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## **Navigating Dreams and Realities**

*An Auto-Ethnographical Approach to the Aspirations, Experiences,  
and Prospective Futures of Bangladeshi Students in Norway*

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## Abstract

This thesis is about the aspirations, experiences, and prospective future of Bangladeshi students' migrate to Norway where being a student myself and a new anthropologist, I undertook an auto-ethnographic approach to the issue. Being a native anthropologist, I tried to explore these phases of life through emotional participation with my participants.

First, I have developed a context of Bangladeshi migration patterns and especially student patterns, and then I have explained the methodology where this thesis has taken a big part in participant observation and open-ended interviews with six Bangladeshi students who were currently residing in Oslo, Norway. Then I have discussed the theoretical approaches where through the help of literature, I found two strategies among Bangladeshi students which I referred to as 'becoming similar' and 'keeping own culture', and I found the presence and absence of social/symbolic capital building and I have explained these approaches along with food, place, and cultural practices as means of identification for Bangladeshi students. Then, through my observation, interviews, and exploration, I have divided and presented these student's timelines in Norway into three phases. The first one is about their motivations leading to their aspirations to come to Norway, the second one is their reality experiences which focuses on work-study-life balance, and the final one is about how they have shaped their futures and if it came to be any different from their aspirations. In all these phases I found diversity and variation in their thinking patterns, social practices, lifestyles, and decision-making. Finally, I have discussed the policy change which refers to the introduction of tuition fees to international students and how it might shape the future of prospective Bangladeshi students who are willing to come to Norway in the future and what might be the future for students who are already living here.

The four approaches I have just introduced and found evident among social and cultural practices are highly inter-connected. Lastly, I explain how those attitudes are interdependent and influential in shaping the lives of my interlocuters.

## Acknowledgment

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## **Part One: Introduction of field, topic, and methodology**

### **The main objective of this study**

My primary research question pertains to the migration aspirations of Bangladeshi students in their decision to move and potentially settle in a new country and in this thesis, I am exploring Norway as the destination country. The research seeks to elucidate the *underlying motivations* driving their aspirations and *the experiences that shape their future life trajectories*. To answer these questions, my research has had as its focus whether and how the realities encountered after arrival in Norway may alter their original aspirations and how these shifts are perceived by them. A qualitative research work has been done by Md Lutful Bin Faruq on a similar topic named “Migrating Abroad: Factors and Experiences of Bangladeshi Students in Umeå, Sweden” where he discussed the factors and experiences of Bangladeshi students in Sweden through taking interviews with six Bangladeshi students who were doing their master’s in Umeå, Sweden. (Faruq., 2021) This study goes beyond what he has explored because this thesis not only looks at the aspirations and reality experiences of the students but also at the outcome of their plans for the future they had originally and explores what they want to do in the future based on their present circumstances. Anthropological methods such as participant observation and an auto-ethnographic approach have been used in this thesis to explore detailed events of the participants' lives and many important situations of other Bangladeshi students who were not actively participating in my research, have been shared in this thesis to give an impression of Bangladeshi forms of sociality.

### **Chapter One: Bangladeshi Diaspora**

*“I was enjoying my Bangladeshi meal after a while at an invitation for dinner organized by one family in the evening of December and since the windows were open, one of them went to close the window and I told them don’t do it, let it be like this or else I feel suffocated inside rooms if every door and window is closed. Then she and her husband told me “Oh, you really like cold, don’t you; then you’re one step forward to settling down in this country, and for that, education is not the ultimate road, rather find yourself a Norwegian guy or a European citizen regardless of where the guy belongs to so that you can marry the guy and settle down here”. It made me think even if tomorrow I like*

*this country to live here and want to enhance my experiences in my career field, is it that difficult to do so or I will be left with no option but to take their suggestion?”*

## **Introductory Context**

Finding the Idea, the above statement is where it all started, with an experience of things beyond my perception and general expectations. I came to Norway from Bangladesh to pursue a Master's in Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo. I am unmarried and came here completely alone. I have no family members or relatives, but several Bangladeshi friends and contacts. And importantly, this is the first country I have been to outside of Bangladesh at the age of 25. In other words, every bit of the experiences that I had, had something new to teach me. The reason behind this little personal introduction is to underline that it took me a while to understand that there is a huge difference between how I perceive the world and my surroundings and that of others. I used to think of things in what I thought was an obvious way and would generally think that others would think the same. In this respect, Social Anthropology has been a game changer for me.

Through learning anthropology, I began to realize how people and their circumstances come to be the way they are for a reason. This has made me want to explore the reasons behind how and why people and their behavior are formed in a particular way. The reason behind highlighting the opening statement is that what happened made me feel weird at first. Honestly, it hit me in my ego that I came here unmarried, and alone and to pursue higher studies doesn't mean I am open to any option or such kind of suggestions from people. Initially, the first few instances of such behavior used to make me upset, but over time, I came to realize that there was a deeper aspect to explore behind such behavior and practices. Eventually, I came up with the idea to explore the life stories of people who are or have been students like me though their pathways are different. This research would help me to know and understand the different kinds of motivations for their migration, how they expect the reality to be, how they perceive it, and how it shapes their future prospects in case of migration.

## **Concept of Bangladeshi Migration**

Generally, people assume it to be a matter of finances and the poor when the word migration comes to mind, but it is not all about living in poverty or the need for financial power these days, it is more than that. Migration has almost become like a business worldwide, also in social sciences, we know about the history of push-pull factors of migration such as Md. Lutful Bin Faruq has also explored the push-pull factors of Bangladeshi students to Sweden in his research “Migrating Abroad” and then how the world is dominated by the first world countries, and how second and third-world countries work. (Faruq., 2021) So, as a starting point for this study is the realization that people from developing countries not only shift to developed countries for study or skilled work purposes, but they try to find any way for shifting to other financially developed countries in search of living a better life. This shift in people’s lives is very beautifully described and explained in Katy Gardner’s work titled “Global Migrants, Local Lives: Travel and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh”, where she writes about the immigration journeys of Sylhetis from Sylhet, Bangladesh to Britain. She researched the people’s lives in “Talukpur” a village in the Bangladeshi district called Sylhet. It was an intensive narrative research work focused on how drastically the life of a migrant can be changed and what are the critical driving factors that lead a person to become a migrant. Now, it is important to remember that this kind of migration is never just a fascinating story, but one that includes many hardships in those people’s lives. The situation she describes started when English men started to invade the southern part of Asia and when the UK had the idea to import a huge number of cheap laborers for British industry from India where the people from the southern part of Bangladesh were mostly included. (P:36-37, Gardner, 1995) Because of the higher value of the currency, it always made sense to work for Britain rather than any other work in Bangladesh. It was not just a matter of a few days or a few years, but it continued and changed in phases throughout history. In the age of UK domination over Asia and then the continuous process of recruiting Bengal laborers for the British Navy and British factories assumptions about South Asian residents belonging to the sub-tropical region, were such that the Bengalis were seen to be fitter to do hard jobs in adverse environments, for example in the engine rooms. All these people from northeast and southeast Bangladesh made this endeavor to migrate to Britain with a lot of valid reasoning on their behalf, such as wanting a good income source, ensuring a bright future for their children, empowering their families by owning



lands in Bangladesh and mostly to bring themselves up from poverty and uncertainty of financial stability.

This whole discussion lends substance to my interpretation that even students in Norway are coming to examine their fate with the hope to establish their settlement here which was also in the time of '70s in Bangladesh as Gardner stated, "Access to foreign countries today is seen as the prime means to improve one's economic position in Sylhet" (P:50, Gardner, 1995). I am not saying this confirms any facts, but it resonates from the very few experiences that I had and faced after coming to Oslo, Norway as an international student. But Faruq in his work also confirms that Bangladeshi students are choosing Sweden as a destination country for their studies intending to settle down in Sweden. (Faruq, 2021)

But the tradition of migration from South Asian part to Europe, Britain, the USA, and all other developed countries has always resulted in a total shift of those migrants' lives, and in itself this is nothing new. It is the specialty of an anthropologist or ethnographer that poses questions of why and how the regular simple happenings while others take it for granted. (P:11, Hasbrouck, 2017)

## **Chapter Two: Norway and student migration, a short background**

### **Norway as a study destination**

Norway is one of the most developed OECD countries, with one of the highest rates of GDP per capita and one of the lowest levels of government debt. This means that Norway has been able to maintain spending on higher education in the years following the economic crisis. Because of this favorable context, students in Norway are well supported and there are high levels of investment in the education systems at all levels. (Thorud, 2018) More than 4 million students in higher education traveled beyond the borders of their native countries to study abroad in 2013. Norway is a small country, but the increase in global student mobility is also noticeable here. The share of foreign students in Norway has tripled since the year 2000. (P: 7, SIU-Omdommerappport-2016, n.d.)

In 2021, nearly 26,000 students at higher education institutions in Norway were immigrants. Furthermore, more than 11,000 students were Norwegian-born to immigrant parents. During the same period, Norway's foreign population increased annually. (Statista Research Department, 2022). Norway has enhanced not only the quality of its education but it allowed more scope of diversity for international students. Concerning this statement, Norway became one of the good choices for higher study among Bangladeshi students. A survey shows that the lion's share come from Europe (53 percent), while another 28 percent are Asian citizens which is the second biggest source of international students in Norway. (P:20, Tungesvik, 2019)

Throughout the migration history from Bangladesh to Norway, several students who had come to Norway temporarily stayed on because of finding a job or a partner. "One informant indicates that students from Bangladesh had learned about the favorable conditions for studying in Norway, with state universities as a rule not charging tuition fees and students from Bangladesh being able to apply for scholarships." (Horst et al., 2010) The lack of tuition fees is particularly important to students from Asia and Africa. These two groups also pay considerably more attention to the possibilities of working during their studies than students from other continents. Six in ten students from these two regions consider this possibility to be important or very important in their decision to come to Norway. (P: 25-26, Tungesvik, 2019)

### **Bangladeshi immigration patterns in Norway**

Before presenting an outline of the central thesis topic, it is critical to first understand and gain a little knowledge about Norway's immigration flow and the flow of migration from other countries.

The first flow of migration from third-world countries started in Norway, not before the 1960s when people were coming only as first labor migrants. Until 1968, Norway was not even considered a net immigration country. As the Peace Research Institute of Oslo shows that only 1.3% of Norway's population at that time was immigrants who also belonged to other Nordic countries, European countries, and North America. Confronting the post-WWII effects and the first oil findings in 1969 in the North Sea introduced a liberal immigration policy in Norway, a shortage of unskilled workers for the industry of farming, oil extraction, restaurants, and

gardening. Despite these events, the immigration flow was little in Norway because other European countries were more attractive in case of culture and migration. Also, Norway was never actively looking to hire people or labor from other countries.(Horst et al., 2010)

In the 1970s, a huge number of Indians and Pakistanis were moving to Norway because of the war going on between Pakistan and Bangladesh at that time mostly following the political tension, dictatorship in the state, and economic instability in Bangladesh. But Bangladeshi coming to Norway at that time were comparatively low and they didn't know each other until they met in Norway. It explains that all the Bangladeshi immigrants of the period from the 1970s to 1997 were politically driven migrants or asylum-seekers with very few students without the exact amount of data in the statistics. According to the PRIO report again, in from 2008 to 2010 has been noticeable for Bangladeshi immigrants to rise in Norway also people not directly coming from Bangladesh but Bangladeshi Immigrants coming to Norway from other European countries especially from southern Europe because of the financial crisis. Still, it was comparatively a small group with 579 immigrants and 337 descendants in 2010 only.

Importantly for my study, there has been made a significant observation that Bangladeshi students in Norway had a mostly temporary length of stay here and among them who has successfully made their stay permanent here were either through getting a long-term job or finding a partner in Norway. This indicates that it is not a flexible country at least for Bangladeshi students and it could be hard for someone who has a mindset to settle down here or plan to live here and, in the future, would like to bring their family members.

Now, this little background history of the Bangladeshi migration pattern is important to establish, because it gives a baseline to the idea of this research and how it came to be an ethnographic research thesis.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Research Questions**

To accomplish the main objective of the research (see page one), I needed to narrow down some more questions to find some specific answers. This helped the participants to understand

my research topic and why they are being interviewed by me. So, I made the following interview questions for my participants:

What are their core motivations and intentions of migrating to Norway as international students? What are the difficulties they face with a part-time job, bringing family, and getting permits of residence after completion of study? Do they intend to stay after post-graduation, if yes, what are the driving factors behind it and how do they manage it?

### **The Scope of the Research**

This research will mainly explore three spheres of the life of a student. The first one is the aspiration and motivation of pursuing a master's program in Norway. The second one is when they are facing the realities of life in Norway, how they perceive and handle those situations, and what the events are that mostly impact their decision-making. Finally, the last one is to explore and understand their prospective migration plans and dig into the span of difference between their aspirations and prospective plans.

Norway has no tuition fees for admission to a master's program for international students, a Bangladeshi student needs to show a certain amount of financial capability, allowing the student to support living in Norway during the study. People do have ambitions and passions for higher studies but as a student of a third-world country, one is aware that there are a lot of tough stories behind where this large amount of money may come from.

This research intends to explore the circumstances and reasons behind Bangladeshi migrants residing in Norway and present the phase of a migrant's life from immigration in Norway towards settlement. In this way, I aim to understand what success for them is, what they hope to achieve in a different land, what they believe will give them a successful life, and what difficulties they may encounter along the way to realizing that goal.

In a report of 2016 by the SIU report series, multiple statistics show different criteria of education pursued by international students from other countries in Norway. In all the statistics such as the top ten countries the international students belong to, top countries from where students are coming to pursue their master's or bachelor's, and top countries from where exchange students are coming in Norway. Importantly, nowhere there is mention of

Bangladesh, which certifies my early statement that Norway is not an easy option for pursuing studies for Bangladeshi students. (P: 13-16, SIU-Omdommerapport-2016, n.d.)

*SIU is Norway's official agency for international programs and initiatives related to education at all levels. SIU is a government agency reporting to the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (KD). As a center of expertise, one of SIU's most important tasks is to broaden and strengthen the knowledge base for further internationalization of Norwegian education through reporting and analysis.*

Research work on understanding the integration system of migrants to the labor market in Norway has also been identified and examined by many organizations and researchers. The report for Norway on the immigration and integration of 2017-2018 by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration with the association of many other Norwegian ministries has reflected an in-detail and complete overview and scenario of all kinds of migrants that are living in Norway from countries around the globe and it also stated facts on almost all aspects of the life of an immigrant. But as such kinds of reports usually have a wider view of people from all different kinds of backgrounds so in my perspective, it was not enough to give an insight into what I was looking for. Then I have gone through the report published in 2019 by Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education researched by Diku especially focused on the role of international students in higher studies in Norway and how they handle academic pressure and then the integration with society through academics. (Tungesvik, 2019)

*Diku – the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education – aims to strengthen the quality of Norwegian education. We promote development and innovation in education and encourage international cooperation and digital learning methods.*

So, in all these different reports and research work, there is a knowledge gap, which this work aimed at understanding the personal life of Bangladeshi students in Norway is intended to fill.

There are three key areas for this research. Firstly, the focus is on exploring the experiences of the participants. Here I use Gullestad's concept of "invisible fences" in Norwegian society. This concept refers to the idea that Norway is viewed as an egalitarian society, but that subtle forms of discrimination are still present to maintain the country's cultural and social

authenticity. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of how this impacts the participants' lives.

Secondly, the research seeks to challenge the notion that Bangladeshi students in Norway are the product of a disrupted and uneven global process. Instead, it seeks to explore how these students are seeking a better life in Norway through their aspirations.

Lastly, the study aims to critically analyze the new policy change that imposes tuition fees for students outside of Norway, Switzerland, and the EU. The intention is to examine the implications of this policy change and how it aligns with the shift toward a more capitalist economic model.

## **Methodology**

The qualitative research method has been selected for this research work which helped me to portray the migration thoughts and real-life scenarios of these Bangladeshi International students in Oslo, Norway. I have also applied an autoethnographic approach to my research, as this project originally had its introduction through my struggle and experiences. Since I'm researching to find out and understand whether my thoughts, struggles, and difficulties are similar or different from other Bangladeshi students, the autoethnographic approach of research is a perfect match for my research methodology. I have pursued personal interviews and complete participant observation to conduct my fieldwork and tried to understand the reasons behind the phenomena that I have observed which deliberately lets an ethnographer communicate with the participants. (P: 124-125, Clifford, 1983)

The method that sets anthropology apart from all the other disciplines is ethnography, the qualitative process of exploring the depth of the whys and hows of human culture, behavior, and expression. Using an ethnographic method, anthropologists can uncover unexpected insights that are best gained by studying a topic in person, in situ, over time, and from diverse perspectives. Anthropological inquiry combines information about people's thoughts gathered through interviews with information collected by observing their behavior and social interactions. (Hyman, 1953)

To be precise, I have used three different methods which helped me to look through different aspects of my participant's life and make my work 'experience-near' in Geertz's terms. The first one is auto-ethnography where I have put myself as a participant and did observation on my journey of being an international student. The second one is in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to have a better understanding of the participants' intentions and mindsets. The third one is participant observation where I have been living around my participants closely, being in touch with them, and hanging out with them to get an insight into their lifestyles and how they deal with different issues of life. (Geertz, 1974)

### **Participants of Research**

From the beginning, I put my focus on Bangladeshi master's students and the context of this thesis arose by experiencing their life events, issues, and different outcome of decision-making, so I tried to explore the life stories of people who are ongoing master's student or has been a student before and living here now on any kind of visa status or recently graduated but wondering about the next steps. This way, I was able to connect to their daily lives more engagingly since I am a student as well and I belong to the same culture, and the same language, and through time I developed a good bond with all my participants. Focusing on my participants being a student in Norway helped me to understand how education can be a means of changing lives for an immigrant and how it is influenced by their present surroundings and how it shapes their decision-making in life.

I have not done any formal pilot survey before data collection but from very general socializing and hanging out with friends and fellow mates who were in a similar situation in my assumption and observation, I found out that the situation was quite predictable and familiar to me already. So, to have a better understanding, I decided to take six different types of participants for my research, and this way I thought I could have a deeper understanding of my participants' lives. But obviously, I chose all my participants who were residing in Oslo, Norway so that I can portray their different ideologies, experiences, and thoughts but all in the same geographical area, and as an advantage, I had easy access to them since my residence was in Oslo too. Another change that I made later is that I planned to interview five couples, five single students, and five full-time skilled workers, but after my realization that I wanted a more nuanced, real, and honest experience of people regarding their situation, participant observation is much better

of a choice than an interview session. So, I decided to do more observations and take a smaller number of interviews. The reason behind choosing only ongoing or former Bangladeshi master's students is to analyze if their perception, plan, and experience of migration are similar or different. Moreover, how do their efforts and opportunities shape their thinking toward migration?

I arranged personal interviews with the people I intended to, and I covered my complete participant observation through the different events of festivals such as Eid (The biggest Muslim festival), get-togethers at someone's house to attend an invitation, and casual meetings with one or more people, even it includes very general conversations that happened with someone while just having a walk or sharing the same transportation. These last categories are completely my observations where those people are in no way my participants and don't even know about my research work. These kinds of observations will be used to provide richer background material on social and cultural contexts. I pursued complete participant observation to bring out the actual perceptions of students on how they experience living and migrating to Oslo, Norway. This will also put more valuable insights and provide a corrective to the autoethnographic approach of the research.

