



Anti-discrimination Students Movement in Satkhira





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Anti-discrimination Students Movement in Satkhira

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Abstract

The Anti-Discrimination Students Movement of July-August 2024 reshaped Bangladesh's political landscape, exemplifying the transformative power of student-led activism. Sparked by the reintroduction of a controversial public job quota, the movement unified students and citizens in demanding systemic reforms. Although it began at the country's centre, its scope and momentum quickly spread to the peripheries. Employing qualitative methodology, this study investigates how regional participation in Satkhira highlighted the intersection of national and local struggles, offering insights into the capacity of collective action to advance equity and justice. Additionally, it examines the formation of youth politics in Satkhira, its current state, and its future trajectory. Key findings reveal that in peripheral regions like Satkhira, local grievances and innovative mobilization strategies significantly enriched the character of the movement. Students and

citizens actively engaged through decentralized protests and social media, overcoming systemic barriers such as state repression and local political interference. Over time, the movement's organizational structure evolved to incorporate diverse participants, fostering dialogue on equitable governance and the inclusion of marginalized voices in national decision-making. By aligning regional priorities with a unified national agenda, the movement amplified its impact while showcasing the complexities of grassroots mobilization. These findings provide a valuable framework for understanding how decentralized efforts can converge into cohesive demands for systemic change, underscoring the enduring relevance of student-led activism in shaping socio-political reform.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The Anti-Discrimination Students Movement of July–August 2024 represents a pivotal moment in the socio-political history of Bangladesh. This movement precipitated the downfall of the 16-year-long Awami League regime, led by Sheikh Hasina, the nation’s longest-serving prime minister. It emerged as a formidable resistance to the authoritarian governance and systemic violence perpetrated by the Awami League over the years. What began as a student-led call for the unresolved quota reformation swiftly escalated over 36 tumultuous days, culminating in a fatal blow to the regime.

Following the regime’s fall, Sheikh Hasina fled to India amidst widespread allegations of state violence and accusations of human rights violations, leaving behind a profound power vacuum. After three days of uncertainty and speculation, an interim government was established under the leadership of Nobel laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus, supported by the students participating in the protests. This transitional government has since initiated plans for institutional and structural reforms, paving the way for a fair and inclusive electoral process to ensure the peaceful transfer of power to a democratically elected government.

Although the resistance originated within the educational institutions and streets of Dhaka, it gradually extended to the farthest reaches of the country. Students and citizens from diverse

regions actively participated, transforming the movement into a truly national phenomenon. This study examines the July Movement’s evolution and impact as experienced in peripheral regions, aligning and contrasting these with its epicentre in Dhaka.

Purpose of the Study

Focusing on the periphery of socio-political movements is crucial because they often manifest differently in these areas compared to urban centres. Peripheral regions can highlight unique dynamics, such as localized grievances, distinct modes of mobilization, and structural barriers to participation, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the movement’s reach and implications. By investigating these regions, the study aims to reveal how the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement resonated with diverse populations and influenced the broader socio-political landscape of Bangladesh.

This approach provides valuable insights into the motivations, methods of engagement, and lived experiences of participants in these regions. Additionally, it explores how the movement unfolded locally, evaluates the current state of its organizational platforms, and analyzes their visions for the nation’s future political settlement and the implications for youth politics.

Research Questions

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What were the key events and dynamics of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement in peripheral regions?
2. What were the levels and forms of engagement by students and local populations in the movement?
3. What is the current state of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM) platform's organizational framework and activity in the periphery?
4. How does ADSM envision the political settlement and the future of youth politics at both national and grassroots levels?

Methodology

The research focuses on Satkhira, a southern region of Bangladesh that provides critical insights into the periphery's role in the July Movement. Primary data collection took place in December 2024, and involved observation, informal group discussions, and in-depth interviews (IDIs). The

IDIs were conducted with students and individuals actively engaged in the July Uprising, as well as members of the general public. Secondary data were gathered from journal articles, newspapers, op-eds, and blogs. These sources offered valuable contextual and chronological information, helping to triangulate findings from primary data. A snowball sampling technique was employed to identify and recruit participants. This method facilitated access to key individuals deeply involved in the movement, particularly in a socio-politically sensitive context where trust and networks play a critical role. Unstructured interviews were employed to encourage open dialogue, allowing participants to share nuanced perspectives and personal experiences. Data were processed through transcription, followed by coding and thematic analysis. This approach ensured a systematic examination of the collected information, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and anomalies. Ethical guidelines were rigorously followed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all individuals involved in the study to ensure their voluntary participation. Pseudonyms are used to ensure the participants' anonymity.

