SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAM OF ISLAMIC POLITICAL PARTY:
A CASE STUDY OF BANGLADESH JAMA’AT-E-ISLAMI

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents Mohammad Abu Taher and Fazila Begum.
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted, either in full or in part, for any other degrees at this or any other institution.

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(Faroque Amin)
ABSTRACT

Engagement in the provision of support for people in need is often motivated by religious ideology. Doctrinally, helping others is one of the general characteristics of most faith-traditions; major monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Judaism, and non-monotheistic ones such as Buddhism and Hinduism convey principles and teachings that exhort their believers to perform various kinds of social services. Islam, also, has such a history of dealing with humanitarian issues through providing assistance to the underprivileged classes of society; ordaining Zakat (lit. almsgiving) as one of the five pillars of Islam or encouraging Waqf (public charity) are major examples of this.

Currently, social welfare provision in most developed countries is organized predominantly by their governments, yet the intellectual influence of religion through biblical references in the historical development of this institution is obvious. This religious influence is more prominent and prevailing in underdeveloped countries, where the state is not capable of providing comprehensive social welfare for its citizens. A very interesting perspective in this discourse was introduced when social welfare provision was adopted as an organizational effort, concurrent with the political trend of contemporary Islamic revivalism in the twentieth century.

This thesis discusses social welfare organization by an Islamic political party in Bangladesh, namely, Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami. The dynamics of the social welfare program are not necessarily identical among the multitude of contemporary Islamic political movements arising in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies. However, the existence of this program, and, more importantly, its recent effectiveness in terms of social achievement and gaining popularity, are an undeniable reality. The effective measures of social welfare provision undertaken by the religion-based political parties are now manifested in some major Muslim countries, such as in the cases of AKP (Justice and Welfare Party; Turkish: Adaletve Kalkinma Partisi) in Turkey, Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement; Arabic: Ḥarakah al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah) in Palestine, Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Middle East, and Hizbullah (Arabic: lit. Party of God) in Lebanon. The scholars who have studied these movements generally acknowledge this aspect of their makeup in their analyses.
Although participation in social welfare organization by an Islamic political party has been a political phenomenon in Bangladesh since the early 1970s, it has not yet been studied and examined sociologically. This research focuses on the social welfare activities of the major Islamic political party in Bangladesh and their implementation in Chittagong, Bangladesh, through Islamic Social Welfare Council Chittagong. It will demonstrate why an Islamic political party ventures into organizing social welfare activities and how it organizes them. It will also show that the relationship between political aspects and social aspects of the party are reciprocal, and, therefore, success or failure in the party’s political activities affects its social welfare activities and vice versa.

This study aims to assess the status of the social welfare program in this party’s overall agenda, as well as its outcomes and potentials. Using a methodology involving in-depth interviews and focus groups, the study presents an ethnographical inquiry into the social welfare program of the Jama’at, particularly in the health and educational sectors. It attempts to explore those activities using a qualitative approach to understanding the motives and perceptions of both the providers and recipients of the service. It has been proven in many Muslim countries that the provision of faith-based social welfare greatly assists the public acceptance of religious political parties in those societies where state-supported social welfare is ineffective or nearly non-existent. In this context, the core argument of this thesis is that the Jama’at in Bangladesh, also, has attempted to utilize this valuable resource in order to mobilize support, but that this attempt has been greatly (and negatively) affected by the prevailing political circumstances. The evident success of Islamic political movements in some other Muslim societies, that engage in social welfare provision as a significant way of engaging the community and thereby gaining its approval of the party, is likely to ensue in Bangladesh also, if the Jama’at is able to manoeuvre its social welfare program with a pragmatic approach that suits the local cultures and societies.
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Note for Non-English Words and Transliteration

This work contains many non-English words, in languages such as Bengali, Arabic and Urdu. I write the non-English words, unless commonly used in English, in *Italics*, then provide an explanation in parentheses, for short meanings, or in footnotes, for long explanations. Instead of any specific transliteration method, for those non-English words I use the general transliteration system as followed by conventional academics and the media.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Social welfare provision is an indispensable and age-old element of human society that places emphasis on the well-being of the members of the society. At various stages of human history, social welfare has been organized and administered by several types of authority. Although there have always been some exceptions, it is generally and naturally carried out by capable authorities, be it by the rulers or by the wealthy people. With the development of social structures and governance systems in the modern era, organization of social welfare provision has become more complex than ever before. Among several other emerging paradigms, one of the interesting cases is the organization of social welfare provision by Islamic political parties involved in contemporary Islamic revivalism in a number of Muslim majority countries.

This research is an attempt to explore social welfare organization by a major Islamic political party, Jama’at-e-Islami (Urdu: lit. Islamic Party) in Bangladesh. It will focus on investigating the social welfare program – social welfare programs are now considered a major avenue for Islamic political parties worldwide to reach ordinary people – administered by this party in the city of Chittagong, the second largest city and the commercial capital of Bangladesh. In the process of achieving this objective, the research will also investigate the policies, motives and experiences of people relevant to the program. In examining this particularly engaging and ongoing social welfare provision, this study is providing an ethnographic study of Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami with regard to its social welfare organization, particularly in the health and educational sectors. The study will explore these activities using a qualitative approach to understand the motives and the perceptions of both
the service providers and the service receivers. It will posit that the progress made by this religiously based political movement, in spite of its decreasing acceptance among middle-class and educated Bangladeshi people in a secular state, is indeed attributable to the social welfare program it has already undertaken. This organization of social welfare by Islamic political parties is a recent phenomenon found in several Muslim countries, such as Turkey, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Indonesia. In many of those countries, Islamic political parties have been able to mobilize this welfare resource successfully to gain political opportunities. The apparent success of political Islamic revivalist movements in Turkey, Egypt and Palestine has inspired the Jama’at in Bangladesh, but, as this research will show, Jama’at has failed to achieve similar political success. Moreover, the social welfare activities of the Jama’at also suffer from major practical drawbacks (see Chapter 8). Nevertheless, welfare organization by the Jama’at in Bangladesh has engendered strong support for the ideological and political causes of the movement and contributed to the development of a modern Islamic polity.

The historical background of this phenomenon will be discussed in this chapter, followed by a description of the significance of the topic, which will also facilitate understanding of the explanation of the key areas of the thesis, such as political Islamic revivalism, the distinctiveness of the Jama’at as an Islamic political party and social welfare provision organized by Islamic political parties in various other Muslim countries. The chapter will also outline the objectives, scope and structure of this study, with a specific focus on the research questions, to which this thesis will attempt to respond. The relevant literature will be reviewed in the next chapter.
BACKGROUND

Religious institutions often engage in providing support for people in need, as well as motivating their followers and adherents to participate in charity and welfare activities or programs. Doctrinally, helping others is one of the general characteristics of most faith-traditions; major monotheistic religions, such as Christianity and Judaism, and non-monotheistic ones, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, convey principles and teachings that advise the believers to perform various kinds of social services (Jawad, 2012). Islam also has such a history of dealing with humanitarian issues through providing assistance to underprivileged members of society. Ordaining zakat (almsgiving; Arabic: lit. purification) as one of the five pillars of Islam or encouraging waqf (public charity; Arabic: lit. stopping) are major examples of this assistance. From the very beginning of its history, the practice of the religion of Islam has been associated with the authority of the governance. In one of his famous statements, Umar (ruled 634–644), the second Caliph after the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), says about himself that “if a dog dies hungry on the banks of the river Euphrates, Umar will be responsible for dereliction of duty” (Mohtsham, 2007, p. 258). This assertion, by an early Muslim ruler, metaphorically referring to an animal, indicates the responsibility of the Islamic state towards its citizens. The Islamic rulers’ sense of responsibility and religious obligation for social welfare have strongly motivated contemporary Islamic political parties’ inclusion of a social welfare agenda in party activities. Both religiously and historically, welfare is counted as one of the primary duties of socio-religious authority in Islam. As the contemporary political Islamic revivalist parties strive to establish Islam in governance, they have also adopted this aspect as one of their primary agendas.

Currently, social welfare provision in most developed countries is organized predominantly by their governments, yet the intellectual influence of religion is obvious through biblical references in the historical development of this institution (Cnaan &
Since the time of ancient civilizations, religion has always been a key determinant in social welfare organization. In underdeveloped countries where the state is not capable of providing comprehensive social welfare to its citizens, non-government private organizations have come forward in an attempt to fill the void. Among these, religious organizations are significantly represented, as humanitarian assistance is a tenet common to almost all religions. However, such religious organizations are customarily apolitical, and social or educational in nature. A very interesting and different trajectory was added to this situation when social welfare provision was adopted as an organizational effort with the political trend of contemporary Islamic revivalism in the twentieth century.

This transnational political trend of Islamic revivalism was introduced in Bangladesh by Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami (lit. Bangladesh Islamic Party). This is the largest Islamic political party in Bangladesh, the South Asian country with the fourth largest Muslim population. Ideologically, this party strives for ‘the establishment of Islamic governance’ (Iqamat-e-Deen) at state level, as advocated by its theologian founder and ideologue, Abul Ala Mawdudi, who formed it in British India in 1941. Similarly to its counterparts in other Muslim countries, Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami (henceforth, the Jama’at) has several social welfare enterprises actively operating throughout the country.

‘Social Welfare’ is one of the four primary official agendas of the Jama’at in Bangladesh, as is declared in its party constitution. The Jama’at organizes several types of social welfare activities targeting society’s poor and underprivileged. It provides them with direct financial donations as well as medical and educational services. In an underdeveloped country where state-provided welfare is significantly inadequate and in some instances even absent, this service has been helping the party to reach a vast cross-section of the population.

One rationale that led to the undertaking of this study was the obvious lack of academic analysis of the social aspects of Islamic movements in Bangladesh in general and of
Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami in particular. In a study of the role played by religion in
Bangladeshi society, the Jama’at is significant and undeniably an influential factor. The
importance that the Jama’at holds in Bangladesh is described by Mumtaz Ahmed (2008, p.
61):

Revivalist Islam in today’s Bangladesh is represented by two distinct and opposing streams:
the politically activist revivalism is represented by the Jamaat-i-Islami, and the quietist, non-
political da’wah-oriented revivalism is represented by the Tablighi Jamaat. … Regarded as
one of the most effectively organized religio-political movements, the Jamaat-i-Islami has
staged a remarkable comeback, despite the enormous liability that its leadership carries from
the 1971 experience when it sided with the Pakistani forces and fought against the
independence of Bangladesh. It was banned, along with the other Islamic political groups,
after the liberation of Bangladesh. Soon after it re-emergence on the national political stage in
the late 1970s, however, the Jama’at became the most powerful Islamist group in Bangladesh.
Compared with fewer than 2 per cent of the votes polled by all Islamic parties, the Jamaat
candidates received 12.13 per cent and 8.63 per cent of votes during the 1991 and 1996
parliamentary elections.

The significance of societal issues in the Jama’at’s agenda is apparent in Esposito’s
description of this party, where he states that the Jama’at “strives for the establishment of an
Islamic state through educational work, social reform, and democratic elections” (Esposito,
2003, p. 156). The Jama’at in Bangladesh is analysed from different perspectives by various
scholars: for instance, its religiously based political ideology (Kabir, 2006), its place in recent
global terrorism discourse (Pattanaik, 2009), its role in importing a transnational
understanding of Islam to the local context of Bangladesh (Hossain & Siddiquee, 2006;
Kumar, 2009), and its approach to addressing women’s issues (Shehabuddin, 1999;
Shehabuddin, 2008). However, I have not been able to trace a single study so far that focuses
on Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami’s social welfare activities. One of the reasons for this dearth
of academic focus on this specific area seems to be the political nature of the movement with
its primary objective of establishing Islamic governance.
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will focus on people’s perception and experience with regard to the Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami’s social welfare program. Consideration of theological aspects of this program is not the central point of discussion in this thesis, but yet these have some significant implications. People expect the implementation and manifestation of some religious aspects of its ideology when they are involved in the activities run by a group claiming religious affiliation. During the initial library research for this study, it was evident that the moral aspects of social welfare have been studied widely and for centuries by Muslim theologians. Certainly this discourse was initiated by the relevant verses in the Qur’an and the compilation of the Prophetic Traditions under several relevant chapters. From a modern-day economic perspective, Islamic tradition is sometimes represented as an alternative: a welfare-generating economy opposing the interest-based modern economic system (Tripp, 2006). In discussions concerning the association of economics with social welfare issues, zakat (almsgiving), third among the five pillars of Islam, is often regarded as the nucleus of the economy of an ideal Islamic state (Weiss, 2002). Jan Ali (2014) explained zakat as a spiritual approach towards poverty alleviation and economic development through charity, an approach which has not been properly practised in Muslim societies for a long time, or in the modern age. While studying the role of religion in modern-day social work, Patel, Numphries

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1 A list of relevant books would contain thousands of titles. Here some book titles are mentioned only to exemplify the classical Muslim scholarship that discusses the welfare aspect of Islam from different perspectives: Purification of Wealth (Islah al-Mal) by Abu Bakr Ibn Abi al-Dunya (d. 894); Book of Wealth (Kitab al-Amwal) by Abu Ubaid al-Baghdadi (d. 838); Rights of the Neighbour (Haqq al-Jar) by Shams al-Din al-Jahabi (d. 1347); Islamic Guidelines for Human Development (Al-Tawjih al-Insani lil-Numuw al-Insani) by Abdur Rahman al-Zaied; Laws of Alms (Fiqh al-Zakat) by Yusuf al-Qaradawi; Culture of Welfare Works (Thaqafat al-amal al-Khairy) by Abd al-Karim Bakkar; Distributing Justice and Need Fulfilment in an Islamic Economy, edited by Munawar Iqbal.

2 Various aspects of welfare, such as almsgiving, charity, helping people in need and especially orphans, social cohesion and cooperation, and social insurance are ordained in and inspired by the Qur’an in numerous verses. For instance, almsgiving (zakat) is mentioned in: Al Baqarah: 83, 177, 261, 274; Al Imran: 133, 134; Al Maaidah: 12; Al Taubah: 60; Al Ahzab: 33 and many more verses. Moreover, thousands of relevant Prophetic Traditions (Hadith) are compiled in several chapters in the prominent compilations such as those of Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, which include the Prophetic Traditions on the topics of charity, endowment, public interest, leniency in financial trading, loans, supporting family members and kin, good behaviour and so on.
and Naik (1998, p. 199) mentioned five principles as intrinsic to Islamic values, that are simultaneously shared by Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism. In this discourse emphasis is placed on the well-being and equality of humankind, individual freedom as being associated with community bindings, and personal responsibilities and relationships based on consultation. These values could be effective as identifying variables in evaluating a religion-based social welfare program.

For a thorough study of this social phenomenon, it is not enough to explore only the roles played by a religion-based voluntary welfare provider, such as the Jama’at, and to understand the social welfare system in Bangladesh. It is also important to appreciate the significance of the contribution made by this service provider to the overall social functioning of the society. Given that the underdevelopment of the Bangladesh economy has resulted in a lack of state-supported social welfare provision, the role played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and religiously based charitable organizations is very important. This study, then, will explore why and how in a secular country, religiously based political organizations or movements such as the Jama’at have a role to play.

Inevitably, the fulfillment of basic human rights is associated with the financial situation of a country or society. The economically developed countries of the world have moved towards being welfare states that secure the basic rights for their citizens. For instance, Australia has seen the emergence of welfare policy, replacing previous charity structures, after the experience of the 1890s economic depression. This influenced the introduction of the old age pension schemes in 1901 (Garton, 1994). Charity organizations are working in the developed states playing diverse roles, sometimes in a supplementary manner and sometimes as substitutes. In underdeveloped countries, the absence of such state-organized welfare systems has opened up greater opportunity and operational space for such
charity organizations. Similarly in Bangladesh, these NGOs play important role in ‘promoting and safeguarding’ human rights issues (Zafarullah & Rahman, 2002).

The Muslims of Bangladesh, who represent the fourth largest Muslim population of the world, are not disconnected from the changes and developments that their counterparts in other countries have been experiencing. As has, simultaneously, been the case with other Muslim societies in different regions, various trends and schools of Islamic thought have flourished among Muslims of Bangladesh along with the continuous Westernization of their society and the burgeoning of secularism. The study of Muslims in Bangladesh, and their approach towards their religion, has more significance now than ever before, within the context of current geo-political realities of the South Asian region. This context is relevant since the Muslims of Bangladesh are affected by the conflicts occurring in their region, in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, many of which are politically and religiously motivated.

Also, the present revivalist trend of Islam represents very diverse ways in which a large number of Muslims look at the role of their lives in the contemporary world. A political interpretation of Islam is one such view and is spreading increasingly in various Muslim societies. The marriage of social welfare with this politics-oriented Islamic revivalism is certainly an interesting phenomenon that will greatly impact on and cause changes to these societies. The political trend of Islamic revivalism calls for establishing Islam in every worldly aspect of human life, and applying religious principles of governance at the state level is considered as the ultimate objective of this discourse. To achieve this goal, political revivalist scholars established Islamic political parties, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jama’at-e-Islami, that started participating in a Western-styled political framework. Although their theological interpretations of Islamic governance disagree to varying degrees with Western concepts of democracy, these parties have been trying to negotiate around these disagreements and to gradually secure political space in Muslim societies. Against this
background, their provision of social welfare functions as an important tool for gaining acceptance in the underdeveloped societies. Moreover, the religious obligation of the Islamic authorities to provide charity has also inspired them to organize welfare activities alongside the reduced state mechanism for social welfare in those countries. Manifested primarily throughout the 1980s and 1990s, this engagement in social welfare provision has already produced positive outcomes for Islamic political parties in countries like Turkey, Egypt, Palestine and Indonesia (Clark, 2004b; White, 2012). In the case of Indonesia, the Islamist political party, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), was not able to form a government in its own right. Kikue Hamayotsu (2011, p. 971) claimed, however, that “the relatively solid party-mass relations and broad spatial penetration of PKS are conditioned by its organizational ability to deliver welfare services to strategically targeted constituencies”.

Examining the manifestation of this phenomenon in the Bangladeshi context will certainly give significant insights into this area of study.

Finally, Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami represents one of the most active and influential sectors of Islamic socio-political endeavour in the country. Many Islamic scholars, and Muslims in general – adapting to different trends of Islamic revivalism, according to their understanding of Islam and their interpretation of religious theories – are divided on the subject of Islamic politics, with Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami considered in reality as the country’s central and mainstream representation of the contemporary political Islamic revivalist approach. It is worth mentioning that the Jama’at is also the most criticized Islamic party in Bangladeshi society. Various Muslim religious scholars, and their followers in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, censure the principles and activities of Jama’at as a result of their theoretical differences with the thoughts of Mawdudi, the scholar-founder of this party. A critical analysis of the concepts and activities of Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami regarding
social issues would assist in building an understanding of the position of this Islamic party in Bangladeshi society.

The Jama’at is currently the largest democratic Islamic political party in Bangladesh, with more followers than all the other Islamic political parties of the country combined. It has gained a major role in the nation, although it is currently facing serious drawbacks in politics with the allegation of its involvement in war crimes during the liberation war in 1971. There are numerous other Islamic political parties in Bangladesh, but some of them lack even a mature organizational structure, while the Jama’at is known for its well-designed organization, such as its leadership and management being conducted through strictly observed party policies and structure. It could also be safely assumed that the initial success of the Jama’at in Bangladeshi politics inspired groups adhering to other religious schools of thought to join in national politics through the formation of several new Islamic political parties. Of all the Islamic political parties in the country, the Jama’at has been able to organize a strong and working social welfare provision framework. Considering all these facts, it would seem obligatory for the study of social welfare activities organized within the political trend of contemporary Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh to start with a case study of the Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami.

POLITICAL ISLAMIC REVIVALISM

Islamic revivalism in the contemporary world is considered a response to modernity. Islamic movements are organized calling for the reformation of Muslim societies based on Islamic values and principles. This wide-ranging concept, of returning to Islam in its pristine form, attempts to extend the influence of religion to all aspects of human life. In twentieth-century
Muslim countries, development of Islamic political activism has contributed to Islamic revivalism and has taken a significant place in this discourse.

Participation by Islamic parties in the process of democratic politics is a very novel course, that has recently been experiencing a rapid expansion throughout the Muslim world. Historically, major segments of the Muslim world in Asia, Africa and parts of Europe were ruled largely by a combination of two types of government: Islamic theo-democracy, known as Khilafah, and dynastic monarchy (Lapidus, 2002). However, religion was never separated from the government. Islam has been always pertinent to those governments to varying degrees, through consultation with religious scholars or by their unmediated involvement in the administration. The monarchs in the Muslim world generally needed religious attestation and affiliation in order to elevate and sustain their authority. The term ‘Khilafah’ originally refers to the ruler, to be either selected or elected regardless of his heredity. However, most of the Muslim monarchs took on the title ‘Caliph’ (Zaman, 2004) (instead of the generic term ‘Amir’ (Arabic: lit. Ruler)) which also indicates their religious affiliation.

In the wake of the European industrial revolution and rapid Western advancement in science and technology, governments in the Muslim world weakened and many Muslim countries consequently experienced European colonization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of the major consequences, in the aftermath of this colonial experience, was the division of the Muslim world into more than 50 Muslim states and the establishment of diverse types of political systems. Some Arab states are still ruled by the dynastic monarchs, but most of the Muslim states are now administered by elected quasi-democratic governments.

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3 The term ‘theo-democracy’ was coined by Mawdudi to define the Islamic method of governance, known as the Caliphate (‘Khilafah’ in Arabic). However, many Islamic scholars argue that the word ‘democracy’ is non-acceptable in Islamic terminology, as it originated in Western civilization. One of the basic principles of the concept of the Caliphate, however, is consultation, according to Islamic textual directives (Afsaruddin, 2011; Esposito, 1999).

4 This practice is according to the mainstream Sunni school of thought. However in the Shi’a school, descending from the house of the Prophet is considered as one of the significant traits of the leadership (Darling, 2004).
(Nasr, 1999). Although the efficiency and the quality of democracy in many Muslim countries are debatable, the situation is similar in many non-Muslim underdeveloped and developing countries as well. The socio-political situation of a country is associated with several factors, such as economics, education and military power, among others. Most Muslim countries are currently struggling for good governance, sustainable development and a stronger economy. Social welfare provision is a significant element in this discourse.

Two major events are marked as milestones in the recent evolution of the ever-changing political trends in Muslim countries: the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1978–1979 and the Arab Awakening in the twenty-first century. Iran has been ruled by democratically elected rulers since the revolution; the Arab Spring is uprooting long-time dictatorships in many Middle-Eastern and Arab-African countries. In this context, Islamic political parties have been accorded great attention in global and local political discourses. The 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers has also played a significant part in the discourse of Islamic politics as it has highlighted and introduced into this discourse the obvious division between radical and moderate trends of Islamic power politics.

On the contemporary political canvas of the Muslim world, several Islamic political parties represent a global political trend of Islamic revivalism in that they have adopted democratic politics as a means to establish Islam in society: the Justice and Welfare Party (AKP) in Turkey, the Freedom and Justice Party (the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood) in Egypt, the Ennahda Movement in Tunisia, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) in Malaysia, the United Development Party (PPP) in Indonesia, the Muslim Brotherhood in several Middle-Eastern and African countries, and the Jama’at-e-Islami in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Salih & El-Tom, 2009). One of the traits common to most of these parties is their involvement in social welfare issues; for instance, the Jama’at in
Bangladesh has been organizing social welfare programs since its inception there in late 1970s.

**IDENTITY OF THE JAMA’AT**

Jama’at-e-Islami is an Islamic movement which was established by the theologian scholar and socio-political philosopher, Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903–1979), in 1941, in the undivided British India. It was initially founded as a religious movement aiming at socio-religious development of the Muslim community in the colonized Indian subcontinent. After the establishment of the partition between Muslim-majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India in 1947, Mawdudi migrated to Pakistan, while the movement also continued to function in India, with autonomous and independent leadership but with a strong ideological influence from Mawdudi’s writings. Similarly, the Jama’at in Bangladesh has also functioned with completely independent policies and leadership since it began work in Bangladesh in 1979, eight years after the country gained independence from Pakistan in 1971.

Emerging as an influential social movement with a strong voice on religious issues in Pakistan and India, the movement started to become more involved in political issues in the late 1940s. In 1951 it participated for the first time in a provincial election in Pakistan. Since then, the Jama’at has functioned as a full-scale political party in Pakistan (Jama’at-e-Islami Pakistan), India (Jama’at-e-Islami Hind), Kashmir (Jama’at-e-Islami Kashmir) and Bangladesh (Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami). Moreover, expatriates originating from these countries, who are influenced by the ideology of the movement, have formed several religious-social movements in various countries: for instance, Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Islamic Forum Europe, and UK Islamic Mission. All of these groups continue working, with their own independent constructs and activities in their respective
countries, towards Islamizing the society, as advocated by the movement’s founder, Mawdudi (Haq, 2010; Nasr, 1994; Nasr, 1996; Riaz, 2010). Mawdudi’s objective is summarized in the World Almanac of Islamism: “Mawdudi believed the only way Muslims could safeguard their political interests was to return to a pure and unadulterated Islam that would not accommodate Hindus. He denounced nationalism and secular politics and held that the Islamic state was a panacea for all the problems facing Muslims” (Council, 2014, p. 827). This revivalist approach has ideological similarities to the approach of Muslim groups in other Middle-Eastern countries, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The objective of Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is also described in the World Almanac of Islamism: “He felt that the weakness of the Muslim world could only be cured by a return to the original form of faith, applying its prescriptions derived literally from the Qur’an and the prophetic tradition to all aspects of modern life – including the political arena” (Council, 2014, p. 1013).

That being the case, there is no simple way to identify the Jama’at as either a political party or a mere religious revivalist movement. Nevertheless, due to its emphasis on political action, the Jama’at is predominantly considered as a political party, with a mention of its distinctive aspect of ideological identity. For instance, the Jama’at is described in the Encyclopedia of Islam (Sija, 2009, p. 388):

The Jamaat-i-Islami is an Islamic political party in Pakistan founded in 1941 by Abu al-Ala Mawdudi (1903–79), the most widely influential Muslim thinker of South Asia in the 20th century. It is an ideological movement that has aimed to create an Islamic state in which all aspects of social and political life would be governed according to Islamic standards and law.

In the party constitution, the Jama’at claims to be a transnational movement working to establish Islam in society (Jama'at-E-Islami, 2011). This ideal has also recently been termed by many as ‘Islamism’ or ‘political Islam’. For instance, Farhat Haq (2010, p. 126) says:
I use the term ‘Islamists’ to describe a style of Islamic politics that insists on taking over the state in order to create a righteous Islamic society. In Pakistan, the Jamaat-i-Islami is the most important example of Islamist politics. Islamists are intensely politicized since they believe that regeneration of Muslim societies is not possible without the assumption of political power.

Concerning the identity of the Jama’at, considering all the diverse characteristics of the group, the preferred notion is that presented by Mumtaz Ahmad, as he identifies the party based on its core objectives and existing characteristics:

The Jamaat-i-Islami and the Tablighi Jamaat, the two most important Islamic movements of South Asian subcontinent in the twentieth century, also represent two fundamentally different approaches to Islamic revivalism. While the Jamaat-i-Islami’s main emphasis is on the resacralization of political life and the establishment of an Islamic state with the Qur’an and Sunna (the way of the Prophet) as its constitution and the Shari’ah as its basic law, the Tablighi movement, on the other hand, focuses its activities on the moral and spiritual uplift of individual believers, asking them to fulfil their religious obligations irrespective of whether there is an Islamic state or not. (1999, p. 458)

A detailed examination of the Jama’at’s development and current situation as an Islamic political party in Bangladesh will be presented in Chapter 6. As a brief prelude to identifying the group, it could be stated that the Jama’at is neither merely a political party in Bangladesh, nor a social movement. Rather, it is an Islamic revivalist movement that has adopted conventional politics as the primary expedient for achieving its own religious and ideological objectives. A similar ideology of reviving Islamic governance in the context of modern times and places has been driving groups in almost all Muslim countries. This ideological agency could therefore be noted as a global movement, whereas the Jama’at is basically a national political party working completely independently in its own geographical precinct, while maintaining some adherence to the global political religious movement in the larger context. Considering this state of affairs, I will continue using the word ‘party’ in this thesis to denote the Jama’at, according to general practice.
SOCIAL WELFARE OF POLITICAL ISLAMIC REVIVALISM

The dynamics of their social welfare programs are not necessarily identical among the multitude of contemporary Islamic political movements from both Muslim and non-Muslim societies. However, the existence, and more importantly, the recent ‘effectiveness’ in terms of gaining popularity and social achievement, of these programs are undeniable. The effective measures of social welfare provision undertaken by the religion-based political parties are now manifested in some major Muslim countries, such as in the cases of AKP (Justice and Welfare Party (Turkish: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)) in Turkey, Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement (Arabic: Ḥarakah al-Muqāwamah al-Islāmiyyah)) in Palestine, Muslim Brotherhood (Arabic: Ikhwan al-Muslimin) in Egypt and the Middle East, and Hizbullah (Arabic: lit. Party of God) in Lebanon. The scholars who have studied those movements generally acknowledge this undertaking in their analysis. As illustrated by Rabasa and Larrabee (2008): “The Islamist political parties, from Refah to Saadet, and above all, the AKP, have been especially active in this area. In a very real sense, these charitable and social-welfare activities have been the basis for the party’s success at the municipal and national levels”.

From her study of health clinics in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen, Janine A. Clark believes that much of the success of the Muslim Brotherhood can be attributed to its history of serious involvement in social welfare from its early days, as “it established numerous private schools, medical services, and charity services – which provided money, food, and clothes – for the poor, aged, orphaned and homeless, to name just a few; it also established a bureau of charity and social services that was responsible for these initiatives” (Clark, 2004b:

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5 Though defining AKP as an Islamic revivalist movement is debatable, most intellectuals and political analysts regard it as a political party of moderate Muslims, considering the situation and the nature of Turkish secularism as well as the wide spectrum of the concept of transnational Islamic revivalist movements. For details, please see (Fuller, 2007: 74-75).
15). Levitt’s (2006, p. 242) assertion about the Palestinian Hamas movement depicts a similar situation there: “Palestinian moderates argue that it is Hamas’ social welfare activities, not its suicide bombings, which translate into grassroots and electoral support for the organization at the expense of moderate Palestinian groups”. Hizbullah in Lebanon is not much different from its counterparts in other countries, as Rana Jawad writes: “The Hizbullah organisations placed most emphasis on religious welfare as in initiative arising from among the people and remaining with the people” (Jawad, 2009, p. 115).

The Jama’at in Bangladesh, also, has a long history of involvement in social welfare activities, dating back to the late 1970s. People associated with the Jama’at are widely associated with establishing schools and medical centres all over the country. Most of these endeavours are on a commercial basis, with their instigators attempting to earn their livings as well, but the Jama’at also operates numerous charity schools and charity medical centres through various Islamic NGOs for welfare purposes. There are differences between these two categories, apart from being commercial or non-commercial operational methods. Although schools and medical centres in the commercial category generally bear an Islamic name and are commonly known to be run by the people of the Jama’at, they generate revenue for the entrepreneurs and therefore regular attempts are made to improve them, in order to compete with other private schools and medical centres. On the other hand, schools and medical centres in the non-commercial category are run by assigned Jama’at leaders and activists who work there as part of their organizational commitment. Being not for profit and charity based, these organizations are not generally well-equipped or modernized, as was found during the fieldwork for this study. A detailed description of these institutions will be presented in the Chapters 6 and 7.

These charity schools and medical centres represent the welfare activities of the major Islamic political parties in Bangladesh. However, no previous academic study has been
carried out to examine this socio-political phenomenon with regard to Bangladesh, in spite of the country’s having one of the largest Muslim populations in the world.

ARGUMENT OF THE THESIS

This thesis examines social welfare organization by an Islamic political movement, namely the Jama’at in Bangladesh. By studying this phenomenon, it attempts to explore the motives of the welfare providers and the experiences of the welfare recipients, in order to conclusively ascertain the reasons for and outcomes of this intriguing phenomenon. Participation by religion-based groups in the quasi-democratic political systems in postcolonial Muslim countries is, itself, a significant phenomenon in the socio-political discourse of Muslim societies. In recent decades, those religion-based political movements have extended their activities to social welfare provision and constructed a fusion of social and political movements.

Welfare activities in some major Muslim countries have already been studied from a social movement perspective. Most studies have regarded them as an avenue for the Islamic movements to recruit and mobilize among the poor classes. Egypt’s Islamic charitable sector was scrutinized by Sami Zubaida (1992, p. 9), who considers that the ‘receivers’ of its welfare programs connect through a “network of patronage and clientship, communal membership and loyalty, and possibly political allegiance”. Similarly, Mustapha K. Al-Sayyid (1993) observes that the Islamic movements, based on a middle-class, professional, welfare providing civil society, are successful in gaining popularity among the middle and lower middle classes. Examining the case of Turkey, Haldun Gulalp (2001, p. 444) describes the provider–receiver relationship inherent in the welfare activities of Turkey’s former influential Islamic party, Welfare Party, as a “vertical bloc comprising segments of different
socio-economic classes”. On the other hand, Janine A. Clark (2004b, p. 4) differs, saying that the relationship between the providers and receivers of Islamic political welfare activities in three Arab countries is horizontal, rather than vertical. She argues that “Islamic social institutions are run by and for the middle class” and at the same time they neglect the poor class as their ostensible beneficiaries. The middle class considers these welfare activities to be effective in gaining popularity among the poor through service provision, whereas the poor class views them as an element in building a strong interrelationship between members of the same class in Muslim societies. With regard to the popularity of political Islam and its relationship with social welfare organization, Turkey is considered one of the successful cases, where the Islamic parties have been struggling against state secularism but remaining in power for a long period. Although Turkey has a better state-supported welfare mechanism in place than many other Muslim countries, religion-based social associations have played a strong positive role in the emergence of political Islam in recent decades (Gocmen, 2014). In this context, in Bangladesh, the under-studied Islamic political parties in general, and their social welfare organization in particular, present a unique case for sociological enquiry. The Jama’at has been organizing social welfare provision in a Muslim majority secular state as one of its major agendas driven by several religious-political motives, and has contributed to people’s lives in varying degrees.

Faith-based social welfare is an age-old social phenomenon which has recently been adopted by contemporary Islamic revivalist political parties. It is obvious that social welfare provision is considered a religious obligation for an authoritative collective entity such as the government, and Islamic political parties have attempted to take up this responsibility to whatever extent possible. Simultaneously, the practical advantages associated with obtaining political opportunities in the corresponding societies could not be ignored. Islamic political parties in various Muslim countries have engaged with social welfare provision and have
achieved differing outcomes. In Bangladesh, the Jama’at became involved in social welfare relatively early, in the 1970s. Considering the timeframe, the existing social welfare activities, and the current status of the party in Bangladeshi socio-political spheres, it has not been able to attain the positive outcomes achieved by its counterparts in some other countries (see Chapter 8). However, the empirical evidence demonstrates that the party has already established a combination of a sustainable working structure and material infrastructures, particularly in the areas of education and healthcare. Moreover, its social welfare agenda has inspired numerous private endeavours in those areas and boosted Islamists’ participation on both a commercial and a charity basis. The cases of other Muslim countries also indicate a potential positive resource mobilization if the party is able to overcome some major hindrances, such as the adverse political environment of the country and a lack of progressive policy making and skilful management of the social welfare activities.

In this context, the core argument of this research is that the social welfare activities of Islamic political parties represent a significant avenue for resource mobilization for those parties. In Bangladesh, the Jama’at has attempted to utilize this method like other Islamic political parties around the world. However, unlike its counterparts in other countries, the apparent lack of success of the Jama’at in Bangladeshi politics is reflected in its organization and administration of social welfare activities. In cases like those of Egypt and Turkey, previous academic research has generally indicated a successful and fruitful social welfare provision organized by their Islamic political parties. Politically, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Justice and Welfare Party in Turkey have been able to achieve significant success in recent years. In Bangladesh, the Jama’at has been gradually declining in the political arena, and its social welfare activities were found, during the fieldwork, to be generally traditional and neglected. Therefore, I would argue that social aspects of Islamic political parties are strongly associated with their political prospects. In the case of the
Jama’at in Bangladesh, political disadvantage has affected its social welfare activities, and vice versa.

**AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The central aim of this research is to explore how a religious and political movement acts as a social movement, by using social welfare as one of its key activities, in a secular state. It will also attempt to find out how effectively this movement plays the role of social welfare provider, and what outcomes this phenomenon has produced. The following tasks will support the process of reaching this objective:

- Examining and investigating the motives and purposes of the Jama’at, primarily an Islamic political movement, for administering such social welfare provision
- Exploring the phenomenon of social welfare provision administered by a religion-based political movement in secular Bangladesh; describing the policies that regulate the organizational social welfare provision of the Jama’at and corresponding activities
- Understanding the experience of the welfare recipients, and the contribution to their lives made by this welfare provision
- Exploring (through a combination of insights thus gained) a critical case study of the social welfare agenda of a religion-based political movement, which has become an important aspect of contemporary Islamic political revivalism

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In this context, the primary question of this research is: why the Jama’at, a religiously inspired political party, mobilizes social welfare activities in Bangladesh, a Muslim-majority
secular state? To address this inquiry, an ethnographic account of the social welfare provision specific to the organized, regulated and sustainable practices by the Jama’at would be crucial to our understanding of this recent phenomenon. These welfare activities, in an economically underdeveloped country, were expected by the party to be an avenue for gaining popularity among the vast poor class, especially among the Muslim population. However, the election results and the general weak support of the people for this political party demonstrate a different situation. In order to understand this paradox, questions are posed to both the providers and the recipients of the welfare programs to find out what they think about them. Their reasoning and explanations will then be analysed. This will entail an explanation of the subjective meanings of their answers, revealing the motives, perceptions and experiences of providers and recipients. For this purpose, the study will pursue the following questions:

1. What constitutes the social welfare activities of Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami?
2. Who are the beneficiaries of this social welfare program and what is the nature of the benefit?
3. Why and how does a religiously inspired political party, the Jama’at, play a role in providing social welfare in a secular Muslim-majority Bangladeshi state?
4. To what extent were the objectives of the providers and the expectations of the recipients met?
5. How can social movement theories explain and engage these social welfare activities administered by a political party?
LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A number of issues pertinent to this research required identification prior to the commencement of the data collection. In order to achieve a fair and feasible orientation when answering the aim of this study, a careful approach to dealing with these issues was necessary. The researcher identified four issues of significance: (i) a lack of related and relevant literature, (ii) the radically and abruptly changing political situation of Bangladesh, (iii) the personal background of the researcher, and (iv) the probable hesitation of the participants in disseminating information that is essential for this research.

(i) Although there is very little literature on the wider topic of Islamic revivalism, political Islam has recently gained attention in academia. However, the social welfare activity of Islamic political parties is clearly a new area of study. Because of the lack of literature there is a lack of theoretical approaches applied in these areas as well. There is an apparent absence of theories of Islamic revivalism in the academic area (Ali, 2012).

(ii) It is important to keep in mind the continuous political instability in Bangladesh when defining the methodology of this study. The case study for this work, Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami, is currently the most criticized and discussed political party of the country. However, it is also the mainstream and most influential group of the Islamic revivalist trend there. The central leaders of this party were arrested by the government of Bangladesh in 2001, accused of war crimes committed during the liberation war of 1971. Several government officials have already called for the banning of the party, whereas some other human rights observers and legal experts have questioned the procedures of the allegations of the war crimes. These political conflicts presented some difficulties during the process of data collection for this research. Included in the history of this party is the fact that it was banned for years after Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan in 1971. It could be safely
assumed that a political ban probably would not be enough to make Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami disappear completely, as the ideology the party embraces has already become a global phenomenon.

(iii) Considering the concept of the utility of social welfare provision for the religion-based political parties, the broader research area includes different perspectives on the relationship between social welfare and Islam in Bangladesh. There are six or seven Islamic political parties in the country which are actively involved in national politics, and the Jama’at is the largest among them. Some of the other Islamic parties adhering to the idea of Islamic revivalism prefer to concentrate on a spiritual program, by being completely apolitical. The traditional religious schools and scholars spreading in the vast rural areas of Bangladesh have also a strong bond with the Bangladeshi Muslim society. Unfortunately, the scope of this research would not allow for covering all of them.

(iv) Personal background of researcher as a Bangladeshi, having friends and family members involved in politics, may result in the objectivity of this study being questioned. However, this debate, with regard to being an insider, outsider or an inbetweener, is not new in social science. Particularly, ethnographic and qualitative enquiries are closely associated with personal and professional identities where the researchers’ backgrounds have influence in varying degrees (Ochieng, 2010). Therefore, ethical responsibility for academic practices of objective research methodologies and for attaining justifiable findings has always been carefully considered during the conducting of this research. It must be noted that this is not an action research that challenges the conventional concept of neutrality and objectivity of social study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 23). On the other hand, the researcher was not considered as a complete outsider at all times during the fieldwork by both parties included in this study: providers and receivers of the welfare programs. Moreover, the background of the
researcher, sharing the language, dialect and other social customs, leads to a strong cultural competence which has benefited this research (Marby, 2008).

(v) The researcher had some negative experiences, as some people were hesitant to participate due to the local political circumstances in Bangladesh, along with the global sense of insecurity resulting from the fear of terrorism. Because some people were reluctant to reveal personal opinions and thoughts regarding Islam in Bangladesh and its politics, the data collection process was challenging, but interesting.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The Introduction of this thesis has outlined the background, significance, scope and arguments of this study. Basic conceptual aspects of the study – for example, modern Islamic revivalism, Islamic political parties, the Jama’at-e-Islami (the subject of the case study of this research) and the social welfare activities of Islamic political parties – have also been introduced in this chapter. Having explained these rudimentary elements, it is now possible to weave in conceptual and theoretical fundamentals of the research.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 constitute the literature review segment of this thesis. Chapters 2 and 3 explore the position of Islam as a religion and the Jama’at as a religious-based political party in Bangladesh respectively. Chapter 2 presents an analytical description of the advent of Islam in this region and the history of its development in Bangladeshi society. Several topics are discussed which lay the foundation for understanding the subject matter of this thesis, such as the place of religion in Bangladeshi society and politics, several reformist religious movements in the past that have had a strong impact on the situation of religion in contemporary Bangladesh and the role of the Jama’at in this religious social atmosphere as an Islamic political party.
Chapter 3 concentrates on the Jama’at, addressing issues such as the birth and emergence of the Jama’at as a religious-political revivalist movement, along with reviewing its current positioning in the country. In connection with this, a short biography is presented of Abul Ala Mawdudi, the founder of the Jama’at and one of the most influential Islamic scholars in modern times. His background and his reasons for establishing this party in British India is an essential knowledge about the party. How the party went through various transformations after the end of British colonial rule and how it has moved into its current position in independent Bangladesh are also described in this chapter.

Against the backdrop of previous two chapters, chapter 4 provides a critical review of literature concerning the research area that incorporates issues having basic relevancy with this topic, such as Islamic revivalism, social welfare, the welfare state and the correlation between welfare and contemporary Islamic political activism. A comprehensive review of the literature on these subjects will explicate theoretical aspects of the topic. This will also pave the way for explaining the theoretical perspectives of this thesis in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 discusses the development of social movement theories and their applicability in the current research area. Social movement theories, as such, are a modern topic in social science. Among them, two particular social movement theories suit the aim of this research. Resource Mobilization Theory and Political Process Theory are explained in this chapter along with their relevancy to the case of the Jama’at’s social welfare organization in Bangladesh.

Chapter 6 considers a number of methodological concerns that are intrinsic to investigating the social welfare activities of the Jama’at in Bangladesh. The literature and the theoretical aspects, as discussed in the previous chapters, are influential in defining the methodological framework of this study. In order to study a people-oriented dynamic social
movement and to find out the results of diverse human interaction in the field, this study requires qualitative inquiry, aiming to obtain elaborate data in their natural settings. This research method, along with the data collection process, the characteristics of the participants, the field data analysis phase and ethical issues are described in this chapter.

Chapters 7 and 8 deal with empirical data derived from the fieldwork by investigating the welfare activities of the party. Chapter 7 presents an ethnographic study of the social welfare activities in the field. It outlines the welfare program organized by the Jama’at in Bangladesh. Chapter 8 attempts to understand the motives and achievements of the providers, as well as the recipients’ perspectives on this social welfare provision, by scrutinizing their experiences and opinions. A set of findings is offered in this chapter.

Chapter 9, the Conclusion, presents further findings, accompanied by the answers to the questions posed by the thesis. This is followed by a discussion of the scope for future research and, finally, a concluding summary of this study.
CHAPTER 2: ISLAM IN BANGLADESH

An analysis of the social welfare activities of the Jama’at in Bangladesh intrinsically requires a historical analysis of Islam’s place and development as a religion in this region. The Jama’at currently acts as a major Islamic revivalist movement in the country, with a significant role in the formation of the religious identity and worldview of a large portion of its Muslim population. Having introduced the research through a literature review and a description of its methodology, it is pertinent here to elaborate on this theme as a conceptual foundation of the research topic. A historical illustration of the development of Islam in this region will also clarify the current situation of religion in Bangladeshi society, which is organically necessary for answering the primary research objective: to understand the existing religio-social phenomenon in the context of a constitutionally secular Muslim majority state.

Bangladesh, geographically a small country in Southeast Asia, containing the fourth largest Muslim population of the world, has an interesting history of socio-religious development. This region became the eastern province of Pakistan at the end of British colonial rule, when the Indian subcontinent was divided into two countries, Pakistan and India, according to the doctrine of the ‘Two Nation Theory’, that focused on the religious identities of their citizens (Ahmed, 2004, p. 5). Pakistan was created as a Muslim majority country and India as a Hindu majority country in 1947. Bangladesh, though located on the other side of India, became East Pakistan at that time, due to the majority Muslim population in this region. However, continuous perceived economic and political discrimination led to a political uprising in this eastern part of the country against the central government of
Pakistan, and Bangladesh finally achieved independence from Pakistan in 1971 (Santos, 2007, p. 24).

As an underdeveloped country, Bangladesh suffers from several crises. Poverty and illiteracy are the most prevalent and long-standing problems it faces. Political instability and weak democracy in the governance have led to a decline in law and order. There are three major sectors of the country’s economy: agriculture, migrant worker remittances and garment export (Lewis, 2011, p. 135).

CURRENT AFFAIRS OF ISLAM IN BANGLADESH

Islam in Bangladesh has been studied from several perspectives. In one of these studies Mumtaz Ahmad (2008) has produced an objective and precise analysis regarding the place of Islam in Bangladeshi politics. In his article Islam, State and Society in Bangladesh, he has attempted to outline the situation of Islam in Bangladesh since its independence from Pakistan. Based on political evidence and historical analysis, he argues that Islamic expression has been diversified in Bangladesh, as it has been in other Muslim societies. He classifies those expressions of diversification into seven predominant categories: Orthodox, Sufi, Revivalist, Liberal, Islamic Patriotism, Post-modern and the Ahl-Hadith Movement\(^6\) that led to Islamic militancy. Though he has mentioned some sociological factors that contributed to the manifestation of some of these categories of Islamic expressions in Bangladesh, his analysis is based on analysing historical events which have resulted in those expressions. In the course of his discussion, Mumtaz Ahmad has considered Bangladesh

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\(^6\) ‘Ahl-e-Hadith’ (Arabic: lit. followers of the Prophetic Tradition) is a term that is locally used to indicate the group that considers following any religio-judicial school of thought (madhab) to be unacceptable in Islam. Rather, the adherents of this movement claim to follow the Prophetic Traditions directly. This movement emphasizes literal interpretations of the religious texts. It also loosely referred to as the ‘Salafi’ in Bangladesh and mostly adopts its theological interpretations from the Saudi religious scholars.
Jama’at-e-Islami as the advocate of the revivalist school of thinking and “as one of the most effectively organized religio-political movements” (Ahmad, 2008, p. 61).

In Bangladesh, about 89.5 per cent of the total population is Muslim, with Hindus, the largest religious minority, making up about 10 per cent of the total population. There are small numbers of Christians, Buddhists and adherents of other religions. The people of Bangladesh are generally described as religious and conscious of their religious identity. Bangladesh is also no different from other Asian Muslim societies that are facing some social, cultural, political and economic dilemmas due to the conflict between modernity and tradition. The inevitable advent of modern science and Western knowledge has brought about many changes in all aspects of life. A local version of Western democracy and the open market economy is in practice through the sector of the population that is educated and in control of the country. At the same time, many are now trying to find solutions to local problems in local contexts and traditions. Some even try to reject modernity to a greater or lesser extent. In all these internal social conflicts and developments, religion is always a significant catalyst.
Table 1: Selected socio-economic indicators of Bangladesh\(^7\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators(^8)</th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area (km(^2))</td>
<td>147,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>People</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (in millions)</td>
<td>148.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population growth (annual %)</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth (years)</td>
<td>68 (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiteracy rate, total adult population (% of ages 15 and above)</td>
<td>44 (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiteracy rate, adult male (% of ages 15 and above)</td>
<td>39 (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiteracy rate, adult female (% of ages 15 and above)</td>
<td>49 (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic groups (2004)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali (% of total population)</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (including tribal groups and non-Bengali Muslims) (% of total population)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious groups (2004)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim (% of total population)</td>
<td>89.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu (% of total population)</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Buddhist, Christian, Baha’i and so on) (% of total population)</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNI per capita</td>
<td>700 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP (in millions, current USD)</td>
<td>100,357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP Growth (annual %)</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation, GDP deflator (annual %)</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty line (% of population)</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty headcount ratio at 2 USD a day (PPP(^9)) (% of population)</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^7\) All figures relate to the year 2010 unless stated otherwise.

\(^8\) This table is drawn based on the data primarily acquired from World Bank website. Data on ethnicity and religion are taken from the CIA World Factbook ("Data on Bangladesh in South Asia (By Country)," ; "The World Factbook: CIA.").

\(^9\) ‘Purchasing Power Parity’ in economics refers to how much money is needed to buy the same goods and services in two different countries.
The religious understanding among Bangladeshi Muslims is a complex issue to discuss. Islam came to this region primarily through Sufi preachers and Arab traders. Due to the historical influence of Sufi thought, the Muslims here are generally inclined to the peaceful aspects of their religion. Instead of refuting or conflicting with local customs and cultural practices, the Muslims apparently try to integrate between them and religious norms. The traditional religious education system and the Imams of the local mosques play important roles in the religious life of ordinary people. However, politically, Bangladesh is a secular country, as the present government has readopted secularism as one of the state principles. Secularism was also one of the state principles of newborn Bangladesh in 1971, but was removed from the national constitution only few years later, in an apparent bid by the then military ruler to gain the popular support of the Bangladeshi Muslims. This demonstrates that the ordinary people of Bangladesh mostly support secular and nationalist political parties, but any attempt to uphold religion appeases them, even it is merely symbolic. Joseph Devine and Sarah C. White (2013b) demonstrates that Islam is deeply rooted in Bangladeshi social mindset which, apart from being merely an observed religion, strongly associates itself with social living and development.