### **Field of Study**

I have chosen Oslo as my field of study and all my chosen participants are currently residing here for more than 2 years now. The first reason behind choosing Oslo is that it is the capital of Norway. The relevance of Oslo being capital with my research work is that my experiences and assumptions were such that Oslo has more people with different cultural practices, more job opportunities, and more difficulties as well. My understanding was that I could easily find and move to my interlocutors for interviews, and conversations and it especially helped me with my participant observation. The arena of communication I had before planning to shift to Oslo from my city Khulna in Bangladesh, I got to connect with and came to know a lot of Bangladeshis who were residing in Oslo because of their studies, jobs, or PhDs. The second reason is the variation of interlocutors. As I have chosen to do my most interviews with recent master's students or people who are on job-seeking visas or got a job in Oslo, so it was easier to connect to them in Oslo because of the transportation system here, availability of jobs in this city and most importantly Kringsjå student housing (studentbolig) in Oslo has a great number



of Bangladeshi students living there and they maintain their own kind of community building and networking between former students and future students.

Since I encountered many people with the same issues and tensions in their student life in Norway. And being a student here myself, it raised questions inside me if everyone is facing the same struggles as me or whether there are significant differences. And if it is different, then what are the other challenges or opportunities they are experiencing that I am not? So, then while studying the Anthropological methodology course in spring 2021, I explored the approach of auto-ethnography, which helps to build an interrelation between the researcher and its participant.

### **Participant Observation**

My research did in-depth interviews with participants which were semi/structured in nature with open/ended questions, to understand different life histories with completely different values and concerns. The intensity of capturing any life history of a participant can only be obtainable through following the fieldwork of participant observation as H. Russell mentioned that “Participant observation usually involves fieldwork, but not all fieldwork is participant observation.” Participant observation is about stalking the culture and learning to act accordingly so that they feel themselves even if the researcher shows up. More accurately this form of fieldwork is to immerse me into the culture and learn to remove myself from that immersion whenever it’s required because then I need to write down all those notes that I have seen and heard with the blend of their reality and my perspective. (P: 343-344, Russell, 2006)

So, according to the classification of the Participant Observation method in Anthropology driven by Russell, I found myself as a participating observer. (P: 347, Russell, 2006) Because being a researcher I was living with them, around them, hanging out with my participants, and at the same time I was studying their behavior, emotions, thoughts, and reactions. What makes me more of a participating observer is that they did know that I am a researcher and what is my research topic since I have done in-depth interviews as well with them. Living and being a part of their lives and noticing all their day-to-day activities made my research work more of an ethnographic study. As I was studying my people and their cultural and behavioral activities in a different nation, it led me to a new method of Anthropology which is an auto-ethnographic method.

At the beginning of my research work, I didn't realize that by default I am following the auto-ethnographic research method because the subject of my research is completely inspired by my own life experiences and social phenomenon which brought questions to my mind about what I am experiencing only my perception or if it represents a common scenario for the Bangladeshi international student society in Norway. Autoethnography is an approach that seeks to systematically analyze and describe a personal experience with social and cultural experience (Ellis et al., 2011).

### **Auto-ethnography**

In my understanding, Autoethnography is when the researcher is a participant him/herself in the research and includes one's own experiences and events combined with others' perceptions which ultimately results in a collaborative finding of the research.

In the words of Khosravi, "Auto-ethnography links the world of the author with the world of others. This linking and communicability of experiences is the core strength of auto-ethnography." (P: 55, Khosravi, 2016) But this method truly helps to connect to the participants in a much more engaging way and for the researcher also it is a much more reliable way to understand the emotional and intellectual aspects of the participants. In general, it reduces the alienation between the relationship of the research and its interlocutors because "Auto-ethnography has been an "emotional participation". (Hage 2009 cited in Khosravi 2016)

Taking auto-ethnography was not a deliberate choice for Khosravi rather his real-life experiences dragged him towards this approach of ethnography to identify himself in other's eyes. His life was full of turbulences where in one segment of his life where he was born in Iran, he had been identified as a 'nomad' by Iranians who is belonging to a minority group called 'The Bakhtiaris' and in the other segment of his life where he has been spending three decades of his life in Sweden, he has been identified as an 'immigrant'. These identical terms of otherings made him question his identity as a human being and he became a political subject because first, he was dealing with all the political turbulences, vulnerabilities, and tragedies at an early age because of the Iran-Iraq war. Then in Sweden, he was dealing with racism and discrimination. A simple 'Why' led him to this auto-ethnographic approach, and how he was interlinked with all the events just blew me away. When he was writing his first draft for

“Engaged Anthropology” in 2015, one viral video on the internet caught his attention. There is this Syrian young guy forcefully asking one question in front of the camera about why people in Syria are suffering, why they are displaced, why they were being mistreated, and why there is this war going on that made their lives miserable. This ‘Why’ to Khosravi was so provoking that it started to remind all the ‘Whys’ of his own life, it triggered all the emotional sentiments related to the identity crisis he has been facing over the years. He almost lost track that how this random guy’s ‘Why’ has become his own ‘Why’ and again all his questions regarding calling him a ‘Nomad’ or an ‘Immigrant’, regarding how he eventually became a political talk of the time was living in his memories, He could also relate this question as same for many other groups who have been displaced from their places due to war or invasion or political turmoil and many other situations through cultural space and time. And this is how he was driven towards this auto-ethnographic approach where he wanted to explore his past and present life and try to find answers for all those ‘Whys’ and possibly understand how to change it. (P: 42-43, Khosravi, 2016)

Now, I have been discussing how Khosravi undertook this approach, because this portrays quite a good image of my research, if not in its entirety. Of course, my research in no way can be compared to his experiences and research work because his work has been extremely engaging and with a much bigger perspective on migration. My main point to take from his whole story is how he tries to find the answers to that ‘Why’ for himself and many others like him. At this point, I can relate to him because this is the same situation, I have been facing uncountable times since I came here as an international student. My ‘Why’ was not as big as an identity crisis but still, it was all about finding myself and many others like me. When I started to discover students like me came here with a mindset to lead a better life here, settle down here, get a steady job, and make a family – but asking is it even worth their efforts and time given the immigration laws of Norway? No wonder, my own and all the other students from Bangladesh like me had one common purpose which was to study, but my interest in this topic was converted to research when I gradually discovered that it was not only studies and the free tuition that were attracting students, but that there is much more to explore behind this obvious purpose of their migration to this country.

## **My Positionality**

Positionality is in my understanding of how an anthropologist's identity, social location and status, race, gender, characteristics, nationality, cultural practices, and class may impact their research and analysis of field events positively and negatively. There is a high probability that the anthropologist's positionality will contribute to shaping their study of the people, it will influence the observations and interpretations of the anthropologist. For example, when a European anthropologist studies an indigenous community in Asia, the researcher will probably have different experiences and explanations of the events that have been encountered than those of an Asian anthropologist who belongs to that same indigenous community. The reason could be that native anthropologists would already have an identity as their people or the advantage of rapport building, especially language plays a crucial role here. Neither the researcher has a problem understanding, nor the participant has any difficulty expressing. It does not mean being a researcher from another culture is a disadvantage. It's just the change of perceptions I would say, where for a native researcher, sometimes many social and cultural practices and events are familiar thus it helps one to dig deeper into the contexts. In simpler words, native researchers gain easy access to the field, and lives of participants and it helps the researcher to understand things from the perspective of the participants. (Harden, 2011)

It was important for me to keep in mind that I don't become morally judgmental of my participants or their cultural practices and perceptions, and I tried my best, the situation that helped to stay neutral was that I have explored my culture and people in a new country and came to know each of them in this country. But I might become judgmental of some of the individual's decision-making unconsciously. (Eriksson, n.d.)

Just the way Narayan figured out that to gain insight into the perspective of the local people, an anthropologist employed the approach of participant observation by living among a diverse group of native individuals, sometimes selecting one as a primary source of information, known as the "chief informant" (Casagrande 1960 cited in Narayan 1997)

So, there was a dominance in selecting the participants for me as my research is native in nature, but I was not predominantly selecting my participants based on similarities to myself, rather I chose them on two main factors that I thought were crucial for my thesis. The first one was whether they wanted to settle down and live their life outside of Bangladesh. The second one

is whether they are master's students at a well-reputed University in Norway. Because my living experiences and way of observing things predisposed me to think that I should take it as research in my master's period. However, it can become a life-changing decision for someone, and for someone, it can be a drastic period of mental degradation. It all depends on how one perceives different life events, and not only is attitude important, but how one manages throughout the whole process plays a crucial part in the consequences as well. Now, there is no way that I would be completely neutral in perceiving the actions, reactions, activities, and thought processes of my participants, most importantly my observations about their way of leading lives, being a brown girl who grew up in a middle-class family who spent her 25 years life and got out of the box through pursuing her master's in the University of Oslo. So I am aware of my positionality in my research work that it would have some pre-conceptual understanding of the perceptions and struggles that other Bangladeshi master's students face. As Hume suggests through her work, "Normalize the occasional (or frequent) feelings of personal inadequacy and social failure that is, perhaps, an inevitable part of successful participant observation; deliberately attempting to simultaneously position oneself as both insider and outsider is, after all, socially disruptive."(Hume, 2004)

### **From Reciprocity to Relationality**

The way I have tried to design my research and fieldwork especially has a reflection on the law of reciprocity, though the law of reciprocity is more relevant in the market of labor and goods. Rather I would go with the view that Paige West argues in her paper "Introduction: From Reciprocity to Relationality", where she proposes that the traditional concept of reciprocity in anthropology is limited and that a relational approach can be more effective in analyzing social interactions. According to her, reciprocity is often thought of as a simple exchange of goods or services between individuals or groups, but a relational approach focuses on the complex and dynamic connections between people and the social structures that influence those connections. She believes that this approach would provide a more nuanced understanding of social interactions and the power dynamics that shape them. By emphasizing relationality, she suggests that we can move beyond simplistic ideas of reciprocity and gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of social relationships. This concept helped me a lot in clearing out the ambiguities between me and my participants by approaching them more in a way of friendship than only building a connection between the researcher and interlocutors. Being native anthropologists, me and my participants having in common that we wanted to

help the prospective Bangladeshi students who desire to come to Norway in the future. Through becoming friends, I did not have to arrange any special access for my participant observation in my field. Most of the time I did not have to go through structured questions because we already had common issues that we usually share or ask for suggestions from each other, which worked as a relational approach for me in my fieldwork.

In my research work, mostly in the observation parts, I might have some pre-conceptions and perspectives on someone's way of perceiving things for example one of my participants was doing a part-time job as a waitress in an Asian restaurant which is quite popular in Oslo among international students because they keep hiring people. The reason behind it is that the workload there was so much that usually, people used to leave after a couple of months of working there because they started to feel exhausted. This is not my statement, through my friends and many sudden meetups with them, and in between conversations they mentioned this matter. But the friend who is my participant as well always used to say that she feels okay, and the workload is also normal to her. Now, why I am talking about this event here is to give a glimpse that I have been aware of my positionality of possible predominant assumptions or biases, but I was actively maintaining my reflexivity towards my participants through the friendship and emotional bond I had with them, so I didn't just presume the same feedback from her, rather I asked how she felt about it. My whole concept of being reflective on my positionality as a researcher and being friends with my participant was inspired by how Judith Okely has carried her positionality in her research work for her book "The Traveller-Gypsies". The way she was being creative in understanding her own biases and assumptions being an academic personality and a member of mainstream society, and then she smartly used her powers and privileges to support the traveler communities and to give a more nuanced insight into their day-to-day lifestyle, culture, and authenticity. Not only this, but she also built trust and friendship with that community to understand them better from their point of view, and, she extended her time with them to experience more cultural activities. Okely, J. (1983).

## **Fieldwork**

I have taken 6 personal interviews in total among which three were male, and three were female among whom I have both types of people with ongoing master's program at a well-reputed University of Norway and who has done with their master's or either on a job-seeking visa or

other processes. The time span of my fieldwork was formally from June to November of 2022. Apart from fieldwork, I have been observing people before and after this time span and have included important insights into this thesis. I explained the purpose of my research and that I am going to anonymize their identity with coded names, I added that there will be no need for any personal information, but it is going to be a complete interview of perceptions, plans, struggles, and prospects. So, I paid special attention to their change of expressions while switching from topic to topic, and the way they felt different in talking about different issues.

All my participants provided their complete consent in sharing their migratory journey with me and I also assured them that they must feel free to ask me anything if they have any questions regarding the research, moreover, they had full freedom to walk out or end the interview session whenever they want. I just wanted to make sure that whatever they were sharing, they had to be comfortable with me and trust me with the information that they shared. Coming to the point of reliability as a researcher, since all my participants were already familiar with me for a long time, I built a good bonding with them a long while before we met as researchers and participants, they were all quite comfortable with me. I can say it was more like casual meaningful conversations rather than formal interviews. But yes, of course, I had to be in the flow of my question pattern that I earlier prepared.

In all my interviews, I communicated with them in our native language Bangla which is an advantage as we share the same culture and language. It helped me a lot to express my curiosity about knowing facts and make them understand what exactly I want to know. Moreover, it helped them to share their true feelings as well. Honestly, this advantage made my fieldwork much easier to conduct and understand the reality of situations. Since I am going to write the whole thesis in English, so I have done the transcription in English and tried my best to keep the meaning exactly as expressed by the interviewees.

Apart from taking personal interviews, I have observed people while they used to talk about their migratory journeys, their purposes and dreams before coming to Oslo, Norway, and then how their experience differed from their imaginations and planning; I tried to notice everything and noted down immediately whenever I got time so that I can write down the solid information while I am into that zone of an observer. Most of these observations I had during sharing transportation with someone, Bengali get-togethers, casual meetings, and festivals where I played my role just as a participant.

## **Chapter Four. Field and Theoretical Approaches**

### **Choosing Norway for higher studies**

Selecting Norway to do my master's from Bangladesh was clear in my mind from the very beginning. It was a very straight yet unpredictable story, for many years I have been seeing the picture of Trolltunga on many social media or relative links but at that time I didn't know where this place belongs or in which country. Sometime in 2018, I was blown away by the picture like every other time but this time I decided to find out where is this place and which country is this and then I came to know about Norway. Pretty fast, I decided maybe I can pursue my master's in this country and then I started researching if the country offers a master's program and what were the requirements. Amazingly, I found that this was the only country at that time offering a master's program in English without any tuition fees which was positively provocative for me. It felt like this country has something which I am exactly looking for.

The latter path was quite easy and turned in my favor, such as applying for a master's and getting admission and then deciding on coming to the country thinking it would be a great adventure for me who has never traveled to any country in the world, not even the neighboring country India. So, I was excited because I am about to go overseas and will be living my dream of childhood to be in a winter country and taking my education there. So, Norway was not on my mind for pursuing higher studies or even I had no clear intention before to study abroad, but my story started with getting interested in an image of Norway but of course, not everyone's story is the same, and the different stories I will be sharing throughout the thesis.

The work of Faruq on "Migrating Abroad" explains the factors which motivate Bangladeshi students to go to Sweden for higher studies where Bangladesh is the 'Home country', he identified the factors such as political instability of the country, climate situation, insecurity of life, corruption and discrimination in workplaces, gender biases and societal conservativeness regarding females and people's judgmental mentality are the main reasons which triggers these students to escape the country. In response to this situation, students are usually attracted to the 'Host country' Sweden for pursuing higher countries and the contributing factors are an easy application process, a degree from a reputed university, social security and peace, flexible visa processing, and traveling to Schengen countries. The findings he presented does not resonate



with my story completely but has similarity such as the motivation of getting a degree in a desired country and the easy visa processing was my motivation. (P:20-21, Faruq, 2021)

### **The Struggle of Time**

Gullestad in her book talks about the flow of immigration after the immigration ban imposition in 1975 in Norway. There she mentions the groups who can enter the countries were experts, family members for family reunification, refugees, and asylum seekers but she writes about students in the following way: “student (with the expectation that they would return to their country after completing their education.” (P: 47, Gullestad, 2002) I can give additional context to the statement. Being an international student myself, the process is complex for students like me, but the time limit is understandable if we see it from the perspective of the state. We, students, have exactly 2 years of master’s programs but the residence card we get is not for 2 years, it’s for one year, then the student must show either around 130000 NOK in the bank or in the form of part-time employment that the student has the job to earn that money throughout the year. It is also possible if someone wants to show a little portion of liquid money and a few percentages of job contracts. It creates chaos for many students as per my observation and information, especially in the time of covid in the first months of 2021. Because of the pandemic, most of the students had no jobs including myself, my participant Abir, Rafsan, and Sinthiya as well. As a result, students had to work more than their capacity in the summer, for example, 300-350 hours in a month, which is quite intense for a student. I have seen other students from the USA or European countries, who were working to collect money for traveling, whereas students from Bangladesh were earning money for renewal, expenses, savings, and remittances, travel was low on the list of priorities at that time. This two years master’s program can be extended to a maximum of three years and UDI also allows a student to apply for one year of job seeking visa. The student gets this time particularly to manage a Ph.D. or a skilled job that must be related to their study background.

In Gullestad’s book “*Invisible Fences: Egalitarianism, Nationalism and Racism*”, she explores the relationship between egalitarianism, nationalism, and racism in Norwegian society. Despite Norway’s reputation as an egalitarian society, Gullestad argues that there are still barriers and inequalities based on social and cultural factors such as race, ethnicity, and national identity which she refers to as “*invisible fences*”. Her discussion revolves around the tension between

Norway's national identity as an egalitarian society and the reality of social and cultural diversity. She argues that Norwegians often rely on subtle forms of discrimination and exclusion to maintain their sense of cultural identity, so she explores the complexities and contradictions of Norwegian society and attempts to reconcile the country's national identity with the realities of a multicultural and diverse population. I would support the existence of the concept of these invisible fences in Norwegian society with a statement from her book, "Immigrants are asked to 'become Norwegian', at the same time as it is tacitly assumed that this is something they can never really achieve". (Gullestad, 2002)

My observation is, based on this limited time allotted to students, that this practice works as a form of limitation or boundary set by the state for international students where the state is playing its role by giving opportunities to students to study for free by which the state is justifying being an egalitarian society. Where the state knows it's not easy to find a job in this country for immigrants who comes here as students because of boundaries set by them, so ultimately people will have to leave the country which I felt plays the opposite role of an egalitarian, in the sense of inclusive society. There is a certain degree of double communication happening. The country here plays a role of welcoming people from different backgrounds to their country and making them feel included and provided with equal opportunities in workplaces and schools same as other Norwegians, however, the state has placed strict boundaries concerning how these people may look for skilled jobs or even further migration.

This idea of mine is supported by Gullestad's concept of an egalitarian society where she defines egalitarianism in Norwegian society as more than just about eliminating social hierarchies and equality. In her book, she first clarified that 'egalitarian individualism' is often said to be a characteristic feature of the Western world (Dumont 1986; 1987; Kapferer 1988 cited in Gullestad 2002).

