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### **Contextualizing Formation of Diaspora of Bangladeshi Immigrants in the UK**

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**Abstract:** *In this study we contextualize the diaspora formation of Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK by analyzing three broad types of diaspora characteristics- dispersion; connection with the homelands; and maintaining a distinctive identity in the host society. Based on secondary data, this study revealed that Bangladeshi diaspora members in the UK are mainly dispersed from their country of origin for economic reasons. As many other diaspora group, Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK maintain several linkages- economical, social and cultural, and political- with their home country Bangladesh. In this host society, they present their distinctive life by maintaining close ties with ethnic Bangla cultural objects. They are also present their vibrant and distinctive Banglaness by doing several activities collectively through associations. By doing so, Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK work like a diaspora as the three broad elements of diaspora were clearly evident in our findings and discussion.*

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Bangladeshi Immigrants, Dispersion, Homeland Linkage, Distinctive Identity Maintenance

## Introduction

In the era of globalization, diasporas have become an important subject of study among researchers, academics and scholars. The past decade has seen a variety of literature on this issue which introduced many academic, political and policy debates that spread across the discipline. In present times, it has become an academic area of research not only in Migration Study, but also in many disciplines including Sociology, Anthropology, History, Geography, Cultural Studies, Political Science and Literature. Several theorists such as Safran (1991), Cohen (1997), Vertovec (1999), and Brubaker (2005) have proposed criteria to define a diaspora. Their research has shown that the concept of diaspora has attained a broad semantic field and its meaning and uses have been proliferated in verity of directions to get the dispersion of this term. While the classical meaning of diaspora involves an involuntary migration, this term has been used for both voluntary and involuntary migration in the current discussion. Thus, in contemporary times, the meanings and uses of diaspora have been proliferated, where the term often implies the ongoing relationship between immigrants' homeland and their host countries (Verhulst, 1999:30). The current members of diaspora include overseas, ethnic, exile, minority, refugee, expatriated people, migrants and so on (Inbom, 2003:10).

Scholars have classified immigrants as members of a diaspora based on their ongoing relationship with their country of origin, in many of their contemporary studies the term 'diaspora' has often been used interchangeably with the term 'transnationalism' or 'transnational communities' who maintain social, emotional and political network that cross the borders of nation-states (Vertovec, 1999). This can also be discerned from Tölölyan's (1991: 5) statement indicating that contemporary diasporas are 'the exemplary communities of the transnational moment' (cited in Faist, 2010: 16). Thus, diaspora members maintain close linkages with their homeland and many of them have important and durable relationships, including socioeconomic,

cultural and political relationships, that flourish in two or more societies at once (Castles and Miller, 2009:3).

This paper attempts to make in the understanding of the diaspora formation of Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK by analyzing three broad categories of diaspora characteristics: dispersion; connection with the homelands; and maintaining a distinctive identity in the host society. Indeed, international migration has become a well-known phenomenon in Bangladesh; a large number of Bangladeshis are migrating outside of Bangladesh every year as long-term migrants. Among the total number Bangladeshis living abroad, according to Siddiqui (2004), there are almost 1.2 million that reside permanently as citizens, or with other valid documents in Western Industrialized countries of Europe, North America and also in Australia. In Europe the highest number of Bangladeshi migrants (500000) is found in the UK, followed by Italy which has 70,000 Bangladeshi, and Greece with 11,000 Bangladeshi (ibid), who maintaining several relations and contribute to the development of their homeland in several ways. In this paper, we first contextualize the term diaspora by focusing on its meaning and developing a theoretical framework. We then go on to outline the method of the study. Finally, diaspora formation of Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK is discussed on the basis of the outlined theoretical framework.

## **Diaspora and Its Formation: Theoretical Background**

### *The Notion of Diaspora: An Introduction*

Historically, there are three dimensions of diasporas: original, classical and contemporary (Inbom, 2003: 9). Originally, the term diaspora is derived from the Greek word '*diaspeiro*' which was used as early as the fifth century B.C. by Greek legends including, Sophocles, Herodotus, and Thucydides (Dufoix, 2007:4). Here, *Speiro* means 'to show' and *Dia* means 'over', hence, *diaspeiro* was used in ancient Greece to mean migration and colonization (Cohen, 1997: ix).

