indication of the success of the new methodology and materials is the keen interest expressed by government, local and international voluntary agencies in BRAC’s functional education approach and its adoption by them” (BRAC, 1977, p.11).

Although BRAC acknowledged the extreme difficulty in measuring quantitative aspects of its functional curriculum that aimed to create greater critical awareness among the rural poor, it pointed to some concrete behavioral changes among its learners who completed the course. BRAC argued that there was greater knowledge and understanding among the course attendants about various rural problems and their own situation than in non-participant rural residents.

According to its own internal qualitative evaluation, changes were that the learners had a sense of solidarity, they were more responsive and receptive to new ideas, and more aware of falsehood and exploitation (BRAC, 1980). Their decision-making capacity was improved, and they encouraged their family members and peers to have access to literacy programs. They organized organizations of landless people and started a few socio-economic activities to better their conditions as a group and as an individual (BRAC, 1980).

Chapter 12

Conclusion

Abed started reading Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1973 (Smillie, 2009) and his long-term effort in sustainable development for the poor was influenced by Freire; although, the reading was mediated by Abed's own understanding of change and the Bangladeshi context. According to Khusi Kabir, one of BRAC's early staff members, after reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, BRAC members "got hooked on Freire" (Smillie, 2009, p. 154) and started thinking how to use it in their literacy work. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Abed read about the relationship between the oppressed and oppressor and understood why the powerless are afraid of greater freedom. Abed recognized traditional 'banking education' as dehumanizing and Freire's 'conscientizing' education could be the best tool in the hands of the rural poor to act and react against poverty and other oppressive elements of reality. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire argued that oppression is deeply rooted in societies and has become an established norm for exploitation, dehumanization, and objectification by oppressors. Freire argued that the oppressed should not be integrated into the exploiting social structure, rather the structure should be changed to make them liberated as fully formed and complete human beings. Abed drew on this and recognized that the rural poor of his literacy project were dehumanized, despite being capable and equally competent as their oppressors. Abed understood that the landless poor of BRAC's project area were victims of exploitive social structures established by rural elites, yet unlike the Freirean model, wanted to alleviate poverty without agitating and transforming the power structure. This is partially evidenced by Abed's use of language. He referred to the poor, not to the oppressed and did not talk about dehumanization or how to become fully human like

Freire. Abed and BRAC's primary goal was to help the poor earn money without disrupting the already established social structure of rural elites in the Bangladeshi context.

Freire said that oppression dehumanizes both the oppressed and the oppressors in the process of exploitation. However, Abed's approach was not to make the oppressed and the oppressors 'free' and complete human beings as suggested by Freire. Abed's mobilization of the poor was not radicalization against the corrupt social system; instead, he meant to create income opportunities for the poor making them conscious of their monetary needs. BRAC wanted to form co-operatives through *Gonokendras* (public-centers) and Village Organizations (VOs) to better the lives of the rural poor and engaged in areas like agriculture, fisheries, and medical care. I conclude that BRAC made the rural poor naively conscious of their situation when avoiding their political radicalization and any attempt to destabilize the rural power structure. He wanted the rural poor to assume responsibility for their own poverty by looking for a way out to make enough money to change their material conditions. Unlike Freire's politically charged discourse, Abed wanted the rural poor to engage with single social issues rather than the underlying root issues of corruption, exploitation and social injustice.

Freire argued that education was a liberating process of humanization and involved cognitive actions. Freire's liberating education was rooted in the synthesis of Christian theology (Catholic Theology of Liberation) and Marxist socio-economic analyses. For Freire, education is a practice of freedom. Abed coopted Freire's liberating approach and assumed that education could be the best tool in the hands of the rural poor to deal with poverty. About co-option of Freire's ideas in BRAC's adult literacy curriculum, Rafi (2003), who worked close to Abed, stated that the reception of Freire's philosophy in BRAC was rooted in a community development approach for its sustainability. However, my analysis of BRAC shows that Abed's

functional education is not ‘liberating education’ precisely because it was limited to provide for the basic needs of the poor, without addressing all other forms of oppression, exploitation or dehumanization that exist in their society.