While Gullestad along with many other researchers suggested that the presence of this concept is much more evident in Nordic countries. Along with her previous research works and studies, she introduced a set of ideas about how 'egalitarianism' is practiced in Norway by ordinary people. She explained that equality in Norway is seen as when someone is like Norwegians, for example when immigrants want to be treated equally and want to be identified by their individualism, one must become similar or the same or like a Norwegian which she named as 'imagined sameness' for simplicity. Now this sameness could refer to a lot of things for example from the observation of my study I could say, I met many Bangladeshis who think

that if they don't drink alcohol they are not welcomed into a Norwegian event or party or they simply assume that they could not fit in, while conversely, I met many Norwegians who were not inclined towards even occasional or weekend drinking at all. Another example could be, being quiet and speaking softly is known to be a norm in Norway and I have heard from many Bangladeshis that they were being stared at inside public transportation whenever they raised their voices while talking to someone physically or over the phone. Now these are certainly not any form of discrimination, but these emphasize or trigger one's inner self to become like a Norwegian and follow these subtle forms of norms. As Gullestad also mentioned this sameness is an interaction style where differences are played down and commonalities are emphasized, in this way, the things I have been presenting above could be examples of how one can make efforts to become included in this society. When a Bangladeshi comes to this country thinking of the country treating everyone as equal and providing equal rights which surely the country does, but then these subtle forms of differences I just explained make people question whether outsiders are welcomed or not. Now, discussing all these important little forms of expressing oneself and becoming like a Norwegian puts Bangladeshi students into questioning, whether they will be able to manage the residence permit for longer to stay in Norway or not. If yes, then it makes sense for them to make an effort to fit into Norwegian society or adapt to have the same ideas as them. And if not, then they are most unlikely to adopt anything from this new culture, and the struggle of time basically shapes who wants to do what. From this observation, two strategies or attitudes can be identified which I want to refer to – one, becoming similar, and two, keeping own culture. Within the given timeframe, a student tries to figure out whether he/she will be able to settle down in this country in the future. And this situation plays a role and vice versa such as, I have observed in some cases, the involvement and adaptability to Norwegian society help them to become like Norwegian and encourages them to shape their future accordingly. The other way around happens when someone doesn't involve themselves in the Norwegian culture and gradually loses the motivation to stay focused in the way of life here and eventually, it leads them apart from their main goal which is studying and getting a good job. But the ultimate observation is in every situation I found, whether they adopt Norwegian culture or not, they want to benefit from the society and Norwegian laws.

### **The key role of Facebook Group (Bangladeshi Students in Norway)**

This Facebook group named Bangladeshi Students in Norway (BSN) that I came across in 2018 deserves greater recognition for the recent increase in the number of Bangladeshi students

coming to Norway. One of my very close senior brothers added me to this group since he knew I was interested to do my master's outside of Bangladesh. By that time, I already had developed a deep interest in Norway, so he told me to follow the group files and posts to know more about the application process and everything. This Facebook group has around 74,000 members now and around 14 admins and moderators to maintain and monitor the group activities. They actively help aspiring students process their application for admission to the universities of Norway, help them with proofreading the motivation letters, and give the guidelines to achieve the required IELTS score, they also provide complete guidelines to process starting from the visa application till getting the visa as well as they have in-detailed written file on what things to pack when a student is aiming to move to Norway as a student. This Facebook group has a file section filled up with detailed application procedures, part-time job searching processes, and how to survive the winter here as Bangladesh is a country with mostly high temperatures, so it is a real struggle for many people who are coming here to live. All the assistance this group has been giving me throughout time, I have received the same. While showing my interest to come to Norway for my Master's, I got to know Alim Hossain Shuvo, who is widely known among these recent master's students for his very kind and helpful nature. He has been a master's student himself at the Western University of Norway and after finishing his master's, he was on job seeking visa here, but he found better opportunities in the USA, so he moved there but he continues to help still the same way. Asking about how many students from Bangladesh came to Norway recently, he told me that through the help and assistance of this Facebook group, 115 students came in 2019, and 161 students came in 2020 which was a Covid year. Despite a lot of restrictions, people came in a scattered motion that year because when international students are coming to Norway, they get residence allocation from the student welfare association operated by the universities. So, SiO (Student Association) is a student welfare association for 27 institutes in Oslo that serves to make students' living experiences better and easier. But in the Covid year, due to border restrictions and lockdown, SiO was not allowing housing allocation for students at that time, and they mentioned in their email that whoever wants to come to Norway will have to take care of their housing allocation and all the facilities by themselves. That's the reason students of the autumn 2020 session arrived at various times between September 2020 to June 2021. I was also a student in that cohort, and I arrived here in November 2020 along with a friend. According to him, the flow remained to rise as 208 students came in 2021, then 245 students came in 2022. Every year this Facebook group used to open a messenger chat group for people who got admission to the universities of Norway and are willing to move here, to help them intensively with little details

of lifestyle and processing. So, he mentioned that he is giving me this data based on those messenger groups especially. In addition, he mentioned that the proportion of male and female students is almost a 55:45 ratio. But the data can also be found in a report made by European Union. (EU, 2020)

In my observation, this group has been playing a crucial role in the increasing number of incoming students in Norway from Bangladesh. I have described the absence of research work that has been done on students' migration from Bangladesh to Norway before which may go some way to explain the meager flow of these students. The absence of an active Bangladeshi community, a collaboration between social gatherings and arrangements, and the communication gap between generations led to this uneven migration flow of Bangladeshi immigrants to Norway. Moreover, many other countries are preferred to pursue a higher degree for Bangladeshi students rather than Norway because of the language barrier and critical citizenship requirements. But this Facebook group to a greater extent, I would say minimized the communication gap among Bangladeshis in this nation as well their active participation in the group posts and informative sessions played a key role in growing the interest among aspiring students in Bangladesh.

### **Forming “Little Bangladesh”**

“Little Bangladesh: Voices from America” is an ethnographic study conducted by Zahir Ahmed that explores the experiences of Bangladeshi migrants living in New York City. The book is based on extensive fieldwork conducted by Ahmed over a period of several years and includes observations and interviews with Bangladeshi migrants from diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic classes. The study demonstrates the role of social and symbolic capital in shaping the migration experiences of Bangladeshi migrants, and how their social and economic mobility is impacted by access to those resources. He also examines the challenges and risks associated with migration, including the exploitation of migrants by brokers and employers, and the limitations imposed by immigration policies and regulations. Ahmed's work provides rich insights into the lives of Bangladeshi migrants in the US and sheds light on complex social and economic factors that shape migration patterns and outcomes. He states, “*It is hardly surprising then, that access to foreign sources of earning is perceived as one of the few ways one can secure one's family's future.*” (P: 68, Ahmed, 2022) In this case, there are two strands shown by him, people who lack this capital had to go to the Middle East and they must do so

through the agencies which are mostly non-reliable, and on the other side, this movement to the US or Europe can be gained through kinship links. As social capital which is perceived as the extended forms of familial relationships and networks (Bourdieu 1986 cited in Ahmed 2022) and then symbolic capital which is evidenced if the UK or the US Bangladeshis are into business ventures in those countries, the children of these upward mobile families are likely to attract marriages with British and American citizens to enhance the connectedness to Britain and America (Gardner 1995; P:69, Ahmed 2022). Under the theme of place, security, and relatedness; he narrates that apart from all those successful rich Bangladeshi Americans, there are people who became illegal migrants who tried to go to the US through brokers and agencies which are mostly frauds in Bangladesh, these kind of brokers give false hope to people that they will go to the overseas with high paid jobs and good lifestyle but once these brokers get the money, few of them cons by not even sending those aspiring people out of Bangladesh and few Bangladeshis become able to go to the US but then become illegal or the way they lead their life is very difficult.

Ahmed's work has helped me a lot in understanding and defining the presence of social and symbolic capitals in my research where I found this Facebook group has played a vital role in forming networks between Bangladeshi students, sharing information, and building relationships among its members. The admin 'Almim Hossain Shuvo' helps people in every way possible and replies to people's questions and messages whenever he could. He does not even bother to attend calls from aspiring students when they need special assistance. Each year out of people who get admission to different Norwegian Universities, he opens a messenger group for them to get connected with everyone on the same platform and shares how to process the visa files. From this messenger group, people get friends with each other, and they share common interests which even helps them after reaching this country. I have been part of 2020's messenger group where I also found many friends with whom I still have good bonding. From the member counts of this messenger group, Shuvo gave me accurate information about incoming students every year in Norway which I have stated earlier in this topic.

The fraudulent acts explained by Ahmed in his work have helped me to understand that this Facebook group works genuinely and that their true intention is to help and serve people, assisting them in planning their movement and migration. The presence and services of this Facebook are easy to reach for anyone without any financial expenses and they get authentic help from the admin group of people as they have been doing this for six years now and many

people have been successfully moved to their new destination with the help of this group. It seems there is no possibility to do fraudulent acts from the group to individuals. But the difference I have analyzed between the Bangladeshi migrants in the USA and Bangladeshi migrants in Norway is that the social and symbolic capital in the US for Bangladeshis are stronger and they mostly get successful once they get there and the parameters of success could be seen as getting a good education, job, house, car and most importantly citizenship. But for Bangladeshi students as migrants in Norway, this access is limited due to little population and strict immigration policies.

## **Chapter Five. Food, Place, and Kin**

### **Difference between single and married students' lifestyles**

Bangladeshi people love food, especially different kinds of *masala* (spices), fresh *shak-sobji* (vegetables), and *mach* (fish). When I met many other students like they were already trying to cope with the food system here such as making tacos, pasta, and burritos. When I first came here, I also brought very basic *masalas* with me such as turmeric powder, chili powder, cumin powder, and specially *biriyani masala*. Biriyani is a special food for Bangladeshis made of *polao* rice which is small and provides a beautiful aroma while cooking, this rice is mixed with pre-cooked chicken which is marinated earlier with around twelve different kinds of ingredients. This is the typical Bangladeshi process of making biriyani, but when I met many other former and present students like me, I came to know that it's not only me, they also brought many *masalas* from home. But the reason I brought masalas with me was to spend the first few days abroad until I learn how and where to buy groceries, how to use transportation and learn about the currencies as it was my first trip to any country outside of Bangladesh. But after ten or twelve months of this timeframe, I noticed that people were still craving the masalas from Bangladesh. There is a common practice among Bangladeshis that whenever someone is visiting Bangladesh, other people would ask them to take or bring some important things for them such as medicines, electronic devices, and gifts for family. But I observed that people would ask them to bring some spices for them from Bangladesh which explains that they still have not coped with the ingredients they find in this country and this practice is specially done by people who are married or have their family here. I have been to a few invitations by families who just arrived from visiting Bangladesh, and they brought special spices and homemade food such as *boot er daler halua* (Split chickpeas fudge), and *deshi ilish mach* (Fresh Hilsha fish).

These are nowhere to be found in Oslo and Bangladeshi people crave these foods. Though there is one shop called *A-Food* in Grønland which is very famous among Asian people for its wide collection of fish, spices, and vegetables so it is a place for Bangladeshis as well if they want to find fresh fish, meat, and vegetables yet from people I encountered, they buy these from these shops just as a substitute to their satisfaction, but it doesn't match their expectation.

There is a very slight difference in cooking style that can be noticed but it depicts a lot of things about different coping mechanisms with a new culture. Such as I went to many invitations to Bangladeshi families while seeing the process of making this biriyani, I could notice a huge difference in how single students make it and how married students or students with their spouses and children make it. As I have already explained the process of making biriyani above, when families make it, they collect and put all the ingredients in perfect proportion and take time to make it and give their best to make it typical Bengali way. This same dish when made by students, I saw that they do it in a shortcut way such as they put half of the ingredients of the actual process and simply cooking chicken curry and mixing it with steamed rice mixed with ready-made biriyani masala to save time. I do the same thing but to understand their reason to do it, I explored the common reply from single students living was that they want to save time for themselves, for studies, and for their part-time job, so they find it hard to manage cooking food in typical Bengali way and then study and work. (P: 63-66, Zaman, 2010) One of my participants Sinthiya expressed her disliking of cooking over time because she used to love cooking once but now, she cooks out of need. While married couples have a very steady routine to manage these things in their life such as I met a couple where the girl was a student, and her husband was working full time, so they divided the cooking routine into three days for each and one day on the weekend they both either cook together or eat outside. This way the girl can focus on her studies and the guy I mean her husband has the time to work as well. So, this way no one is being over pressurized by managing everything.

### **Kringsjå as a preferred living place**

Kringsjå is in the most northern part of Oslo, and it is especially famous for its cheap student housing, its geographical positioning is quite attractive to students because it has views of the lake, forests, and mountains. It is also an ideal place for Bangladeshi students because the campuses of the University of Oslo and OsloMet University are only five to fifteen minutes away from here. Most Bangladeshi people I came to know from here, Kringsjå, but it doesn't



mean that Bangladeshi students are not living in other parts of Oslo, whenever I met new people at a gathering or get to gather, though I met them in Kringsjå but they were living in parts of downtown in Oslo such as Tøyen, Grønland, Linderud, Lørenskog.

But what I noticed is for everyone Kringsjå was the biggest meeting place and they would always celebrate any Bangladeshi or religious events in Kringsjå such as “Eid Day” which is the biggest festival for Muslims and I have seen it celebrated for 2021, and 2022 as well. It is celebrated in Sognsvann Lake which is an eight-minute walk from Kringsjå. Here also I noticed that mostly, the dishes that required a lot of time, processing, and quantity were made by couples such as *biriyani*, *beef curry*, *chicken rezala*, *chicken roast*, *pulao*, *fish curry*, *fish fry*, *egg bhuna*, *eggplant fry*, *mixed vegetables*; all these were divided among couples to prepare because they have more experience in cooking, they have a partner or children to help in the cooking, as well as there, was a general conception that they have more financial stability as well. Where the single students were given to prepare food such as salad, kheer (made with milk, sugar, and rice through longer steaming), and fruit custard, and given activities such as bringing cold drinks, arranging mats and chairs for everyone’s comfort, preparing things needed for different kind of play activities for adults and children as well after the cuisine.

People have a general conception of couples having more financial stability than single students in my observation is because according to UDI when there is one student and his or her partner is on a spouse visa, then the student is allowed to work eighty hours besides studies and their partner is allowed to work full time. And single students are allowed the same to work eighty hours and must do everything alone, which few students find pretty hard to cope with. This topic itself is a controversy among Bangladeshi people because from couples I have always heard them say in general, “Single students are lucky, they have fewer expenses, fewer household chores to do, and most importantly they can easily move to any other country if they couldn’t make it here in Norway.” Whereas single students think that the couples are blessed people in this unknown land because they have someone with them to share all the struggles and issues of day-to-day life, they have opportunities to earn and save more money, they can easily make Bangladeshi cuisine often, and most importantly they have more time to stay in Norway than any single student. (P: 59-63, Zaman, 2010)

What many couples do is that while one is a student and the partner is on a spouse visa, as soon as one finishes the studentship, the spouse applies for a master’s program and becomes a student so now they are doing the same thing and vice versa for another three or four years and

naturally they are allowed to have more time to stay in the country. To break it down, one couple named Rabby and Sarika shared their story with me. When Rabby first came here as a master's student and while he was a student, his wife Sarika came on a spouse visa and worked full time besides learning the Norwegian language because she wanted to pursue a master's at a Norwegian university, the year Rabby finished his master's, Sarika already applied for master's in the universities and got admission the next year while her husband was on job seeking visa then. When Sarika became a student, then her husband's visa status was a dependent visa or spouse visa. So, then they both had another 3 years to live in Norway and it was a good opportunity for Rabby because he wanted to get a Ph.D. It took him more than a year after finishing his master's to get a Ph.D. Since he was on a spouse visa so he had no tension about leaving the country soon, but if his wife could not make it to the university then it would have been difficult for them to manage the situation he expressed. This interprets that if a single student faces the same situation, then the student is most likely to leave the country because he or she would have no ground visa to stay here anymore after the studentship and if couldn't find a suitable job relevant to studies that can convince UDI to give the stay permit.

### **Building Kinship through Food**

In simpler words, kinship is defined as blood relations but also bonds that are not made because of blood. It could be referred to as neighborhood, social bond, political relations, and many more like this. Well, this conception is just a crack of the word kinship. In an anthropological sense, it's beyond just blood and relationships. Kinship over time influenced many other spheres of our everyday outside life such as – business and trade, job promotion, migration and globalization, power, and politics. The book “Vital Relations” co-authored by McKinnon and Cannell and published in 2013 has demonstrated the concept of social and cultural practices that sustain human life such as food production, reproduction, and the transmission of knowledge and skills. According to the authors, these practices are often overlooked in Western societies which plays a vital role in forming relationships, societies, and individualism as well.

The Kinship I found in my research among the Bangladeshi people, the little society, and the bonding they try to maintain among themselves is not directly kin-based society but a form of kinship in modern societies. A strong reference from the article “The American Family: Its Relations to Personality and to the Social Structure” (1955) by Talcott Parsons, who in his times beautifully justifies the difference between these two kinds of societies. According to

him, kin-based societies are dominative in structure which lacks independent choices and maintain heredity in the family business while advanced societies are operative by states, churches, larger business systems, academic professions also and so on which isn't a source of the kinship system. (McKinnon & Cannell, 2013)

One example that is very different from other social ethnographies can be taken from Carsten's research work presented in "Vital Relations" (Chapter 5) which was an ethnography on the workplace of pathology labs and blood banks of a hospital in Penang, Malaysia. Some very unusual yet obvious connections of relationships came out from her work which was very spontaneous, and situation based. She somehow tried to portray a bunch of valid reasons from her work on despite the non-presence of kinship system, how staff in that hospital still got connected in a very well-mannered bond and a connection of empathy which she quoted in a subtle way that "What I highlight here is the visible and strong effort made by staff to domesticate the working environment and to make it a sociable space. (P: 127, Carsten, 2013) In that chapter, she started the discussion of her research with ghostly appearances in the clinical pathology and blood banks of the hospital which she later found as a considerable interest because of the workplace. I think it is obvious to hear ghostly stories of any hospital whether it's much true or not. But the real fact that came out from her research is that, because of these ghost stories, the workplace at a certain point became quite unsafe for its staff. So, if we imagine any workplace as unsafe then it is very general that working there would become more like a nightmare every day.

Through Carsten's research, some effective ways of dealing with this unwanted situation came out and the first one of those is talking about food. She stated, "People in Penang love to talk about food and do so constantly, swapping recipes and recommendations about favorite eateries. It thus seemed paradoxical to discover the degree to which food was a fundamental part of collegial relations and a major topic of conversation." (P: 113, Carsten, 2013) Her work describes that co-eating habits and hanging out to share food can transform collegiality into a friendship or relationship that is different and long-lasting than family or marital relationships. The second one is the topic of children and babies. She found out while talking to the lab technologists or other staff that most of them had postnatal restrictions, and taboos about childbirth and bath after it and they shared it with the interested ones which built a connection among them. The final one is an ethical judgment that led people to connect with others because of being kind human and helpful. Such as learning scuba diving to rescue dead bodies from the

rivers which was a voluntary task but for someone it was almost like a duty as a human. Also, being very polite, kind, and friendly to the new internees of the hospital leaves a memorable image of that person to others. (P: 120-122, Carsten, 2013) All these points indicate that kinship is not confined to the blood relationship from a traditional perspective, but it now serves the same purpose as kinship but differently.

While exploring the life stories of my participants, I found Abir, Sinthiya and Promy are extremely engaged in sharing food with people, and through this practice, conversations were extended, and different kinds of friendships, bonding, and relationships were formed through regularity. Many other Bangladeshis gradually started joining them not daily but occasionally and often they used to spend time together and it would always start from buying groceries and making food together. This is also where the initiative of a Facebook community group named “Hridoye Bangladesh” was founded where these couple of people started organizing little events, but it reached so many Bangladeshis gradually that now they organize bigger events.