Chapter Two

Chronological Analysis of Student-Led Movements in Bangladesh (2018–2024)

The Anti-Discrimination Students Movement of July–August 2024 should not be understood as a sudden act of resistance but as the latest chapter in a series of sustained student-led protests from 2018 to 2024. The origins of the movement’s primary demand can be traced back to the quota reformation protests in 2018, which catalyzed subsequent mobilizations. Over the years, students have consistently taken to the streets to address pressing societal grievances, including the road safety crisis and opposition to the repressive Digital Security Act (DSA) (Ataulla & Yildirim, 2021; Jackman, 2019). These demonstrations were met with severe state repression under the leadership of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, characterized by the deployment of excessive force, arbitrary mass arrests, and the strategic use of social media surveillance to quash dissent (Ghosh, 2023).

Notwithstanding these oppressive tactics, the students’ commitment to activism remained steadfast, driven by an persistent pursuit of justice, accountability, and democratic reform. This enduring spirit culminated in the renewed vigour of the most recent movement, as mounting frustration with systemic discrimination, entrenched political corruption, and authoritarian governance reached a tipping point (Ahmed & Ellis-Petersen, 2024). Protesters from various socio-economic and educational backgrounds coalesced around a unified vision of equity, justice, and the unfettered exercise of freedom

of expression. Their collective actions underline the resilience of student movements as agents of socio-political transformation in the face of persistent authoritarianism (Corea & Erum, 2024).

Quota Reformation Movement (2018)

The quota reform protests of 2018 constituted a landmark moment in Bangladesh’s political history, generating debates on equity, privilege, and governance. Originating in March 2018, this movement was spearheaded by students from universities and colleges nationwide, who criticized the 56% reservation of government jobs, including a 30% allocation for the descendants of freedom fighters (Mamun, 2024). The protesters argued that this system undermined meritocracy and perpetuated inefficiency in public administration. The protests, marked by sit-ins, marches, and road blockades, escalated on 8 April, when Dhaka University students occupied the Shahbagh intersection. State responses, including police deployment with tear gas and rubber bullets, intensified tensions (Shovon, 2018). Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s 21 March declaration to retain the existing quota structure fueled dissent, but on 11 April, Sheikh Hasina announced the abolition of quotas for first- and second-class jobs (The Daily Star, 2018). However, the absence of a legislative framework to formalize these changes left many issues unresolved, sowing seeds for future unrest.

Government efforts to counter the protests included characterizing protesters as politically motivated and deploying party-affiliated groups to intimidate them (Shovon, 2018). Protesters responded by broadening public support through grassroots mobilization and leveraging media platforms to counter disinformation.

Road Safety Movement

The tragic deaths of college students Diya Khanam Mim and Abdul Karim Rajib on 29 July 2018 in a road accident in Dhaka exposed deep systemic issues within Bangladesh's transport sector, including unlicensed drivers and weak enforcement of safety regulations (The Daily Star, 2018). This sparked a nationwide movement, led predominantly by students who took to the streets to enforce traffic laws themselves. Their actions included checking licenses and creating public awareness about road safety (Kaiser, 2023). The movement issued nine demands, such as stricter penalties for violations and improved public transport systems (Dhaka Tribune, 2018). Initially peaceful, the protests turned violent on 4 August, as police and pro-government political activists clashed with demonstrators, employing tear gas and rubber bullets. The government launched disinformation campaigns, labelling the movement as politically charged, and used intimidation tactics, including the mobilization of ruling party supporters. Protesters responded by utilizing social media and organizing mass rallies to sustain public momentum (Ghosh, 2023). On 6 August, the government passed the Road Transport Act, which partially addressed the movement's demands but failed to ensure effective enforcement (Dhaka Tribune, 2018).

The unmet promises of 2018 reignited road safety protests following the deaths of Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) student Abrar Ahmed Chowdhury in 2019 and Notre Dame College student Nayeem Hasan in 2021 on the streets of Dhaka (Dhaka Tribune, 2019). Persistent traffic violations and a lack of enforcement prompted students to organize marches and forums advocating stricter implementation of

traffic laws. They described these incidents as manifestations of corruption and systemic failure, referring to them as structural murders (Adhikary, 2022). While the government attempted to delegitimize the movement through rhetorical framing and sporadic arrests, protesters countered by maintaining nonviolent tactics and fostering public discourse on the urgency of reforms (France-Presse, 2019).