Islamic collective activism is divided among several political and apolitical groups in Bangladesh. In the beginning, differences in interpretation of religious thought and practices represented the primary cause of the emergence of several Islamic groups in Bangladesh. These differences have resulted in strong political rivalry among the groups. The characteristics of these numerous groups are highly diverse. Among them, Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami is a major political party that has played a significant role in the national politics of the country for the last three decades. Many consider the Jama’at as an Islamist party adapting to the democratic strategy, while others regard it as “the main political arm of Islamism” in Bangladesh (Harder, 2010, p. 357).
THE ADVENT OF ISLAM IN BENGAL

A detailed examination of the advent of Islam in Bengal and its development through its various historical phases is essential when embarking upon a study of the contemporary issues of Islam concerning this region. The present-day country known as Bangladesh, the 55,598 square-mile area in the north-west part of the Indian subcontinent of South Asia, does not resemble the historic region of Bengal. Historians use the name ‘Bengal’ to indicate the area of the greater Ganges-Brahmaputra valley that comprises contemporary Bangladesh and West Bengal state as well as the state of Assam in present day India. With the end of British colonial rule over the subcontinent in 1947, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam became part of the Republic of India. On the other hand, East Bengal, with its Muslim majority, was made a part of Pakistan and remained as East Pakistan until it became an independent country, Bangladesh, in 1971 (Ali, 1985a; Britanica, 1998, p. 100; O'donnell, 1984).10

It is difficult to ascertain exactly when Islam arrived in the Bengal region. Abbas Ali Khan (1914–1999) preferred the opinion of some historians that the Arabs had a trading relationship, through the sea route, with the Indian subcontinent even in the pre-Islamic era. Muhammad Abdul Mannan (Mannan, 2004, p. 77) mentioned that Khaliq Ahmad Nizami wrote: “India’s relationship with the Arab world goes back to the hoary past. Long before the rise of Islam, there was brisk commercial contact between India and Arabia, and the Arab traders carried Indian goods to the European markets by way of Egypt and Syria. Elphinstone has rightly observed that from the days of Joseph to the days of Marco Polo and Vasco da Gama the Arabs were the captains of Indian commerce. There were large numbers of Arab colonies on the Western coast of India and many Indian settlements in the Arab countries”. The Arabs had commercial sea communication with Abyssinia (Ethiopia) on the African continent and travelled to China in Asia for trading. An ancient locality, Malabar, located at

10 Muhammad Mohar Ali depicted in detail the geographical features and developments of this region from historical perspective. For details, please see Ali (1985a).
Kerala in South India is assumed by many historians to be one of the stopovers for Arab trading vessels heading towards China and other south-eastern Asian regions (Khan, 2007, p. 14). According to Muhammad Mohar Ali (Ali, 1985a, p. 43), Arab Muslim traders had come in contact with Bengal not much after 700 AD, if not earlier.

Commercial and religious contact by Arab Muslims with Bengal preceded the Muslim Turkish conquest of this region by a long period. The Arab heritage and history of trading through maritime communication played a great role in preaching and establishing Islam in this part of the world. The first Muslim conquest in the subcontinent was in Sindh, in 700 A.D./81H, when the army led by Muḥammad bin Qāsim carried out a retributive expedition against the local king, whose army had illegally captured and robbed an Arab mercantile vessel in an earlier period (Khan, 2007). According to Muhammad Mohar Ali, “the acquisition of this territory had momentous consequences for Islam as well as for the Arabs. It opened the gates for the gradual expansion of Islam and the subsequent establishment of Muslim political power in the subcontinent” (Ali, 1985a, p. 29).

Abbas Ali Khan mentions that the Arab traders reached Chittagong and Sylhet provinces of the Bengal region during pre-Islamic times. Later, Islam arrived mainly through the already established communications. He asserts that the early Muslims who arrived in this region from outside were mainly from two categories. First, there were saints and pious people who came with the Arab traders and preached Islam, with some of them even settling permanently. The behaviour and morality of the Arab traders also attracted local people to Islam. This kind of religious communication was built up in the region in the early days of Islam. Second, Muslims of another type came to this region in later times: the warriors and soldiers. They established political control by the Muslims in the subcontinent (Khan, 2007, pp. 13-17).
The establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal took place about three centuries after the Muslim Arab conquest of Sindh. Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Ṭhaqāfī Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī (d.1206 A.D./602H.), a Muslim commander with his own army, led a military expedition against the Hindu ruler of Bengal, Lakhman Sena. His victory in 1203 ended the prevailing rule of the Hindu Sena Dynasty in this region.\footnote{For a detailed account of the background and events of this victory, see Ali (1985a, pp. 49–60).}

Though Islam arrived in Bengal in the early centuries A.D., the number of Muslims was not very significant. When they arrived and established political control over the region in the thirteenth century, Muslim conquerors encountered cults of gods, goddesses and spirits, shaped by an overwhelming concern for survival among the majority of the native people. Instead of emphasizing transforming the society and Islamizing the native people, they focused on infrastructural development, with the objective of consolidating their political power in a territory which was almost entirely non-Muslim but secluded from the other neighbouring Hindu regions by geographical situation and historical reasons. They constructed several masjids (mosques) and madrasahs (religious schools), supported Muslim scholars, saints known as Sufis, preachers and religious endowment activities, and encouraged immigration from other Muslim regions (Ahmed, 2001).

Muslims were migrating to the agriculturally and economically enriched and affluent Bengal region from different places, like the West Indian regions, Afghanistan, Persia, Arabia, Turkey and Africa. Eaton (2001) suggests that the Bengal region became one of the most dynamic economic zones in all Eurasia during the Mughal Empire, especially by the end of the seventeenth century. Abbas Ali Khan (2007, p. 21) added, “the numbers of Muslims in Bengal were increasing rapidly. Most of them arrived from different places as soldiers, traders, preachers, refugees, and so on.”
However, even before the Muslims gained political power in Bengal, some of the local people converted to Islam, mainly because of the high moral attributes, attractive personality and humane behaviour of Muslim saints and personalities. At that time, the Hindu Brahminic caste system was predominant in this region. Therefore, the low caste people, victims of discrimination in every aspect of social life, were increasingly attracted by Islamic teachings regarding human equality and the distribution of rights. Local Buddhist and Jain people, whose situation was not better than the low castes but worse, in that they faced oppression by the Hindu upper-class rulers of the Sena dynasty, also found a shelter in the developing Muslim community (Mannan, 2004).

However, Mohar Ali (1985b, p. 752) suggests that the rigours of the caste system were not the main reason for the Hindus’ conversion to Islam in Bengal. He considers this theory of the low-class Hindu origin of Bengal Muslims to be propounded based on mere “probability” and “supposition” that “was not substantiated by any specific example from history”. According to Ali, though what is said about the spirit of equality in Islam is undoubtedly true, this is not the case advocated by several British ethnographers and historians who claim that almost all of the Muslims in Bengal originated from low Hindu castes. This notion is termed by Richard Eaton the “Religion of Social Liberation Thesis” (Eaton, 1993, p. 117). Rather, according to Ali, “instances of immigration of Muslims from other countries into Bengal and of their having settled there are, at any rate, more numerous and direct than those of conversion from the local population” (Ali, 1985b, p. 760). On the other hand, “propagation of Islam was undoubtedly an important aspect of the activities of the settler-preachers. … There is however very little direct evidence of any organized Islamic missionary efforts. Nevertheless, individual efforts of the Shaykhs (Islamic Scholars and Saints), and their teachings and examples must have contributed to the expansion of Islam
among the local population” (Ali, 1985b, p. 781). He mentions several pieces of evidence for conversion to Islam by the higher classes of Hindu society, as well as the Hindus from lower classes. Ali (1985b, pp. 787-788) concludes:

The ratio of immigrant Muslims to local converts is difficult to determine. The available evidence indicates however that the number of the former was considerably higher than that of the latter. … An idea of how immigrations have changed the demographic features of Bengal may be obtained from the fact that on the eve of the British withdrawal in 1947 Muslims in the eastern districts of Bengal which now constitute Bangladesh numbered about 60 per cent of the population, but according to the latest census they now constitute more than 85 per cent of the population. This variation in their percentage has been due not to an increase in their birth-rate, nor even to conversion to Islam during the last quarter of a century, but to the migration of some Hindus from the former East Pakistan and the immigration into it of a considerable number of Muslims from West to East Bengal which took place during the Maratha incursions in the mid-eighteenth century.

It is also noteworthy that some historians and social scientists saw a continuation of the previous class system, in a new and hidden form, among the Muslims. The immigrant Muslims were called Ashraf (Arabic: lit. honourable) and considered themselves representatives of an authentic Islamic culture. Thus, the newly arrived social and cultural influences of Islamized Arabs failed to become a general trend among local people, and remained as practised by some people and praised by the others. This compromise between incoming concepts and prevailing traditions was somewhat accepted, and preferred to the previous Hindu caste system of social life, where the oppression and inhumane differentiation were obviously cruel. Nevertheless, this peculiar classification of social life had a highly

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12 Muhammad Abdul Mannan produced a detailed study of the contributions of various Muslims preachers, most of whom were Ṣūfīs, prior to the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal and also during Muslim rule. He considered Bāyejīd Bostāmī, Sultān Māhmud Balkhī, Shāh Muhāmmad Sultān Rumī, Bābā Ādam Shahīd, Shāh Niāmat Ullāh, Shāh Mākhdūm, Nūr Kutub and Shāh Jālāl as the significant Muslim preachers in the early and mediaeval history of Bengal. Though most of these were peaceful preachers, some also organized military activities against the oppressive Hindu rulers. But most of the Muslim preachers worked individually, without government affiliation or relationships and focused on social services. For details, please see Mannan (2004, pp. 92–103).
significant effect on the socio-cultural situation of the Muslims of Bangladesh. Rafiuddin Ahmed (2001, p. 13) asserts:

The social and cultural influences coming from outside Bengal remained restricted primarily to these classes, including the Ulama (religious scholars), leaving local Muslims in the same situation where they had been prior to their assimilation into Muslim society. The latter continued to live in their ancestral villages, were indistinguishable in occupation from neighbouring non-Muslims, and often participated in social traditions and festivities that were established in this region before the advent of Islam. Even in the nineteenth century, and, in many instances, until recently, their lifestyle and world-views did not fundamentally change, nor did the attitude of the ashraf towards them.

The local culture of Bengal, historically deep-rooted in Hindu concepts, is still in practice in many parts of rural Bangladesh, irrespective of the Muslim or Hindu religious identity of the people, who show great similarities in dress, manners, names and occupations and even in some of the rituals and festivals. This diversity in socio-religious life resulted in East Pakistani Muslims being considered as ‘less Muslim’ by many West Pakistanis in pre-independence Bangladesh. This was evident in contemporary discourse on the role of religion in state governance. In her book about the identity of Bangladeshi Muslims in pre-independence period, Ferhana Hashem, a research fellow at the University of Kent, wrote (2010, p. 62):

The West Pakistani elite and the Bengal Muslim elite both articulated contrasting views on the role of Islam in Pakistan. Crucially, the Bengal Muslim elite alluded to a broader inclusive religious policy that extended across communal lines and was the main source of conflict between the two competing elite groups. The West Pakistani elite alluded to a communal religious identity that drew exclusively from the tenets of Islam; however, underlying the pretext of such Islamic ideals, this group sought to continue the economic, social and political marginalisation of the Bengali Muslims. Thus, they used Islam to continue their exploitive rule over the Bengal Muslim elite and masses.

Regarding language, Urdu, the common language of West Pakistan, was considered as an Islamic language due to its being written in Perso-Arabic script and spoken by most of the
Muslim elites in the subcontinent. On the other hand, Sanskrit-prone Bengali, the common language of East Pakistan, was generally viewed ‘as totally foreign to Muslim culture’ by many non-Bengali speaking Muslims of the Indian subcontinent (Uddin, 2006, p. 4). This lingual-religious divide has a long history in this region. During 200 years of British colonial rule, Muslim population practiced Persian and Urdu in their education to the extent that many of them refused to learn English considering it a non-Islamic language. On the other hand, Hindu population of India generally practiced Sanskrit, Pali, Hindi and later English in their educational institutions. Amena Mohsin, a professor of International Relations at the University of Dhaka, wrote (2009, p. 35):

British colonial policy of divide-and-rule stopped the growth of this process (religiously pluralistic development). Their economic and education policies as pursued in Bengal were aimed at creating a Hindu aristocracy as a counterweight to one traditionally represented by Muslims. For instance, the Zamindari system (1793) sharpened the dichotomy between the Hindu landlords and Muslim peasants. The use of Persian for official purpose (Persian was spoken by the Muslim aristocracy, and was the language of the Muslim court) was replaced first by Bengali and later by English. This opened up job opportunities for Bengali Hindus, since Muslims refused to educate themselves in English. The result was the emergence of a white-collar, English-educated Hindu urban class, and the steady decline of Muslim aristocracy.

Although the Muslims of Bengal spoke Bengali, their religious education was predominantly administered through Persian and Urdu. This affiliation between language and religion was also reported by Turkish Islamist Intellectual and Journalist Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu. In exploring major languages spoken by the Muslims in the East, he wrote about Bengali (Ihsanoglu, 2003, p. 115):

No doubt, the fact that Bengal was subject to Muslim rule for six centuries contributed to the spread of Islam throughout the country, and the Bengali language, in addition to Persian and Arabic, played an important role in consolidating Islamic culture there. Some linguists describe Bengali as an Indian language (descended from Sanskrit) of the Indo-European family. However, others think that the basic structure of Bengali is Dravidian, rather than
Sanskrit, even though the language may later have come under Sanskrit influence, particularly owing to the efforts of Hindu writers. Writing in Bengali came somewhat later, given that the official languages of the Islamic state and those of education were Persian alongside Arabic. For this reason we find no literary works by Muslims in Bengali before the sixteenth century… Islamic subjects in Bengali literature subsequently became more popular and Arabic, Persian and Urdu words, expressions and phrases entered the language.

Before we thoroughly discuss the position of Islam and Muslims in the creation of Pakistan in 1947 and Bangladesh in 1971 in the coming sections, it is critical to shed more light on the early period of Islam in this region particularly because the perception regarding the ‘Muslim-ness’ of Bangladeshi Muslims, as held by many West Pakistanis, was actually associated with the syncretistic nature of the origins of Islam in Bangladesh.

**MUSLIM RULE IN BENGAL**

Abbas Ali Khan (2007) mentions the names of 100 Muslims rulers of this region during the period of Muslim rule in the Bengal. This period started with the conquest of ‘Lākhṇābatī’ by Ikhtiyār Khaljī in 1203 and ended with the defeat of Sirājuddaulā in 1757 at the Battle of Plassey. This defeat was in a battle against the British forces of the East India Company and the traitors from his own army. There were three categories of Muslim rulers during this period. Some conquered the incumbent power through their own strength and were recognized by the Muslim rulers in Delhi, who were considered as the central rulers of the Indian subcontinent due to their power and the territory they held. Some were totally sovereign rulers but connected with Delhi by good diplomatic relations.13 However, some

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13 Muhammad Mohar Ali wrote: “Another myth created by the nationalist (Hindu) writers centres round the conflicts between the Lākhṇābatī rulers and the Delhi Sultans. These have too often been depicted as Bengal’s struggle for ‘independence’. These conflicts were born out of personal ambitions and had nothing to do with regional or territorial nationalism which was unknown at that time. Besides being an attempt to read modern developments into past events, the myth is also fraught with inconsistency and double standards. To say that the expansion of Muslim political sway in Bengal was slow because of sustained Hindu resistance, and at the same time to suggest that the Lākhṇābatī rulers were fighting Bengal’s struggle against Delhi’s hegemony is clearly antithetical” (Mohar Ali, 1988, vol. 1, p.74).
rulers were appointed by Delhi and ruled this region as governors. The following table provides an outline of the Muslim dynasties which had political control over this region at different times.

Table 2: List of Muslim ruling dynasties and orders in the Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Dynasty/ruler</th>
<th>Type of ruler</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1203–1227</td>
<td>Khalji dynasty and lieutenants of Ikhtiyār al-DīnKhaljī</td>
<td>Turks having good diplomatic relations with Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1227–1341</td>
<td>Balbani rulers under the rule of Delhi</td>
<td>Mongols from Central Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1342–1413</td>
<td>Ilias Shahi dynasty</td>
<td>Sovereign rulers originating in Sijistan, Persia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1414–1441</td>
<td>Ganesh</td>
<td>Hindu local landlord, sovereign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1442–1487</td>
<td>Recovered by Ilias Shahi dynasty</td>
<td>Sovereign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1487–1493</td>
<td>Habshi rulers</td>
<td>Abyssinian (Ethiopian) origin, Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1493–1538</td>
<td>Husein Shahi dynasty</td>
<td>Arab origin, sovereign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1538–1564</td>
<td>Shur dynasty</td>
<td>Bihar origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1565–1576</td>
<td>Qarrani dynasty</td>
<td>Pathan origin, Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1576–1757</td>
<td>Mughal dynasty</td>
<td>Governors of Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1757–1857</td>
<td>British East India Company rule</td>
<td>Puppet local ruler, acquisition of Diwani (the office of revenue collection and civil administration) and Nizamat (military affairs, security and criminal administration) by the British East India Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857–1947</td>
<td>British crown rule</td>
<td>Colonial rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947–1971</td>
<td>Province under central rule</td>
<td>Greater Bengal region was divided along religious lines. West Bengal remained with Hindu India, and the eastern part became East</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


15 Muhammad Mohar Ali described this system of governance by the British East India Company as “power without responsibility” for “ensuing pillage”. Please see Ali (1985c, p.10).
During the 550 years of Muslim rule in the Bengal region, the establishment of Sharī‘ah (Islamic jurisprudence) in civil order neither materialized nor was given priority by the majority of the Muslim rulers, as internal conflicts for power and conspiracies by various interest groups provoked political unrest among the rulers from different dynasties, with these political activities hardly affecting the lives of common people. The secular practice of conceptual separation of religion and state was in operation (Eaton, 2001), and in general the peasantry, with its agriculture-based economy, continued without being bothered by the political situation. The religious life was developed mainly by the Muslim preachers, saints and Ṣūfīs, who spread Islam through social services. In the course of this historical trend, a lack of the practice of Islamic culture, along with maintenance of the old local customs and traditions derived from Hindu religion played a key role in the cultural and educational decline of the Muslim community in later decades. Moreover, the British colonial administration was mainly supported by the Hindus, who perceived it as an opportunity for revenge against centuries-long rule by the Muslims. During the two centuries of British colonial rule that followed, the Muslim society experienced severe and collective decline in all aspects of life, especially in education, economic activities and government services.\textsuperscript{16} This was the historical period when Muslims worldwide faced colonization and intellectual backwardness. This prevailing situation, from both local and global perspectives, certainly affected the religious development of the Muslims of Bengal.

\textsuperscript{16} For a detailed examination of the prevailing situation of discrimination towards the Muslims in Bengal with evidence from government records, please see P. Hardy (Hardy, 1972, pp. 198-221).
According to Abbas Ali Khan (2007), though the Muslims ruled Bengal for nearly six centuries, the Muslim people lacked an awareness of religious identity. This situation arose mainly because of their inclination towards the practice of Hindu culture, exemplified in traditional folk activities, literature, festivals, fairy tales, lifestyles and so on. Khan claims that one of the major reasons for this religious decline is the ‘half-conversion’ of the locals from their pagan idol-worshiping religion to Islam, without their having a basic understanding of or orientation to Islamic teachings and principles. Many of them resorted to Islamic identity in order to avoid the social discrimination of the Hindu caste system or/and to achieve the privileges that went with being from the ruling religious identity, but a proper Islamic education was absent in many communities. Thus, the imitation of various Hindu rituals, like enkindling fire in festivals, using musical instruments in mass processions to celebrate Muḥarram,\(^{17}\) worshiping at graves,\(^{18}\) and non-Islamic ways of showing respect for the saints became widespread and performed by Muslims oblivious to their inherent contradiction with Islam.\(^{19}\) During its history, this region has also seen various efforts by Muslim reformists dedicated to spreading Islamic teachings among the masses.

A brief analysis of those reformist movements is indispensable here, as the Jama’at, the subject matter of this research, is itself currently pioneering a new type of religious reformation in this region. The Jama’at has introduced a socio-political explanation of Islam to this society. This age-long continuation of the call for religious reformation certainly

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\(^{17}\) *Muḥarram* is the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is one of the four sacred months of the year in which fighting is prohibited. This month is an occasion of mourning in remembrance of the Battle of Kārbālā, which took place in this month, in which Ḥusayn bin ‘Ali, the grandson of Muḥammad (PBUH), was killed by the forces of the second Umayyad Caliph, ‘Yāzid.

\(^{18}\) According to mainstream Islamic principles, a dead person has no power to do anything good or bad for anyone living in this world, unless God allows them a power of recommendation on the Day of Judgement. However, many people following local practices and popular culture in Muslim societies believe otherwise, considering a pious person able to make a strong recommendation to God, even after death. Therefore, people continue to visit the graves with special prayers, and sometimes their practices extend to bowing down or prostrating themselves towards the grave, which is considered a serious sin in Islam.

\(^{19}\) For details, please see Khan (1996, pp. 59–70).
facilitated the acceptance of this revivalist thought in its early period. The historically significant and most recent reformist movements are presented in the following section.

REFORMIST MOVEMENTS

On many occasions in the historical development of the society of Bengal Muslims, compromises between Islamic directions and the prevailing social customs and prejudices have been reached. Therefore, though the number of Muslim inhabitants was always increasing with the popularity of Sufi trends and peace-loving preachers, the concept of Islamic society and state was ignored during most of the history of this region. As a result of this trend, old Hindu culture continued to be the dominant culture and led to a local version of Islamic practice, considered by orthodox religious scholars as deviationist innovation \((\text{Bid’ah})\), among the Muslims of this region.

However, Muslims in Bengal experienced several reformist movements, from religious and social perspectives, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The concepts and discourses of different Muslim reformist movements in Arabia as well as in Greater India influenced many consciously practising Muslims of Bengal: for instance, the Salafiyyah movement of Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb\(^{20}\); the movements of Shaykh Aḥmad Sarhindī al-Fārūqī al-Naqshabandī (1564–1624), known as Mujaddid AlfqeqThānī; Shah WalīAllāh Muḥaddith al-Dehlawī (1702–1760) and his son Shah ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (1745–1823); that of Sayyid Aḥmad Berelawī (1786–1831) of Raebareli in northern India; and that of Shah Ismāʻīl Shahīd (1779 –1831).\(^{21}\) The Tariqah-i-Muhammadia and the Faraizi

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\(^{21}\) In his book, Muhammad Abdur Rahim, a famous Muslim historian of the Indian subcontinent and Professor in the Department of History in Dhaka University, studied the reformist movements of the Muslims of Bengal, the influence of contemporary great reformist movements on them and the participation of the Muslims of
movements are reportedly the most prominent local Bengali movements influenced by the above mentioned Indian movements (Ahmed, 1981, p. 39). Moreover, there were movements among Muslims which simultaneously represented the people’s resistance against colonial oppression and the struggle to maintain their Muslim identity in the face of oppression by Hindu Zamindars (Feudal Lords), collaborators with the British colonial rulers (like the Faqir insurgency) and the movement of Titu Mir (Ali, 1985c). Nevertheless, there was no sustained and influential state governed by Islamic ideology in the greater Indian subcontinent until the nineteenth century, despite the fact that many Muslim rulers and dynasties had ruled for different periods of its history.

A great breakthrough in the history of Muslims of the subcontinent took place in the middle of the twentieth century. A concept of autonomous rule based on religious identity was growing. Poet philosopher Muhammad Iqbal envisaged first an independent country for Muslims of this region and proposed a Muslim state in his speech in the 1930 All-India conference of the Muslim League in Allahabad. Ten years later, in 1940, a resolution was proposed by Fazlul Huq, then Prime Minister of the Bengal province and President of the Bengal Muslim League, and subsequently accepted at the conference of the All-India Muslim League in Lahore. This resolution is known as the ‘Lahore Declaration’. It called for Muslim autonomy in different parts of British India based on the religion of the majority of the population. Later, this resolution developed into a popular demand from the Muslim people to establish the country of Pakistan, and Muslims from all over the Indian subcontinent joined this movement (Rahim, 2006).

Bengal in the historical Jihad movement against British colonial rule. For more information in this topic, please see Rahim (2006, pp. 74–86).

22 Muhammad Iqbal said in his historical speech: “A separate Federation of Muslim Provinces, reformed on these lines I have suggested, is the only course by which we can secure a peaceful India and save Muslims from the domination of non-Muslims” (G. Allama, Pakistan Movement historic documents, published for the Department of International Relations, University of Karachi, p128–133, as quoted in Mannan, 2007, p. 252).
Abdur Rahim, who later founded the Jama’at in this region, joined this movement and worked continuously in mobilizing public opinion and increasing awareness of the movement among the common people through effective communication. Almost at the same time, Mawdudi initiated his activities, with a call for a return to the purer form of Islam in people’s personal and collective lives. At that time, Mawdudi’s activities were limited to writing and intellectual discussions only. The young Abdur Rahim came to know about this new trend of thought when he was a researcher at Calcutta Madrasah and shared its ideology.

With freedom from British colonial rule and the establishment of the new state, Pakistan, the endeavours and thoughts of Abdur Rahim were given free rein. The Bengal region, an area with a Muslim majority, became known as East Pakistan (excluding West Bengal with its Hindu majority which became part of the other state, India). Muhammad Ali Jinnah was given authority as the Governor General of Pakistan, the new state for Muslims, who had been waiting for it for two centuries. Abdur Rahim devoted himself to serving his ideology both intellectually and practically in this new-born state. In subsequent years, he authored a number of books on different aspects of Islamic ideology. At the same time, he pioneered the translation of Arabic and Urdu Islamic books into modern Bengali language, and thus introduced world-renowned Islamic literature to the Muslims of this region. To be precise and evaluative of his authorship at this period, it is obvious that his focus was mainly on writing about political and social affairs of Islam. Later he included the study of Islamic economics, religious affairs and some other issues (Majidi, 2003).

THE EMERGENCE OF THE JAMA’AT AND INDEPENDENCE OF BANGLADESH

In order to grasp the emergence of the Jama’at in Bangladesh, one needs to understand the historical context in which this movement started its activities in this region in the late 1960s in pre-independent Bangladesh. Present-day Bangladesh became East Pakistan during the
partition of the Indian subcontinent because of its Muslim majority. But from the very beginning of this state, Bengalis had to struggle for a balanced and equal representation in politics and government jobs. At the end of British colonial rule, this region was lagging behind other parts of the subcontinent in education and economic prosperity. Repeated military rule by West Pakistanis and continuous economic disparities fuelled the grievances of the Bangladeshi people. Discrimination against them in the civil and military services was apparent (Asad, 1990; O'donnell, 1984; Sobhan, 1993). Akhtaruddin Ahmad (1982, p. 30), a minister in the last cabinet of East Pakistan and a pro-Pakistani politician during the liberation war, had to agree that:

[t]he material progress (of all Pakistan) was so much visible that the transformation of these spheres went beyond recognition in spite of its limited resources and lack of skilled manpower. … But certain things were lacking in this development. 1) The development in the agricultural sector lagged behind, especially in the east, with a permanent food deficit due to drought, flood and cyclone. It was a country with an 80 per cent agricultural population and 85 per cent living in villages. 2) The gap between the rich and poor could not be narrowed appreciably because of the capitalist structure of industrial progress, with a vast majority of agricultural and industrial workers remaining neglected though almost all the industries were based on agricultural products like jute, cotton, tobacco, tea, sugarcane, etc. Last but not least was the unequal development of East Pakistan, which contains the majority population and earned the maximum foreign exchange and national revenue in juxtaposition to West Pakistan.

As a result of this situation, the Awami League, a pro-secular political party of Pakistan, primarily based in East Pakistan, became popular among the Bangladeshi people. Even though the majority of the Bengalis were religion loving people, the political agendas of the secular Awami League achieved a high popularity among them, since the Awami League was perceived as a force defending their basic rights against discrimination and oppression.23

23 For a detailed examination of the historical background of how the Awami League gained huge popularity in East Pakistan, please see Asad (1990, pp. 1–81).
Almost all Islamic political parties had failed to feel the pulse of the nation and continued supporting the West Pakistani rulers, with the hope of maintaining the integrity of the state which was established in the name of Islam. Abul Asad (1990, p. 239), an intellectual leader of Jama’at-e-Islami and the present editor of the Islamic newspaper, The Shangram, conceded:

It was the biggest failure for the Islamic activists to not to realize the reality of the liberation war, which started on March 26, 1971, all of a sudden. They misinterpreted the active roles of socialist and secular people during the movement and considered it as their own fight without any popular support. But it was a fatally wrong assumption. Brutal attacks and killing operations of the Pakistani army against unarmed civilians on the night of March 25, converted this movement into a revolution of Bangladeshi people, who were fighting to protest the inhumane military cruelty without any prior plan.

Another significant and practical reason behind such a political stand was the assumed secret relationship of the Awami League with the Indian government agencies, which were believed to be active in weakening the rival state of Pakistan through instability and disintegration (Asad, 1990; Azam, 2004). Concerning this situation, Akhtaruddin Ahmad (1982, p. 50) asserted:

The country no doubt made tremendous progress in economic development, though not so much in the agricultural sector. But East Pakistan, being not given her right share in economic development, remained a constant breeding ground for discontent. Out great neighbour India never remained inactive throughout these years with its greater resources and pull in the international sphere. … His (Sheikh Mujib’s) involvement in the Agartala conspiracy case made things more confused and desperate. India’s design to aid the secession of East Pakistan through the armed uprising of Bengali forces became crystal clear in this case. But the way the case was conducted created a reverse reaction in the mind of East Pakistanis.

Consequently, the general election of Pakistan, on 7 December 1970, produced a national triumph for the Awami League. It was the first election in the history of Pakistan, administered under military rule and in which people directly voted to elect the National
Assembly members. The Awami League not only won 160 of the 162 seats in the provincial assembly of East Pakistan, but achieved an absolute majority by winning 160 of the 300 seats in the National Assembly. O’Donnell (1984, p. 86) says that “an analysis of the election figures from East Pakistan shows that the 17.4 million registered voters who went to the polls cast 73 per cent of their votes for the Awami League. The only other political party to obtain more than 5 per cent of the vote was Jama’at-e-Islami”.

Instead of transferring power to the newly elected political party, the military ruler, General Yahya Khan, continued with political dialogues. Jama’at-e-Islami condemned this injustice and demanded the immediate transfer of government power to the elected parties.

Separatist and revolutionary ideas were spreading among the masses again in this deadlocked political situation, but the military ruler continued reinforcing military power in the province. Finally, on the night of 25 March 1971, a crackdown operation by the Pakistani army against civilians took place in Dhaka, the provincial capital of East Pakistan. Michel Laurent, an associate press photographer who escaped military censorship and roamed in places of conflict even after other foreign journalists had been expelled, reports that the count of lives lost through this genocide had reached 15,000 people by 28 March 1971 (O’donnell, 1984). This was the beginning of a civil war which consequently became the liberation war, lasting for nine months until the separation, when East Pakistan emerged as independent Bangladesh on 16 December 1971.

The Awami League leaders escaped to neighbouring India along with millions of civilian refugees, whereas the leaders of the Islamic political parties remained inside the country and tried to pacify the unrest. The Jama’at leaders claimed that it was a life-

24 A statement by East Pakistan Jama’at-e-Islami leader, Gholam Azam, was published in the newspapers on 4 March 1971. He stated that the “irresponsible decision to postpone the National Assembly without consulting the party of absolute majority has created a dangerous situation threatening the security of the country. The popular unrest indicates that the people would not tolerate such a type of conspiracy anymore. The martial law authority does not have right to remain in power after a clear and vivid public opinion is expressed through the last general election” (as cited by Asad,1990, p. 42).
threatening situation for them to move to Hindu India due to their religious identity. They also had to bear the responsibility of various war crimes, for example, the killing of civilians, rapes, inhumane and brutal tortures perpetrated by the Pakistani army and some of their native collaborators (Asad, 1990; Azam, 2004; Hossain & Siddiquee, 2006).

To understand the issues regarding this historical conflict, which still has a great impact on the position of Islamic movements in Bangladesh, a short analysis of the socio-cultural situation is required. It is a historical fact that Islam entered this region early in its history and that Muslims ruled over it for centuries. Muslims became the majority population in the eastern part of Bengal, which is not the case in West Bengal. In describing this growth of Muslim population and Muslim rule over this region, Abbas Ali Khan (2007, pp. 59-70) claims that under Muslim rule the Bengal region always had a history of peaceful coexistence between Hindus and Muslims. According to Khan, although a large number of people who converted to Islam were attracted by the social rights given by this new religion to every member of society – irrespective of their previous castes or family identities, in the context of the prevailing Brahminic caste system – the social life of the local Muslims remained nevertheless amalgamated with the prevailing cultures and social habits derived from Hindu and Buddhist traditions.

Historically, the West Pakistani Muslims considered themselves as better Muslims than those of East Pakistan. Many illiterate soldiers of the Pakistani army believed that they were serving Islam by killing the Bengalis and that raping Bengali women was halal (lawful) as they were part of ganimah (booty). They killed Hindu civilians in many parts of Bangladesh and even in Dhaka. Gholam Azam, then President of the Jama’at-e-Islami East Pakistan and one of the chief collaborating Bengali politicians, described some incidents of this nature. He mentioned that Pakistani soldiers used to say: “All Hindus should be banished in order to purify Pakistan” (Azam, 2004, p. 153). Rafiuddin Ahmed (2001, p. 3) noted the
fact that “the experiences of the Muslims of Bangladesh suggest that socio-territorial identity plays a critical role in defining and redefining the parameters of a community”. One of the major reasons behind this situation in Bengal is the historical separation of two aspects of life: individual and collective. History has witnessed that most of the Muslim rulers, as well as the people, followed Islamic principles in their personal lives and social occasions, but did not attempt to reflect those principles in collective issues like the judiciary, state affairs, or the economics system (Khan, 2007, pp. 70-78).

The impact of this historical experience, leading Bangladeshi Muslims to practice a culture-influenced version of their religion, is still evident in the socio-political discourse of the country. Current Bangladeshi political parties are predominantly divided into two nationalist-identity alignments. Secular-nationalists identify the people of Bangladesh with the term ‘Bengalis’ which includes people of the Bengali-speaking Hindu-majority West Bengal state in neighbouring India. This group incorporates the secular Awami League and all communist and socialist political parties. On the other hand, religious-nationalists employ the denomination ‘Bangladeshi’ which passively excludes people of West Bengal and thus bears an inclination towards Islamic identity of the people of Muslim-majority Bangladesh. This group consists of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and all other Islamic political parties including the Jama’at. However, the term ‘Bangladeshi’ was not much used in pre-liberation period as the country was named as Bangladesh after the independence. This identity struggle between ‘Bengali’ and ‘Bangladeshi’, as correctly investigated by Sufia M. Uddin, was a significant factor in the process of liberation of Bangladesh as the term ‘Bengali’ represented an opposition to West Pakistani culture-influenced version of Islam. She (2006, pp. 117-118) noted:

... nineteenth century reformers’ and Muslim elites’ attempted to create a unified subcontinental Muslim culture and community but inadvertently also reinforced a uniquely Bengali vision of Muslim community. This vision alienated the Bengali Muslims from their
coreligionists who identified more closely with the broader subcontinental Muslim culture symbolized in the knowledge and use of Urdu. The alienation became evident only after Pakistan gained independence from the British. This was not merely a Bengali community distinct from Muslim identity but was rather a Bengali-informed Muslim community ... regional distinctiveness and conception of community, the product of nineteenth-century literary production in the Bengali language, would not be supplanted in the twentieth century by some form of West Pakistani culture that West Pakistanis viewed as more authentically Islam. Bengali Muslims would not surrender the regional distinctiveness that had been so prolifically articulated in the previous century. Bengali Muslim efforts to keep Bengali culture alive would feed the move to independence from Pakistan. Secularism instead of Islam in addition to Bengali culture would be the basis of nationalism in Bangladesh.

The historical background of this Bengali-influenced Islam was reported by Sanjay Bhardwaj, a South-Asian Studies scholar, in his research on the contesting identities in Bangladesh as (2011, pp. 6-7):

... the result was that culture and society in Bengal evolved with a set of syncretic values that emphasised religious inclusion. This was the result of a longstanding tolerance among the people of this deltaic region in relation to a wide range of influences that included Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Sufism and Tantrik cultures, each of which had been accommodated within indigenous tribal cultures. Within this syncretic Bengali society, one could still identify longstanding forms of worship from pre-modern Bengal. Brahmanical and Islamic identities seeped into the layers of society and created a distinct culture in Bengal such that there was a co-existence between old and new religious practices. This meeting of Islamic and indigenous cultures went on to create the world’s second largest Muslim ethnic community.

This topic was summarized by Denis Wright as he wrote (1987, p. 15):

Bengali Islam has its own cultural distinctiveness. In comparison with other parts of India, Islam came late to this region, and by the time it did, it was largely through processes of filtration and infiltration that it happened. Because Bengalis were usually converts from Hinduism, their Islam has been more liberal and tolerant of unorthodoxy than that of north-western India. A direct reinforcement of that liberalism took place because Islam came to Bengal largely through the activities of the Sufis, who taught an esoteric way of approaching the faith.
Interestingly in the independent Bangladesh, bearing Secularism as one of the fundamentals of the newly-born state, orthodox religious segments of the society and general liberal Muslims alike were threatened by the triumph of secularism and the increasing cultural influence of neighbouring Hindu-majority India. This led to the formation of the ‘Bangladeshi nationalism’ trend in country’s politics. According to Akhand Akhter Hossain (2015), an academic specializing in political economy, this nationalist political trend based on the ‘Bangladeshi’ identity demonstrates a re-emergence of Muslim nationalism, which was originally ‘the basis for the establishment of Pakistan’. To him, this is the continuation of deep historical differences between two religious communities, Hindu and Muslim, and “it is competing against Bengali ethnicity, language, culture and secularism within an emerging two-party political system” (Hossain, 2015, p. 368). However, other scholars such as Denis Wright (1987), M.G. Kabir (1987) and Aminur Rahim (2007) viewed ‘Bangladeshi Nationalism’ as the process of a search for a new ‘religio-linguistic’ identity. In this proposition, secularism never had a stronghold in the Bangladeshi society and polity, rather people supported the secular Awami league in order to oppose Pakistani military regime which promoted Islamic fraternity in order to carry out its economic exploitation over the Bengali Muslims. Denis Wright (1987, p. 21) argued:

In spite the fact that Bangladesh became a secular state along the lines of the Indian model immediately the Awami League took office, Bangladeshis were often reminded of their Islamic heritage. According to one Bengali source, while only half-heartedly underlining their Islamic identity during the Pakistan phase, the impetus for Bangladeshis to do so disappeared when Bangladesh became a reality. Islamic identity became the centre of resistance against Indian predominance in Bangladeshi politics. Whether or not Muslim Bengalis had not been serious in stressing a Muslim identity as part of Pakistan is a moot point, and somewhat more complicated than is implied by the quotation. It was not merely a reflection of anti-Indian sentiment which produced this phenomenon, although this was its most obvious manifestation. Secularism was simply not an issue during the Pakistan (although democracy certainly was).
The latter opinion seems to be closer to the reality, as the increasing influence of Islamic political parties in Bangladesh validates its argument. These religiously based political parties broadly identify themselves as Islamist and non-nationalist movements, however, they maintain strong political alliance with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the primary campaigner of ‘Bangladeshi’ nationalism, and which was characterised by Sufia Uddin as a religious nationalist party. She elaborated (2006, p. 123):

Yet Bangladesh today is experiencing an emerging nationalism based on religious identity as expressed by the BNP as well as another nationalism based on secular Bengali identity, which was the foundation of the independence movement. Complicating matters further is a third movement, fundamentalist in nature, that promotes a global Islamic culture. Fundamentalists strive to move Bangladesh toward a state governed by Islamic values.

While clarifying these ‘fundamentalists’, she put the Jama’at-e-Islami an example of fundamentalism in Bangladesh (Uddin, 2006, p. 136). Although similar point of view about the Jama’at is held and expressed by the researchers such as Ali Riaz (2010) and Taj Hashmi (2011), there are utterly opposing opinions expressed by other contemporaries such as John Esposito (2008), Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr (2005), Mumtaz Ahmed (1999) and Maidul Islam (2015). The latter segment emphasized on the long history of the Jama’at’s democratic political struggle and stronghold in the society. Bangladeshi Muslim society, where Islam came predominantly through Sufi Muslim preachers and which inherently rejects extremist Islamic thoughts until today, would not provide a religious party with such a strong position as the Jama’at holds in the national politics if it would adopt and practice religiously extremist ideas. The history of the Jama’at’s democratic political struggle in Bangladesh is another major witness of its being non-fundamentalist as well.

The events of the liberation war and independence in 1971 had a tremendous effect in the development of Islamic politics in the country. During the nine-month military occupation, pro-Islamic leaders remained in Bangladesh and formed various civil and
paramilitary organizations to support the Pakistani army. On the other hand, the leaders of the Awami League and other secular and communist parties took shelter in neighbouring West Bengal in India and organized guerrilla warfare from there. Finally, India fought a direct war with Pakistan in December 1971, when Pakistan attacked some parts of India. The continuing internal civil war was transformed into a war between two states. After a short period of full conventional warfare, the Pakistani army surrendered to the Indian army in Dhaka on 16 December 1971.

With the liberation of Bangladesh, absolute control by the pro-secular Awami League began and religion was outlawed from the political arena. The Muslim League, the Nejam-e-Islam Party, the Jama’at-e-Islami and all other Islamic religious parties went underground and continued only among their dedicated activists and in a very feeble way. In fact, Sheikh Mujib converted Bangladesh into a one-party state, ruled by his authoritarian governance, and this continued until he was killed in a military coup on 15 August 1975 (O'donnell, 1984, pp. 174-176).

The key person of the liberation movement, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, returned to Bangladesh, freed from the Pakistani gaol, and became President of Bangladesh. Secularism was adopted as the key principle of the new government and the constitution. All Islamic parties were out of the political arena due to their previous stance during the liberation war. As a consequence, many innocent people involved with Islamic political parties were killed by the guerrillas, and even lynched by the masses who had experienced extreme levels of torture during the war from the Pakistani army and their local collaborators (Asad, 1990, p. 259).
POLITICAL ISLAM IN CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESH

The 1971 Liberation war of Bangladesh marked a crucial milestone in the development and role of Islam in Bangladeshi society. West Pakistani rulers emphasized the unity of the newly-born Muslim state in this conflict while their counterparts, East Pakistani leaders, focused instead on social, political and economic discrimination. Secularism emerged there as the means to struggle against this exploitation of Islam by the West Pakistani political and military leaders. However, the large majority of the Bangladeshi Muslims never withdrew their deep faith in their idiosyncratic religion which had been assimilated with local traditions and culture. Therefore, the return of religion in the political arena occurred soon after independence in the mid-seventies and it has been growing stronger since then. This was also contemporaneous with the rise of political Islam in many other Muslim countries in the context of the cold war era.

Continuing from there, the present landscape of political Islam in the Bangladesh consists of a plethora of Islamic political parties and organizations adhering to various interpretations of Islam as well as to different religious leaders. Mubashar Hasan, a former journalist and currently a PhD candidate at the Griffith University, wrote regarding the historic development of political Islam in Bangladesh (2011, p. 155):

Development of political Islam took place in Bangladesh mainly in four phases: the Turkish war and the founding of the Khilafat movement during the First World War; the Oil crisis in the 1970s and the boost of Islamic institutions and practices in Bangladesh’s political discourse, mainly supported by the Middle Eastern countries; the Soviet–Afghanistan war and its linkage with Bangladeshi radicals in the 1990s; and by the globalization of war between Al-Qayeda and West and its implication on Bangladesh through the rise of extreme groups.

Only four years after the independence, in August 1975, the supreme Bangladeshi leader of the liberation war, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was assassinated by a group of Army officers after becoming the dictator President of Bangladesh and banning all political parties except
his newly formed one. (Islam, 2015; Lewis, 2011). This regime change ousting the secular politics from the power was the most significant event leading to the re-emergence of Islamic politics in this region. The military coup eventually led to General Ziaur Rahman, a Liberation War hero and the Army Chief, becoming the President of the country until he was also assassinated 5 years later in 1981 by another group of army officers. The period of Zia’s rule witnessed the establishment of a multi-party democratic political system and the strengthening relation with Islamic countries in the Middle-East. The new state government also initiated formal practice of religious rituals and symbols in socio-political events, removed Secularism from the country’s constitution and lifted the longstanding ban on Islamic political parties for the first time in Bangladesh. The next Military President General Ershad proclaimed Islam as the state religion in 1988. (Devine & White, 2013a; Griffiths & Hasan, 2015; Hossain, 2012; Islam, 2015; Riaz, 2011; Uddin, 2006). Several Islamic parties such as the Muslim League, the Jama’at-e-Islami, Nezam-e-Islam, Islamic Democratic Party and so on started their activities in the independent Bangladesh. The Jama’at is the most influential Islamic party in the country today, whose history and development will be examined in detail in the following chapter. Prior to that, this section now focuses on a brief literature review of political Islam in Bangladesh.

There are large numbers of Bangladeshi Muslim population who affiliate themselves with the Tabligh Jama’at, a transnational and apolitical religious movement. Focusing on individual piety and avowedly distancing themselves from religion-based politics, the Tabligh is generally not considered as an Islamic political party but an Islamic piety movement. According to Jan Ali, a social scientist specialized in Islamic revivalism, this

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25 ‘Zia’ is the conventional short form of the name ‘Ziaur’ in Bangladesh when it is mentioned as the single-word first name.

26 In 1977, General Zia amended the Constitution and replaced one of the four state principles “Secularism” with “Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the basis of all actions”. Finally in 1988, General Ershad declared Islam as the State Religion of Bangladesh. Recently in 2010, the Supreme Court has reinstated Secularism as one of the four state principles in the Constitution. While this research is being submitted in March 2016, the court is hearing a petition to revoke Islam’s state-religion status.
apolitical nature is aligned with the transnational missionary nature of this movement. He wrote (Ali, 2010, p. 121):

Tabligh Jama’at’s sense of identity is faith-based and it does not pay any attention to political and historical realities of the modern nation-states in which it pursues its missionary activities. If this is the case then what conclusions can be drawn regarding the importance and relevance of modern concepts of rule of law, citizenship, and constitutional liberalism in a modern democratic state? Generally speaking Tablighis barely pay attention to these and do not concern themselves with state differences based on different political ideologies.

The Tabligh is essentially a non-political religious movement, however, there are some exceptions among the adherents of this movement in the deeply politically divided Bangladeshi society. Similar to the neighbouring countries and all over the world, the Tabligh collectively distances itself from any political parties or ideologies in Bangladesh, but a large number of Tabligh associates there are typically known for their personal political support for the secular Awami League. According to Sufia Uddin (2006, pp. 161-162):

Tabligh Jama’at is avowedly apolitical and thus differs markedly from another transnational movement, the Jama'at-i-Islami. In fact, members of the Jama’at-i-Islami are frustrated that the Tabligh is no ally in politics, as it is and always has been unwilling to participate in political debates. In fact, Tablighis typically support the Awami League.

This support for the Awami League cannot be considered as a collective stance of the Tabligh, as many of them also vote for the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in the national elections. In general, there is no evidence to show that the Tabligh, as a group, inspire its adherents to support any specific political party, rather it unequivocally avoids political issues. Moreover, leaders of the both secular-nationalist and religious-nationalist political parties usually visit the great annual conference of the Tabligh, named as the Ijtema. Taj Hashmi (2011) opined that some Tabligh organizers could arguably be personally sympathetic to ‘transnational Islamic terrorists’, but there is no solid evidence found in reality that may support this view.
Some other minor Islamic groups exist in the country as well who do not participate in the elections. Hizbut Tahrir is such a small group with transnational network, currently banned by the government and secretly popular among some young students. It considers participation in any democratic process as forbidden in Islam. There are some extremist groups such as Jama’atul Muzahidin, Ansarullah Bangla Team, Harqatul Jihad etc., working secretly in Bangladesh with very minor support and continuous opposition towards democracy. Ali Riaz mentioned that they are ‘too many to be mentioned individually’ and ‘many of them are minuscule and many others keep changing names to avoid any crackdown’, but ‘some have built widespread networks’ within different countries in this region (Riaz, 2011, p. 16).

According to the Election Commission database, Bangladesh has currently 13 Islamic political parties among a total of 41 political parties registered with the Commission (Commission, 2012a). These are: Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami (registration withheld in 2009 according to a High-Court verdict), Zaker Party, Bangladesh Toriqot Federation, Bangladeshi Khelafot Andolon, Bangladesh Muslim League, Jomiot-Ulama-e-Bangladesh, Islamic Front Bangladesh, Islami Oikkojot, Bangladesh Khelafot Mojlish, Islami Andolon Bangladesh, Bangladesh Islami Front, Khelafot Mojlish, and Bangladesh Muslim League (BML Group). Many of these parties are dissenting fractions of few old Islamic parties. It is a commonplace among those Islamic parties to form new parties following their differing leaders. Most of them are based on the traditions provided by religious educational institutions, such as the Madrasah system. Students and former students usually follow their teachers, who can simultaneously be both political and spiritual leaders of those parties (Riaz, 2008). There are a few local Islamic parties, like the Zaker Party and the Toriqot Federation, also formed by the followers of certain Sufi orders, and their influence is primarily limited to their local districts mainly. Some of them do not have enough public support to participate in the
national elections. Ali Riaz & Kh. Ali Ar Raji (2011) mentioned that, the numbers of Islamic parties contesting in national elections were only 2 in 1979 and 1986. The number increased to 17 in 1991 and 18 in 1996, afterwards it decreased to 11 in the 2001 National Election. However, these smaller Islamic parties often form political coalitions as an electoral strategy. The significance of Islamic parties in Bangladeshi politics and their struggle is evident in Ali Riaz’s (2011, pp. 15-16) following statement:

In Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Jamaat-i-Islam (BJI, which until recently called itself the JIB – the Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh) not only weathered the political storm after the independence of the country, which they violently opposed, but also emerged as the kingmaker in the 1990s. There are a number of other smaller Islamist parties who represent the broad spectrum of religio-political parties. A coalition of these parties is known as the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ, Islamic United Front). Both the JI and the IOJ were partners of the ruling coalition led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), a right of centre party, between 2001 and 2006.

An analysis of the 9th National Parliamentary Election 2008 shows that, the Jama’at-e-Islami got 4.70% of the total turnout vote in the country, whereas all other Islamic political party jointly received 1.67% (Commission, 2012b). In the previous National Election of 2001, the Jama’at received 4.28% of the total votes, and all other Islamic political parties combined only received 0.8% (Commission, 2002). This shows that the Jama’at received slightly less in 2008 whereas the other Islamic political parties more than double their results from the previous election. For most of these Islamic parties, the Jama’at in Bangladesh showed the way to participate in democratic politics. However, all opposition political parties, including the religious-based parties, boycotted the latest National Election in 2014 as the Awami League government abolished the Caretaker Government system\(^\text{27}\) which had been

\(^{27}\)Caretaker government in Bangladesh is a tentative form of government, comprised of ten selected advisers who would be agreed by all major political parties and headed by the Chief Adviser who would be the last retired Chief Justice of the country. This government would be in effect for a maximum duration of three months at the end of a normal government’s five-year regular tenure, and the primary goal is to administer the national election neutrally. Caretaker government system was first proposed by the then Jama’at President Ghulam Azam in 1990 after the fall of Military Dictator General Ershad. Such government supervised the
temporarily in place during all national elections since the 1991 after the mass-revolution against the last military dictatorship in Bangladesh. The apparently fewer proportion of votes received by all Islamic political parties, including the Jama’at, is explained by Ferdous Jahan and Asif M. Shahan (2014, p. 426) as:

In Bangladesh, Islamic political parties’ policy influence is very high and electoral success is very low. A deeply entrenched civil religion in the form of nationalistic identity bars religion from playing a significant role in influencing the voting behaviour of the citizens.

This multitude of Islamic parties in Bangladesh has various agendas, interpretation of religion, ideological disagreements, and various types of leaderships. Different scholars have attempted to classify them into broader categories. Taj Hashmi’s (2011, p. 32) categorization in this regard may be oversimplified when he divided them into four major categories. These are: 1. fatalist/escapist, 2. militant fundamentalists, 3. opportunist/pragmatist, and 4. liberal/modernist. According to him, the Jama’at falls in the militant reformist category, although there has been no evidence of the Jama’at being related with militancy so far. Regarding the Jama’at in particular and Islamic terrorist groups in general, Akhand Akhtar Hossain (2012, pp. 182-183) explained in a recent study:

Clearly, Islamic resurgence in Bangladesh has not taken a militant path under an organized political party or movement. Neither the BNP nor the Jamaat-i-Islami has direct linkage with Islamic militancy. Indeed, objective conditions in the country are not conducive to extremist Islamic movements. Some of the youth joined some overseas Islamic resistance movements in the 1970s and 1980s and later formed militant groups within Bangladesh. But violent activity in the country has been sporadic at best, and evidence of links with international terrorists or militant organizations is slight and lacks credibility. The facts aside, the domestic mass media have engaged in ‘sensational reporting’ of the activities of Islamic militants, especially since 9/11.
With regard to the classification of Islamic groups, Maidul Islam (2015, p. 6) presented an even more simplified spectrum as he asserted:

Islamist organization form a broad political spectrum, and one can categorize them into three distinct groups in terms of operational strategies and attendant tactical questions related to the modes of capturing political power: (a) Parliamentary Islamists (b) Militant Islamists and (c) Extremist Islamists. The Parliamentary Islamist generally use and chose parliamentary democratic methods such as participation in elections and mass mobilizations, like the Jamaat-e-Islami in South Asia, Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Refah Party in Turkey, etc. Militant Islamists use both parliamentary methods and armed violence like Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Extremist Islamists, however, use only violent and terrorist methods like the Al-Qaeda network, Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also been called as Islamic State of Iraq and Levant, or in short, Islamic State (IS) and groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba which are based in Pakistan and operate in Kashmir.