Freedom of Freire is connected to equality and social justice. Freedom in Freire’s thought meant liberation from all sorts of oppression, the ability of all human beings to question, and uninterrupted access to all social and economic resources. Freire was always on the side of the oppressed and thus, dedicated his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) “to the oppressed and to those who suffer with them and fight at their side” to make them free (Freire, 1970, p. 5). For Freire, freedom is not bestowed upon the oppressed as a gift rather it should be achieved through meaningful struggle (Freire, 1970). However, Freire also recognised that the oppressed are often unaware of the reality of their oppression and rarely admit their fear of freedom openly (Freire, 1970). Being absorbed by the dread of freedom, the oppressed avoid listening to both the appeals of others and their own conscience (Freire, 1970). Freire argued that idea of freedom is not a myth, but an ideal that is an indispensable requirement to be a complete human being (Freire, 1970). Dehumanization is a result of an unjust order that causes violence in the oppressor and in turn dehumanizes the oppressed (Freire, 1970). As an inevitable tool to achieving the pursuit of the humanity, Freire considered “the dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom” (Freire, 1970, p. 97). However, I argue that Abed’s focus on designing functional education curriculum was different from the Freirean emphasis on freedom and dehumanization of the oppressed. In his approach to BRAC’s adult literacy program, Abed did not attempt to make the rural poor conscious to struggle for the pursuit of the humanity denied by the injustice of rural elites and how to be capable and complete human beings being liberated from the state of dehumanized poor. Abed limited BRAC’s functional education to social and financial

activities through Village Organizations (VOs) and microcredit programs that did not facilitate the poor to question the root causes of poverty and social inequality. Although there were visible changes among the participants after Sulla: Phase 2, and they were able to better their lives in the long run (BRAC, 1980), there was no initiation of revolutionary changes charged by radical political force to challenge the rural power structure and ensure social justice.

Unlike Freire, liberation in BRAC's initiatives was to get rid of poverty and hunger and to enable the rural poor to generate income through financial activities. I argue that for Abed, being free from the harsh sufferings of poverty was equivalent to liberation of the poor, whereas Freire argued that authentic liberation is a humanization process and the praxis of all the oppressed is "to transform the world" (Freire, 1970, p. 79). However, BRAC did not intend to initiate any humanization process in its functional education curriculum for its adult learners. BRAC also did not instill any radical component of praxis to act and reflect as suggested by Freire. Therefore, BRAC's functional education curriculum was flattened and conformist than that of Freire's critical pedagogy.

Unlike Freire, BRAC had a very restricted approach around its associates. BRAC's projects, activities and services were limited to its members and their well-being. For functional education program, BRAC's concern was only the landless poor people (members) of its project area as a marginalized segment of society, not all the people of the villages in general while Freire wanted all the oppressed in general to be engaged in their struggle. Although Freire wanted the oppressed from all walks of life to be involved in their fight to challenge all forms of oppression, Abed mobilized only the BRAC's members of its projects. Plus, BRAC did not involve its associates to raise real struggle in all fronts of oppression and injustice, rather wanted

them to simply understand that they were capable of income generating activities and that they had the capacity to change their level of poverty. Thus, BRAC only worked for its project members to help them alleviate their level of poverty, not for all the poor villagers or landless poor in general.

Under Abed's leadership, BRAC shifted from conventional teaching to its version of critical pedagogy based on Freire's ideas. In line with Freirean principle, Abed understood that freedom from poverty would not be bestowed automatically upon the rural poor by the rural elites and the poor should take the responsibility of their own freedom, freedom from poverty and hunger. However, BRAC's functional literacy approach was not intended to equip the adult learners to initiate their struggle for their own freedom, freedom from poverty and hunger. BRAC did not educate and sensitize its learners to instigate their fight for their complete freedom on their own. In BRAC's initiatives, the changes were not approached systemically even though the poor were mobilized to be their own examples in the struggle to change their level of poverty. Abed was also silent about freeing the oppressive rural elites by liberating the landless poor in pursuit of human completion. Abed did not take initiatives to make the oppressive rural elites understand that in the process of exploiting and violating the rights of their fellow poor villagers, they also dehumanized themselves, and they could liberate themselves in the act of liberating the rural poor. Freire (1970) further argued that "the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors" (p. 44), and only the oppressed had the power to free both the oppressed and the oppressor. However, in my analysis of BRAC's functional education curriculum, I found that BRAC's adult learners were not made aware of any humanistic or historical task to liberate them and their oppressors as suggested by