On the other hand, the classical discussions of diaspora were mostly rooted with homeland that was basically concerned about paradigmatic cases including Jews and some other 'classical' diasporas (Brubaker, 2005:1). Thus, in the classical notion, diaspora refers to the forced dispersion that is basically concerned about the traumatic history of dispersal, myths and memories of the homeland. For instance, Armenian, African and Palestinian along with Jews and some others who forcibly dispersed, such as the Irish<sup>1</sup>, were referred to as a diaspora due to their collective trauma and fate to live in exile (Cohen, 1997).

In contemporary times, the specific definition of diaspora has been proliferated by academics and social scientists through their work. Research findings shows that the contemporary concept of a diaspora is a way of understanding migration, immigrants, any kind of dispersal, their identity maintenance, integrations, and transnational linkages, etc. In this vein, Richard Marienstras argues that diaspora concepts are increasingly used to explain any group or population that in one way or another has a history of migration (cited in Wahlbeck, 1998:10). In that way, numerous contemporary studies conceptualize different immigrant groups as diasporas. For instance, according to Anderson (1998), migrant groups who are defined as 'long distance nationalist' belong to diasporas because of their continuous involvement in home politics and nationalist movements, examples of these are the Kashmiri, Palestinians, Tamil and others (cited in Brubaker, 2005:2). William Safran's also argue that Cubans and Mexicans in the USA, the overseas Chinese, Poles, Palestinians and blacks in North America and the Caribbean, Turks in Germany, Indians and Armenians in different countries, Pakistanis in Britain, Maghrebis in France, and some others, are various diaspora groups around the world (Safran, 1991:83). Drawing on the same logic, Sheffer (2003) identifies a number of labor migrants as diaspora because of their emotional and social ties with their homeland. For instance, Bangladeshi, Pilipino, Indian, Greek,

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<sup>1</sup> According to Cohen (1997:27) "The migration of the Irish over the period 1845 to 1852, following the famine, can be regarded as an analogous trauma".

Haitian, Italian, Korean, Mexican, Turkish, Polish, Salvadorian, Pakistani, Vietnamese, and many other labor migrants could be argued to be a diaspora (cited in Brubaker, 2005:2)

However, Cohen (1997) offered a more nuanced typology [Table 1] of diasporas on the basis of conditions of migration, using categories such as victim or refugee diaspora, labor or service diasporas, trade or business diaspora, imperial or colonial diaspora, and cultural or hybrid diaspora. According to Cohen, each of the diaspora groups have their own condition of migration, for instance, victim diasporas are created through forced dispersion from their homeland as a result of political unrest or persecution, whereas labor diasporas are formed by people leaving the homeland in search of work abroad. Cohen highlights that one diaspora group may belong to more than one category depending on their origin, function and characteristics. For example, Table I shows that during the colonial period Indians were indenture laborers but in the modern global world they became a trade/business and professional diaspora.

**Table 1: Different Types of Diaspora**

Types of Diaspora	Examples
Victim/Refugee	Jews, African, Armenians, Irish, and Palestinian
Imperial/Colonial	Ancient Greek, British, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch
Labour/Service	Indentured Indian, Chinese and Japanese, Sikhs, Turks, Italians
Trade/business/professional	Venetians, Lebanese, Chinese, today's Indians and Japanese
Cultural/hybrid/postmodern	Caribbean and today's Chinese and Indian

**Source:** Cohen (1997:178)

Therefore, building on contemporary meanings from the above discussion, this study has chosen to define the term diaspora as a group of immigrants who maintain various relationships with their homeland.

### *Formation of Diaspora: Theoretical Framework*

Several theorists have proposed criteria for a diaspora's characteristics. In order to present the theoretical framework of this paper here we present the prominent diaspora paradigm that is discussed by Safran (1991) and Cohen (1997). In addition, two contemporary discussion of diaspora formation, those of Vertovec (1999) and Brubaker (2005) are also addressed.