In this categorization, he correctly separated the Jama’at, the largest political Islamist trend in the Subcontinent, from extremist groups, but he could not appreciate the syncretistic nature of Islamic politics in Bangladesh by including smaller Islamic political parties other than the Jama’at. This diversity of Islamic parties in Bangladesh is better illustrated by Ali Riaz and Kh. Ali Ar Raji in their presentation of ‘Taxonomy of Islamist Political Parties in Bangladesh’ (Riaz & Razi, 2011, p. 48). They described the Jama’at as a pragmatist/opportunistic Islamic party with wide-raging support base. Islamic parties following traditional religious scholars were characterized by them as idealist and orthodox, while the followers of Sufi orders were mentioned as shrine based political parties. Finally, Islamic parties or groups that never participated in elections are divided into two categories; urban elite-centric and jihadists. However, unlike Taj Hashmi, they didn’t include Tabligh Jama’at in this categorization of Islamic political parties in Bangladesh which is a more proper approach considering the apolitical nature of the Tabligh in Bangladesh and elsewhere.
CONCLUSION

Islam came to the Bengal region in its early days, during the first century of this religion. Since then, the role of religion in this society has gone through an enormous development and transformation. As in almost all other Muslim societies around the world, religion influenced the local culture of Bengal, combining with local tradition in the maturing religious practice. Although this region was mostly ruled by Muslim rulers after the advent of Islam, orthodox Islamic principles were not strictly imposed in the social life of the people. Another reason behind this flexibility was the contribution of Sufi religious figures to the spreading of Islam in this region. The Sufis mostly preferred to use peaceful means of conversion, instead of hostile conflict and they allowed the people freedom to keep their traditional culture while attempting to teach them absolute monotheism.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this region experienced numerous religious reformist movements, mostly in response to foreign colonization. Increasing communication with the outside world also facilitated the transfer of ideas from the Middle-East and other Muslim societies. In contemporary times, the religo-social ideas of Bangladeshi Muslims are as diverse as in any other Muslim societies. Globalization and modern communication methods have a significant role in the development of the multifaceted expressions of religious practice in Bangladesh. One of these expressions, or schools of thought, has led to political participation by the Islamic revivalist school. This school, as exemplified by the Jama’at-e-Islami, comprises people from every walk of life, as well as from different Islamic schools, such as Sufi, Salafi and modernist, among others, all actively working inside the Jama’at framework.

Before studying the social welfare programs of the Jama’at, it is necessary to recognize the characteristics of this movement. Although the common people have great affection for Islam and their own religious identity, serious debates and controversies about
Islamic political movements exist in Bangladeshi society. Several factors, such as the role of Islamic political parties during the country’s liberation war, the growth of secularism and nationalism along with modern education and the occasional conflict of religious reformist approaches with local traditions have contributed to this present situation. The issue of liberation was a highly significant factor in Bangladeshi politics, yet four decades after independence was achieved, the Jama’at faces political annihilation. However, due to the government’s autocratic subjugation of this political party, the Jama’at is now more of a social movement in the country. The following chapter will present the history and development of the Jama’at in Bangladesh, along with its current position in Bangladeshi Muslim society.
CHAPTER 3: BANGLADESH JAMA’AT-E-ISLAMI:
HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami now plays a significant role in the national political arena, and, politics apart, this group is also indispensable to the study of the presence of Islam in Bangladeshi society and the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism worldwide. In common with other Muslim countries, Bangladesh has several Islamic groups and parties participating in national politics, of which the Jama’at is the largest one. In the post cold war period, and especially during the current epoch of the ‘global war on terror’ following the 9/11 attacks, ‘political Islam’ has increasingly become a major point of interest in socio-political discourses in many countries, including Bangladesh.

Jama’at-e-Islami was established in 1941 in undivided British India, as the brainchild of the theologian scholar Abul Ala Mawdudi. The Indian subcontinent was divided into independent India and Pakistan in 1947, and the Jama’at continued its activities in both countries. Several years after the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971, the Jama’at also started its activities in the new-born country of Bangladesh. Currently the Jama’at operates in at least eight geographic locations: as political parties in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India’s occupied Kashmir province and Pakistan’s Azad Kashmir, and as Muslim community and social organizations in Great Britain and North America (Nasr, 1994: xiv). Although the Jama’at organizations in different countries enjoy a warm

28 The Muslim migrants to Britain, adherents to the ideology of the Jama’at in a broad sense and primarily originating from the subcontinent, established a large Islamic organization named Islamic Forum of Europe (IFE). There is another London-based Islamic organization, named Da’watul Islam (lit. Preaching of Islam), which was established and is run predominantly by British citizens of Bangladeshi origin.

29 Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)
relationship amongst themselves, they work separately, as their policies, programs and authorities are different in accordance to their local contexts. They all share the common aim, however, of religiously educating people with a focus on a political reading of Islam, mostly based on literature by Mawdudi. In general, the activities of the Jama’at in one country are not influenced by any means by the Jama’at or similar organizations from other countries. Although they have some informal inter-communication and an identical way of thinking, this does not affect their independent agendas, decision making and political activities.

This chapter seeks first to explore the history of the Jama’at and its development in Bangladesh. A description will then be presented of the Jama’at’s organizational structures and programs. This is intended to pave the way for the following chapters which will study the social welfare activities of this party.

THE FORMATIVE CONTEXT OF THE JAMA’AT

During British rule, Muslims in the subcontinent generally considered themselves as repressed. British rule began there when the forces of the East India Company captured the region from the Muslim rulers, in the Battle of Plassey in 1757. A century later, in the aftermath of the Great Indian Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and the defeat of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar (1775–1862), the Muslims in this region became more detached from the British rulers, and subsequently fell behind their Hindu counterparts in the socio-political and educational spheres.

This situation led to Sir Syed Ahmed Khan’s (1817–1889) forming a reformist educational movement called the Aligarh Movement and establishing a Muslim university in the city of Aligarh. This movement later produced the All-India Muslim League, in 1906, a political party aiming to promote modern education for Muslims and advance their agendas.
This party became the major political party representing the Muslims of this region in subsequent years and, finally, in 1947, the ruling party of the newly created Muslim majority state of Pakistan.

In the early 1920s, Muslims in British-controlled India formed a movement named the Khilafat Movement, primarily to support the Ottoman Caliphate in Turkey during the aftermath of World War I. The movement failed, as the Ottoman Caliphate was abolished. However, it revived the spirit of independence among the Muslims of this region that had been long suppressed after the failed Sepoy Mutiny. During this time, a socio-political Hindu nationalist movement named Shuddhi (Sanskrit: lit. purification) became popular among the Hindus. One of the prominent leaders of this movement, Swami Shraddhanand (1856–1926), was killed by a Muslim assassin, and riots between Hindu and Muslims became rampant throughout India.

Altogether, during this period, politically conscious Muslims of India were generally divisible into three categories: 1) supporters of the Indian National Congress, demanding Hindu-Muslim unity and keeping India united based on nationalism, 2) supporters of the Muslim League, demanding separate states for the Muslims and the Hindus based on the ‘Two Nation Theory’ and 3) small groups of supporters of the British colonial rulers.

While establishing a new Islamic political party at this crucial time, Mawdudi had to explain explicitly why his stand was different from that of both the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. He wrote strongly against the possibility of a Hindu-Muslim joint state, highlighting the severe discrimination faced by the Muslims in previous years and

30 The Two Nation Theory demonstrates that the Muslims and Hindus are two different communities, so different in religious, cultural, social, economical and political aspects of their lives that they should be considered as two different nations and would require two different countries. Differences between these two communities were first given emphasis by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, a Muslim educational reformist, in order to make the Muslims aware of their educational and culture backwardness. Later, Muhammad Iqbal, a Muslim poet philosopher, propagated the idea of two autonomous homelands for two different nations and finally Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan, politically translated this concept and introduced it to the people through his party, the Muslim League.
refuting the doctrine of nationalism as held by the Congress. At the same time, he denounced
the Muslim League for their support of secularism and nationalism, for he considered both of
these ideologies anti-Islamic. His refusal to accept a future nationalist state was so strong that
he even wrote: “If there is any greater enemy of Islam after Kufr (disbelief) and Shirk
(associating anyone with God), that would be this devil of race and motherland” (Khan, 1996,
p. 52).

THE BIRTH OF THE JAMA’AT: MAWUDI’S RESPONSE TO MODERNITY

Any study of Muslims on the Indian subcontinent and the emergence of political Islam in the
modern era, and particularly the Jama’at, would not be complete without a clear
understanding of the role played by Mawdudi, the founder of the Jama’at-e-Islami. The
movement was established in 1941 in Lahore, a city in the Punjab province of the then
undivided India under British colonial rule. Within the last seven decades, the party has gone
through several stages of development and change in its policies and strategies as it has
spread to different countries. Before studying its current position in Bangladesh, it is
important to have a critical understanding of the early development of the party.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the political spheres of the Muslim
world were pretty much void. While the British, French, Italian and other European colonial
rulers were withdrawing from various Muslim majority regions, the Muslim population in
those countries faced the unprecedented predicament of determining their political
framework. Historically accustomed to dynastic rule and later on to colonial subjugation,
their preferences for political models varied. In some Arab and Asian Muslim countries,
socialist political and economic models gained popularity. However, Western democratic
political models were followed in most other Muslim countries. During this time of historical
changes, a few Muslim scholars around the globe came forward with their ideas regarding an Islamic politico-economic model based on their interpretations of Islamic principles and practices. Mawdudi, a prolific Indian writer, was one of these.

In the March 1941 edition of the magazine, *Tarjuman al-Qur’an*, Mawdudi wrote an outline of a new Islamic party, explaining why such a group was needed. This article initiated correspondence with like-minded people from all over the Indian subcontinent, and he invited them, about 75 people, to his magazine’s office to attend a conference (Khan, 1996, p. 75).

Mawdudi’s primary focus was on changing and Islamizing the educated elite of society. He considered them to be the major catalyst of societal change and was concerned about the increasing influence of Western ideas and culture in their lives. His strategy was to motivate the educated and developed portion of society to embrace Islam as a complete way of life, with the long-term aim of eventually Islamizing the whole society. At the same time, he had a strong faith in the ‘Islamness’ of the masses, as he considered them to be a great supporting factor in actualizing his vision of establishing Islam in society. In one of his interviews, published in 1967, he was asked whether democracy would be a good option for his party, given the fact that the masses were likely to support non-Islamic parties which might better address their material needs. His reply was:

Their hearts throb with the love of Islam and they cannot be lured away by the slogans of bread and clothing. Even in Arab countries the popularity of un-Islamic movements is mere propaganda. I have observed the situation obtaining there and have also had the opportunity to study closely the Arab masses. They love Islam from the core of their heart. But whether in Syria, Egypt, Iraq or some other Arab country, the masses have never been allowed the right to choose their representatives.(Selected Speeches & Writings of Maulana Maududi, 1982 as cited by Shehabuddin, 2008: 580)

The hypothesis was that Islam, being the main issue and base ideology of the Jama’at, could attract the votes of the masses, and finally the ensuing ‘Islamic State’ would solve all existing
problems. However, it seems that the experience of the following years changed Mawdudi’s proposition in terms of political reality. Nasr referred to the statement Mawdudi made in 1971, where “in a rare show of self-criticism, he declared that the Jama’at boasted a literacy rate of 85 per cent in a country where the same percentage were illiterate; it had spent too much energy and resources on attracting the educated, while it was the poor and uneducated who determined elections. The Jama’at should re-examine its policies and its orientation and strategy” (Nasr, 1994, p. 90).

Abbas Ali Khan (1914–1999), former president of the Jama’at in Bangladesh and a history teacher by profession, described 1946 and 1947 as the years of expansion and development for the Jama’at. Starting with fewer than 100 people in 1941, the Jama’at organized a two day central conference in April 1946 in Elahabad City, in which more than 2,000 delegates participated. Literature by Mawdudi was being translated into many languages, such as Arabic, English, Turkish, Tamil, Malayalam, Bengali, Sindhi, Hindi, Gujarati, Persian and Poshtu. Organizational structures of the party were developed and people from different walks of life, such as religious scholars, academics, businessmen and civil servants had joined the party (Khan, 1996, pp. 122-145).

After the division of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, Mawdudi, along with some of his colleagues, migrated to the newly established Muslim state, Pakistan, while many others decided to remain in India. As Mawdudi declared during the division process, the party was divided into two independent parties in the two different countries, with their own agendas and activities: Jama’at Islami Pakistan and Jama’at Islami Hind (India). The number of Rukon (highest cadre in the party organization) was 625 before the division. Of these, 385 established the party in Pakistan, and the remaining 240 continued with the party in India (Khan, 2007, p. 198).
ABUL ALA MAWUDI: A PIONEER OF ISLAMIC REVIVALISM

Mawdudi was born on 25 September 1903 in Awrangabad, a city in the Indian state of Hyderabad (located in the present-day Indian province of Andhra Pradesh). He came from a religious family known for their piety and educational excellence, referred to by Roy Jackson (2011) as a ‘noble lineage’. His father, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, a lawyer by profession, followed Sufi practices and it was because of his influence that Mawdudi chose to receive a traditional Islamic education. Being a talented and bright student, he acquired a good command of Islamic knowledge and different languages, such as Urdu and Arabic, from an early age. In 1918, when he was 15 years old, he started writing about Islamic and political issues in various newspapers and magazines. At the age of 17, he became the editor of a weekly magazine, *Taj*, published in Jabalpur City. The following year, he went to Delhi to work as the editor of *The Muslim*. In 1924, he edited the magazine, *Al-Jam’iyyat*, the official publication of the organization, Jam’iat-e-Ulama-e-Hind, the national umbrella organization of the Indian Muslims at that time. He continued with this magazine until 1928, when he resigned and devoted himself to writing as an independent.

These intellectual works of Mawdudi’s introduced him to the leading Muslim intellectuals and politicians of the Indian subcontinent of that time, and he became involved in the Tahrik-i-Hijrah movement, a group opposing British rule in India and inspiring Muslims to migrate to a Muslim majority country (Jackson, 2006, pp. 190-196).

In 1931, he became the editor of a well circulated Islamic monthly magazine, *Tarjuman al-Qur’an* (Urdu: lit. Meaning of the Qur’an), that was published from Haiderabad City. Later, in 1938, he established an Islamic institute and complex, called Dar al-Islam (Arabic: lit. House of Islam), in Pathankot City. The magazine continued to be published from the new base. During these years, the Indian subcontinent was preparing for independence from British rule, and various ideologies and political doctrines were
flourishing there. Mawdudi started writing intensively, explaining some contemporary aspects of Islam, such as Muslim cultural identity, Islamic reviveristic movements, the importance of education, and so on. He also advocated the concept of *Ummah* as unity based on religious identities, and refuted all other forms of nationalism.

The life of Mawdudi can be divided into two main phases. In the early part of his life, until the late 1940s, he was a prominent scholar, calling for holistic politico-economic changes in society. Even with the establishment of the political party, Jama’at-e-Islami, he was relatively better known for his focus on the social and educational reformation of Muslim society. It was not until the division of India and Pakistan in 1947, when he migrated to the newly established Muslim country, that he started advancing his causes through his political activities and became renowned as a politician struggling to establish Islamic principles of governance and an Islamic constitution. Although he continued writing profusely during this second phase of his life, his intellectual activities were further enriched with socio-political activism. During these years, he had to face imprisonment on several occasions, the banning of his party and even a death sentence pronounced by a military court, which was withdrawn later due to international pressure on the Pakistani government.

As an ideologue and religious scholar, Mawdudi wrote more than 100 books and treatises on different aspects of Islam. Many consider his most important intellectual work to be the exegesis of the whole Qur’an, called *Tafhim al-Qur’an* (lit. understanding of the Qur’an). Through this explanation of the central text of Islam, he attempted to interpret the religion as a complete way of life and a system of collective human living on this earth. His other significant intellectual contributions include *Khutbat* (Collection of Lectures), *Tafhimat* (Elucidations), *Tajdid wa Ihyaā‘ Din* (A History of Islamic Revivalist Movements), *Al-Jihad Fil-Islam* (War and Peace in Islam), *Risalat-e-Diniyat* (Towards Understanding Islam), *Sud* (Usury), *Purdah* (The Veil), *Rasa‘îl wa Masa‘îl* (Questions and Answers), *Tanqihat*

However, Mawdudi’s writings did not meet with universal acceptance. Some critics of his intellectual contribution to Islamic knowledge claimed that his emphasis was too much on socio-political change, to the detriment of moral and spiritual development. Defending his stance, Humeira Iqtedar (2011) argued that Mawdudi opposed the traditional tendencies of the *Ulama* (Islamic Scholars), offering a more enlightened interpretation of religious texts. According to Iqtedar (Iqtedar, 2011), Mawdudi adopted and reproduced ‘Western political concepts, structures, and operations’ that were novel, in order to present Islam as a rational and universal religious system. However, looking at the topics covered by Mawdudi, it is clear that he wrote on several religious and spiritual aspects of Islam. His books covering the Islamic belief system and the philosophy of worshiping in Islam are still, to this day, included in the syllabus of the Jama’at as introductory reading materials on Islam. In this regard, it can be assumed that while Mawdudi was a vigorous critic of Western values and ideologies, at the same time he adopted a Western methodology of organization and rational explanation. This resulted in both widespread acceptance of his work by educated Muslims and agitation amongst many traditionalists.

Mawdudi’s religious interpretations and concepts clearly influenced many great Muslim scholars globally, such as Syed Qutb and Muhammad al-Ghazali from Egypt, Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, Manzur Elahi, Amim Ehsan Eslahi, Israr Ahmed, Khurshid Ahmed from Pakistan and India and Gholam Azam from Bangladesh. He died in 1979 in a hospital in New York at the age of 75 and was buried in front of his house in Lahore (Khan, 2008, pp. 356-359).
Regarding Mawdudi’s brainchild, the Jama’at, the party has gone through several developments with different characteristics in different places. For instance, Jama’at-e-Islami in Pakistan and Bangladesh continued to oppose secularism strongly, seeing it as an anti-Islamic ideology, whereas the Jama’at in neighbouring India urged the government to apply secularism in order to protect the minority Muslims (Ahmad, 2009b).

**ISLAMIC REVIVALISM AS THE IDEOLOGY OF THE JAMA’AT**

Islamic Revivalism is a complex term that includes several meanings. Primarily, it entails the removal from Islam of the foreign accretions of all historical periods. It is natural that the practices of the religion would become mixed up with other social and religious influences, and Islam exhorts its followers to strive always to remove such accretions and return to the origins of Islam as derived from the Qur’an and the Prophetic Traditions, the two major sources of Islam, and emulate the religious culture practised in its pristine period.

The interpretation of the nature of the origins of Islam varies from one movement to another. However, the perception of its being challenged by modernity and Western civilization is a common feature of these movements. Therefore, many scholars agree that several movements adhering to the concept of Islamic revivalism in modern times are connected through a common appreciation of “the ideology of a defensive reaction to modernity” (Ali, 2012, pp. 23, 45). For instance, the Jama’at regards secularism and cultural Westernization as the greatest challenges faced by an Islamic movement today. The doctrine of Egyptian scholar Syed Qutb, who considers Western civilization as *jahiliyyah* (lit. ignorance) is highly esteemed by the Jama’at. At the same time, the Jama’at has also been negotiating with various modern methods to smooth their organizational activities (Ahmad, 2009b, pp. 49-50). The rationale presented here by the Jama’at is that participation in
electoral politics and the modern management of its organizational structure are not part of its central ideology.

This characteristic way of dealing with modernity is also apparent in the activities of the Tablighi Jama’at, the world’s largest transnational Islamic revivalist movement. It has adopted modern technologies but with an emphasis on avoiding the negative consequences of modernity (Ali, 2010, p. 127). There are differences among movements concerning the issues that they focus on and the approaches that they adopt for their activities. The degree of emphasis on personal piety, spiritual development and self-reformation as well as on social issues, political agendas and education also varies from one to another.

The Tablighi movement inherently attempts to avoid political issues in its activities, whereas the Jama’at is primarily known as a political party for its emphasis on and involvement in political issues. The political method that the Jama’at adopts to attain its ideological objectives is currently termed ‘political Islam’. According to Akbarzadeh (2012), political Islam is a phenomenon that is manifested in taking a stand against other prevailing political ideologies, such as nationalism or secularism. For Islamists, reinterpretation of Islamic history and re-evaluation of religious texts act as the core forces in their demand for social changes to establish their ideology. Akbarzadeh correctly recognized that Islamism confronts two primary rivals, on two different levels: national governments at the local level and the West on a global scale. However, his explanation of ‘the paradox of political Islam’ seems to contradict the reality of the political situation. For him, a major feature of the Islamists is that “their understanding of Islam is presented as the only authentic version, dismissing alternative views as inauthentic and illegitimate” (Akbarzadeh, 2012, p. 3). This verdict suffers if one appreciates the pluralistic nature of Islamism and its diverse interpretations, ranging from reformist to extremist. It is common knowledge in Islamic studies that the religion has been subject to interpretation of its primary texts, that is, the
Qur’an and the Prophetic Traditions, after the revelation ended with the death of the last prophet. Therefore, almost all Muslim scholars see the possibility of an error of human reasoning. Current scholars explaining and upholding Islamic political ideologies are no different, except for a very few extremists, who are certainly not representative authorities of the wide ranging contemporary Islamic political scene.

Against the backdrop of this intricate conceptual composite of Islamic revivalism, it is a challenging task to define the Jama’at. Emphasis on a particular aspect, such as politics, might result in disregarding religious or social aspects of this movement. Broadly speaking, the Jama’at represents the ideology of legalist reformist Islamism in Bangladesh. In defining the trends of Islamic movements in the modern era, scholars and intellectuals differ hugely on what they believe to be the correct typologies. Classic classifications consider these movements as primarily divided into three categories: traditionalists/fundamentalists who focus on theological principles; modernists/reformists who attempt to modernize Muslim societies without compromising their religious aspects; and secularists/liberalists who are more inclined to rational explanation rather than textual or religious explanations of Islam, as propounded by scholars like H. Gibb, W. Smith, A. Hourany, L. Binder, H. Mintjes and R. Humphrey (Auda, 2009). However, these typologies have become more complex during the recent decades. This very problem was recently emphasized by Tariq Ramadan in his website (2013) as:

The problem of terminology, confusion is rampant; no one knows exactly who or what ‘Islamism’ means. The term, which has now become powerfully pejorative, can be applied to movements ranging from al-Qaeda (worldwide, and most recently in northern Mali) to the legalists of Ennadha and the Muslim Brotherhood by way of the Justice and Development parties in Turkey and Morocco (with certain reservations), and up to and including the Iranian regime. It is hard to believe that the confusion is being maintained, and the terminology being utilized purely by chance. Meanwhile the petro-monarchies of the Gulf, those wealthy allies of the West, whose authorities affirm that democracy is un-Islamic, regimes that apply the
Shari’a in its most legalistic and repressive form and that forbid women from social and political participation, are never described as ‘Islamists’ even though their policies and practices form the essence of political Islam.

Using a different approach, John Esposito recognized four categories of Islamic movements, based on their attitudes towards Islamic socio-political change: secularist, conservative, neo-traditionalist and Islamic reformist. He considered Jama’at-e-Islami as a neo-traditionalist Islamic movement.

Although they value the classical Islamic synthesis, they are not wedded to it as are the conservatives. Movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jamaat-i-Islami reflect a neo-traditionalist approach. While they accept much of classical law, they believe that law historically incorporated many un-Islamic practices. Therefore, Muslims must return to their revealed sources to revitalize the Islamic community. (In this sense, they may be called fundamentalists). Claiming continuity with eighteenth- and nineteenth- century Islamic revivalists like Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Shah Wali Allah, neo-traditionalists maintain that the only authority to be followed is that of the Quran and Sunnah; they claim the right to interpret (ijtihad) the Quran and Sunnah to respond to the needs of modernity. (Esposito, 1998, p. 315)

**POLITICAL METHODOLOGY OF THE JAM’AT**

Pakistan was created as a state for the Muslims, but its founding fathers were mostly secular in their political ideologies. They preferred the Western approach of democracy in polity and a legal system independent from theological influence, with a minor role given to religious identity. Mawdudi was blatantly opposed to this from the very beginning and advocated a central role for Islamic governance, including having the state and the constitution shaped by religious principles. These ideas also resulted in much controversy, with some claiming that Mawdudi and his followers were opposed to the creation of Pakistan as a separate state for Muslims.
In a speech given in Aligarh Muslim University in 1940, Mawdudi claimed that an Islamic state should be an “ideological state”, completely free “from all traces of nationalism and its influences” and “built exclusively on principles”. He also argued that such a state “conducted on a definite set of principles and ruled by a group of persons composed of widely differing nationalities who have accepted those principles as the basis of their entire life” could have been possible following the French Revolution, or indeed the establishment of Communism, but both of those human endeavours finally “disappeared in the darkness of nationalism”. He also argued that a proper Islamic revolution can only take place through constant efforts to bring about societal changes, whereas a nationalist state for the Muslims would lead them away from this revolution (Mawdudi, 1977, pp. 17-18).

The timing of Mawdudi’s strong assertion regarding a nationalist state is interesting, as it was expressed only six months after the acceptance of the Pakistan Resolution in Lahore by the Muslim League. However, despite his public misgivings, he migrated to the newly created state immediately after it was founded in 1947, claiming that he was actively supporting the creation of the Islamic state of Pakistan. In Pakistan, he continued struggling to introduce Islamic principles into its constitution and legal system (Yasmeen, 2012a).

However, a critical reading of Mawdudi’s activities and intellectual contributions confirms that his thoughts and concepts developed throughout the years and changed to fit the changing circumstances. Instead of holding to a rigid interpretation of religious perspectives, he adapted progressive and rational explanations to advance his cause. Roy Jackson (2006, p. 191) has correctly summed up Mawdudi’s role in the creation of Pakistan and his objectives in writing on several aspects of Islam:

The primary focus determined from all his works is a genuine concern for the future of Islam coupled with the call for an Islamic state and how this might be constituted. Further, he believed that Islam could achieve this through its own ideology which he considered to be self-sufficient and distinct from Western values. In many respects, his views echo those of the
Salafiyyah. Undoubtedly, Mawdudi’s writings and activities contributed greatly to the founding of Pakistan in 1947. Today, Mawdudi continues to be read, studied and respected by Muslims across the world and is constantly referenced in relation to modern themes of Islamic resurgence.

To summarize and to put the political methodology of the Jama’at into a current perspective, it must be said that Islamic activism within the electoral democracy is now one of the major trends of contemporary Islamic revivalism, that ultimately seeks to re-establish the Caliphate (Islamic State) governed by Islamic principles. Jama’at-e-Islami (Urdu: lit. Islamic Party), one of the oldest and largest transnational Islamic movements, introduced a modern political revivalist reading of Islam to the South Asian region. The party was initiated officially in August 1941 by theologian scholar Syed Abul Ala Mawdudi in undivided India under British colonial rule. Mawdudi was always outspoken about the prime objective of Islamic politics being ‘establishment of the religion’ (Iqamat-e-Deen), and this objective still remains the same for the party. However while keeping their objective intact, Islamic political parties, including the Jama’at, have adopted several methodologies and changes in their strategies worldwide. Interestingly, these parties have currently been going through severe turmoil and upheaval around the world. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt formed a political party called the Freedom and Justice Party, which won the national election in 2012, and its leader, Mohammed Morsi, became the first democratically elected President of Egypt. However, he was ousted by the Egyptian army on 3 July 2013. Similarly in Bangladesh, the Jama’at leaders are facing a war crimes trial, some have received the death penalty, others have been imprisoned and the party was barred by the court on 1 August 2013 from participating in the upcoming national election. A panel of High Court judges viewed that one of the Jama’at’s

31 For a brief description of the life and thought of Mawdudi, and his contribution to Islamic revivalism through establishing the Jama’at, please refer to (Nasr, 2005, pp. 98-121)

32 “Revivalist Islam in today’s Bangladesh is represented by two distinct and opposing streams: the politically activist revivalism is represented by the Jamaat-i-Islam, and the quietist, non-political da’awa-oriented revivalism is represented by the Tablighi Jamaat” (Ahmad, 2008, p. 61).
fundamental principles, as outlined in the party’s constitution – to believe in God as the source of all sovereignty and power – contradicts the fundamentals of the country’s constitution, as, according to the constitution, the people are the source of all sovereignty and power. Consequently, the judges panel decreed the registration of the Jama‘at under the election commission null and void, and thereby made the Jama‘at ineligible to participate in any election in the country.

The Jama‘at in Bangladesh is generally identified as a political party with an Islamic agenda, that seeks to establish Islamic principles at the state level through regular politics. However, the beginning of the party was different in nature. At the time of its inception in the 1940s, the aim of the Jama‘at was primarily centred on establishing an Islamic community. In its early years, the Jama‘at intentionally refrained from political activities, such as participating in elections. This was due to the earlier theological reasoning by Mawdudi, the founder of the party, and his fellow religious scholars, who regarded participation in Western style politics as prohibited by Islam. But in 1951, Mawdudi came to the conclusion that political participation would be an acceptable way to further establish Islam in the people’s personal lives (Iqamat-e-Deen) and to reassert the governance of God in their collective lives (Huqumat-e-Ilahiyyah) – his two primary agendas (Nasr, 1996, p. 43). This notion occasioned major disagreement among several Jama‘at leaders, and Amin Ahsan Islahi (a notable religious scholar and commentator of the Qur’an), Muhammad Asimul Haddad (the director of the Arabic translation bureau) and Israr Ahmad (a notable political and religious figure) resigned from the party. This was the second instance of some Ulama (religious scholars) leaving the party; the first was the departure of Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi and Manzur Nomani in 1942. Nasr described this trend as a struggle with the Ulama and stated that “as the Jama‘at became more a political party than a religious movement, Mawdudi’s style began to change from scholar to politician” (Nasr, 1996, pp. 43, 115).
However, the objectives and the activities of the Jama’at extend far beyond the political sphere. It adheres to the doctrine of transnational Islamic political revivalism which is clearly realized in its official objective: “to achieve the satisfaction of God and success in the hereafter through establishing Islam for the sake of peace and human welfare in Bangladesh and in the world” (Jama'at-E-Islami, 2008, p. 11). Theoretically, the Jama’at observes politics as a means to secure social justice and welfare based on Islamic principles.\textsuperscript{33} In conjunction with this claim, it has attempted to establish a practical model of Islamic social welfare policy. Currently, the people adhering to the ideology of the Jama’at administer the most successful private interest-free Islamic Bank in Bangladesh, a widespread network of hospitals and pharmaceutical services, and educational institutions, both general and religious, all over the country. Considering the banking and other financial institutions primarily as profit-oriented services, these social activities of the Jama’at could be roughly divided into two major categories: profit-oriented socio-economic services and non-profit social welfare. In the current research, my aim is to study the latter, which is significantly instrumental in the resource mobilization process of the Jama’at as a social movement.

The non-profit activities target the people living in poor conditions. As a religion-based political group, it is expected that the Jama’at should serve the material needs of poor and needy people. Moreover, helping the poor and bringing about constructive changes in society is an indication of piety, which was demonstrated in the early history of Islam. It is expected that this practice be adhered to by different Islamic movements in different ages and places. However, the pragmatic motivation of attracting the masses towards the party ideology or of collecting more followers has a significant place in this discourse. To sum up, \textsuperscript{33} This is perceivable from the four major activities of the Jama’at as they are officially stated in the party constitution: 1) revival of Islamic values and national unity, 2) creating responsible citizens and eligible leadership for building a justice-based society and state, 3) ultimate dependence on the Almighty Allah to secure democracy, economic and social justice, basic human rights, balanced distribution of the wealth and development of living quality, and 4) universal Muslim brotherhood and friendship with all other nations (Jama'at-E-Islami, 2008, pp. 11-12).
the structure of the Jama’at represents a complex socio-political framework that attempts to uphold religious principles while compromising with current socio-political phenomena.

From the historical development of the Jama’at, it is apparent that the party has adopted a top-down approach, in line with the thinking of its founder theologian Mawdudi, whose priority was to Islamize the educated sector of the society. His concern was that being an able Muslim requires an adequate amount of knowledge (Jackson, 2011, p. 65). This educational elitist approach has resulted in a gap between the party and the vast majority of Bangladeshis, who are far from being educated and who are living below the poverty line. To close this gap, there is an noticeable attempt inside the party to reach the marginalized population through social welfare provision. Moreover, there has been a recent trend in the activities of the Jama’at towards adapting a bottom-up approach based on strengthened social foundations (Razzak, 2012).

JAMA’AT-E-ISLAMI IN EAST PAKISTAN: EARLY DEVELOPMENT

To understand the situation of the Jama’at in present-day Bangladesh, a brief look at its development in this region is necessary. As a political party, Jama’at has had to operate throughout different types of socio-political change taking place in the greater Indian subcontinent. Mawdudi established this party, initially, with a vision of changing the male elite of his society through educating them about Islam. The cadre-based organizational structure and a highly categorized academic syllabus were manifestations of this vision. Later activities of the party included women and working class people (Shehabuddin, 2008, p. 579). The Jama’at, having been established as a religious movement in the British ruled Indian subcontinent, was later converted into a religion-based political party in Pakistan after
partition in 1947 and continued to operate in Bangladesh after its (Bangladesh’s) independence in 1971.

The Jama’at was introduced into present-day Bangladesh by a Bengali religious scholar named Muhammad Abdur Rahim. Rahim lived in Calcutta as a student and later as a researcher for about eight years, from 1938 till 1946, except for an interval of a few months in 1943, when he stayed in his own village in Pirojpur. Calcutta was the centre of political, economic and cultural activities for the whole of Bengal at that time. Rahim’s surroundings in Calcutta helped in developing political awareness in his thoughts. Moreover, he was a conscious observer of the process of independence of the subcontinent from British colonial rule and the subsequent formation of the two states based on religious identity. Though he was a supporter of Pakistan, he did not actively participate in the Muslim League, as he did not like the agenda of nationalism and the Muslim League leaders, who were secular in their thoughts and lifestyles (Majidi, 2003, pp. 39-45). In this respect, he had a similar approach towards Islamic worldviews as that advocated by Mawdudi. According to his biography, Muhammad Abdur Rahim felt the inner urge to provide effective services for his community and to serve the greater objectives of participating in Islamic revivalism after reading some books authored by Mawdudi. He began to learn more about the political party, Jama’at-e-Islami and started a written correspondence with Mawdudi through the post and finally participated in the greater Indian conference of the party, which was held in Allahabad in March 1946. He met his mentor, Mawdudi, for the first time during this conference. Upon returning home, he established the first unit of Jama’at-e-Islami in the Bengal region in his own locality (Majidi, 2003, p. 48).

In November 1950, Abdur Rahim went to Karachi to join the central conference of Jama’at-e-Islami and stayed in the Central Office in the company of Mawdudi for three months. He frequently travelled to different provinces of West Pakistan with Mawdudi and
had the opportunity to learn about the society and the Islamic movement. He exchanged views with Mawdudi and received his guidelines for organizational works in East Pakistan. Furthermore, this was an opportunity for Abdur Rahim to observe and train himself in the official activities of an established Islamic political party. Jama’at-e-Islami was yet to achieve the status of a full-fledged provincial organization according to its constitution, so Rafi Ahmad Indori, a West Pakistani Jama’at leader, was appointed to oversee the party’s activities in East Pakistan and worked as Secretary General of Bengal region under the authority of the central body from West Pakistan. After Abdur Rahim’s return from Karachi in January 1951, Rafi Ahmad returned to West Pakistan and Abdur Rahim began working as the provincial Secretary General. In February 1953, Jama’at-e-Islami in East Pakistan achieved the status of an autonomous provincial organization, separate from its central body, and Chowdhury Muhammad Ali was sent from West Pakistan as Amir (President) of Jama’at-e-Islami of Bengal region. Abdur Rahim was appointed as Secretary General at that time (Majidi, 2003, pp. 62-64). Later, in 1956, he became the first elected Amir, and Ghulam Azam became Secretary of East Pakistan Jama’at-e-Islami in the party’s new form as a fully autonomous provincial organization (Islam, 2005, pp. 31, 75). According to Enayetur Rahim (2001, p. 237), “to accelerate its activities in East Pakistan, Maulvi Abdur Rahim of Barisal, the only notable presence of a Bengali in the Jamat hierarchy, was appointed Amir of East Pakistan in 1951”. However, the biography of Muhammad Abdur Rahim confirms that he was appointed Amir in 1956 (Majidi, 2003, p. 75). However, Muhammad Abdur Rahim was the only Bengali member of the Jama’at from this region at that time, as the previous leader, Rafi Ahmad Indori, was from West Pakistan, and probably it was this fact that led Enayetur Rahim to consider him as the Jama’at leader in this region as early as 1951.

A new wave of organizational activities of the Jama’at-e-Islami in East Pakistan began with this new committee, and Mawdudi visited East Pakistan for the first time in 1956.
He, along with the provincial leaders, travelled to the major cities of East Pakistan and delivered speeches to various public assemblages. These programs began the larger scale public activities of Jama’at-e-Islami among the masses of this region. Abdur Rahim continued working as President of East Pakistan Jama’at-e-Islami for about twelve years, from 1956 to 1968, a period which was considered as the formative era of Jama’at in this province.

Though the Jama’at is concerned with social development and service for the common people, its main focus has proved to be on national politics and the social elite, with priority given to the agenda of ‘establishing an Islamic state’. However, this approach led to the Jama’at leaders’ failure to understand the popular perceptions of the people and their basic needs during the Bengali uprising in the late 1960s. Jama’at’s primary concern for the formal status of Islam resulted in their reluctant official support for Pakistani economic and political discrimination against the people of East Pakistan. This discrimination subsequently led to the bloody armed conflict which secured East Pakistan’s independence. In Bangladeshi politics and society, the Jama’at is still facing the backlash of that political decision to support the unity of Pakistan during the 1971 liberation war and is consequently being accused of ignoring social concerns and popular demands. Vali Nasr described this stance as a failure to “successfully ride the tide of discontent” and notes that the party “narrowly looked at Pakistani politics solely as a struggle for Islam and democracy and were oblivious to the significance of the socioeconomic changes” that Pakistan was experiencing at that time (Nasr, 1994, p. 157). The biggest issue that the Jama’at is facing now in Bangladesh is the allegation against it of war crimes and of collaboration with the Pakistani army in the liberation war of 1971. A detailed account of the party’s background is given in the previous chapter.
JAMA’AT-E-ISLAMI IN BANGLADESH: LATER DEVELOPMENT

After Bangladesh achieved independence in 1971, all religiously based political parties were banned in the new-born secular state. This scenario changed dramatically after the assassination of the founder and President of the country, Sheikh Mujib, in 1975, by a group of army officers. The Fifth Amendment in the national constitution of 1979, which replaced secularism with the principle of ‘Faith in Allah’, subsequently paved the way for the ‘rehabilitation’ in national politics of the Jama’at, along with all other Islamists (Kabir, 2006). There are now six Islamic political parties participating in the national electoral democracy and several others which are officially banned due to their perceived or alleged extremist and terrorist orientation and activities. The Jama’at thus pioneered the entry of Islam into Bangladeshi politics and initiated the direct involvement of religion there.

Following the death of Sheikh Mujib, military and nationalist rulers attempted to use religion as a tool to gain popular support. Today, religion has secured such a strong place in politics that the current government of the Awami League, the party of Sheikh Mujib, now led by his daughter, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, is apparently unable to effect a total ban on religion-based political activities. This government left the issue of religion-based politics unresolved when, in 2010, it revoked the Fifth Amendment of the national constitution and reinstated secularism, removing the principle of ‘Faith in Allah’.

Based on the observation of previous socio-political events in Bangladesh, it can be safely assumed that the social involvement of people adhering to the ideology of the Jama’at would not be eliminated from Bangladeshi society even if the government were to take any extreme measures against this party, such as banning it. This capacity of sustainability is partially due to the social services the party has been providing to members of Bangladeshi society at the grass-roots level. The sense of religious identity in the Bangladeshi Muslim mindset also plays quite a significant role in this regard. However, with secularism now
reinstated in the constitution of Bangladesh, a court verdict has declared the Jama’at prohibited from participating in the upcoming election. At the same time, five among seven central leaders of the Jama’at have been given death sentences by a tribunal set up by the current government, due to their collaboration with the Pakistani army in 1971.

There are two major allegations that the Jama’at usually faces in Bangladesh. The party is criticized by many for having an association with Muslim extremist organizations and/or collaborating with the Pakistani army in perpetrating war crimes during the liberation war in 1971 (D'costa & Hosasin, 2010, p. 346). Some even claim that it is an extreme group working towards the ultimate goal of establishing a theocratic Islamic state in Bangladesh (Kumar, 2009, p. 541). The Jama’at has often faced allegations of association with extremist Islamic organizations, as some of the extremist leaders and activists were associated with the Jama’at earlier in their lives. However, the Jama’at has been able to secure its democratic position, so far, by adhering steadily to the national political culture and avoiding the use of force for the purpose of religious coercion. There is a common assertion made by the members of the Jama’at that the extremists left the party and joined or formed other parties only because the Jama’at doesn’t accommodate and conform to their ideas. Through different activities and publications, the Jama’at has attempted to secure this moderate stance and refute religious terrorism and hostility. Regarding their position against the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the Jama’at leaders argue that it was a political decision to support the unity of Pakistan and they claim no participation or involvement in the military operations, atrocities or war.

Another situational aspect which helps in understanding the significant role of Jama’at-e-Islami in national politics is associated with the utilization of religion as an effective tool of power politics in this country. Though the country initially established secularism as one of its core principles, the rulers and political leaders have been always
aware of the place of Islam in the mindset and everyday lives of Bangladeshi people. Even Sheikh Mujib, the founder leader of Bangladesh, who established this country on the basis of secularism, decided to make Bangladesh a member of the OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference) at its summit in 1973, three years after Bangladesh’s independence from the Islamic state of Pakistan (Kamal, 1990: 73). All of the subsequent leaders of Bangladesh, irrespective of their ideologies and political doctrines, have used Islam as a useful tool for political legitimization (Hakim, 1998, pp. 113-115).

There are similarities between the Jama’at in Bangladesh and its counterparts in other Muslim countries with regard to the concerns they address and challenges they meet as Islamic political movements. In addition, the socio-political challenges for the Jama’at in Bangladesh include the consequences of its support for the unity of Pakistan (given in the belief that the unity of that perceived Islamic state was vital for the Muslim identity) during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. The Jama’at in Bangladesh has been surrounded by increasing controversy in recent years. Allegations have been made against some of its leaders relating to their association with and participation in the war crimes primarily committed by the Pakistani army during the 1971 liberation war. A ‘War Crimes Tribunal’ was established in 2011, after four decades of independence. Throughout this period the Jama’at had participated in all national and local government elections. Though the election results represent a debatable scale by which to measure public acceptance, where a myriad of variables such as democratic conditions, local agendas and interests and the law and order situation have impacted on them, they generally provide an accepted appraisal of the status of the political groups involved. This is also important when the Jama’at, whose ideology and objectives are religious, has adapted to the electoral democracy in order to establish its

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34 The Organization of Islamic Conference recently changed its name to Organization of Islamic Cooperation, in June 2011. It is an international organization of Muslim countries, and the largest international organization outside of the United Nations.
ideology. The Jama’at even enjoyed the position of a stakeholder during the formation of the governments in 1991, 1996 and 2001, when both of the major political parties failed to achieve absolute victory in the national elections. Table 3 shows the position of the Jama’at, which is normally considered to be the fourth largest political party of Bangladesh, in four general elections contested for the 300 constituency national parliament.

Table 3: Results for the Jama’at in national elections of Bangladesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Total votes cast</th>
<th>Votes for the Jama’at</th>
<th>Seats won</th>
<th>Percentage of total votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third national parliamentary election</td>
<td>7 May 1986</td>
<td>28,903,889</td>
<td>1,314,057</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth national parliamentary election</td>
<td>27 February 1991</td>
<td>34,477,803</td>
<td>4,117,737</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh national parliamentary election</td>
<td>12 June 1996</td>
<td>42,880,576</td>
<td>3,653,013</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth national parliamentary election</td>
<td>1 October 2001</td>
<td>55,736,625</td>
<td>2,385,361</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

35 The three parties which are larger than the Jama’at are, in decreasing order of size: 1) Bangladesh Awami League (Urdu: lit. Bangladesh People’s League), a centre-left secular party; 2) Bangladesh Nationalist Party, a centre-right nationalist party; and 3) Bangladesh Jatiya Party (Bengali: lit. Bangladesh National Party), the party of a former military dictator, which preceded the Jama’at in Bangladesh with regard to its position in the national political arena.

36 The Jama’at boycotted the fourth election in 1988 and the sixth election in 1996.

37 Data of the third and fifth elections are gathered from Wikipedia (Wikipedia, 2012).

38 The fifth general election, in 1991, was the first of its kind to take place under a non-political ‘caretaker government’ after the public revolution against the military dictatorship. It is considered by many as the first fair national election in the country’s history.


Currently, in Bangladesh, the Jama’at is facing some political challenges. Considering its rise in the 1980s and 1990s, it was generally expected that the party would continue gaining acceptance in a society where most of the members are Muslim and well aware of their religious identity. Some political observers, intellectuals and party activists argue that compromising certain religious principles for the sake of political gain has created a ‘power-hungry’ image of the Jama’at in people’s minds, and resulted in ‘a narrow support base’ for this movement (Hossain & Siddiquee, 2006). Examples of the success of several Islamic political revivalist movements in various Muslim countries have also been introduced into this discourse.

Barrister Abdur Razzak, a central executive committee member of the Jama’at, recently wrote an article, *Islamic Movements in Different Countries and the Arab Spring*, which was published in a national newspaper. In it, he described the modern strategies adopted by Islamic movements in several countries and especially in Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey and India. Justifying those strategies with different verses from the Qur’an and the life of the Prophet Muhammad, Abdur Razzak clearly called on the Jama’at’s leaders and followers to abandon rigidity in policy making and to be more pragmatic when dealing with public issues. When describing the recent progress of various Islamic movements, he has rationalized the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt’s latest national election as being the result of “their being very close to the general people through their social welfare activities” (Razzak, 2012).

| Ninth National Parliamentary Election | 29 December 2008 | 69,372,897 | 3,289,967 | 2 | 4.70 |

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41 Due to the unavailability of a digital statistical report of the Bangladesh Election Commission on the ninth parliamentary election, data have been collected from a UNDP report (Eicher, Alam, & Eckstein, 2010, pp. 80-81)
ORGANIZATION AND PROGRAM OF THE JAMA’AT

The Jama’at adheres to a cadre-based organizational system, whereby a person progresses from a primary level up towards the leadership. This progress is achieved through involvement in organizational activities, in addition to personal development using knowledge-based activities. As part of these procedures, the party has an official syllabus published and prescribed for its adherents. A preliminary study of this syllabus shows a separate segment with a list of recommended sections from the Qur’an, selected Prophetic Traditions and particular books on different social topics, such as social relations, social services and changes in society, from an Islamic perspective.

According to the party’s constitution (revised in April 2011), it is imperative for anyone willing to join the party to believe in the basic tenets of the Islamic belief system. The Jama’at’s constitution can be divided into two sections. The first section briefly introduces the religious discourse of the Jama’at that acts as the theological foundation of the party. The rest of the constitution discusses several organizational issues, such as the conditions, responsibilities and working procedures of the leadership of different levels of the party. According to this constitution, the primary objective of the party is to attain the satisfaction of Allah through the establishment of the Islamic way of life. In order to achieve this objective, the Jama’at lists four permanent programs of work to be undertaken: 1) preaching Islam, 2) educating people, 3) providing social welfare, and 4) establishing Islam in the state through constitutional and systematic means (Jama'at-E-Islami, 2011, pp. 8-13).

Organizationally, the Jama’at is a cadre-based organization, where an activist is required to participate in regular activities and complete the studies prescribed in the party

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42 Seyyed Nasr explained that, since the commencement of party activities, the Jama’at has closely followed the teachings and structure as laid down by Mawdudi. The party structure consists of members and sympathizers on five different levels, making up a cadre system of activists. There have been minor modifications and alterations in the structure at different times and places, but this system remains the core of the Jama’at’s activities (Nasr, 2005, p. 112).
syllabus. According to the constitution, anyone, regardless of gender or religion, who agrees to the objectives and agendas of the party is eligible to become an associate member (Jama'at-E-Islami, 2011, p. 14). It is common practice that an associate member must participate vigorously in party activities and accomplish the party syllabus through study circle programs before taking the oath of membership of the party. The party syllabus is divided into three sections: 1) membership syllabus for the less educated, 2) membership syllabus for the educated, and 3) syllabus for higher study (Jama'at-E-Islami, 2010).

The organizational structure of the Jama’at is basically laid out in three books: the Constitution, the Syllabus and the Working Manual. The Constitution contains fundamental principles and the Syllabus contains the list of study materials. Apart from these, the Working Manual of the Jama’at illustrates four primary programs of the Jama’at, as well as the activities through which those programs are implemented (Jama'at-E-Islami, 2006). The basic organizational structure of the Jama’at is built upon these three books, and interestingly, the Jama’at could be singled out as the only political party in Bangladesh that regularly implements democratic procedures in its leadership elections. The other three major political parties of Bangladesh, namely the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, the Awami League and the Bangladesh National Party (established by the military ruler, General Ershad, during his autocratic rule) have their own constitutions and working manuals. But it is common knowledge that the central leadership of these parties comes from among the family members of the party founders. On the other hand, the Jama’at has always been strict in establishing its leadership through the chain of party members. This movement never selects or elects its leaders from among the family members of existing or previous leaders, which is an extraordinary feature in Bangladeshi political culture.
SOCIAL PROGRAM OF THE JAMA’AT

The foundational base for any political or ideological group is the society and every group must deal with social issues, especially when they strive to put an ideology or doctrine into practice in that society. While doing this, political or ideological parties become engaged in social change and social opinion formation processes to varying degrees. Most of the Islamic movements worldwide are no different in this aspect of the socio-political process. Even the radical groups have had their own methods of social manifestation. No opinion or idea regarding human society can survive if it is not cherished by some of the people, even though it might be a very small segment of the society. Youssef has studied the socio-political manifestation of an Egyptian Islamic resurgence group, Al-Jihad, considering it as an Islamic social movement (Youssef, 1984). Berna (2008, p. 4) goes further, arguing that “Islamic fundamentalist movements are inherently social movements”.

Increasing penetration by contemporary Islamic groups into the national politics of several Muslim countries is now another focal point of discussion among the socio-political analysts. This political engagement of Islam, which is often called ‘political Islam’, was pioneered in the Indian subcontinent by Jama’at-e-Islami. One of the variables that are working behind the increasing popularity of Islamic political activities in these several countries is the discontent people feel concerning their socio-political experiences with Western secular governance (Yılmaz, 2002, p. 3). This scenario is common also in Bangladeshi Muslim society.

The significance of social issues in the ideology of the Jama’at can be understood from the objectives and permanent agenda of the party, as defined in its constitution. The second objective of the party – reviving Islamic values and building national unity being the first one – is stated as the establishment of a justice-based society without any kind of discrimination, through creating responsible citizens and eligible leaders. The third objective
in the constitution speaks of upholding the ideals of democracy, economic and social justice, basic human rights, a balanced distribution of the wealth in the society and freeing Bangladesh from discrimination, corruption and terrorism. Additionally, one of the permanent agendas is “social reformation, moral reconstruction, cultural change and service to humanity based on Islamic values” (Jama'at-e-Islami, 2008, p. 13). Moreover, a perusal of the party’s syllabus, containing the prescribed reading list for adherents, shows a significant number of books relevant to social life and society.

