



THE NEW SEEKERS: EXPLAINING THE CHANGING TREND OF RADICAL FUNDAMENTALISM IN BANGLADESH

A H M Nahid ¹

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Development Studies, Islamic University, Kushtia-7003, Bangladesh. Email: nahid@ds.iu.ac.bd

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Abstract

Since 2000, radical fundamentalism has surged globally, including Bangladesh. The governmental countermeasures forced the radical organizations to evolve. The 2016 Holey Artisan Attack underscored a new trend: the attackers were home-grown and from privileged economic and educational backgrounds. This marked the existence of a new type of seekers. This study, using an institutional perspective, develops a theoretical framework based on theories and models from America and Europe to unravel their nature. The framework is tested against primary data, collected through purposive sampling, and an alternate model is proposed. The major finding is that the new type of seekers from privileged economic strata and non-general educational background might be approached and successfully recruited by radical organizations using either infection or seed crystal model. Beyond epistemology, the findings and the alternative model hold significance for law enforcement and policymakers combating radical fundamentalism, both at home and abroad..

Keywords: Disinformation, Information Disorder, Social Media Manipulation, Democratic Resilience, Artificial Intelligence-Generated Disinformation, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Terrorism is a global phenomenon with regional characteristics shaped by local traditions, social values, political culture, and historical experiences. In Bangladesh, terrorist incidents have had a destabilizing effect. After 2000, the country faced radical fundamentalist attacks from domestic and foreign extremist groups. Between 2000 and 2016, attack patterns, intensities, group policies, and resistance measures evolved significantly. Radical ideologies survived by adapting to social and security changes, continuously identifying new targets and vulnerabilities. Some socio-economic factors have always emerged to create vulnerabilities of new types. The evolution of radical ideologies in Bangladesh warrants renewed academic and policy interest, especially as the global rise of religious influence poses a compelling challenge for integrating religious and political expressions.

This study focuses on radical fundamentalism and its growth. Juergensmeyer (2004) notes that while fundamentalism denotes unwavering religious faith, critics view it as isolating problems into a deviant form of religion. Radicalization is a process of personal transformation, and Radical fundamentalism, as the secondary term, refers to an ideology that induces violent behavior against those who reject one's perverted religious views.

In Bangladesh, extremist religious interpretations have radicalized many youth, causing violence, injury, and death. Military actions have failed to defeat these groups because they exploit the existing socio-economic environment. Previously, recruits were predominantly poor youth with religious education only. However, recent attacks like the Holey Artisan (Daily Star, 2016) and Sholakia (Daily Star, 2016) attacks indicate a shift: now well-educated, wealthy young people are joining religious extremism, marking a strategic change by radical organizations. According to North et al. (2012), societies can prevent violence through institutions and norms. Yet Bangladeshi society no longer does so, suggesting socio-economic changes enable recruitment from higher economic strata. Identifying the factors driving this behavioral change constitutes the research puzzle.

To ensure clarity and accessibility, the paper is divided into 6 subsections. Section 2 is a review of previous research on radical fundamentalism, institutional failure, seekers and recruitment models, leading to a theoretical framework. The methodology of the study is explained in details in section 3. Section 4 presents the findings from the primary data, discusses them and proposes an alternative model. Section 5 draws the curtain with a conclusion section which includes both synopsis and implications of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Radical Fundamentalism and its Rise in Bangladesh

Bangladesh, in south-east Asia, was born through a nine-month 'war of liberation' in 1971 (Jahan, 2000). Nationalism, not religion, played the key role in liberation (New Age, 2016). The first constitution (1972) added secularism as one of the four state principles while banning religion-based politics (Jahan & Shahan, 2013). After the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the nation's focus shifted. Political dynamics from 1975 to 1990 fueled the growth of religious fundamentalism. General Ziaur Rahman's Fifth Amendment (1976) removed Article 12 (secularism) and added "Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim" to the preamble (Anisuzzaman, 2000). The right to establish religion-based political parties was introduced in 1979 (ibid). General Ershad's eighth amendment (1988) established Islam as the state religion (ibid). Secularism has since been reinstated, while Islam and religion-based parties retain their rights (The Daily Star, 2013).

Fundamentalist political parties, banned in 1971, re-emerged in 1979. Jamaat-e-Islami, banned for opposing independence, returned as Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB). Various religion-based political parties rose as military autocrats used religion to safeguard their power, influencing the elections of 1991, 1996, and 2001 (New Age, 2016). Both major parties—Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)—showed inertia in implementing policies contrary to Islamic principles, misinterpreting religion as affecting power transitions rather than their own governance

failures (Jahan & Shahan, 2013). Consequently, beyond JIB, other fundamentalist parties (Islami Oikya Jote, Islamic Front Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish) and radical groups (Harkat-ul-Jehad-ul-Islam, Jamyaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh) emerged. During the BNP-JIB coalition government (2001-2006), the opposition Awami League claimed 33 radical fundamentalist groups existed in the country (New Age, 2016). In 2016, BNP similarly claimed IS was present (ibid). Though governments denied these claims, later attacks (blogger killings, suicide bombings) proved them true (ibid). Prominent attacks include the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) bombing (Chicago Tribune, 2001), Ramna Batamul bombing (rediff.com, 2001), the 2004 Shahjalal grenade attack (The Daily Star, 2004), the August 21 grenade attack (The Daily Star, 2004), the 2005 nationwide bombings (The Daily Star, 2005), the Jhalakathi attack (The Daily Star, 2016), the Holey Artisan attack (Dhaka Tribune, 2016), and the Sholakia attack (Daily Star, 2016). These incidents resulted from society's failure to contain violence, primarily due to institutional failure. Political institutions failed to create a non-violent environment, making violence an ever-present and easier means to achieve goals.