### **Religious Context and Practices**

In ‘Invisible Fences’. Gullestad’s whole debate revolves around a very thin line between Norway being an egalitarian society (in the sense of including immigrants as a part of their society) and being ‘Us’ (in the sense of an immigrant can never become a Norwegian). In her book, she demonstrated many examples of Norwegians expressing grief toward Muslims for their attitude toward being themselves and not putting effort into becoming a Norwegian. Wikan’s example among many of her examples, portrays that, “ ‘Immigrants’ and ‘immigration problem’ have virtually become synonymous with Muslims.” Where Wikan clarified that Muslims are a group of people who distance themselves from Norwegian cultural values while enjoying and benefitting from Norwegian material welfare and freedom. Gullestad also highlighted the text of Wikan where at a point Wikan said, “Every choice has its price, and the price for living in Norway is that one must accept that one’s children become Norwegian – if they themselves so wish.” Keeping in mind this context, I encountered many Muslim Bangladeshi families who discuss this same topic among themselves. They especially, talk out between themselves that they are concerned about their children learning about LGBT rights in Norway from the society since according to Islam and Muslims it is prohibited in their religion. Now, this concern is not solely from a religious perspective but a Bangladeshi cultural

perspective as well but still it leads to a religious perspective because the state religion of the country is Islam.

Among families, I have seen few who are anxious that their children will grow up with Norwegian values which they do not oppose but at the same time do not support it either. These values revolve around issues that can be easily overlooked or not so noticeable but will contribute to shaping one's mindset in life as I have observed. Such as, people want their children to learn how to be polite, trustworthy, honest, and helpful from Norwegian society. Whereas they want their children not to learn how to be independent in choosing and believing in religion. These are certainly not extremist forms of differentiation they make, and they certainly do not wish to show any indecency towards Norwegian values but merely an effort to keep them connected with the values they got from their motherland. These tendencies were completely invisible among my participants since none of them have any children. Also, none of my participants are extremely religious except Abir who tries to follow very basic fundamentals of Islam, being a Muslim myself and from the perspective of Islam, I cannot claim him as a pious Muslim but surely, he restricts himself from many inter-social activities in the name of religion which I have tried to tease out a little in the next chapter. Now, this whole discussion completely resembles Wikan's thought on immigrants - accepting Norwegian welfare according to convenience but not the culture due to the inconvenience of aligning with their own religious and cultural values.

Bringing here the other side of the context is, even if one is not a practicing Muslim, and away from all these religious values, even to some extent tried to cut off themselves from cultural values as well, then it raises a big question for me that what they are trying to become in the end. Along with my participants, many other Bangladeshis who have raised their families here are far away from religious practices in their daily life, the only prominent religious practice among Bangladeshis I have seen here is the 'Eid Festival' which unites them all in one place, even anyone from any religion or background is welcome there. But still, they face other issues to feel included in the society completely or still having the identification of an immigrant. Thus, it clarifies, Gullestad's second example in her book which is a conversation between a professor of Nordic languages and a woman with an immigrant background, the conversation was conveyed to Gullestad. The woman was born and brought up in India but has lived many years in Norway speaks the language well but not perfectly and claims herself a Norwegian citizen. She asked the professor, "I want to know if I am still an immigrant?" The professor's

response was ‘Yes’, as simple as that. And then the woman followed the conversation with grief since she expected to get rid of this label and asked, “But for how long will I then continue to be an immigrant?” “All your life”, answered the professor. As a response to the essence of this conversation, I will present another perspective with a conversation that happened in front of me between two of my Bangladeshi friends and I am coding them here with F1 and F2.

F1: These Bangladeshis are always breaching the rules of Norway and looking to get benefitted only, while they don’t realize because of them, there are many genuine people with an honest interest in gaining knowledge and building a career who are also losing the chance to get into the country. Every act has a certain repercussion!

F2: How are Bangladeshis violating rules, I don’t think they are. I understand your concern for the welfare of Norway since we all are getting benefitted from the country and could study for free here got many facilities but still one should never forget where one came from and how one has been brought up in his life.

F1: I do agree with you but I am not even talking about forgetting about the places and situations where we came from, all I am saying to a Bangladeshi is, when you are in Norway, don’t try to make it another Bangladesh, rather accept and immerse into this new culture, if not so, why bother coming all the way here then!

Now, here two different strong sentimental reactions were going on and I see both justified from their point of view, one expressed respect and audacity towards the nation where he is right now and not disrespecting his own country but just the people who are doing bad deeds. Another is not disrespecting Norway but being emotional and protective about her country’s values, which is the same as a Norwegian would do to protect their country.

But there has been a huge shift in how Norway perceives immigrants from before and it has been examined by Thomas Hylland Eriksen. He highlighted how the public and political discussions about immigration have shifted gradually from economic concerns to issues of culture, identity, and belonging. His explanation revolves around Norway’s concerns about Islam and Muslims especially because of the religious and social attitudes they have among them which poses a threat to the Norwegian society because they are not being integrated completely into the society. He referred to Unni Wikan as well where her work (Wikan, 1995) “implied that patriarchal ideologies among immigrants (especially Muslims) were instrumental

in curtailing not only the freedom of minority women but also preventing the full integration of immigrants into Norwegian society”(P: 103, Eriksen, 2016). His work shows enough circumstances where these complex Muslim ideologies are usually seen among Pakistani-Norwegians which is the largest non-European immigrant population in Norway. (Eriksen, 2016) My observations on Bangladeshis say that Bangladeshis are not intended to change this society rather they are interested in being integrated into Norwegian society by adopting social and cultural values, and religious values would not hinder if they wish to these instances I have tried to show through the individual journeys of my participants.

## **Part Two: Experiencing Diaspora, and Dealing with Invisible Fences (Individual Experiences)**

### **Chapter Six: The aspirational journeys from Bangladesh to Norway**

In this chapter, I have tried to highlight and illustrate the conversations, interviews, and important parts of my observations that I had on my participants. All the stories here focus on these individuals' motivations, perceptions, and aspirations regarding their reasons for coming to Norway. I have given the names of the subheadings of the chapters by picking up the best word that describes their personality and journey to make it identifiable and clear.

#### **Behavioral Pattern**

I became friends with Saifan through Facebook and got to know him through chatting on Messenger. Through chatting, he seemed an interesting guy to me for how he perceives life and his surroundings, so I decided to meet him to strengthen the friendship. He is in his late 20s now and a former master's student in “Informatics: Programming and System Architecture” at the University of Tromsø, after finishing his master's he worked for an IT company there for about one and half years and then moved to Oslo for his job here for another IT company.

Saifan's main aspiration is to go to the USA since he visited the USA while he was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of his master's in Norway, whenever he talks about the USA, I could see a different charm in his eyes and gratitude while he is talking about his visit.

Asking about what his aspirations were for coming to Norway, he expressed,

“I never planned to come here honestly, or I never had any mindset. But I wanted to come to Europe to do my master's because I think to have access to study and visa grants for us Bangladeshis, Europe is quite a good choice.” He added, “I wanted adventure in my life and I love to take challenges luckily after applying I got admission to the University in the North of Norway and I would say those years I have spent there are the best years of my life so far.”

I was blown away by how he finished the sentence, so with curiosity, I asked, “Can you tell me how it became best?” Then he replied,

“Because, in those days, I was able to make international friends, I was blessed to witness a bit of Norwegian culture since Tromsø is in the complete north of Norway with little population and with deep dark 8 months of the year, but other seasons there can be immensely beautiful and the people there are so much generous and humble than Oslo. In Oslo, people are always in a rush for I don't understand what! Arrrghhh!”

No wonder he could feel the difference in the diversity of culture between the two cities. But also he expressed that he likes the liveliness in Oslo because Tromsø is very quiet and almost no flow of people except in the sentrum (City center) area. His way of expressing things with such intensity of memories and enthusiasm made me believe that he aspired to have an adventure in life and the second one is the ethical absence inside the people of Bangladesh.

Another day when I went out with him for dinner, we were having a conversation about how spectacular the nature of Norway is and I mentioned, “I want to visit Lofoten and Flåm, these are like must-visit places.” He replied, “The whole of Norway is beautiful, it's been 5 years and I still can't get enough of it.” I commented, “Well, I completely agree with you. But I just don't say it because other Bengali people judge me. After all, in their opinion, I'm crazy if I like this country because to them this country is very dull, cold, and dark.” Then he replied, “People who comment or belittle others like this, they probably have never got outside of their



houses in life. Can you tell me something from our country which you feel proud of?” I told him, “Yes, I am proud of our food and its taste, but I can’t say that confidently in front of others because our street food is not hygienic enough, and also I am proud of our history, how our martyrs fought for the country.” He was like, “Okay, I agree, but now tell me something you dislike, probably the list is going to be long!” I was like, “Well yes, but I can summarize all those reasons into one and that is the mentality” then I asked him to answer the same question and he replied that it is ethics for him. He elaborated then, “I was always so shocked at what these Bangladeshi people think of themselves and others. They have no ethics inside them. They belittle other people; they would justify anything just to win an argument and would exploit people’s rights just to satisfy themselves. They always used to demotivate me that I would not be able to do anything good in life, on what basis they are judging me? I don’t understand where the ethics are and where is the humanity of our people!” He seemed to get quite upset after this conversation and I commented, “I understand your situation, but we can’t do anything about it, right? We can just try to share our thoughts in case someone tries being a receptor.” Then he told me, [In Bengali – Asholei, amra kichui korte parbona, ejonnoi ami amar desh ta chere ashte cheyechi shobsomoy] which translates as “Actually, we can’t do anything and that is why I chose to escape that country.” Escape in Bengali is “Paliye jawa” or “Chere jawa” which refers to basically escaping a situation physically in the English thought process. This concept resonates with how Schielke explained the story of Tawfiq for whom his own country is a prison. Why I highlighted this part is this one sentence gave me the interpretation to my question of motivation for him to come to Norway that he was kind of tired of the unethical events around him and he was not able to deal with that by not being ethical rather he chose to escape the country. In addition, I have already referred to his liking towards the USA justifies that he always had the wish to settle down somewhere far from Bangladesh if not in Norway. (P: 43, Schielke, 2019)

His personality and behavioral pattern changed my whole conception of Bangladeshi people struggling in Oslo, Norway. Before the meeting, I was kind of pre-conceptual about Bangladeshi students only facing difficulties, but my anthropological understanding and his perception made me think all these through a wider perspective. because he was talking beyond struggles, journeys, and difficulties and his prospects were quite unpredictable. It was a whole positive journey of migration which might portray a cinematic view where everything looks like one living his dream life. The person spreads so much positive energy that he was feeling blessed to have some sort of Bangladeshi food in here where I have seen most people complain

about this thing that they don't get any kind of our country food in Oslo. So, I assumed that he is an optimistic man, and it played a big part in his whole migration journey. Another thing to be added is that he comes from a well-established renowned family in Bangladesh that's why he didn't have any financial problems as well as any family responsibilities such as - their son cannot go out of their family business, their son must provide monthly living expenses back to their country or their son must abide by what his family tells him to do.

### **Masters as a gateway**

I met Abir after coming here and he used to live in the same student housing as mine and his building was quite close to mine. He is a twenty-nine years old guy pursuing his master's in Information and Technology at the University of Oslo and is quite a famous personality among other Bangladeshi international students and skilled workers society because he is good at his management skills of arranging Bengali events and parties. This way he meets many other Bangladeshis usually and they have a very good impression on him. From my perspective, I have seen him as a very humble and caring person because he always used to invite me for lunch or dinner as well as helped me to carry furniture for my room. He is a personality who loves to socialize and play games so much, every time I met him coincidentally, might have encountered him inside the T-bane since we both used to live at the same student housing, always I get to know either he is coming from Athletica (Sports by the Student Association of the University of Oslo) or going to Athletica. Though he is a very outgoing and social person but his socialization is limited to Bangladeshi and Pakistani people mostly. Being a practicing Muslim, he avoids drinking any kind of alcohol or even avoids any kind of meat which is not halal. *In Islamic terminology,*

*“Halal” means something permissible in Islam, and it falls under the law of Islam. Mostly it is referred to as food and drinks, but it can be other things such as marriage, business, and personal conduct as well. Such as many kinds of jobs such as serving alcoholic drinks, pork meat, or dealing with these are also considered haram in Islam and if someone abides by all the rules or considers themselves as practicing Muslims are likely to be following these rules of law.”*

So, it is my interpretation of his surroundings because I have been in close contact with him because of my participant observation and I have seen mostly he hangs out with Bangladeshi and Pakistani people. He has two Norwegian friends who are his flat mates whom I have met

since I used to visit him in his building, but I have never seen him hanging out with them or even having casual or deep conversations on anything.

I told him about my research topic and that I wanted to interview him, and he liked my research interest quite a lot and agreed to participate. So, while having our first interview session with him in the kitchen of his housing which he used to share with 6 other people, starting with casual conversation, at a point I asked what his motivation was to pursue a master's outside of Bangladesh. He answered –

“Pursuing a master's was just a gateway for me I cherished having a life outside of Bangladesh for a long time. I have seen many of my friends and other people supporting their families, getting successful in life, and getting a job with a huge salary and I saw all of that happen quite fast. So, I thought it was better to go abroad to struggle for a future there rather than struggle in Bangladesh. Because in Bangladesh there's no job security, no work-life balance, and underpaid jobs, I was even employed in a governmental job service, but the salary was so low that I was exhausted with financial and family pressure.”

So, I asked about what he meant by financial and family pressure. Then he replied, “I have a brother who is married, and my brother is a pious Muslim, so he doesn't work.” I was like “Doesn't work at all? And what does it have to do with being Muslim? You are also Muslim, I am Muslim, and we are working, so what's the issue with him?” He replied, “Honestly, I have no idea, but he justifies it like every work includes some haram activity and, in his view, all the work is haram, and he should only pray to Allah and that's it.” I was quite shocked to hear this because that's something not that usual to me or I at least did not have that kind of Muslim around me. Just when I was wandering in my thoughts, he suddenly said, “I know what you are thinking, that it's a crazy family I have, I also started thinking that and I was tired of these issues. So, I decided to look for countries with no tuition fees and easy visa access, though I wanted to go to Germany, I did some research on how the lifestyle of a student works there, and I preferred to go there. But the only difference between Germany and Norway you already know, right? Since I was taking a loan from my father with a condition that after reaching Norway, getting my bank account done, and as soon as the University returns my whole money immediately, I will send it back to my father. So, you know it was not possible if I wanted to go to Germany, my amount would have been blocked there for one year.

Being an international student, I am already familiar with the procedures that's why between conversations he affirmed that I already know the difference between the two countries, so I can clarify the issue now is that whenever we students get admission here, we must send around 130000 NOK as our living expense for a year to the University's student account where one wishes to study. Without sending the money one cannot apply for a visa to come here or simply is not eligible to get the visa. This is the same process with Germany as well, the only difference is that Norwegian universities assure the students to transfer the whole amount of that living cost to the student's bank account once the student has got their bank account in Norway while the German universities take these amounts as blocked amounts in the student's bank account, so if someone wishes to return the whole money to Bangladesh it is not possible from Germany, but it is possible from Norway. And in my student life in Norway, I can remember at least six of my friends clearly who returned the whole money to Bangladesh within six months after reaching Norway. Also, I know another girl from another University in Norway who had the same situation of taking a loan from her family with the condition of returning the money as Abir.

So, not only the internal problems inside the family and within the society led him to wish for higher studies but also, he took it as a pathway to escape financial instability and aspired to become wealthy for himself and his family as well.

### **Seeking for Freedom**

Sinthiya is a 27 years old girl who has been growing up in a middle-class family in Bangladesh, she is very helpful in nature, and physically active because she was involved in sports at her university while she was doing her under-graduation in Bangladesh and she was in the same University in Bangladesh with me and now as well we are both in the University of Oslo, that's why I know some traits of her but through this research and participant observation, I came to know her life story better. And she is a very good cook.

Once Sinthiya invited me to her home because she cooked "*Biriyani*", which is a quite famous food in Bangladesh, most people make it whenever they invite someone or it's a wedding or grand party, this is like a code of food there. And Sinthiya is commendable at her cooking, and she shared with me that she brought all kinds of spices with a little amount of portion that we Bangladeshis usually use in our food which I also brought here with me because I was a little unsure how I am going to survive without the kind of meal I am habituated in having, so along

with all other important things, I brought spices with me as well. And this act has been done by many other Bangladeshis I know, as mentioned above.

So, exactly this is how our conversation started we were talking about how often we cook in a week and how we feel about it and then she started missing her family badly. So I am presenting the conversation here by referring to Sinthiya as (S) and myself as (I) –

I: “Maybe you could give a visit to your family?”

S: “Even if I want I can’t right now, they are in the UK with my brother and sister-in-law, and I have applied for a family reunification visa there, but I have been rejected four times now.”

I: “Oh! So, you want to shift to the UK with your family? But why your application is getting rejected? Have they stated any cause?”

S: “Yes, they stated that the first-blood relationship I have there is not strong enough to get the visa for me yet.”

I: “Wait, what! I didn’t understand the matter, would you explain?”

S: “Since my brother still did not get citizenship yet and my sister-in-law is a UK citizen, so I was applying for family reunification on that ground, but on this basis, they are not granting visas.”

I: “So is family the motivation behind your coming overseas or there is any other?”

S: “I always dreamt of leading a life full of freedom and independence, though I got that from my family in Bangladesh as well, I was not independent regarding financing my own needs. I used to get financial support from my family, so I wanted to get rid of that and wanted to become independent financially. Also, it was so difficult for me to get a job that pays a fair amount. On the other side, I used to like the lifestyle of these Western countries. I love the fact of how systematic and disciplined everyone’s life is here. And of course, since my brother was already living in the UK for many years, the expectation naturally raised in my family on me to go abroad and settle down.”

I: “So you are planning to settle down in Norway?”

S: “Well, I am still trying to figure out what I want to do or where I want to move, but the case of Norway is complicated you know, it doesn’t depend on what I want to do, it depends on if I will get any opportunities here. I don’t see many opportunities for odd jobs or skilled jobs even which are related to my subject. But I would figure out something inside Europe.”

And that is how our conversation on that topic has been ended and then we started enjoying our meal. But her word of determination kind of left me awestruck because of the positivity she had to lead an independent life in abroad because managing a new lifestyle all of a sudden and being determined with the mindset in between all these mixes of cultures and norms, is not easy for a Bangladeshi single girl living here. Why I am specifying a single girl here is according to my observation I have mostly seen women coming abroad either with their husbands on a spouse visa or through family reunification. Bangladeshi females independently coming out of Bangladesh for study or skilled job purposes is very low progress over time with a little increase in the last few years.

Gullestad portrayed the flow of immigrants over time in Norway which is comparatively lower than countries such as Sweden, Denmark, Germany, or France but 41 percent of ‘non-Western immigrants’ live in Oslo according to the information given in her book of that time. She mentioned, “Many ‘non-Western immigrants’ work unskilled occupations as taxi drivers, hotel personnel, cleaners, and so on, doing many jobs that ‘Norwegians no longer want.’ Educated ‘immigrants’ often experience difficulties in obtaining employment that fits their educational level.” The statement here clarifies that the job opportunities in Norway for immigrants are not so promising and easy to get.

### **Change of Fate**

I met Promy through my participant Abir while having dinner once in his building. Promy was also sharing the same corridor with Abir and there were two other Bangladeshi living there. So mostly they all used to cook together or cook for each other and share food just like it happens in our country. So, Promy is also amazing at her cooking as Sinthiya. Whenever I have visited these people or even outside in an unplanned conversation, I observed mostly Promy cooks for herself and for all of them as well. They were living more like a family and two other Norwegian students were living and they as well became a part of this little family.