During recent decades, the party has become actively involved in a myriad of socio-religious matters, in order to advance its political agenda and to keep it contemporary. One of these much debated issues is the status of women and their participation in social and political activities. The common secular trend of criticizing women’s status in Islam has lent support to the Jama’at’s opponents in intellectually undermining its stance regarding women’s issues. An analysis of the social welfare program of the Jama’at, which is the aim of this study, would lead to the greater project of understanding the the party’s point of view regarding Bangladeshi society and its different elements. This discourse concerning social spheres intrinsically includes women’s issues.

The understanding of democracy by Mawdudi, the founder of the Jama’at, is different from the conventional Western concept. According to him, absolute sovereignty belongs only to the God who is one and eternal. He prefers the coined term, “theo-democracy”, as the ideal designation for an Islamic state. This is not identical to the European concept of theocracy. Mawdudi explains that “the theocracy built up by Islam is not ruled by any particular religious class but by the whole community of Muslims including the rank and file. The entire Muslim population runs the state in accordance with the Book of God and the practice of His Prophet. … that is to say a divine democratic government, because under it the Muslims have been given a limited popular sovereignty under the sovereignty of God. The executive under this system of government is constituted by the general will of the Muslims who have also the right to depose it” (Maududi, 1967, pp. 139-140). According to Esposito, “this position does not mean that Mawdudi and other modern Muslims reject the idea of a democratic political system. They only insist that it be framed within the worldview of *Tawhid*” (lit. oneness of God) (Esposito & Voll, 1996, p. 23). The Jama’at propounds that all other principles of human society, such as the issues of economic and social justice, human rights and others, should be shaped according to the framework of Islam in a similar fashion.

Elora Shehabuddin alluded to this practice in Bangladesh while mentioning the claims of secularist non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that “Islam has been harmful to women and the only route to progress is to discard the shackles of religion and tradition” (Punch, 2006, p. 69).
The aspect of religio-political appreciation of gender in Bangladeshi society is partially relevant to this study. A few academic and other analyses have been done concentrating on different aspects of the Jama’at’s position regarding women’s issues. This thesis will also look into this topic in the following empirical chapters by studying gender issues that arise during social welfare activities.

Elora Shehabuddin (2008, p. 577) claims that the current Jama’at leadership and intellectuals advocate a progressive viewpoint regarding women which is not aligned with the one promoted by Abul Ala Mawdudi (the party’s founder and theoretical leader) during the early days of the party. Mawdudi acknowledged the crucial role of both genders in the development of Islamic civilization. He asserted the importance of the individual identity of women, as they are directly responsible to God for their own deeds. According to Mawdudi, Islam ensures equality and rights for both men and women, with some specific obligations for each gender. Thus, men are responsible for working for the family, while women are responsible for taking care of the household. Shehabuddin’s argument is that the Jama’at has made these recent adaptations due to ongoing social and political progress, and specifically through the establishment of a democratic polity and encounters with secular social organizations. She concludes that the contemporary Jama’at leaders are starting to recognize women’s individual places and roles in society in addition to their domestic obligations, which were central in Mawdudi’s discourse concerning women in Islam (Shehabuddin, 2008).

CONCLUSION

The Jama’at, then, an Islamic revivalist movement, is generally identified as a religion-based political party or a religio-political movement with a strong emphasis on social issues.
Ideologically, this party strives for the revival of an Islamic state in Bangladesh – and ultimately in the world – which it considers as its chief collective religious obligation. In reality, this party has been struggling to strengthen its position in the electoral politics of Bangladesh. From both perspectives, the party regards society and the people in it as the primary catalyst for change.

The movement has developed through a great deal of transformation in its methodology and scope since its initiation in the 1940s. On the other hand, the primary objectives and ideology of the movement remain unchanged and are devoted to Islamic revivalism. In Bangladesh, apart from its rivalry with secularism and communism, the movement is particularly haunted by its collaboration with the Pakistani army during the liberation war of 1971. However, the Jama’at still holds a significant place in national politics as the fourth most popular party, and also as a significant catalyst in the formation of coalition governments. With regard to social perspectives, this movement introduced a religious ideology which focuses more on social-political aspects of Islam than on personal piety aspects, thus playing a significant role in the formation of a collective religious identity in the mindset of many Bangladeshi Muslims. In order to achieve its primary objective of establishing Islam at the state level, the Jama’at mostly emphasizes preaching Islam, spreading Islamic principles through its activities, participation in political activities and the organization of social welfare. Following chapter will present a critical investigation of literatures on the primary issues of this research, namely social welfare and Islamic politics in the contemporary world.
CHAPTER 4: SOCIAL WELFARE AND ISLAMIC POLITICS

Islamic revivalist movements’ participation in social welfare activities in Muslims societies is a recent phenomenon that is yet to be extensively studied by academics. In contrast, general social welfare policy has been one of the key areas of study in social science for a long time. Social scientists have long been advocating and analysing various concepts of social policies, and many of those conceptual frameworks are being put into practice in different countries and regions. There is thus a contrast between the wide scope of the literature in the broader area of study and the lack of literature concerning the specific area of this thesis. The topic of social welfare has been explored from numerous perspectives, producing a large number of conceptual frameworks and analyses and resulting in its being one of the major themes of both modern sociology and political studies. This plethora of studies supports current research which aims to put the social welfare aspect of Islamic revivalism into perspective, and to appraise it in relation to the socio-historical context of social welfare issues. However, the dearth of literature on the narrower field means that there are few case studies available to be compared with and tested against. More importantly, there is a shortage of theoretical frameworks by which to study this complex socio-political phenomenon, which has economic implications, also, for the societies in which it occurs.

Therefore, this chapter aims to conceptually categorize the major studies in the existing literature and critically review them, in order to establish the context of current research, and also to justify the research questions and theoretical space of this study. As part of this process, the development of the existing literature on major conceptual aspects of this research topic, such as welfare policies and the modern welfare state, Islamic revivalism, and
the social welfare programs of Islamic political activism will be investigated. (A theoretical framework for this current research, based on scholarly precedents and basic characteristics of the field, will be outlined in the following chapter.)

THE MODERN WELFARE STATE AND THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY

Social welfare is a noteworthy and complex issue in modern sociology, being tied up with myriad other sociological themes, such as social stratification, poverty, equity, political intervention, individual and family life, social work, social policy, citizenship rights and so on. Although throughout history providing welfare for the underprivileged has been always considered a general responsibility of an ideal rulership, the concept of welfare has become simultaneously more developed and more complex with the evolution of social and political practices. With the development of the modern governance system of the state and its economic practices in the last century, the state became increasingly involved in social welfare practices. According to Peter Flora and Jens Alber (2009, p. 48), the last two decades of the nineteenth century was the ‘take-off period’ of the modern welfare state in practice. Their choice of this timeframe is based on state expenditure rates with regard to social welfare and structural innovations. Scholars have varying opinions about the state social welfare system with regard to its current growth or decline, which will be discussed later in this section.

I begin by inquiring into the philosophical foundation of the concept of social welfare. One of the common aspirations human beings usually share, irrespective of socio-political times and places, is to live in a state of well-being, in the company of other individuals, with the family as the smallest social unit. Meeting this demand, by providing people with the
support and resources necessary to allow them a minimal or satisfactory standard of living is a phenomenon of long standing in human society. A general definition of social welfare “could incorporate all organized societal responses that promote the social well-being of a population” (Ambrosino, Ambrosino, Heffernan, & Shuttlesworth, 2008, p. 4). In other words, “social welfare policy is collective strategy to address social problems”. It includes numerous activities such as education, health, psychological and material assistance, and support for families, adults and children.

It could also be assumed that the existence of social welfare is as old as the existence of human society. People have always needed reciprocal aid to survive, the usual sources being the family or the tribe. David Macarov (1995) attempts to find historical traces of authority’s involvement in social welfare, and claims that the origin of the practice of welfare in human societies or in collective living patterns lies in antiquity. He mentions the Babylonian King Hammurabi, who composed the famous ‘Code’ more than 4,000 years ago. The Code mandated that society should help the victims of natural disasters. The practice of social welfare in varying degrees can also be traced back to other ancient civilizations. The Greek civilization had provision to support the poor, disabled soldiers, and the families of soldiers killed during battle. Miriam Hoexter (2003) argues that, as in Islamic civilization, religion has always had an important role to play in welfare in other civilizations, such as in those of early Greece and Rome, the early Christian Church and in the Indian subcontinent. In his study of the historical development of social welfare, Leslie Leighninger includes Muslim civilization, along with Judeo-Christian civilizations, in his statement that those early civilizations had divergent practices to provide help to the poor, and that this continuous trait of assisting needy people has been developed and transformed into the modern social welfare policies implemented in the industrialized countries of the contemporary era. For this

religious attachment to ancient social welfare, he credits welfare practices as ordained in the doctrines of Judaism and Christianity (Leighninger, 2008).

In modern times, the organizers of social welfare provision range from individuals to groups such as “federal, state, tribal and local government agencies; non-profit and for-profit organizations; religious institutions; and community groups” (Segal, 2010, p. 3). Overall, today’s social welfare tends to be limited to the policies and programs administered by the government for the support of its citizens, particularly in developed countries. Governments have taken several measures to provide social welfare to their citizens through various agencies and legislation, such as the Social Security Act (1935) of America (Ambrosino, Ambrosino, Heffernan, & Shuttlesworth, 2008). Thus, in the Western world, social welfare is a task performed predominantly by the state. This is implied in the following definition in The Social Work Dictionary, as cited by David Macarov (1995, p. 5): “Social welfare is a nation’s system of programs, benefits, and services that help meet those psychological, social, and economic needs that are fundamental to the well-being of individuals and society”.

However, non-governmental and religion-based organized social welfare activities exist alongside the state-based system in almost every country and society in the world. While lecturing on faith and globalization, at Yale University in 2008, Tony Blair, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, acknowledged the contribution of Judaeo-Christian tradition in the Western concept of social welfare and the roles of different religion-based social welfare organizations in the modern era, such as the Islamic Relief, Christian Aid, Hindu Aid, World Jewish Relief, and Khalsa Aid (Blair, 2008).

Alongside the feudal system, the church functioned as resource provider to the poor in mediaeval Europe. An early instance of government intervention in social welfare can be
found in the Statute of Labourers Act in England in 1349, which ordered that all able persons be employed within their parish, in the aftermath of the deaths of approximately two-thirds of the English population from the bubonic plague. At that time, this decree also prohibited helping the poor, those in authority believing that such help might lead to idleness (Ambrosino, Ambrosino, Heffernan, & Shuttlesworth, 2008).

The significance of the combined role performed by the church and the feudal system in social welfare increased to such an extent that by the end of the fourteenth century, following the division of the church during the Reformation era and the breakdown of the feudal system, poverty and social problems had become widespread in Europe. However, modern development of social welfare has its roots in the Act for the Relief of the Poor 1601 (popularly known as the Elizabethan Poor Law) in England. In particular, this law made the secular local government units, named Parishes, responsible for the care of people in need. Another major event in the historical development of social welfare in Europe was German Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck’s several legislations on social welfare. Later, social welfare concepts were used to stabilize the United States after the Great Depression of the 1930s. It was similarly important in the whole of Europe in the post-World War II era (Ambrosino, Ambrosino, Heffernan, & Shuttlesworth, 2008; Ginsberg & Miller-Cribbs, 2005, p. 18; Macarov, 1995, p. 4).

In modern-day North America, religion still functions as a strong catalyst in the organization of social welfare. Although the country was founded on the principle of ‘separation of church and state’, this principle is now being challenged when it comes to the issue of religion-based social welfare. This is exemplified in the receipt of public funds by several religious organizations, such as Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, and Jewish Family and Children Services (Segal, 2010).

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46 This Act provided some conceptual foundations to later American social welfare legislation.
Social welfare policies development has gone through various stages and changes in different countries and societies. The experiences of a certain country in Europe may differ greatly from that of a country in Africa or Asia. This is due to the impact of various factors, such as the economic strengths and social approach of the country, government policy, political leadership and so on. Throughout the twentieth century, governments with left-oriented ideologies were known for relatively more state intervention in different aspects of social life, and likewise in welfare intervention. Health care and education were generally regarded as the state’s responsibility in those countries which came under Communist rule. At the same time, capitalist economies had different approaches to and trends in welfare issues in different countries, adopted by different governments and policy makers of different times. So, it is obvious that the welfare issue has a strong relationship with the approach and understanding by governments of different ideologies. It should be borne in mind that an increase in the extent of state welfare is indicative of an increase in the extent of state intervention in the lives of individuals and families. Therefore, though welfare provision was nationalized in the Communist states, Marxists were critical of the concept of the welfare state as manifested in developed countries. They saw the Western approach to welfare as a means to ensure a better workforce, in order to sustain a capitalistic market-based society, and considered it a “result of dysfunctions within the capitalist system during the Great Depression” (Martin & Torres, 2004, p. 2). Through the welfare system, the state primarily intervenes in specific areas of social life, such as family life, education and health care. Louis Althusser explained the welfare state as an element of a capitalistic network which imposes a dominant ideology on society (O'Brien & Penna, 1998). In the following section, an overview of the state welfare practices in different regions of the world will be presented and critically discussed.
According to Giddens and Sutton (2013, p. 553), “most developed and developing countries in the world today are welfare states. By this, it is meant that the state plays a central role in the provision of welfare, which it does through a system that offers services and benefits to meet the basic needs of citizens for healthcare, education, housing and income”. Bilton et al. (2002, p. 240) state that the term ‘welfare state’ denotes “a system of government where the state is responsible for providing its citizens with a wide range of welfare benefits.”

Welfare management by the state has a strong relationship with the taxation system of the country, as the public welfare expenditure must be met from the income of the government. Therefore the provisions of state-provided welfare is proportional to the tax revenues. In general, a country with higher tax revenues usually provides a higher budget for welfare for its citizens. However, tax revenues vary significantly from country to country. For example, in 2005, tax revenues represented 51.1 per cent of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in Sweden, 45.4 per cent in Belgium and 49.7 per cent in Austria, while at the same time in some other developed countries the percentage was less: 37.2 per cent in the UK, 34.7 per cent in Germany and 26.8 per cent in the USA (Giddens & Sutton, 2013, p. 553).

The historical development of social welfare implementation in Britain in the recent era has entailed various approaches, that are representative of the several political philosophies underlying them. While studying British government approaches to family structures, Tony Bilton and others mentioned that post-World War II Britain’s emphasis on the nuclear family system was influenced by two opposing ideas with regard to social welfare. The nuclear family model was emphasized from 1945 to 1979 by Conservative and Labour administrations, due to the concept that it helped to remove inequality among families by providing them with necessary provisions and access to an equal distribution of life chances. This school of thought, known as Welfarism, was “based on the view that
impoverishment and disadvantage were not matters of individual failure but socially constructed conditions characteristic of a stratified society that needed state intervention to ameliorate them” (Bilton, Bonnett, Jones, Lawson, Skinner, Stanworth, & Webster, 2002, p. 240).

The nuclear family continued to be emphasized by the Conservative administration, led by Margaret Thatcher, that gained power in 1979, but with a completely different view of social welfare. Between 1979 and 1990, the school of thought which is known as the New Right advocated the nuclear family structure as the means to “reward individualism, self-help, enterprise and initiative, thereby reducing the state’s involvement in people’s lives” (Bilton, Bonnett, Jones, Lawson, Skinner, Stanworth, & Webster, 2002, p. 240).

The New Right viewed social welfare provision as weakening the roles of successful individuals in the society and providing unnecessary support to its less able members. According propagators of the New Right, individuals are responsible for their own successes and failures; the state has no business to be involved. Welfarism was therefore considered “costly, unnecessary and morally repugnant” (Bilton, Bonnett, Jones, Lawson, Skinner, Stanworth, & Webster, 2002, p. 240). Though the necessity of a safety-net for the most underprivileged members of the society was acknowledged, it was proposed that any help should be distributed on a strictly means-tested basis, in order that it be given only to the poor. Thus the idea of a wide ranging welfare system covering most of the society was rejected. A new satirical term, ‘nanny state’, was coined, to voice the opinion that the ‘welfare state’ was overprotective and counter-productive. However, Welfarism returned to British state policy in a newer version with the success of New Labour in the general elections of 1997 and 2001 (Bilton, Bonnett, Jones, Lawson, Skinner, Stanworth, & Webster, 2002).
More than seven centuries after the enactment of the English Statute of Labourers Act of 1349, the neo-liberal economists in the West maintain a similar attitude, claiming that a reductionist approach to state welfare is necessary for economic development. In a recent radio interview, Australian Social Services Minister, Kevin Andrews, stated that the government should review the “unsustainable and relentless” welfare expenditure of the country, otherwise it will lead to a financial crisis (Woodley, 2014). On the other hand, scholars advocating the development of welfare policy argue that the well-being of all members of society is important for productivity and development (Midgley & Tang, 2001).

In spite of these critics of ‘welfarism’, there is evidence that Western countries have achieved remarkable progress in designing and implementing social welfare for their citizens. In the current socio-political context, social welfare is an inevitable organ of the government, even though different countries have varying focuses, mostly associated with the governing party’s political philosophy. In this regard, Elizabeth Segal (2010, p. 57) says:

Conservatives generally oppose government intervention as a waste of taxpayers’ money. Social programs are viewed as providing benefits to those who do not need them or as creating a dependency that encourages people to stop caring for themselves. […] Liberals generally support active intervention by the federal government. Social welfare policies are regarded as being so important that they should be legislated by the government.

INADEQUATE STATE-RUN SOCIAL WELFARE IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES

Islam, like almost all other religions, encourages charity, with zakat (almmsgiving) being one of its five foundational principles. In addition, numerous other voluntary religious rituals, such as sadaqah (optional charity) or waqf (endowment), are part of Islamic practice. The development of Islamic thought in the history of the Muslim world has always been closely related to religio-social charity. In the days of the Prophet (PBUH), this practice helped a group of his companions to devote themselves to the purest of knowledge. For the following
fourteen centuries, in various parts of the world, this inalienable aspect of Islam was a core force in keeping the practice of Islamic knowledge alive through religious schools and modest-living religious scholars.

Social welfare was always an inseparable part of governance in early and mediaeval Muslim nations. Beginning from the first Islamic state in Medina, under the supervision of the Prophet Muhammad himself, it was commonplace to support those in need on a regular basis from the state treasury (Bayt al-Mal). Umar bin Khattab, the second Caliph of Islam, is considered by many as the founder of child benefits, pensions for aged people and the disability benefit systems. A steady state of material affluence and the subsequent economic improvement of the societies under the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties have been examined and attested by numerous historians. This tradition continued during the Ottoman Empire (1299–1923). Danisoglu (1987) states that an old and strong tradition of providing education and social security was customary in the Muslim world under Ottoman rule, and was primarily motivated by conventional religious principles of equity and justice. This tradition officially declined under colonial rule over the Muslim majority lands and weak economic management and political instability became common features of the Muslim majority countries after the emergence of nation states in the last century.

Unlike Western countries, most Muslim majority countries are underdeveloped, with more practical need for working social welfare policies. Although some Middle-Eastern countries are rich in natural resources, most of their governments have not developed any sustainable social welfare policy. Middle-Eastern traditional societies have an inherent tendency for social work. Helping the vulnerable and poor, an obligation ordained in the Islamic religious texts, is considered one of the natural duties of every person. Islam always has a significant role in shaping this mindset towards welfare policies in those societies. However, instead of developing an integrated state welfare system, most Arab countries
practice welfare through their traditional method, whereby people seek help through personal communication with tribal leaders. Poor and needy people in Saudi Arabia can receive help from the Ministry of Social Welfare, as from the 1960s the monarchy has promoted “education and social welfare benefits for all Saud citizens” (Chai, 2005, p. 5). However, this process suffers from long bureaucratic procedures, and mostly results in inadequate assistance. Instead, a person may go to the local governor, who is also a member of the royal family, to visit him personally and receive an ample financial donation. According to Hossein Soliman, “in the Middle East, it seems that a combination of religious, historical, ideological, cultural and geographical factors have influenced the emergence of social work” (Soliman, 2013, p. 4). The result of not implementing a systematic welfare service is that a large number of the population live below the poverty line, a social reality partially manifested by roaming female and child beggars at the busy street junctions, in the most oil-rich country of the world. However, Qatar stands out as an example of the systematic implementation of a state welfare system, which ensures free education and healthcare for all its citizens. One of the outcomes of this is that the people of this country are less prone to protesting against the monarchy and are less affected by the recent ‘waves’ of the Arab Spring (Khatari, 2011).

Currently, compared to the industrialized countries in Europe and North America, Muslims majority countries, mostly in Asia and Africa, are obviously underdeveloped with regard to the provision of state-organized social welfare for their citizens. Although almost all Muslim countries have state-run mechanisms in place for welfare purposes – for instance state institutions for zakat (alms) collection and distribution – these are not adequate for providing comprehensive care for underprivileged citizens, as compared with the state welfare systems in industrialized countries. With regard to the Middle-Eastern countries, John Gal and Rana Jawad (2013, p. 250) argue that the social welfare aspect of the
governance has been neglected in this region in modern times: “social policy has never really played a central role in public policy or in national development planning”.

Revising the term ‘new-old’ (coined by John Madeley to explain the current role of religion in European politics) with the argument that religious influence in European politics is an old and continuous phenomenon, Jawad (2009) claims that religion and social welfare have an ‘old-new’ relationship in the Muslim majority Middle-Eastern region. She thus opposes the common sociological idea that religion, which is primarily concerned with faith and rituals, is not concerned with issues of social justice and rights, which are generally considered as secular notions. She attempts to establish a strong relationship – an old and continuous one – between religious motivation and practical social welfare work in the Arab nations. Through studying social welfare provision in Lebanon, she argues that the religious welfare organizations are among the most active in providing help for the needy. She also demonstrates that these social welfare provisions have impacted on the political thought of the general population to a great extent in Lebanon. Although Lebanese Islamic political movements were included in her study, the primary focus was on all sorts of non-governmental social welfare organizations.

Non-governmental social welfare in Muslim countries has recently been receiving attention in academia. In the Muslim-majority countries in the African region, issues of private versus public social welfare organizations are explored, especially in Sudan, Morocco and Senegal. Additionally, Islamic social welfare organizations in Nigeria and Ghana have been studied from different perspectives. In a book edited by Holger Weiss (2002), several writers examine social welfare provisions in these countries and claim that private religious social welfare organization has a more ‘solid foundation’ in African local Muslim societies, through different religious institutions such as Sufi orders and charitable religious educational institutes, than does public or government involvement in social welfare provision. In fact,
the weak economic condition of their governments has resulted in the growth of ‘Islamic economics’ in many African countries. Holger also asserts that state failure to provide adequate welfare in many African countries, just as in many other Muslim countries throughout the world, has resulted in the rise of Islamism, an ideology ideally claiming to bring “demand of ‘social justice for all’ which, according to the propagators of Islamism as well as Islamic economics, would materialize through an Islamic welfare system, a system, which only an Islamic state would be able to establish” (Weiss, 2002, p. 15). However, his focus of discussion was on the theoretical place of zakat in Islamic social welfare and he did not provide any empirical evidence of this phenomenon occurring in African countries. In this context of theoretical explanation, Rudiger Seesemann (2002) presents a different case study of Sudan, where the government has been controlled by the Islamists since the military coup in 1989. He states that the Islamist government has been propagating a religious argument that the hardship experienced in this worldly life will result in more rewards in the hereafter, while claiming that the West (particularly the former British colonial rule) is responsible for the economic underdevelopment of the country. Moreover, while failing to provide adequate welfare to the poverty-stricken Sudanese victims of war and natural disasters, the government has spent most of the ‘welfare’ revenue for military purposes, providing financial support to fighters and the families of ‘martyrs’.

In the case of Iran, Kevan Harris mentions that the country has achieved notable development in matters related to literacy, education and the alleviation of poverty, achieved through its economic growth before the 1970s. The 1979 Islamic revolution did not hinder welfare development; rather, the new regime successfully managed to overcome the economic crisis experienced during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980 to 1988. Moreover, it managed to establish a strong welfare state, with primary health care and housing provision, that resulted in a scarcity of non-government welfare organizations in the country (Harris, 2010).
This claim concerning Iranian welfare development is supported by Eric Hooglund’s (2008) argument that the revolution in Iran facilitated a power shift from the secular and Western-oriented elite class to the clergymen and technocrats of middle-class and lower-class origins. This new political leadership has proven beneficial for the rural poor of the country.

Regarding Muslim majority countries in Asia in general, John Esposito (2008, p. 4) excellently summarizes his observations regarding the Islamic political movements’ roles and involvement in social welfare activities in those countries:

Governments and opposition movements appeal to Islam to enhance their legitimacy and mobilize power support; Islamists or Islamic activists (sometimes popularly referred to as fundamentalists) engage in political and social activism. Some have won elections as mayors and parliamentarians and served in cabinets and as prime ministers. Others have created strong social movements that are effective institution builders. They have created new institutions in civil society, offering education, along with legal and social welfare services, and they have established Islamic banks, insurance companies, publishing houses, newspapers, and web-sites. A small though deadly minority of religious extremists use violence and terrorism in attempts to destabilize or overthrow regimes.

As a result of the inadequacy of government social welfare support, there are a large number of private and non-governmental welfare organizations working in the Muslim countries of Asia and Africa. Most of those organizations have religious affiliation, claiming to be Islamic charitable organizations or non-governmental organizations. Beginning from the mid-twentieth century, Islamic political parties have also become increasingly involved in such social welfare activities. In the following sections, the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism in general and the political branch of Islamic revivalism in particular, along with the social activities of those political movements will be reviewed, with the aim of explaining the emergence and existence of the Jama’at in Bangladesh as a social welfare providing entity.
ISLAMIC REVIVALISM: A CALL FOR RELIGION-BASED DEVELOPMENT

It is a common phenomenon among religions that some groups engage in renewal and reform from time to time as a way of returning their religion to its purer form. This revivalist thought and engagement usually attempts to revive the roots and origins of the religion according to religious scriptures (Peters, 2010, p. 70). In the very early stage of Islamic history, Umayyad caliph, ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (682–720), is considered as the pioneer of religious renewal. This is because it was he who first re-established the governance of the early Islamic era, the period of the Prophet and the subsequent four ‘rightly-guided’ caliphs, during a time when a lavish monarchy ruled the powerful and expanding Muslim state. Another prominent revivalist in Islamic history was Abū Ḥāmed al-Ghazāli (1058–1111), who, through his scholarly works, successfully reduced the conflict between orthodox Islamic studies and philosophical thought.

The idea of Islamic revivalism has its roots in the religious scriptures. As narrated by Abu Huraira (R), the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was reported to have said that Allah promised that every hundred years He would send someone to renovate the religion (Hadith No. 8592, Al-Hakim, p. 567). According to general Muslim theological opinion, the explanation of this Prophetic Tradition is that the concept of ‘renovators of the religion’ does not necessarily mean that someone will perform miracles, or inflict a state of dependency on a person with a certain set of characteristics. Rather it implies the need for continual effort to ensure that religion advances with the progress of time, and that this task could be led by an individual or a group of individuals or even by the state (Al-Asqaalani, 1959, p. 295; Al-Dhahabi, 1921, p. 180). Simultaneously, the importance of the development of society in a collective sense is given emphasis here. Finally, every Muslim is responsible for striving towards progress, in addition to there being some people who are able to lead this endeavour and bring about greater changes due to the divine assistance they receive.
It is noteworthy that this Prophetic Tradition was interpreted by Mawdudi in a way that opposes some traditional interpretations. His flexible interpretation of this *Hadith* (Prophetic Tradition) does not confine itself to a specific timeline, the beginning or the end of the calendar century. Nevertheless, no century, according to Mawdudi (Maududi, 1963, pp. 32-33), will be devoid of people who will stand against ‘ignorance’, remove all kinds of impurities from the body of Islamic practice, and re-establish Islam according to “its original form and spirit”. He also asserted that this task of ‘rejuvenating Islam’ is not necessarily specifically the responsibility of one individual and only once a century; rather, it “may imply a single person, a group of persons or even organisations of people” (Maududi, 1963, pp. 32-33). In explaining this Prophetic Tradition, Mawdudi clearly opposed the traditional interpretations and attempted to increase the significance of the organizational practice of Islam, which he considered to be one of the basic objectives of Muslim life.

To place the concept of Islamic revivalism in a contemporary context, it can be seen that a very complex set of understandings and interpretations has evolved around it. While some scholars, such as Jamal al-Din Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, have explained this phenomenon in a positive way, others, such as Muhammad Qutb and Abul Ala Mawdudi, have emphasized problematic areas relating to contemporary Muslim socio-political spheres. Although both sets of scholars agree that there is persistent conflict between Islamic ideology and Western modernity, their interpretations of these two terms differ and they even use different linguistic terms in connection with them.

Additionally, the modern-day process of Islamic revivalism is manifested in the endeavours of Muslims to survive the socio-cultural challenges that have primarily been imposed throughout the centuries of the civilizational paradigm shift from the East to the West. The experience of Western colonial rule in recent centuries has further accentuated this urge for self-development in many Muslim countries, where religion has also been identified...
as one of the decisive factors behind geo-political conflicts. The quest for development has resulted in a focus on different areas of Muslim societies, such as spirituality, reformation of religious knowledge and practices, education, political power and economics. Interestingly, some Muslim revivalist intellectuals have proposed the adoption of modernity to varying degrees into Muslim societies. In the context of increasing tension between liberal Western and traditional Islamic principles and practices in the nineteenth century, it was their desire to emphasize the societal development of Muslims, supported by the modern Western knowledge, rational thinking and individual independence that had become features of Western civilization by that time (Browers, 2013; Kurzman, 2002; Rahnema, 1994; Rane, 2010). Therefore, they are usually labelled as ‘reformers’ rather than ‘revivalists’. Several terms are employed in the study of different trends of Islamic movements and their implications often overlap. In general, the term ‘modernist’ is used as a synonym of ‘reformer’. On the other hand, the Jama’at is considered as adhering to the ideal of re-establishing Islam through a primary focus on politics; this trend is often seen as political revivalism, fundamentalism, and sometimes resurgence.

The concept of Islamic revivalism becomes more diverse when a developed understanding is reached with the emphasis on different focus areas, and the local experiences of various Muslim communities in different parts of the world are taken into consideration. Furthermore, to many scholars, religious Islam and the secular historical

47 Tasawwuf and Tablighi schools of thought are examples of focusing on spirituality as well as ascetic and humble living with the objective of reviving Islam in society.

48 Focus on education, politics and economics and similar modern social issues in the Islamic revival is a recent trend which was propounded in the late eighteenth and the twentieth century by scholars like Jamal al-Din Afgani, Muhammad Abduhu, Mawdudi, Syed Qutb and Muhammad Iqbal.

49 Modern Islamic reformists, such as Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Muhammad Abduhu, Rashid Rida and Jamal al-Din Afgani, considered this approach as the roadmap for the development of Muslim societies.

50 As mentioned earlier, ‘revival’ in contemporary Islamic studies implies an urge for development on the foundation of original religious scriptures and practices. However, when Muslim leaders are called ‘reformists’ it implies that their call for development has a primary focus on development itself.
progress of society are not two distinguishable issues; rather they both evolve around identical human issues.

In any discussion of Islamic revivalism as a model for the development of Muslim societies, the economic aspect of the development is an unavoidable issue. According to Umar Chapra (1998), the emerging trend of Islamic revival poses a need to enquire about the quality of Islamic development and the possible role of Islamic teachings in supporting this development using the existing resources of the Muslim countries, in order to reduce macroeconomic imbalances in those countries. Islamic revivalist movements’ involvement in social welfare organization is certainly a very significant aspect of this economic relationship with the society in which they are located. However, the broad phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism is articulated by Jan Ali from three different perspectives: the socio-economic and political perspective, the historical-cultural perspective and the defensive reaction to modernity perspective. According to the first view, Islamic revivalism is an outcome of discontent and grievance. The second analysis focuses on “a positive relationship between success of Islamic societies and government”, while the third explains Islamic revivalism as the attempt to purify Islam from ‘foreign accretions’ derived from modernity (Ali, 2012, pp. 23-24).

To sum up, revivalism is a perpetual part of Islam (as in any other faith) which began in the early era of Islamic history. Various Muslim scholars and leaders attempted to reform religious practices, emphasizing different aspects of their religion, according the needs of their times and places. In the modern age, Islamic revivalism was pioneered by several religious personages. Among them, the early phase included Shah Wali Ullah Dehlawi (d. 1762) in India, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1787) in Arabia, Uthman ibn Fudi (d. 1817) in West Africa and Muhammad al-Sanusi (d. 1859) in North Africa. Their common aim was to revitalize Islamic practices in community life, in an era when most of the Muslim
communities around the world suffered under colonial rule. In general, they did not focus on confronting the colonial rulers; rather, their priority was educating the masses and inspiring them to return to practising religion in their lives.

In the following decades, Muslim scholars increasingly became aware of the backwardness of Muslim communities with regard to their cultural, social, political and economic conditions. During this phase, prominent revivalist scholars, such as Jamal al-Deen Afghani (d. 1897) in Asia, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (d. 1898) in India, Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905) in Egypt, Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi (d. 1944) in India and Said Nursi (d. 1960) in Turkey, advocated the reform of educational and religious practices, while some of them strongly emphasized an approach to integrating modern knowledge, especially science, into Muslim education. To them, cleansing religious practices or developing education was the aim of religious revival. With these scholars focusing completely on religion and education, some others adopted a critical approach and blamed Western civilization for the decline of Muslim societies. Religious scholars, such as Syed Qutb (d. 1966) in Egypt and Abul Ala Mawdudi (d. 1979) in India and Pakistan, theorized a call for ‘establishing Islam in every aspects of life’, which sees religion as being able to perform its obligatory function only when the society is ruled by it. Therefore, this new trend has its central focus on politics as the way to gain governance and establish Islam. This focus was described by Milton-Edwards as “the agenda of Muslim renewal or revival centred on both a personal and political dimension to identity. Islamic revivalism was apparent not only in increased religious observance of rites such as Ramadan, mosque building, Muslim dress and customs and prayer, but was translated into political and social action around Muslim perspectives of governance, civil society, economic reform and law” (Milton-Edwards, 2014, p. 55). The former trend is recognized as the apolitical trend of modern Islamic revivalism manifested through religious movements such as the Tabligh Jama’at or educational institutions such as
Aligarh University. The latter has come out as the political trend of Islamic revivalism. This study focuses more on the social welfare activities organized by groups espousing this political Islamic revivalist trend.

THE NOVELTY OF SOCIAL WELFARE PROVIDED BY ISLAMIC POLITICAL PARTIES

The absence of state-managed social welfare in Muslims countries has meant that the management of social welfare has been assumed instead by private enterprises (both individual and collective), religious and secular charity organizations, NGOs and political parties. One of the curious aspects of this framework is the undertaking of social welfare provision by Islamic political parties, extending their reach beyond conventional political activities. This is now a common phenomenon, with Islamic political parties playing a significant role, globally, in organizing social welfare. The organization of social welfare by contemporary Islamic political parties needs to be examined and understood, in order to recognize its significance in Muslim societies. Due to its novelty, this phenomenon of social welfare has yet to be studied intensively. However, there are scholars who have initiated research in this area in some Muslim countries. Furthermore, the concept of social welfare and its organization by various authorities, including governments, in the modern world is also pertinent here. The following section will survey and evaluate relevant literature on Islamic politics and social welfare, with the aim of building a foundation for this research. Works on this topic will be critically reviewed and information gaps will be assessed.

Indonesia, with the largest Muslim population of the world, has seen the rise of Islamic political movements’ participation in social welfare activities. Among a dozen Islamic political parties, Partai Kedilan Sejahtera (PKS, Prosperous Justice Party) acted as the
frontrunner in this regard. The PKS is appraised as “an Islamic political party par excellence with a solid and cohesive membership. It has acted not only as a formal political party, but also as a movement providing wide-ranging social services” (Latief, 2013, p. 181). In 1999, PKS established an organization named PKPU (National Humanitarian Agency), exclusively for carrying out social welfare activities. The PKS in Indonesia and the Jama’at in Bangladesh have aspects of great similarity. Both parties adhere to the ideology of political Islamic revivalism and both are organized through strictly defined membership ranks. In the same way that the PKS formed PKPU, the Jama’at established ISWCC (Islamic Social Welfare Council Chittagong) in 1977 (which is the subject of the primary case study of this research). However, Hilman Latief (2013) concluded that in Indonesia the intense social activism by the Islamic political parties is an outcome of the Islamization of the urban middle class.

A similar finding, with small variations in connection with the social welfare activities of Islamic political parties in the Arab region, was reported by Clark (2004b). In her book, *Islam, Charity and Activism*, she illustrates the client–provider relationship in the activities of Islamic social welfare organizations in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen. Her primary argument is that the Islamic social welfare institutions are strengthening the horizontal ties between the service providers and the middle-class service consumers in these countries. This strong relationship provides great political benefit for Islamic parties. In this process, as she argues, the vertical tie between the service providers and the poor who, unlike the middle-class, receive free services, is given less attention in the activities of Islamic social institutions (ISI), especially in Egypt. She mentions that though the poor receive numerous benefits from ISIs, the ‘sense of shared meaning’ is weak or nearly absent. Therefore, she concludes that the social services administered by Islamic organizations are mostly benefiting people other than the poor, while “the poor are neglected or, more accurately, alienated from
the Islamist social and political vision” (Clark, 2004b, p. 38). Both Latief and Clark recognize
the significant role of middle-class Islamic activists in organizing social welfare provision in
Indonesia and Egypt, with Latief identifying the poor class as the beneficiary in Indonesia,
while Clark found that the middle-class consumers were receiving the most from these
welfare activities in Egypt.

Political aspects of Islamic social welfare activities are identified by Quintant Wictorowics and Suha Farouki from a very different perspective in the case of Jordan. The
country lacks an open democratic polity, being ruled by a strict royal family through a
parliamentary monarchy, but Jordan nevertheless has several Islamic parties. Among them,
the most influential one is the Islamic Action Front (Jabhat al-Amal al-Islami), a political
wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, that has ideological similarities with the Jama’at in
Bangladesh. However, Jordanian law strictly prohibits any relationship between social
welfare and political activities, by stating that social and welfare activities can only be
organized to provide social services without any intention of financial gains or other personal
gains, including political ones. Therefore, although Islamic social organizations and political
parties such as the Islamic Action Front have interlinking interests and passive
communication, they do not formally interact with each other. In the context of this apolitical
nature of Islamic social welfare activities in Jordan, Quintant and Farouki claim that those
activities have a political nature that “lies at the symbolic and discursive level”, instead of
having a direct association with any political parties (Wiktorowics & Farouki, 2000, p. 686).

It is also important to mention that Islamic humanitarian organizations are
increasingly accused of being associated with terrorist funding. For instance, Hamas (Islamic
Resistance Movement), an ideological offshoot of Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, was
originally formed in 1987 as a non-profit religious and charitable organization. It entered into
politics in 2006, winning a landslide victory in the national election. Jacqueline Benson
(1999) mentions that, according to a rough estimation, 95 per cent of Hamas’s activities are associated with social welfare and religious work, whereas 5 per cent have terrorist affiliation. Such multifaceted political organizations are generally regarded by Western governments as terrorist organizations. With the global political situation moving rapidly towards general hostility, and with increasing political instability in particular areas, many Islamic political parties, such as Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, are now held responsible for their ties with armed terrorist activities. Interestingly, all of those organizations are now becoming increasingly active in providing humanitarian aid in the conflict-ridden areas of the Arab world.

One example of social welfare involvement by a recognized terrorist organization is found in Pakistan and studied by Samina Yasmeen. She claims that an organization named Jamat-ut-Da’wa, an offshoot of the banned terrorist organization, Lashker-e-Toiba, has received acceptance in society as a social welfare organization, and that this has been possible “due to the state’s failure to meet the needs of its citizens, including the provision of education and relief and rescue efforts after natural disasters” (Yasmeen, 2012b, p. 408). State failure has also created a similar context in Bangladesh, where government welfare has proved to be inadequate. However, in Bangladesh, there is no evidence of any extremist Islamic organization’s involvement in systematic and organized social welfare provision. The reasons and motivation behind this phenomenon of non-government social welfare provision in the Muslims countries are examined by Fulya Apaydin. According to her analysis, based on research on Turkey, Sudan and Germany, existing literature on this topic has adopted two explanatory approaches. She calls the first one a ‘cultural approach’ which highlights the religious motivation of Islamic charity works. The second is a ‘political approach’ that highlights the political opportunities achieved through social work by the ‘nonstate organizations’ in seeking “change in political governance structure and/or formal and
informal rules of political completion introduce new opportunities” (Apaydin, 2013, p. 208).

In the case of the Jama’at in Bangladesh, most of the the social welfare organizers claim to engage in welfare activities due to their religious motivation. However, in reality, it was the political motivation to mobilize popular support for their political cause that was strongly in evidence during the fieldwork for the present study (see Chapter 7).

CONCLUSION

One of the intrinsic features of Islam is the close and active relationship of religion with governance and social administration. Islamic political parties, in postcolonial Muslim countries, are striving to establish Islam at a state level, according to their own various interpretational ideologies. The primary identity of the Jama’at in Bangladesh is that it represents the transnational political trend of Islamic revivalism. Hence, it is imperative to understand the notion of Islamic revivalism to appreciate the Jama’at. The deep inner urge to attain ‘worldly’ development for the Muslim Ummah (Arabic: lit. nation, community) has certainly influenced the involvement of these religion-based political parties in their several socio-economic activities.

The Jama’at, the brainchild of Mawdudi, one of the leading religio-political revivalist scholars of contemporary times, has become, in Bangladesh, a major religion-based political party that has a systematic welfare provision program in operation. Similar activities of comparable organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine or PKS in Indonesia, have been studied from various perspectives. No study was found which focused on a case study of the Jama’at in Bangladesh. However, some researches (although very few due to the novelty of this phenomenon) in other parts of the world have revealed several examples of cause and effect with regard to the social welfare
involvement of Islamic political parties. Underdevelopment of the state economy, religious motivation and political opportunity mobilization were among the major causes in most places. In both Egypt and Indonesia, studies found that middle-class people took a significant role in both organizing and gaining benefit from this welfare work. However, such Islamic political parties have a track record of successfully exploiting this social welfare resource in their political process, for example, in Turkey, Egypt and Palestine where Islamic parties have even formed governments. On the contrary, even though it became involved in social welfare activities a long time ago, in the late 1970s, the Jama’at in Bangladesh is currently facing a structural decline in both politics and society. This research will attempt to explore the social welfare activities of the Jama’at as well as the reasons behind the current situation.

Islamic activism in general is a very wide and indefinite term, that may include both the large-scale and the smaller and more personal religious activities. Individual endeavours to achieve divine blessings through helping others, or small-scale community development projects with religious motivation occur in every society. There are also several national, and even global, Islamic organizations and NGOs in various countries, actively working for social welfare purposes. In conducting this research, my primary objective is to study the social welfare provision run by the branch of Islamic activism which might be designated the political trend of contemporary Islamic revivalism. Although this has not yet been widely researched, most studies in this area have used a social movement theory approach (for example, Clark’s (2004b) study on the Muslim Brotherhood’s social welfare programs in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen) to analyse its characteristics and development. In Bangladesh, the Jama’at clearly utilizes social welfare provision as a significant avenue of resource mobilization. The following chapter, based on the literature reviewed and the elements of the field research, will clarify the best and most suitable theoretical framework for this study.
CHAPTER 5: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

A social phenomenon is best examined either through existing theories, or through developing new theories, if none yet applies to that phenomenon. Theories assist in systematically interpreting and explaining the data as well as predicting future outcomes. In order to understand a particular human behaviour or enterprise, one theory or a combination of theories constructs a theoretical framework. This research will also employ its own theoretical framework to explore and understand social welfare provision as organized by the Jama’at in Bangladesh.

There are numerous definitions of a theory with regard to its workability in the social sciences, as rendered by various scholars. According to Kerlinger (1986, p. 9), “[a] theory is a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions and propositions that presents a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena”. Mangal and Mangal (2013, p. 35) defines a theory as “a set of logically consistent statements comprising of a number of laws, principles or beliefs capable of explaining and predicting a phenomenon”. Schweigert (2011, p. 13) explains the theory as “a set of related statements that explain and predict phenomena. The statements used in a theory can be laws, principles or beliefs”. An overview of the definitions quoted above clarifies three basic objectives of a theory: to describe, explain and predict. Therefore, we may deduce that a theory is a collection of interrelated concepts and principles that can describe, explain or predict a phenomenon by comparing similar variables.

This chapter aims to describe the theoretical framework of the present study. To establish the background, and to comprehend the history and development of this scenario, it
will examine major theoretical approaches as applied to the study of the social welfare activities of Islamic political parties in the Muslim world. Further, it will draw a framework and justification of the researcher’s own theoretical device, a synthesis of two social movement approaches – resource mobilization theory and political process theory – employed to examine welfare programs of the Jama’at in Bangladesh.

According to Charles Tilly (2004a), any of the following four approaches could be employed in applying a theory to a sociological phenomenon:

1. Subsuming the phenomenon of interest directly under the theory
2. Borrowing an informative metaphor without insisting on strict correspondence
3. Using the well-developed theory to pose telling questions about the phenomenon, but not supposing that the answers would remain the same
4. Extracting certain mechanisms and processes from the existing theory, rather than adopting the theory as a whole, in the hope that some mechanisms and processes work in the same way within the new domain

In studying the social welfare organization of the Jama’at in Bangladesh as a social movement, it is difficult to follow the first approach of incorporating the phenomenon entirely with any particular existing theory. Islamic political revivalism is a very modern socio-political trend, for which various scholars have employed various explanatory theories using different theoretical frameworks. Since less academic work has been done focusing expressly on the social welfare sector of this political trend, this academic void is more intense, and it is not helpful to resort to metaphorical usage without a meticulous analysis. Therefore, this research will integrate suitable theories and test the observed phenomenon against the conditions and assessments of those theories. This approach is chiefly a synthesis of the third and fourth strategies proposed above. Before discussing the relationship between a suitable theoretical framework and the subject matter, and its relevance, it is necessary to examine the major social movement theories.
SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORIES

Defining social movements is an arduous task, as several trends have been developed among scholars, stressing different aspects of this collective action. In the 1960s, grievance was considered as the primary cause of social movement formation. This ‘deprivation’ approach is evident in Ted Robert Gurr’s account: “relative deprivation is the basic precondition for civil strife of any kind” (Useem, 1981, p. 263). In the following decades, most scholars started looking at social movements from a political perspective. For instance, David West defines a social movement as an extra-institutional political organization which attempts to “generate social power in order to achieve collective goals for their common benefit” (West, 2013, sec 1.1). Similarly, Jeff Goodwin and James Jasper assert “social movements are conscious, concerted, and sustained efforts by ordinary people to change society by using extra-institutional means” (Goodwin & Asper, 2015, p. 3). This simplified political concept of a social movement is refined in the exposition introduced by Charles Tilly, where he challenges its being used loosely to indicate ‘all sorts of popular causes’. According to Tilly, a social movement is a distinctive form of contentious politics that combines three major elements: “sustained campaigns of claim-making, an array of public performances, and repeated public displays of worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment (WUNC)” (Tilly, 2006, p. 183). Sidney Tarrow also adopted this contentious politics approach, but focused on wider characteristics in defining social movements as “collective challenges, based on common purpose and social solidarities, in sustained interaction, with elites, opponents, and authorities. This definition has four empirical properties: collective challenge, common purpose, social solidarity, and sustained interaction” (Tarrow, 2011, p. 9).

Unlike North American scholars, European academics focus on the cultural aspects of social movements. Johnston and Klandermans note elements such as ‘organizations, resources, structural preconditions, networks and rational choice’ as parts of a ‘backward’
and conventional definition of social movement, whereas ‘customs, beliefs, values, artifacts, symbols and rituals’ are elements forming a progressive definition of a social movement. To them, a social movement is a collective action that responds to cultural change and domination. Different cultural elements, such as ‘symbols, values, meanings, icons and beliefs’, interact reciprocally with social movements: they shape the movement and are shaped and reshaped by the movement (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995). Emphasizing cultural aspects, Hank Johnston (2014, p. 23) attempts to define a social movement in a wider sense as follows:

The social movement concept is a high-level abstraction that embraces complex sociocultural phenomena whose boundaries, ideally, are drawn by how three basic dimensions of social life converge: (1) the structural-organizational sphere; (2) shared ideational and interpretive elements; and (3) networked performances that confirm, elaborate, and give life to the first two.

To summarize, social movements are an informal collective action that deals with cultural elements of social life, based on contentious political thought. A social movement may result in several social movement organizations. For instance, the environment movement in North America includes different organizations such as Greenpeace, Earth First, and the World Wildlife Fund. Other movements have received greater attention in contemporary times in Europe and North America, such as the movements organized around issues of civil rights, armed conflict, women’s rights and suffrage, environment, workers’ rights, global justice and so on. Although social movements have occurred all over the world – mobilization of opinion against the caste system in British India, or internal resistance to South African apartheid, for example – Western sociologists naturally developed their concepts based primarily on the social movements in their own part of the world. Later, their attentions expanded to include social movements worldwide, and various types of social movements in different countries were explored. For instance, in a book first published in 1989, several urban social
movements in Peru, Argentina, India, Pakistan, South Africa, Brazil, Chile and the Philippines were studied from various perspectives (Schuurman & Naerssen, 1989).

Currently, social movements constitute a major and crucial area of research in sociological study worldwide. Charles Tilly, considering social movements as a part of the modern democratization process, views them as being non-existent three centuries ago. This new form of politics was instigated by the Western Europeans and North Americans in the late eighteenth century. From there it later spread to other parts of the world (Tilly, 2004b). However, this Western approach ignored the human nature of collective contentious protest that was certainly manifested in all ancient civilizations – as it was also in recent Islamic civilizations within different empires and monarchies. The Kharijite movement, for instance, in the late seventh century, rejected the authority of government and the wider community and demanded their own extreme interpretation of socio-religious justice.

In studying the development of social movement theories in modern sociology, Steven Buechler sketched three conceptual phases, contributed by six prominent personages, as the classical sociological approaches that preceded the genesis of modern social movement theories. First, Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924) (who revised Marx’s work) are generally not considered as social movement theorists, but their analysis of class alienation and capital exploitation, as having a deep-rooted relationship with workers’ grievances, certainly made a major contribution to social movement theories constructed by the Western sociologists in the late nineteenth century. Second, Max Weber (1864–1920) and his student Robert Michels (1876–1936) (who later elaborated Weber’s work) produced some core ideas regarding collective action, such as the explanation of the causes of social action and the importance of the ideas behind it, or the typification of social authority and charismatic leadership discourse which contributed to later social movement theories. Third and finally, Emile Durkheim’s (1858–1917) work on social integration and religious ritual,
followed by Gustav Le Bon’s (1896–1960) crowd analysis had rich implications in the later study of social movements (Buechler, 2011, pp. 9-55).

In the twentieth century, development of social movement theories occurred in two geographical locations in different ways. North American scholars emphasized collective behaviour and resource mobilization approaches, whereas new social movement theory originated in Europe. Suzanne Staggenborg noted that the Chicago school approach of collective behaviour, founded by Robert Park and Ernest Burgess in the 1920s and later developed by scholars such as Herbert Blumer, Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian, focused on participants’ action in social movements. This approach branched out into mass society theory, which considered collective behaviour as an intense reaction to social isolation, and relative deprivation theory, which emphasized grievance as the primary reason for participants’ engagement in collective action. In the 1970s, the North American proposition, steered by scholars such as William Gramson, Dough McAdam, John McCarthy, Mayer Zald and Charles Tilly, shifted to a resource mobilization and political process approach. This approach argues that socio-political connectivity, rather than social isolation, and the availability of various moral and cultural resources cause social movements to occur. Eventually, these two approaches created a synthesized model that explains social movements as ‘political entities aiming to create social change’. On the other hand, various European social scientists, such as Jurgen Habermas, Alberto Melucci and Dieter Rucht, studied new types of social movements in the post-industrial era, primarily focusing on issues like new types of structures, constituents, identities and cultural innovations (Meadam, 1996; Mccarthy, 1996; Staggenborg, 2008; Zald, 1996).