Movements Against the Digital Security Act (DSA)

Students have been central to the movements opposing the Digital Security Act (DSA) since its enactment in 2018, which introduced sweeping powers to suppress dissent under the pretext of national security and cyber regulation. University and college students, alarmed by the law's potential to criminalize dissent and curtail fundamental freedoms, organized protests to demand its repeal (Amnesty International, 2020). These movements were particularly notable for their innovative use of digital platforms and grassroots mobilization to counteract the government's censorship. Students created alliances with journalists, activists, and human rights organizations, forming a coalition that critiqued the law as a tool for authoritarian control.

The protests gained momentum in 2019 when students held demonstrations on campuses across Dhaka, Rajshahi, and Chattogram, raising awareness about the DSA's misuse to target academics, bloggers, and social media users. In response, the government employed heavy-handed measures, including detentions and harassment, and branded the movement as instigated by anti-state actors. Students countered these tactics by adopting encrypted communication tools, organizing flash protests, and garnering international support through social media campaigns (Amnesty International, 2020). Cases such as the arrest of photographer Shahidul Alam and university students for social media posts further galvanized youth involvement, transforming the movement into a broader struggle

for freedom of expression (Al Jazeera, 2018). Despite the government's repressive actions, student-led resistance has ensured that the demand for abolishing the DSA remains a central issue in Bangladesh's democratic discourse.

Learnings from Previous Movements

Looking back at the events of these movements, we can find some consistent patterns. Most of these protests were initiated by students at different levels, often starting in Dhaka before spreading, to some extent, across the country. With most protest leaders based in Dhaka, the state found it easier to suppress the movement by targeting its leadership. The first few days remained largely peaceful, but violence escalated towards the end. Initially, these protests were not politically driven; they emerged as resistance to systemic oppression and discrimination. However, the state labelled them as politically motivated and as instruments of unrest, thereby legitimizing its use of violence against the protesters.

A crucial aspect of these movements was the strategic use of social media. Protesters leveraged digital platforms for grassroots mobilization, to share live updates, and to counter government disinformation. In turn, the state used social media surveillance to quash dissent, often leading to arrests and digital harassment. These movements also saw protesters forming alliances with other groups, such as journalists and human rights organizations, which amplified their demands and added to their legitimacy. Finally, the cyclical nature of the protests shows that the government's temporary, partial concessions failed to address the root causes, leading to the resurgence of mobilizations.

Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (2024)

The High Court's decision on 5 June 2024 to reinstate the public job quota system reignited

widespread dissent (Al Jazeera, 2024). Perceived as a reversal of earlier reforms, the ruling triggered nationwide protests beginning on 6 June. Students and civil society groups demanded the abolition of the quota system and called for equitable recruitment practices (The Daily Campus, 2024).

By 1 July, protests escalated into blockades, sit-ins, and university shutdowns. The "Bangla Blockade," held from 5 to 7 July, disrupted transportation networks and economic activities across major cities (The Business Standard, 2024). The government responded with heavy-handed measures, including deploying pro-government groups to suppress dissent, initiating propaganda campaigns to delegitimize protesters, and employing legal intimidation tactics. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's address on 14 July exacerbated tensions when she labelled the protesters "Rajakars," invoking historical wounds associated with anti-independence collaborators of 1971. In response, protesters leveraged social media platforms to counter government narratives and appealed to international advocacy groups for support (The Daily Star, 2024).

By mid-July, the movement reached a tipping point. On 14 July, student leaders submitted a petition to the nation's president for quota reform (Prothom Alo, 2024). The first attack on students occurred at the University of Dhaka on 15 July, when Bangladesh Chhatra League members, reportedly following orders from Obaidul Quader, General Secretary of the Awami League and a government minister, assaulted protesters with improvised weapons (banglanews24.com, 2024). The subsequent days saw violent confrontations, particularly on 16 July, when police employed excessive force, killing Abu Sayed, a student from Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur. Shot at close range with birdshot, his death, captured on video, became a symbol of police brutality (The Daily Star, 2024). From 16 to 23 July, violence escalated dramatically. Reports indicated over 200 deaths and numerous disappearances of student leaders. On 18 July, the government imposed a nationwide internet blackout, isolating protesters and limiting media coverage (Dhaka

Tribune, 2024). Despite this, protesters adapted through local assemblies and physical distribution of information. Advocacy groups and international media condemned these actions, amplifying global scrutiny of the Bangladeshi government. The partial restoration of internet access on 23 July coincided with a government notification on quota reform, which was deemed insufficient (bdnews24.com, 2024; The Daily Star, 2024). Protesters maintained their demands for systemic reforms and accountability for state violence.