2.2. Institutional Failure to Contain Violence: The Gradual Growth of Radical Fundamentalism in Bangladesh

The growth of radical fundamentalism was related to the state, its political and economic institutions, and their inability to control violence. North et al. (2012) presented a framework assessing the importance of state institutions in containing violence. They assumed violence was an ever-present problem because individuals and organizations often use violence to gain resources. To enable development, the violence probability must be kept in check by providing incentives (rents) to those with violent capacity. The political system produces these rents by manipulating economic interests. North et al. (2012) termed this a Limited Access Order (LAO). In LAOs, a dominant coalition (organizations with greater violence capacity) creates rents for themselves. Rents are the stabilizing factor, as economic growth is traded off for stability. LAOs may experience growth, stagnation, or collapse. A spectrum of LAOs—fragile, basic, and mature—exists. A society's position on this spectrum (see Table 1) is defined by the organizations it can sustain. Movement along the spectrum is possible (e.g., fragile to basic, basic to mature), but LAOs mostly stagnate or regress due to vulnerability to internal shocks. Open access orders (OAOs)—the opposite of LAOs—feature private economic organizations with no discrimination or impediments to forming economic or political organizations. Transition from mature LAO to OAO requires two key features: institutional arrangements enabling impersonal exchange among elites, and expanding such exchange.

Table 1: Types of LAOs and Their Characteristics (North et al., 2012).

Types of LAOs	Characteristics
Fragile LAO	1. The government has simple institutional structures. 2. The dominant coalition finds itself in a difficult situation if both the external and internal violence is present. 3. Neither the economic nor the political organizations are distinguishable. 4. The case is also same for civilian and military organizations as they too aren't easily distinguishable.
Basic LAO	1. The government is more established. 2. All the economic organizations are associated with the state. Also, most of the political organizations are controlled by the state. 3. Not every organization in a basic LAO has violence capacity, but most of those with this specific capacity are part of the state. 4. Significant number of non-government organizations with violence capacity exist.
Mature LAO	1. The government is well set up and the offices and functions are well defined by rule of law.

Types of LAOs	Characteristics
	2. A larger number of economic organizations apart from the government are supported by dominant coalition. But the access for the private economic organizations is effectively limited. 3. More political organizations exist but they have to depend on central authority. 4. The Government controls almost all (with only a few exceptions) of the organizations that have the power to create violence.

In Bangladesh, the state structure is defined by rule of law. Most economic organizations linked to the dominant coalition are constituted by political leaders and elites, though some are linked to multinationals. Most political organizations with high violence capacity are part of the state, while the opposition is weak, sidelined, and under threat. Yet many non-governmental organizations possess significant violence capacity. Increasing bureaucratic discretion and the rise of public enterprises owned by the defense forces prove that violence capacity determines rent distribution. The current system is stable but may prove fragile under pressure from external or internal forces. Some strong political actors outside the dominant coalition push for entry or seek rents. Constitutional institutions (e.g., Election Commission, Anti-corruption Commission) are not strong or independent enough (The Daily Star, 2016). Some religion-based political parties create hegemony through demands (e.g., Hefazat-e Islam) or violent acts (e.g., strikes by Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh) (BBC News, 2013).

Bangladesh is a basic LAO with risks of fragility. Political institutions outside the dominant coalition find it impossible to gain rents. The existing institutional framework does not allow this, so they use religion or radical fundamentalist groups to achieve political goals. Thus, there is constant demand for such groups as tools to pressure the government or express clandestine resistance. This creates a political vacuum that paves the way for radical fundamentalists.

2.3. Filling in the Political Vacuum: How the Radical Fundamentalists Capture the Opportunity

Radical fundamentalists fill the political vacuum and need individuals to join, get radicalized, and carry out radical acts. The people who join radical groups are also created by political mechanisms through their impact on economic and social mechanisms.

Venhaus (2010) proposed four categories of "seekers" based on their motivations. First, the revenge seeker thinks his success is blocked by the system, filled with rage, and looks for a way to express frustration. Kohut identified this rage as 'narcissistic rage' (Ornstein, 2011). Second, the status seeker feels the world doesn't appreciate him enough; isolation and undervaluation push him toward an 'I'll show you' response. Third, the identity seeker looks for a group to belong to—an organization providing belonging, structure, and clear rules. Fourth, the thrill seeker looks for adventure to prove his 'manhood,' impressed by tales of heroism and glory. When studying IS recruits, Quantum researchers identified nine categories of seekers, all of which fit Venhaus's four-seeker model (Tucker & One, 2015).