**First**, Safran (1991: 83-84) propose some component of diaspora in his study- '*Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homelands and Return*'. Here diaspora have been defined as expatriate minority communities that contain following key components:

*1) They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (Safran, 1991:83-84)*

**Second**, another list of key features of diaspora is found from the discussion of Cohen; he uses Safran's criteria, but supplements some points. He merges

criteria number four and five of Safran, i.e., *'their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home'* with *'committed to the maintenance or restoration'* into one and adds a line *'even to its creation'*. On the other hand, he adds four more criteria to that of Safran: *groups that disperse for colonial or voluntarist reasons; a diasporic identity; mobilize a collective identity; in solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries* (Cohen, 2008:6-7). As a result, Cohen (2008) has listed the following nine components for defining diaspora:

*1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically to two or foreign regions; 2. Alternatively or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; 3. a collective memory and myth about the homeland including its location, history, suffering and achievements; 4. an idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation; 5. the frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland; 6. a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate; 7. a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group; 8. a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and 9. the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.* (Cohen, 2008:17).

**Third**, analyzing Sarfen and Cohen and, some other proponents, Brubaker (2005:5) has identified the three following criteria for diaspora which he mentioned as core elements for diaspora formation:

1. Dispersion: it refers to any kind of dispersion in space that crosses state borders. According to him it is widely accepted but not a universal criterion (ibid).



2. Homeland Orientation: the second criterion is homeland orientation. Here he includes four of the six criteria of Safran related to homeland orientation such as, (i) maintain a memory, vision, or myth about the homeland; (ii) ancestral home as a place of eventual return to homeland; (iii) committed to the maintenance and restoration of this homeland; and (iv) a continuing relationship with the homeland (ibid).

3. Boundary-Maintenance: it is involved with the preservation of distinctive identity where one can be part of a diaspora with the following distinctive and relatively dense social relationship as a transnational community through their links that cross state boundaries (ibid, 6).

**Fourth**, considering the transnationalism of diaspora, Vertovec (1999) conceptualizes the term diaspora *as a social form, as a type of consciousness, and as a mode of cultural production.*

1) Diaspora as a social form, he addresses the social, economic and political networks of the transnational communities. In this notion, he includes three social categories. The first category is 'a specific kind of social relationship' where the diaspora is seen as consequences of voluntary or forced migration; consciously maintaining collective identity; institutionalizing networks of exchange and communication; maintaining a variety of explicit and implicit ties with their homelands; developing solidarity with co-ethnic members; inability or unwillingness to be fully accepted by 'a host society' with feelings of alienation, exclusion or others differences (Vertovec, 1999). The second category is called '*political orientation*' where individual immigrants are significant actors who through their collective organization work as a pressure group in the domestic politics of their host country for the favor of their country of origins (ibid,4). The third category is 'economic strategies of transnational groups' which he mentions as an important source and force of international finance (ibid).

2) Diaspora as a type of consciousness, he refers to a particular type of awareness that is based on a variety of experiences which generated among the contemporary transnational communities (ibid).

3) Diaspora as a mode of cultural production, he refers to production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena which constructed the styles and identities of diaspora communities (ibid).

In this vein, it seems clear that there are no universal characteristics of a diaspora. Thus, the elements considered to define an immigrant community as diaspora mainly depends on its dispersal condition and homeland connections. However, it seems from the above discussion that there is an understanding among the authors about three broad types of elements of diaspora. These include (1) dispersion: which can be voluntary and non voluntary; (2) connection with the homelands; (3) distinctive identity maintenance in the host society. Therefore, this study will use these three broad aspects of diaspora characteristics: dispersion; homeland connection; and maintaining a distinctive identity, in order to better understand the formation of the Bangladeshi diaspora in the UK.

## **Methodology**

The research methodology for this article involved rigorous analysis, and the examination and evaluation of literature relevant to the diaspora formation of Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK. Therefore, this paper on the one hand analyses the theoretical discussion about the concept of diaspora and its formation based on several authors' discussion in different books, journals and academic papers. On the other hand, diaspora formation of Bangladeshi immigrants is conceptualize through the analysis of secondary sources that include several articles, research papers, reports of both governmental and non-governmental organizations about Bangladeshi migration to the UK and their homeland relations and their identity maintenance.