In a controversial development on 27 July, detained coordinators of the movement announced the suspension of protests during a press conference at the Detective Branch (DB) office, allegedly under duress (Prothom Alo, 2024). This coerced declaration temporarily dampened morale, but other coordinators repudiated the suspension, revitalizing the movement (Voice of America, 2024). Amid the escalating protests, on 4 August, following a national security meeting, top leaders of the Bangladesh Awami League declared

their intent to counter the movement politically (Prothom Alo, 2024).

Tensions culminated during the nationwide non-cooperation program on 4 August, which saw violent clashes resulting in at least 91 fatalities (CNN, 2024). Pro-government activists, allegedly supported by police, used firearms to suppress dissent. Defying curfews, millions participated in the “March to Dhaka” on 5 August, demanding Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s resignation (The Daily Star, 2024). Protesters breached government buildings, including the prime minister’s residence. Facing mounting pressure, Hasina announced her resignation and fled to India later that day (Reuters, 2024). On 8 August, Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus was sworn in as the head of an interim government, symbolizing a profound political shift and the culmination of years of youth-led activism (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Chapter Three

Flow of Events in Satkhira

Reintroduction of the Quota System and the Inception of the Movement: 5–30 June

The Second Quota Reform Movement started in Bangladesh on 5 June 2024, following the reintroduction of a 30% quota for the children and grandchildren of freedom fighters in all government employment. The verdict, delivered on the same day, was perceived as a farce by students, sparking anger across the country, including in Satkhira. On the same day, a protest program was declared in Satkhira, which would eventually escalate into a mass uprising in July–August, leading to the fall of the Sheikh Hasina regime.

Around 2 p.m. on 5 June, upon hearing the news of the verdict, Rahim Mia, the central president of Chhatra Adhikar Parishad, along with Abdus Salam, the president of Satkhira district, and other Satkhira student leaders, announced a nationwide program through an online video. This announcement empowered activists in Satkhira to organize their own movement. Salam reached out to activists in his party, Chhatra Adhikar Parishad, and to non-politically affiliated students through Facebook groups on 5–6 June, mobilizing them using his experiences from the 2018 Quota Reform Movement. The initial effort lost momentum during the Eid-ul-Adha holidays but regained momentum at the beginning of July.

Formation of ADSM and the Emergence of the Movement in Satkhira: 1–14 July

During the first week of July, the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM) platform was established in Dhaka, and demonstrations were taking place all over the country, including Dhaka University. Student leaders from Satkhira met and decided to initiate a local protest. By then, they were in contact with the central coordinators of the ADSM, although district-level coordinators had not yet been assigned. Coordination was initially organized through colleges under the National University and campus-specific committees. Salam was assigned as the coordinator for Satkhira Government College and joined a National University coordinators Messenger group, where each college was represented by one student coordinator.

Online Groups and Member Addition Process

A WhatsApp group was created by student leaders on 9 July to organize the movement in Satkhira. Later, a public Messenger group was also created, and the link was shared on social media to allow anyone interested to join. Initially, the group reached 250 members before they transitioned to the public WhatsApp group after 12 July, which had no member limit. Within three days, the group

had over 1,200 members. However, these groups were quickly infiltrated by members of the National Security Intelligence (NSI), DB, and Chhatra League, the student body of the then ruling party Bangladesh Awami League. Chhatra League members, including their Satkhira president, joined the group to monitor discussions and collect participants' phone numbers. To ensure the continuation of the movement in the event of arrests, Satkhira student leaders created multiple WhatsApp groups and maintained a separate group exclusively for the movement's leaders and coordinators. This group initially had 26 members but later grew to 34.