Numerous radicalization theories offer stage-based or pillar-based models (NYPD, 2007; Sageman, 2008; Taarnby, 2005; Gill, 2008; McCauley & Moskalkenko, 2008; Moghaddam, 2005). Wiktorowicz (2002) emphasized social influence. Shane et al. (2016) cited personal disappointment, perceived discrimination, anger, and the desire to become a hero as causes of jihadist ideology. Bizina and Gray (2014) listed numerous factors: teenage disaffection, social alienation, lack of gainful employment, identity crisis, discrimination, religious misinformation, Western foreign policy, social actors, social networks, youth clubs, worship places, and geopolitical issues. Sageman (2004) stated that a person is open to joining a fundamentalist group if society seems to offer little. Youth, as 'in-betweeners' with un-solidified identities, often feel this way (Shane, Pérez-Peña, & Breeden, 2016).

Bangladesh's diversified education system has three dimensions: general, madrasah, and technical (Malek, Begum, Islam, & Riyad, 2014). Madrasah education has two streams: Alia (can enter mainstream education) and Qawmi (cannot) (ibid). There is also an English medium system (Oxford, Cambridge, or Edexcel curriculum) and a cadet college stream at secondary/higher secondary levels. There are four levels: primary (1-5), secondary (6-10), higher secondary (11-12), and tertiary (ibid). This multi-stream system has increased literacy but also created problems.

Due to different curricula, some students lack awareness of national history (English medium), some lack religious knowledge (general, English medium), some are neglected (madrasah background), and some face alienation due to their educational background (English medium, madrasah, private). Unemployment is high, causing frustration among youth across all backgrounds. Rising expectations from Western values and lifestyle, coupled with failure to fulfill them, exacerbate the problem (Moghaddam, 2005).

Amin (2013) argues that madrasah education is undervalued. In 2017, the government recognized the Qawmi degree (The Daily Star, 2017), allowing Qawmi graduates to join government jobs (The Daily Star, 2018). Qawmi students cannot access tertiary education; Alia students face discrimination—even at the University of Dhaka, they were barred from seven subjects until 2017 (Dhaka Tribune, 2017).

Private education students often suffer identity crises due to societal discrimination in both social and employment contexts. English medium students (mostly upper-middle/upper class) face a different crisis: foreign curricula leave them unaware of their country's history, religion, and social systems. They feel alienation and struggle with identity. Cadet students, deemed worthy by society, grow up detached and often need help understanding social systems. General stream students receive limited religious knowledge, making them manipulable; madrasah students may be brainwashed through their education.

Socialization actors matter. Pre-existing family and peer ties ease recruitment (Gill, 2008). Meeting like-minded people drives madrasah students toward fundamentalism (Taarnby, 2005). Socialization and propaganda exposure can lead to radicalization (Gill, 2008). Globalization and cultural aggression create cultural hegemony, further confusing madrasah and English medium students already uncertain about their own culture.

Six socio-economic factors affect students: economic vulnerability, lack of employment opportunities, dissatisfaction from isolation and undervaluation, cultural hegemony, religious misinformation, and influence of socialization actors. Their contribution to the four seeker types is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Influence by the Socio-economic Factors on Seekers.

Type of Seeker	Socio-economic factors responsible to the creation of the type
Revenge Seeker	Economic Vulnerability, Lack of employment opportunities, Dissatisfaction (Due to Social Isolation & Sense of Undervaluation), Misinformation about Religion, Influence by the Socialization Actors.
Status Seeker	Economic Vulnerability, Lack of employment opportunities, Dissatisfaction (Due to Social Isolation & Sense of Undervaluation), Cultural Hegemony, Influence by the Socialization Actors.

Identity Seeker	Economic Vulnerability, Dissatisfaction (Due to Social Isolation & Sense of Undervaluation), Cultural Hegemony, Influence by the Socialization Actors.
Thrill Seeker	Influence by the Socialization Actors (partly) or None.