## Result and Discussion: Formation of Bangladeshi Diaspora in the UK

### *Desperation*

We have already showed in the theoretical discussion that the older notion of a diaspora was mainly concerned on the forced dispersal of a people, such as the Jews, the modern notion of this term refers to any kind of dispersal. For instance, Cohen (1997) has proposed trade diasporas and labor diasporas, whose dispersion happened mainly for economic reasons. In this study, to investigate the nature of dispersion of the Bangladeshi migrants in the UK, the following section focuses on the history of Bangladeshi migration to the UK.

It is claimed that Bangladeshi migration to the UK is connected to Bangladeshi's history of British Colonialism (Siddiqui, 2004). As Adams (1994) points out, many Bangladeshis decided to migrate to the UK in search of work as Bangladesh was a part of the British Empire (cited in Hussain and Mirza, 2012: 74). Indeed, Alam stated (1988, cited by Siddiqui, 2004: 17) that part of landless people from the *Sylhet* region (the north east area of modern day Bangladesh) found jobs as dockyard workers, cooks, cook-mates or cleaners over the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in British merchant navy ships that carried goods from Kolkata in India to all other parts of the world. This group of people did not have much seafaring experiences. For that reason, according to experts, they left ships when presented with the opportunity (ibid) and found themselves in a number of countries, such as the USA and the UK, where they introduced many small settlements (Sikder, 2008:258). From this group of people of the *Sylhet* region, Bangladeshis who jumped ship in the UK, mostly settled in London, Liverpool and Bristol from the 1850s onwards (Change Institute, 2009) and sought work as peddlers, or in hotels and restaurant (Gardner, 2006). This people (i.e.: the *Sylheti*) are identified as the main pioneers of the British Bangladeshi diaspora. Still, the majority of Bangladeshis in the UK come from the region of Sylhet (Garbin, 2009:2).

The second wave of Bangladeshi migration to UK, started in 1950s and 1960s (Siddiqui, 2004; Gardner, 2006, and Change Institute, 2009) since UK conceived a new policy to encourage labor migration from its former colony due to its labor shortages. UK's Bangladeshi diaspora members took advantage of this opportunity to help their kin and kith to migrate to the UK by providing them with credit, arranging documents and thus gradually spreading their network (Gardner, 1993). As a result, a large number of Bangladeshis, mostly from *Sylhet*, arrived in the UK and most of them started a life as laborers in the heavy industries of Birmingham and Oldham, a few were settled in London and continued their trade as tailors (Siddiqui, 2004). Researchers explained this immigration as a long history of male immigration because it was not until the 1970s that their family members (i.e.: wife and children) joined them in the UK. Family reunifications began during the late 1960s and peaked in the 1970s (Change Institute, 2009:25). Beside economic migrants, according to Siddiqui (2004), a small number of non economic migrants, highly educated people from the upper and middle class of Bangladesh, also migrated to the UK before the Second World War to pursue higher education. However, compare to the economic migrants, this number was relatively small (ibid).

Thus, from the above history of Bangladeshi migration to the UK, it can be said that Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK are mainly dispersed from their country of origin for economic reasons (i.e. to earn a living). Thus, the nature of their dispersion is similar in nature with Cohen's labor diaspora - "*a diaspora can be generated from by emigration in search of work*" (Cohen, 2008: 61).

#### *Connection with the Homeland*

Several authors (e.g. Safran, 1991; Cohen, 2008; Brubaker, 2005; and Vertovec, 1999) have identified 'homeland connection' as an indispensable criterion for diaspora formation. Many studies have shown that as a dispersed community, Bangladeshi migrants in the UK maintain various ties with their family, relatives, and friends who live in Bangladesh. They have established a strong social, economic, cultural, and political relation with their homeland. As it is highlighted in one of the recent studies:

*“The community [Bangladeshi in the UK] maintains strong ties with Bangladesh through travel, remittances, trade and commerce, cultural ties and politics. These are stronger with the older generation and whilst many young British Bangladeshis still value Bangladesh as the country of their roots and heritage; few are willing to invest, send money regularly, or stay in the country for a long term” (Change Institute, 2009:6).*

The following section present and discuss the findings related to the homeland linkages of Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK by dividing it into economical, social and cultural, and political linkages.