Through regular visits there, I was able to build a good bond with Promy she was very naive and sweet as a person, and I liked talking to her. She is 30 years old and came here to do a master's in "Ibsen Studies" at the University of Oslo. While having the interview with her for my research, I specifically asked about her motivation for coming to Norway as a student and she replied, "I just wanted to experience the outside world of Bangladesh, and Norway's student application process seemed the easiest in the world to me, I had to pay no application fees, or no paperwork at all, all I had to do is apply with my academic certificates and I had to prepare myself for IELTS, that's it." I asked her if the financial amount for living cost here required by the universities was okay for her or not. In response, she said, "Yeah, it was pretty much flexible for me in comparison to any other university in any other country, because I don't have to pay any tuition fees, and the living cost I can manage by working part-time, so I in fact return half of my money back to my home already though my family didn't ask me to do so, I did since I can manage my finances here. So, it was good to choose Norway regarding all these criteria."

Similar to my participant Saifan, Promy also came to Norway directly to have a change and adventure in life, she did not have any clear plan or what she wanted from Norway or in her life, but it clearly expresses she wants her life to change from what it was. Let me present a brief history of her life in her own words –

"I come from a middle-income family, and I lost my mother while I was a child and I have no siblings, so it has always been very lonely and difficult in life to move on and deal with even the simplest things in life. I am a very sentimental person in nature, I get hurt very easily by people, and at the same time it was not possible to live alone in life of course, you need friends and people around you who care about you. I also wanted the same. But the judgmental mentality we have in Bangladesh you know, I was tired of it and I wanted to get out of that zone. They always kept judging me for my body, my academic life, and my personal life, they would suggest my father get me married as soon as possible and I never understood why that is so important and why people whose presence I don't even bother about are leaving an effect in my life. But when you are mentally upset about these circumstances, it doesn't matter if you share those with anyone because no one understands, with people I have shared my experience and situation with, they have only thought that I am overthinking. But it's not like that, I believe in life it's not always about money or expensive things you need to own, I

understand it plays a key part in a country like Bangladesh where many people even struggle to put food in their mouths in a day. But I think mental peace is the most important thing in life to have, growing up dealing with all these kinds of emotional encounters and surroundings, my only escape was to go out of the country. My feeling was like I couldn't change how people think about me around me but at least I could change the place where I was living. Certainly, I did not know if my decision would change my life or not but at the time when I decided to pursue studies in an outside country of Bangladesh, this was the only choice I could make to bring a change into my life. But it was an exploration for me as well because I used to do a governmental job in Bangladesh, and you know how respectful a government service holder is in people's eyes in Bangladesh, still, I did not receive that immense level of respect just because I was an unmarried girl of my age. So, I took a leave from my job with an agreement of doing a master's and that I would return and join them again. So, I kind of had thought in my mind that if I like living abroad, I will try to secure my life here or wherever I can, and if I couldn't make it overseas, I have my job in Bangladesh so I will go back and join that again."

Through her response, it indicates her family doesn't have any financial expectations from her which leads her to choose how she wants her life to be and as well as she was in the state of finding out, but it also expresses that she is solely not to study here but rather was looking for something better or which matches her personality.

### **An Opportunist**

Rafsan became one of my closest friends of mine genuinely, not only because of the research purpose. I started to like his thought process and how he is pessimistic as a person but this pessimism of his was to only support himself mentally from getting shattered if he expects something too high or if something he wishes doesn't turn out to be the way it is. When asking him about his motivation for coming to Norway, he had a list of countries as he applied for a master's in Austria, Germany Finland, and Norway and he got admission into Austria, Finland, and Norway. But he chose to come to Norway because the visa application processing was comparatively easier than in the other two countries in Bangladesh. He had no strong motivation to leave Bangladesh, rather he was looking for better opportunities in life and trying to enrich his capacities toward a successful career. As I mentioned earlier, he is a very



straightforward guy, he shared the plan he had before was rather than doing an entry-level job in Bangladesh which usually requires a lot of effort and less amount of salary, it is better to do a master's outside of the country. His father is a reputed officer in one of the private banks of Bangladesh, so he has been pressurized to apply for jobs in the banking sections which he strictly opposed doing so which also works as an escape from the situation if not motivation. He wanted to utilize the time by gaining a master's degree in the meantime and then after going back to the country he would join as a lecturer in any of the reputed Universities in Bangladesh and then in the future he would go to Canada for a Ph.D. But he did express his wish to at least try to look for a skilled job in Norway because he got to know from many sources that students with IT backgrounds have a high probability of getting a skilled job in Norway. So, throughout the conversation and getting to know about his plans, it's pretty clear that he is very realistic in his life, he likes to adapt to new environments and challenges, and he always actively tries to keep his mind ready for any situation. Even throughout the informal meetings or outings, I had with him, he usually mentions plan B in everything. It is like his "*Mudra dosh*". In Bengali the word '*Mudra*' means '*Money*' and '*Dosh*' means '*Fault*' but if together it works like a phrase which means filler words in English terminology. Fillers words are like phrases to emphasize a conversation or to continuously alert the listener to concentrate. It is natural human behavior as an output of confidence as well as it could be of excessive use when someone feels nervous or unsure. My observation is whenever Rafsan usually says "Plan B" as a filler word, he emphasizes others to agree with his statements and tries to prove that he is right in most of his approaches as well as owning up to being an independent and adaptive personality to his surroundings.

### **Seeking Good Life**

Afra is a 29-year-old girl who came to Norway in 2018 to pursue her Master's in Information and Communications Law at the University of Oslo. Before coming here, she was in the UK for 8 years and completed her high school, bachelor and masters there. The master's she pursued in Norway was her second master's.

So, while having this interview with her, when I asked why she came to Norway despite being in the UK for many years, her response was,

“I pursued this master's only to enter Norway because to get a skilled job here I must have a master's from Norway, no matter how many qualified degrees or experiences I

have from other countries, having a Norwegian master's degree puts you one step ahead in the job market. Also, one of the attractive points for me was there were no tuition fees. Though I moved to the UK at a very early age and it was my father who wanted me to go outside of Bangladesh, and I couldn't say anything about the reason to move from the UK was, the immigration system in the UK was not working the positive side for me and at that point, Norway grabbed my attention as the best choice to study, build a career and live a life. Moreover, I faced so much discrimination in the UK, they are more outspoken and upfront about racism and discrimination in Norway in comparison with the UK is nothing, I feel much more independent, and confident in this country since I am a law student, and I admire how Norway provides equal rights even to the international students just like all other Norwegians get. So, before coming to Norway I have done a little research on all these things such as how the study system, job market, and everything work here and then I decided to come here in search of a better life. Especially what attracted me the most about Norway is how every kind of occupation pay is more or less the same and every work is treated as equal, there's no such discrimination between different categories of work and its PayScale nationally as Norway is a welfare state but of course, people here are racist inside the offices but still how they build their societal system and how they maintain it, I appreciate these things about this country and I was willing to make all the efforts to engage myself into this society. To be honest, coming here was not a coincidence or just taking a chance for me, I planned it and I was optimistic about my academic qualifications, work experiences, and the thinking pattern I have. I believed in myself and took this opportunity to achieve what I want in life.”

Her motivations are almost similar to the motivations and aspirations of my participant Abir, but unlikely Abir, she has experience living abroad for many years and she knows well how to handle different situations of life and she is not confused as any other participant of mine. The things she explained reflect that she has a goal to achieve, and she focused on her goal. But apart from her own choice, her father's choice was the main reason for her to go outside of Bangladesh.

## Summary

In this chapter, I have highlighted the little life histories and backgrounds of my participants and have explained what their reasons and aspirations were to come to Norway for a master's program. I found different variations among their motivations, yet all led to one goal which is to seek a good life. The approach of Nicholas de Genova, who examined and explained the complexities behind the motivations of migration. He emphasizes migration being multifaceted in nature, in the article "Migrants and their motivations: An anthropological inquiry". He portrays the different aspirations of migration motivations apart from political, social, or cultural factors. In addition to these factors, he emphasizes it could also be the desire for an adventurous life, an aspiration to be surrounded by certain geographical features, or to maintain historical legacies. (Genova, 2017) Also, he argues that migrants are not passive or helpless victims of global processes as people perceive them, but they are active agents who have the capability or at least continuously try to transform their social, economic, and cultural context through negotiation, resistance, aspirations, and desires for betterment by encountering new challenges and opportunities. (Genova, 2017)

Though I found social pressure pushed Abir and Promy to move this further in case to escape from their situation, so Abir took this master as a gateway to enter into a future he wants for himself. Promy wanted to change her fate that's why she came here to get over all the Bengali social pressure and conformity which she was not able to carry on living in Bangladesh. They gained symbolic capital through strategies such as socializing with people who are already in Norway or going to pursue a master's, Abir and Promy also were living in the same building in the student housing along with other Bangladeshis so it is strongly visible that they are attracted towards their own culture, they have surrounded themselves with Bangladeshi people and they would take the community in making it stronger further. While Saifan and Sinthiya did not have social pressure to shape their thought process but still they did not like the way Bangladeshi society works, they wanted to lead their life in a society alike Norwegian. And in their behavior, it is visible that they are interested in becoming Norwegian which I earlier conceptualized as "becoming similar". Saifan's behavioral pattern is incredible and with that, he wanted a better future for himself where there will be no certain typical Bengali traditions that he has to follow and it again confirms that he no longer wants to hold onto his own culture but adapt to Norwegian culture and society. Sinthiya's motivation is almost similar to Saifan but she was looking for freedom which she got in Norway as Norway offers equal rights and

social status to women and the country has no discrimination regarding gender which is the opposite in Bangladesh. Afra already had the freedom, and the living style since she has been living in the UK, but she came simply to build a better life here but she had no particular social or symbolic capital that made her come here, and she is not concerned with to maintain the originality of her culture. Rafsan has been a rebellious kind of person and he has always opposed the social structure Bangladesh has but as he is an opportunist, he does not deny anything that life has to offer him. He has a very critical way of thinking, so he took this master's as an opportunity to build his career and life. And it justifies that he also has an attitude towards becoming similar to Norwegian. All these stories tell that behind this intaking study program, everyone has a big dream to follow, and that is to have a good life with security, to build good financial mobility for themselves and happiness.

## **Chapter Seven: The Challenges of the study-work-life Balance**

### **Focus and Long-term Strategy**

On a wintery dark evening, I went to meet Saifan in person for the first time, as we had good reliable communication through social media for a long time then. We went to have dinner together and the food was coming late, so the conversation started with how life was going on with each other and so on. At first, I noticed he was quite mesmerized with his ongoing life full of adventurous activities, a perfect work-life balance, and fulfilling his wishes. But as the conversation was getting intense, the person expressed his true feelings about how he perceives the social life here. According to him, the social life here is very tough to be integrated within and language is the main barrier where an outsider cannot invade into a joyful conversation. He seemed strongly opinionated as a person and very clear with his thoughts at the same time diverse in his perceptions. When I asked him about how he managed to get a job when he doesn't even learn Norwegian completely yet whereas everyone else struggles here to find a job even sometimes despite knowing the language. He explained, "You need to focus on your study and not just run after part-time work and money, I see a lot of people do that, they go crazy about the hourly wage here once they start earning a lot even being a student with limited hours. But I only used to work as a dishwasher while I was into my studies and that also I left when I had my exams and thesis semester." He added, "It's really important to take care of

your heart in this country or you will go numb eventually.” I got an impression of him as very focused and crystal clear with his goals and thoughts on life.

About part-time job he always used to say one thing –

“When I was a dishwasher at a restaurant, I used to enjoy that time, cleaning the dishes and everything while hearing songs through my headset. Oh my! Those were tiring as well as enjoyable days.”

Saifan used to do only this job as his part-time work while he was in his full-time studies, but also he was a tour guide in Tromsø for a few months, but he used to do one job at a time, he did not have two or three job contracts at the same time. Once he told me that when he had his thesis submission, he left his work just to focus on his thesis to get good grades. Once when we were talking about self-financial management and savings, he shared his thoughts in such a way –

“I wanted to enjoy my life, on my 2<sup>nd</sup> year of studies, I went to the USA and spent all the money I had, but the trip was worth it, but since I had no reason to save money such as I never send money back to my home, or I don’t anywhere else to invest or give money regularly, so I did what I felt. Of course, I would never suggest anyone go on a trip like this where you will lose everything but for me it was okay. Then I used to work only to bear my expenses for the month. But it’s not that I was living a lavish life. My room was very small, and I had to adjust to my way of living which I’m not used to such as sharing the kitchen. But what made my living in Tromsø worthwhile was the views, I had a great view from my window, and every time I was seeing it, I felt it like new and it would always cheer up my mood.”

Throughout the conversations with him, how I observed him while spending time with him, hanging out, eating food, playing, and everything, he is a very straightforward person in nature but likes to be organized and is extremely creative. He would collect things that are thrown or given away by other people such as laptops, headsets, mobile phones, or other different electronic materials, he would fix them spending nights and days, through this act he finds joy, it helps him to stimulate and release his adrenaline. His circle of friends was also mostly Norwegian, but it was not that he used to hang out with them every day, but he used to join his classmates and friends in gatherings, study sessions, and festivals. At the same time, he was

traveling, earning money to bear his expenses, and giving complete concentration on his studies to achieve remarkable grades. Once he told

“I maintained getting grade A in almost all courses except one or two.”

My observation is the way he maintained his life in Tromsø, being disciplined with time management, maintaining a friend circle that helps him to focus on study, and of course, the family background he has where he has no pressure of being responsible for anything or sending money back to the country are all the reasons behind the way he sees life now. And these are situations that helped him to shape his life the way he wants and it gave him the freedom and environment as well to stay focused on his goal of leading a good life. When he talks about his experiences in Norway, I could observe almost no grief in his way of talking out those things, about most of the things he felt glad about. A completely other way around experience I got to know from my other participant Abir.

### **Diversion of Goal**

Unlikely the first interview session, this time it was not planned, Abir was feeling a little bored and coincidentally that time I just texted him to ask if he has a bicycle that I can ride just to learn better movements and turnovers, he told me he also wants to go out cycling so I can join him, as said, I joined him and we were riding for a long time together and then we reached the “Vigeland Park” in Majorstuen, so we stopped there and started a casual conversation about life and I asked him how he finds this new place to cope with and how he’s managing his studies at the same time arranging his financial expenses. He replied with so much grief in his eyes and the way of talking, that it’s hard to find any spare time for himself, to have some rest and cozy time at his house. Even if he manages to have some time, then he worries a lot about the future, his family in Bangladesh, and his friends there. He misses everything about his life in Bangladesh here and he added that it’s important to have mental support from the closest ones which he lacks here as he’s living alone all by himself. One of the biggest struggles for him was finding a part-time job because when he arrived, it was a complete lockdown in the city, so there were zero opportunities to get any work at all and that’s a major reason for going into depression, the reason behind this explained as belonging from a middle-income country and then bearing living expenses in Oslo with the money he brought from Bangladesh was a stress every minute for him. He came here with a genuine dream to achieve a master’s degree with an outstanding result, find a great job for life, and finally get permanent residency here

but after passing one and half years in this country, he feels it's all myth to living a dream life in abroad. He even has to support his family financially regularly, so this person is full of responsibilities apart from his studies. But he was still determined he would try his best to find a suitable job here and try to secure his permanent stay. Now, here is the contradictory part within oneself he doesn't have a lot of opportunities to be here but in search of a better lifestyle, he has no other way but of trying to settle down here. Of asking why he wants to stay, he made two things as responsible factors behind this ideology, one is job security with work-life balance, and another one is the systematic way of every work around the city. But every time I ask how his studies were going, he used to have the same reply –

“ ‘Porashona korte vallagena’ which means ‘I don't like to study; Nothing is going as planned, the study system here is too hard, nothing goes into my mind. I just need a job; I don't feel like studying anymore.’”

Well, I could relate to this kind of feeling of him as I have explained in the aspirations chapter about him where he expressed studying as a gateway to end his sufferings in life. Also, I have explained his being a sporty personality and always engaging himself in some kind of sports, could be a reason to distract himself from all the tensions around him related to his job, family pressure, and study as well. There is a huge difference in the way of master's program is structured and evaluated between Bangladesh and Norway, so in this case, if someone sees a master's as only a gateway to escape one's financial situation, in my opinion, one cannot just succeed without making efforts. My observation says, he was facing a reality he did not expect, he thought he would somehow get the degree or maybe not, but he will find a job. But in Norway, for international students, the job market doesn't work that way, the hiring process requires a master's degree usually according to the job position, and then some previous working experience as well. Even if someone has all of it, still there could be requirements of language, and certain skill acquisition especially for IT students, but Abir has completed none of it and still expects to get a skilled job.

In the summer of 2021, he started his part-time work as a staff in a Pakistani super shop, where he had to lift and move huge baskets full of groceries, meat, fish, and other foods. Then he joined a restaurant as a waiter where he mostly took night shifts where he had to serve alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks to people, and he used to work at the bar as well. Besides, he also had a job contract with a group of Oslo where staff is working to make big stages and after programs and concerts again putting back everything. For privacy reasons, I am not mentioning the

company name here, that's why I described the work type. He was working at three places, but it was in the summer, so it was understandable because students are allowed to work full-time in the summer and winter holiday seasons. But even after summer, when the semester was going on he used to work more than eighty hours often in a month, and when I asked why he was doing that, he responded –

“The hourly wage in this country is so good that I can't control myself if I miss working any day in a week, I feel like I am missing out on something big, also I feel bored if I am at home, I don't feel like studying, I cannot put or keep my concentration on studies, so ultimately the day goes to waste, so I feel its better to at least earn money, I can make savings.”

His statement here clearly explains that he was completely diverted from his main goal which was getting a master's degree and a skilled job in Norway, but his concentration was shifted to making more money and savings. Though he had no clear plan of what he is going to do with that savings, he just felt like doing that. One thing to be reminded of here is that earlier in his aspirational journey, I mentioned he is a practicing Muslim and tries to eat and work in a halal way. But the work he was doing does not fall into the criteria of living a halal life according to his definitions.

### **Adaptability**

I first came to know about this guy through a Facebook group named “Bangladeshi Students in Norway”. We came to know about each other in detail while chatting with a lot of other members in a chat group in the messenger of this Facebook group which was also introduced by the same admin of the Facebook group. This admin's main role is to help people regarding the student application process to Norway such as – what are the main documents one needs to apply to the universities, spread knowledge on important changes of universities regarding tuition fees, attested academic copies due to criminal offenses before, motivation letters and IELTS score. Now the part I am talking about here and I am going to talk about before my interaction with him is not a part of my fieldwork. But since we became friends before I pursued my research work, it is important to portray the important details that I still had quite refreshed in my mind till I started looking at him as a participant in my research, to give the reader a



chance to criticize whether my understanding and perceptions about his ideologies and opinions are biased or not.