Freire. More importantly, BRAC's functional curriculum was not designed to make the rural poor understand that only they had the power to free them and their counterpart rural elites.

Freire suggested a humanizing pedagogy as the only effective tool that establishes a connection of dialogue with the oppressed, where teachers guide students in the process of conscientization (Freire, 1970). Further, it was considered a radical requirement for the oppressed to regain their subjective humanity and stop thinking themselves as objectified "things" (Freire, 1970, p. 68). However, Abed's approach and BRAC's adult literacy program adopted no complete humanization policy for the rural elites and also for the rural poor by themselves. Abed recognized the theoretical and essential aspects of Freire's pedagogy in socio-political context, but adapted it within the limitations of BRAC's literacy program in the social context of Bangladesh. I argue that Abed did not want BRAC's adult literacy program to be challenged by the powerful social structure so it could be more successful in supporting capital gains for its project members. In my analysis of BRAC's functional education curriculum, I also found that there was always a dominance of skill and economical discussions and an absence of exploitative social structure and political issues (BRAC, 1980). It is important to note here that BRAC's final stage of adult literacy was to give loans to the successful graduates of the functional education program (Rafi, 2011) which indicates that BRAC's adult education program was far more financial and developmental than political and transformational.

In Freire's analysis, the oppressed were often not able to raise voices against unjust situations. Freire argued that oppressed are capable human beings like their oppressors in their cognitive competence and could therefore be made critically conscious about their surroundings. Abed also felt it was necessary that adult learners be trusted and motivated to believe in their

own abilities to reason and capabilities to change. They should also be made confident in their abilities to create some economic opportunities through social institutes and cooperatives to fight poverty. Referring to Freire, Abed said that “He made us realize that poor people are human beings and can do things for themselves” (“Interview - Fazle Hasan Abed,” 2005). Abed believed that the rural poor were the actors of their own history, had their own ways of thinking about life and if they could be made critically aware of their own condition and act accordingly on their own, could change their conditions more easily (Poplin, 2016). Under this guidance, BRAC advocated trust in the rural poor to help themselves, specifically women who were thought to be weak and fragile in the Bangladeshi socio-religious context. In Sulla, Jamalpur and Manikganj’s women only projects, BRAC entrusted women to take charge of alleviating their own poverty. Abed and his team in BRAC trusted in the ability of poor uneducated women and gave them the responsibility of making oral saline properly for the large development project, which was remarkably successful in dealing with the second largest cause of child mortality in Bangladesh. Referring to the success of this BRAC project by the rural women, Poplin (2016) wrote:

Perhaps the best example of Abed and BRAC putting that idea into practice was an oral re-hydration therapy (ORT) program aimed at ultra-poor women in Bangladesh starting in the early 1980s...Conventional wisdom held that illiterate, uneducated women were incapable of properly mixing and administering ORT, but BRAC taught millions of women from Bangladesh’s slums and villages how to do it. And today Bangladesh’s ORT rates are among the best in the world.