Economic Linkages: Garbin (2005) has argued that in material terms, the ties of Bangladeshis in the UK with their homeland are expressed by their sending of remittances to their families and relatives who remain in their country of origin. A recent study on the Bangladeshi diaspora in the UK and the US shows that 84 percent of the respondents from the UK were sending remittance to Bangladesh (Siddiqui, 2004: 47). Table 2 presents the share of remittances received from the UK among the total remittance to Bangladesh. The Table shows that the contribution of remittances from the UK among the total remittance received in Bangladesh was 8% (US\$ 789.65 million) in the financial year, 2008-09 and 7.53% (827.51 million) in financial year of 2009-10 and 7.63% (889.60 million) in 2010-11, 7.69% (987.46 million) in 2011-12, and 6.86% (991.59 million) in 2012-13. Among these financial years, according to the Central Bank of Bangladesh, the UK was the fifth largest sources of remittance next to Saudi Arabia, UAE, USA, and Kuwait since 2011-12. In the year 2012-13, it became the sixth largest remittance sending country next to Saudi Arabia, UAE, USA, and Kuwait and Malaysia.

**Table 2: Share of remittances from the UK in terms of total remittances received in Bangladesh**

Remittance Received (USD in millions)	Fiscal year				
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Total remittance to Bangladesh	<b>9689.26</b>	<b>10987.40</b>	<b>11650.33</b>	<b>12843.44</b>	<b>14461.13</b>
Remittance from the UK	789.65	827.51	889.60	987.46	991.59
Share from the UK (%)	8%	7.53%	7.63	7.69	6.86

**Source:** Central Bank of Bangladesh, 2013

Studies show that these remittances are mainly used for the development of family dynamics such as for maintaining own or extended families expenditures, purchasing/constructing land and houses, and for increasing family income by developing business (Siddiqui, 2004). Occasionally remittances is also sent for the support to their non-migrant relatives and friends in Bangladesh that help them either survive or migrate (Siddiqui, 2004; Change Institute, 2009). Moreover, remittances are also send for the purpose of social welfare and religious activities in their natal villages that are used for charity, support during natural disasters, and for providing *Zakat*<sup>2</sup> (ibid).

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<sup>2</sup> Zakat is the third Pillar of Islam, which is regarded as a type of worship and self-purification by practice of a mandatory offering of a set proportion of one's accumulated wealth to charity.

Besides, Eade and Garbin (2003:9) have observed that UK based remittances have a great impact on the local landscape of many *Sylheti* villages, where most of the Bangladeshis in the UK originate. For instance, in this region many new roads, modern houses, religious institutions like mosques, madrassahs, and educational institution like schools have been constructed with the remittances from the UK that changed the outlook of the rural landscape. This has made this area an exemption in terms of infrastructure when compared to other rural areas in Bangladesh. Therefore, the above mentioned Bangladeshi immigrants' economic findings are in high concordance with the diaspora features presented by Cohen (2008) and Vertovec (1999) stating that immigrants have a 'sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members' that live in their natal villages in their homeland.

With regard to investments, research findings show that many people from the Bangladeshi community in the UK were investing in various sector including hotels, private property, and food import businesses which they considered permanent assets as these could be used as security measures upon return to their country of origin (Change institute, 2009). Thus, the motivation behind the investments is indicative of the diaspora characteristic of Safran (1991): they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they, or their descendants, will eventually return when conditions are appropriate. Besides individually sending money, Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK also sent remittances collectively through several associations that mainly based on the district, village and town of their local area of origin (Siddiqui, 2004). These remittances are mainly used for community development and charitable purposes such as fund raising for local schools, providing scholarship for poor students, building mosques, infrastructure repairs, relief activities during natural disasters, and other reconstruction activities (ibid). Similarly to Safran (1991) and Cohen, (2008) this collective initiatives indicates that UK based Bangladeshi immigrants are 'collectively committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland'.

Social and Cultural Linkages: according to the Change Institute (2009) kinship is extremely important in the case of Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK. Immigrants maintain communication with and regularly visit their family members, friends, and relative who remain in their home country. The reasons for their visits varies largely but can be broadly categorized in the following groups: for charitable purposes, often after political, economic, and environmental crises; in order to arrange marriages/wedding ceremonies; and to bury their dead (ibid). It has been argued that the increased availability and affordability of telecommunications made the communication stronger and denser between Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK and Bangladesh (Zeitlyn, 2011). For instance, during the 1980s, transnational *Sylheti* families in the UK mainly communicate with their natal villages through letters, which took weeks or months to reach their destination, as most households did not have a telephone. However, now, due to the availability of mobile phones Bangladeshis in London are involved in the day-to-day affairs and decisions of their families in Bangladesh. They can also feel the sense of companionship with other large joint family members in Bangladesh that they miss through their frequent communication with relatives in Bangladesh (ibid).