Planning the Protest in Satkhira

Planning for the protest in Satkhira started to gain momentum during the first week of July. Students of Satkhira Government College who wanted to join the protest held a meeting among themselves around that time. On 11 July, the second meeting was held at the college to discuss plans for the movement. Only 15–20 people attended, primarily from the Economics Department, led by Sakib—whose twin brother, Zakir, later died protesting in the streets of Dhaka on 18 July. A document supporting the movement was submitted to the Registrar Building that same day. Non-politically affiliated students, witnessing the Chhatra League's brutal attacks on protesting students in Dhaka and Cumilla, began joining the Messenger and WhatsApp groups to participate in demonstrations in Satkhira. They communicated through batch Messenger groups of their respective educational institutions, sharing links to protest groups, videos, and photos.

The Beginning of the Street Participation

As movements spread across the country, students in Satkhira took the initiative to start their own. On 13 July, they held a press conference in front of the Department of Zoology at Satkhira Government College. Around 15–20 protesters participated, accompanied by a notable presence

of police, NSI officials, and media personnel. The program lasted until 8–9 p.m., with female participants leaving earlier. The remaining male protesters announced plans for the next day: a mass procession to submit a memorandum to the district commissioner's (DC) office in Satkhira at 3 p.m. on 14 July. This aligned with the central movement's plan in Dhaka, where a memorandum was to be submitted to the office of the Honourable President of Bangladesh.

Obstruction From Teachers and Administration

Following the announcement, protesters faced pressure from the Chhatra League, college authorities, and administrative officials to abandon the movement. On the day of the memorandum submission, teachers instructed students to go straight home after their exams to avoid trouble. The principal—a supporter of the ruling Awami League—initially blocked the march and later threatened students, warning that he would send Chhatra League members to confront them. Additionally, according to the student leaders, he provided a list of names to law enforcement, resulting in the arrest of several individuals.

Submission of Memorandum

On 14 July, students themselves contributed to the preparations for the march, raising funds for flags, banners, and poles. The march began from Satkhira Government College with slogans such as:

“Quota or merit? Merit Merit!”

“Abolish the quota system, free the meritorious!”

“In my Golden Bengal, there's no place for discrimination!”

The march was intercepted near the DC office, where several leaders were summoned for the submission of the memorandum. They ensured proper documentation of the event and received the DC's assurance that the memorandum would be forwarded to the central government. After

submitting the memorandum, while protesters were writing slogans on the walls of the city, members of Chhatra League began identifying and threatening the female students who had participated in the protest. Despite the fear, these students returned the next morning with even greater determination. From 15 July, the movement in Satkhira gained momentum, with protests starting directly from the Khulna intersection.

Towards the Mass Mobilization: 15–18 July

The movement received support primarily from political student wings such as Chhatra Adhikar Parishad, Chhatra Dal, and Chhatra Shibir. However, the largest group of participants consisted of ordinary, non-politically affiliated students. Alongside student leaders like Abdus Salam, Kamrul Hasan Jony, and Sumon Ahmed, non-affiliated leaders such as Sonia, Sakib, and Ikhtiar led the movement with tremendous courage. On 15–16 July, students from various colleges—including Government Polytechnic Institute, Satkhira Government College, Haraganga College, and Simanta Adarsha College—joined the protests. Chhatra Dal joined later, while Chhatra Adhikar Parishad and Chhatra Shibir were early participants, though members of both Chhatra Shibir and Chhatra Dal often concealed their affiliations.

Different student wings adopted varying strategies to ensure the movement's success. Chhatra Dal initially refrained from formally joining due to fears of the movement being labelled as opposition-led, as many of their leaders were already under law enforcement scrutiny. Chhatra Shibir members masked their faces during speeches to contribute without drawing attention.

First Encounter with Chhatra League

Around 100 students joined the protest on the morning of 16 July. Initially, the plan was to start

the march from Satkhira Government College. However, Chhatra League members forced the students out of the college field, prompting a change of route to Narkel Tola. They attempted to intimidate the female protesters by taking photos and videos. Coordinator Sonia arrived at Narkel Tola first and took the lead of the procession. Students regrouped through different alleys and continued their march, eventually reaching Khulna intersection. While returning, 20–30 local Chhatra League members arrived on motorcycles, honking and chanting slogans, which led to a direct confrontation. The police intervened and dispersed both groups.

