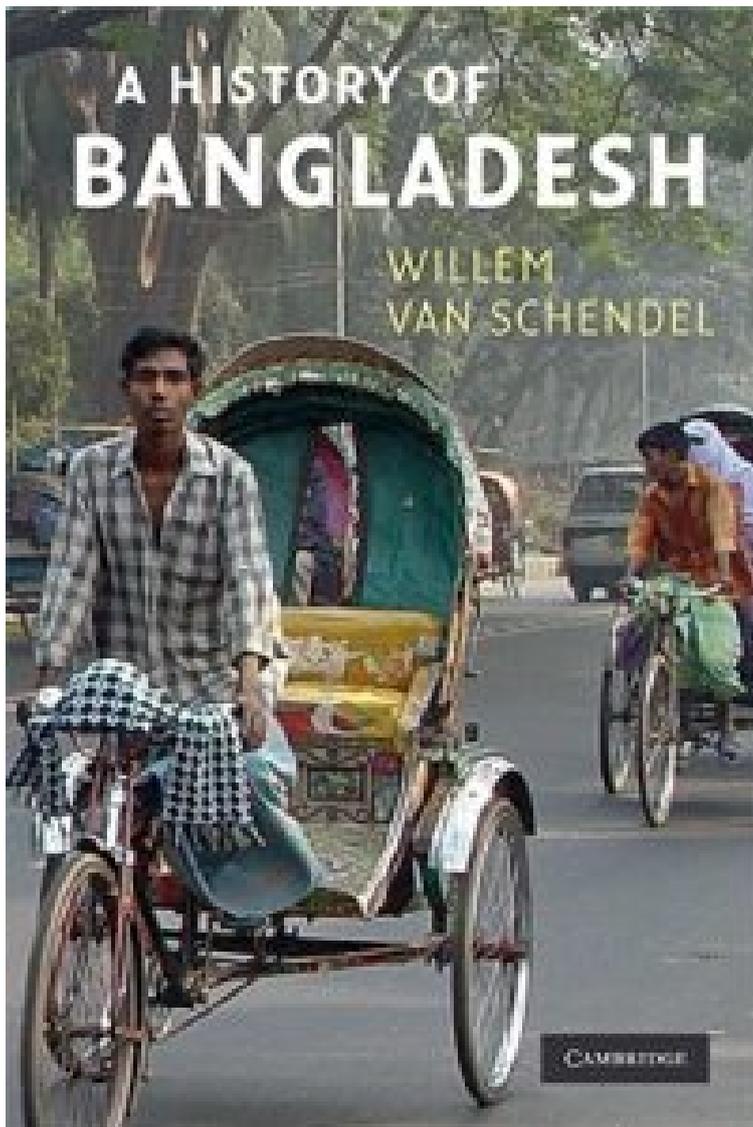


A HISTORY OF BANGLADESH

The journey as an independent state of Bangladesh started after 16 December 1971. If we want to know more about the history of this cultural land, it's not only 46+ years old but it is linked with thousands of year-old-stories. That long period includes the ruling of maharajas, then emperors and colonial masters. This book of Willem Van Schendel, I found was an informative book to explore more about the history of Bangladesh.



The book contains five parts where the writer gradually explains the cultural history to political history of Bangladesh. The author also uses many Bangla rhymes as he found it important to express the feelings accurately.

In the chapter “A Land of Water and Silt” the author describes the geographical position and its linkage with other countries like India and Nepal. As Bangladesh is known mostly as a country of rivers and fish and the rivers are mostly Himalayan Rivers. Because of the monsoon weather the country often gets flooded and for the human life it has negative as well as positive impact. Annual floods fertilize the land but it increases human sufferings also. The political nature of Bangladesh is also mixed as the village level power sharing is not centralized. Nature and rural politics has similarity as both have to change by course of time.

‘Jungle, Fields, Cities and States’ here the author pointed out the historical natural elements of the country. Very rare kinds of animals are also pictured here like *Shishu* a water animal now it's extinct because of dams and barrages over the shared rivers between countries. This chapter also discussed the emerging time

of urban life, the harvesting culture and architectural heritages over time. As an example the author portrayed 'Gaur' where urbanization happened and fell again.

'A region of Multiple Frontiers' described the changing pattern of historical time through four frontiers like, The Agrarian frontier, the State Frontier, the religious frontier, and the language frontier. In different frontiers the integrity and cultural mutuality took place. How cultural transition happened time to time with regional cultural priorities is what the author tried to bring in this chapter. In the multiple identity section he includes the *pirs* like *shahjalal*, *Gazi pir* and other female pilgrims of spiritual guides. The ethnic identities like *Chakma*, *Garo's* are also included in the multiple identity section and their contribution towards the emergence of Bangladesh is also indicated.

The Delta as a Crossroads

Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal and numerous rivers decides the delta fate and crossroads as well among the countries. The natural position of this delta encourages invaders in this region. The route includes the crossroads like, India to Srilanka, from there to Maldives, western India, eastern Africa, Arabia and the Mediterranean. The other maritime route went east, following the coasts of Arakan and Burma and then on to south east and east Asia. The most important ancient port controlling this route was known as *samandar or sattigaon*, identical with or near present Chittagong. The first Portuguese traders turned out, the Dutch following them, and then the British and the other traders came. One of the features of the delta is the openness of adding a constant stream of goods to the economy and acting as a boon to the local industries. People got the chance to interact with different cultural people and activities.