Behind the motivation of the above mentioned personal contacts, it has also been found that Bangladeshi migrants want to foster strong ties between their new generations who are growing up in the UK and their family members who still live in Bangladesh through regular telephone conversations and visit. For instance, Mand (2010) worked with British-born Bangladeshi children aged 9 to 10 and finds that most of the children whom she interviewed maintain transnational social relationship between Bangladesh and the UK, thus making them active members of transnational families. These immigrants' children often visit their parents' home, the Sylhet region in Bangladesh twice, or even three times a year, most times along with their families. There they often attend major festivals and functions such as weddings. In addition, weekly conversation over the telephone with their family members in Bangladesh were found to be the most common way in which children kept in touch with their grandparent and other family members. For these social relationships,



children have portrayed Bangladesh as their *desh* (home) and Britain is *bidesh* (a country away from home). Therefore, Just as Cohen (2008) argues, we can argue that Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK constructed their homeland as the ideal way of maintain social relationships. Besides, as Cohen (2008:17) stated diasporas have “*a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement*”, Garbin (2005) also noted that the UK based Bangladeshis also maintain transnational social ties with other Bangladesh diaspora elsewhere. This is sustained through their religious rituals; circulation of goods and gifts; communication over phone, e-mail, and other social media; matrimonial links, i.e., selection of partners from Britain, America or other parts of the world instead of Bangladesh.

On the other hand, it seems that Bangladeshi migrants in the UK have cultural attachments with their homeland. They maintain their cultural linkage by means of several ethnic newspapers and TV channels in this host country, the UK. For example, they introduced various electronic and print ethnic media such as Bengali news papers including *Janamat, Natun Din, Shurma, Patriaka, Sylheter Dak, and Euro-Bangla*; English news papers such as *Dainik Bangladesh*; other forms of media such as radio and television channels including ‘*Bangla TV UK*’ have also been introduced (Siddiqui 2004). According to Siddiqui (2004) these media provides necessary information related to several immigration issues, and it provides an update of day to day politics, economic, and social aspects of Bangladesh. These media also tend to be involved in lobbying and networking with the British Governments on behalf of the Bangladeshi community (ibid). Apart from these cultural linkages, they also celebrate different Bangladeshi national, traditional social, cultural and religious festivals in this host society. Immigrants do this collectively through associations which provide Bangladeshis with opportunities to gather and to build up social linkage between their community’s people who live and work in this country (ibid).

Furthermore, immigrants also remain connected to other Bangla traditions. For instance, findings of several researches show that they have

strong linkages with their Bengali language, even with the local dialect, *Sylheti*. According to the Health Survey for England in 1999 (cited in Change Institute, 2009), 54 per cent of the UK Bangladeshi age between 16 and over used Bengali as their main language, followed by *Sylheti* (25 per cent) and English (20 per cent). Besides, 90 per cent of Bangladeshi Londoners use Bengali as the main medium of communication in their home (Change Institute, 2009), while they use English mainly outside their home (Lawson and Sachdev, 2004). It is also evident that Bangladeshi people in the UK have linkages with their ethnic food. Throughout London, because of the large demand among the Bangladesh community, Bangladeshi spices, vegetables, fish, fruits, sweets, snacks are readily available in Bangladeshi shops and supermarkets (Jennings et al, 2014). Immigrants even maintain the tradition of chewing *Paan*, a mixture of betel leaf and areca nut, as is common in Bangladesh (Hussain and Mirza, 2012). Bangladeshi migrants' linkage with their ethnic food is also evident in their habits of bringing back a variety of Bangla foods when they return to the UK after visiting Bangladesh. As it is mentioned by the Gardner (1993:11):

*“The bags of migrants returning to Britain are often filled with chutney, pickled mangoes, and dried fish. Once in Britain these are distributed to the kin of village neighbors living nearby. Likewise Bangladeshi food is readily available in British cities. In London, fresh Sylheti fish is flown in daily. In season jackfruits (selling for twenty or thirty pounds each) can be bought in Brick Lane and Spitalfields markets. Most families consume rice from Bangladesh or India, along with betel nut, spices and a wide variety of Bengali vegetables”.*

Therefore, just as Cohen's (2008) proposed criteria it seems clear that they are presenting their 'distinctive creative, enriching life' in their host country, the UK by preserving and promoting their ethnic culture.