In sociological terms, social movements are originally informal, and mostly without organizational structures; rather, they are formed by interactions between different actors of collective actions with a distinct collective identity, acting to resolve or influence clearly
identified political and/or cultural conflicts (Porta & Diani, 2006). However, modern social scientists have extended social movement theories to examine and study various aspects of formal and organized religious, political and social organizations. In the case of social welfare provision by the Jama’at in Bangladesh, the actors are identified in two phases. The broader phase includes different social welfare organizations that work under the umbrella of the mother organization of the Jama’at. In a narrower context, the participants in these social welfare activities, both the providers and recipients, play roles in shaping the whole phenomenon. However, this welfare provision is administered through an organized structure, with some informal interactions between the actors, which facilitate their motives and agendas. In the following section, theoretical approaches to studying similar organizations will be investigated.

**ISLAMIC ‘POLITICAL’ REVIVALISM**

Contemporary Islamic revivalism is an umbrella concept that could be broadly categorized into two types with regard to ideological interpretations and affiliations with political activities of the state or the society. Political Islamic revivalism, commonly referred to as ‘political Islam’, is generally explained by its advocates and ideologues from a historical-institutional point of view. To conceptualize this phenomenon, religious scholars apply texts from the two primary sources of Islamic knowledge: the Qur’an and the Sunnah (Prophetic Traditions). Further, historical arguments are built on the exegeses of the Qur’an (Tafsir) and of the Sunnah (Sharh) and the life of the Prophet and consequent pious generations (Sirah). These are followed in the hierarchy of importance by other secondary sources, such as consensus (Ijma), analogical reasoning (Qiyas), juristic discretion (Istihsan), objectives of the Islamic law (Maqasid al-Shariah), public interest (Masalih al-Mursalah), local tradition (Urf) and so on. In this approach, all of these elements contribute epistemologically to justifying
and outlining the formation of Islamic politics in the modern world. Several Muslim scholars are notable in this regard. For instance, Mawdudi argued that the fundamentals of the Qur’an demand that a Muslim obey the political authority of Islam, regardless of time and place, and that the real understanding of the terms employed in the Qur’an to embody the essence of the religion uniformly advocates political activism in varying degrees in order to establish Allah’s rule in this world (Al-Maududi, 1996). However, this interpretation by Mawdudi was criticized by scholars of the influential Deoband school of thought, the oldest and most orthodox Islamic educational ideology on the Indian subcontinent, for being an overly political interpretation of religion. According to Manzoon Nomani, one of the renowned Deobandi scholars, Mawdudi’s excessive focus on politics resulted in sedition, offering “legitimacy for the atheists” and shaking “the very foundation of Islam” (Ahmad, 2009a, p. S156).

Syed Qutb expressed views similar to Mawdudi’s, but with more focus on confrontation between Islam and anything non-Islamic. He considered a governance or scheme of life that is guided by any system other than the authority of Allah as *Jahiliyyah* (ignorance). Therefore, an active movement, rather than a mere theory, to consistently confront this ignorance is a social necessity in Muslim communities. According to Qutb, “Islam is not merely a belief, so that it is enough merely to preach it. Islam, which is a way of life, takes practical steps to organize a movement for freeing man” (Qutb, 2006, p. 85).

Participation by Islamic political parties in the democratic political system is an extraordinary and recent phenomenon experienced in post-colonial Muslim countries. In the twenty-first century, this Islamic political activism is considered as one of the mainstream trends of global Islamic revivalism and has naturally attracted intense academic attention from socio-political analysts worldwide, attempting to understand its characteristics, motives and developments. Islamic revivalism itself is a broader concept, that encompasses a
multitude of active approaches to reviving the basic spirit of Islam and employing it in modern life. Social welfare programs organized by Islamic political parties are a much more recent phenomenon, yet to be extensively investigated. An exploration of the literature revealed some relevant research, involving case studies of Islamic welfare programs in several Muslim countries, such as Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Yemen, Lebanon, Sudan and the Congo. A similar case study in India, which is a Muslim-minority country, was also found. However, not one piece of thorough research has been done into such social welfare programs in Bangladesh.

Theoretical explanations of Islamic political movements, in many cases, are subject to an ‘essentialist’ approach. The ‘essentialist’ reading of Islamic political movements reduces this complex social process to certain narrow and limited essential features. While it explains Islam as a cultural process, this approach creates a discontinuity between traditional Islamic history and the modern world. This results in a perception of the governance of Islam in particular, and the religion of Islam in general, as having been limited to times and communities of the past, and thus as being sometimes incompatible with the diverse expressions of the modern age (Tugal, 2002). Unlike Mawdudi, who considers Westernization and secularization within modernity as problematic, and not modernity in general, scholars such as Bernard Lewis and Bassam Tibi have adopted the essentialist approach by presenting an over-simplistic dichotomy between Islam and modernism, which supposes that there has always been a clash between Islam and ‘modern’ civilization. From this approach, contemporary Islamic religious movements are seen as an outcome of constant conflict – a reactionary force emerging from the Muslim world as a rebellious response towards all aspects of modernity. Islamic political activism is viewed as a system that is fundamentally incongruous with modern concepts such as democracy (Tibi, 2008), and in this viewpoint, Islam is considered as a cultural faith system that may become modern with
necessary reformation. Though he mentions “a record of helping the suffering urban masses” as being a trait of Islamic democratic political forces in the Middle East, Bernard Lewis, one of the famous modern-day advocates of the essentialist approach, also viewed those Islamic political parties as mostly authoritative and intolerant of the opposition (Lewis, 2010, p. 87). However, Lewis’s approach, towards Islamic revivalism in general and Islamic political revivalism in particular, is questionable, as he has previously stated his view of the Islamic legal system, as being the core of this religion, as inherently problematic, rigid, anti-modernity, and anti-democratic (Lewis, 2010, p. 40).

This ‘essentialist’ detachment between Islamic historical background and the contemporary social realities of Muslim communities left a void in this discourse. A ‘contextualist’ approach attempted to fill this in and explain the phenomenon of Islamic political activism through different contexts of Muslim societies. Yavuz (1995) considered interplay between internal and external socio-political factors as the basic reason for the development of Islamic political consciousness, and thus he argued that the relationship of Islam to ethnic identities is contextual. Similarly, Turner (2003) illustrated Islamic political action as a response emerging through the synthesis of foreign intervention and internal crises in Muslim societies. Criticizing this contextualist trend, Husnul Amin stated that “the problem with these explanatory models is the explanation of the Islamist phenomenon subject to external conditions. This approach undermines the inherent explanatory power of Islamist ideas and worldviews” (Amin, 2010, p. 40).

SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORIES AND ISLAMIC POLITICAL PARTIES

Islamic revival, including both political and apolitical notions within revivalist thought, is itself a developing concept in modern academia, which is yet to be studied thoroughly. For
instance, in studying a non-political contemporary Islamic movement, the Tabligh Jama’at, Ali (2006) looked at contemporary Islamic revivalism through a combination of theories of church-sect, deprivation and Mawdudian Islamic revivalism. The dearth of academic literature in this field is a major reason for the shortage of relevant theories.

Social movement theories have recently been brought into the discourse to appraise Islamic political movements. Among them, ‘relative deprivation theory’ and ‘collective behaviour theory’ are frequently cited, as they emphasize features such as the defensive reaction in Muslim political identity which emerged in Muslim societies in response to several factors, for example, the experience of Western colonial rule, socio-economical discontent, or generalized beliefs. The theory of ‘relative deprivation’, a term first used by Samuel A. Stouffer in 1950, “assumes social movements are the outgrowth of the feeling of relative deprivation among the large numbers of people who believe they lack certain things they are entitled to – such as better living conditions, working conditions, political rights or social dignity” (Tischler, 2011, p. 426). Relative deprivation theory constitutes a partial representation of collective behaviour theory, which became the dominant paradigm among sociologists by the middle of the twentieth century for explaining social movements. According to Herbert Blummer, although everything social might be regarded as collective behaviour, spontaneous and unregulated behaviour is different from that governed by norms and traditions. Several sociologists, mostly from the Chicago school, introduced various models and elements of collective behaviour, and as a whole, this is generally considered as the classical model of social movements. Collective behaviour theories are also referred to as strain or breakdown theories, because they generally regard social movements as the outcome of social disruption, mostly due to deeply felt grievance, rather than being part of a standard political process (Buechler, 2011; Morris, 2004; Staggenborg, 2008).
Jean-Paul Carvalho considered ‘raised aspirations, low social mobility, high income inequality and poverty’ as the key determinants of emergence of a religious revival. He argued that there are two factors that contributed to the development of contemporary Islamic revival: the dilemma of raised but unfulfilled aspirations among the educated middle class, and discrimination and poverty suffered by the lower middle class (Carvalho, 2009).

In evaluating the political development of the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan, Isani (2011) discusses another aspect of social movements. Whereas a social movement usually experiences four stages in its lifetime – emergence, coalescence, bureaucratization and decline – apart from repression, co-optation, success or complete failure (Christiansen, 2009), according to Isani, the Jama’at in Pakistan arose with an enormous potential, but failed to follow its own theoretical ‘masterframe’ and therefore eventually declined.

Previous research has analysed diverse trends of Islamic movements from the social movement theory perspective. In the seminal book, 

Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach, edited by Quintan Wiktorowicz, Hafez (2004) studied the Algerian Islamic movement, Hafez and Wiktorowicz (2004) studied the Egyptian Islamic Movement, Robinson (2004) studied Hamas in Palestine and Schwedler (2004) studied Islah Party in Yemen. All of these scholars used different social movement theories, although they focused on the organizational aspects of Islamic political parties rather than on their social welfare activities. For instance, Hafez (2004, p. 38) asserts that the anti-civilian violence adopted by the Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA)) in Algeria is an element of the radicalization process of this group that is ultimately “connected to the broader political process of violent contention”. In an attempt to fill the theoretical vacuum of academic study regarding the Islamic Resistant Movement (Hamas) in Palestine, Robinson (2004) argues that this party is intelligible through a combination of its political perspectives, resource mobilization process and cultural framing in its local context. In the Turkish context, Islamic
revivalist movements are defined by Yavuz (2003) as a utilization of cultural and political ‘opportunity spaces’.

While the key phenomenon of political Islamic revivalism suffers from a lack of theoretical explanation, certainly the social welfare activities of modern Islamic political parties have received even less attention. Nevertheless, there are a few works that have studied social welfare activities of Islamic political movements in different countries. For instance, Janine A. Clark (2004a; 2004b) studied social welfare provision by Islamic activist groups in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen, using resource mobilization theory, and argued that the Islamic social service institutions are successful social movement organizations by their nature and characteristics. Rana Jawad (2009) analysed political and non-political social welfare activities, including those of Hizbullah, in Lebanon and concluded that social service is both instrumental and of intrinsic value to the role of religion in society.

With regard to the Jama’at in Bangladesh, its primary identity is as a political party. Besides this, it also extends its activities into different socio-religious aspects of people’s lives. The Jama’at certainly adheres to the global trend of Islamic political organizations that strive to establish Islam at a state level, in line with their own methodologies and understanding of religion. Although the Jama’at, in its party website, claims to be a ‘spiritual party’ (Jamaat-E-Islami, accessed on 10/05/2013), in reality, its emphasis on political activities represents a different trajectory. As a result, the Jama’at is primarily recognized as a religion-based political party in Bangladesh. However in the party website (Jamaat-E-Islami, accessed on 10/05/2013), it defines itself as follows:

Jamaat e Islami is not a conventional religious, political, social or cultural party only. Jamaat performs as a spiritual party as spiritual life is important in Islam. Jamaat performs in the political arena because Islamic law can’t be implemented without political force. Jamaat concentrates upon social service and social reform as strong emphasis has been given on
social service and social reform in Islam. In this sense, Jamaat-e-Islami is a complete Islamic movement.

The party website also clearly articulates that establishing Islam in society (Iqamat-e-Deen) is a duty upon every Muslim, following the life of the Prophet, which necessitates a united purpose in life – hence the movement. In order to achieve this stated objective, the party attempts to combine a ‘top-down approach’ (positioning Islam as the driving force of its society) with a ‘bottom-up approach’ (training individuals to be more devoted and pious Muslims). The party website states:

It was not possible even for a prophet to accomplish this duty individually. So, prophets executed a movement making them united who came under the shade of faith. It is tough to lead life as a complete Muslim in a society where Islam is not in force. And, the task of establishing the Deen of Allah is in no way possible without being united. (Jamaat-E-Islami)

There are other Islamic movements, such as the Tabligh Jama’at, that clearly emphasize the ‘bottom-up approach’, with the aim of establishing Islam in society by changing the individuals in it. There are also institutions, such as religious educational ones (Madrasah), local Islamic preaching organizations, religious figures known as the Pir, with a large number of followers, and Sufi institutions, all of which have their own place in Islam in Bangladeshi society. All of these religious authorities negotiate among themselves with various degrees of interrelation and confrontation, thereby maintaining the place of religion in Bangladeshi society. In this multifaceted context, the endeavour undertaken by the Jama’at to organize social welfare programs points to its aim of reaching out to the diverse range of the masses. Along with the religious motivation behind it, this is an absorbing case for socio-ethnographic investigation.

Institutionalized social welfare provision acts now as a major element in the whole program structure of the Jama’at. In the Bangladeshi political context in general, and concerning the topic of social welfare provision in particular, this phenomenon can be better
understood through a combination of resource mobilization and political process theories. Although concurrent religious motivation is obvious in the social welfare provision organized by the Jama’at, this party is also striving to achieve political improvement, one of the tools certainly being the strength of its organizational effort in social welfare. Staggenborg (2008) mentioned several aspects of resource mobilization theory, such as the central role of tangible and intangible resources in organizing collective action, the role of movement entrepreneurs and their ability to mobilize the conscience of constituents, and the role of formal or informal structures and their influence on a movement’s development. In the study of the organization of social welfare provision by a political party, these elements will play a crucial role in the examination of empirical data. Moreover, the inseparable political identity of the providing organization requires investigation into the role of political opportunities in the mobilization and outcome of this phenomenon. Later sociologists have worked an approach synthesizing these two theories, called the ‘classical social movement agenda’ due to its significance, which “views social movements as political entities aiming to create social change” (Staggenborg, 2008, p. 18). The motives and outcomes of the social welfare program of the Jama’at will be examined through the elements of this integrated approach.

As a political party, the Jama’at was in a coalition government for a five-year term, and was in opposition most of the time in the history of independent Bangladesh. Like any other political party, it has its own agendas, activities and participation in the political arena of the country. However, in addition, it runs a compulsory, ongoing education program among its activists and supporters all over the country. In order to remain within the organizational circle and move up the leadership ladder, every Jama’at activist has to continue studying the movement’s literature. This literature, primarily based on the writings of Mawdudi and other like-minded Islamic authors, includes vast subject areas such as different branches of Islamic knowledge, politics, society, economics, ethics, and so on.
Apart from these political and educational aspects of the Jama’at, it makes another major contribution to Bangladeshi society through its social work and welfare services.

The Jama’at-administered charity programs are of different types, ranging from distributing relief to the victims of natural disasters and donating winter clothes to the homeless and the poor, to providing financial and material assistance to the needy, such as orphans and widows, on various religious occasions and festivals. Nevertheless, the primary focus of this study is on two well-established and continuous welfare channels: charity medical services and education management for the poor. Other occasional welfare activities, such as one-off or casual financial and material assistance, relief distribution, winter clothes distribution and so on, will also be included in the data analysis (see Chapter 7). The network of social welfare activities in Bangladesh, as run by the people associated with the Jama’at, is unparalleled in its nature and magnitude. None of the other conventional political parties, or even smaller Islamic political parties, has such organizational emphasis on carrying out social services for the underprivileged class. To date, no academic study has been conducted concerning this distinct socio-political feature of the Jama’at in Bangladesh. This social movement aspect of a political party needs to be understood through appropriate social movement theories. According to Porta and Diani (Porta & Diani, 2006, pp. 5-6), there are four core sets of questions to be posed in social movement analysis, as follows:

The first set of questions refers to the relationship between structural change and transformations in matters of social conflict. Can we see social movements as expressions of conflicts? And what conflicts? Have there been changes in the main conflicts addressed by social movements? And along what line? Another set of questions has to do with the role of cultural representations in social conflict. How are social problems identified as potential objects of collective actions? How do certain social actors come to develop a sense of commonality and to identify with the same ‘collective we’? And how can specific protest events come to be perceived as part of the same conflict? Where do social movement cultures and values originate from? A third set of questions addresses the process through which values, interests and ideas get turned into collective action. How does it become possible to
mobilize and face the risks and costs of protest activity? What are the roles of identities and symbols, emotions, organizations, and networks, in explaining the start and persistence of collective action? What forms do organizations take in their attempts to maximize the strength of collective challenges and their outcomes? Finally it has frequently been asked how a certain social, political, and/or cultural context affects social movements’ chance of success, and the forms they take. What does explain the varying intensity over time of collective violence and other types of public challenges against power holders? Do the traits of political systems and their attitudes towards citizens’ demands influence challengers’ impact in the political arena? How do protest tactics and strategies change over time, and why?

Based on this approach, the current study will enquire about the reasons working behind the emergence of social welfare provision organized by the Jama’at in Bangladesh, the problems and prospects it has experienced during the last three and a half decades, major social welfare activities and real outcomes.

For this, a synthesis of resource mobilization theory and political process theory will be employed to test and validate the empirical data. With regard to the resource mobilization aspect, individual participants in the social movements are considered as the rational actors. They, both providers and recipients, will be interviewed in order to understand their perspectives. Resources of this social movement, both tangible (funding, infrastructures, activities) and intangible (commitment, motivations, experiences) will be investigated. Staggenborg (2008, p. 17) mentions that “studies have suggested that organizations with more formalized or bureaucratic structures are better able to sustain a movement over time, whereas informal organizations are better at innovating tactics and taking quick action in response to events”. The structural framework and strategic development of social welfare activities of the Jama’at will also be scrutinized to understand whether this statement is in line with the reality of the party or not. From political process perspectives, the role of a favourable or adverse political environment of the country in developing this phenomenon will be examined, along with the opportunities and outcomes it has provided to the providers
and recipients. Finally, a combination and comparison of the abovementioned topics will ethnographically explore those social welfare activities in Bangladesh for the first time and provide answers to the question: why has a religion-based political party become involved in social welfare provision in a Muslim majority society in the context of Bangladesh? This analysis will eventually lead to the examination of the success and failure of social welfare activities of the Jama’at in an attempt to find out how and to what extent the Jama’at has succeeded or failed in mobilizing this innovative resource to gain political opportunities and what are its similarities with and differences from major Islamic political parties in other countries.

CONCLUSION

Similar movements from around the world, for instance, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Welfare Party, have been studied by scholars, with emphasis on their social welfare organization. An investigation into the social welfare activities of the Jama’at in Bangladesh will add a novel and valuable perspective to this field of knowledge. Moreover, the answer to the primary question of this research – why and how does a religion-based revivalist movement involve itself in social welfare organization in a secular state? – will introduce a case study which can be compared with its counterparts in other Muslim societies. In this process, as will be shown in Chapters 7 and 8, the most important question to be posed is: what went wrong with the Jama’at in Bangladesh, that it has failed to mobilize this valuable resource of social welfare provision (unlike several Islamic political parties in some other countries) even after four decades of operation? It is hardly possible to make up for the dearth of academic studies in this field with just one research project; nevertheless, this study will also seek to understand the resource mobilization process of the Jama’at, employing a social movement theory approach, to provide an empirical foundation for future studies. The
findings of this research will fundamentally depend on data collected through a combination of fieldwork conducted over a period of seven months, a three year correspondence with the movement and academic research. The methodology adopted during this research, along with its justification and implication, will be discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 6: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology that was adopted in carrying out this research on the social welfare programs of the Jama’at-e-Islami, the largest religion-based political movement in Bangladesh. The place this movement holds in national and international politics was discussed briefly in the previous chapter’s literature review, and will be elaborated in Chapter 6. In addition, a reference to the movement’s social and political status will be made here followed by a rationalization of the methodology. Although it is the fourth largest of the major political parties of Bangladesh, with regard to public support as well as votes received in national elections\(^{51}\), the Jama’at is certainly the most discussed political party of the country. Continuous and conflicting negotiations between left-wing secularist supporters and right-wing nationalists in the Bangladesh political arena have created a unique opportunity for this Islamist political movement. This movement is the most debated in the national media and in intellectual political discourses nationwide due to its controversial role during the war of liberation in 1971.\(^{52}\) Furthermore, the recent global emergence of Islamic revivalist political activism in various Muslim countries has added strength to the significance of the Jama’at.

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\(^{51}\) In the 8th National Parliamentary Election of Bangladesh, held on 1 October 2001, the Jama’at was the third most successful major party, winning in 17 constituencies (4.28 per cent of the total vote cast) among the total of 300, whereas Bangladesh Nationalist Party won in 195 (40.97 per cent), Awami League in 58 (40.13 per cent) and Islami Jatiya Oikya Front in 14 (7.25 per cent). In the 9th National Parliamentary Election, held on 29 December 2008, the Jama’at came in fourth in terms of total votes received, with 4.70 per cent of the total. Awami League received 48.03 per cent, BNP received 32.50 per cent and Jatiya Party received 7.04 per cent in this election. Opposition parties, including the Jama’at, boycotted the latest, the 10th National Election, which was held on 5 January 2014 (Commission, 2002; Commission, 2012b).

\(^{52}\) On 1 August 2013, the High Court of Bangladesh cancelled the registration of the Jama’at under the National Election Commission, which means the party is barred from contesting in the national elections. The Wall Street Journal mentioned this as being ‘styles after Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood’ (Al-Mahmood, 2013). However, major opposition parties boycotted the following national election, and local leaders of the Jama’at participated in several local government elections afterwards without bearing the party’s name.
Social welfare activities of the Jama’at comprise diverse events and involve many different people. Their experience and opinions were investigated during seven months of ethnographic fieldwork, which included one-to-one semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and extensive participant observation. The purpose of the fieldwork was to explore the social welfare activities of Jama’at-e-Islami in Bangladesh, along with the primary aim of gaining an understanding of the reasons behind the espousal of such systematic social welfare programs by a religion-based political movement in a Muslim majority secular state. This chapter describes the tasks undertaken in achieving that objective during the fieldwork, along with those conducted before it and afterwards. It is necessary to outline the methods adopted for gathering and analysing data, as well as the reasons that those specific methods were applicable, in order to apprehend the arguments of this thesis and relate them to the methodologies of the research. Therefore, this chapter presents a brief description of the field and the major events during the fieldwork, an explanation of the qualitative research method and the data gathering process, a clarification of the data analysis phase, and a description of the participants in the study.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

In investigating this little-understood phenomenon, the most important question of the study will be: why does a religion-based political movement provide organized social welfare services in a secular state? In order to answer this, other issues need to be addressed. Understanding the organization of this welfare provision requires ethnographic investigation of the existing welfare services, objectives and motives from the point of view of the providers, as well as the experiences and perceptions of the recipients.
The service provider studied in this research, namely the Jama’at, is a political
movement that has almost always been an opposition party in Bangladeshi politics. The only
exception was the five year period between 2001 and 2006, when it was part of a coalition
government led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Since the Awami League came
into power in 2008, the Jama’at has been facing the worst time in its history. The movement
has been struggling against a very adverse government for the last six years. One of the
central leaders of the movement was recently hanged by an internationally controversial and
condemned war crimes tribunal and most other central leaders of the Jama’at are waiting for
the gallows. Moreover, the high court of Bangladesh has recently revoked the registration of
the party under the Election Commission, which has resulted in its being temporarily
suspended from participating in the elections. This long history of facing oppression has
made the people of the Jama’at protective and secretive by nature when discussing internal
issues. Given such a mindset, proper research data collection from the people involved
requires time consuming narrative discussion. With regard to the recipients, most of those on
this welfare program are from the underprivileged class, and illiterate. Many were reluctant to
give information for various reasons, including shame of their social stigma, fear of losing the
welfare assistance and various negative experiences.

From all of the above, it is clear that the nature of this research demands studying
people’s lived experiences in their own life-setting, rather than removing them from their
familiar context. As Berg (2004, p. 7) says, in relation to this issue:

Qualitative research properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings
and the individuals who inhabit these settings. Qualitative researchers, then, are most
interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these
settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social
roles, and so forth.
In social research, the quantitative paradigm is dominated by positivist views, considering observation or experience as the only means of achieving objective knowledge in a scientific way. On the other hand, the qualitative paradigm is influenced by relativist and social-constructionist approaches. The relativistic approach consists of several variants, which are generally referred to as qualitative research. It predominantly recognizes that the reality of the social world cannot only be determined through natural scientific approaches, as the subject matter of this area, human beings, carries heterogeneous values, ideas and meanings attached to their social reality, and those social constructions are subject to diverse interpretations (Robson, 2011).

More importantly, the core research question of this study, that is, the inquiry into the reasons behind the existence of such welfare provision in Bangladesh, should be addressed by an interpretive and descriptive approach. Another important fact to consider when analysing the social welfare program of this religion-based political movement in Bangladesh is that it is a very new area of study. An extensive search of the literature revealed some recent research on the topic with regard to Islamic movements in countries like Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Turkey and Indonesia, as described in the literature review in Chapter 2. Due to the scarcity of literature on the subject, this present research is important in explaining this social phenomenon. The particular characteristics of the study and its context as outlined above together point to the need for a carefully designed qualitative method (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, pp. 2-3; Rossman & Rallis, 2003, pp. 8-12). I found this to be the best data collection method for this research as it suits the naturalistic genre of qualitative inquiry.

This study also seeks to analyse the subjective understanding of the people involved in any specific social welfare program. This is a complex process occurring in a real place and time. Experiencing and analysing a great deal of detailed communication will lead to an understanding of the contexts and current reality here. The qualitative method is appropriate
“because thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive worlds are involved, the researcher needs to understand the deeper perspectives that can be captured through face-to-face interaction” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 53). Initially, the data gathering method of this research work consisted of semi-structured interviews only. Later during the fieldwork, it included focus group discussions and participant observation, as these were found effective in collecting data, particularly from the receivers’ class. This additional method will be described in detail in the relevant sections of this chapter.

DATA COLLECTION

The fieldwork began on 7 August 2012 and ended on 5 March 2013. Altogether, almost eight months of activities were dedicated to gathering the data about the social welfare activities of the Jama’at in Bangladesh. The first two weeks of this period were significant as this was the second half of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. During this month of religious significance, it is common practice for Muslims around the globe to increase their charitable activities, and this usually intensifies during the last ten days of Ramadan. Similarly, in Bangladesh, it is an important time of the year for the Jama’at with regard to their social welfare organization. Several charity programs are organized at this time, as well as the collection of a large portion of the party’s welfare funds for the year. Everyday throughout this first two weeks of the fieldwork, I attended several charitable events, for example, programs for distributing zakat (alms), iftar (breakfast food) and Eid clothes, organized by

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53 “An in-depth interview is a one-to-one method of data collection that involves an interviewer and an interviewee discussing specific topics in depth” (Nasr, 2005, p. 112).

54 The Arabic word ‘Eid’ means festival. Muslims have two annual religious festivals: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Here the word suggests Eid al-Fitr, which is celebrated at the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting. The other Eid, Eid al-Adha, is celebrated, basically by sacrificing animals, during the Arabic month of Dhul-Hijjah, the time of annual religious pilgrimage.
the Jama’at in different areas, and spent time in their city office in order to become acquainted with their welfare activities during this peak period.

A small-scale pilot research study was conducted, by me, prior to the acceptance of my research proposal through confirmation of candidature in the university. In this phase I communicated with at least 20 people relevant to the research and had a thorough correspondence with them through emails and telephone calls. This communication confirmed my previous understanding that the Jama’at is earnestly emphasizing its social welfare agenda following the example of other successful Islamic revivalist movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Justice and Welfare Party in Turkey. This correspondence also revealed some achievements of the movement in Bangladesh, accomplished through its social welfare agenda, as well as some shortcomings experienced by it. This initial research helped in producing the research proposal, supported by some empirical data. In 2010, during the planning phase prior to the fieldwork, I had also communicated with several central and local Jama’at leaders by telephone regarding the project, thus ensuring their cooperation. However, by the time I arrived in Bangladesh, on 7 August 2012, the political situation had changed suddenly. Top Jama’at leaders had already been arrested between January and July 2010, accused of committing war crimes during the liberation war in 1971. A controversial International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) had been set up, but there was a general perception that the trial would take years. However, the government began a crack-down operation on the opposition activists in mid 2012. On 6 December 2012, the magazine, *The Economist*, published a report on leaked Skype conversations and email correspondence between the chief judge of that ICT and an expatriate Bangladeshi lawyer living in Belgium. According to the report, these conversations and emails indicated that the upcoming verdicts of the ICT had been pre-determined by the government and that the whole procedure was being carried out for political gain, not justice. Later, on 9 December 2012, a
Bangladeshi national newspaper, *Amar Desh*, published the transcript of those conversations, which resulted in the newspaper being banned and the editor arrested. Despite the fact that audio recordings of those conversations became available on Youtube and other internet sites, the government went ahead with the tribunal, even after major flaws were exposed in its activities, in addition to the leaked conversations.

During this time, police also started to arrest Jama’at leaders and activists indiscriminately, even going so far as to arrest their family members, including women and children. In addition, their residences and business buildings were vandalized and anyone with a beard or wearing a *burqa*55 or any other form of Islamic dress was harassed in the street and sometimes arrested. All of these events meant that the situation in the country was extremely unstable during the period of my fieldwork. As the Jama’at was the focal point of this turmoil, people associated with the movement became more secretive than ever and extra care was taken to protect their activities. Despite the earlier guarantees of cooperation, upon my arrival the Chittagong City Jama’at office told me that the party would not allow me to conduct any interviews, record anything or make any personal enquiries. I then had my first meeting with the president of Chittagong City Jama’at in Dhaka and he asked me for an elaborate explanation of the research project. On the following day, he gave me a full interview and allowed me to interview only city Jama’at leaders and intellectuals. He also gave me permission to participate in social welfare activities as an observer and to take notes. Hence, I adopted the participant observation method from the beginning, in order to gather research data, along with conducting regular informal conversations with the service providers and recipients. I joined several welfare events organized by the Jama’at in Dhaka and Chittagong as a passive participant without any active role, and talked to people freely to gather information through informal discussion. After three weeks of building this rapport, a

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55 A *burqa* is a long and loose dress for women, covering them from head to feet and usually black in colour, worn by many Muslim women.
pattern of participating in tasks was fixed, according to the field conditions. In an average week, I tried to maintain a schedule of spending the working hours of two days in the charity schools, two days in the charity clinics and another day in the main office of the ISWCC. As a participant observer, I discussed several topics with the service providers (the organizers, teachers, doctors and other staff members of those institutions) and with the recipients (the students, their guardians and medical patients). All the time I took short field notes in such a way as not to make others uncomfortable, and wrote elaborated accounts of those notes from time to time.

After two and a half months of fieldwork activities within these limited stipulations, I was finally allowed to conduct interviews and focus group discussions with local activists and recipients of welfare activities, on 14 October 2012\textsuperscript{56}. However, the participant observation method had already proved to be useful in my understanding of the nature of this welfare provision and in gathering ethnographic data. I therefore continued using this method along with interviews and focus group discussions till the end of my fieldwork on 4 March 2013.

**PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING STRATEGIES**

Participants in this study were predominantly divided into two categories, according to their association with the party’s social welfare activities: providers and recipients. Both categories comprised different subgroups. The providers included Jama’at leaders, activists, leaders who were specifically responsible for party welfare organizations, doctors, teachers, and staff working in the welfare organizations. The recipients included medical patients receiving treatment in the charity clinics, parents of the poor students studying in the charity schools.

\textsuperscript{56} As a formal documentation of this permission, the President of ISWCC approved an application written by me. A copy of that application is added to the Appendix.
and recipients of one-off or occasional welfare and financial or material assistance organized by the Jama’at. Their connection with the research topic and the roles they played in the welfare activities will be discussed in later chapters. Recipients’ names have been altered to protect their identity, and the identity of some providers, usually the activists at field level, is also protected in this research for their safety. All such people were given pseudonyms. However, some providers, city-level leaders and intellectuals consented to the use of their real identity. Their designations in the organizations and their roles in the social welfare activities are widely known to the public and it is impossible to hide their names when the specific post is mentioned.

The recipients of the social welfare provision comprised different types of people. Initially, two interviews were attempted with the recipients. Later, focus group discussions were found to be a better method for collecting data from them. A brief description of all participants is given in the Appendix.

The sampling process is important in determining the extent to which findings can be generalized (Bouma & Ling, 2005, p. 113). In order to achieve maximum useful participation from all subgroups listed above, a combination of two non-probability sampling methods was exercised. Quota sampling was used to ensure participation by all subgroups. Quota sampling is defined by Berg (2004, p. 36):

A quota sample begins with a kind of matrix or table that creates cells or stratum. The quota sampling strategy then uses a nonprobability method to fill these cells. The researcher may wish to use gender, age, education, or any other attributes to create and label each stratum or cell in the table. Which attributes are selected will have to do with the research question and study focuses.

57 Non-probability sampling is a process that does not include a random sampling process. Rather, the samples are selected by the researcher, with consideration of sample group characteristics. In order to ensure representation of different types of participants from the providing and receiving classes of this welfare organization, I had to communicate with them and consider their roles in the organization.
Among the subgroups, the snowball sampling was adopted to reach maximum potential for reliable sources of information. Snowball sampling technique is defined by Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011, p. 136) as follows:

The snowball sampling technique is used when you need to gain access to certain types of people or to a particular group, but you know only a few people who fit the category and there is no publicly available listing. In this technique you gather your sample by first approaching those who are available and ask them to nominate others that they know, and then they nominate still others.

In this way, I was able to classify the necessary participants from the different subgroups before approaching them. I communicated with people from all those subgroups and, along with procuring their participation, sought information from them about others who would fit into those categories.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

One-to-one interviews were one of the primary methods of data collection in this research work. They allowed me to accumulate significant information about the experiences and opinions of relevant people. In-depth interviews with the welfare providers associated with the Jama’at and its charity organizations, medical centres and schools, deepened my understanding of their history, activities, motivation and other aspects of their social welfare organization. Interviewing those key informants was of great value in data collection for this study as they were able to provide specialized knowledge and recount experiences regarding the research topic. The following descriptions clarify the significance of these interviews.

Key informants are individuals who possess special knowledge, status, or communication skills, who are willing to share their knowledge and skills with the researcher, and who have access to perspectives or observations denied the researcher through other means. (Gilchrist & Williams, 1999, p. 73)
Whereas social researchers speak of ‘respondents’ as people who provide information about themselves and thus allow the researcher to construct a composite picture of the group those respondents represent, informants are members of the group or other people knowledgeable about it who are willing to talk about the group per se. (Rubin & Babbie, 2011, p. 358)

Interviewing is considered one of the principal data collection strategies of the qualitative research method, delivering a great degree of flexibility and a wide range of findings. It is defined as “a conversation with a purpose” (Berg, 2004, p. 75), or “a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent” (Babbie, 2010, p. 320). Among all kinds of interviewing techniques (for instance, structured, semi-structured, unstructured, non-directive, focused, telephone, computer-assisted or web-based), the semi-structured interview enables greater freedom of queries. However, although very helpful and flexible in terms of data collection and robust inquiry, this method has some disadvantages as well. For instance, lack of careful consideration in interviewing might result in bias and a less comprehensive interpretation, excessive time consumption and so forth (Robson, 2011). However, the diverse characteristics of the participants and the naturalistic nature of the field data in the working setting of the activities providing social welfare in this study required intensive enquiry, and theoretical as well as practical advantages and disadvantages were considered carefully prior to the application of this method in the fieldwork.

When designing this research project, it was estimated, based on the approximate number of working people in the field, that around 20 key informants among the service providers should be interviewed, in order to gain a deep insight into the whole cultural process. As this social welfare provision by the ISWCC is primarily based on three charity clinics and three charity schools, I intended to interview one organizer from each institution, with the addition of two more participants from the healthcare sector and two more from the education sector. Altogether, the plan was to include five policy-making Jama’at leaders who
were involved in the political activities of the movement, five who were directly responsible for organizing the movement’s social welfare activities, five activists and staff working in medical welfare and five working in educational welfare. However, the ratio of these four groups did not remain exactly the same during the fieldwork, primarily for two reasons: political circumstances made it difficult for many people to communicate, and, during the sampling process in the initial correspondence and participant observation phases of the fieldwork certain people from different subgroups were deemed more important to the interviewing process. After interviewing a few participants who worked especially in the charity clinics and schools, as teachers, physicians and staff members, and having informal and lengthy discussions with some of them in the initial phase of the fieldwork, it was clear that their experiences were similar. Although they represent the direct contact point with the recipients, they do not have any active role in the decision making system or welfare organization except for doing their jobs in return for a monthly salary. Therefore, I increased the number of Jama’at leader and activist interviewees who were found to play major roles in organizing those charity schools and clinics. Finally, a total of 19 informants participated through the semi-structured interviews, among whom 5 were policy-making leaders of the movement, 8 were leaders having particular roles in welfare organizations, and 3 were from medical clinics and three from charity schools.

However, this reduction in the number of specialized informants from the medical and education welfare sectors had no negative effect on the data collection process. Rather, increasing the number of informants who were leaders of the welfare organization resulted in my receiving more inclusive data regarding both the medical and education sectors, as well as on other occasional welfare activities. Although the country’s political unrest was a major hinderance to the fieldwork, important and necessary key informants were finally interviewed after several attempts. Moreover, 7 among 19 interviewees were contacted afterwards for
another follow-up interview, as they were found to be relatively more resourceful in providing valuable data for the study.

The interviews in this fieldwork carried an element of risk and some appointments were cancelled for fear of sudden police intervention. One of the important interviewees, the city branch Welfare Secretary of the Jama’at, changed his appointment three times, being in hiding and unable to move, and he was unwilling to inform me about his whereabouts. I was finally able to interview him in the office of a private school where he came to visit his son; he told me beforehand to be there. He was arrested by the police the following week like many others, as police from all local police stations were deployed to arrest any active Jama’at leaders and activists at that time. Another local activist of the Jama’at was killed, three months after I interviewed him, in a major clash in the city that took place between the Jama’at activists on one side and the police, together with the Awami League activists, on the other. I learnt of this incident over the phone after the completion of my fieldwork, while discussing some follow-up aspects of the research questions with another interviewee. All the Jama’at leaders, activists, doctors, teachers and staff interviewed were male, as there are no females involved in providing these social welfare activities. When asked about this lack of a female presence, the Secretary of the Jama’at explained:

Although they are not visible, this does not mean that they are not involved in the activities of our organizations. We have a significant level of organizational activities among the women in our society. You will find it is mostly woman among the beneficiaries of our social welfare programs. However, our social tradition and religious practice is the reason for their absence in public life, or in administering any public event. An autonomous women’s committee organizes our activities for the women, which are mostly educational such as organizing lectures and study circles. They also reach out to the poor women in different suburbs and inform them about our social welfare programs, whenever it is deemed necessary and appropriate.

58 A detailed description of the secretary of Chittagong City Jama’at, is added in the Appendix in the List of Participants.
In the interviews with the service providers, the major focus was on their motivation and objectives as organizers of the social welfare programs. They were also asked to describe their activities, experiences and the obstacles and problems that they face in organizing social welfare. Most of the interviewees had been given, beforehand, a list of major themes and issues to be discussed, in case they wanted to prepare for the interview. However, the interviews were never limited to those themes or questions only. Rather, the list helped in providing the basis for the conversation, and the discussion with every interviewee was extended beyond those themes according to his personal interests, focuses and experiences. In this fashion, the following primary themes acted as the starting point for open-ended discussions with the interviewees:

- When and how were you introduced to the Jama’at?
- What is your experience with the social welfare programs of the movement?
- What are the activities that could be named as the social welfare programs of the movement?
- What is the history of the development of these social welfare activities of the Jama’at?
- Why do you or your movement organize this social welfare provision?
- What does the Jama’at achieve from these activities?
- What are the problems faced by the Jama’at in organizing these activities?
- What are the expectations of the organizers and their future plans?

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

Focus group discussion is another useful data gathering strategy in applied social research, which is now widely used in market and political research in order to recognize participants’ opinions in a social context. It involves interviewing a small number of people together, usually from 5 to 15, instead of one person alone, and can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured, like the one-to-one interview technique. According to Berg (2004), this strategy
has been in practice since World War II, when governments used it to study the effectiveness of radio programs among the members of the armed forces. However, Robson’s (2011) view is that this technique existed in the 1920s, when it was employed in market research, in order to identify various aspects of consumer behaviour. With the advancement of technology, web-based or online focus group discussion is a common practice nowadays.

A significant portion of the data in this study was derived from discussion with the respondent participants, who were social welfare recipients, most of whom were financially dependent on the social welfare provision to partially meet their basic needs. Initially, the semi-structured interview technique was determined as the method of collecting data from the recipients. Upon obtaining permission from the organization, after spending the first two months as an observer, I arranged interviews with some patients of the charity medical centres and parents of the children studying in the charity schools. After several interview attempts it became clear that the predominantly underprivileged people remained hesitant in giving information even in a very private setting. There was a fear among them that the interviewer was somehow associated with the welfare providing organization, and that revealing any negative experiences might jeopardize any help they might receive. Even after reassuring the participants of confidentiality, only two of the ten interviewees honestly expressed their opinions; the others remained, understandably, silent and hesitant. This was particularly noticeable with the female interviewees, whose social behaviour and religious habits became an obvious hindrance in collecting data through one-to-one interviews.

When separate focus group discussions were organized, twelve female patients of a charity medical centre participated, with the support of a female organizing assistant. At the beginning of the discussion, one of the officials of the welfare providing organization reassured the participants that this data collection session was being held exclusively by the researcher, who was not associated with the organization. It was also reiterated to them that
the collected information would never be traced back to any of the individual participants, and that the disclosure of their opinions would not harm them or create problems regarding future welfare services. This assurance was followed by a lively three hour discussion and valuable information was gathered.

Although the political situation in Bangladesh was not favourable for organizing those focus group discussions freely and openly, I was able to conduct two more such discussions; one involved eight fathers who had children studying in two charity schools of the Jama’at, and the other involved bridegrooms whose marriages had been conducted in a welfare event organized by the Jama’at. This was a dowry-less mass marriage, where 30 underprivileged couples were married with the assistance of the Jama’at. Among these, ten grooms agreed to participate in a focus group discussion.

In the focus group discussions, the men were asked various questions, based on the themes of this research. Moreover, many questions and topics were derived on the spot during the discussion, as had happened also during the semi-structured interviews with the providers. Basic questions asked, which acted as the baseline in those group discussions, were:

- How did you come to know about this service?
- How was your first contact made? And what has been your been experience since then with this service?
- Why do you receive this service?
- What are the problems you have been facing in receiving this service?
- How do you evaluate the service providing organization in particular, and the Jama’at in general?
- Has this service made any significant contribution to your personal and community life?
PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

In social ethnography, participant observation is an essential method of studying the issue in its natural setting. This method originated in the work of anthropologists (Robson, 2011), when they attempted to study small and homogeneous cultures in the late nineteenth century (Tedlock, 2005). To carry out a successful ethnography, the researcher is expected to spend an extended period of time among the participants, while taking part in regular activities and observing “their joys and sufferings as a way of obtaining material for social scientific study” (Tedlock, 2005, p. 467). In this method, the observer attempts to blend in with the participants of the study and seeks thereby to become part of the observed group to some extent. There has been a long debate about subjectivity versus the possibility of objective interpretation in adopting this method as a way of gathering social data. However, it is being widely practised in the field and is claimed to be ‘scientific’, as “objectivity can be approached through a heightened sensitivity to the problem of subjectivity and the need for justification of one’s claims (Robson, 2011, p. 309).

During the whole period of my fieldwork for this study, I attended numerous welfare events organized by the Jama’at and its organic welfare organizations. In the days when no event took place, I was present in their offices, charity clinics or charity schools. I never acted as a complete participant, as I never concealed my identity as an observer. Most of the time, I was an ‘observer-as-participant’59, joining in with both providers and receivers. Furthermore, I was a ‘participant-as-an-observer’60 in a few large-scale welfare programs, such as relief distribution for the victims of natural disasters. In some other large events, I tried to stay most

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59 “This is someone who takes no part in the activity but whose status as researcher is known to the participants” (Robson, 2011, p. 323).

60 In a few events, the organizers introduced me to welfare recipients as an external researcher and asked me to sit with them on the stage. In those cases, I was not able communicate directly with the recipients. I also perceived that some of the recipients, due to their lack of knowledge about academic research, and being from a very poor class, considered me an informal part of the welfare providing organization and sought my help in getting assistance.
of the time with the recipients and attempted to understand their experience within their own circumstances.

In this research, data collected from the welfare providers was intended to explain their motives and activities, while data from the welfare recipients was intended to enable an understanding of their experiences and perceptions. Initially planned research questions were determined on the basis of personal observation at different times and a reading of the existing literature. During the research proposal phase, the questions for the two participant categories were focused on obtaining this information. Participant observation during the first two months of the fieldwork added a valuable perspective. This period included observing a range of activities, starting from seasonal and occasional welfare provision, such as distribution of clothes among the poor during the *Eid* festival, provision of financial help for the victims of a fire accident in a slum and winter clothes distribution, to regular and ongoing welfare provision, such as the operation of two charity medical centres and two other charity schools, one of which also included an orphanage. During this observation period, a good relationship of trust was developed between myself and various participant groups. In addition, valuable information and insights were achieved through informal conversations with the providers and the recipients of occasional welfare provision.

To summarize, all data was collected through 7 months of participant observation, interviews with 19 providers, 2 semi-structured complete interviews and 3 focus group discussions that involved a total of 45 recipients. All interviews and focus group discussions where consent was given were audio recorded. Additionally, I talked to around 20 welfare organizers and more than 100 recipients during this period. Rather than formal interviews, conversational inquiries were made, covering aspects of an event as they emerged. Finally, a regular journal was kept during the fieldwork, thus assuring an accurate record of relevant events and observations. This journal was, in fact, a detailed account of my field-notes
written almost every day during my participant observation activities. During the observation period, I noted down keywords, mentioned as ‘cryptic jottings’ by Berg (2004, p. 174), about conversations and events, as deemed necessary, trying to do it briefly without distracting other people’s minds or attracting any attention. I wrote a detailed description, based on those keywords, as soon as I left the field, and relevant descriptions were later developed into analytic notes during the data analysis phase.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Data collection methods for this research comprised the interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, in which the participants talked about their motives, experiences, perceptions and aspirations. All these discussions were transcribed, exactly, into Bengali texts. A literal translation into English is likely to result in a loss of the passive meanings, emphasis and implied perceptions that were realized during the discussions. Therefore, I translated necessary portions when needed, based on the audio files and Bengali transcriptions. Prior to the translation, I repeatedly listened to those audio clips and reread all the journal entries that I had written based on the field-notes.

All the raw data was transformed into meaningful understanding by thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is defined as “to construct an index of central themes and subthemes, which are then represented in a matrix. …. The themes and subthemes are essentially recurring motifs in the text that are then applied to the data” (Bryman, 2008, p. 554). According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), looking for some characteristics such as repetitions, indigenous typologies or categories, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, missing data and theory related materials are some of the basic recommendations of thematic analysis.
This data collection process resulted in the accumulation of a great amount of information. The large raw data set was organized according to different variables, such as social service providers and recipients, males and females, young people and adults, and relationship to education or medicine or both. For the coding, the descriptive mode of selecting the key words and the analytical mode of finding out the key terms were employed.

The themes used during the data analysis phase were planned and determined before the data collection phase, so that there would be coherence between the objectives of answering the research questions and the processes of data collection and analysis. However, some new insights and points of view emerged during the data collection phase, and those were taken into consideration.

**SALIENT FEATURES OF THE FIELD AND MAJOR EVENTS**

The Jama’at organizes welfare activities in education and health through various means. A complex network of organizations keeps these services running, with the Jama’at working as the primary decision making authority. Although the movement often carries out welfare services in its own name, a larger portion of those services is channelled through its sister organizations, due to strategic reasons. By regulating welfare activities through several officially apolitical social organizations, instead of organizing them directly, using the name of the political movement, the Jama’at has been able to garner government support in the form of more funds, approval and better access to the population. By doing this, it has established several social and community organizations, all over the country. It is common knowledge that these organizations are controlled by the Jama’at, just as their officials are appointed and supervised by the Jama’at on a regular basis. One such major organization in Chittagong City is Islamic Social Welfare Council Chittagong (Bengali: Islami Shomaj
Kollyan Parishad). Besides, two other organizations work under the umbrella of the Jama’at, targeting two specific organizations in society: Islamic Labourers Welfare Federation and Bangladesh Farmers Welfare Cooperative. Regular charitable, medical and educational services of the movement in Chittagong are organized through the previously mentioned ISWCC (Islamic Social Welfare Council Chittagong).

Apart from organizing both regular and occasional welfare activities, this council has launched several ambitious initiatives, such as publishing a local newspaper, the Karnaphuli. It has also established a successfully run private university, International Islamic University Chittagong, and a medical college and hospital. As part of its welfare program, the council supervises several charity clinics, general schools, religious schools (madrasah), orphanages and an office to provide financial and material assistance to the poor.

Taking into account all the social activities of the ISWCC in particular, and of the Jama’at in general, it is possible to classify them into two categories with regard to the nature of the welfare they provide. The first category would consist of regular medical and educational endeavours, such as International Islamic University Chittagong, ISWC Medical College and Hospital and five general schools in the city. These institutions run as regular business ventures where the patients or the students pay charges or tuition fees. However, these are less than what would be charged for hospitals and schools of similar standard, in order to accommodate services for lower-income people. Moreover, these institutions also provide free services to some selected consumers who are unable to pay anything.

The second category of the services provided by ISWCC in Chittagong comprises three charity clinics, two religious schools and an orphanage, all providing free services to their poor beneficiaries. In a country where more than 76.5 per cent of the population live
below the poverty line, with less than 2 USD income per day\textsuperscript{61}, people in need of such welfare service are certainly larger in number than the ones who can afford even the minimal cost. Figure 1 illustrates this ratio, where the middle circle represents the core target subject of this research work, charitable medical and educational activities of the Jama’at by itself and other organizations such as the ISWCC. (The outer circle is included as it represents the welfare provision by the movement itself.) A comparative representation of both these categories, with emphasis on the former, is included in this thesis to better clarify the phenomenon.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1}
\caption{Classifications of the social welfare program of the Jama’at}
\end{figure}

The first significant event during my fieldwork was on the day after my arrival, in the last week of the religious month of Ramadan. A program was organized by a local unit of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\end{footnotesize}
Jama’at to distribute clothes among people in need, as a gift for the upcoming *Eid* festival celebration. There were 40 females, 25 males and more than 50 children present who received clothes.

After a few days of initial observation in a medical centre, I attended another charity event organized in a slum by a different local unit of the Jama’at. It was on the day of the *Eid*, and the unit prepared food in a field just outside the slum and distributed it among more than 400 people. Another event I attended was a dowry-less mass wedding\(^{62}\), where 30 underprivileged couples were married. Following a major fire in a slum, a program was organized to distribute help among the afflicted families. On another occasion, the city unit of the Jama’at organized a program, which they do once a year, and distributed 15 sewing machines to selected women in need, from all over the city. Most of the recipients were widowed or divorced, and this particular sewing machine distribution program aims to bring about a sustainable change in their lives by helping them to secure self-employment.

There is a perception in society that the beneficiaries of charitable welfare activities are generally poor and financially deprived people. Interestingly, the fieldwork uncovered a different situation. By means of interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation activities, it was found that there is a wide range of people from different social classes who are beneficiaries of Jama’at-run social welfare activities. Although mostly poor and underprivileged, some come from the middle and lower middle classes.

Some other unexpected findings came out of this fieldwork: for example, a shortage of medical supplies which would normally have been considered as vital to an organization of this nature, a lack in motivating the teachers and educators, and shortcomings in management

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\(^{62}\) Giving a dowry to the bridegroom is a traditional practice in Bangladesh that creates a heavy financial burden on the bride’s family, usually the father of the bride, and this practice results in several social difficulties. Islamic Farmers Welfare Federation, a sister organization of the Jama’at, regularly organizes this dowry-less marriage program on an annual basis. A detailed description of the event is provided in Chapter 7.
were discovered. There were also stories of incredible and life-changing events occurring due to the contributions of some welfare programs. These will be explored in Chapter 8.