From the very first time, I started chatting with him, I somehow had a gut feeling that he is an intellectual identity and was more straightforward with his words than needed. Why I am mentioning “than needed” because I am as a person a little soft speaker and I like being bold with my feelings or opinions but in such a way where I don’t want anyone to be sad or feel bad, at the same time I would take enough time and patience to make the other person understand what I am trying to say. But Rafsan in his nature was completely different than what I just explained about being straightforward in a nicer way. But I am not accusing him of being mean or careless personality rather his way of showing care and love to his closest people was this way of being very upfront about the things he felt and having no ambiguity in relationships. He is the guy who picked me up from Oslo Central Station on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2020 in the evening around 17 the day I first landed on this land. He helped me with carrying my luggage and showed me how to buy a ticket to use the transportation inside zone one of Oslo city. He all the way walked me through the student housing we both were living in called Kringsjå Studentbolig and showed me my building, even my apartment as well. The best part he did was that he made a Bangladeshi meal (Rice, lentils, and chicken curry) for me and my friend who came along with me on the same flight, this was something I was not at all expecting but this gesture of his was like a blessing to me that time. With this whole event what I am trying to portray is that one thing about him seemed quite clear he is helpful and generous as a human being and caring for his friends. For a person like me, who had never stepped out of her country, not even to the neighboring countries like India, Pakistan, and Nepal; the moment I stepped into this country from Bangladesh literally 7289 km away suddenly the first time in my 25 years life, was a moment I can never cherish enough. Now, to explain this event was important for portraying two scenarios here, one is that his gestures of picking me up, showing me the way to my living place, and making food express that he does care about the people around him, and the other one is that since this moment was so important and a lifetime memory for me, I might always have a soft corner for him for his kindness. This is important to know because then the reader can have a whole factual ground to understand if I am being biased or not in assuming his reactions and way of thinking in further explanations about my observation on Rafsan.

Rafsan was a 24-year-old guy when he came to Norway for the first time in September of 2020 to pursue his master's in "Informatics: Programming and System Architecture" at the University of Oslo, right before the collapse of everything due to COVID, still, he took a brave step to not care about how life is going to be in another country where starting from housing system to national system, everything was pretty structured and new for people like Rafsan and me.

He often used to call or text me asking if I wanted to go for a walk because we were living quite close to this beautiful, serene lake called Sognsvann in the North of Oslo, it is around 3.3 km circumference with a forest area to the incline parts is quite popular among not only Norwegians but as well as among students because Kringsjå Studentbolig is just the next T-bane (Train) stop after Sognsvann. It is also popular for picnic and BBQ parties, ice-bathing, camping, skating, and skiing in the winter, and a very calm and quiet place to have deep conversations, self-focus and treat your eyes with nature. So one such evening in the spring he asked me if I want to go on a walk, so I agreed and we started walking towards Sognsvann, our conversation started with talking about the nature of that evening and he expressed his feelings on how the sky was a beautiful mix of pink, blue and orange that time. Then I replied, "No wonder, Norway has one of the best sunsets always which I experienced almost anyone can witness from anywhere they are living in the country." Rafsan replied, "Indeed, do you feel the same for Bangladesh? You don't, right?" With confusion, I looked at him and said, "How Bangladesh is coming into this topic?" Then he replied, "Well, you know how congested our buildings are, you might not have experienced the intensity of it since you have never lived in Dhaka, but the city is full of dust, air pollution, unhygienic sides of buildings, and traffic jams of course. In between all of this where there are no spare clean places to walk, how can you even expect to see the sunset? But it's not that we never can see the beauty of sunset in our country, but I feel geographically Norway is beautiful to encounter such beauties without chasing for it." It explained that he really loved being in nature and as well we were walking around this lake he approached, he was taking full advantage of the beauty as well. So, randomly I just asked him that "have you always dreamt of coming to Norway or how you ended up in here?" He firmly shook his head and described that "No no, I had the plan to go to Canada, but it required a lot of money that time as well as time for the admission and visa processing, so I thought Europe would be the best choice to do master's and the cost is quite affordable." I was like "Whoa, you think this country is affordable, out of all other countries?" He replied, "Well, you know it is how you look at it. Can you even imagine yourself at this age

earning 15000 NOK with the number of hours we are working back in our country?” Then I was thinking and replied, “Actually yes, you are right, I could never think and possibly I would not be able to earn this much money if I was in Bangladesh right now, but also it is expensive here, a huge portion of our earning goes to fixed expenses anyways.” He critically replied, “Well, there are always more reasons to be grateful for if you look at the positives and if you look at the negatives, it’s always possible to find the things you don’t have. We can save money if we want apart of paying those fixed expenses.” He replied, “Whew! No need to mention that it is quite easy for both of us as an employee of Foodora, it saves a lot of our energy and time as well, so we are not ruining our health by working like hell in those restaurants and earning good figures as well, it’s not like you’re going to build a house or own a yacht here that you’ve to save millions, save that part when you are going to do a skilled job.”

Since we both were working with Foodora (Food Delivery Service) in Norway, we were sharing how much we earn usually and how we can save money each month after our expenses. It is important to explain Foodora’s working pattern before going forward into the conversation, the working shifts in Foodora are very flexible because it has a different kind of work timing not limited to from nine to five or from three to nine working hours. It can start from a minimum of 2 hours of working till 10 hours of maximum in a day and it can be divided into a separate group of hours with intervals in between. It might seem a little detailed but my observation indulged with his reply is that Foodora might seem like a lot of physical work but it is quite chill for the mind, so whenever a student is doing part-time with Foodora, it gives them the option to have more time to study, to have time to apply for jobs or learn the language or for an extra-curriculum freak, it gives the chance to engage themselves in curricular activities in the campus. Where he expresses the workload of restaurants as too much and that it can ruin one’s health in the long term. Now, this is where I remember a completely different perspective of my other participant named Sinthiya.

### **Use of Strength**

Me and Sinthiya, we both loved to explore different places in Oslo and we often used to go to beautiful spots just by exploring the map completely unplanned and that’s how we became quite good friends. When I first met her and came to know little about her, I had an impression of her as a really strong independent girl at the end of her 20s concerned to figure out how she should design her future. But one thing I noticed about her is that she is physically very strong

and active as well. This could be only my interpretation as I'm not physically active so anyone who has more sustenance in the duration of working hours and can hike without any fear to me seems physically on good terms. In such an event, we went on hiking to Kolsåstoppen in the summertime, and it is such a hilly place with high inclination and since I am afraid of heights, I was struggling to crawl on the big stones, but she was going quite fast and motivated me to keep on going. Then I asked her, "How you're even so good at it?" She replied, "I used to play volleyball at my university when I was doing my Bachelor's in Bangladesh, so maybe that's giving me an advantage in this Norwegian terrain." I replied, "That's amazing, then I assume you are good at managing your part-time job and studies, yeah?" She replied, "Well, I do three jobs usually, so it is a little hectic for me to manage along with the study. In my opinion, study and part-time work especially if it implies physical work, it's no way manageable. People who do good in their studies must be working fewer hours or their convenient hours only. It's better to either study full-time or have a full-time skilled job. I can take physical pressure as much as I can have but mental pressure, I can't take at all, so I struggle in completing the courses and getting good grades."

### **Exploring Life**

From the beginning of her arrival in the country, Promy has been engaged more in social gatherings with Bangladeshis, traveling with her friends to new countries, and working extended hours than students are allowed to do. She loved to enjoy every moment in this country which she earlier stated as I showed her motivation in the aspirations chapter. But on the other side, she was not doing justice to her studies, this is my interpretation which is if one migrated to a country with a certain motive in the process keeping aside her personal interest, one should obey that. What I mean to say here is as Promy came on a student visa, keeping up to date with her study should be her utmost priority and all other things should come later. I am posing this interpretation according to the situation UDI made in their regulations of processing student visas. Earlier, I have explained how students struggle with time, showing visa renewal requirements of money, how they are required to renew their visas every year in their studentship is a certain process to make sure that students are studying and not just roaming around with their interests and getting the benefits of this welfare state. Also, it is not that I have just assumed her activities in a certain way and trying to define her way of living life as breaching the rules set by UDI, she expressed her interests in such a way –

“Coming to pursue this master's is just a means of going out of my country, I am taking this period more as an exploration for myself and my life rather than being focused on studies. My subject is something I chose out of no choice, this was not something I wanted to study because it is mostly about Scandinavian culture and everything is related mostly to European and Scandinavian culture which I felt I could never be a part of because I am Asian and to take this kind of studies as a career in life, it is not usual if one does not belong here by born.”

Though she tried to objectify her reasons for not being studious and progressive in her academics she kind of assumed how the output will be in the end without even trying to embrace this different field of study. Resembling this to my own story, I never thought that I would shift to this field of study from ‘Development Studies’ but gradually I started liking it and was able to form good connections not in academics only but live anthropology in the way I perceive and understand things now. It convinced me to see things through and from different perspectives. If Promy would have tried to think differently than just presuming things about her studies, her situation could have been different.

### **Clarity and Concentration**

Afra was solely dedicated to her studies here in the ICT Law program at the University of Oslo. She expressed that she was very clear in her mindset that she must focus on her studies to get a subject-relevant job here. She told me, “When I came here, I knew no one who came on this program as mine from Bangladesh, so it was a difficult time for me because I was confused in my mind if I am going to be able to get a job or not. Many people discouraged me regarding my program, they used to tell me that no one got a job with an ICT Law master’s from Bangladesh in here. But I was not demotivated rather chose to stay persistent in my vision.” She added, “It’s difficult to manage study and part-time work when you’re a full-time student but since I have been living many years in the UK, so I was already proficient in my time management so the first six months I was not working at all rather I spent my time in my studies but after six months I started working part-time for a law firm which was related to my subject since I knew to stay longer in Norway, I have to get a job related to my field of study, so I thought why not starting that while I am already a student rather than working in restaurants or cleaning companies or any sort of courier jobs.

## Summary

In this chapter, I have highlighted how the individuals have been experiencing their new life journey in Norway and how they have been handling the balance of study-work-life. Saifan, Rafsan, and Afra have been focused on their studies, their main goal was to get a good job and life, and they were able to identify that if they put effort and stay consistent with their studies, it will bring a lot of good opportunities for them in their future. They even kept themselves away from all those conformities that the Bangladeshi community plays in Norway. I have observed that these three people were not interested at all in maintaining the Bangladeshi cultural norms here such as visiting other Bangladeshi's houses, cooking and eating together, and gossiping about everyday life, few even did not participate in the biggest Bangladeshi event 'The Eid Festival' just to avoid being judged by other Bangladeshis and getting familiar among others. They clearly understood the more they can maintain a certain distance from their own culture, they can be focused on their own goals and they can make efforts to 'becoming similar'.

While Abir and Promy have been extremely diverted from their main goal and engaged themselves in social activities more to make themselves feel at home which I referred to many times as making and building social and symbolic capital in Norway. These two of my participants are lead actors in building social networking among Bangladeshi students through sports and food. But the surprising part is they are still carrying on with the same Bangladeshi culture here as an attitude which I referred to earlier as "keeping their own culture". I found both of them did not integrate much into Norwegian society but rather involved themselves in the social and symbolic capital building of Bangladeshis in Norway through maintaining social conformities. This seemed a bit contradictory to me because they aspired to escape from Bangladeshi social boundaries and to live in a society like this but they seem to make no effort or are not even interested much to be engaged in this new society. Sinthiya had no similarities in this case with other participants rather she was trying to focus on what she wanted to do for her future, but clearly, she was not interested anymore in her study program as she to somewhat extent understood that Norway would give her a hard time to get the permanent residency and citizenship. So, she was not interested anymore in adapting anything from Norwegian society, her life revolved around earning money, socializing, traveling with Bangladeshis, and planning for a secured future that can give her the surety of permanent residency and citizenship in a European country. So, she had an attitude of keeping her own culture throughout this journey. It tells that the value of a master's program is a step towards getting permanent residency in

Norway for many people and it plays a crucial part in someone ‘becoming similar’ or ‘keeping own culture’.

## **Chapter Eight: Shaping the Prospective Futures**

Throughout the participant’s observation phase of my research and through conversations about their emotional and social experiences, my understanding was that many of them were struggling to become specific about what they want for their future, and many were very straightforward with their planning based on their living experiences in Norway. For example, noticeably, Rafsan, Saifan, and Afra had clear intentions to settle down outside of Bangladesh and somewhere life is easier and they can find the life they want while Rafsan and Saifan had no intention specifically to become permanent residents but eventually with opportunities, they were able to achieve it. And Afra had clear intentions with goals and she also achieved the purpose already she came with in Norway. On the other side, I found Abir, Promy, and Sinthiya quite struggling with their surroundings among them, Sinthiya also had clear intentions she would also settle down in a European country if its Norway or not, and she successfully did that while Abir and Promy seemed to be taking different paths more like with no choice but to accept the present. I wanted to explore how the situations have been changing in student’s life throughout their overseas journey and wanted to understand what circumstances made an impact on these changes in their aspirations and realities of migration and how it shaped their prospectus futures here I will be discussing below.

### **Mapping security and decision-making**

In this case, Sinthiya’s journey and decision-making were very spontaneous I would say, and she has been very practical with the opportunities of life. Let me present her future plan in her own words while she has successfully moved to Finland -

“I don’t want to go back to live my life in Bangladesh, it’s hectic there, so much corruption, inequality, and underpaid jobs, I want a life of freedom. Of course, I would go back to my country to enjoy myself, and I would never go away from my culture, but I would like to live my life and settle down here in Europe. Within one year of my master’s program here I realized that Norway is not a flexible country for me, I cannot

find a subject-relevant job that easily, at least no way without learning Norwegian. And even if I was able to find one, it's hard to sustain in the corporate sector here I feel. I got an overview from many friends that Norwegian organizations or companies don't prioritize immigrants for job positions over their native people. So I found it impossible for me to find a job in Norway and then sustain myself there and through that, I would get permanent residence or citizenship in the future. It would take me seven to eight years but all of this with uncertainty. Because if you for some reason lose the job before getting permanent residency and you cannot find another suitable job within six months, then there's a huge probability that you must leave the country. I couldn't take the risk of investing all my years for nothing. So I was deliberately gathering information about other EU countries and how flexible the immigration policies were. Finland was on top of my list of choices, and I have been recommended by many other Bangladeshis to apply for a master's program in Finland because, in Finland, the duration of pursuing a master's is included for someone who wishes to get permanent residency in Finland in the future. So, if I can complete a master's program in Finland and then sustain myself another 2 years in the country through any kind of job, then after four years there is an assurance that I will get permanent residence in Finland. The biggest advantage in Finland compared to Norway is that unlikely Norway, in Finland a master's degree holder doesn't have to find a subject-relevant job in case to reside inside the country. This made me believe that Norway is not an immigrant-friendly country because of the restricted immigration rules the country has.”

So, she decided to apply for a master's program in Finland to intake autumn 2022 session and got admission there. Meanwhile, when she was in Norway, she was working full time to save money for the tuition fees for Finland. Since she had the plan to start the semester in the autumn of 2022, in the spring of 2022, she went back to Bangladesh, got married, and applied for a visa for both in Finland. Then in August 2022, she moved to Finland and her husband moved with her from Bangladesh. In December 2022, I contacted her to talk about these changes, how she thought of this whole process, and how life is going on there. Her response was like –

“The way I planned everything turned out successful and it's quite good here in Finland, not many changes since the Scandinavian culture and way of life are almost the same but less amount of people in the city I am living, not many part-time work opportunities and the study system is comparatively harder than in Norway.”



Asking about how work and study life balancing is working out, she replied –

“I am not working anymore since the course credit completion system is quite difficult here, I have to put more time and concentration on my studies, so my husband is only working and I have the savings money from Norway with which I am paying the tuition fees, so we are managing our regular expenses through the money my husband is earning.”

Sinthiya also shared her assumption of getting hired for a skilled job in Norway where she thinks that in any job position, the Norwegians will get the highest priority which she took as pretty obvious, then there will be Europeans in line, then Americans, and then comes her number, that also only if she has outstanding academic qualifications and experiences along with language skill. It seemed pretty logical to me and also resembles a quote from “Invisible Fences” where Gullestad said, “Many ‘non-Western immigrants’ work in unskilled and semi-skilled occupations as taxi drivers, hotel personnel, cleaners and so on, doing many of the jobs that ‘Norwegians no longer want’. Educated ‘immigrants’ often experience difficulties in obtaining employment that fits their educational level.” From her statement, I could find the exact reality of how Sinthiya explained her assumption and more or less this could be the outlook of many other students and immigrants.

Sinthiya has been a volleyball and handball player in her bachelor period in Bangladesh and she has been a pioneer team player her team won 4 continuous matches every year while she was an active player in the team. She still maintains the legacy of being an inspiration to the team and maintains communication through video calling from overseas. Another notable fact about her is she is in the process of accomplishing her travel goals in Europe, within two and half years, she has already traveled to eight countries. The reason behind highlighting these practices in her life is that it portrays that she is mentally a strong woman because of her strategic mentality developed through sports and she is certain about her goals in life, she is not a person who takes huge risks rather she would go with a plan which can bring success for her in the long term. Just the way Glucksberg found these practices evident among her study on elite women. (Glucksberg, 2018)

## **Pathways beyond migration**

Unlikely Sinthiya, the case of Rafsan was the other way around. He didn't have any intention to settle down or even look for relevant jobs in Norway. Let me present his plan in his own words while he is already on his skilled job visa –

“When I first came to Norway, I had no plan to settle down here. It was not that important for me to stay here as a permanent resident. I have been a very compromising person in my life and I have never been susceptible to losing opportunities in life, rather I like to make my opportunities. My simple plan was to complete the master's with my utmost audacity so that I can get good grades and then I will go back to my country, try to become a lecturer in private universities and after a few years I would apply to pursue a PhD in Canada. But I believe, we always have to make the best out of what life gives us. After finishing the first year of my studies, I somehow realized there is a huge chance for me to get a skilled job people think here getting a job in IT is easy, but it's not if you don't develop the particular area of interest in IT and skills that are required by the job market. IT has many branches, mine is business IT and Norway needs a lot of expertise in this sector in my opinion. But you will find many other IT experts specialized in networking or law but hardly find a job. But out of many motivations to apply for a skilled job, one of the motivations was I was being extremely demotivated by other Bangladeshis, who used to tell me that I will never get a job in Norway, as people usually don't get jobs here, they would always suggest me to get the degree and move to another European country for a job. This continuous blabbering of the same suggestion made me furious, and I developed an aspiration to see myself proving them wrong. Then I joined as an IT instructor for 6 months in a school where I had to teach the use of different programs to students under 12 years old. I started doing this job so that I can show this work as an experience before applying for professional IT jobs. And it gave me a boost in my CV and interviews. I have been hired by quite a renowned IT company in Norway and I have been blown away by the work culture they have. I already got three years residence permit card through my job and now I do have a plan to get permanent residence and then citizenship in Norway if everything goes well with the processing in the future. Deliberately I don't have a plan to move to any other country because I feel the salary scale and work-life balance Norway has is the best for me.”

After joining the company, Rafsan immediately started looking for a partner, because even though everything was going perfectly in life according to him, he expressed his loneliness to me as well. He told me once, “I badly need to be with someone I like, it’s not possible to live in this country alone anymore.” Rafsan claims himself as being a rebellious child as he used to contradict his parents a lot in opinions and ordered discipline, he deliberately takes all the credit for his successful life by himself, which is not common practice for Bangladeshis, usually, Bangladeshis always give the first credit when they accomplish something desirable to their God and then their parents or family. My observation about him also goes with his view of himself because I have seen him accomplish things in a very short amount of time and with a proper plan. Within one and half years of his aspiration to lead a better life, he joined as a skilled worker in a company, found a partner for himself, and changed to private housing along with his partner from student housing. All these shifts from one situation to a better situation portray him as a successful personality. It is not my own opinion to claim him here as a successful personality, but I encountered someone who stated “I want to be like Rafsan one day”. This is a friend of Rafsan and for a particular help, I contacted him once and got introduced. But then in the conversation, at a point of talking about getting jobs, he mentioned that sentence. This made me think that there is a tendency among other Bangladeshi people to see people like Rafsan as an idol.