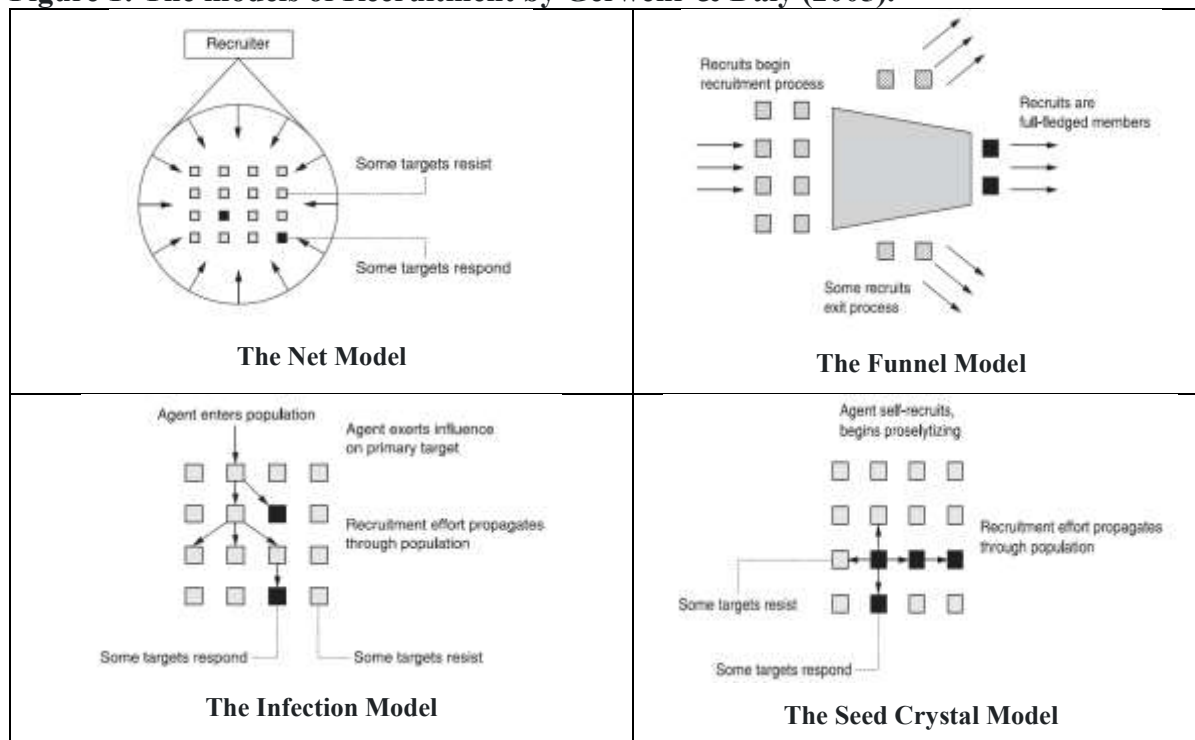
The socio-economic factors lead students to become seekers. Seekers look for alternatives to the system, and radical fundamentalist organizations then introduce themselves and try to influence the seeker to join.

2.4. How the Organizations Contact Seekers: The Recruitment Models

Radical fundamentalist organizations require a steady flow of manpower; recruitment is therefore critical. Recruitment processes vary by community and depend largely on the consciousness and resistance of targeted youth. Gerwehr and Daly (2005) discussed Al Qaeda's recruitment approaches, noting that effective recruitment must match the recruit's cultural, social, and historical context, often disguising itself as patriotism or social advancement. Gerwehr and Daly (2005) identified four models: the net model, the funnel model, the infection model, and the seed crystal model.

First, the net model targets a homogeneous population with little opposition. Second, the funnel model applies to populations that are ripe but require significant transformation; recruits emerge after completing the funnel's journey. Third, the infection model operates like a viral disease—subconscious transmission—used for populations with hardline resistance. Fourth, the seed crystal (self-recruitment) model is used in hostile environments where no trusted agent can be placed; an external trigger initiates self-recruitment, then injection begins through the recruit. Application depends on the population type and local authorities' reaction.

Figure 1: The models of Recruitment by Gerwehr & Daly (2005).

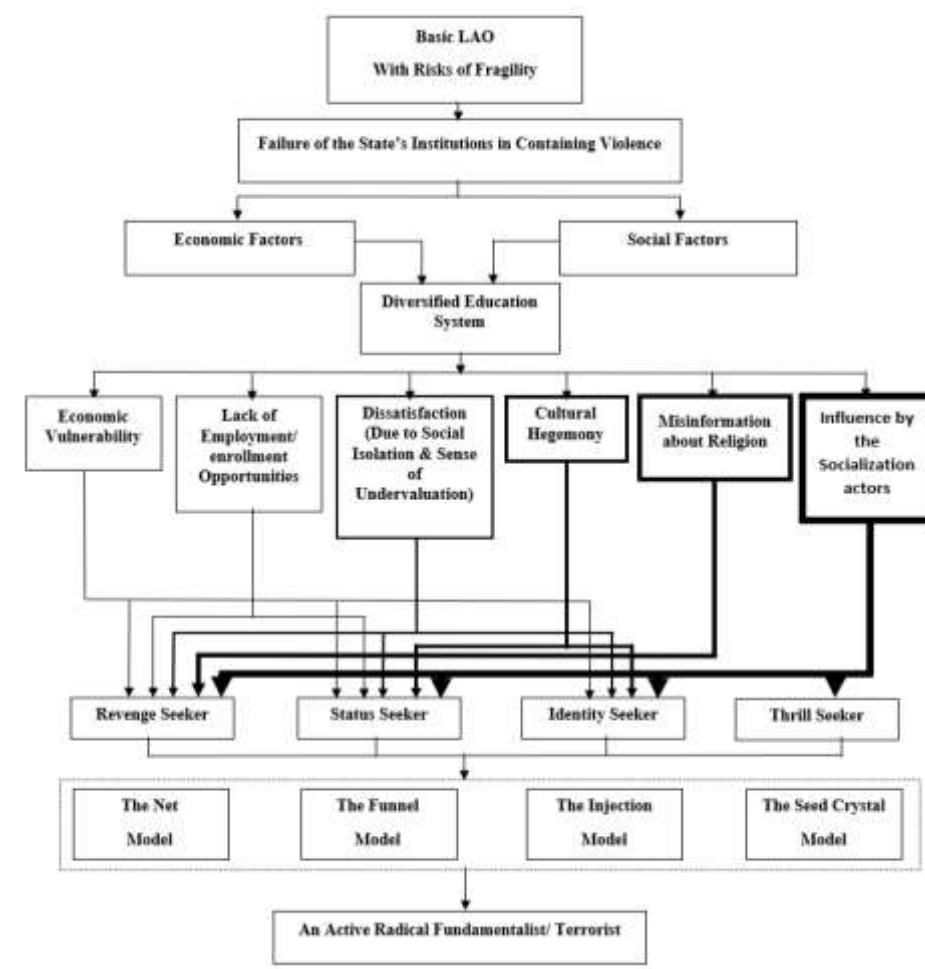


Bangladesh's reaction to fundamentalist approaches is mixed. Before the Holey Artisan Attack (July 1, 2016), there was little consciousness or resistance among the population. However, after the incident, government programs and high alert among law enforcement agencies made it difficult for fundamentalists to approach the population. In Dhaka, the capital, pressure and resistance are the