Abed's understanding of poverty and its reduction strategy in BRAC's context reflected his reading of Freire mediated by his own intentionality. Freire saw poverty as not limited to only a personal economic condition, but rather considered it as a systemic issue related to the mode of production, conditions of political powerlessness, lack of opportunities and lack of critical consciousness. Freire further stated that all kinds of deprivation and exploitations were instilled in poverty, bestowed and established by the oppressors. An oppressive social order does not allow the oppressed to question its unjust social system. However, Abed saw poverty as lack of income, opportunities, health care, and education (Poplin, 2016). Although Abed was not radically critical about oppression in rural societies, he also understood that poverty is not a curse, but an outcome of systematic social structure. Abed understood the complex structure of poverty and his moral obligation kept him focused on the poor and underprivileged. Thus, his strategy was rooted in developing occupational skills among the poor to generate income opportunities (Smith, 2014). BRAC initiated the organization of cooperatives, established marketplaces or outlets and provided microfinances to support income generation. As BRAC's main objective was to alleviate poverty, they concentrated more on economic activities like poultry, cold storage, learning and training centers, horticulture, and outlets to sell and distribute produces and products.

It is important to note here that, after the liberation war in 1971, people were open and receptive to political and structural changes. Structural changes were expected by the people and would be easily attainable if there were any political initiatives as people were highly dissatisfied, upset, angry and frustrated with the oppressive and dictatorial governments. The first democratic government formed by Bangladesh's Awami League (BAL) became extremely oppressive, corrupt, and unable to ensure good governance. They also controlled newspaper and

media, banned all other political parties and ceased the democratic rights. Consequently, Awami League's leader and Bangladesh's president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, along with his family members, was killed in August, 1975. Then military General Ziaur Rahman came to power, but still there was no public protest at a large scale as people were eager to see some political and structural changes. Later, General Zia was also killed in 1981, and then another military General Ershad grabbed the power. All these issues paved the way for a radical social transformation and people were ready to accept any positive change. However, BRAC's programs did not address greater public interest. Abed remained silent to ongoing political movements and need for political reformations. He chose his political standpoint align with BRAC's needs. Within this limited context, he intended to make the rural poor their own actors in actions to fight poverty. In spite of the profound differences, Abed often referred to Freire. In an interview in 2014, Abed acknowledged that Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) influenced his thinking about organizing the poor and developing a pedagogical approach to facilitate the rural poor in fighting poverty (Abed & Khanna, 2014).

Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) was rooted in his lived experiences. His firsthand experience of hunger and poverty made him understand the complex nature of poverty and show solidarity with the poor (Macedo, 2005). In a letter, Freire (Freire, 1996) stated that many of his classmates suffered from hunger and his feeling of hunger united him with them and gave them a sense of unity. To Freire poverty is nourished by oppressors' unjust social structure and hunger was not a will of God or destiny as stimulated and preached by the oppressor to be accepted by the oppressed (Freire, 1979). Referring to poverty, how that affected his learning, Freire said that he was not dumb and did not lack interest, but rather his social condition did not allow him to have an education (Gadotti, 1994). Through his real-life experiences, Freire learned

the relationship between social class and the acquisition of knowledge. According to Macedo (2005), Freire's family experienced poverty and hunger and he connected with Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1963). Freire saw an inextricable relationship between the fight against hunger and the liberation of the poor through their own struggle. Consequently, Freire proposed liberatory education and pedagogy as practice of freedom (Freire, 1970). Unlike Freire, although Abed was born in a well off family, he saw poverty firsthand growing up in rural Bangladesh and became aware of the multidimensional aspect of poverty, particularly the worsened conditions during natural disasters, war and famine (Poplin, 2016). For the rural poor, Abed's major concern was to end their poverty and hunger. To do so, he also used education as a tool to fight poverty like Freire. After meeting unsatisfactory outcomes in Sulla: Phase 2 from 1973 to April 1974, Abed realized that BRAC's functional education project for adult learners was related to the correlation between hunger and social class. It was not the lack of intelligence or interest of the poor adult learners, but hunger and poverty that affected their learning. Later, this understanding helped Abed and his team revise and redesign a functional curriculum, with the mode of imparting the lessons grounded in people's experience. Adopting Freire's ideas, Abed recognized that poverty is deep rooted in the society and the rural poor should be aware of their own responsibilities. Although there were some topics and lessons relevant to social exploitation like money lenders, land, loan, mortgage, village touts, corruption in co-operatives, interest, traders, starvation, and social status in functional education curriculum, Abed's intentionality of coopting Freire's ideas in BRAC's context was not radical and revolutionary. I argue that although Abed wanted to end the sufferings of hunger and poverty of the rural poor, he did not use Freire's politically charged radical pedagogy in BRAC's adult literacy program. Freire demanded complete freedom for the poor and challenged the established social status quo,