The protesters regrouped, and the second procession started again from Narkel Tola in the afternoon at around 2–3 p.m.; Chhatra League members intercepted them again. This time, the police permitted the Chhatra League to attack the protesters and then dispersed the procession using brute force and threats of arrest. The protesters decided to end their program for the day and began returning to their homes and hostels. However, Chhatra League members attacked them again on the way back. Both male and female students took shelter in nearby houses, where they remained until the evening. These multiple attacks sparked mass outrage among students across Satkhira.

Strengthening the Movement: Attacks, Resistance, and Police Raid

A historic victory for students in Satkhira was marked on 17 July, as they successfully resisted the ruling party's student wing, the Chhatra League. Male and female students worked side by side, complementing each other's efforts in the struggle. The protest resumed at 11:30 a.m., with a large crowd gathering on Khulna Road. Chhatra League members attacked the protesters with local weapons in front of CB Hospital, injuring many. Initially, protest leaders considered retreating, but several female students stepped forward and challenged the male protesters to

stay and resist. They mockingly urged them to wear bangles if they planned to back down. These words inspired the protesters to return to the front lines. On the opposite side of the road, some female students had taken shelter in a tea stall, where they were attacked by Chhatra League members. A group of Chhatra Dal activists, armed with galvanized iron (GI) pipes and hammers, came to their rescue and engaged in clashes with the Chhatra League. These small acts of resistance helped the panicked students regroup. Armed with bamboo sticks, stones, and other makeshift weapons, they retaliated and forced the Chhatra League to retreat. Despite numerous injuries, this victory significantly boosted the students' morale for the next day's protest.

That night, police raided student hostels and messes, arresting many protesters. NSI agents threatened the movement's leaders, warning that the Chhatra League would bring reinforcements the next day, including members of the Awami Jubo League, the youth wing of Bangladesh Awami League, and thugs from nearby Jashore district.

A Sea of Students, League Infiltration, and Police Station Siege

Satkhira witnessed the largest student gathering in its history on 18 July, with attendance estimates ranging from 15,000 to 25,000 students, according to different sources. The victory of the previous day had instilled a renewed sense of courage and unity among students. Initially hesitant, general students joined the protest in larger numbers, fueled by anger over the brutal attack on female students at Dhaka University and the killing of Abu Sayed in Rangpur. Students were instructed to bring makeshift weapons, such as sticks and metal pipes, to defend themselves against potential attacks. Local residents supported the cause by providing water, wooden sticks, and other forms of assistance.

The procession began at Amtola intersection and swelled as it reached Bishtola. The route was altered, leading the march through Labani and Sangita intersections before arriving at the police station. Even teenage boys and girls from nearby homes joined the procession. At Sangita, a microphone announcement informed the crowd of the arrests of 20–25 students, prompting protesters to surround the police station. Protesters were repeatedly instructed not to engage in any provocative behaviour, but some aggressive individuals began throwing stones at the station, prompting the police to open fire using pellet guns, tear gas, and sound grenades. Protest leaders attempted to negotiate for the release of the detainees, but the police used the violence as a pretext to arrest many more students, including Salam, the movement's main coordinator in Satkhira.

Approximately 45–50 students were arrested and brutally beaten by the police. Some detainees, injured and bleeding, were denied medical treatment and kept in unsanitary lockups. Arrests continued throughout the night, with around 40 more students picked up from various locations, including Amtola intersection. Some were subjected to extreme torture, particularly those detained earlier by the DB. Local journalists captured footage of Chhatra Dal leader Sumon in front of the police station and portrayed him as the mastermind behind the attack, aiding the government's attempt to frame the movement as a Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-Jamaat conspiracy.

Curfew, Surveillance, and Legal Battles: 18 July–2 August

Following the events of 18 July, Satkhira's residents were gripped by fear due to mass arrests, the imposition of curfew, internet shutdown, and intense surveillance by police and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB). The curfew, imposed on 19 July, severed all communication, as both mobile internet and Wi-Fi connections were disabled. From that day onward, BGB and

police vehicles patrolled the streets continuously, and heavy police presence was observed at every major location in the city. Law enforcement operated under strict orders: any gathering of two to three people deemed suspicious would result in immediate detention, leading to widespread harassment. During this period, police, DB, and intelligence agencies targeted the movement's leaders and coordinators by raiding homes, gathering intelligence, and making multiple arrests. They tracked phone calls and arrived quickly when leaders attempted to use their phones. In response, movement leaders changed phones and SIM cards to avoid detection.