highest. Therefore, radical fundamentalist groups might use the infection model or seed crystal model for recruiting seekers in Dhaka. Despite the hostile environment, an abundance of sympathetic seekers makes their task easier.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

Bangladesh falls into the category of basic LAO with risks of fragility. The political institution has failed to contain violence. As a result, various socio-economic factors have risen that influence the lives of the individuals. The socio-economic factors are narrowed down using diversified education system prevailing in the country. The socio-economic factors that affect the students and cause them to fall into any of four seekers category are: economic vulnerability, lack of employment opportunities, dissatisfaction arising from social isolation & sense of undervaluation, cultural hegemony, misinformation about religion and influence by the socialization actors. In a country where the scope for fundamentalist activities is present as there is enough supply of recruits in the form of seekers, the fundamentalist groups and cells grow up rapidly. Their approach to the potential recruits mostly depends on the consciousness and response of the state to their activities. Depending on the response and reaction by the state, the fundamentalist groups may use recruitment models that cover vastly diversified population (the net model) or a target population (the funnel model) or insular population (the infection model) or inaccessible population (the seed crystal model). Bangladesh, now as a state, is creating great consciousness and pressure against terrorism after some recent fundamentalist extreme attacks. But the number of seekers is also high in the society. As such, for recruiting the seeker in Dhaka who is from an education background other than general and who belongs to the privileged, higher middle class or higher class might be approached by the radical organizations using either infection model or seed crystal model. After the radicalization process is complete, the potential recruits come out as active radical fundamentalists as well as terrorists. **Figure 2: The Theoretical Framework.**



3. Methodology

This is a qualitative exploratory study analyzes the factors that make individuals from privileged economic and non-general educational background to embrace radical fundamentalism in Bangladesh. The research is not designed to make generalizations; rather it aims to build a theory.

The study was carried out in the Dhaka Metropolitan area as it is the educational hub of the country and is home to some of the most famous public and private universities, draws students from all over the country and is the seat of the economic elite of the country. Closed-verbatim interviews with an open-ended questionnaire were used to collect primary data. Four private universities (North South University, BRAC University, American International University Bangladesh, and East West University) participated, with a total of fifteen students (six female, nine male, aged 20–24) participating. A purposive, snowball sampling method was used. Muslim students from private universities with higher-middle and high economic backgrounds and different secondary level educational backgrounds (English medium, madrasah, cadets or general) were selected.

The questionnaire included 25 questions under six themes: religiosity and perceptions of radical organizations, family and peer group perceptions, secondary educational background and its impacts, perceptions of society, cultural understanding, and economic background. Interviews were conducted in Bengali, then manually transcribed and translated into English. Data analysis was done through open coding.

Secondary data were collected from relevant articles, books, journals, newspapers, and publications from concerned organizations. Ethical procedures were strictly adhered to: the purpose of the study was explained to respondents, the respondents' anonymity was ensured, no details were recorded for identification, the respondents were given complete freedom to respond to sensitive questions, and no leading questions were asked.

Besides, the study faced several limitations. Firstly, the issue selection was based on dependent variable. While King et al. (1994) and Geddes (1990) had identified this as a weakness, George and Bennett (2005) and Ragin (1997) argued that dependent variable-based issue selection could provide opportunities for studying deviant cases. Secondly, this paper tried to develop a theoretical framework based on existing limited evidence and does not attempt to explore the strength of the model.

4. Findings

This section covers the analysis of the primary data collected through closed verbatim interviews using an open-ended questionnaire. A total of fifteen respondents were interviewed. Six were female and the rest were male. All of them were within an age limit of 20 to 24 years. The fifteen respondents belonged to four renowned private universities of the country: North-South University (NSU), BRAC University, American International University Bangladesh (AIUB) and East-West University. A total of eight students were from Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) and the rest were pursuing graduation in either Bachelor of Pharmacy, Bachelor of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE), or Bachelor of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (EEE).

4.1. Religiosity and Religious Understanding

Eight of them were practicing Muslims. Seven of them prayed regularly. The other from this group quoted, *"It is not always I get successful in doing so, but I try to say five times prayer a day."* The rest, seven respondents, introduced themselves being occasional prayers (prays on occasions like Jumma, Eid etc.). Ten respondents fasted in Ramadan (the holy month of fasting). Two respondents responded quoting, *"Sometimes."* Three respondents answered in the negative and said that they did not fast in Ramadan.