whereas Abed limited his scope to economic opportunities and took a personal redemptionist approach to change within the system of oppression. Although Freire regarded education as a political act, Abed took education as a tool critically important to development within the established system. Abed's vision was more economical, developmentalist, and capitalistic than political, radical, socialistic or even Marxist. Abed's struggle for the poor was largely limited to the material gain in a capitalistic structure and support the production system of the rural people. Although BRAC's functional literacy program was more successful after adopting and adapting Freirean ideas than its first attempt in Sulla Phase 2 (1973 to April 1974), it lacked the broader Freirean view of freedom and the humanizing process of education.

For Freire, reading and writing was connected to understanding the real world and to have experiences of touching and changing it. Abed grasped Freire's idea and perceived a broader understanding of literacy that involved reading the words for understanding and changing the world but Abed did not go as far as Freire did. To Freire, words were not only instruments of dialogue, but also transformative tools with dimensions of action and reflection. Elements of truth and authenticity were important for Freire because of the real world connection. Abed grasped that authentic words were critical to learning and the potential transformation of personal and surrounding realities. In designing its functional education curriculum, BRAC intended to avoid empty words as prescribed by Freire in his pedagogy. BRAC used words, topics and themes generated by the rural poor connected to their personal and social life. BRAC took Freire's ideas of reading the word not only for the sake of reading the text only; rather, curriculum was designed to guide its learners to critically understand their surrounding reality. I argue that like Freire, Abed recognized that language is not neutral because words are powerful and can be transformed into significant action. To help its learners to grasp

the soul of the words, BRAC included words in its curriculum that were easily relatable to learners' living experiences. Freire argued that narrative education detached from reality and disconnected from totality is like "sonority of words" that does not have the capacity to transform the society (Freire, 1970, p. 71). Freire said, "Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity" (Freire, 1970, p. 71).

Freire's critical pedagogy saw learning as a process that presented knowledge to learners that is then shaped through understanding, discussion and reflection. To Freire, liberating education was a learning situation in which the cognizable object mediates the cognitive actors (teacher and students). Freire said that learning is a mutual process where teachers learn in the act of teaching and learners teach in the act of learning (Freire, 1970). Abed also attempted to translate this approach into BRAC's functional education program as accommodating mutual learning where the teachers also learned. Before implementing Freire's pedagogy, the process of teaching and learning in BRAC's program was unidirectional and had a top-down approach, and failure of its first adult literacy project in Sulla (1973 to April 1974) is connected to this approach. BRAC also made attempts to make its functional education teachers aware not to thrust the functional literacy learners with narrations that were disconnected from their universe.

In my analysis, BRAC's functional education was designed to make the poor adult learners aware of their impoverished situation and learn how to generate income opportunities to better their lives, not to challenge the underlying root causes of poverty and exploitation. Although Abed was aware of the complex nature of rural poverty in Bangladeshi context and recognized that poverty is also lack of 'conscientizing' education, BRAC's functional education curriculum did not intend to conscientize and radicalize the rural poor to go against the

oppressive social structure. Abed facilitated the poor to fight poverty but was politically passive unlike Freire who was a revolutionary and wanted a radical form of democracy. Abed's nature of betterment for the poor was not in line with Freire's notion of liberation and the subjects as political agents although BRAC's functional literacy curriculum contained some topics and lessons relevant to social exploitation like money lenders, land, loan, mortgage, village touts, corruption in co-operatives, interest, traders, starvation, and social status in functional education curriculum (BRAC, 1977). Although Abed acknowledged that Freire wanted to raise critical consciousness of the oppressed through critical pedagogy to balance the power structure acknowledging the conflict of class struggle, he intended to raise naïve consciousness among its functional education learners to fight poverty being within the system without challenging the rural power structure. Although BRAC's functional literacy program was not as successful as expected, it assisted people to be united, developed a sense of solidarity among the poor and create village organizations. It lacked the broader view of freedom and humanization process of Freire. So, I argue that although BRAC's functional education curriculum created a platform for the rural people to move towards limited and personal economic improvement against material poverty, not from systemic poverty. It limited its learners' capacity and opportunity to fight for structural change, social reform and justice like Freire understood in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Clearly, Freire's intention was to make the learners read the world to challenge it, change it and humanize it (Macedo, 2005).