Political Linkages: it has been argued that since the 1960s, when a sizeable Bangla community began to emerge to the UK, the issue of home country's politics became an important issue among this community (e.g.

Garbin, 2008; Alexander and et al, 2010). Garbin (2009) has argued that first generation migrants were actively involved in the resistance leading to the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War (*Muktio Juddo*) against Pakistan. These UK based migrants supported their home country's freedom fighters by fund raising for them, by holding public protest, and with their lobbying and networking with the British government, institutions, and media (Garbin, 2009; Alexander and et al, 2010). These activities have been considered as '*long distance nationalism*' of Bangladeshi diaspora that promoted a collective and authentic Bengali identity among the British Bangladeshi community which transcended class, caste, and religious boundaries (ibid).

According to Garbin (2009), political activities of Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK are sustained through a set of networks and practices that connects groups and local communities, as well as encourages the movement and circulation of people between Bangladesh and the UK. It has been argued that nearly all Bangladeshi political parties have been represented in Britain since the mid-1980s (Garbin, 2009). Most of the members of these political parties are first generation migrants who settled in the UK in 1960s along with other Bangladeshis who came during 1980s and 1990s. With regard to their activities, it has been shown that Bangladeshi political parties in this host society perform social and political work, mainly campaign for their parties during election times in Bangladesh. In addition, these parties help first generation migrants to get elected and develop economic activities and to protect business interests in Bangladesh (ibid).

On the other hand, studies showed that second generation Bangladeshis in the UK are mostly involved with UK's politics. The majority of this generation supports the Labor Party, and some members even became actively involved in local politics as elected members (Change Institute, 2009). For example, *Rushanara Ali*, a young British Bangladeshi, was elected as a member of the British Parliament as a British Labor Party representative in 2010. In light of the study of Vertovec (1999), however, it has been shown that by participating in a host country's electoral politics, Bangladeshi immigrants

in the UK are lobbying in the favor of their homeland by influencing policies in favor of Bangladesh (Siddiqui 2004:13).

### *Distinctive Identity Maintenance in the Host Society*

The third element which has been considered in the investigation of diaspora formation is the 'distinctive identity maintenance in the host society' that several authors argued is an essential element for a diaspora (e.g. Safran, 1991:83; Cohen, 1997:24; Brubacker, 2005:6, Vertovec (1999:279). In this case, some features that have been outlined in the discussion of the theoretical framework were also evident in the case of Bangladeshi immigrants living in the UK.

In this regard, as Vertovec (1999) has argued, the collective identity of a diaspora is sustained by their common origin and historical experiences, this aspect is evident in the activities of Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK and it is also evident that they maintain this community and traditions in order to maintain their distinctive identity. For instance, focusing on this issue, the Change Institute (2009:39) has stated the following:

*"They [respondents of Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK] suggest that this identity is strongly linked to their cultural heritage, their nationality of origin, and affinities with the politics and political parties of Bangladesh".*

Indeed, in the UK, the distinct secular nationalist *Bangla* heritage is expressed by the visible symbols of *Shaheed Minar*, a monument which commemorates the martyrs (*shaheed*) of the Bangladesh's Language Movement of 1952, and the sculpture of the *Shapla*, the national flower of Bangladesh (Garbin, 2005; Eade and Garbin, 2006). The *Shaheed Minar* was erected in Altab Ali Park, Whitechapel, Tower Hamlet and in Oldham, that was built in the Bangladeshi area of Westwood along with the sculpture of the *Shapla* (ibid). The researchers highlight that for the Bangladeshi community, "*this visibility was a crucial marker of collective identity*" (Eade and Garbin, 2006, 186). It is also

worth mentioning that the days and festivals Bangladeshi migrants in the UK celebrate are related to the national history of their homeland. For instance, they celebrate the date of language movement (21 February), Independence Day (26 March) and Victory day (16 December) of Bangladesh (Siddiqui 2004). Thus, their collective *Bangla* identities originate from their common historical background. These examples indicate that Bangladeshi migrants in the UK are 'maintaining a strong ethnic group conciseness and collective identity' that being a key feature of Cohen's (2008) definition of a diaspora.