**ETHICAL ISSUES**

The University of Western Sydney, where this thesis was undertaken, is compliant with the Australian Government standard in the matter of ethical aspects of its research works. As it is compulsory for every doctoral research project, I filled in the National Ethics Application Form on the government website and submitted it to the research office of the university on 20 July 2012. This painstaking task of completing the 32 page form was overseen by the supervisory panel. The form included various ethically essential queries, such as the detailed description of the researcher, the research project and the participants, duality or conflict of interest, probable benefits and risks to the participants, the relationship of researcher to participants, the participant recruitment process, data collection and organization methods, the consent process, storage and disposal of information, expected research outcome and so forth.

The National Ethics Application was submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee of the university, who approved the research proposal bearing the code number H9806, on 20 October 2012, with the provision that the Committee should receive an annual progress report and a final report on completion. Consequently, in October 2013, a progress report was submitted to the committee, and final progress report was submitted along with the final draft in March 2015. Ethical practices, as mentioned in the form, were maintained carefully during the fieldwork and afterwards.

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64 For a description of ethical issues to be considered in social research, please see the form on the NEAF website, and Babbie (2010, pp. 62-86), Berg (2004, pp. 43-74), and Robson (2011, pp. 194-230).
Empirical data of this research is derived from semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation. Moreover, many informal discussions occurred during the participant observation process. All participants in interviews and focus group discussions were provided beforehand with an elaborate information sheet and a clearly outlined consent form, both were written bilingually in order to convey accurate meaning, and were previously reviewed by the supervisory panel and the ethics committee of the university. To many participants, it was a new practice in the local context of Bangladesh. During my fieldwork, I came to realize that the common understanding in Bangladesh about research activities corresponds to anonymous surveys. Interviews and focus group discussions were very unusual and regarded as odd research method to most of the participants. Therefore, I tried to explain briefly how their participation would contribute in this research in places where I felt it necessary.

Regarding consent, although some of them initially hesitated to put their signature on the form, this attitude changed after the methodological aspects and ethical issues were explained. Pertinent issues such as consent to participation, anonymity of the participants, confidentiality of information, and the right to withdraw were discussed briefly on many occasions, and particularly in all focus group discussions. The participants in informal discussions or those present during the participant observation were also debriefed about those issues to ensure that they remain conscious regarding the research. Altogether, these activities made a positive contribution towards gaining the trust of the participants during fieldwork, especially considering the instable political circumstances of Bangladesh during the fieldwork.

The study involved a political party, Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami, which was facing subjugation during the period of the fieldwork from an oppressive government. However, no

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65 Information Sheet, Consent Form and Withdrawal Form are attached to the Appendix of this thesis.
discussion or issue was derived that could instigate any potential risk or harm for the participants. This is due to the scope of this research which focused primarily on the social welfare activities of this party and did not include any discussion with regards to political activities or opinions. During the time of the fieldwork, August 2012 to March 2013, government pressure was initiated through several steps such as arresting leaders and activists of the Jama’at, banning the party from participating in elections, and bringing central leaders of this party in the court of law with allegations of war crimes that occurred primarily by the Pakistani Army during the 1971 liberation war (Jalil, 2010). Despite this political tension, the social welfare activities of this group were mostly uninterrupted during that time.

The situation in the country has changed ever since, with three of the senior Jama’at leaders and another opposition leader from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party already executed by an internationally criticized crime tribunal66. Further, thousands of local leaders and activists all over the country have been killed, arrested and tortured by both police and government party activists (Pennington, 2015; Quadir, 2015). Recently as November 2015, government officials started enlisting all business and charity endeavours established or administered by Jama’at, with allegation of financing terrorism (Ahsan, 2015). No actual link between the Jama’at and the extremists has been proven so far. Although a widespread criticism of this claim as an opportunistic utilization of current global security situation is apparent (Hashmi, 2015), the welfare activities of this party are nevertheless looking at an uncertain future at the moment.

Taking all these facts into consideration, informing the participants about consent process and right to withdraw was strongly emphasized by the researcher. There was some reluctance to provide information felt from the side of some participants, however, none

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withdrew their participation during the events and during the follow-up contacts as well. Some interviewees expressed that any information about their organization will be manipulated against them. One local leader of the party told specifically that he is afraid that the information will be used by ‘Western intelligence agencies’ against the party as, according to him, any Islamic party is a vulnerable target in the war against terror, irrespective of its association or enmity with the extremists. In all instances, I mentioned their right to participate or withdraw at their own will at any time. On the contrary, some participants instead encouraged an honest and unbiased discussion about their party, and some of them were eager to inform the world about their party. I had to remain aware of all possible exaggeration and understatement at all times, by constantly cross-checking their accounts against facts in the field noticed during participant observation. The combination of distinct cultural construct of Bangladeshi society, complex and unyielding internal sphere of the Islamists situated inside that society and hostile political environment made this research difficult. Although my background as a Bangladeshi gave me a unique opportunity to gain access to this adverse situation, I tried my best to remain primarily concerned about the academic objectivity of this research and the participants’ safety.

During the final weeks of fieldwork, I had follow-up meetings with some key informants, mostly Jama’at leaders and intellectuals, and naturally the discussion about my experience and initial findings took place. I informed them about major positive and negative observations that would be analysed in detail in this study. Although some of them argued with different viewpoints, none of them denied or opposed those plausible research outcomes completely.

In order to protect the anonymity of the participants of this research, all names have been changed. Protection for the children was also observed, as no participants were under 18 years old. In the case of the charity schools students, their parents participated on their behalf.
in the study, as they were in a better position to inform me about their relationship with the welfare service providers.

Overall, there was no payment or remuneration provided to the participants of this research for their participation. In one exception, at the end of a focus group discussion, I found out that many of them suspended their work in order to participate in this research. As all of them were very poor, I provided each of them with their one day work’s worth, which is less than three Australian dollars, to compensate for their time. It was not decided or declared previously, therefore it had no bearing on the participation. However, token gifts were presented to some of the one-to-one interviewees, and light snacks were served during focus group discussions, as they are suitable with local culture. This created a comfortable environment and initiated relevant informal communication. None of these was considered or understood as any sort of return for their wholly voluntary participation.

All participation was audio-recorded and transcribed digitally. Relevant portions of texts were translated by the researcher who is a native Bengali speaker.

CONCLUSION
Taking into consideration the basic elements of the framework of this thesis, such as the research questions and the complex structure and nature of social welfare services administered by the Jama’at, as well as the diversity of the people associated with them, the qualitative method has proven to be the most suitable approach to data collection from the field. In addition to semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, continuous participant observation was a powerful tool for gaining very important insights into this social movement. Altogether, the data gathering phase greatly helped to build up essential
knowledge of this extraordinary endeavour of organized social welfare provision by a religiously based political movement in a secular state.

By discussion with the welfare providers through long one-to-one interviews and with the recipients through focus groups, a comparative understanding of their motives and experiences was developed. In addition, participating in regular welfare activities provided me with an opportunity to grasp the real complexities of this phenomenon, and, consequently, to understand it through the empirical study of relevant movement activities. After seven months of fieldwork, collected data was analysed thematically in order to approach the primary research questions, apply the relevant theory to the subject of this study and thereby meet the research objectives.

There were huge security issues arising during the fieldwork, as the movement was facing a great degree of oppression by the government. Although the social activities of the movement were slightly less affected than its political activities, it was still necessary to be very careful when collecting data. Throughout, nobody was harmed by this study and no law was broken. Ethical issues were considered with utmost priority during all phases. However, this sudden security situation of the country has a curious relationship with the topic under research.

The founding fathers of the country, leaders of a secular party, the Awami League, incorporated secularism into the constitution, in 1972, as one of the four state principles, together with nationalism, socialism and democracy. The principle of secularism was later revoked in 1977 and replaced by ‘absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah’. However, the current government, led again by the Awami League, restored ‘secularism’ in 2010 (Islam, 2013). Saidul (2011) has branded this process as ‘ultra-secularization’ and mentioned ‘massive crackdown on Islamic parties’ as one the key strategies taken by the government –
the Jama’at being the prime target in this intimidation process. All these factors will be apparent in the empirical data that lays the foundation of analysis of this case study.

The following chapters will empirically investigate the social welfare activities of the Jama’at in Bangladesh, exploring them in order to understand the reasons for and outcomes of this curious phenomenon – social welfare provision by an Islamic political revivalist movement in a secular state.
CHAPTER 7: SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAM OF THE JAMA’AT: THE ETHNOGRAPHY

This chapter studies the social welfare programs of the Jama’at, ethnographically reporting its activities and their manifestation. It explores these programs serving the social welfare agenda and their real-life implementation. It also attempts – based on empirical data derived from interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation – to critically understand these programs, as well as understand the outcomes secured by them. In doing so, the chapter presents a case study of the Jama’at’s activities in Chittagong, the commercial capital of Bangladesh, which is generally considered one of the strongholds of support for the party.

The Jama’at has established several organizations that work as its social welfare outlet alongside some welfare activities organized directly in the party’s name. The Islamic Social Welfare Council Chittagong (ISWCC), established in 1977, is the first among such organizations. This organization was the central point of study in this research. Besides this, activities of other organic welfare organizations of the Jama’at were also given attention, according to their place in the party’s overall social welfare framework. All of these activities could primarily be categorized into two major areas: 1) continuous charitable works in education and healthcare, and 2) occasional charitable works to assist the underprivileged poor. Before presenting a description of these works, a brief outline of their historical background will set the context of the current phenomenon.
SOCIAL WELFARE OF THE JAMA’AT THROUGH ISWCC IN CHITTAGONG

Prior to the British colonial era and during Mughal rule in the fifteenth century, the name of the city of Chittagong was Islamabad (lit. City of Islam). Sir William Hunter (1877) colloquially translated this Farsi word as ‘Residence of the Faithful’. This appellation was mainly due to the powerful role of religion in the society and local culture, as well as the increasing number of Sufi preachers in this region at the time. According to Hans Harder (2011), this name was given by the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb in 1666, and the previous name of this region was an Arakanese word ‘Cattala’ or ‘Cit-taut-gaum’ meaning ‘do not make war’ which was restored as ‘Chittagong’ by the British rulers in the eighteenth century. Some historians consider Chittagong Port as the early contact point with this region of the Arab traders who brought Islam here in its first century (O'donnell, 1984). Continuing from this historical background, Chittagong is considered as one of the most religiously influenced places in Bangladesh. Traditionally, this region is known for its association with several movements which have inherent religious motivation against British colonial rule. Moreover, Chittagong is ‘home’ to various Mazar (Sufi tomb/shrine), and practices of several Sufi schools of thought are common in Chittagonian culture (Harder, 2011).

During the eighteenth century and most of the nineteenth century, several Islamic reformist movements were developed in the Bengal region. The teachings of major Bengali revivalist Islamic figures, such as Shah Wali Ullah and Haji Shariatullah, calling the Muslims to revive textual practices of the religion and to reject innovations in religious practice (Bid’ah) were widespread in the eastern and northern regions (Uddin, 2006). However, those movements were relatively less popular in Chittagong in the south. Rather, the majority of the people there continued with their religious practices, blended with local culture and Sufi teachings.
At the same time, the concept of religion-based politics was introduced into this region at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Khelafat Movement, an all-Indian movement in support of the Turkish Caliphate, was active in Chittagong, as in all other places with a Muslim majority. Later, in the nineteenth century, religious intellectual leaders, such as Maniruzzaman Islamabadi and Ataur Rahman, played a significant role in local politics during British colonial rule. Their campaign and struggle to gain rights for the Muslim population were strongly supported by the local Muslims, as the Hindu–Muslim social relationship at that time was based on grievance and discrimination (Alam, 2007; Samaddar, 2014). During that period, those movements were focused on protesting against the oppressive Hindu landlords (Jamindars) and British rulers, as well as calling for educational and social development for Muslims. Afterwards, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Muslim League was the most popular political party in this part of the country. This party advocated the ‘Two Nation Theory’, calling for separate states for the Muslims and the Hindus. The party was inspired by an ideology that considered religious identity as being at the core of nationalist existence. Most of the Muslim League leaders were secular, and, unlike those now espousing current Islamic revivalist thought, were therefore less interested in the implementation of Islamic principles in politics and society (Khimjee, 2013; Sisson & Rose, 1991).

It was in this socio-political atmosphere that the Jama’at started working in the mid-1940s. After the partition of India and the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, it slowly but steadily gained influence in both provinces of Pakistan, East and West (Nasr, 1994). Early activities of the Jama’at in East Pakistan, currently Bangladesh, were initiated in the southern region of Barisal in 1956 (Majidi, 2003). Within the next couple of years, the Jama’at spread to the provincial capital, Dhaka, as well as to Chittagong. Initially, the party consisted of a group of like-minded student leaders influenced by reading literature authored by Mawdudi, who started gathering together and preaching their ideology among other students.
From the very beginning, the Jama’at advocated the implementation of Islam at a governmental policy-making level and promoted its slogan, ‘Islam is a complete way of living’ (Nasr, 2005). Interestingly, in Chittagong and elsewhere in Bangladesh, it avoided confrontation with religious practices that were long influenced by the local culture and concentrated more on competing with other political parties such as the Muslim League and the Nejam-e-Islam Party, another influential Islamic political party of that time. According to Nazmuddin Maudud, a 74-year-old prominent Jama’at intellectual:

Here I talk about the time before independence, before 1971. Other Islamic parties used to complain that the Jama’at is pro-American, or American agent. This was because we were thinking and working in a progressive way... we did not want to stir up mass emotion before gaining people’s confidence. You need to be pragmatic and rational if you want to achieve something fruitful. You have to achieve religious authority if you want to discuss religious issues. Moreover, we had to prioritize solving problems... it was a time when many educated people of our society didn’t care about Islam. They had great influence over general people. They were writers, teachers, leaders; all popular in national level. Human being loses everything, all senses, when fanatic nationalism arises. At that time, I have heard by my own ears many people saying things about Islam publicly which are unspeakable. In order to resist Pakistani oppression, they were even ready to leave Islam... the Jama’at thought otherwise. Their opinion was to find solution inside Pakistani framework. At that time, most people in Dhaka, in universities and government offices, became mad with Bengali nationalism. It was like mass hysteria. The Qur’an said ‘Do not die unless you are Muslims’. Being Muslim is your prime identity, you – as a Muslim – have no option to prioritize another identity... the Muslim League was propagating Secular nationalism, and the Nezam-e-Islam party was unpopular in political arena, they had no appeal to educated minds because they are so confined in traditional Islam... (so) the Jama’at wanted to educate people about Islam, serve them through welfare activities, not confront them (Interviewed at his residence in Dhaka on 25th September 2012).

‘Social Reformation and Social Welfare’ had been the third of the four officially proclaimed agendas in the party’s constitution (Jama'at-E-Islami, 2011). However, the other three – preaching of the ideology, organization of the activities and political reformation – dominated

67 All interviewees’ names are fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
the Jama’at’s activities in its early days in the 1970s. The Jama’at’s first organized effort involving social welfare activities in this region was to distribute relief support to the poor and homeless around the coastal area, who were affected by the devastating cyclone of 1969 (Abdur Rahim,\(^\text{68}\) an ISWCC leader, interviewed in his office in Chittagong on 27\(^\text{th}\) December 2012).

The importance of social welfare as an integral part of the Jama’at activities was manifested in a later event. The party was banned in the newly-born Bangladesh, due to its previous support for the Pakistani government during the 1971 war. The situation changed dramatically when President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated in 1975 and the pro-Indian secular Awami League was removed from power. It was not until 1979 that the Jama’at started working again in Bangladesh using its official name, although its members had continued working during the years between 1975 and 1979 under the names of different local organizations, such as Islamic Social Welfare Council, Islamic Labourers Welfare Federation, Islamic Farmers Welfare Organization and Ideal Teachers Association, among others (Khan, 1996; Majidi, 2003). These were either non-political social welfare organizations or non-political religious organizations, quietly mobilizing pro-Jama’at people and carrying out their activities – mostly religious, social and educational – without being involved in national politics.

The Islamic Social Welfare Council of Chittagong (ISWCC) was established in 1977, by people who had been Jama’at activists in the 1960s. Almost all of them had been forced to flee the country, or go into hiding for a long time, after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. They started coming back gradually when the political situation eased after the regime change in 1975. Instead of entering into politics directly, during the military rule of the late 1970s, they formed ISWCC, a non-political social welfare organization, in order to continue

\(^{68}\) This name is fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
advocating their ideology. Asaad Mahmud, an ISWCC leader, recounted his involvement with the organization:

I joined the Jama’at in 1966, I was a college student at that time... however, many events took place... It was a time of turmoil, socially and politically. So, ISWCC was established at a later time. It started its formal activities in around 1977. I was assigned to work here... I always have a personal tendency to mix with general poor people. Since then, I worked mostly in Islamic Labourers Welfare Federation in different cities, and now I’m back in the ISWCC since 1997... we had very limited fund and activities in the eighties, all offices were in the same compound. This office building of the ISWCC – as you can see now – we moved here after 2001... however, our focus is now on social welfare activities, such as organizing religious programs, schools, clinics and so on, nothing political (interviewed in the ISWCC office on 1st December 2012).

The establishment of ISWCC in Chittagong was a revolutionary milestone in the history of the Jama’at in the new country of Bangladesh. It was undoubtedly an ingenious decision, that paved the way for the Jama’at’s return to the political arena in later years. Initially, ISWCC concentrated on establishing a few schools that then became the nucleus for the movement in those days. This created an opportunity for the party leaders, most of whom were previously student leaders with a good academic education, to be employed in the teaching profession. Besides, it helped them to regain an honourable and acceptable place in the local society. During the following years, the activities of ISWCC were extended into offering free education for the children of poor families, establishing orphanages, providing underprivileged people with basic medical services and distributing relief assistance during natural disasters, such as cyclones and floods. Considering the socio-economic condition of the country, these activities successfully gave the party a foundational status in local society. Moreover, it was naturally convenient for pro-Jama’at people to proclaim that the motivation for these social welfare activities came from religious aspiration. However, a leader of the

This name is fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
Chittagong city Jama’at with special role in the welfare provision, Rafiqul Islam, agreed that his party has a ‘pragmatic motive’, alongside religious aspiration, driving these social welfare activities:

Our first and primary motive, behind all these social welfare activities, is to serve our Islamic perspective. Our religion ordered us to serve humanity, to serve people in need. Islam is to guide people, as it is said in the Qur’an ‘Hudallinnas’, guidance and welfare of all human beings. It didn’t say that it is for the Muslims only... every person should help elderly people, children, people who are facing troubles, and so on. So, the Jama’at also tries to do for this cause as it can. I know, these activities can be explained as a way to gain popularity, and I wouldn’t deny the fact that they help our party sometimes, but that’s not our objective. As a political party... every member of the Jama’at, including me, we need to assimilate with our own population. We can mix with public through those activities. Therefore, the Jama’at emphasizes strongly on those activities... you may find that we contribute much for the poor. Our country is poor and the population is huge. I would consider success from another perspective. If we can encourage our people to help needy people for the cause of Islam, that is a success to me. I can say that ninety percent of the Jama’at manpower, if not hundred percent, are somehow associated with social welfare activities, whatever little or big the degree is (interviewed in Chittagong on 1st January 2013).

On the other hand, one of his deputies in the welfare division of Chittagong city Jama’at Executive Committee, Yeasinul Kabir argued that there is no political or ‘worldly’ motive for these welfare activities, rather it has merely a religious motive. As he says:

I understand what you have mentioned about others’ opinion, but as I see it... there is a Hadith (prophetic tradition) ‘help your brothers whether they are oppressed or oppressors’. When it comes to the social welfare activities of our party, we don’t see who supports which party. I want to give an example. After the great cyclone in 29th April 1991, we built around two hundred houses in Parua Para village. This is my own village in South Chittagong. It was a great disaster, thousands died and village people were helpless for weeks. They had nothing. We started with emergency food and clothes, then provided materials to build houses to the neediest families. We distributed such support in more than three hundred villages in South

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70 This name is fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
71 This name is fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
Chittagong. This was one of biggest relief work in our history, supported by overseas fund. I don’t know whether you can remember or not, there was a big shipload of aid that came to the Chittagong port at that time. We worked for the next six months... In the National Election of 1996, Advocate Shamsuddin Mirza (the Jama’at candidate for parliament membership) received a total of 66 votes from my village. Think about it. Each house doesn’t contain one person, there are several family members in every house. If we would get two votes only from each house we built five years ago, there would be four hundred votes for Mr. Mirza from my village. But it didn’t happen that way. Political vote is a different issue, and we do not work for worldly gain. If we focus on that in our social welfare activities, we would not remain as an Islamic idealistic movement... there were families who were in better situation and therefore we provided less support for them, but I know that they voted for us... so, it’s a complex issue, and you shouldn’t judge our political condition from the viewpoint of our social welfare activities (interviewed in Chittagong on 5th January 2013).

Both leaders are true in their statements regarding the motive of Jama’at’s welfare activities. During the fieldwork, it became clear that the Jama’at people focused more on religious motivation and idealistic aspiration. However, they have also been becoming concerned about their practical and political outcomes, as there have been some attempts to regulate their welfare activities. There is lack of strategic planning which they are now considering. Currently, regular and ongoing financial supports are predominantly given to the people who are associated with the party. Although welfare activities like relief distribution during natural disasters, or ongoing charity schools and clinics are open to everyone, regular monthly financial supports are not provided to everyone who applies for that. Before discussing this fact in the following analysis chapter, it is pertinent to study the organizational structure of the Jama’at in providing social welfare.

The success of ISWCC in Chittagong inspired like-minded people all over the country. Hospitals, clinics, schools and research centres were formed in the early 1980s in almost all regions of the country, by people who were both non-officially and officially
associated with the Jama’at (Aref Haidar,\textsuperscript{72} a leader and member of the Executive Committee of Chittagong city Jama’at, interviewed in Dhaka on 24\textsuperscript{th} and 25\textsuperscript{th} September 2012). Thus, the establishment of ISWCC was a pioneering step in the history of the political comeback of the Jama’at.

The Jama’at was officially re-established in Bangladesh in 1979, when the new government allowed it to start working again. It took the name Jama’at-e-Islami Bangladesh, instead of Jama’at-e-Islami Pakistan, as it had been called before independence in 1971. After 1979, the Jama’at continued to employ its resources for its fourth agenda, social welfare, as well as continuing ISWCC. The party still has its own activities for social welfare purposes, together with the ISWCC which works as the major outlet for this specific objective. Moreover, several other organizations, such as the Islamic Labourers Welfare Federation, the Islamic Farmers Welfare Organization and the Ideal Teachers Association have been established and are run by the members of the Jama’at.

This network of organizations and activities has formed a complex web of social welfare activities. Understanding this structure is important when analysing the social welfare program of the Jama’at, as all social welfare activities are administered through this network. All of those organizations embody a larger perspective of social welfare activities, while relating to the Jama’at as the mother organization, with ISWCC as the primary outlet. Other secondary organizations have their own functions as well. Before looking into the activities and their objectives, it is important to examine this network.

\textsuperscript{72} This name is fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
THE NETWORK OF ORGANIZATIONS

One of the major characteristics of the Jama’at is its organizational structure and working procedures. It is a cadre-based organization, where everyone has to climb up the organizational ladder by fulfilling certain criteria. For instance, starting with the rank of ‘Supporter’, members will go through the levels of Worker, then Associate Member and finally Rukon (lit. Foundational Member) (Jama’at-E-Islami, 2011). These ranks are achieved through a combination of two basic means: 1) participation in party activities and 2) the completion of the study syllabus set for each rank. People’s commitment to fulfilling these two requirements, along with their religious practices and personal characters, are assessed by the respective committees and, if the committee members agree, are promoted to the succeeding rank. For instance, a local committee makes decisions concerning the Active Member level, the city committee decides about Associate Member level and the central committee decides on eligibility for the Rukon level. A person eligible for the rank of Rukon must take an oath to attain that status (Shafiul Azim, a leader and member of the Executive Committee of Chittagong city Jama’at, interviewed in the Jama’at office in Chittagong on 16th November 2012).

At the micro-level, a ‘block’ of members carrying out the Jama’at’s activities is called a unit. This is usually composed of 10 to 20 activists, with a committee comprising Unit President and Secretary, plus other secretaries for finance, preaching, social welfare and so on. Each administrative subdivision (Thana) is divided into several units according to the manpower in that subdivision. All subdivisions also have similar administrative committees.

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73 In the party constitution and in practice, people of the first three ranks are called with the Bengali words for supporter (Shomorthok), member (Kormi) and associate member (Shohojogi Shodossho), but those in the top rank are called with the Arabic word ‘Rukon’ as it is mentioned here.
74 This name is fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
that work under the divisional or city committees. Finally, all divisional and city committees
are accountable to the central committee of the Jama’at in Bangladesh.

The Central President of the Jama’at in Bangladesh is called the Amir-e-Jama’at (lit. Leader of the Jama’at). There are two higher consultative committees of the Jama’at called Kormo Porishod (lit. Working Committee) and Nirbahi Porishod (lit. Executive Committee). These committees comprise the Amir-e-Jama’at, a few Naeb-e-Amir (lit. Deputy Leader) – of whom there are currently three – a Secretary General and several Assistant Secretaries General – currently, eight. In addition, there is a central committee, called Majlis-e-Shura (lit. Consultative Committee), that is formed by the representatives of all divisional and city committees from all over the country. This central Consultative Committee elects all of the central leaders bi-annually, except the Secretary General. The newly elected Amir nominates his Secretary General at this same committee meeting (Shafiul Azim, a leader and member of the Executive Committee of Chittagong city Jama’at, interviewed in the Jama’at office in Chittagong on 16th November 2012).

In the current research, my ethnographic study of the Jama’at was limited to the party’s activities in Chittagong City and most important members of the city committee, in consideration of their ranks and positions in the party hierarchy, were interviewed. Also, some unit presidents and activists who are relatively more active in the social welfare area were selected through the snowball sampling process and were interviewed. Every local unit of the party has its own social welfare activities and they submit a regular monthly report to the city committee. The Chittagong City President of the Jama’at, the Secretary General and the Social Welfare Secretary jointly allowed me access to the welfare reports of the years 2011, 2012 and 2013. These reports provide a detailed structural overview of the welfare activities administered, and the funds spent by the party in Chittagong.

75 This name is fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
Unlike the Jama’at, the Islamic Social Welfare Council of Chittagong (ISWCC) works as a non-political organization and is registered under the social welfare ministry of the government of Bangladesh. This council is administered by its own committee, comprising President, Secretary, other secretaries and 60 members who have the right to elect the committee bi-annually (Asaad Mahmud, an ISWCC leader, interviewed in the ISWCC office on 1st December 2012). The association between the Jama’at and the ISWCC is not officially proclaimed – the ISWCC is registered as a non-political social welfare organization and the Jama’at is a political party. However, it is common knowledge that the council works as the primary social welfare outlet for the party. At the same time, these two organizations maintain a safe distance from each other, at least officially, as the Council is bound to submit annual reports and audit reports to the government. The members of the ISWCC are usually Jama’at leaders and activists or like-minded people with contributions to make in philanthropy and social welfare. A previous president of the ISWCC was the Chittagong City president of the Jama’at in the eighties. He started working for the ISWCC after another elected president took charge of the Jama’at city committee. Similarly, the current president of the ISWCC was previously a member of the city Consultative Committee of the Jama’at. Moreover, the current Secretary General of the ISWCC was the president of the Chittagong City committee of the Islamic Labourers Welfare Federation, another organization that works as a sister organization of the Jama’at, particularly for the labourers.

The Jama’at’s method of organizing social welfare activities through different non-political organizations has intriguing similarities with the social welfare administration of another Islamic political party in Turkey. Jenny White (2012, p. 61) explained:

76 This name is fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
A major reason for the success of WP\textsuperscript{77} (and, after it, VP and AKP), however, was its style of mobilizing supporters. The party perfected a face-to-face, personalized style of mobilizing ‘cells’ of neighbors on the basis of local solidarities. In other words, in addition to the business-as-usual patron–client relations common to all political parties in Turkey, WP relied on networks and horizontal relations, that is, relations among neighbors. These personal networks were mediated by a system of associations, foundations, and informal organizations formally unconnected to a party. It also allowed the system to continue to accumulate support even when a party was closed down. The networks made the Islamist movement independent of the party and encouraged the enthusiasm of activists, who saw this as ‘their’ social movement.

Social welfare organization by Islamic political parties in Turkey is considered one of the most successful cases worldwide, as Islamic parties started to join the government there in the 1990s and the AKP formed a single party government in 2002. However, although the Jama’at has formed a complex network of organizations also, there are fewer of those officially unconnected social organizations in Bangladesh, and they maintain a very close relationship with the mother political organization.

Besides ISWCC, the Jama’at established two autonomous organizations: the Islamic Labourers Welfare Federation and the Islamic Farmers Welfare Organization (Aref Haidar,\textsuperscript{78} a Chittagong city Jama’at leader, interviewed in a hotel in Dhaka on 24\textsuperscript{th} and 25\textsuperscript{th} September 2012). The activities of these organizations are limited to their respective target groups, and despite having been run for more than three decades, their influence is insignificant. The Chittagong City offices of both of these organizations are situated in the same premises in the Chittagong City Jama’at office. The ISWCC has its own office building in a different place, which indicates that it has relatively more autonomous power of administration compared to the two previously mentioned organizations. However, the presidents of both the labourers’ and the farmers’ organizations were also interviewed.

\textsuperscript{77} Welfare Party, Currently AKP or Justice and Development Party.
\textsuperscript{78} This name is fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
In summary, the Jama’at carries out social welfare activities under the party name at all levels of the party structure. Unit-level activities are intense, regular and close to the people of the small area that the particular unit covers. All of the units under a subdivision branch also occasionally organize social welfare activities for the poor people of that subdivision. The City of Division branch also organizes such programs from time to time on a larger scale, incorporating several subdivisions. These activities are generally event-oriented rather than being a regular and continuous program, for instance, helping the people affected by a natural disaster, distribution of zakat (alms) during the month of Ramadan (Arabic month of fasting), distribution of financial help, clothes and food during the two religious festivals (Eid) of the year and assisting poor people with their marriage ceremonies (Annual Welfare Reports of Chittagong city Jama'at, 2011; 2012; 2013).

Regular social welfare programs are generally administered by ISWCC, which does not carry the name of the party. However, it is commonly known that the real authority belongs to the party structure. ISWCC runs three fully operational schools, three orphanages, three religious schools (madrasahs), two mosques and three charity clinics. Moreover, ISWCC is also involved in partially administering a private university and a fully equipped hospital with a medical college (Asaad Mahmud, an ISWCC leader, interviewed in the ISWCC office on 1st December 2012). The Islamic Labourers Welfare Federation has comparatively little effect in the field. It distributes zakat and other financial help occasionally among the poor and needy labourers. It also protests against government policies and actions that are harmful for the labourers. But its role and influence are much less than those of the active leftist labour organizations. Similarly, the Islamic Farmers Welfare Organization has some occasional activities, such as distributing financial help.

79 This name is fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
among needy farmers, distribution of seasonal seeds and fertilizers and so on (Aref Haider, a Chittagong city Jama’at leader, interviewed in Dhaka on 24th and 25th September 2012). A detailed outline of all of these social welfare activities is given in the following section.

SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMS

When asked about the social welfare programs of the Jama’at, the Chittagong City Secretary of the organization began his response by emphasizing that social welfare is one of the four permanent principal programs of the party. The Jama’at has declared these programs in article 6 in the party manifesto as:

1. Introducing the authentic form of Islam to all citizens of Bangladesh
2. Organizing interested people and educating them
3. Social reformation and service for humanity based on Islamic principles
4. Reformation of the government and policies through constitutional means

According to the a city Jama’at leader, Shafiul Azim, the party inspires and encourages everyone, from the leaders to the field-level activists and supporters, to become social workers, and therefore one of the five conditions of joining the party as an activist is a degree of involvement in social work. He said that

[a] complete calculation of the social welfare activities undertaken and initiated by our organization is impossible to estimate. You will get a comprehensive idea of these activities

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80 This name is fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
81 This name is fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
82 The organizational structure of the Jama’at categorizes its manpower into four levels: Associate Member, Active Associate Member, Worker, and Member (Rukon). According to the party’s constitution, a person has to fulfil five conditions to achieve the status of a worker, which is the most common rank of the Jama’at activists. The first two ranks listed indicate the supporter and active supporter classes. The conditions are: to join in the party activities regularly; to provide a monthly financial contribution; to maintain a report of personal daily activities; to preach Islam among people generally; to participate in social services (Jama’at-E-Islami, 2011, p. 12).
by looking into both our monthly and yearly reports. But the actual work done is spread from
the root level of the society. The reports will show the declared tasks that were done officially
and reported in the unit level in every suburb, and finally combined together for the city level
report. However, that report does not always include, for instance, a Jama’at worker who
helped his ill neighbour out of the inspiration received from the party. The party always
teaches its manpower to practice *Qard-e-Hasana* with relatives and neighbours in need.
Usually, this kind of personal level activity is supposed to be included in the report, but many
a times it is not. (Interviewed in the Jama’at office on 16th November 2012)

It was clear from speaking with the interviewees, that the city-level leaders of the Jama’at, as
well as the top officials of its welfare organization, ISWCC, have a thorough understanding
and knowledge of the social welfare activities administered by the party. This has been made
possible by their having access to the reports of the party and their participation in the party’s
activities all over the city. As for the local activists, they gain a theoretical knowledge of
relevant tasks by reading the party manifestos and literature and by joining in the party
training programs. Individual local units have their own priorities and involvement in various
types of welfare tasks, primarily meeting the practical needs of their local areas and,
sometimes, special efforts prioritized by the local leaders. In the next section, the social
welfare activities of the Jama’at will be described, as revealed through the interviews and
party reports.

The city-level report of the entire activities program undertaken by the Jama’at in
2012 is divided according to the party’s four permanent programs. Under each program,
several tasks carried out in 2012 were reported, within five categories:

1. Planning at the beginning of the year
2. Implementation throughout the year
3. Increase or decrease in number of activities

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* *Qard-e-Hasana* is an Islamic term describing an unconditional loan.
4. Increase or decrease in percentage of same
5. The target for the following year

Amongst the four permanent programs covered in this report, the third is entitled Social Reformation and Service. This program contains five subsections:

1. Prayer organization and lectures in the mosques
2. Organization of local libraries and social clubs
3. Participation in local community organizations
4. Community activities
5. Welfare for all people

There are 43 tasks reported under these subsections and the characteristics of those tasks are diverse. Some of these tasks are: giving lectures in the mosques; maintaining a library for the local people and offering education services, including education in writing and literature; providing agricultural training and tree planting in public places; helping to organize and participating in funeral prayers and visiting sick people; providing unconditional loans (Qard-e-Hasana) and giving financial support to the poor; providing medical services, such as eye treatment camp, circumcision camp and blood donation camp; organizing and implementing relief distribution for the victims of natural disasters and clothes distribution on various occasions; running programs to increase social awareness of various issues (Annual Welfare Reports of Chittagong city Jama'at, 2011; 2012; 2013).

Among these many tasks, major welfare activities will be discussed here based on the proportion of the report dedicated to them and their relative importance in the bigger picture of party activities. Most of the interviewees mentioned five tasks as their primary social welfare activities, and the data in the party report, as well as participant observation during the fieldwork, support this claim. These tasks are:
- Medical services
- Educational services
- Financial aid
- Material support
- Relief distribution

**MEDICAL SERVICES**

Within the overall social welfare program of the Jama’at, the party’s main focus is on providing medical services to the poor and underprivileged people in the community. When asked about the Jama’at’s welfare activities, most respondents immediately mentioned two sectors: medical and educational. The medical service also provides huge benefits for women and the number of female patients in the Jama’at charity clinics is considerably larger than the number of male patients. The overcrowded environment, sub-standard living conditions, malnutrition and other factors which usually exist in underdeveloped countries are commonplace also in Bangladesh. Moreover, gender-discriminating socio-economic circumstances make it harder for women to have their medical needs met. Given this situation, it is understandable that large numbers of female patients benefit from the Jama’at charity clinics.

Of the 17 providers interviewed – Jama’at leaders, ISWCC leaders and officials – 8 singled out medical services as their primary sector of welfare provision. The ISWCC President said:

> Although the education sector should be prioritized in theory, as this would be the most important issue to develop our society and the country in the long run, the prevailing situation has compelled us to work more in the medical sector. In our annual report and planning papers, you will find education at the beginning. In the same report, you will see that the medical sector is the largest in terms of funds spent and the numbers of people who benefit.
Need of education is an ideal matter, but we have to comply with the demand of the practical situation (interviewed in the ISWCC office on 27th December 2012).

Currently ISWCC runs one allopathic/general charity clinic and two homeopathic charity clinics in Chittagong. Apart from that, the organization actively participates in administering a fully operational hospital. Clinics are smaller primary health care centres, where patients can visit a doctor to get prescriptions and medicines. The one hospital that ISWCC has been administering since 1989 was recently transferred to another authority and developed as a medical college hospital, with a medical school attached. The new authority is called International Islamic University Chittagong Trust (IIUC Trust), another venture of the Jama’at. The IIUC Trust President is the city president of the Jama’at, and ISWCC has three representative members on the Trust Committee. This administrative change was undertaken to ensure more funds and resources for the hospital, as the available manpower and annual budget of the ISWCC is not enough to run a fully functioning hospital, along with a medical school. A brief overview of the contributions made by these charity medical services run by ISWCC, from 197784 till 2003, is presented in Table 4.

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84 According to the ISWCC President, the organization provided free medical services to the poor in its organizational office for two years, prior to the establishment of its first separate charity medical centre in 1979.
Table 4: Charity medical services of ISWCC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Jhautola Homeo-pathy Clinic</th>
<th>Jebunnessa Homeo-pathy Clinic (closed down 1989)</th>
<th>Darush Shefa Allopathic Clinic</th>
<th>Madarbari Homeo-pathy Clinic</th>
<th>ISWCC Hospital (transferred to IIUC trust 2011)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of patients who received treatment and medicine</td>
<td>111,543</td>
<td>1,2141</td>
<td>85,365</td>
<td>65,581</td>
<td>261,568</td>
<td>536,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumcision</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,085</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,978</td>
<td>6,063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccination</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19,139</td>
<td>19,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye treatment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6,489</td>
<td>6,489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth delivery</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathological services</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,168</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8,410</td>
<td>11,578</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from these small-scale but permanent medical centres, some other occasional medical services are provided for the poor by the Jama’at, sometimes under its own name, and sometimes through ISWCC. These services are infrequent, but the practical situation of the local society and the immense unmet needs of the poor have made the services indispensable to the masses. One of the city-level leaders of the party, an elected councilman in Chittagong City Corporation and is considered as one of the most active Jama’at leaders in welfare activities in city level, described this situation as follows:

> We do social work through our own organization, and sometimes through other organizations. You need to understand the political situation of different areas of the city. In some areas, the Awami League or BNP [Bangladesh Nationalist Party] have a stronghold, and they would not like signs with the word ‘Jama’at’ on them. So, our people build social and community clubs, but you will not find their activities in our party report. However, even the people of Awami League or BNP know that these organizations are administered by our people. The patients

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85 The clinic was established in a slum with the support of a local philanthropist named Abdul Hamid. After his demise, his descendants wanted the land back. ISWCC did not have enough funds to continue the service in that area. According to the ISWCC President, it was therefore shut down and never reopened.
going there to receive the services know that they are Jama’at people. Because we always talk about our Deen [religion], we try to motivate them to read the Qur’an. For others, as long as it does not bear the name of the party [Jama’at], they do not object. As far as we are concerned, the work is more important at the moment. We will put our name when an appropriate time comes. I am happy to tell you that that we have around 86 suburb-based social organizations in this city. Some of them are regularly active, most are occasional though. Now I will tell you what they do. They collect funds from the local rich people and distribute help among the poor. We have many natural disasters every year, as you know. During these cyclones and floods, they do relief work. They organize medical camps all year round. There may not be many, but if each club organizes one event a year that adds up to a large number with many contributions by the end of the year. They do circumcision camps, dental treatment camps, blood donation camps, free medical camps and special medical camps for women run by female doctors. In a few places, they provide weekly or monthly free medical prescriptions and basic medicine for the poor people. In Potenga [a backward suburb of Chittagong], we provide this medical camp on the last Friday [weekly holiday in Bangladesh] in every month.

(Interviewed in his local council office on 17\textsuperscript{th} December 2012)

On the last Friday of the month of this interview, I visited the premises of this medical camp in Potenga, which were found to be a one-room club office in a densely populated slum. The signboard in front of the club office read ‘Mukto Kafela’ (Bengali: lit. Free Caravan).\textsuperscript{86} One physician was present, along with several volunteers coming and going throughout the day. Around 50 patients, more than half of whom were women with children, visited the physician up until 5pm. They received prescriptions and were told to go to a certain local pharmacy to get the medicine free. There was one volunteer assistant who kept records of the medicines prescribed and consulted with the doctor during the day. I learnt that the club received 10,000 taka (around 150 AUD) from the party and that the total expenditure of medicines prescribed that day should not exceed that limit. As a student, the attending doctor had been an activist leader of the student wing of the Jama’at. He worked in these medical camps, voluntarily, twice a month – once in Potenga and once in Halishahar.

\textsuperscript{86}'Kafela' is an Arabic word which has been adopted into Bengali. Its intentional use in the name implies an association with Islam.
The party organized five circumcision camps in Chittagong in 2011. That same year, ISWCC organized three similar camps in Chittagong City. This day-long event takes place in lower-income suburbs, usually in a school or community centre, where the necessary facilities for circumcision are made available for poor parents who bring their boys there for the free surgical procedure. On 12 November 2013, I attended one such circumcision camp in Bakalia. It was organized in a local school at the weekend; a total of 48 boys were circumcised between 9am and 4pm. Two physicians and two medics with the relevant basic medical instruments, desensitizers and medicines and around ten volunteers were organized by ISWCC. Local activists of the Jama’at had circulated the news in that area prior to the event, had listed the boys and their parents and given them coupons with serial numbers. Similarly, the activists of the Jama’at also organize vaccination camps from time to time and actively participate in government-announced national vaccination day programs. A city Jama’at leader with special role in the social welfare activities explained:

we are a political party, but I am grateful to Allah that this party has given us some avenues to serve humanity. After each big natural disaster in the last two decades, we have exhausted all our resources to help the people left with nothing but their lives. I can remember some events where the person’s life was changed forever. There was a widow who was completely helpless and about to become a street beggar. One of our activists communicated with her, and we provided her with a sewing machine and some training. Now, she is financially secure, a respected working woman. The most important contribution made by us, in my opinion, is the medical service. I don’t know whether you can imagine the actual condition of the poor people. Some of them would simply die without any treatment. Some of the children would not be given vaccines for polio or other dangerous diseases, if we were not there on time. We do organize circumcision camps in the slums. Usually, the boys are young, but sometimes older. Once I found a teenage boy of around 17 or 18 years old, who was not circumcised and felt unable to tell anyone due to shyness and social stigma. We try to organize these services to such needy people. It benefits their health as circumcision is not only a religious issue, but also a health issue. We try to raise their awareness about health issues. (Interviewed in Chittagong on 1st January 2013)
During my seven-month stay in the field, no dental or eye care camps were organized either by the Jama’at or by ISWCC. When asked about this, an ISWCC leader said,

dental and eye camps are not as frequent as other medical services. Usually we organize four or five such events a year. These are in fact a preliminary check-up for the very poor people. Most of them suffer from dental and eye problems due to their poor living conditions and lifestyles, but they continue to ignore those problems unless they become severe. Then they go to the government hospitals for treatment and suffer more. We do not have the ability to remedy this situation fully, for instance doing surgery for a major eye or dental problem, but we try to organize one-day camps and check their health. If the problem is curable by medicine or primary treatment, we give it to them. Sometimes the problems require long-term treatment or even major surgery. In that case, the attending dentist or eye-specialist gives the patient some basic medicine along with a short letter of recommendation to some specific doctors who are party activists. When the patient visits them, they try to treat them. If the procedure and medicines are very expensive, then we also try to give financial support. However, such cases seldom occur, probably 20 or 30 times altogether in a year. (Interviewed in the ISWCC office on 1st December 2012)

The contribution towards the charity medical services made by the Jama’at is an integral aspect of the discourse of Islamic social welfare in Bangladesh. Shibir, the student wing of the Jama’at, is well known for its stronghold among medical students all over the country. Apart from the Jama’at’s charity medical services, vast numbers of physicians associated with the party are running hundreds of clinics, hospitals, pathology centres and other service-oriented businesses related to the health sector. In every city of Bangladesh, there are private and commercial hospitals that are publicly known to be administered by Jama’at members. Although these hospitals do not provide a free service, they are usually known to charge less than those run by the government and offer a better service and ethical behaviour. As a result, they have a good reputation and the Jama’at also gains some degree of acceptance for being behind these endeavours.
EDUCATION

Education is considered to be one of the primary services provided by the Jama’at. The second permanent objective of the party, according to the official manifesto, is to educate people. The first objective, preaching Islam and introducing it to the people in its authentic form, is also strongly related to education. The educational activities of the Jama’at consist of several regular programs, such as lecture programs in the mosques, maintaining small-scale public libraries in different suburbs through party units, literature programs, study circles, discussion and lecture programs on different occasions and so on. I have joined a mass event called Qiyam al-Layl (Arabic: lit. night-stay), that was organized in a local mosque and had around 60 participants. It started at 11pm with a two hour workshop on a chapter of the Qur’an – participants were divided into three groups and each group was moderated by a Jama’at Rukon (full member). After a short interval for sleep, everyone woke up at 4 am for Tahajjud (complementary prayer) followed by Fajr (morning prayer). On another occasion, I joined a local unit program where 14 local activists sat together in their unit office and listened to the guest lecturer’s presentation on the topic of the importance in Islam of unity and obedience to the leadership. Another big event, called TC (Training Camp), was organized in Dhaka for selected local leaders from different districts. It was organized on the weekend in a school building and was kept secret due to the political situation of the country. I visited the event on its last day for one hour. The schedule of the event showed that the whole two days were packed with lectures on different religious and political topics.

The Jama’at has slowly advanced in the formal education sector of the country and, after around four decades of continuous endeavour, party members are now associated with various schools and colleges in every district and sub-district in Bangladesh. The most notable achievement, to date, by the Jama’at in the education sector in the whole of the
country, is the establishment of a private university, the International Islamic University Chittagong. Established in 1995, this is currently the largest private university of Bangladesh, with around 15,000 students in 14 departments. One of the longest serving staff members of the ISWCC, who has been working with the organization for last 22 years, said,

ISWCC had a core role to play in establishing IIUC in 1995. During the first two years, and until it was able to employ sufficient people and build an autonomous structure, we maintained everything to do with the finance, construction, employment, curriculum, government inspections and approvals and so on. The president of the ISWCC at that time, the late Mr. Shamsuddin, was the vice-president of IIUC Founding Syndicate. The president of that syndicate was the late Sheikh Abdul Jabbar. Other renowned and philanthropic people like him were on that committee and all of them played vital roles in the early years of the university. However, you cannot detach ISWCC or our party [the Jama’at] from this university, which is now internationally known. The current properties of the university would be worth more than one billion taka now. They have their own large campus with so many buildings and hostels, students and teachers from different countries, but the first office in 1995 was a building with nine rooms only, and the rent was paid by the ISWCC. The founding secretary of this university was the late Mr. Badiul Alam, who was then secretary of the ISWCC also. We have three representatives in the syndicate committee now, one of them is the current president of Chittagong City Jama’at. (Interviewed in the ISWCC office on 28th November 2012)

Among the 77 private universities in Bangladesh, IIUC is well known for its quality education with low tuition fees and lenient fee charging schedule and the substantial financial aid available for students with good results who are experiencing a financial crisis. The high cost of tuition fees in the private universities led to a social situation in Bangladesh where only students from affluent families could afford to study at them. Conversely, a large portion of IIUC students come from middle- and lower-income families. However, this university is not actually a welfare project, although it makes a passive contribution to the social welfare of the community. Regarding the Jama’at’s involvement in establishing private universities in Bangladesh, a city Jama’at leader said:
The IIUC is a great success; we hope that this university will make a contribution in the future that we cannot even conceive of right now. There are three other private universities that were established later and the people associated with the Jama’at had roles to play in their establishment: Manarat University and Bangladesh Islamic University in Dhaka, and Leading University in Sylhet. But they are more private enterprises and the party never gets directly involved in administering those universities, unlike the IIUC (Interviewed in Chittagong city Jama’at office on 16th November 2012).

Apart from these private universities, the Jama’at is involved, with varying degrees of influence, with several hundred schools in the country. In almost every city and in rural areas, it is publicly known that these schools are being run by people associated with the Jama’at. In Chittagong, ISWCC is currently running five such secondary schools. However, like the IIUC, these are also private schools, where the students have to pay tuition and other fees. To provide welfare or charity-based education, the Jama’at runs a religious education complex in the suburb of Nasirabad and a religious school in Agrabad. The religious education complex is called Abu Huraira Complex, named after a scholar companion of the Prophet of Islam. This complex includes a secondary-level religious school with 850 students, a Hifzkhana (specialized boarding school for the memorization of the Qur’an only) with 82 students, a technical institute where the students from poor families get vocational training, and an orphanage for 200 boys, who are also students in the above-mentioned religious school and technical institute. The other religious school, in Agrabad, is not a government approved institute, but rather a religious education centre, teaching around 250 young boys and girls in the morning and around 40 adult males at night (Secretary of the ISWCC, interviewed in the ISWCC office on 1st December 2012).

Apart from these charity-based educational services, the ISWCC also runs some morning schools in several suburbs in Chittagong, of which I visited three. Each of these had more than 150 students, both boys and girls. An ISWCC leader said:
We have several Maktab [religious morning school] in various places in the city. We pay the local Imams [appointed leader of the prayer in the mosque] to spend one to two hours in the early morning for this, and we provide the syllabus and curriculum. These schools are free, and open for all children in the locality, seven days a week. We try to educate the children with proper recitation of the Qur’an, basic Arabic, religious rulings that are appropriate for children, good moral character development through story-telling, basics of daily prayer and other Islamic rituals, and so on. We regularly communicate with the parents as well. We try to listen to their problems, and help them through consultations. Most of the children come from very poor families, whose parents are rickshaw-pullers, daily labourers, housemaids and even beggars. There are some children from the solvent families as well. They go to the general schools. However, some of the poor children remain there after the Maktab-time, and we appoint another teacher to teach them basic writing, reading and math. These venues are called Child Education Centres. Among the approximate 30 Maktabs we organize in this city, there are 6 such Child Education Centres currently operating. There is another program that we organize on a regular basis. Each year, we organize at least two training programs for all the teachers from all of our educational institutes. We listen to their problems, experiences and expectations, and we motivate them to instil Islamic values into the students. While talking to you about our charity medical and educational services, I feel a need for organizing such a program for our doctors and other medical staff. Unfortunately, we don’t have anything like that for them. I know that they, along with the environment of our medical centres, encourage the patients to learn and practise Islam. But a training program might make it more effective. (Interviewed in the ISWCC Office on 27th December 2012)

Regarding charitable educational services, one of the local Jama’at leaders, a school teacher by profession, said in his interview:

In many cities, the Jama’at started their work through educational activities, in the early days after independence. For instance, in my home city Bandarban87, this is literally true. Before being involved in any political activities, the then president of the Jama’at in Bandarban City was a school teacher. He, along with some like-minded friends, started an orphanage and a religious primary school where many homeless children got refuge. There were many children living on the streets, their parents, or one of them, having died at the hands of the rebel group ‘Shanti-Bahini’, and they had no one. These people collected funds from the rich class, and from the Middle-East, and now they are operating three orphanages in the

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87 Bandarban is a hill-tract city under the greater Chittagong division, situated around 46 km from Chittagong CBD.
Bandarban area. This morning I met a person who grew up in such an orphanage there, and now works in the IIUC as a lecturer. He has a wife and two children. I remember him being taken out literally from a roadside paddy field to an orphanage run by the Jama’at.