When questioned about the perception towards the people who do not follow their religion regularly, four groups emerged. One group of eight respondents took liberal stand. One of them quoted, *"Well, everyone has their own views towards life. Who are we to judge others?"* Another of them went further to explain, *"Who will get guidance depends on Allah, the Almighty. Some will progress fast, some will be slow, so slow that no progression might seem to occur. Someone not following religion"*

now might start to follow later. We just need to have positive mindset.” The second group, consisting of only one respondent, emphasized on motivating the people to follow the religion. The third group of four respondents took negative stand. One of them mentioned, *“They are wrong and must correct their mistakes before Judgment Day.”* The last group of two respondents took an aggressive stand. One of them quoted, *“They are fully under the influence of the Devil. They should be corrected while there is still time for reconciliation.”*

Twelve respondents responded positively while asked about the role of religion in life. They stated that the role or importance of religion in life is very high. One respondent quoted, *“Religion has played the most important role in my life. It helps me to understand what is prohibited and finally, how to lead a satisfied life with limited assets.”* Two respondents rejected the idea. One of the two respondents said, *“It is okay not to believe in religion as long as one believes in humanity. Besides, too much religious belief makes one blind-sighted and narrow minded.”* One Respondent agreed about the importance of religion in life but stated the role as a ‘moderate’ one.

The respondents were questioned about people’s claim about Islam not being a religion of peace. Fourteen respondents completely rejected the claim. One respondent of them echoed, *“I don’t agree with them. Islam is a religion like other religions with its own teachings. So, if someone is to blame it is the people, not the religion.”* But one respondent supported the claim.

Respondents were also asked about the role of Islam in triggering violence. Again, fourteen of them rejected the notion that any religion would support the radical activities. One respondent who differed stated, *“Religions has played some role. If one gets involved too deeply into something, people’s minds get narrow.”*

The next question was about the role of religion in minimizing violence. One respondent said that religion can play no role in this. He/she quoted, *“not any religion, only strict rules can stop these.”* Fourteen others have stated that religion can play strong role in minimizing violence. But their viewpoints have been difference. Some emphasized on ‘Quran and Sunnah-based life’, some focused on creating more awareness while some had opted for understanding the true meaning of religion, its traits, customs, and beliefs. One quoted, *“Instead of praying five times or even hundred times a day and praying for forgiveness to the Almighty like Robot, people should understand the meaning of those prayers. Praying won’t help until people understand the concepts correctly.”*

Then the respondents were delivered another statement like ‘the bloggers’ critics or actions or offensive words against certain religion or religious ideologies make it justified to be violent against them or kill them’ and asked whether they agreed with the statement or not. Fourteen of the respondents said that they didn’t agree with the statement. One of them elaborated, *“Bloggers shouldn’t criticize any religion. But if so, they also shouldn’t be killed. They are also human beings.”* One respondent took a different stand saying, *“Bangladesh is an independent country. Everyone has right to say. Everyone has their own perspectives to see things. So, whether it is a blogger or, it is a religious person, everyone has their rights to express their opinions. But there is always a limit never to be crossed. After all, we live in a society and we must follow its customs. So, the answer to this question is neither yes nor no!”*

Later, the respondents were asked about their opinions on the roles played by the radical fundamentalist organizations like Al-Qaeda or Islam State (IS). All the respondents marked these organizations as terrorist organizations. In this context, one accused these organizations stating, *“They don’t even know Islam.”* One went further to lay focus on the intentions of these organizations, *“Their main goal is not to establish Islam; but to establish chaos.”*

While asked about these organizations’ right to represent Islam, all the respondents agreed on the same answer that these organizations have no right to represent Islam. One stated the cause as, *“They don’t know Islam at all. Their actions are against Islamic laws and values They just want to create fear among the population using the name of Islam.”*

Why are these organizations becoming relevant? – is another question asked from the respondents. Four respondents opted not to answer the question. Others identified misinterpretation by the media,

lack of actual knowledge among the Muslims, global politics etc. One added, *“Because they are using the name of Islam.”*

It is evident from the interviews that the respondents, with a few exceptions, love their religions and value its role in life. But not all of them are the practicing ones. Their views towards non-practitioners are mostly liberal, but aggressive views are also present. Though they claim that their religious knowledge is basic, they strongly agree that Islam or any other religion have no hand in this kind of terrorist acts and religion can play strong role in containing those acts. Consciousness is high about the radical fundamentalist organizations like Al-Qaeda, IS or JMB. Resistance to the radical terrorist organizations is also high among the respondents.

4.2. Family and Peer Group Perception towards Radical Organizations

While asked, all the respondents agreed to the fact that neither their parents nor the other family members supported the radical fundamentalist organizations. One quoted, *“They do not support these organizations at all.”* Another respondent stated, *“My family members think they are the worst of criminals, worse than animals.”*

The respondents were also asked about the perception of their peer groups. All the respondents marked the perception to be *‘same as myself’*. But seven respondents have mentioned that they have friends who support these organizations and their causes. In this case, one respondent quoted, *“One day in a friendly discussion, one of friends, argued in favor of those organizations. I was left speechless by his words!”*

The interviews show that neither the parents, family members, nor the peer groups support radical fundamentalism. But several actors are present in the peer groups who support radicalization.

4.3. Secondary educational background and its impacts (if any) in the later life

Out of fifteen respondents, five were from English medium background, five from Madrasah background, three from cadet background and two were from general education background at the secondary level.