The second part of the books starts with 'Colonial Encounters'. Here the author indicates the periods of British colonial masters as the first chapter includes the 'War of Palassey' in 1757 that historians indicate as the beginning of British colonial rule in South Asia, a rule that lasted till 1947. From the Mughal Empire to the British Empire the transformations took place in step by step. In the Mughal period, Bengal was under twelve *vhuiyas* and there were many incidents and unsuccessful operations from the Mughal side to expand their direct rule in Bengal. The Mughal started their rule from Delhi and appointed officials outside from Bengal for tax collection. They divided the places and named them as *thana*, *suba*, *porgana*, *mouja* and appointed officers called *subadar*. Still now *thana* and *mouja* system prevail in rural Bangladesh. In the British period first East India Company became the *Diwan of Bengal* and then they captured the whole of Bengal and Indian region.

'The British Impact' enhanced the political modernity, nationality, education and at the same time it divided the people according to religion and rich and poor class. 1943's famine was the best example of mismanagement during the Second World War period. 'Colonial Conflicts' also emerged in the British period. 1857 mutiny could be traced back as the first conflict against colonial masters which is considered as the seed of independence. Steps toward an Independent Bangladesh were relied on the 1905 division as a part of administrative change. Many saw the Bengal partition of 1905 as a calculative move to break the anti colonial movements and to divide and rule the Bengali speaking population. Although the partition was withdrawn in 1911 itself. In 'Towards partition' we see Hindu-Muslim rivalry, *tevaga* movements from rural side people led to the partition process. And after ww-2 the British decided to meet the nationalists demanding with a mixture of repression and concession. In early 1946 a cabinet mission arrived from Britain to discuss the terms of India's independence. Although the Hindu-Muslim relation in Bengal was already under strain, it deteriorated rapidly as thousands of people died in politically instigated communal riots in Noakhali, Kolkata, Commilla and neighboring Bihar. Some congress party leaders and Muslim league leaders in Bengal made a last ditch attempt to avert the looming disaster of partition by proposing that united Bengal could become an independent country. These initiatives received the blessings of some influential national politicians (M K Gandhi and M.A Jinnah) but it was shut down by national congress party leadership, who demanded Bengals partition. Bengals fate was sealed its west half was to join Independent India and east part to independent Pakistan. So that's how the author pictured the birth of East Pakistan that later on became independent Bangladesh.

Part three of this book is all about the various experiments of West Pakistan to East Pakistan. A religion

based country that has a middle country between its own territories with raw material producing regions. But new East Pakistan had to experience a lot of difficulties in the hands of officials with little knowledge. The unity was not there between two parts of Pakistan. Language was the barrier that started the first movements in East Pakistan. The achievement was too high through this movement that succeeded with the sacrifice of East Pakistani Bengali speaking people. This incident acted as the root behind the independence. The electoral process also linked with the history of Bangladesh. United front first elected in 1954 on the basis of majority seat in provincial election.

The most important incident happened in 1955 when Awami Muslim League renamed themselves as Awami League and secular messages from this group was published through newspaper Ittefaq.

In 1958 dictatorship of Ayub Khan started and it continued till 1969. Between 1962 and 1968 the Ayub regime was personified in the delta by hostile provincial governor Abdul Monem Khan who persecuted and arrested political opponents, tightened control over the media and created an atmosphere of fear.

This book gives us the gradual movements towards independent Bangladesh such as 1966 six point movement, 1969 mass unrest, 1970's election and then 1971 Independence movement. And the socio cultural reasons behind the war were also focused.

The 'A state is born' chapter mainly focuses on war torn state building process including war victims, war damages with moderate government. In 1973, the first election was held and according to the book, the Awami league was responsible for the corruption in that election and got 97 percent seats in the parliament. The famine of 1974 worked against the government party and it led to an authoritarian rule in Bangladesh.

The author tried to give a vision to the readers about an imaginary new society. The culture and tradition was same among all Bengalis, religion becomes a barrier only during British raj. After independence Bengalis got a new national culture that includes national fruits, currency, Flower, Fish.

Political structure of Independent Bangladesh includes 1975-90 military rules. 1990 -2006 parliamentary democracy was there. Author gave us the views on Islamic radicalism and the roots and causes behind this. Ethnic clashes were also included in the political structural part. The trial of war crime also became a part of politics. Transnational linkage includes foreign Aid through governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

Economic structure includes rice cultivation, jute production as well as export and Shrimp export mostly. Because of urbanization people started shifting in the Dhaka city. The population pressure endangers the environment, as a result deforestation happening rapidly.

After the independence a national culture grown up where we can find Islamic properties like bishow ijtema and the celebration of pohela boishakh, Durga puja, Baul songs, Fish and Rice , sweet addiction of Bengalis.

In this book the author tried to give readers a view of Bangladesh History from the root. Historical time travel reveals the origin and development of the foundation of Independent Bangladesh. Those who are interested to know more about the history of Bangladesh can read this book for primary and brief knowledge.

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