(Interviewed in his school office in Chittagong on 28th January 2013)

FINANCIAL AID

One of the major outlets of the welfare activities of the Jama’at is through providing one-off financial aid to people in need. The city committee of the Jama’at has 18 local units, which are called Thana. According to the Jama’at city secretary, each Thana spends 40 per cent of its collected funds for welfare purposes in its own locality. This amount is usually around 20,000 Bangladeshi taka (BDT) per month, which equals around 300 US dollars (USD). For some Thanas the amount would reach up to 50,000 BDT (around 700 USD) every month. Apart from occasional welfare distribution, most of this fund is spent through direct financial aid to the poor. Additionally, the city office of the Jama’at also spends a minimum of 200,000 BDT (around 3,000 USD) every month in providing people with direct financial aid (Shafiul Azim, a city Jama’at leader, interviewed in Chittagong city Jama’at office on 16th November 2012).

This financial aid is given under various conditions. Qard-e-Hasana (unconditional loan) is highly encouraged through the party study materials and activities. A person in need of a large amount of money, usually for the marriage of one of his or her children, or for setting up a small business, or for the medical treatment of a long-term severe illness, would receive this loan without any interest or time limit imposed. Most importantly, it would be forgiven and forgotten if the person were unable ever to repay it. Also, any poor person in need can apply to the Jama’at city office or local offices for Sadaqah (lit. donation), which is

88 This name is fictitious to maintain confidentiality.
an one-off non-refundable financial aid. After assessing the application, the Jama’at usually gives 2,000 to 5,000 taka, according to the situation. A city Jama’at leader elaborated this:

Our financial aid is primarily of two types, sadaqah and qard-e-hasana. Many receivers will never be able to return that loan, they are really poor. In some cases, we simply waive it after a long time. Some return it after they get better in business or job. Sadaqah is consistently given to random poor people every month. However, qard-e-hasana is encouraged more within us. This is an important Islamic tradition as well... many of our people are not very poor, they are from lower middle class or middle class. They don’t want to receive donation, but sometimes some of them fall in dire financial need. In those cases, we manage personal loans from our own people if the payback is guaranteed. Sometimes we raise fund to provide loan if it’s long term or uncertain, considering the financial condition of the receivers. In some rare and important cases, we provide that loan from party fund as well. All these decisions are made after much discussion in the relevant committee (Interviewed in Chittagong city Jama’at office on 16th November 2012).

Table 5 shows the reports of financial aid provision by Chittagong City Jama’at, including all 34 Thanas under the city office, in 2010 and 2011.

Table 5: Financial aid given by the Jama’at city office

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>2010 (in BDT)</th>
<th>2011 (in BDT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qard-e-Hasana (unconditional loan)</td>
<td>9,757,156</td>
<td>9,279,515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-off financial aid</td>
<td>2,996,064</td>
<td>7,287,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-off financial aid particularly for medical treatment purposes</td>
<td>96,517</td>
<td>711,277</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ISWCC office also carries out this task regularly, alongside the Jama’at city office and local units. In ISWCC, this financial aid is collected through zakat (Islamic alms) and spent on people who are eligible to receive zakat according to Islamic rulings. Table 6, below, shows the areas where the ISWCC contributed and the number of people who benefitted during the period from 1977 to 2003. The individual amount of aid is not mentioned in this

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report. However, it was understood during the fieldwork that, currently, each applicant would usually receive 4,000 to 5,000 BDT, an amount which is certainly greater than it would have been in the early years.

Table 6: Number of recipients of one-off financial aid from the ISWCC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause of need for financial assistance</th>
<th>Number of recipients</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1977–2002</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical treatment</td>
<td>4,987</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>1,763</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ admission and exam fees</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly scholarship for poor students</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House renovation</td>
<td>997</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting converted Muslims</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial of unclaimed bodies</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>1,023</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the Jama’at leaders explained when and where usually this financial aid is provided by saying:

Most of financial aid, in fact, goes either for education or medical purposes. This money is given in extreme emergency situation, and when we are able to verify the facts of those applicants. For instance, a student can’t pay the fees of their final exam, or a person can’t pay the charges of their medical surgery in a government hospital, we provide support for them… to the extent of our ability… I can give you one example. Few months ago, once I was travelling to my office by Rickshaw. I noticed that the rickshaw-puller was a very young boy, and his speech was somehow different than the usual rickshaw-pullers. We talked, and I came to know that he passed the SSC (Secondary School Certificate) exam from Bakalia (an inner-suburb in Chittagong city) High School. He was working to save money for his college admission fee. I told him to contact our local unit president; I also talked to him (local unit president). They talked to his father and some teachers, and eventually the local Jama’at unit gave him 3 thousand taka for that admission fee… I’ve just remembered one incident. Last year, I was sitting in our city office and some people brought a foreigner to our city president

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after *Asr* (afternoon) prayer (Chittagong city Jama’at office complex includes a mosque in its ground floor). He was an overseas student from Nepal, studying in Dhaka. He came to visit Chittagong, some hijackers robbed him in a street near to our office. He was Hindu, and it was a sad incident that a guest was robbed in our city. However, the city office gave him some money. He was very happy that he can go back to his university in Dhaka. He didn’t know anything about us, some random people from the locality brought him there. This shows that people know they can get help from us in case of emergency (Interviewed in Chittagong city Jama’at office on 5th January 2013).

**MATERIAL SUPPORT**

One of the welfare activities of the Jama’at is to provide the underprivileged with material support from time to time. This includes several types of aid, including warm clothes and blanket distribution during the winter season, clothes distribution during the Eid al-Fitr (religious festival at the end of Ramadan), sacrificed meat and food distribution during the Eid al-Adha (annual religious festival when the animals are sacrificed) and distribution of sewing machines among widows and other poor women (A city Jama’at leader, Interviewed in the city Jama’at office on 16th November 2012).

During the fieldwork, I was able to attend all four of the above-mentioned programs, organized both by the Jama’at, under its own its name, and the ISWCC as well. These programs are organized through a system that has been developed through years of practice. Local Jama’at activists receive the budget estimation from their city office, or the ISWCC office, or the local offices and visit the slums prior to the program, where they communicate with their contact people, make announcements, assess the situation of the potential recipients, make lists of those receiving aid at the upcoming event and give them coupons with a serial number. According to the annual reports of the Chittagong City Jama’at, in 2011 the party distributed 4,535 blankets, 10,334 items of winter clothing and 17 sewing machines
(Annual Welfare Report of Chittagong City Jama'at, 2012). The amount of clothes and food distributed during the yearly religious festivals was not mentioned in the annual report. However, around 100 people received clothes on the occasion of the 2013 Eid al-Fitr in Bakalia Thana, when I was present. I was told by a city Jama’at official that a total number of 15 Thanas organized such programs on the evening before that day. In addition, the ISWCC also organizes similar programs on these occasions. According to its annual report, it distributed 32 sewing machines and 2,650 articles of winter clothing in 2012 (Annual Report of the ISWCC, 2013).

Most of the interviewees from the Jama’at and the ISWCC mentioned several types of material support provided by their organizations. The ISWCC organizers emphasized their sewing machine distribution program. Large sewing machines are expensive in Bangladesh and a person can generally earn their family’s day-to-day expenses by working with this. These machines are usually given to the poor females, many of whom are widows and in most cases, recommended by local Jama’at leaders. On the other hand, the Jama’at leaders mostly discussed clothes and food distribution programs. A Jama’at leader elaborated this by saying:

We provide a lot of support for poor people, in every city. I can talk more about my home town Rangamati\textsuperscript{91}, every week at least one hundred poor families receive something random from Rangamati Jama’at office. People are very poor in that underdeveloped hilly area. We give them clothes, rice, lentils, baby food, blankets. You will always find something in Rangamati office. I know that we can’t help much, but at least we give few kilograms of rice when some starving families come to our office. We are a political party, not an NGO. We try to give instant support, our resources are primarily employed in our political and organizational activities. The ISWCC is dedicated for social welfare activities, so they can organize sustainable support where they will be able to follow up (Interviewed in Chittagong on 8\textsuperscript{th} October 2012).

\textsuperscript{91} A major hill district in Chittagong division, located 77 km north of Chittagong city.
During the fieldwork, I attended clothes and food distribution programs organized by different local units of Chittagong city Jama’at. The last ten days of the month of Ramadan, followed by the Eid day, are considered most important times for religious charity in Islam. I was present at the events where the Jama’at distributed food such as rice, semi (a particular sweet food item of local culture that is cooked for the Eid festival) and clothes among the poor people. I also witnessed winter clothes and blanket distribution programs. Local units of the Jama’at organize campaigns to collect second hand clothes and blankets and then distribute them among the homeless people in the streets at nighttime.

RELIEF DISTRIBUTION

Bangladesh is a country prone to natural disasters and with underdeveloped infrastructures. Since independence in 1971, the country has endured five major cyclones, five great floods, ten tornados and several earthquakes and landslides. In all of those disasters, thousands died and millions lost their homes and everything they had. Additionally, accidental fires in slums are commonplace every year. Due to the deficiency in natural disaster management and the lack of government resources, NGOs and international aid organizations play a major role, even proportionately bigger than that of the government itself, in relief distribution after each of these natural disasters. Other political parties also attempt to reach out to the poor at these times. The Jama’at members are noted for their relief distribution during natural disasters, as they are generally known to be corruption free due to their religious attachment, whereas most regular politicians are known to extract profit from the situation and get rich during these times.

According to the annual reports of the ISWCC, the organization distributed relief among 13,576 people between 1977 and 2002, and 649 people in 2003, all of whom were
victims of various natural disasters (Annual reports of the ISWCC, 1977 – 2003). After the
cyclone of 1991, the ISWCC organized a massive relief distribution, house renovation
program and medical treatment for the wounded, provided by several mobile medical teams.
This effort was funded jointly by several national and international organizations, such as
Rabita al-Alam Islami of Saudi Arabia, International Islamic Relief Organization of Kuwait,
ISRA of Sudan, Muslim Aid of UK, Islamic Relief London, Al Faisal Foundation of KSA
and Islami Bank Bangladesh Foundation. The ISWCC also organized large-scale medical
support for the Rohingya Muslim refugees in 1992, who migrated to Bangladesh due to ethnic
cleansing and communal riots in neighbouring Myanmar (An ISWCC leader, interviewed in
the ISWCC office on 27th December 2012). According to the annual report of the Jama’at, the
party distributed 2,380 pieces of clothing and 300,000 taka among fire victims in different

Both the Jama’at and the ISWCC organize numerous relief distribution programs
around the year. After any natural disaster, it is a common scenario that the Jama’at people
provide relief support in the affected areas. All interviewees discussed their experience of
participating in relief distribution programs organized by the party, almost all of them
mentioned the relief work carried out in Chittagong after the great cyclone of 1991. Older
leaders recounted the experience of relief work after the 1969 cyclone as well. Besides, every
year the party organizes several relief distribution programs when a slum is burnt by fire. It is
a regular incident in Bangladesh. I have attended such relief distribution programs during the
fieldwork where I informally talked with the recipients to inquire about their situation. Some
of their slum houses were burnt completely and the food and clothes provided by the Jama’at
were certainly great support for them.
CONCLUSION

The social welfare provision of the Jama’at is predominantly of two kinds: regular and irregular welfare programs. The regular welfare program comprises charity religious schools and medical centres, and the irregular welfare program is carried out through financial and material assistance on various occasions. The regular program is organized through a sister organization, Islamic Social Welfare Council Chittagong (ISWCC). Although the ISWCC administers various irregular welfare activities, such as relief distribution and financial assistance provision, most of these activities are conducted by the mother organization, the Jama’at.

The social welfare program of this movement is administered through a complex but systematic and bureaucratic structure. It was understood, during the fieldwork, that the structure has long been established and the providers do not pay much attention to its development. This will be further clarified through analysis of relevant data. The following chapter will analyse the empirical data of this research, in order to understand the reasons for this welfare phenomenon and its existing outcomes.
CHAPTER 8: SOCIAL WELFARE OF THE JAMA’AT: THE ANALYSIS

This chapter aims to analyse the emergence and existence of the social welfare program of Jama’at-e-Islami in Bangladesh, in light of two social movement theories: resource mobilization theory and political process theory. The chapter assesses the views of the service providers and receivers, ascertained through interviews and focus group discussions. Further, it includes other crucial findings garnered through participant observation during the fieldwork.

In brief, this chapter reflects and reviews data obtained through communicating with the service providers and the recipients of the Jama’at’s social welfare provision in Chittagong City, through interviews, focus group discussions and through participant observation that includes informal conversations. The primary goal was to understand the roles played by the actors at different levels in this collective action and their relationships with each other and to explore the objectives of this welfare provision, along with its outcomes. To achieve this goal, the study attempts to understand participants’ responses, including their aspirations, experiences, frustrations, achievements and expectations. Finally, a critical analysis of participants’ perspectives, supported by the ethnography presented in the previous chapter, will provide answers, in a holistic fashion, to the research question of why and how this particular welfare phenomenon exists in Bangladesh.
FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The primary research question of this study has two parts. The study attempts to explore the reasons responsible for the existence of the Jama’at’s welfare programs. In other words, it aims at an understanding of why a religion-based political party has engaged in systematic welfare provision in a Muslim majority secular state. Additionally, this study seeks to explicate the outcomes of this social welfare provision, for instance, what the Jama’at, as a political party providing welfare, has achieved through these welfare programs in the last four decades.

These two aspects of the research question need to be studied in an interlinked manner and they therefore require a framework involving a synthesis of two social movement theories. The second part, the outcomes and current condition of the party’s welfare programs, has mostly been described through the ethnographic study presented in the previous chapter. An analytical exploration of this aspect requires resource mobilization theory. As was elaborated in Chapter 5, on the theoretical framework of this thesis, resource mobilization theory argues that the collective action, and the movement’s prosperity or failure, are essentially associated with its maneuvering of tangible and intangible resources. According to John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, “the resource mobilization approach emphasizes both societal support and constraint of social movement phenomena. It examines the variety of resources that must be mobilized, the linkage of social movements to other groups, the dependence of movements upon external support for success, and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements” (McCarty & Zald, 1977, p. 1213). The outcome achieved by this welfare provision will be explored by analysing the experiences of the people associated with it, either through organizing aid or through receiving it. Here, people, or the actors of this collective action, are regarded as the primary resource of the movement. The services offered through this organization will also be examined, as the
secondary resources. Combining insights gained from these two perspectives will clarify the current situation of this party’s social agenda in Bangladesh. The Jama’at, as a religion-based political party, certainly needs the popular support of the welfare receiving poor that it can gain through organizing these services. This study’s analysis of resource usage will also reveal to what extent reality has met this expectation. Answers to the second part of the research question will be achieved through discussing, with participants, the following themes: providers and clients of these services and their experiences; the religious, political and economic influences these services have on people’s lives.

Many social scientists argue that the success or failure of a social movement depends not only on its resource mobilization, but also on its methods of negotiating with the current political elements, such as the state or the government, of the society. Resource mobilization theory thus emphasizes various aspects of the political process, such as the consequences that political opportunities, or ‘breaks’, have for the movement, or the organization of the movement’s structure. The operational method of the Jama’at’s social welfare activities was explored in the previous ethnographic chapter. Following on from that, the major theme here encompasses the motives, management strategies and experiences of the providers of these social welfare programs. A critical review of this theme will seek to elucidate the first part of the research question: the reasons behind the Jama’at’s organizing social welfare provision in Bangladesh.

MOTIVES AND MANAGEMENT OF THE PROVIDERS

Political parties are generally concerned about the social situation and they are expected to work towards socio-economic development. Apart from this general expectation, Islamic political parties, in various countries throughout the world, have attracted attention from
socio-political observers due to their contribution to and participation in social welfare activities. The major aims of this research are to explore the motives behind and objectives of the Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami’s welfare activities. A comparative discussion of the managing strategies of this welfare provision is necessary to give an understanding of the implementation and effects of these objectives.

The 19 interviewees in the study who were instrumental in providing social welfare services represented a range of different classes and ranks among the Jama’at members: leaders, intellectuals, activists, office staff, doctors and teachers. All said that religious obligation was the primary reason behind their involvement in these social welfare programs. Most of them replied simply that it is an obligation imposed by Allah, and that the Jama’at, as an Islamic party, has to be involved in this cause. This same motivation is evident in replies such as: ‘to satisfy Allah’; ‘this is an integral part of Islam as shown by the practical examples in Prophetic life’; and ‘this is a duty set out in our religious texts in the Qur’an and Sunnah’.

Of the 19 interviewees, 12 cited, in various terms, the motive of gaining acceptance among people through social welfare provision. One gave the example of zakat, saying that one of the Islamic objectives of distributing alms among the needy is to attract them to Islam. However, when asked about this objective, another person strongly denied that the party provides social welfare to gain popularity. The remaining 6 interviewees agreed that political gain played a part, and 3 of these argued that while the party does not work consciously to achieve this goal, it might come about as a natural consequence of its charity. They described how people receiving welfare help from the Jama’at often vote for other parties in national elections, and the party does not consider this a problem when selecting target recipients. On the other hand, one of the leaders clearly stated that when providing support under its own
name, the Jama’at unofficially seeks out people who are somehow associated with the party, or who support it politically. However, the welfare provision by the ISWCC is open to all, merely based on the needs of the people, without considering any socio-political background. Of the 19 interviewees, 10 also mentioned the objective of providing a service for mankind as a humanitarian responsibility that should be fulfilled collectively. According to a city Jama’at leader:

Our objective is to satisfy Allah, as Muslims, by assisting people in need. It is our religious duty to serve the poor, to develop society and to practise our moral conscience according to the way shown by the Prophet. In order to make our society beautiful, peaceful and prosperous, we need to practise religious obligations and help each other. Political achievements will come naturally, but for the social welfare provision we focus fully on serving humanity. For political reasons, we have many other activities and tasks to do. (Interviewed in Dhaka on 24th and 25th September 2012)

Most of the Jama’at leaders and activists engaged in welfare provision stressed the same sense of religious motivation and duty, directly based on religious obligation as ordained by Allah. One leader, however, explained this religious motivation from a different perspective. In his professional life, he works as an administrative executive in the social responsibility section of a large corporation. It seems that his involvement in social works administered by both the Jama’at and by general non-Jama’at and non-political organizations has given him a broad scope of thought and a pragmatic understanding. He integrated a realistic sense of humanitarian motivation with the theoretical aspect of religious obligation, thus:

To me, our objectives for all social welfare tasks should be restoring human dignity. It is true that helping others is our duty as Muslims, but we do not understand why this duty was enacted by Islam. Whenever you read the Qur’an, you have to feel that every instruction given there is to restore honour and rights for the human beings in this world. In this aspect, Islam talks about human beings, not who is Muslim or who is not. All religions in the world, in fact, want to elevate the place of humans. To us, Islam is the best way to establish this honour. One of the biggest reasons why this honour is damaged is poverty. A person loses his
dignity when he cannot meet his own basic needs. Due to his poverty, debts, sickness, family and so on, he feels shame and neglected. Allah dislikes this situation for His slaves. Therefore, we have to work to restore him to his normal condition. We should not think that we are helping him by this work. Rather, we help ourselves here. Therefore, I, personally, try to encourage my fellow activists and friends to take the ‘rights-based’ approach in providing social welfare, instead of a ‘need-based’ one. (Interviewed in Dhaka on 12th October 2012)

EXPERIENCES AND DIFFICULTIES

While several interviewees agreed that the Jama’at might make political gains through social welfare provision to varying degrees, a few of them strongly opposed this claim, citing their experience in the field. One of the Jama’at leaders said:

Vote calculation and political consideration in our country is different. Here, you should not expect political support by providing welfare. Most of them are very poor; you cannot imagine the hardship of their lives. You have tried to support them during the year, when they needed medical help or some financial aid, but everything changes overnight before the election-day. They receive 500 or 1,000 taka that night, and forget everything else. They forget the relief you have given to them, or the blanket or the food or even employment assistance. They have to buy food for the next day, and that money they receive is the most important thing for them at that moment. Besides, there are some other factors which also play roles in political elections. Sometimes they have to obey the leaders of their slum or local area. There is another thing, and I would say this is the most important thing here. The Jama’at is the third largest party of the country. While giving the vote, many think that the vote will be spoiled if it is given to the Jama’at, because they will not win. Then they vote for BNP if they are inclined towards Islam, or for Awami League if they are pro-secularism. This is a vicious circle which our party has not been able to break by gaining confidence among people. You can find hundreds of thousands of people who like us, but vote for either BNP or Awami League on election-day. (Interviewed in his NGO office in Chittagong on 27th January 2013)
This motive of achieving practical gain was explained from another perspective by Nazmuddin Maudud\textsuperscript{92}, who, at 74 years of age, is one of the leading Islamic intellectuals of the country, a retired government secretary, author and political commentator and former activist in the student wing of the Jama’at during his student life.

It is good that the Jama’at works for society for the sake of Allah. It is also true that there is a sense among everyone that doing social welfare works feels good, we will gain popularity, our acceptance will increase, and people will think that we are helpful. But it hasn’t actually happened like this in the case of the Jama’at. I would say this is due to our weakness in the management of preaching Islam. You will find numerous people in this country who are against Islam and against the Jama’at. How could it happen that such a great portion of the population do not like the Jama’at, let alone politically support it, after the party has been working in this country for 50 years? This means, we thought that we would be able to reach the people, but in reality, we did not. Social welfare should be an integrated part of Da’wah [calling towards Islam], not a separate agenda. If we had been able to do Da’wah effectively, the society would have become more developed and poverty reduced. Now, we are providing some money, or very basic temporary medical treatment. If you look into their problems, as an Islamic preacher, you cannot stop at that. You want to educate them about Islam, about the world. You are aware of the need for healthy living conditions for their family. This is real social welfare in Islam, and one aspect among many of Da’wah. (Interviewed in Dhaka on 25\textsuperscript{th} September 2012)

While explaining the difficulties faced by the Jama’at in providing social welfare services, he also brought up the issue of the 1971 liberation war:

Another major obstacle, that is confronting the Jama’at in gaining proper benefit from its social welfare provision, is the stigma attached to us due to the political stance taken by the party during the liberation war. Every country has its own setting. Egypt, Turkey, Palestine; all of these countries where Islamic movements are able to perform better social welfare have their own environments, backgrounds and obstacles. The setting in Bangladesh, as a result of the 1971 war, has proved fatal and damaging in the long run. Moreover, continuous propaganda by the Awami League and lying in the name of history in the media and the education curriculum have made the situation worse. Now, the Jama’at or any Islamic

\textsuperscript{92} This name is fictitious to protect confidentiality.
movement has to face severe fanaticism in this country in the coming days. If we do not modify or change our approach in all we do, including social welfare, we will be destined to failure. (Interviewed in Dhaka on 25th September 2012)

In reviewing the welfare activities of the Jama’at, one of the party’s intellectual figures, who is also a university teacher, commented:

There is a gap between the tasks we undertake and the reality in society. You will find the majority of the recipients of our charity are like most people, and do not pray regularly. How can you expect them to understand Islam and follow other religious and ethical obligations? If you tell someone to pray, he might pray twice or three times a day. But to make them do it regularly by themselves, you need to make a meaningful contribution in their thoughts and lives. Some secular and Christian NGOs are doing this, but we could not. Most of our schools are religious, where they learn to read the Qur’an. This is good, but what they will do after that? How will they survive in this society with honourable income after this? Do we really reach effectively to the lowest classes of society? They are struggling to survive, and we are busy with formalities such as taking pictures, submitting reports to the foreign donors, publishing news and so on. Islam does not punish first [for a crime], it gives the food first and then comes the punishment for any crime committed. We have a channel to reach to the daily labourer. This channel of social welfare was established five decades ago, but we have failed to develop it because we did not have the foresight, and we have failed to educate them. As a result, you will find them receiving occasional help from us, but knowing nothing about Islam which is actually able to give them their rights, not the Communism as many of them believe. (Interviewed in his university office in Chittagong on 9th October 2012)

THE RECEPIENTS’ PERSPECTIVES

The recipients of the social welfare program of the Jama’at fall into various categories. It was evident throughout the participant observation phase that the party provides welfare services to literally anyone, irrespective of their age, race, religion or any other personal traits. Therefore it is very common to find a Hindu woman as a patient waiting for medical treatment in one of the charity medical clinics which bears an ‘Islamic name’. It is also
commonplace to find non-Muslim poor people partaking in other occasional welfare programs organized by the Jama’at. However, the case of the charity schools is different. These are obviously known as religious schools where the students learn how to read the Qur’an and other basic Islamic knowledge as part of their curricula. Therefore, there are no non-Muslim students attending those schools.

Regarding gender and age, religious schools certainly provide for young pupils. The Jama’at’s biggest religious charity school is Madrasah Abu Huraira. It has around 600 students studying from the primary level up to the secondary level. Among them, around 100 are students of Tahfiz, a different curriculum of study dedicated to memorizing the whole of the Qur’an. There are no female students in the Tahfiz section, but the general section has around 200 girls, which is two-thirds of the total number of pupils. Another charity school has 100 students, at the primary level only, 20 of whom are girls.

Among the patients of the charity clinics, in a normal working day, it was observed that more than one-third were married females. However, many of them accompanied their infant babies and children. The political or ideological affiliation of the patients was not found to have any bearing on their eligibility for this service.

Darush Shefa is the most popular of the three charity clinics run by the ISWCC in Chittagong. It is situated in Chawkbazar, a bustling old suburb of the city which is generally known as the location of some famous schools and colleges and a university, as well as being a middle-class residential area. In terms of locality, meeting the needs of the low-income areas was not considered, the emphasis being on using a section of the city office building of the ISWCC for this clinic, in order to save establishment costs and to maximize its usage of the building. However, two big slums, Joynogor and Bakalia, are situated nearby and are populated predominantly by poor daily labourers, rickshaw-pullers and housemaids. The clinic in Chawkbazar only operates in the evenings, between 5pm and 8pm; anyone can visit
the doctor by paying a token amount of 20 taka, whereas the usual fee to visit a general practitioner in Chittagong is 300 taka or more. The clinic includes a small pharmacy where the prescribed medications are provided free of charge.

The average number of patients seen in Darush Shefa on a normal day ranges from 15 to 30. On any given day, during the period of fieldwork for this study, there were one or two patients who looked different from the others. It was clear from talking with them that they were from the middle class; most were small businessmen or workers in the government service, who lived in this same suburb but were trying to minimize their medical expenditure. In an interview one of them explained:

I have bought a flat in this suburb. This is expensive and I am going to pay that debt for a long time. I know that some of my neighbours look down on me as I, and all of my family members, visit this clinic whenever we need basic medical treatment. However, they will not pay my debts, which are my personal responsibility. We visit other specialists if the doctor here refers us to them in more serious cases. Otherwise, the treatment for common diseases here is quite good, sometimes better than any government medical hospital. We have been living in the area for the last four years, and visiting this clinic for at least three years. My leg was burnt accidentally and now I come here once a week to get the dressing changed. I spend only 20 taka here, the doctor changes the dressing and the clinic provides me with the necessary ointment. If I went to a general practitioner, it would cost more than 500 taka every week. I am a diabetic and have to regularly buy insulin and medication. Therefore, I need to manage my medical expenditures and I don’t mind coming here at all. (Interviewed in a charity Clinic of the ISWCC on 17th January 2013)

In this society there is clearly a sense of there being a social stigma connected with receiving charity services, as it is generally perceived that these services are for poor people. Although some people from the middle class and lower middle class visited the medical centres, they did not seem to be comfortable being there. One of these two medical centres, Darush Shefa, is well known in the city for carrying out cheap but skilled circumcision operations. (Circumcision is considered a religious obligation for young Muslim males.) Darush Shefa
takes 250 taka as a token charge for this minor surgery and in most cases even this is waived if the parents submit an application form claiming their financial inability to pay. Although, officially, this circumcision procedure is free in the government hospitals, in reality one has to pay at least 500 taka to the nurses and other staff in order to be seen and receive medicine on the earliest day possible. In the private clinics, this procedure costs 3,000 to 15,000 taka, depending on the quality and status of the clinic.

One evening I saw a boy, aged about eight, who was crying. At first I thought this was because of his fear of the upcoming circumcision, but his father told me that his son wanted to get it done in a specific clinic, that charges around 5,000 taka. This man is a school teacher and paying that amount of money is difficult for him. Having to pay only 250 taka in Darush Shefa was a big relief and comfort to him. However, the boy’s cousin was circumcised in that private clinic and now the boy feels he will be ashamed in front of others when they learn he was circumcised in Darush Shefa. The father promised to give him something valuable as compensation. It came as somewhat of a surprise to me to witness how much social stigma is attached to this service, even in the mind of a very young child.

Both from the above story and through informal conversations with other middle-class patients, the degree to which social stigma is attached to receiving this medical welfare service was clear. However, none of the patients participating in the focus groups expressed such an attitude. In these groups there were eight female patients, mostly housemaids or housewives, all of whom lived in a nearby slum and in very poor economic conditions. Six of them were Muslims and two were Hindus. Although they discussed some problems they faced when receiving treatment in this clinic, they expressed overall gratitude and satisfaction, as this clinic provides them with the opportunity to receive basic medical
treatment at almost no cost. Hamida Begum\textsuperscript{93}, is in her late thirties. She teaches children in the slum how to recite the Qur’an in Arabic and her husband is a rickshaw puller. She explained her situation:

I first came here 12 years ago, when my newborn baby girl’s leg suddenly swelled up. We tried some Kabiraji medicines [local unconventional medical treatment based on herbs and plants] but it got worse. Then a neighbour directed us to this clinic. I believe that this was help from Allah, because otherwise my daughter’s leg might have been amputated eventually. Since then, my whole family, including my three daughters, two sons, husband and in-laws, visit this clinic whenever we need medical treatment. My monthly earnings are less than 3,000 taka and my husband also doesn’t earn much. Most of it goes on the house-rent and education of our children. If this medical service was not available, we would have no alternative except visiting free government hospitals, which is a terrible experience (Focus group discussion by female patients of an ISWCC charity clinic on 6\textsuperscript{th} November 2012).

Another primary medical centre run by the ISWCC is situated in the suburb of Madarbari, home to people of very low income, mostly labourers in the transportation sector. This clinic provides homoeopathic treatment to anyone, completely free of charge. This is an alternative, non-scientific, medicine which is cheaper than general (allopathic) medicine. A doctor, who is also a local Jama’at leader, sees patients in this clinic every morning from 10am to 12pm and at night from 8pm to 10pm. According to him, this schedule is designed to suit the working hours of the labourers living in adjacent areas. The room has a table, chairs and a wall cabinet containing the homoeopathic ingredients. The doctor sees his patients and puts together the free homoeopathic medicines for them. The same room in which the clinic is run is also used as the office of the local Jama’at unit in the daytime and evening. The number of patients in a normal day is between 10 and 20. During my seven months of fieldwork, none of the patients in this charity clinic were solvent or from the middle class. Almost all went there with a fever, asthma or other chronic diseases that require long-term medication. I discussed their jobs, families and diseases with them through informal conversations and

\textsuperscript{93} This name is fictitious to protect confidentiality.
found most of them earned a monthly wage of 5,000 taka (around 70 USD) and lived in local slums or makeshift huts.

A focus group was organized in which seven respondents participated, all of whom had children studying at one of the charity religious schools, the Madrasah Abu Huraira, run by the ISWCC. Religious schools, known as *madrasah* in Bangladesh, are usually considered inferior in educational standard to the general schools. Education in the religious schools usually does not assure students any mainstream job in the future. Rather, most of the graduates work as *Imam* (the appointed leader for the congregational prayer in the mosques) or as *Muazzin* (who are responsible for prayer call and mosque supervision), receiving a very minimal wage. It is a common social scenario in Bangladeshi society that the students of such religious schools come from underprivileged families. The case of Madrasah Abu Huraira fitted this scenario. As well as the many poor students, there were also fee-paying students from middle-class solvent families. The principal of the school informed me that around 150 students out of a total of 700 pay for their tuition and boarding expenses, while the others study and live there completely free of charge. All parents participating in the focus groups were from low-income classes, living in nearby slums. One of them, aged 45, described his situation:

> I was a labourer in a steel mill, but I am not fit for work anymore after a long illness. My wife works as a housemaid and she carries the costs of our daily living. Our eldest son got admission to this school which was a great relief for us. Religious education is also important at this young age and I hope he will be accepted in mainstream college after completing his secondary education here, so that he will get a good job in the future (Focus group discussion by the guardians of children studying in an ISWCC charity school on 12th December 2012).

No parents who were solvent accepted my request to be part of the focus group discussion, but some of them had informal conversations with me. All were aware of the probable future job problem for their children, but they felt that it was important for them to receive religious
and moral education so as to become good Muslims. As in the case of the father mentioned above, they hoped their children would go to mainstream colleges in the future and continue their studies in the general education system.

Apart from these people who received medical and social welfare, recipients of other occasional welfare services organized by the Jama’at also shared their experiences. A 55 year old male, working as a security guard and living in the community centre where he works for a monthly salary of 3,500 taka (around 50 USD), occasionally received financial assistance from the Jama’at office. His wife, along with their four unmarried daughters, lives in his village and he had not been able to visit them in the three months prior to the interview. His salary was not enough to cover his family expenses and he was unable to work elsewhere due to his age. He was an enthusiastic activist of the Jama’at and known to the city Jama’at leaders for his participation in political activities. He puts in an application to the social welfare secretary of the city office of the Jama’at whenever he needs money. This could be for various reasons, such as costs associated with the education of his children, medical treatment for one of his family members or simply to repay a debt, and the Jama’at welfare secretariat helps him. According to his estimation, he usually receives 2,000 to 3,000 taka (about 40 USD) every two or three months. When asked, he claimed that this has never affected his relationship with the party, but he is grateful for this assistance (Interviewed in Chittagong city Jama’at office on 18th January 2013). The City Welfare Secretary of the Jama’at previously mentioned that the party’s city office helps around 15 such people on an irregular but continuing basis, who have financial problems primarily due to their advanced age. According to him, such cases would be found in every local units working under his party’s Chittagong city branch as well. He was also clear that this could not be considered as a basis of a relationship between the party and its needy activists, as these are special cases, and the party does not help all of its thousands of needy activists in a similar way. Rather, it
encourages them to find employment or other self-employment activities by which to earn money (Interviewed in a school office in Chittagong on 1st January 2013).

Some welfare events have a bigger impact on recipients’ lives than others. For instance, a different type of welfare program was arranged by a sister organization of the Jama’at, the Islamic Labourers Welfare Organization (ILWO). On 15 January 2013, ILOW organized a mass wedding ceremony without the demand for a dowry. In Bangladeshi society, a marriage imposes a huge financial burden on families, especially the underprivileged. According to the local custom, the father of the bride usually gives a dowry – a large sum of money and other material things – to the bridegroom, as part of the marriage contract. Every year many women are tortured or even killed in Bangladesh because the bridegroom’s family is not satisfied with the quality or quantity of the dowry.

ILWO has been organizing mass marriage programs annually, with the aim of abolishing this dowry tradition. Any couple, or their families, can register for this event, on the condition that there will be no dowry given in the marriage. ILWO conducts the formalities of the marriage and provides food for the guests in a big community centre. At this particular event, 30 couples were married on the same day. The program started at noon, and the traditional marriage lunch was served after an hour-long religious ceremony. The organization allowed me to run a focus group discussion, but for the bridegrooms only, as it was felt that the brides would probably not be suitable participants in the discussion on the day of their marriage, ‘due to their emotional state’. Eight bridegrooms participated in a focus group discussion; all of them were poor and needy, mostly working as daily labourers and rickshaw-pullers.

All the recipients at other occasional welfare events which I attended, such as for the distribution of assistance for Eid (yearly religious festival) celebrations, for helping the victims of fire in a slum, for distributing winter clothes and giving sewing machines to
widows and women in need, were obviously very poor and members of the low class of society. Almost all of them were uneducated, struggling to meet the needs of their daily lives and not very active politically.

**RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE**

The Jama’at is a religion-based political party, well known in the country as being fundamentally affiliated with Islam. All party leaders and activists are practising Muslims. However, the welfare services of the party are available for everyone in need, irrespective of their religious or political affiliations. It was clearly apparent during the participant observation phase of this study, that the charity clinics and other occasional welfare activities of the Jama’at benefit poor people from other religions as well. At the same time, it was apparent during discussions that these services have varying degrees of influence on the religious mindset of the recipients.

Among all the welfare services, one in particular, educational welfare, is only offered to Muslims. Although there is no official restriction against non-Muslims, the religious nature of the charity schools naturally excludes them. Two charity religious schools, run by the ISWCC in Chittagong, have between them more than 800 students. The major one, Madrasah Abu Huraira, has 700 students, among whom 60 are orphans. The school authority also runs an orphanage in the same compound, where orphan students live free of charge. The other charity school is still a small project with around 100 students, who specialize in memorizing the whole of the Qur’an. These religious schools have adopted a government approved religious education curriculum, almost half of which consists of general subjects such as

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94 The educational system in Bangladesh is divided into two categories: mainstream education and religious education. The religious educational institutes are known as madrasahs. The madrasah system is also divided into two types: the Alia Madrasah and Qawmi Madrasah. The former is recognized by the government and the latter is independent in its administration and syllabus and known to be the more traditional of the two.
languages, grammar, history and science. The rest of the syllabus covers religious subjects such as the Qur’an, Hadith (Prophetic Traditions) and Fiqh (Islamic Law). For this reason it is highly unlikely that a non-Muslim student would study in such a school, and there are currently none who do. However, the principal of Madrasah Abu Huraira informed me that there were seven students whose parents had converted to Islam.

The Jama’at follows a specific ideological trend in Islamic politics. Although there are several other political and non-political Islamic groups in Bangladesh, it is seen as a party that strives to establish Islam through the existing democratic political system. This political ideology is additional to its central religious ideology, in that being associated with the Jama’at implicitly implies being religious. However, being religious in Bangladeshi society does not necessarily indicate an association with the Jama’at.

The ideological influence of the party is developed in a person through regular participation in party activities, and, specifically, through reading the party syllabus, which mostly consists of books written by Mawdudi. This essential and inherent feature of the Jama’at creates an obstacle for the people from the lower classes of Bangladeshi society. Those who live below the poverty line mostly lack any education, even basic literacy. The Jama’at has some programs, such as study circles or sessions where their literature is read aloud to an audience, but those programs are very limited in number and scope. As a result, the lower echelons of Bangladeshi society are not generally aware of the ideological aspects of the Jama’at, but rather see it as just another political party, with an Islamic leaning.

Although there was no evidence of any ideological influence of the party’s welfare provision among the patients of the charity medical service, in the case of the educational service the situation was slightly different. One of the fathers participating in the focus group discussion raised an interesting issue. He was a local factory worker and unable to afford the
cost of education for his children. He had two daughters and three sons, all attending different charity religious schools. He said:

My youngest son who is studying here [Madrasah Abu Huraira, run by the Jama’at] is somehow different from my other sons. All of them are studying in the madrasah system, but this one doesn’t want to visit other people’s houses as a Talibul Ilm, and reads some books which are not part of their madrasah syllabus. After the last election, he asked me why I had voted for the Awami League [the major secular party in Bangladesh]. In fact, I had received 1,000 taka for doing so. He told me that I had committed a Haram [religiously forbidden deed] by doing this. He is only 15 years old, can you imagine that? (Focus group discussion by the guardians of children studying in an ISWCC charity school on 12th December 2012).

As he said this, the father’s approvingly smiling face showed that he was proud of the stand taken by his son. This stand was an indication that the students studying in those charity schools might become politically and ideologically aware. Reading books other than the regular school syllabus is also a very rare practice among poor Bangladeshi families. The father was not able to say what types of books these were, but there is a strong possibility that the abovementioned young student had adopted the habit of reading Islamic literature from his madrasah.

The environment and daily activities of these schools are highly religious in nature. The students are visibly identifiable by their Islamic attire. The teachers and other staff working in these schools have religion uppermost in their minds in determining everything associated with the institutions. Therefore, the religious influence of these institutes is firmly established in the lives of their students.

However, it is different in the case of the recipients of charity medical services and other occasional welfare services. During my periods of participant observation in these

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95 This is a local religio-traditional practice where the students and teachers of the religious schools are invited to a person’s house on specific occasions, such as the anniversary of an elder’s death, or with the hope of receiving help in overcoming troubles in business. They go to the house, recite some chapters of the Qur’an, pray a special prayer and finally have dinner. This practice is considered unacceptable Bid’ah (ritualistic innovation) by many Muslims.
medical clinics, the presence of women wearing traditional Hindu *shindur* on the forehead, a symbol of their marital status, was a regular phenomenon. Among the eight women patients who participated in the focus group discussions, two were Hindus, although the advertisement seeking participants for these discussions mentioned no religious criteria. They came to the discussion groups voluntarily, after selection on a random basis, and their participation and opinion sharing were completely natural.

The religious identity of these two women was immediately apparent, due to their appearance and names. This having been noted and a friendly atmosphere established, I asked them whether I could ask a question which might be of a sensitive nature. They agreed, so I asked them how they felt about being receiving help from an organization which bears the name of Islam. Everyone in the participant group smiled and one of the Hindu women replied:

>You don’t have to be so wary in asking about this. It is not a sensitive issue here. I have been a patient here for at least the last five years. Whenever it is necessary, my husband, two daughters and one son also come here for their treatment. My father-in-law also used to come here, but he died a couple of years ago. My mother-in-law is a very traditional Hindu; she doesn’t visit any Muslim doctor. But she never complains either when we visit this centre. This is because the service is almost free and they give the medicine for free as well. My house is located very nearby, so we can walk here. Almost all Hindu people from our slum come here for medical treatment, if it is not a severe illness. In case of bigger issues, we go to the government hospitals, and that is the same for the Muslims here (Focus group discussion by female patients of an ISWCC charity clinic on 6\textsuperscript{th} November 2012).

This woman is 40 years old and illiterate but clever and works as a maid in several houses. Her husband is a rickshaw-puller. She looked at the other Hindu woman and asked jokingly: “Have you ever felt that they are trying to convert us?” Then everyone laughed again. From the whole conversation it was perfectly clear that the question of religious identity was not a hindrance to receiving the benefits of this medical welfare service.
On another occasion, I was present at a relief distribution event for victims of a fire in Bakalia, a western suburb of Chittagong. This was a slum where more than 100 makeshift huts were burnt in one night. Most of them had housed families of rickshaw-pullers, daily labourers and housemaids, who lost almost all of their belongings in the accident.

The Jama’at branch of that local area organized a relief distribution program and the President and General Secretary of the city committee went there to distribute aid among the victims. This lasted for around two hours in the afternoon. After short speeches by both visitors from the city committee, as well as the President of the local Jama’at unit, they distributed clothes, blankets, baby food, bags of rice and some other food items among the people. I observed that it was all very organized, in that every person had a piece of paper which he or she gave to a local Jama’at activist standing besides the guests, who then picked up the things to be given to that person, according to what was written on the paper. The victims of the fire then joined a queue to meet the visitors, who formally gave them the aid allotted to them. Of about 200 victims receiving help from the Jama’at leaders, I found at least 10 women identifiable as Hindus by the religious symbols they wore. An old man also wore dhuti, a traditional Hindu male dress, although it is rarely seen nowadays.

During the program, the City Secretary of the Jama’at had introduced me to the local unit President as an external researcher. After the event ended, I asked him if he would clarify some things for me. He explained that the local activists of the Jama’at had prepared a list of potential assistance recipients before the event took place. All victims were given some help in accordance with the number of their family members, especially children, and their financial situation. The President assured me that no political or religious factors were taken into consideration when making up this list, as everyone had been equally affected by the fire. He also told me that there were other male Hindu and Buddhist recipients who could not be identified as non-Muslim by their appearance. He estimated that around 20 of the 200 or
so people were non-Muslim, and stated that religious identity is never looked at by the Jama’at when organizing such mass charity events.

For the recipients of the welfare services, their relationship with the Jama’at does not correlate with their religious lives. Although it does not represent the best way to measure a person’s religiosity, regular prayer is generally considered an indication of a practising attachment to Islam. Among the recipients, those who are activists of the Jama’at, or who practise Islam from their own personal motivation, are found to pray regularly. Only two of the eight female patients who participated in the focus groups said that they regularly pray five times a day, and both were active supporters of the Jama’at. One said that she prayed every day, but not all five prayers. She expressed no interest in politics. The other three patients, who had received benefits from the Jama’at’s charity clinic for years, said that they prayed occasionally. During a focus group discussion with the bridegrooms, concerning the dowry-less marriage program, it was discovered that only one of them prayed regularly, and he was also active in the local Jama’at unit. None of the other seven had regular prayer habits, nor did they have any relationship with the Jama’at, other than receiving occasional welfare. One of them explained when this topic came up:

I work on construction sites as a daily labourer. It is not easy for me to pray regularly, although I know that I should. I try to go to the Friday prayer, if I’m not working that day. My wife recites the Qur’an every day and she has memorized many chapters of it. I can’t read the Qur’an. I came to know about this organization through our local councilman Mr Mahbub [a Jama’at leader]. He runs a Qur’an recitation teaching course in our local mosque, but I just don’t get time to do anything after work. (Focus group discussion by the bridegrooms of a dowry-less mass marriage program in Chittagong on 5th December 2012)

In summary, it is clear that family background and personal viewpoint are active elements in some recipients’ being more religious than others. All of them identified themselves as Muslims and asserted that they had the intention to pray regularly, but they presented
common social excuses for not being a practising Muslim, such as current difficulties in their lives or intending to pray, later, in old age. Similarly, among all those who received occasional social welfare provided by the Jama’at, there was no perceivable religious influence exerted by these service providers, nor did the recipients feel obliged to be religious in their personal lives. However, the recipients who were also actively associated with the party activities had a different perspective. For them, their association with the Jama’at, in its political and social ideology, brought certain demands of religious practice in almost every aspect of their lives.

**POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS**

During this period of observation, a good trusting relationship was developed between the regular service recipients and the researcher. In addition, valuable information and insights were acquired through informal conversations with the recipients of occasional welfare provision. At this time, a curious fact about the recipient class came to light. It is a common assumption that people who receive social welfare services provided by the Jama’at are generally supporters of the party, or at least are favourably inclined towards it. However, this did not always prove to be the case. Among the recipients, there were even supporters of the Awami League, the party which is ideologically and politically the arch-rival of the Jama’at. Despite this, it appeared that as a result of those charity events, the Jama’at had gained a higher moral standing, in the eyes of the recipients, by providing assistance. For instance, one of the Awami League supporters asked for and received financial help from the Jama’at city office that helped him pay part of the SSC (Secondary School Certificate) exam registration fees for his young son. During a focus group discussion, he told me that he feels good as a Muslim receiving help from a religious party, but at the same time, he supports the Awami League politically because he sees it as better fitted to run the country.
While these welfare services are available for anyone, and various types of people were found among the recipients, some steps are taken by the party administration so that people associated with the party will benefit. During my interview with one of the City Jama’at leaders, he informed me that a large portion of the party’s welfare budget is spent on offering personal financial help. He explained:

We receive a lot of applications every week. We cannot help everyone according to their need, due to insufficient funds. For instance, a poor person may need 80,000 taka for surgery. We may give him, based on his application, 5,000 or 10,000 taka. Or someone needs a lot of money for his or her marriage, so we try to contribute by giving 3,000 or 5,000 taka. These sums do not completely meet their need but contribute to it. As we have hundreds of such cases in any given month at the city level, we cannot satisfy someone fully and neglect others. Besides, the units are also helping people at the local suburb levels. Those applications come to us primarily with recommendations from the local Jama’at activists. However, if someone comes directly to our city office with an application, whether they are associated with the party or not, and if we later find out through investigation by the Jama’at activists in their local areas that the case is valid and they really need help, we never stop helping them based on the fact that they didn’t come through our party channel. Rather, our help is open to anyone who is in need of it. (Interviewed in Chittagong city Jama’at office on 16th November 2012)

Overall, it was clear that a large number of the people who come to the party office seeking direct financial help are either Jama’at activists, or sympathizers of the party. On the other hand, people who receive welfare services through different public outlets, such as the charity medical centres and schools, or the sister organizations of the Jama’at, fall into a different category. Their political association with or sympathy for the party, or even their religious identity, is not a factor.

During the focus group discussion among the bridegrooms who participated in the dowry-less mass marriage organized by the ILWO, it was revealed that one of them, aged 22, was actively associated with the political party, the Awami League, which is the major rival of the Jama’at in Bangladeshi politics. Another was not politically minded, but had voted for
the Awami League in the previous election because he had received 1,000 taka from the local Awami League members. Among the remaining bridegrooms, only one was actively associated with the Jama’at. The other seven participants supported and voted for the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which is in a coalition with the Jama’at and therefore the rival of the Awami League.

With reference to his political orientation, the bridegroom associated with the Awami League said:

I voted for the Boat [symbol of Awami League in the national election]. I like them as they are the party who brought us independence from Pakistan. They are also powerful in our area. When I heard about this dowry-less marriage program, it was the first time I had heard about this organization. They are doing good things. Some of my friends told me that it is run by the Jama’at. Then I consulted with Mr. Mahbub. He is our local councilman and an Awami League leader. He told me that there is no problem if my marriage takes place at this event. I work in a salvage shop and I can’t afford to conduct a huge ceremony for my marriage. It is a good thing that my relatives went there and had good food. The organization [ILWO] also gave us 10,000 taka and wedding clothes. My father is also happy because the local imam told him that the dowry is not part of our religion. (Focus group discussion by the bridegrooms of a dowry-less mass marriage program in Chittagong on 5th December 2012)

This conversation made it clear that although this young man was aware that the program was organized by people associated with the Jama’at, he did not consider that receiving services from them would harm his political convictions. Moreover, the local Awami leader allowed him to do so.

Similar stories were told by the patients of the medical services. Of the 12 female participants of the focus group discussion, 3 said that they had voted for the Awami League in the previous election, 4 had voted for the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and only 1 for the Jama’at. The other 4 participants had not voted, claiming they were not interested in politics.
ECONOMIC INFLUENCE

People need welfare assistance when they are unable to meet their minimum living requirements by themselves. Many industrialized countries are welfare states, providing care to their citizens to varying degrees. Although Bangladesh has a governmental welfare mechanism in place to provide for its citizens, as an underdeveloped country it is unable to cover the real needs of its people. In this densely populated country of 170 million people, 26 per cent of the population lives below the national poverty line of USD 2 per day.

Bangladeshi society is home to several types of welfare and charitable works. NGOs run on foreign funding can be found all over the country, in addition to a myriad of religious charities. However, the Jama’at is different from these others, as it is predominantly a political party which emphasizes welfare activities, with its religious affiliation adding a further dimension.

It is evident that most of the welfare activities of the Jama’at, while making some contribution to the recipients’ lives, do not fully satisfy their medical or educational needs. Medical needs, for example, are ongoing and a person might require assistance at various times in his or her life. Although they have been in operation for three decades, the two charity clinics run by the Jama’at in Chittagong are not up to a satisfactory standard. Despite their history and the demand for their services, they still offer only basic healthcare. Although medicines are provided by the clinics, patients have to buy medicines elsewhere if they are expensive and not the conventional ones. In cases of any serious disease or the need for major treatment, the patients are forced to go elsewhere.

The charity schools make some positive contributions to their students’ lives. Several people to whom I spoke had studied in those schools and are now solvent thanks to their various occupations. However, such cases are not commonplace, and there are other former students who work in low-paying jobs. This circumstance has arisen because of the socio-
economic situation of Bangladesh, as the students of religious schools do not have many opportunities in the job market there. Moreover, there is an apparent negligence on the part of the Jama’at to maintain and develop the educational welfare activities.

Other occasional welfare activities, such as one-off financial donations, are mostly partial and temporary solutions to the problems of the recipients. The most sustainable project of the Jama’at is the distribution of sewing machines to needy women. This usually takes place once a year and from 10 to 15 sewing machines are distributed on each occasion. Apart from this program, the Jama’at provides partial financial help with costs of marriage ceremonies, business capital, house renovations, examination fees and other major needs of poor people. The sum provided to each person usually amounts to 10 to 30 per cent of the total required to meet the need.