While asked about the difficulty or discrimination they faced while enrollment or subject choice, the responses were of three types. One group, consisted of Madrasah students, answered positively that they had faced discriminations. One former Madrasah student quoted, *“It was a panic situation. I was in fix not only about where to get myself admitted but also about where, in which subjects I can get admitted.”* The second group, cadet and general students said that they faced no discrimination or difficulty while the reaction from third group, English medium students, was mixed. They stated that they didn’t face any discrimination but had to overcome some difficulties. One of them said, *“There were definitely some problems regarding the preparation for the admission. Those are manageable. But the managing costs were high.”*

While asked about having courses on religion, the country-based courses, and its effectiveness, all the English medium background students responded the same. They didn’t take any courses on religion at secondary level. They stated two reasons for this: the courses were optional, and the teachers of the courses weren’t good, mostly part-time ones. One of them quoted, *“Why should I go for extra burden?”* Another of them went further to explain, *“I didn’t because the teacher wasn’t good at all. It is always difficult to find good teachers for the subjects.”* The general and cadet students responded similarly that they had courses, but they weren’t enough to give them proper understanding. A general student quoted, *“It obviously wasn’t enough. It was just a basic course. It was never sufficient for me to understand what Islam is. For that, I had to go for more books and hadiths.”* On the other hand, the Madrasah students agreed that they had proper knowledge about the religion, but the confidence level wasn’t the same for all. Some were confident about the view while some weren’t. One respondent of this type expressed, *“I think I know religion well. I have studied this for many years through different subjects.”* Another former Madrasah student quoted, *“Islam is a very broad concept. It is almost impossible to know it fully. But I think I know enough to lead my life properly.”* But about the country-based courses, they responded the same as the general and cadet students’ group.

The interviews indicate that Madrasah students have faced discriminations while their treatment by the society as well as enrollment in tertiary education. There is a gap created by the English-based foreign education. The English medium students do not have proper knowledge about neither their country nor religion. General and cadet students have basic knowledge about religion and their country, but they agree that those aren't enough. Madrasah students claim to have enough knowledge about religion, but there are gaps that can be manipulated.

4.4. Perception towards the Society They Live in

While asked about the society they live in, all the responded negatively. All of them expressed their dissatisfaction. One quoted, *"Every day women get raped, people die, corruption at its best, the rich get richer, the poor turns poorer. It is not the society I desire to live in."* Another went to go further to explain, *"Seems like the whole system is falling apart. It needs serious reconstruction."*

When asked about their treatment by the society, the general, English medium, and cadet students replied that the treatment is okay. But there was serious objection from the Madrasah students. They said that sometimes the treatment by the society and some people in it makes them feel alienated. One sadly quoted, *"Me, wearing Punjabi, is different, much different than me wearing any other dresses. Why is that? I don't know."* Another quoted angrily, *"If being a Madrasah student causes the treatment to be different, then why the different streams of education are there!"* All of them agreed that both Madrasah education and the students are undervalued by the society. Here rose a major gender issue while the female respondents filed serious complaints about their treatment of society.

When asked if they feel ignored by the society and their voice needs more recognition, eight of the respondents replied in the negative. Six respondents responded positively that voice of the youth in the society needs to be heard more. The other respondent took a somewhat different stand quoting, *"Maybe or maybe I don't want to raise my voice because it is not good at all."*

The responses by the interviewed indicate that the students have negative perception towards the society and the existing system. They have shown apathy towards the society and suggest that reform is needed. Sense of undervaluation is also present among the respondents.

4.5. Cultural Understanding

The respondents were questioned about what specific cultural festivals reflect Bangladesh. Nine respondents have detected only 'Pahela Baisakh' and couldn't detect any others. One respondent quoted, *"I have no idea."* Four of them have used religious festivals like Eid-ul-Fitr or Eid-ul-Azha or both as festivals reflecting the country. Another respondent responded differently, *"No festival. We are getting western day by day."*

While questioned about participation in the cultural festivals, seven replied in the negative, seven responded positive that they do participate and one said that s/he do not like to participate always, but at times s/he participates.

They were also asked about their participation in cultural activities. None of them participated in cultural activities. One quoted, *"I am an audience and I like watching performance rather than being in one."*

The analysis shows that cultural gaps existed. Most of the respondents seemed confused and misinterpreted Bengali culture. Apathy towards participation in cultural festivals is also present.

4.6. Economic Background

Only four of the respondents earn while others do not. The monthly earnings range from 7000 taka to 15000 taka. While asked about monthly income, one respondent quoted, *"I am still a student. I don't earn. It is not my job to do so."* On the other hand, the monthly expenditure of the respondents ranges from 10000 taka to 25000 taka.