Abed also intended to organize the poor as a collective to increase their individual capacities over income generating activities. I argue that BRAC focused more on organizing people to implement the organization's development activities but not to inspire them to take over the control of power from the rural elites. BRAC wanted them to be more aware and skilled

to be more productive in generating income. Thus, they largely provided medical care, loan and agricultural support to fight food scarcity and hunger. Abed drove them for production and market related activities to solve hunger and poverty but not to enter in the radical class struggle against the rural well-off farmers, *mahajons* (money lenders), exploitative business entrepreneurs, and local or central governments. I argue that although BRAC organized the rural poor to alleviate their poverty through income generating opportunities, its functional literacy curriculum lacked liberatory vision of Freire. Abed did not intend to revolutionize them as a radical political force to break the rigid social and political power structure. Abed and BRAC's initiatives in implementing functional literacy for adults were not courageous enough to raise a struggle against the corrupt power structure, rather it was largely limited in skill development, agricultural production and income generation. However, Abed said that he used Freire's methodology by giving the poor an idea of why deprivation happens in society, why power relations are important to understand, and how they can also challenge certain power groups to get their rights established (Abed & Khanna, 2014). I argue that his approach in the field was far from Freire's. For Abed, organizing the poor was directed towards poverty alleviation and development, not towards social transformation and liberation as Freire demanded. Freire used radical language with a vision to ignite consciousness to bring change and social justice through a revolution. He wanted the oppressed to challenge the existing social structures to get rid of their dehumanized status to be free and complete human beings. Freire used radical words to discuss oppression, whereas Abed used indistinctive words like 'landless mass,' 'poor' and 'poverty' in its project proposals to its donors. Freire's words 'conscientization' and 'praxis' related to structural changes were translated in a different perspective in BRAC's functional literacy program as Abed had a different political intentionality. Avoiding Freirean radical

language signaled that Abed was less committed to systemic social transformation. Although the Bangladesh government was not strictly monitoring the NGO activities in 1970s, BRAC did not include politically charged initiatives in its programs to organize the poor. I argue that although Abed recognized the revolutionary force of Freire's pedagogy, he adopted and adapted it as a developmental tool in terms of BRAC's needs. More specifically, Abed used functional education for adults as a tool to alleviate extreme poverty. However, although Abed considered literacy as the most important tool to development to move away from abject poverty, he conceded that traditional education would not help the rural poor to get rid of poverty. Abed's intended approach in BRAC's activities was not to take education as a tool for freedom from oppression like Freire, rather his intention was to use education as a tool to make people aware of their ability to overcome extreme poverty and make them mindful of economic activities they could undertake. Thus, even though BRAC's functional education curriculum included topics and components on social construction and power relations related to poverty, it generally avoided the radical aspects of freedom and liberation that formed the basis of Freirean pedagogy. As previously stated, Abed's intention in designing BRAC's functional education was primarily to create income opportunities to help the poor fight poverty rather than to generate a vision along with the activities that aim at questioning the social and economic system.