Some other welfare activities are conducted following major natural disasters or accidental events. Winter clothes distribution or relief distribution among the victims of floods, for example, provides temporary support to many people in severe distress. This assistance is not intended to improve their economic condition or to make sustainable contributions to their lives, but rather to help them meet their immediate needs or regain their normal lives.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION FOR POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY
The Jama’at is a religious-based political party based on the ideology of a transnational Islamic revivalist movement. The party has formal structures and policies in effect. On the other hand, social movements are primarily informal network or people or groups deriving through collective action in order to achieve specific goals or changes. Therefore, a question
arises. Can the Jama’at be considered as a social movement at the first place, before even an attempt is being made to explain its activities through social movement theories?

The answer to that question can be found in the complex identity of the Jama’at. Although it is a formal political party, the Jama’at has longstanding history of confrontation with the establishment. In Pakistan, the party was banned in the fifties by the military ruler Muhammad Ayub Khan. After the independence of Bangladesh, it was banned again (Nasr, 2005). Apart from participating in the coalition government during 2001 – 2006, it has always remained in the opposition and struggled for different political, religious and social issues. Currently, it is officially prohibited from participating in the elections\(^{96}\), although the people associated with the Jama’at have active participation in all areas of political sphere through various names and forms\(^{97}\). Moreover, social movements do not necessarily exclude any formal organization all the time. Staggenborg (2008) studied social movements that included movements with various organizational structures. He suggested that organizations with more formalized structure sustain more as a movement whereas informal organizations performs better at adopting innovative strategy. This is exactly the case with the Jama’at in Bangladesh as already discussed in the previous chapter and as will be elaborated more in the conclusion chapter.

The definition of the social movements, as given by Greg Martin (2015, p. 1), is worth mentioning here. He viewed that the social movements “are collective forms of protest or activism that aim to affect some kind of transformation in existing structures of power that have created inequality, injustice, disadvantage, and so on”. It can be said that the social welfare activities organized by the Jama’at in Bangladesh meet the general characteristics

\(^{96}\) As mentioned previously in the Chapter 3, the High Court of Bangladesh suspended the registration of the Jama’at as a political party under the Election Commission of Bangladesh on 1\(^{st}\) August 2013, and thereby the party is currently barred from participating in any national or local elections. 

\(^{97}\) For instance, two Jama’at leaders were interviewed during the fieldwork of this research who were elected as the Councilmen in the 2014 Chittagong City Corporation election. All Jama’at affiliated local leaders contested in that election as independent candidates.
mentioned in this definition. The party is providing welfare through an organized and collective activism process with an aim to bring about change in the society. The motives and aspirations working behind this welfare provision will be examined, based on the empirical data, in detail in the chapter 7. In brief, the Jama’at recognizes the poverty in the society as an outcome of unjust governance and attempts to alleviate it through welfare activities as an integral part of its political activities. Social scientists have always been trying investigating the reasons that motivate people to engage in collective action. For the Jama’at adherents, social welfare activities represent a core religious duty. Additionally, this activism has served the party as an avenue of mobilizing its manpower and material capitals in order to gain popular support as well.

Apart from the social-change aspect, the Jama’at also represents an ideological movement. However, this ideological aspect of the party is strongly interconnected with its social aspect as it is competing in political and religious fronts with the ultimate objective of implementing ideology-based political and religious changes in the society. In this process, it has constantly been facing opposition on different grounds. Extremist religious groups condemn the Jama’at for compromising Islamic principles, according to their religious interpretations, as the Jama’at complies with the state law as ‘opposed to the Shar’iah (lit. Islamic Legal System) law’ (Islam, 2015). On the other hand, many in Bangladesh allege the Jama’at for being the umbrella organization for the extremist terrorists (Hashmi, 2015). In this constant struggle, the Jama’at has chosen to strengthen its ties with the society which has been proved to be vital for its own existence. While conversing with the leaders and members of the party, it was clearly understood that, especially with regards to their welfare activities, all of them consider their collective action as more of an ideological movement than merely a political party.
Social movement studies have recently been resorting increasingly to two closely related modern approaches to explain this phenomenon, they are Resource Mobilization Theory and Political Opportunity Theory (often named as Political Process Theory also). Developed by sociologists and political scientists such as Doug McAdam (1996), John McCarthy (1977), Mayer Zald (1996), Charles Tilly (2004b), Sydney Tarrow (2011) and so on, Resource Mobilization Theory recognizes the significance of resources in mobilizing a collective action whereas Political Opportunity Theory argues that the mobilization and success of a social movement largely depends on contemporary political opportunities. The political opportunity approach also focuses on factors such as resources, organization and the strategy of the movement (Cuzán, 1990).

A combination of these two approaches are employed in this research to investigate the resources utilized by the Jama’at in organizing its social welfare activities as well as to examine the political circumstances surrounding those activities. In this study, several types of tangible and intangible factors such as manpower and social welfare activities themselves represent the resources. Moreover, motives of the welfare providers and experiences of the welfare receivers are analysed to understand the political realities of this phenomenon.

Discussions in the previous chapter as well as in this chapter demonstrate that the Jama’at has a motive in gaining popular support and a stronghold in this economically underdeveloped society through various social welfare programs. Although the people associated with the Jama’at have their primary focus on religious humanitarian motive, they do not overlook their work’s implication in local and national politics, as well as in the elections. In his interview, a city Jama’at leader overtly attributed party’s political success to its social welfare activities:

Practicing Islamic ideal can only change the society for better. Islam teaches us to serve helpless people, and we are actually far backward in this aspect. If the Jama’at can do proper
social welfare, this would be enough to win their heart and mind. Therefore, we are trying to inspire our people, to mix with others, to help them by whatever possible means... in the recent city corporation election in Chittagong, we have won 2 councils. Both of the areas are mostly populated with the Awami League supporters. One is the council no. 8, in Sholoshohor (a suburb in Chittagong city), the other is council no. 13, in Pahartoli (another Chittagong suburb), can you believe that Mr. Mohiuddin Chowdhury’s (the most influential Awami League leader in Chittagong. In Bangladesh, people usually support top leader especially if such a famous leader comes from their local area) home is situated in that council?... both areas are overpopulated with slums. They didn’t vote for the Jama’at, they voted for those two elected councilmen. They were the most active local Jama’at leaders organizing religious programs, charity schools, clinics, employment programs, cleaning programs, social awareness programs and so on in those slums. We even organized a Zakat (alms) distribution program in the home of Mr. Mohiuddin Chowdhury. It was not a Jama’at program, rather it was an ISWCC program. All of them know that we are the Jama’at, but they like us, they voted for us in local council election despite their political support for the Awami League (Interviewed in Chittagong city Jama’at office on 16th November 2012).

An investigation into the social welfare activities of the Jama’at proves that socio-political connectivity is vital for organizing social movements as well. The Jama’at provides a socio-political platform for people from various parts of the society to communicate and negotiate their demands. In this negotiation process, both moral and cultural resources play important roles. Interpretation of religion, socio-economic condition of the country, organizational structures and material resources, participation of the organizers in these welfare activities, varying influence of these programs on their receivers; all these factors constitute the construct of this social movement.

CONCLUSION
The people categorized as providers in these welfare programs of the Jama’at comprise the party’s leaders, intellectuals and activists and those other people who are directly involved in the welfare organization. The recipient category constitutes several types of people: patients...
in the charity clinics, students receiving education in charity religious schools and their parents, people receiving financial and material assistance from the Jama’at and so on. Analysis of their participation revealed diverse facts and issues associated with social welfare provision by the Jama’at in Bangladesh.

With regard to the providers’ motives, belief in a religious mandate to help the underprivileged is a very strong factor and religious motivation is undeniably the major reason behind organizing these welfare programs. However, the reality (and hence the practical demands) of the political context cannot be ignored. The Jama’at initiated social welfare activities as a means to pave the way for its return to politics, in the post-liberation war period, when the party was banned officially due to its war-time association with the Pakistani army. Moreover, in economically underdeveloped Bangladesh, the failure of the state to provide welfare for its citizens has resulted in fertile ground for private charity endeavours. Currently, the Jama’at, like many other Islamic political parties elsewhere, attempts to exploit this void to reach to the masses. Most Jama’at activists long for the socio-economic development of their country and see it as going hand in hand with their humanitarian activities. Obviously, gaining popular support in a politically competitive environment is important for the future of the party.

In providing these services, the party faces many challenges, most of which are associated with funding and with the political instability of the country. However, it would appear that the party is not focusing on improving the management of its social welfare provision at this time; rather, it simply wants to keep these activities going while focusing on other, primarily political, issues of the country.

Recipients of these welfare services are presumed to belong to the lower income classes of society. Although this may be the case for most services, such as charity schools or activities offering occasional financial assistance, for the medical welfare service there are
some exceptions in this regard. Through participant observation, I found that some beneficiaries in those charity clinics were from the middle and lower middle classes. However, unlike what was found in previous studies of Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, the recipients of the welfare organized by the Jama’at, as an Islamic political party, in Bangladesh are, in general, the very poor and underprivileged people.

The welfare provided by the Jama’at is greatly appreciated by the people who benefit from it. Although it is not sufficient to meet all their needs, it helps them face their immediate problems and generally there are no complaints about the shortfalls. Nevertheless, it was clear that the Jama’at has failed to utilize its potential to develop a better welfare service, primarily due to its lack of emphasis on this area. This can be seen in its out-dated working strategies regarding the organization of its social welfare programs. Despite, or maybe because of, being in operation for more than four decades, party leaders and activists generally carry out welfare activities as part of their regular work and do not seek to improve their scope and effectiveness.

Among the recipients, despite their gratitude for whatever they receive, this situation has some negative consequences for the party, the major one being the lack of religious, political and economic influence that it has in their lives. The party certainly has the opportunity to spread its religious teachings, as well as its political ideology, through these activities, as many of the welfare workers would like to do. Moreover, proper planning and strategic development would enable the party to make a more sustainable socio-economic contribution to people’s lives. But this has not happened in Bangladesh. The Jama’at was a major part of a coalition government of the country from 2000 to 2005 and the Secretary General of the party acted as the Social Welfare Minister at that time. But it failed to utilize that opportunity also, due to its emphasis on political aims instead of religious and social aspects of its agenda. Currently, the Jama’at is facing political annihilation by the
government; one of the Assistant Secretaries General was hanged in December 2013, the supreme leader of the Jama’at died in jail in October 2014 and all other central leaders are in prison, either having received a death sentence from the War Crimes Tribunal, or waiting for it. This political hardship is certainly a major drawback for the party’s social welfare provision. However, the ISWCC and other social welfare organizations of the Jama’at, although operating at a very minimal level and affected by the political instability, are now providing the party with an important means to communicate with the general population. It is obvious that this social welfare provision has a great potential in Bangladesh. Two important factors need to be considered in this regard. First, the weak economy of the state allows opportunities for private welfare endeavours. Second, although the state is officially declared secular, most Bangladeshis lean towards their religious identity. Religion has always been an important factor in Bangladeshi politics. In this context, a successful social welfare movement requires better resource mobilization and more sophisticated dealings with the major political elements of the society.
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the Bangladesh Jama’at-e-Islami, an Islamic revivalist political movement which embraces modern socio-religious strategies in order to attain its primary objective of establishing Islamic governance at a state level, focuses significantly on providing social welfare assistance. The primary aim of this study is to undertake an ethnographic exploration of the party’s social welfare activities and, in so doing, to examine the reasons behind this socio-religious phenomenon, which has practical political implications in a Muslim-majority secular state. In order to address this task, the qualitative inquiry method has been adopted for the research. The significant data, gathered through interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation, demonstrate that the social welfare provided by this political party serves as one of its avenues of resource mobilization as a social movement in Bangladesh.

Political activities always have a close relationship with the society in which they are conducted. The phenomenon studied in this research has added a new dimension to that relationship with regard to the Islamic political parties. It also implies the future growth of such welfare programs in many Muslim countries, the majority of which are economically underdeveloped and lacking an adequate state-supported welfare system for their citizens. Although the Jama’at has several organizational shortcomings, the party’s provision of social welfare provides it with a support base in Bangladesh to some extent, despite the current adverse political situation there. The Jama’at’s support for the poor, who constitute the vast majority of Bangladeshi citizens, creates opportunities for this movement to increase its political power, although its inherent religious motivation to offer charity is also genuine.
In order to expand the arguments of this study, the first five chapters present the conceptual foundation of the topic, along with its historical background and a descriptive inquiry into the current situation of the Jama’at. As a major Islamic revivalist movement, the Jama’at holds a significant position in the socio-political discourse of Muslim societies. Particularly in the context of the current global war on terrorism and the civilizational clash, and like its counterparts in other Muslim countries, which are embracing a corresponding ideology and working to bring a religious change into socio-political governance through political participation, this movement plays an important role in the balance between secularism and religious extremism. Chapter 5, which examines the history and development of the Jama’at in Bangladesh, shows that after steady growth in the political arena during the last three decades, the Jama’at in Bangladesh is currently encountering the most difficult period in its history. Several top leaders of the party have been imprisoned and some have been given death sentences following allegations of war crimes committed during the liberation war in 1971. Three central Jama’at leaders, Abdul Quader Mollah, Muhammad Qamaruzzaman and Ali Ahsan Muhammad Muzahid were hanged between 2013 and 2015, the others are awaiting legal execution in prison. Although the party has now been legally banned from participation in elections and most of its activists are either in prison or in hiding, it is interesting to note that the social welfare programs of the movement are still actively functioning.

One of the reasons for this is the organizational structure that the Jama’at has adopted to implement its social welfare agenda. This operates through a combination of internal party structures and a complex network of socio-religious non-political organizations run by Jama’at members. The party has established several non-political welfare organizations as a front for its social welfare program, the Islamic Social Welfare Council Chittagong (ISWCC) being the oldest and most active of these.
Chapter 6 focuses on ethnographically investigating the social welfare program of the Jama’at, especially the medical and educational welfare organized through the ISWCC in Chittagong City. It also examines in detail, through data gathered during fieldwork, the overall composition of the social welfare program of the party. The arguments and findings of this thesis are finally offered in Chapter 7.

Although Bangladesh is constitutionally a secular country and the current government is run by a secular political party, religion still remains one of the most powerful factors in determining mass opinion regarding political issues. However, this fact has not much benefitted the Jama’at or any other Islamic political movements there. The development of religious identity in the Bangladeshi Muslim mindset has a strong relationship with local culture and traditions. As in many other Muslim majority countries, political revivalist readings of Islam have introduced a new way of looking at religion to the masses, most of whom are illiterate and belong to the economically underprivileged agricultural classes. In this context, social welfare provision should assist the Jama’at in building a functional relationship with them.

The provision of social welfare is certainly atypical as a general characteristic of conventional political parties, but this marriage between political and social activities achieved by the Islamic political parties has become an emerging trend, worldwide, in recent decades. The Jama’at initiated this merger in the 1970s, almost at the same time as did other Islamic political parties, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle-East and Islamic movements in Turkey. It can therefore be assumed that the instigation of social welfare activities by the Jama’at was not just their own initiative, but rather part of a global trend adopted by several movements having a similar ideology. In Bangladesh, the adverse post liberation war situation of the Islamic movements and the government’s ban on the Jama’at gave the members of this movement more reasons to attempt such non-political means of
starting up their activities. However, the development and outcomes of this social welfare phenomenon differ from country to country, and society to society.

It is naturally to be presumed that the utilization of social welfare as an important instrument of resource mobilization would help advance these movements politically, especially among the lower classes of society. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood’s social welfare program, predominantly in the health sector, has established a stronghold for the party among the general population. The Muslim Brotherhood won the first democratic election in Egypt’s history in 2012 – only to be ousted from power by the Egyptian military one year later. In Turkey, Islamic movements have achieved remarkable success through their participation in social welfare activities, ranging from health and education to financial institutions. Currently, the Justice and Development Party, officially a democratic party, but influenced strongly by Islamic revivalist ideology, has been ruling since 2001. These success stories are often cited by Jama’at members, motivating them to put more emphasis on social development. However, the current situation of the Jama’at in Bangladesh is very different from that of such Islamic movements in other countries. The party is now in opposition and has been strongly repressed by the government since 2008. During the several years prior to that, it experienced constant growth in national politics and won seats in 17 constituencies out of 300 in the national election in 1991. The party was part of a coalition government and the Jama’at President and the Secretary General held ministerial positions from 2000 until 2005. After three years of military government in Bangladesh, the Jama’at won only two seats in the national election in which it participated in 2008. The party boycotted the national election of 2013, along with other major opposition parties.

Political outcomes aside, the social welfare program of the Jama’at makes contributions to the recipients’ lives from religious and economic perspectives, particularly in the education sector, through charity schools which have a strong religious influence in the
lives of the students who attend them. The medical and financial assistance given was mostly found not to have such a strong and sustainable impact, although the contribution it makes to the lives of the poor who are struggling merely to survive in this underdeveloped country should not be ignored.

One of the major weaknesses apparent in the social welfare program of the Jama’at is its lack of strategic planning and its outdated approach. Its welfare activities in independent Bangladesh began in the 1970s, prior to its political activities. Most of the infrastructure, such as the buildings and material resources which are still being used for charity welfare purposes, was established around this period. From the condition of those buildings and items of furniture and their settings, it is obvious that the organization has made no attempt to modernize them or develop them from time to time.

The modus operandi of the Jama’at’s social welfare provision, such as the sectors in which it operates and the activities through which it is carried out, has likewise hardly been updated. The method of fund collection also remains the same, as the organizers have not considered any income-generating activity or business or any other new sources of funding. Although the organization has long been suffering from a funding crisis, it remains solely dependent on occasional donations and religious alms (zakat). Almost all of the participants in this research who work in the Jama’at social welfare program complained of lack of funds, although they seemed to have no great concern about or plans to fix the problem. This attitude is in direct contrast to that evident in their rival NGOs, which are flourishing thanks to their fund-generating financial dealings, a comparatively new trend in Bangladesh, referred to as ‘social-business’ and introduced by Noble Prize laureate, Professor Yunus. With regard to the funding of the Jama’at’s social welfare program, most of the infrastructure was built and the activities devised in the 1970s, when charity funds from Middle-Eastern countries
were readily available. Currently, however, the situation is very different. In the aftermath of global terrorism, Middle-Eastern funding is almost impossible to obtain.

The outdated strategic implementation of social welfare activities of the party is noticeable in its programs and activities. An examination of the annual welfare reports of the Jama’at and its secondary welfare organizations shows that almost identical programs have been continuing to run without any visible change for more than the last four decades. One of the reasons behind this could be an unchanged strong leadership over the years. The leadership of the party, along with its subsidiary organizations and institutions, mostly consists of the people who initiated or joined the party in the late seventies. They are highly respected inside the party environment for their lifelong and selfless contributions to the party. This has both positive and negative outcomes. The Jama’at is known for its strong inter-membership bond and undivided obedience, however, the policy and activities of the party are suffering from being outdated.

The leadership of the Jama’at has very strong authority over the party programs and agendas, as well as the party members. Although there are some perceivable grievances and criticism among some of the young party members, they are very minor in influence and number. Improved strategic aspects such as modern methods of fundraising, need of the websites and information sharing, providing one-stop service through an easily accessible customer care centre, professional review of welfare activities, and so on were mentioned in some instances by some of the young party leaders during interviews. However, all of them expressed that such changes are hard to see in the near future due to various facts such as the protective nature of the party facing adverse political circumstances, and stagnant mindset of most of the party leadership and members as well.
Currently, there is a huge possibility that the Jama’at would be banned in Bangladeshi politics as the government has been threatening and openly planning to do this for the last few years. In many cases, government officials even mentioned their plan to seize all properties and funds owned by the Jama’at, including all of its secondary organizations like the ISWCC. Although some of the Jama’at leaders, adopting a pragmatic approach, view that the party should move forward with a new name and changed leadership in order to face this threat, most of them have different opinions. A common argument prevailing among them suggests the fact, that the party was able to re-emerge in the independent Bangladesh with all stigma attached to its name due to its support for Pakistani rulers and the occupying army during the 1971 war, proves that there is no need to adopt new name, policy, or leadership. Moreover, this name, the Jama’at, is considered by many as a heritage and a symbol of connection with the identity of a transnational Islamic movement in the Indian subcontinent. This also shows the protective and orthodox mindset in effect among the Jama’at people.

It is important to remember that the Jama’at is primarily a political party which has a strong capacity in social welfare. Major identity of this party is religious, and it considers social welfare as part of its religious obligation alongside political changes to uphold Islam in society. Although the party do not take a more modernized approach in its activities, young party supporters and workers have a visible presence in the digital world. In the context of the oppressive political situation of Bangladesh, the Jama’at people resort to the social media in order to propagate their ideology as well as to continue their activities. On the other hand, Bangladeshi mainstream media is generally politically biased as almost all newspapers and TV channels are owned by secular nationalists, and the Jama’at is generally subjected to negative propaganda most of the time. The Jama’at people have always been complaining about this issue and have been unsuccessfully attempting to gain a place in the media. However, the only TV channel owned by pro-Jama’at people was shut down by the
government in 2013 at a night of a massive police and paramilitary crackdown on the Islamists. There are few newspapers still running by pro-Jama’at people at the national level but they are very insignificant, suffering from low circulation, due to outdated presentation that fails to appeal to most of the population. This also proves that the stagnant and reactionary approach towards strategic policy is a common disease that the Jama’at is facing on all fronts, alongside their social welfare activities.

One may wonder how this party continues to exist in Bangladesh and gain strong influence in politics although it fails to update and improve its policies. The answer is probably hidden in the complex nature of this party. Due to being a religious-based party, traditional means of propagation such as meeting in the mosques during regular daily prayers and religious meetings provide this party with an avenue for outreach which other political parties and social organizations certainly lack. During the fieldwork, it became apparent that the Jama’at will remain one of the most significant religio-political actors in Bangladesh despite all government oppression and enmity from strong secular segment of the society. If the party policies were strategically more advanced and updated, it may have an opportunity to win in this confrontation. However, that is not the likely case today considering its current condition.

Another aspect of the social welfare program of the Jama’at is the increasing commercialization of their projects, which were initially set up to provide welfare. In the 1970s and 1980s, numerous schools and medical centres around the country were established by Jama’at members, primarily with the objective of spreading their religious ideology. Almost all of these are now run as private profit-based businesses. They are commonly known for their religious affiliation and cost effectiveness, but they are not affordable for the lower-income classes. This is now true for all educational and medical service institutions run by Jama’at members, that is, the schools, universities and hospitals established in the last two
decades. Increasingly, the Jama’at members are finding employment and hence gaining a stronger financial position through these service-based business endeavours, but the number of charity schools and medical centres has actually decreased at the same time. Non-religious general NGOs are now establishing more charity schools and medical centres, whereas the Jama’at’s biggest fully functioning charity hospital in Chittagong, the Rabita Hospital, which used to be funded by the OIC (Organization of Islamic Conferences) and other Middle-Eastern charitable organizations, was shut down in 2007 due to long-term mismanagement and the lack of post 9/11 funding.

Political Islam is a worldwide thriving phenomenon in the current era, especially in Muslim countries. Long experience of colonial rule and failure of the authoritarian rulers to meet people’s expectation have paved a demand for democratic good governance based on the rights of the people. In this context, religious-based political parties will certainly continue to have influential positions in those countries and in the global politics as well. Despite the significance of this phenomenon, the Jama’at in Bangladesh has not received much academic attention. There is a dearth of literature regarding this party and its position in Bangladeshi politics and society, and even almost none about its social welfare programs. This study can claim to be the first investigation into the social welfare program of the largest Islamic political party in Bangladesh. Through an ethnographic approach, this case study introduces a detailed insight into the social welfare activities of the Jama’at in Bangladesh, and therefore, it is expected to be a useful reference for future research in this area. Furthermore, while focusing on social welfare aspects, this research work also provides an outline of historical and contemporary significance of this religious-based political party in Bangladeshi politics. Both social and political studies of Bangladesh have, to date, overlooked this position of the Jama’at due to various reasons, mostly attributed to the secretive nature of this strictly organized party as well as the political stigma attached to its
role during the 1971 Liberation war. However, this is an undeniable fact that the party has been increasingly gaining influence among the general Muslim population and in politics. Despite announcing all threats to ban the party, the government officials also occasionally mention that the ideology and though of politico-democratic Islam would not be removed from society. In this context, this thesis also claims to contribute in the area of studying the Jama’at in particular, religious-based political parties in general, and any social welfare activities administered by religious authorities or organizations as well.

Before this research, no study has been carried out which investigates the social welfare activities of the Jama’at in Bangladesh. However, social welfare activities of Islamic political parties in some other Muslim countries have been studied in the recent years. Most of these studies focused on the Middle-Eastern countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, and Turkey. There is an interesting similarity between these Islamic political parties with regard to their social welfare activities which has been long overlooked by the academicians. Charitable works and social welfare activities were one of the major avenues taken by most of the Islamic political parties in order to initiate their political existence in all those countries. The AKP in Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt were vigorously involved in social welfare activities in their early days. (Clark, 2004b; Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008). In Bangladesh, the Jama’at had also started education and medical services before it announced itself as a full-fledged political party. One can deduce from this that the Islamic political parties have an inherent characteristics of providing support for underprivileged population and making their way into politics through this social class. On the other hand, electoral successes of the AKP in Turkey, the Hamas in Palestine and the Hizbullah in Lebanon were largely attributed to their social welfare activities (Clark, 2004a; Jawad, 2009; Levitt, 2006). This is different in case of the Jama’at. Although it is the largest Islamic political party in the country, it comes after two other major political parties, secular
Bangladesh Awami League and liberal-nationalist Bangladesh Nationalist Party, in terms of general popular support. In Bangladesh, the Jama’at has not gained much success in the national elections except being an alliance of a coalition government for once in 2001. Less attention towards improving its social welfare activities might be a significant factor in this regard. While the studies regarding social welfare activities of the Turkish AKP and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood indicate their attention towards service development and continuous strategic improvement in their charity schools and hospitals, a critical observation of the charity schools and medical clinics run by the Jama’at in Bangladesh demonstrates a contrasting situation. Most of the welfare activities of the Jama’at are administered within the similar formats and strategies as they were initiated with in the late Eighties. Instead of improving charity activities of the party, the people associated with the Jama’at developed their private commercial endeavours in these service sectors. As a result, charity medical services of the Jama’at are provided through two modest clinics in Chittagong city whereas there are more than six full-fledged hospitals operating in the city that are established and run by the Jama’at leaders, workers and supporters. Similarly, charity schools run by the Jama’at through the ISWCC do not hold reputation and quality as like as the general schools run by the Jama’at people in the city. Apart from the lack of attention towards social welfare strategy development of the Jama’at, as it is argued in the analysis of Chapter Eight, this situation clearly indicates negligence towards the social welfare services of the party.

A critical observation of the field of study affirms that relative deprivation and collective behaviour theory were not pertinent to the history and development of the Jama’at in Bangladesh, as some scholars suggested for some Islamic movements in other countries, claiming that low social mobility, great income inequality and poverty contributed to the development of social movements. This is not the case in the phenomenon of social welfare services organized by the Jama’at in Bangladesh. Rather, resource mobilization and political
opportunity models of social movement theory were most applicable there, as the
development of the Jama’at’s social welfare provision owes much to a synthesis of religious
motivation, potential achievement as a political party and pragmatic consideration of the
socio-economic reality of the country. The analysis in this thesis demonstrates that most of
the vital components of a social movement formation are present in the existence of the
Jama’at in Bangladesh and in its social welfare activities. Political oppression and
confrontations have resulted in a sense of grievance or ‘insurgent consciousness’ among a
group that has been actively trying to achieve a political goal. In the case of the Jama’at, this
particular goal is verily religious, which makes this a very unique and new social movement
phenomenon. This also shows the importance of looking into the role of religion in creating
social changes in this diverse and changing modern world. The role of religion as a resource
element is also a curious addition to the social movement discourse.

In this phenomenon in Bangladesh, social welfare activities are considered an
important resource by the Jama’at in an attempt to meet its political opportunities. Although
the Jama’at’s activities suffer from a lack of development and several shortcomings, the
important role played by its tangible resources (such as political gain and ownership of
infrastructural properties) and its intangible resources (such as religious and ideological
motivation) is an inevitable benefit to it as a political party. In organizing social welfare
provision, the Jama’at certainly regarded it as an important resource for achieving its
ideological and political objectives, and thereby strengthening probable political
opportunities. It could be argued that in organizing social welfare provision the Jama’at is not
as successful as its counterparts in other Muslim countries. However, the current positive
outcomes and the future potential of these socio-political activities are impossible to deny.
PARTICIPANTS IN THIS STUDY

The following is a list of the social welfare providers interviewed during the fieldwork, totalling 19, categorized according to their role in the social welfare provision. The first group included 5 interviewees who were political and intellectual leaders with roles at the policy-making level of the movement. In the interest of confidentiality, all names are fictitious in this research to protect their identity. They are:

**Aref Haidar**, 59 years old, a Chittagong city Jama’at leader, former leader of Bangladesh Islami Chatra Shibir (the student wing of the Jama’at) and a former member of the National Parliament of Bangladesh. He considers social welfare as a religiously indispensable duty of any Islamic group. He is a full-time politician with involvement in land business to support his private life. He was interviewed on 24 and 25 September 2012 in a hotel in Dhaka.

**Shafiul Azim**, 52 years old, a Chittagong city Jama’at leader, former agriculture expert by profession and currently a full-time politician and the person most informed about the Jama’at activities in the city due to his position in the city Jama’at Executive Committee. He is responsible for communicating with local and field-level leadership of the Jama’at and organizing all political events. According to him, improving socio-economic conditions is a prerequisite of establishing Islam in the society. He was interviewed on 16 November 2012 in the Chittagong City office of the Jama’at-e-Islami.

**Nazmuddin Maudud**, 74 years old, one of the prominent intellectuals of the country, a retired civil servant and known widely as an Islamic intellectual figure. He was an activist of the Jama’at during his student life before joining the government service. According to him, the Jama’at should focus on welfare through education in order to sustainably contribute to society’s development, something which has not properly taken place until now. He was interviewed on 25 September 2012 in his residence in Dhaka.

**Abdullah Masud**, 42 years old, an academician teaching at a university in Chittagong. He taught in ISWCC welfare schools and currently associated with training management for the teachers of those schools. He is of the view that the moral development of the people at the...
root level of the society is the biggest welfare service that should be carried out by any Islamic group. He sees obeying Allah’s order to help the underprivileged as the only objective of social welfare service by the Jama’at. He was interviewed on 9 October 2012 in his office in the International Islamic University Chittagong.

**Nawshad Ahsan**, in his late forties, one of the elected councilmen from the Jama’at in Chittagong City Corporation. He owes his electoral success and popularity in his local area to the social welfare services of the party. According to him, selfless service for the people, regardless of their political or social identities, can only ensure acceptance of Islamic ideology of the party in Bangladeshi society provided that the providers plan and work intelligently to contribute to the recipients’ lives with long-term effect, which is not common in the organization of social welfare by the party. He was interviewed on 17 December 2012 in his office of Madarbari Council, Chittagong.

The second group of the provider-participants comprised Jama’at leaders and activists who have a direct role in the party’s welfare provision, and staff working in the welfare providing organizations. Similarly to the previous group, all names are fictitious to protect their identity. Eight of them were interviewed during the fieldwork. They are:

**Abdur Rahim**, 65 years old, a member of the Executive Committee of Chittagong City Jama’at and one of the Islamic Social Welfare Council of Chittagong (ISWCC) leaders. He sees social welfare as the best avenue for preaching authentic Islamic teachings to the masses, but concedes that inadequate funds are the major problem which the Jama’at faces in organizing this provision. He was interviewed on 27 December 2012 in the head office the ISWCC (Islamic Social Welfare Council Chittagong).

**Asaad Mahmud**, 68 years old, one of the ISWCC leaders, a full-time welfare organizer in the council and responsible for field-level implementation, and a *Rukon* (highest cadre of the party) of the Jama’at. He is responsible for communicating with all project officers, doctors, teachers, administrators and staff. With regard to the obstacles they face in organizing social welfare provision, he also seconds the opinion of the president that inadequate funds are the major problem. He was interviewed on 1 December 2012 in the head office the ISWCC.

**Rafiqul Islam**, 51 years old, a member of the city Jama’at Executive Committee with special duty in social welfare provision. He been working with the Jama’at since 1977 when he was a student, and working in his current welfare related position for last six years. He communicates with, and manages, all social welfare secretaries of all local units of the party in Chittagong City. He emphasizes the importance of good organization of social welfare, as
it helps all party activists to train themselves to serve society, although he considers that the party has not been able to gain any political benefit from these activities. He was interviewed on 1 January 2013 in the office of a private secondary school in Chittagong.

**Gias Uddin**, early fifties, an activist of the Jama’at and professionally working as the Supervisor for several welfare projects in a UK-based NGO in Bangladesh. He believes that humanity should be put first to improve the quality of social welfare services and to make best use of it in socio-economic development. He was interviewed on 2 January 2013 in his residence in Chittagong.

**Yeasnul Kabir**, 50 years old, a city-level Jama’at leader with special duty in welfare provision. He has been working with the Jama’at since 1979. He thinks that the party does not gain any political benefit from social welfare services, as the election system in Bangladesh is corrupt and the poor voters are easily bribed by other parties. He was interviewed on 5 January 2013 in the Chittagong City office of the Jama’at-e-Islami.

**Abdul Qayyum**, 51 years old, working as a welfare organizer of the ISWCC for 19 years. He thinks that the ISWCC has much more potential, which has not been implemented due to a lack of strategic planning and professionalism. He was interviewed on 28 November 2012 in the head office of the ISWCC.

**Nazmul Islam**, 41 years old, working as an welfare organizer of the ISWCC for 22 years. He considers the Jama’at exceptionally successful in educational welfare. He was interviewed on 28 November 2012 in the head office of the ISWCC.

**Rabiu Islam**, 35 years old, working as an welfare organizer of the ISWCC for 7 years. He is responsible for record keeping and official procedures. He thinks that the ISWCC lacks proper motivation and administrative resources. He was interviewed on 5 December 2012 in the head office of the ISWCC.

The third group of provider-participants consisted of three staff members and activists who were especially involved in the medical welfare sector. Their real names are replaced with pseudonyms in this research to protect their identity. They are:

**Dr Zaman Ahmed**, 35 years old, working as a physician in a charitable clinic run by the ISWCC. This clinic is open in the evenings from 6pm to 8pm. This is not a voluntary job for him as it is a common practice for young doctors in Bangladesh to work part-time in
pharmacies and private clinics, mostly in the evenings. He is neutral regarding politics and apparently not very serious about practising Islam in his personal life. He was interviewed on 1 November 2012 in a charity clinic run by the ISWCC.

**Asadur Rahman**, 38 years old, working as an administrative assistant in an ISWCC charity clinic for the past 16 years. He is an activist of the Jama’at and, by profession, part of the administrative staff in a non-government hospital in Chittagong, which is commercially run by people associated with the Jama’at. He was a valued informant regarding medical welfare services of the Jama’at, as he was found to be one of the most knowledgeable about its medical welfare administration. He was interviewed on 31 October 2012 in a charity clinic run by the ISWCC.

**Nazmul Islam**, 42 years old, local Jama’at leader and President of a local unit of the party, businessman by profession, with a special interest and long-term experience in the medical welfare organization of the movement. Interestingly, he considers organizing social welfare services less important for the Jama’at, feeling it should focus on the moral development of the society through Islamic preaching. He was interviewed on 8 October 2012 in his residence in Chittagong.

The fourth and final group of provider-participants consisted of three activists and staff with roles in the educational welfare organization of the movement. Their real names are replaced with pseudonyms in this research to protect their identity. They are:

**Muhammad Jamal Khan**, 38 years old, an activist of the Jama’at, founder of an NGO in a village in Chittagong and principal of a charitable primary school. He is more concerned about the funding problem than about examining the motives and objectives of the party. He was interviewed on 27 January 2013 in his NGO office in Chittagong.

**Abdullah al-Hasan**, 35 years old, teacher by profession and local Jama’at leader. He is of the view that the party should employ more resources for better social welfare services provision, as the management of welfare is not properly planned and lacks motivation. He thinks that the people of the Jama’at are doing this now as routine work, rather than with a feeling of a prioritized moral obligation and inspiration. He was interviewed on 28 January 2013 in his school office in Chittagong.

**Khondoker Nizam Ahmed**, early 40s. He has been an activist of the Jama’at since his student life and is now the Corporate Social Responsibility Management Officer in a large commercial corporation. He has a special interest and long-term role in managing educational
welfare activities of the movement in various places. He considers the Jama’at has failed in providing any real benefit from its social welfare services, due to corruption and lack of proper planning by the providers. He was interviewed on 12 October 2012 in his residence in Dhaka.

Following is a brief description of the service recipients who participated in one-to-one interviews. Their real names are replaced with pseudonyms in this research to protect their identity. They are:

**Sirazul Islam Khan**, 45 years old, a small businessman and supporter of another political party, the Awami League, a political rival of the Jama’at. He receives regular medical services from the ISWCC charity clinic, despite being a middle-class person with relative solvency. His view is that the Jama’at is a party of good people but they are unfit for the dirty political arena in the country. He was interviewed on 17 January 2013 in a charity clinic run by the ISWCC.

**Kabir Sardar**, 55 years old. He works as a security guard in a community centre and receives occasional financial assistance from the city office of the Jama’at. He thinks that he would be a beggar and in a very miserable situation with his four unmarried daughters if there were no help from the party. He was interviewed on 18 January 2013 in the Chittagong City office of the Jama’at-e-Islami.

The first focus group discussion took place on 6 November 2012, in a community centre near the charity clinic, Darush Shefa. Although some recipients consented to use their real names, their identity is protected here by the use of pseudonyms. The participants are all female patients who received treatment in that clinic. They are:

**Nasima Akhter**, late 20s, married. She works from home as a dress-maker and supports the Jama’at politically because this is a religious party and she feels it is her obligation to support it even if there were no welfare assistance.

**Modhubala Debi**, mid 20s, unmarried. She works as a housemaid and is not concerned about the political affiliation of the charity clinic that is providing her with medical assistance.

**Hamida Begum**, late 30s. She is married and teaches children of the slum in her home. She is grateful to the ISWCC for the welfare assistance she receives but feels there are some
major drawbacks, one being that there are no female doctors available to treat female patients for gynaecological problems.

**Rahima Khanam**, mid 20s, married. She is a housewife and states that the performance of and services provided by this charity clinic meet her expectations.

**Asmani Begum**, mid 20s, unmarried. She is a garment factory worker and has mixed feelings regarding this medical welfare service. According to her, most of the medicines are not available here and she has to buy them from general pharmacies. However, she is grateful that the ISWCC provides great support for her and her family members. She is happy to be able to receive services from an Islamic organization despite the fact that she is a Hindu.

**Khadiza Khatun**, late 20s, housewife. She sees the Jama’at as a good political party but incapable of administering the country. Therefore she has always voted for another rightist political party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

**Radharani Vottacharjo**, mid 20s, married. She is happy with the services she receives from this charity clinic.

**Bindubala Debi**, late 30s. She is married and a housewife and thinks that this charity clinic is a blessing for the poor people living in the nearby slum, particularly the women. She is a Hindu and does not see any problem in receiving support from an Islamic organization in the same way as other Hindu women living in the nearby slum. Her mother-in-law, although she does not like to visit this centre, does not prohibit the family members from going.

The second focus group discussion took place on 5 December 2012, and comprised the beneficiaries of a particular welfare event organized by the Bangladesh Farmers Welfare Cooperative, a sister organization of the Jama’at. The Cooperative organized a dowryless marriage ceremony, where 38 couples were married. Eight of the 38 bridegrooms joined a focus group discussion. They are:

**Muhammad Anwar**, 22 years old, daily labourer. He is not aware of any relationship between the organizers of the occasion and the Jama’at. However, he is inspired by this event to practice Islam.
**Abdur Rahim**, 23 years old, rickshaw puller. He does not support the Jama’at in politics but he likes the local councilman, who is a Jama’at leader, for his support and care.

**Muhammad Suruz Chowdhury**, 23 years old, construction worker. He joined this program because his new father-in-law is a Jama’at supporter and inspired him to take part in this marriage occasion as he cannot afford to organize an expensive wedding ceremony.

**Abdul Hamid**, 22 years old, construction worker. He does not support the Jama’at but his parents are strong supporters of this party.

**Muhammad Nasiruddin**, 27 years old, salesman in a furniture shop. He is an activist of the Jama’at and his new wife also supports the party. He believes that this kind of dowryless marriage is a religiously praiseworthy act and that the party did well by organizing it.

**Kamal Uddin**, 29 years old, factory worker. He sees the Jama’at as a proper Islamic party that helps poor people like him to meet the important needs of their lives.

**Nazrul Shah**, 23 years old, rickshaw-puller. He supports the Jama’at, as does almost everyone in his extended family.

**Muhammad Hasan**, 25 years old. He is learning automobile repair in a polytechnic institute established and run by the people associated with the Jama’at.

The participants in the third and final focus group discussion were the parents of students studying in the religious school run as a charity by the Jama’at. The discussion took place on 12 December 2012 in that school. The participants are:

**Mahbubul Islam**, late 40s, owner of a small grocery shop. He has six children, two of whom are studying in the charity-run school. He is grateful to the Jama’at for providing this important assistance.

**Rashed Ahmed**, late 30s, former rickshaw-puller and currently physically disabled due to a road accident three years ago. He thinks that general education is better than education at a religious school because it ensures better employment in the future. However, he cannot afford that for his son, a student in an ISWCC charity religious school.
Bahar Uddin, early 40s, daily labourer. He has five children, two of whom study in a ISWCC religious charity school. The others are infants.

Nazib Miya, late 40s, jobless. His wife works in a garment factory and they have two sons, one of whom studies in a ISWCC school while the other goes to a free government school. He thinks that one of their sons should be religiously educated.

Morshed Alam, 45 years old, jobless. He has a son studying in a ISWCC school. He believes that childhood is an important time, when a child’s mindset is being formed, and therefore religious education at this stage is important in order for the child to become a better Muslim in the future.

Rajibul Islam, late 30s. He has four children, including a son who goes to a ISWCC school. His wife nearly died while giving birth to this son, and he vowed to give him a religious education if both mother and son survived.

Yusuf Islam, late 40s. He is a Jama’at activist who sends both his son and daughter to a ISWCC school. He hopes that both will be good religious scholars in the future.
SAMPLE: LETTER OF APPROVAL BY PARTICIPANT ORGANIZATION

Following application was written in Bengali and was approved by the President of ISWCC:

To
The Honorable President
Islami Shomaj Kollan Porishod Chittagong
Chittagong, Bangladesh

Sub: Seeking Permission for Academic Research Data Collection

Dear Sir,

I would like to inform you that I, Faroque Amin, am an HDR student of Religion and Society Research Centre in the University of Western Sydney. I am inquiring regarding religious-based social welfare activities in Bangladesh as a part of writing my PhD thesis. For this purpose, I need to gain academic analytical knowledge and understanding of the medical and education services organized by your esteemed organization and provided to the needy and underprivileged people of this region. I would like to talk to social welfare organizers such as the doctors, teachers, staffs as well as the receivers of those welfare activities.

Therefore, I am requesting your kind permission to interview relevant people and observe the activities of those welfare institutions.

Date, Chittagong
14.10.2012

(Faroque Amin)
HDR Candidate
University of Western Sydney
SAMPLE: INFORMATION SHEET

Centre for the Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies
School of Social Science and Psychology, UWS

Information Sheet / তথ্য প্রশিক্ষণ

Social Welfare Program of Islamic Political Party: A Case Study of Jama’at-e-Islami Bangladesh

The investigators of this study / এই প্রকল্পের পরিচালক:

- Dr. Jan A. Ali / ড. জান আলি
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- A/Prof Adam Possamai / আ/প্রফ আদম পোসামাই
  Email: a.possamai@uws.edu.au Phone: +612 9772 6623

Student / ছাত্র:
- Farouque Amin / ফারুক আমিন
  Email: famia@uws.edu.au Phone: +6145 100 1517

What are the research aims?
The aim of this research is to explore the phenomenon of social welfare organizations by a religious-based political party in Bangladesh. It will be a sociological investigation of the experiences of this social welfare providers and receivers.

What will you be asked to do?
Social service providers are invited to attend an about 1 hour one-to-one semi-structured interview. Social service receivers are invited to attend an about 1 hour focus group discussion along with other 7-9 members. There you will be asked some questions about your experiences with these social welfare activities. The person asking the questions will be an outside person, researcher student of the University of Western Sydney, and not employed by any company or organization. Your answers will be heard and seen only by the researchers, NOT by anyone employed by or related with the social welfare providing organization or others. No supervisors or representatives of them will be there. There will be no implications of these interviews or focus group discussions on the relationship between you and your respective organizations.

What are the benefits of this study?

The Centre for the Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies (CSCMS) in conjunction with the School of Social Science and Psychology, UWS, is investigating the social welfare program of Islamic political parties in Bangladesh. The purpose of this study is to explore how these programs are implemented and the experiences of participants who engage with them.

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Centre for the Study of Contemporary
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UWS

Will anyone know what answers you give?
Your information provided through interviews or focus group discussions will be confidential. Interviewees will be asked whether they would like to remain anonymous, and if willing, every measure will be ensured to keep the confidentiality. During focus group discussions, everyone will be requested to not to disclose information to others. We are only interested in exploring your experiences. All the information materials and audio recordings will be taken from here and locked in a safe place by Faroque Amin before being taken back to Australia. Then after the completion of this research project, they will be kept in a locked cabinet in the University of Western Sydney under the supervision of Dr. Jan A. Ali. No one else will be able to see your answers or no one else will know your name or any identity information. All the materials will be viewed only by the researcher and his academic supervisors.

What will happen to the findings?
A PhD thesis on the findings from this fieldwork will describe the organization of this social welfare program in Bangladesh. It will identify the motives, influences, characteristics and outcomes with regard to this social welfare program as experienced by different groups. Moreover, future academic journal articles, conference papers and other scholarly publications will use this information for data analysis. All kind of usages will be for academic purposes only. As practiced by the Australian general standard, audio recordings, transcriptions and translations will be kept locked up safely for five years following submission of the final PhD thesis to the University of Western Sydney. These will then be destroyed in a secure environment.

How do I consent to participate:
Your participation is entirely voluntary. A consent form is attached. The research project will be explained to you by the student. You will give your consent simply by signing this form before the interview or focus group discussion if you will decide to participate in this project.

How do I consent to participate:

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What if I change my mind:

It is completely ok to change your mind. You can withdraw, revise or make any amendment to your participation at any time before the final data analysis phase of this research which will start approximately by February 2013.

If you change your mind after signing the consent form, or when you are part-way through the participation, or even after completing it, you will be asked to complete the ‘Withdrawal of Consent for Use of Data Form’ or to notify the researcher student that you wish to withdraw or revise your participation.

If you choose not to take part in this research, or withdraw, or amend/revise your participation, there will be no consequences for you of any kind.

Will I benefit by taking part in this project?

By answering the researcher’s questions and providing him with relevant information, you will help us to explore this social welfare program organized by a religious-based political party in Bangladesh. There will be no direct benefit occurring through this research project for any of the participating groups. However, social welfare organizers may have an opportunity to look upon themselves and find the problems, if any.

Will participating in this study be harmful to me anyway?

No. You will not be at risk or any discomfort or any other kind of harm. The social welfare organizer authority has agreed with conducting this research, but they will not know what you say, unless you want it to be known.

Is this research part of any other project? No.

If you feel this project has any other questions or concerns, you should ask the researcher student to explain them in detail.
Will the result be available to me?
A brief summary of the PhD thesis will be made available in English and Bengali at the end of the compilation of this thesis. Besides, the complete thesis in English will be available in the UWS library. You can obtain the summary, if you are willing to do so, by contacting the researcher student.

Who can I ask any questions I have about this study?
The researcher student, Faroque Amin, will be available during all participations, or you can contact him anytime at:

Faroque Amin
Centre for the Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies
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University of Western Sydney
Parramatta, NSW 2142, Australia
Email: famin@uws.edu.au
Phone: +61 455 180 151

If you have any complaints or official queries that the researcher has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact:

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Phone: +61 2 9773 6675

OR

Human Ethics Officer
Research Quality, Policy & Planning Team
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Social Welfare Program of Islamic Political Party: A Case Study of Jama’at-e-Islami Bangladesh

I have read/have had read to me and understood the participant information sheet and consent form, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree/do not agree to participate in the interview.

I would like to publish my identity/remain unanimous.

I also agree that the interview will be recorded by audio recording equipment and all research data provided by me or with my permission during the project may be included in a thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals and other scholarly publications.

I understand that I may withdraw or revise my participation at any time.

I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

I agree to the interview being published.

I agree to the interview being included in a thesis.

I agree to the interview being presented at conferences.

I agree to the interview being published in journals.

I agree to the interview being published in other scholarly publications.

I agree that I may withdraw or revise my participation at any time.

Participant’s Name / নামঃ ...

Signature / সাইনচেক্স: ...

Date / তারিখ: ...

Researcher’s Name (print name) / গবেষকের নামঃ Faroque Amin / ফারুক আমিন

Signature / সাইনচেক্স: ...

Date / তারিখ: ...

Supervisor’s name (print name) / উপদায়কের নামঃ Dr. Jan A. Ali / ডাঃ জেন আলী
SAMPLE: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION CONSENT FORM

Centre for the Study of Contemporary
Muslim Societies
School of Social Science and Psychology,
UWS

Consent Form / সম্মতিপত্র
Focus Group / ফোকাস গ্রুপ

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I ...................................................... have read/have had read to me and understood the participant information sheet and consent form, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree/do not agree to participate in the focus group discussion.

I also agree that the discussion will be recorded by audio recorder equipment and finally all research data provided by me or with my permission during the project may be included in a thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals and other scholarly publications with the condition that neither my name nor any other identifying information is used.

I understand that I may withdraw or revise my participation at any time.

আমি ...................................................... এ পংক্তি পাঠানো হবে আর আমার প্রণয়নো স্মৃতিসৌধের জন্যে প্রার্থে করি।
আমি ফোকাস গ্রুপ আরো অপর অপর অন্য স্মৃতি সৌধের জন্যে প্রার্থে করি।
এছাড়াও আমি সম্মতি আন্দোলন করি যে, ফোকাস গ্রুপের সাথে আমার প্রকল্পের স্মৃতি সৌধের জন্যে প্রার্থে করি।
আমি ফোকাস গ্রুপের সাথে আমার প্রকল্পের স্মৃতি সৌধের জন্যে প্রার্থে করি।
আমি প্রকল্পের সাথে আমার প্রকল্পের স্মৃতি সৌধের জন্যে প্রার্থে করি।

delete: আমি বলি যে আমার জন্যে আমার প্রকল্পের স্মৃতি সৌধের জন্যে প্রার্থে করি।

Participant’s Name / অংশগ্রহণকারীর নাম: ..........................................................
Signature / চিঠ্য: .......................................................... Date / তারিখ: ..........................................................

Researcher’s Name (print name) / গবেষণকারীর নাম: ...... Faroque Amin / ফরোকে আমিন
Signature / চিঠ্য: .......................................................... Date / তারিখ: ..........................................................

Supervisor’s name (print name) / ভাইজিউসের নাম: ...... Dr. Jan A. Ali / ড. জান আলি
Withdrawal of Consent for Use of Data Form

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I, ........................................................................ wish to WITHDRAW my consent to the use of data arising from my participation in:

☐ Interview / ইন্টারভুয়েন্স
☐ Focus Group Discussion / ফোকাস গ্রুপ ডিসকাস

I understand that data arising from my participation will be destroyed provided this request is received before the final data analysis phase/February 2013.

Data arising from my participation must NOT be used in this research project as described in the Information and Consent Form. I understand that this notification will be retained together with my consent form as evidence of the withdrawal of my consent to use the data I have provided specifically for this research project.

*Please tick as appropriate / সংজ্ঞায়িত করুন যা পছন্দ করেন

Participant’s Name / অংশগ্রহণকারীর নাম..................................................

Signature / চিহ্ন........................................... Date / তারিখ..................................
REFERENCES


Michelle Browers. (2013). Islamic Political Ideologies. In Michael Freedon

Lyman Tower Sargent & Marc Stears (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (pp. 627-643). Oxford: Oxford University Press.


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