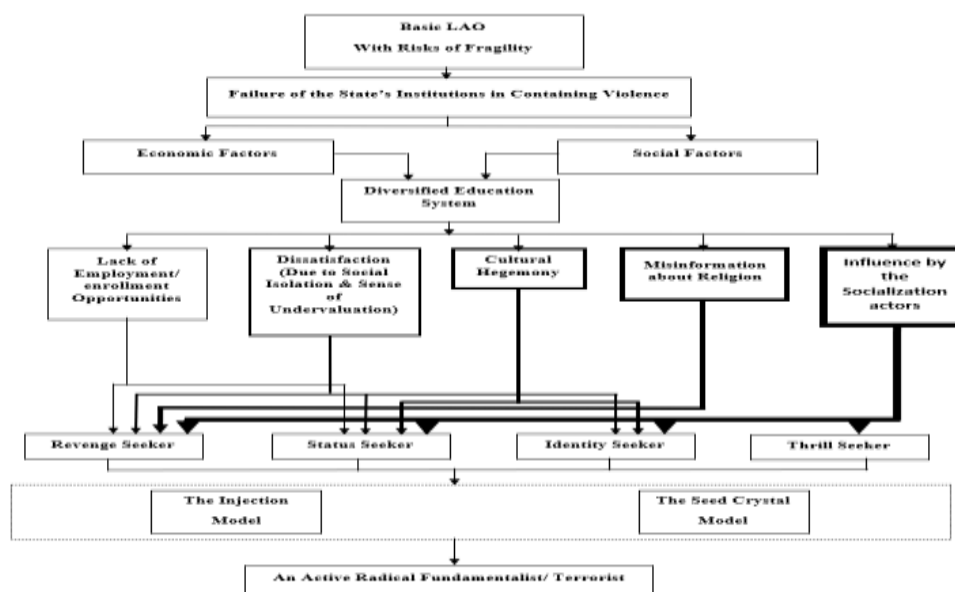
In all of the cases, there is a clear distinction of 5000 taka to 8000 taka between the income and the expenditure. This indicates that all the respondents are from well-off families and belong to the higher middle or high economic strata.

5. Discussion

There are several significant insights from the interviews. First of all, the respondents, mostly, love their religions. They also value the role of religion in their life. But surprising not all of them, in fact, only a few are the practicing ones. Their views towards non-practitioners are liberal, but some have also shown aggressive attitudes. They claim that the religious knowledge that they possess is basic. But based on that basic knowledge, they strongly agree that Islam can have no role in triggering radical terrorist acts and it can play strong role to stop them. Consciousness and resistance to the radical fundamentalist organizations like Al-Qaeda, IS or JMB is high. Secondly, the parents or family members of the respondents do not like and also oppose radical fundamentalism. The peer groups also do not support radical organizations and their actions. But few persons from their peer groups support radicalization or radical fundamentalist organizations. Thirdly, Madrasah students have faced sad discriminations. The types of discriminations include their bad treatment, them getting lesser or denied enrollment opportunities etc. English medium education may have created a gap by lacking country-based or religion-based focus. Thus, the English medium students lack knowledge about their respective country or their religion. General and cadet background students have basic knowledge about religion and their country. They also agree to the fact that the knowledge they have are just basic ones. Madrasah students claim to have enough knowledge about religion. But the existence of gaps is also there which may cause manipulation. Fourthly, the students have negative perception towards the society and also feel that it needs reform. They are apathetic towards the society. The respondents show signs of undervaluation feelings. Fifthly, most of the respondents have misinterpreted Bengali culture and mixed religious festivals with Bengali festivals. Apathy towards participation in cultural festivals and also cultural activities is also present. Last but not the least, the respondents are from well off families and belong to the higher middle or high economic strata.

Based on the facts revealed from the interviews, it can be said that the students show high consciousness and resistance towards the terrorist organizations. But there also facts like discriminations, apathy towards society, cultural, historical and religious knowledge gaps, sense of undervaluation, existing sympathetic peer groups ties can lead them towards becoming a seeker. And for recruiting the seekers in Dhaka who are from an education background other than general and who belong to the privileged, higher middle class or higher economic class might be approached by the radical organizations using either infection model or seed crystal model. As such, the recruitment is more likely to be successful. This is signified through the alternate model (shown in figure 3) which sticks largely to the theoretical framework rejecting only one of the factors: economic vulnerability.

Figure 3: The Alternative Model.



6. Conclusion

Till the year 2000, radical fundamentalism and radical attacks have become a common phenomenon in Bangladesh and also globally. The authorities have tried to fight and prevent the radical organizations through cure-based strategies. But the organizations have managed to survive through evolution. They have added newer dimensions to the context and have gone to recruit seekers of new type mostly created the socio-economic contexts in the respective country, place or region. This particular study might help authorities to fight the problem at grassroots level and might help them form preventive strategies. This will surely add value to the forces fighting against radical organizations.

The study has tried to set up a theoretical framework in the Bangladesh context considering the mechanism at play behind the rise of the socio-economic factors, the factors themselves, the effects they pose on seekers and also the models that can be used by radical organizations. In spite of being a small-scale exploratory study, the framework presented by this study can be a very useful contribution to the epistemology. It might also help the authorities, in Bangladesh and also abroad, to combat the biggest challenge of the twenty first century, to fight the powerful giant named radical fundamentalism.

This exploratory work is undertaken in a small scale and could provide no generalized conclusions due to its constraints. The findings from the interviews indicates to the conclusion that for recruiting the seekers in Dhaka who are from an education background other than general and who belong to the privileged, higher middle class or higher economic class might be approached and successfully recruited by the radical organizations using either infection model or seed crystal model. But this sector needs more attentions and further larger, broad and focused studies.

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