After completing its first phase in 1972 devoted to relief and rehabilitation, BRAC started its development work based on its literacy program in 1973. As part of its primary development approach, BRAC initiated its first adult education program in Sulla in 1973 aiming to develop the skills of literacy and numeracy with the hope that these skills would help the rural poor learners improve their lives. However, BRAC's efforts were unsuccessful to bring in desired change and failed to make the learners retain the skills for very long (BRAC, 1977). Thus,

learning from BRAC's early failure in the Sulla Project (1973 to April 1974), after extensive research, Abed and his team decided to reduce the quantitative aspect of the adult literacy program and took up the task to develop a non-formal functional education program appropriate for its adult learners and compatible to its development strategy. Here is when Freire's writings entered the play. BRAC's specific objectives of this educational approach aimed to make its adult learners critically aware of their surrounding and social conditions through maintaining their interest and participation. Thus, BRAC received Freire's student centered content and horizontal pedagogical relationships according to its learners needs. BRAC adapted basic Freirean concepts such as conscientization, problem-posing, and freedom to a notion of change based on individual and communal improvement of material conditions within the system. However, this was coupled with limited questioning of the social order that was limited to the local village, if it existed at all. Overall the program followed the participatory approach characterizing Freire's pedagogy but without the aim at radical political and social transformation.

Through a historical analysis approach, this study shed light on Abed's perspectives in embracing Freire's critical literacy in BRAC's education program in the Bangladeshi context. By analyzing documents and information on how Abed read Freire to address BRAC's needs, and how Freire's adult literacy theory was integrated in BRAC's functional education curriculum design and practice, the project filled in the knowledge gap of how Abed adapted and adopted Freire's adult literacy in BRAC's development programs. Abed's discourse did not always reflect his intentionality in the actual program. This study also was an unprecedented examination of how Abed and BRAC contextualized Freire's method. Finally, curriculum designers may find useful insights in the analysis of BRAC's curriculum.

This initial research opened new questions that require further investigation. At the pedagogical level, further analysis of the materials used in the village circles is necessary. At the organizational level, it is important to explore how BRAC became a powerful financial institution, including the compensation of their workers and executives. While I have assessed that Freire's radical pedagogy was co-opted of its political dimension, most scholars have discussed BRAC in glowing terms. Further critical analysis is needed.

Among a few, one important limitation of my research is that it does not cover many individuals or NGOs who have been involved in the discussion of Freire or have had experiences in applying his theory and methodology in practice in Bangladesh in 1970s and 1980s. Rather, it focuses particularly on BRAC and Abed's reading and implementation of Freire. Other individuals and NGOs not explored in this study were also engaged with Freirean principles. Most importantly, I did not interview any of BRAC's functional education teachers, trainers, student or curriculum designers who were directly involved in teaching, learning or designing functional education curriculum for BRAC. This study could have been improved with primary research on Abed and his primary team members responsible for designing BRAC's adult literacy curriculum. However, to address this limitation, I used a number of published interviews. The research can be extended to other NGOs like, PROSHIKA, Nijera Kori, Gono Shahajjo Sangstha, ASA and REFLECT that also used Freirean pedagogy. Similarly, more primary documents like students' responses, notes and feedback would have positively contributed to this research. Suggestions for further research on Freirean scholarship in Bangladesh is to extend the research to interviews and possibly extend the scope to do comparative analysis with NGOs and activism outside Bangladesh, including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan and Myanmar. Further questions inspired by this research are: is there any possibility of applying Freirean

methodology in formal education in Bangladesh? What level of education would be most suited? Is it possible to apply Freire's theories and methodology in the context of Islamic educational institutions, such as in *madrasas* or in Islamic institutes? If it is possible, how and under what conditions? I think the issues that I mentioned above should be taken into consideration by anyone interested in investigating the influence and reception of Paulo Freire in Bangladesh.

Reading Freire, Abed gained insights that the landless masses are not less complete human beings than their counterpart rural elites. They could be mobilized to fight poverty. Abed co-opted Freire's idea and wanted to implement BRAC's poverty alleviation strategy according to BRAC's perception of the needs in Bangladesh's socio-political context. Abed's political connections and understanding of change sustained BRAC's work. BRAC's vision and mission have also evolved in course of time. Although it once endeavoured to make Bangladesh a country free from poverty and exploitation, its contemporary mission looks forward beyond Bangladesh to make the world a better place and states that they are working towards a 'world free from all forms of exploitation and discrimination where everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential ("BRAC: Our Mission," 2019).

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