### **Calculative Risk**

Saifan, who is one of my participants, thinks in a similar way to Rafsan. I noticed that they both used the phrase ‘calculative risk’ to describe their approach to decision-making. They both mentioned that they tend to carefully consider the potential outcomes before taking risks. I am presenting here what Saifan plans for his future –

“I am not sure if I want to live my whole life in Norway, I would love to move to the USA once I get citizenship here. Though Norway is a beautiful country I feel, but not only the weather is cold here, the culture as well. Through my job, I have tried to socialize with Norwegian people but that’s a hard process, I need to push myself to get included in them. Norwegian people are not usually comfortable in sharing deep bond who doesn’t completely belong to them. By this I mean, I don’t speak their language, and this is something I have to acquire to have deep conversations with them. I felt Norwegians are very reserved and they will never open up themselves to someone of

whom they are not sure or if they don't feel secure. I know the language a little and I have to learn it completely in case to apply for my citizenship, but I don't feel that I will use the language to build communication with Norwegians. But I prefer to take calculative risks so I would not lose my chance of getting citizenship in Norway just to satisfy my adventurous wish at the moment. I have already acquired my driving license and bought a car to explore the natural beauty of Norway. I have just gotten married and brought my wife to Norway, though she has the plan to study at Business Institute (BI) in Oslo, my brother just got admission to one of the top universities in the USA. So, all together I have a feeling that I might move to the USA because the cultural diversity, beauty, and social system the USA has is underrated I feel. While my visit there, I have seen how lively, cheerful, and vibrant the city of California was. I want see to myself enjoying life somewhere like that.”

Though Saifan had no fixed plan of settling down overseas but over time he realized that he has good opportunities and he liked to stay here rather than be in Bangladesh. I understood this when he motivated me to try to stay in Norway or try to move to any other European country through academic programs. He was highly discouraging me to go back to Bangladesh. And as I have discussed his viewpoints about Bangladeshi people and the social system we have, all of those give a baseline to his discouragement of the concept of returning to Bangladesh.

Through the experiences of Saifan, as expressed, I can say he experienced the subtle forms of discrimination that Norwegians try to do to maintain their ethnicity or security. In terms of Gullestad, I found the presence of ‘invisible fences’ such as the attitude of other Norwegian colleagues created a situation for my participant where he feels that he is not completely included among them since he does not speak the language. But it does not mean he is deprived of any other facilities or rights from the company. He gets treated equally as any other employee in the company and they do not discriminate in case of his working pattern but when it's a party or an event or any informal get-together, he just felt the difference in how Norwegians talk to each other and when they talk to an expat or immigrant. There is a slight difference in the way of having a conversation and my participant used the term ‘push’ to give me a clear picture of the situation. He told me that he has to push any conversation with them, it does not go along naturally. All these slight differences in his working place and social surroundings are leading him to prefer the USA as a living place compared to Norway. But on the other side, the social benefits, equal consideration in the workplace, fair wage scale, and

most of all the opportunity to get citizenship in Norway are giving him reasons to stay here and accept even the smallest differences that he can sustain with. With the help of how Ahmed has described the formation and benefits of the social and symbolic capital of Bangladeshi migrants in the US, my interpretation is that Saifan's interest in moving to the US is not only that he does not completely feel included in the Norwegian society, but also as he mentioned in the monologue that his brother has got a scholarship at a reputed university in the US, plays a big part in shifting his motivation to live in the US. The way Saifan expressed that he needs to learn the language in case to become Norwegian, but he is not sure either if learning the language would completely help him to belong in the Norwegian society, this is the practice of his calculative risk analysis thinking as he mentioned himself. I think, this also contributed to his motivation towards moving to the US in the future.

### **Making of Social Capital**

Another participant of mine, who is also a master's student of IT, named Abir, whose experiences explain a completely contradicting scenario compared to Rafsan and Saifan. He is still an ongoing student in his master's program and couldn't find any relevant job, the last time I talked to him he seemed quite depressed and when I asked about what he was planning, his response was such as –

“I am not getting married, not getting a job despite having work experience from my country, and I am not even able to concentrate on my thesis because of all these tensions in my head, now I am even worried if I will be able to complete my master's program or not, so I stopped planning for anything. I feel like I should go with the flow of life, there is nothing much I can do. So many people are getting jobs and getting married, but I have no idea why I am stuck in here with literally no way out. My family is also going through difficult times, my father's health is degrading but as a son, I can do nothing. I should be sending money home for their betterment, but I am even struggling to manage my expenses due to looking for halal jobs.”

Asking if he would return to Bangladesh or move to any other country, he told me –

“Certainly, I don't have the plan to move to any other country, also I don't want to return to Bangladesh but if I am unable to find any job relevant to my background

before my existing residence permit in Norway expires, I would have to go back to Bangladesh.”

Earlier in the aspirations chapter, I explained Abir’s personality as a very social and interactive being. He loves to help people, be around people, and is quite susceptible to flattery and praise. But his social circle revolves only around Bangladeshi people, he does not make any effort or try to become friends with other nationalities except a few Pakistani people. This is not my assumption, through my observation of him, every time I met him in a planned way, for a specific reason or coincidentally, I have never seen him associating with any other nationality people, even though he is quite comfortable talking with me and about sharing information with me. I have never heard about any of his friends who is not Bangladeshi whereas most of my participants expressed their interaction with Norwegian or other international group of people through which they have learned something in life or those kinds of interactions either helped them or made things difficult. This practice of being social with only Bangladeshi people might have affected him in his studies and made him go far from his aspirations of coming to Norway.

My observation brings out another situation responsible for the way he feels now about his present and future. He was not only in continuous communication with other Bangladeshis, but he used to live with few on the same floor of his student housing building. Most of the time, I have seen them cooking altogether, gossiping the whole night, playing cards, calling Bangladeshi friends from other buildings, and inviting them to join them, eat, and play something. From my perspective, the way we Bangladeshi cook food takes a huge time, no matter how much the quantity is, it would take a lot of time to prepare everything, then cook, and then clean everything and keep everything in the right place.

Of course, it varies from person to person how one leads their life. I would bring my example, from the time I came to Norway till around one year, I used to buy a lot of groceries and cook often, almost every day, but after that time I realized this is taking too much time and I was getting bored every day thinking about what to cook or not. So I started cooking less, or cooking once in three days and it gradually helped me to save time and focus on other things in my life. Another experience of mine is that whenever I used to attend a Bangladeshi invitation, it would take me the whole day or night to try to leave the party. The environment there is so addictive that one needs to push oneself to leave the party. Considering these experiences of mine and the observations I had of Abir’s surroundings, he always used to be engaged in such kind of

acts as - cooking, organizing, preparing, buying groceries for everyone, and arranging parties. He is even formally the committee head and founder of a group named “*Hridoye Bangladesh (Bangladesh in Hearts)*” which was founded in May 2021 with its first arrangement of Eid Festival, the group is ongoing and rising with many other successful program execution such as Eid, Football and Cricket tournament, collection of aid for natural disasters such as they recently were actively collecting support such as money and clothes for the affected people from the earthquake in Turkey and Syria. So his involvement with such kind of social welfare acts has affected his personal life and he did not even realize that he is getting far away from his actual goal of coming to Norway. He is very genuine and helpful to many other Bangladeshis and almost anyone can rely on him regarding putting any responsibility on him, because he is famous for his well-planned and executed programs, but through managing all this around, he got distracted from his disciplined studies and skill development for jobs.

These kinds of practices can be categorized as ‘social gathering focus’ and a social hub for these Bangladeshi students to feel connected and it forms a place of belonging. This interpretation is supported and reflected by Ahmed’s work. In his book, through his empirical observations, he tried to explain how Bangladeshi migrants often do not assimilate themselves into the new world rather they remain part of two worlds - as a Bangladeshi diaspora. Ahmed accompanied his observations with Katy Gardner’s statement, “Both connections and disconnections are taking place here – physical, material, and emotional.” Where according to Ahmed, connections seem as - The United States is commonly viewed as a country that attracts immigrants, a government that operates with transparency, and a place where employment opportunities are secure. Essentially, it is a key player in the global capitalist system. However, the disconnections seem - the sense of being disconnected from one’s homeland is counterbalanced by maintaining social relationships and networks through community involvement. He mentioned, “Establishing a connection to home via participating in different community activities in Little Bangladesh provides a ‘state of belongingness’ that ensures mental satisfaction.”

### **End of a Dream**

Promy, one of my participants whom I found in a similar kind of situation, notably she is one of the housemates of Abir, so she has been involved in the same kind of activities as Abir but she has never been an active member of “*Hridoye Bangladesh*” but she used to contribute her

efforts and time for the organization such as whenever there was a big program to be held, she used to cook food in great quantity for people. She also has been an active part of the day-to-day activities as Abir, what I am trying to express here is Promy used to be engaged in similar kinds of acts to Abir and most of her day would surround her with being among a lot of her friends and serving them with food, sports and an environment of fun conversations. Though her way of thinking was not like Abir's. Apart from all these daily acts, she likes traveling a lot. Once she was planning to go to Lofoten, a beautiful archipelago in the north of Norway, and is quite expensive to travel and roam around there in summer. She asked if I want to join or not but I replied negatively and I did not have the financial situation at that time to travel anywhere. Then she expressed her feeling such as, "I don't care about money, I need to travel as many as places I can because who knows if I will have the opportunity in the future or not, so the money I earn usually I love to spend that for traveling, you should do that too." I nod my head with an affirmation to her but in my heart, couldn't agree because I believe we need to have certain savings for uncertain situations.

In recent times, she has completed her master's in Spring 2022. A few months after she completed the program, when I met her, I asked her about what she was planning for her future and what she wants to do next, she replied –

"I have applied for a job-seeking visa of one year, I don't see a relevant job here in Norway, even if I learn the Norwegian language, I see no possibility of getting a job. But I have applied in Finland for another master's program, and most likely I will move to Finland if I get admission there. I quite like to live out of my country because being a girl, I have all the freedom and security here that might be a dream for me in Bangladesh. Everything is so systematic that there is no hassle that I have to face regarding any sort of work, pay scale, document issues, or anything. But the immigration system in Norway is too strict, where in Finland people can apply for a residence permit with any kind of job contract whether it is related to one's academic degree or not, in Norway, it's not possible for students like us. I wonder why Norway being a Scandinavian country is so different from other Scandinavian countries. All other countries such as Sweden, Denmark, and Finland give such opportunities to people where people can learn their language and stay and contribute something to the country. But the way Norway is putting new rules every time for migrants, I feel like they don't want us to be in Norway anymore. But I will keep looking for ways through



which I can live my life in Europe. But at the moment I don't have the opportunity to plan anything until I get the job-seeking visa here to stay another year or to move to Finland once I get admission.”

As she mentioned, she was waiting for her job-seeking visa besides waiting for getting admission into the universities of Finland as well. But this January of 2023, I came to know that she is leaving Norway and going back to Bangladesh since she has not been granted a job-seeking visa in Norway. So, legally she cannot stay in Norway anymore and had to leave. Through my observation, I have not seen her grieving about it or being extremely sad that she has to leave the country but normally she is a girl I have always seen smiling and very jolly-minded, but I met her a few days before she was about to leave, and I saw her eyes were numb and she was noticeably quiet. It explains, as in the conversation, the way she expressed her will to stay here, her face and expression told that her dream was shattered into pieces.

Now there is another side of this story, the situation itself seems emotional and inconceivable to the person herself, me, and probably the reader as well, but this is the process the Norwegian immigration services generally expect to happen. All the students are expected to come for studies with the intention to return to their country, this is a valid process and that is why the ratio of getting student visas is hundred percent in Bangladesh. Because UDI has strict criteria to provide skilled visas to people and because of such requirements, UDI has an idea of how many people will manage to get jobs in Norway with their acquired degree. Even when Bangladeshi students come here, they also know these facts and agree with them, I did the same. But still when I encounter such kinds of situations others are facing or going through it raises the question that why then they come to this country if they have such a dream which has to be broken someday despite knowing the restrictions and boundaries of staying after the study period. The answer could have several strands of life and this thesis itself might have successfully explored many situations and constructive practices that lead one to choose this path.

### **Inclusive Thinking Pattern**

One answer to such situations could be the thinking pattern of my participant Afra who has developed herself as a successful woman here and is leading her life in her way. Though she came to Norway intending to get a job and live here and acquire citizenship because it was getting difficult, time-consuming, and uncertain to achieve citizenship in the UK. Norway's

academic international programs being tuition fees free were the main attraction for Afra to get admitted here. Since she had experience of living and studying in the UK for many years, she was confident and capable enough to find a relevant job for herself, still, it wasn't just a piece of cake for her to achieve. But she managed to get a skilled job along with her master's degree and now living on her three years skilled job visa. She has learned the language already and has a steady plan to apply for permanent residence in Norway and then acquire citizenship in Norway. While having a conversation with her I wanted to know her views about inclusion into Norwegian culture and she was quite diplomatic in her response –

“It is difficult to get into a new culture and cope with the differences since Norway is completely different from Bangladesh in every way for example, transportation system, living housing, language, and thinking patterns of Norwegians but I believe since I am here to live, so I have to make the effort to become one of them. I would never expect the Norwegians to make an effort to include me in their culture or conversations, yet they are a polite nation with utmost audacity in their behavior that they would include someone in their regular meetings, parties, and gatherings who does not belong here but maybe their colleague or mate in some way. Though it is undeniable that when there is a room full of Norwegian and you are someone who does not know the language and is not associated with the norms they follow in such situations, you will feel unwelcomed. But I guess this is a common scenario in any society you go around the world. I feel Norwegians are well-mannered and they keep enough space for themselves and for others as well which I like the most about them and which is not present in my Bengali culture, that's why I maintain a certain distance from Bangladeshis usually until I find someone very genuine and feel a good connection with. But honestly, I try to choose my friends wisely and I don't have uncountable friends but very few are close to my heart and I like it to be this way in my life. I like to keep things clear and precise in my life, free from any complexities and miscommunications. I feel this behavioral pattern of mine helped me a lot to adapt to the norms and values of this country.”

Through presenting her answer here, I have tried my best to portray her sophistication in her way of talking, she as a person is very elegant and talks very softly and slowly, she takes time to say something but not in a way where she is thinking, she tries to be calm and specific in what she is saying. And the way she perceives things are very appreciable and constructive. Her views on Norwegian cultural adaptation are quite commendable I would say because where

usually my other participants always tried to bring up the differences and inability to cope with the culture and usually blamed the society as reserved, Afra on the hand praised the society system and trying to become the best version of her ethnicity along with Norwegian cultural adaptation.

Now, I am not only interpreting this based on her statement, but through my observation and meetings with her, I realized she maintains strict discipline in her life such as she usually does not have any time for meetups on weekdays, even if she has, that's after 7 pm, as well as she maintains her sleeping time and wakes up early in the morning. She enjoys the weekend to her fullest by giving time to herself through reading books, cooking for herself and her husband, and all the casual meetups she prefers to plan on the weekend, she also loves to go out, especially to the cafes but she also goes there on weekdays when she has a home office rather, she loves to work through her laptop enjoying coffee or any kind of caffeine drink in a café. Even her home is well-organized and there is a feeling of peace felt, everything was in the right place and filled up with a lot of wall-hanging pictures, and rooms are decorated with both artificial and real flowers. These little details I feel express her personality very well and that she loves to be organized both inside and outside.

Gullestad in her *"Invisible Fences"* has portrayed her arguments with the help of Unni Wikan who is well known for her many years of anthropological scholarship in predominantly Muslim societies. Most of her debate revolves around how Muslims criticize Norwegians for being Norwegian in everything and that they chose to come and live in this country but they do differentiate between culture and society, even few practice segregation. Gullestad here argues supporting her statement with an implicit opposite of criticism is not neutrality but rather praise. She makes connections beautifully with Wikan's recently published book of that time on 'Norwegian immigration policy for the general public, *Mot en ny norsk underklasse: innvandrere, kultur og integrasjon [Towards a new Norwegian underclass: immigrants, culture and integration]* (1995) in many ways through the main ideas and interests. Gullestad explains that immigrants try to be neutral because they need benefits from the country, and by not praising they try to maintain their ethnic belonging. These immigrants don't praise the society and the country but rather keep themselves away from criticizing is a practice of convenience which she withstands by Wikan's concept of 'passports of convenience'. Wikan said, "My opinion is that one is not Norwegian in practice (*I gavnet*), if one has a Norwegian passport, but distances oneself from fundamental Norwegian values and does not learn

Norwegian.” (Wikan 1995a: 177-85 cited in Gullestad 2002: P 54) Gullestad also portrayed the relationship of Norwegian with the immigrants metaphorically as a host-guest relationship where her interpretation is supported by Wikan’s categorization of ‘immigrants’ as guests who arrived uninvited on their own initiative. Gullestad explains that being a host, Norwegians as a state have the power to set rules and act as judges as well, the host provides freedom and material welfare while the guest is expected to be grateful for receiving such hospitality and adopt ‘basic Norwegian values’. The thinking and behavioral pattern I have observed and found in my participant Afra completely implicates the argument posed by Gullestad. Afra is trying her way best to adapt to the Norwegian culture, she is not only neutral but praises the society for being the way they are. She expresses her gratefulness through being disciplined and showing respect to the Norwegian work culture, by learning a language, and by making an effort to include herself in this society. Also, the way she maintains a certain distance from other Bangladeshis and especially the social gatherings has played a big role in her life for her interest in adaptation to this new culture and society.

Asking of what she wants to do in the future, her reply was subtle and composed –

“Me and my husband thought that once we get citizenship in Norway, we would both do business, in such a way what we usually see in Bangladesh and here in Eastern European countries which is not existing in Norway. We would open a shop for flowers and cafes and in those cafes, we would decorate them in an elegant way where people of every class and standard can come and enjoy the tea and coffee with their gossip and conversations. Yes, you can find these scenarios outside of expensive restaurants and bars in Oslo but what I want to do is not like that. That will give you a chill vibe, where people can relax without having any alcohol or expensive foods. I will try to provide a feeling of our traditional *“Tong er cha ebong adda (Tea from a Tea stall and gossip)”*”

*“Tong er cha ebong adda”* literally means having tea from a little tea stall and sitting either inside the stall or outside and gossiping with friends and also having meaningful conversations. The tea stall is usually made of bamboo sticks and coconut leaves but sometimes it could be made of brick as well, and usually it's an emotional place for students in the universities in Bangladesh. But this kind of stalls one can see on every corner of residential areas or roads or highways, where people stop to relax and sometimes, they would spend hours there day after day so gradually it becomes an emotion for people where they may have made plans, taken decisions of life, got good or bad news, some people perceive it as their second home as well.

From my perspective, the reason behind her mention to establish this kind of business could be because her husband is a very outgoing and social person, especially tries to maintain a bond with other Bangladeshis, I would say the opposite of the way Afra carries her personality, another reason could be her personality itself and she wants to create a *desi* environment where people don't have to be bothered about it being expensive, they can be in the hassle-free atmosphere and enjoy themselves whether being alone or along with friends. But her future plan is completely different from all other participants I have not heard of a similar kind of future plan from any other Bangladeshis that I have encountered regarding this issue.