With regard to identity maintenance, another diaspora feature '*distinctive creative, enriching life in the host countries*' proposed by Cohen (2008) is also evident in the activities of Bangladeshi immigrants. As we have shown in the previous section, Bangladeshi migrants in this host society present their distinctive life by maintaining close ties with ethnic *Bangla* cultural objects. As we have already demonstrated, they maintained strong linkages with their ethnic media, food, and language with and some other cultural objects. They also present their vibrant and distinctive *Banglaness* by doing several activities collectively with their ethnic associations. For instance, we have already mentioned that Bangladeshi associations observe different home festivals. In these occasions, they follow their traditional rituals, as is done in Bangladesh. For example, different types of homemade food and small handcrafts stalls are arranged, and several cultural programs are staged where different Bangladeshi artists performed traditional Bangle folk music, dance, drama and pop music (Siddiqui, 2004; Eade and Garbin, 2006). In addition, programs in the national days are also framed with the Bangladeshi national anthem, speeches, and recitation of Bengali poems. They also arrange several musical shows where popular artists from Bangladesh perform (Siddiqui, 2004; Eade and Garbin (2006)). It has been argued that through these activities aimed at preserving and promoting *Bangla* culture, they made Brick Lane a "Bangla town" where the 'International Curry Festival' and the celebration of *Baishaki Mela* (the Bengali New Year) play important roles (Eade and Garbin, 2006).

Therefore, these migrant activities- individual practices and associational activities- indicate that Bangladeshis are presenting their distinctive identity through their cultural practices in their host society, the UK, and at the same time this collective activities indicates their 'collective commitment to the maintenance of homeland' (Safran, 1991, Cohen, 2008).

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to contextualize the diaspora formation of Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK, with a focus on their nature of dispersion, connection with the homeland, and distinctive identity maintenance in the host society. First, with regard to the nature of the dispersion, the findings of this study indicate that Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK are similar in nature with Cohen's definition of a labor diaspora - a diaspora can be generated by emigrant in search of work (Cohen, 2008). Second, with regard to the homeland linkages, as Vertovec (1999:279) mentioned, diasporas maintain '*a variety of explicit and implicit ties with their homelands*', taken as a whole, the above discussion of the section homeland linkages has delineated the fact that, UK based Bangladeshi migrants have been playing crucial roles in order to maintain linkages with their country of origin. They have built up social and economic linkages with families, relatives, and friends that they left in their home country. Also they have maintained cultural linkages with their homeland by retaining their cultural roots, which is visible through their attachment with ethnic media, i.e., *Bangla* television channels and newspapers, with ethnic food in the daily meals, and activities in Bangladeshi associations, and participation in national and cultural festivals of Bangladesh. Besides, members of the first generation remain actively concerned with their home country's politics, while members of the second generation have involved themselves with local and national politics of their host country, the UK. It has been found out that nearly all the Bangladeshi political parties have been represented in the UK where most of the members of these political parties are first generation migrants who settled in the UK in 1960s, along with other Bangladeshis who came during 1980s and 1990s. In addition, by

participating in the host country's electoral politics, Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK are working and influencing policies in favor of their homeland, Bangladesh.

Moreover, with regard to identity maintenance, their activities in the host society expressed their commitment to retain their Bangla identity by maintaining strong linkages with their home culture. They present their vibrant and distinctive *Banglaness* by displaying their national cultural diversity in their host societal environment. They organize different cultural events, sports events, and celebrate all of Bangladesh's national days and festivals. Their distinctive Bangla identity is also expressed in the visible symbols of Bangladeshi monument, such as the *Shaheed Minar* and the sculpture of the Bangladeshi national flower *Shapla* that have been built by the collective initiative of the Bangla community in the UK. Therefore their activities show that they are working like a diaspora as the three broad elements of diaspora were clearly evident in our above findings and discussion.

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