### **Summary**

This chapter was all about how my participants were planning their futures with the help of the master's program and what are their decision-making for the future and if it is any different from the previous aspirations they had when coming to Norway. Rafsan, Saifan, and Afra seemed to finally achieve their goal almost if not exactly what they wanted, but since they are interested in living in Norway and have the opportunity to get citizenship of Norway, it pretty much clarifies that it is the good life they were seeking, apart of that, people of course change through time and so does their aspirations. These three people deliberately avoid Bengali social gatherings, and they seem to be satisfied with the life they have now, and my observation is I found the strategy of 'becoming similar' among them.

While Abir and Promy had completely different pathways than what they expected and the common issue here I found was being distracted from their studies because that was the only medium through which three of my other participants secured their career fields. As I have mentioned before, Abir and Promy are key actors in building up social and symbolic capital in Norway though it started with making themselves feel at home which again refers to the term I introduced 'keeping own culture'. Eventually, these are all interconnected and lead to one path, and that has been the outcome of these two of my participants. Sinthiya was also distracted from her studies rather she chose to accept the safest option where she can be guaranteed her permanent residency or citizenship in Finland in the future. Though Sinthiya has not been actively involved in forming any kind of capital for the Bangladeshi community in Norway but she has neither been interested in 'becoming similar' to aspects of Norwegian society since she was not getting the things she wanted from the society.

Their way of perceiving things tells us that all of them have knowledge of their own cultural values and criteria as well as they are aware of Norwegian values. The extent of this knowledge is different for everyone and their actions tell us how they identify and implicate those things in their life. This is a complex yet interesting process that I have tried to bring out in these individual short stories from interviews.

My observation throughout all the phases of their migration journey is that the two forms of attitude I explored among my participants through the help of Gullestad's book, 'becoming similar' and 'keeping own culture', and through the help of Ahmed's work, the conceptual evidence I found in the lives of my participants such as the presence and absence of social and symbolic capital, these four things are highly inter-related. For example, I found where there is a presence of Bangladeshi social and symbolic capital, there is an absence of a 'becoming similar' attitude to Norwegian culture and when there is an absence of those capitals, there is a high probability of one's giving effort in 'becoming similar'. It could be the other way around as well such as when there is the presence of a 'becoming similar' attitude, it leads to the absence of 'keeping own culture' which ultimately leads to no interest in building social/symbolic capital. And when there is a presence of 'keeping own culture' attitude, it leads one's interest towards building social/symbolic capital thus the person has no scope for an attitude of 'becoming similar'.

## **Part Three: Policy Change, Scope of Future, and Discussion**

### **Chapter Nine: Policy Change and the Future**

On March 2023, the Norwegian Parliament, Stortinget, decided to impose tuition fees for all new-incoming international students from countries outside European Economic Area and Switzerland.

In this March and April of 2023, the Facebook group I mentioned at the beginning of the thesis had several posts from random aspiring Bangladeshi students who posted the screenshot of their admission email and expressed their grief in many ways such as - "The end of a dream",

“It’s so tragic that I got the admission but no way for me to make it now”, “How pathetic that I am eligible but Norway just made it impossible for me to pursue study there” and there were many similar kinds of posts by all those students who had a dream or a plan to come to Norway to pursue master’s and they were expressing their feelings that their dreams have been shattered as they cannot afford the newly introduced tuition fees in Norway.

Now, a dream in their perspective means the termination of an opportunity to change their luck of leading a good life. Just as *Zahir Ahmed* mentioned in his “*Little Bangladesh*” that how people from Bangladesh who won DV visas migrated to California with the hope of changing their luck by connecting themselves to “American Dreamland”. For Bangladeshis, the opportunity to study outside of there is seen as an opportunity to change their lifestyle, escape from political and social boundaries, to get rid of unemployment and poverty in their perspective which has been explained and experienced by *Zahir Ahmed* and I have been experiencing the similar kind of situations throughout my research. But there is this contradictory reality as well, that on the one side, there are those people who got the admission but realized that they could not make it to pursue their studies here, and on the other side here I am or people like me who made it to this country to pursue master’s but still the opportunities for getting a job or Ph.D. seems unachievable. Or if I say that the dream they see and think that they could achieve if somehow, they could come to the country doesn’t practically happen as I have been blessed to get the opportunity to come here but it’s not that I have been able to change my whole life or I could escape from all the problems I had in my life.

### **“Dream of Norway ends here”**

Considering this observation of mine let me present the story of someone named Ali who is in his mid-thirties, has been able to come to this country, pursue his master’s degree from NTNU successfully, lived here for five years, and tried his best to fit into this country, and tried to achieve skilled work requirement but still couldn’t make it to permanent residency. He told me the whole story while he has been successfully shifted to another European country on a temporary residency visa and switched that one now to a working visa but due to his privacy concern, I am keeping the country name private, and I am presenting the story in his own words:

“I have been living away from my home since 2010 and from that time till now on I am fighting to settle down abroad. From 2010 to 2016 I have been living in the UK, first I went there with a student visa to do my master’s and then switched to a work visa after 3 years, still couldn’t make it there for permanent residence and citizenship, the process is too complex, and it doesn’t give the surety to stay there for a lifetime. In 2016, I had to leave the UK and return to Bangladesh but then I applied in Norway and fortunately, I got admission and I came to Norway in 2017. I finished my master’s in 2020 and applied for a job-seeking visa which spans for one year, I got rejected for the job-seeking visa, then I applied for a skilled worker visa, and by that time I already learned the Norwegian language quite well I was good enough to have communication with Norwegians. When I was a student I used to work in a renowned super shop in Norway and I had a very good bonding with the owner of the shop so I explained the situation to the owner and asked if he could help me in any way, so he offered me with a job contract as someone in the management position which was related to my subject but didn’t require a Norwegian master’s degree to work, so after eight months of my application UDI again rejected that visa as well. As immigrants, we do have a right to make an appeal and ask for justification for that decision of UDI, so I appealed to the UDI in this period we do have the right to stay in Norway until a decision comes from them but we are not allowed to work and one should be ready in the phase of an appeal because if the decision comes in negative, then you have to leave the country within seven days. So, I was kind of ready to leave and I already packed all my things, but while waiting for the decision it was too difficult to live without working and earning anything in this expensive country. So, I already tried to look for other opportunities for work in other countries and was planning to move to another country. Coincidentally after two days of moving to this new country, I got my decision from UDI and it was negative, so I felt blessed that I made the right choice by already moving to another country. My dream of living my life in Norway ended there. People of my age, almost everyone is settled somewhere successfully with a good job, are married and some have babies here I am still fighting to settle down abroad, but I have no regrets, I believe Almighty is planning the best for me and I will keep fighting with any kind of situation he puts me into.”

He is a pious Muslim and a very genuine guy that’s why he was mentioning about the God he believes in and it makes him an optimistic person despite having difficult situations or things



he does not expect to happen but still, he manages to keep himself calm and composed. While he was telling me all this, I could see the subtle form of grief and desperation in his way of talking, but at the same time, I could see he felt blessed with everything he has. His story helped me to realize how different can be realities and it shows the variation in outcome of how someone perceives things only in a particular way. People who are in Bangladesh now grieving that they couldn't make it to Norway, so they are losing the opportunity to become successful in their life can also have a different kind of reality such as Ali's story.

### **Inclusive yet Excluded (Quasi-citizens)**

Khosravi has used the concept of "borderwork" in his ethnographic work "Illegal Traveller" which refers to the cultural attitudes, policies, and practices that regulate the movement of people across borders. It includes physical borders as well as social and cultural processes which reinforce the borders. For example, Khosravi describes how the Iranian state has created a "moral geography" which stigmatizes a certain group of people as morally suspect and thus ineligible for full citizenship rights.

In his book, Khosravi explained throughout the book about how undocumented migrants have been living away from their homes for years and how them being undocumented put them into difficult situations in life every day, as the book an auto-ethnographic study, he explained his struggles in the borders as well. Because he was a convener of a workshop on 'irregular migration in Europe' at a biannual conference, he arrived at Bristol airport along with his few colleagues from Stockholm University. He was stopped there by a security officer while the officer let pass Khosrvai's blond fellow travelers. After that, he had to face a mini-interrogation where he answered questions about himself and the purpose of traveling but the officer was not satisfied and started asking questions about his mother and family, Khosravi couldn't find any connection between terrorism and his mother. And then he became outspoken about that he is being interrogated because of his 'Middle Eastern' look and the officer being racist despite Khosravi being a Swedish citizen and passport holder. There the officer responded with affirmation that "You want to kill us. We have to protect ourselves". Khosravi explained that this 'YOU' was pointed at him and the terrorists, and then he decided to be persistent in not answering further questions but then he was neither even allowed to enter Bristol nor return to

Sweden. Here he claimed he was at the border at that time, and because of his being detained, the officer finally let him pass. But this whole act he describes as him being a ‘quasi-citizen’ of Sweden where an immigrant always remains an immigrant despite being a citizen with the passport of full rights but these rights can be suspended any time in a state of emergency. Khosravi said that he can cross borders most of the time without any major issues but there was one issue persistent every time which is he had to live up to his passport and act like a Swedish, that he can speak Swedish and prove his identification with his passport while others pass through. He stated, “Ironically, the same authority that approved my citizenship and issued a passport in my name mistrusts the relationship between my body and passport”. (Khosravi 2002, P 97-99)

This whole concept of how borders treat people who do not look like European people or to be more specific who belongs to the middle east or Asia can fall into these interrogations and despite having a passport, and full rights of citizenship, people who do not belong in EU by born should always be ready for any kind of detention. My observation throughout my research is that, in this case, Norwegian immigration policies and law is very strict and not compromising at all. As Ali mentioned in his monologue, once the decision of the last appeal comes, he had to leave the country within a very short period. So from the time he appealed, he was ready to leave, he expressed, “I already had my things packed up and I told my landlord as well about the issues so that I don’t violate the housing contract”. This status of his explains how vulnerable immigrants and it certainly justifies Khosrvai’s statement as well that “Through ‘inclusive exclusion’ (Agamben 1998:17), undesirable people – ‘illegal migrants, refugees, and quasi-citizens - are positioned on the threshold between *in* and *out*.” UDI is quite efficient and fast forward while students apply for their renewal of student visa but they do require students to complete their course requirements in their or else there is a chance to get rejected for renewal of the visa which I found the logical and right thing to do because UDI gives the visa in the first place to students for being allowed to do study, so, of course, they are going to check that, they are extra concerned in this stage because there are many people who work and earns more money instead of studying in this country and of which UDI is aware of. But the tension between these Bangladeshi students rises more I have observed after the completion of their studies, these students if move to Finland, Sweden or Denmark, or many other East European countries seem to sustain themselves for more years but in Norway, they cannot sustain themselves even for one more day without a legal status.

## **Common Perception of Bangladeshis**

I have observed a common perception of Bangladeshis around me that they think Norway and UDI as a state are too strict and non-negotiable on immigrants and when it's time they would just throw out people from the country. While I see UDI being very clear with its approval on their cases and they are just being strict followers of their law, in Ali's case, he applied and appealed so many times still the last time he was on a visa status was when he was allowed to stay in the country but not work legally which I found UDI being humanitarian and giving the chance to someone to at least stay instead of throwing out because of being rejected many times. This way of thinking can be supported by the concept of how Gullestad, in the end, explained the dynamic intention behind how Norway acts on everything, that, “ ‘We’ (‘Norwegians’), are thus considered more advanced and hierarchically superior to them’ (Muslims’, ‘Pakistanis’, ‘Vietnamese’, ‘Tamils’, ‘our new countrymen from other cultures, and so on)’”. But then she portrays the reason behind it as Norway has been a victim of colonization from Denmark not a colonizer, so Norway has been playing a crucial role in peace negotiations in various regions around the world. Besides, Norway is at the top in the world for its rate of per capita expenditure on development aid to the Third World. This is why she mentions, “ ‘Immigrants’ who do not play down their difference are perceived as provoking hostility, and thus to threaten such narratives about Norway as a homogenous, tolerant, anti-racist and peace-loving society.” (P: 59, Gullestad 2002) My impression of this statement along with my observations from the fieldwork and my thinking pattern, Norwegians and the state is just extra conscious and concerned before integrating someone into the society and culture it does not eventually only promotes one to become completely like them but rather they expect immigrants to show the respect, honor, and gratitude that the country deserves. (P: 61, Wikan, 1999)

The debate about inclusion and integration of immigrants into a new society could go on and never literally resolve but what I feel is these cultural and social differences are what make us unique, interested in each other, and share among us the differences. The best we can do for each other is to embrace each other's differences and culture and try to show the respect best way possible which I believe Norway is doing already. There are many perspectives on phenomena and about if Norway is anti-immigrant or not, in this case, I would say they are not and that's why they were welcoming thousands of international students to their country to

share their rich culture and societal norms and values through providing free education. Now, there would be a group of people who could say that the country could not survive without immigrants because they need more people for different job sectors and some even argue this in the sense that the country has such little amount of population. But here, I would say from the perspective of my country, I have always believed when there is population according to the size of a country and its capacity, there is peace.

The way Abir engaged himself in all kinds of activities such as sports with seniors (mostly came to Norway on a skilled worker visa) and social gatherings focusing on food, and community building programs, initially made me think that he is somehow doing it intentionally with an expectation to get something in return. Back in Bangladesh, while I was in my under graduation program, in Bangladeshi university there is a common form of networking is friendship or bonding between senior and junior batches, they could belong from the same or different backgrounds of departments and still could be great friends and circle in the University and they mostly are involved in curriculum activities in the universities but because of this vast networking, it helps them in their studies, examinations even in a future career path as well because these bonds were not just a connection of give and take of notes and certain help but these are life-long commitments. I could see Abir forming those kinds of relationships and it reminded me of the concept of “*Reciprocity to Relationality*” which I have explained in the Methodology chapter of the book and how it helped me to make bonds and build common interests between me and my participants. The same thing Abir is trying to do the same thing and in a way forming social capital but considering all other criteria for a student in case to be permanent in Norway, Abir, and Promy seemed to be lagging or I should say their pathways have been changed while Rafsan, Saifan and Afra have made it to their destination whether or not their main goal was to get Norway’s permanent residency, and Sinthiya’s story tells how to change one’s fate through capability and opportunity so she has done both, migrated yet on the way to achieve what she wanted to. But the common motivation among all of them and apart of them the other people I have encountered throughout my fieldwork, was in search of a good life which is the same Ahmed found in his work where he mentioned, “Wanting a better life was given as the main motivation to immigrate by 99% of the informants.” (Ahmed 2022, P: 32) He found 75% people who arrived in the US has previous links or forms of social and symbolic capital where I found the contrary in my research and almost none of them had any previous links in Norway. The only link I found is the people coming on a spouse visa or dependency visa but as I have explained throughout the research

that I have found many places which are in the process of building strong social capital which might bring many other people from Bangladesh in the Future.

### **The Future is in Finland**

Though only Sinthiya among my participants moved to Finland to secure her permanent residency and citizenship, I have observed in the last two years that most of the Bangladeshi students who couldn't find a job in Norway and are on that job-seeking visas are moving to Finland through enrolling themselves into another master's program. This is happening because Finland is becoming more flexible with immigration visas. In Finland, four years of legal stay in the country is required to apply for permanent residency in the country, and they don't have a boundary for someone to have a subject-relevant job for that. So, what students are doing is usually they are doing a two years master's program and then they try to secure any kind of job for the next two years, once four years are completed they are eligible to apply for permanent residency and gradually citizenship. In Norway, the eligibility comes only after when someone secures a subject-relevant job for themselves or a Ph.D. which has a minimum contractual period of three years, if someone loses the job and couldn't find a job within the next six months, they are most likely would be asked by UDI to leave the country. Students especially find it hard to look for a subject-oriented job and thus this is a complex and uncertain immigration process compared to Finland. In chapter four, I have discussed the struggle of time which explains this complex immigration process of Norway and which shapes their attitude towards Norwegian society in the time of studentship. Now, the decision-making of moving to Finland works as a motivation for people who have this 'keeping own culture' attitude, and the uncertainty of living in Norway arises the unacceptability of 'becoming similar' to aspects of Norwegian society such as behavioral norms, social values, and cultural practices

### **The Essence of Autoethnography**

I have explained in earlier parts of the thesis how my research work became auto-ethnographic in nature and in different narratives I have also interjected my own opinions and experiences as well. This auto-ethnography is quite different from Khosravi's auto-ethnography as his life experiences and writing is way different from mine and the context is much broader where he talked about the border, its politics, and the life stories of border transgressors. In my auto-

ethnography, I am friends with a few participants of mine before this research work and I was familiar with many other Bangladeshis which gave me an advantage in my identity as a researcher to them. As a Bangladeshi, I had their trust in me, I could understand their expressions, struggles, and planning more deeply because of no boundaries in language. But I was not biased in any other things such as interjecting my thought process or perception into them rather I tried to highlight in this research how Bangladeshis tend to influence their people through their ideas and emphasize others to believe that the world works only in a way how they see it. Surely, this is not the scenario for everyone, there are intellectual people among my participants who are very thoughtful about their life and shows gratitude for what life has to offer them.

## **Conclusion**

In this thesis, I tried to explain the life journeys and stories of individuals' migration to Norway and highlighted the underlying motivations driving their aspirations and the experiences that shape their future life trajectories. So, I first started by giving attention to the moment when the idea of this research work came into my mind and then I explained the historical patterns of the Bangladeshi diaspora in Norway to give an idea of how it has been over the years and then a brief history of Bangladeshi students migration in Norway.

I tried to categorize the life journeys of my participants into three phases of their life in Norway, on the first phase I focused on the motivations that led them to their aspirations to come to Norway where I found many varieties in their past life and how they perceive life. Mostly the common reason was they all were searching for a good life, and the definition of this life according to them, I understood is to have freedom of financial stability and a good lifestyle which the Norwegian society offers as I have explained under many circumstances.

Then the second phase is all about how these individuals encounter the balancing of study-work-life. I explored that few of them adapted nicely to this new environment as if they were meant to be in this society but it was their perception, behavioral pattern, and goal-oriented attitude that helped them to balance it. While few others were struggling rather, they chose to remain inside their familiar community activities and people to make themselves feel at home but they were being diverted more into social conformity rather than being focused on their

own life goals. Though such kind of acts contributed to expanding the Bengali community in a larger form but it has different impacts on individual lives.

The third phase is about how my participants designed their futures for themselves and if it is any different from the aspirations they had earlier in this journey. It was an exciting phase for me to explore being a student myself, I explored how others were planning, very minimal situations that had an advantage or disadvantage in their decision-making made it more diverse. But it was incredible to experience their journeys along with them and some journeys were like stories to me.

Lastly, I finished the thesis by highlighting the policy change in Norway for international students that imposed tuition fees. So, experiencing the journeys and my assumption says, this tuition fee can be a burden and hindrance for many Bangladeshi students who now aspire to come to Norway and build a future like my participants or something similar. If there will be no introduction to a scholarship scheme or extended years of job-seeking visa, Bangladeshi people would not have the capacity and opportunity to come here and testify their fate. So, this is a different strand of this student's migration journey that would have the scope to explore and understand in the future. The way Bangladeshi students are shifting from Norway to Finland because of the flexibility in getting permanent residency and citizenship can end the era of building futures in this country and the shift can take place in Finland. Thus, my interpretation is in the future even if Bangladeshi students will come, they will decide much earlier if they can accomplish the requirements to get permanent residency and citizenship here, and based on these decisions, they will build their individual strategies and attitudes of 'becoming similar' or 'keeping own culture'.

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