Despite continuous surveillance and the communication blackout, students made scattered attempts to continue the movement, but these efforts lacked momentum. Small-scale activities were organized by groups such as Islami Chhatra Shibir, the Boys' School group, and Chhatra Adhikar Parishad. However, participation—especially from non-affiliated students—was limited, making it difficult to sustain the momentum. With colleges and hostels closed and no campus to organize from, leaders struggled to coordinate and decided to temporarily suspend the movement until communication lines were restored and the curfew was lifted.

During this phase, the movement shifted to online platforms and the legal arena. On 28–29 July, a coordinator committee consisting of 10 coordinators and 14 assistant coordinators was established in Satkhira to legitimize and strengthen the movement following discussions with local student leaders.

The Jail and Free Legal Support from Lawyers

All arrested protesters were brought to court, where charges were filed against them under Sections 143, 147, 149, 332, 333, 307, 353, 427, and 34 of the Penal Code. The first accused was Abdus Salam, followed by 200–300 other individuals. The deputy jailor and jailor visited the

protesters after their arrival in jail and treated them well upon learning they were students. Several lawyers from Satkhira—including Advocate Shariful Islam, Ashikur Rahman, Mahfuz Sarker, Abu Kashem, and Gazi Hasan—provided free legal assistance to the students, risking their careers and personal safety. Advocate Ashikur Rahman was physically assaulted in court and arrested for defending the students. These legal professionals played a crucial role in challenging false charges and advocating for the protesters' rights.

Throughout this challenging period, the students stayed connected via phone and made ongoing efforts to keep the movement alive. On 2 August, another protest attempt was thwarted by police and DB interference. Whenever students announced a program, rumours frequently circulated from various sources claiming it had been postponed—most of these rumours were instigated by members of Chhatra League and Awami League. On the night before 2 August, it was widely circulated that the planned program had been cancelled, preventing students from mobilizing. However, the movement resumed on 3 August.

The Mass Uprising: 3–5 August

On 3 and 4 August, the movement escalated into a nationwide mass uprising, and Satkhira was no exception. Advocates, teachers, parents, day labourers, rickshaw pullers, and local residents joined the students in solidarity. The protest resumed at 11 a.m. on 3 August, with over 2,000 to 3,000 people participating, giving protesters the confidence to continue on the next day. During these final days, other coordinators played a crucial role in sustaining the movement while Salam, the main coordinator, remained in jail. These coordinators reached out to all student organizations, including Chhatra Shibir, Chhatra Adhikar Parishad, and Chhatra Dal, all of whom pledged their full support. To evade police scrutiny, the coordinators operated under pseudonyms. If one leader was arrested, another immediately assumed leadership responsibilities and resource mobilization. Protesters adopted

strategic approaches to avoid police and Chhatra League surveillance, moving in small groups through alternative alleyways to reach their protest destinations.

Chronology of Events on 5 August

On 5 August, the movement received overwhelming public support. People from all walks of life participated, and all major areas of Satkhira were completely blocked. Locals provided food and water to protesters enduring the scorching heat. The protest officially began at 11:30 a.m., coinciding with the “long march to Ganabhaban” announced on 4 August. By midday, clashes with police erupted, involving the use of tear gas, rubber bullets, pellet guns, and counter-charges from demonstrators.

In the afternoon, news spread that Sheikh Hasina had resigned and fled the country. This prompted members of various political organizations—including Jamaat-e-Islami and BNP, who had not previously been involved—to join the movement in an attempt to claim credit. Even former Awami League supporters joined after 2:30 p.m. However, general students swiftly removed these groups from the stage, ensuring that only student leaders were allowed to speak.

As the day progressed, rumours of communal riots and vandalism began circulating. Upon hearing of vandalism, students led a victory procession toward New Market. By late afternoon, chaos intensified as news of Hasina’s departure spread further. Enraged mobs began targeting individuals affiliated with the Awami League, and a mural of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was attacked. In retaliation, Chhatra League members allegedly attacked the superintendent of police (SP) office, likely in an attempt to provoke the police and discredit the movement. In response, police opened fire on protesters, injuring two individuals.

During the attack on the SP office, several officers were trapped inside. Movement coordinators intervened to prevent further escalation.

Throughout the afternoon, student leaders urged the crowd to remain calm, emphasizing the importance of nation-building and maintaining public safety. Similar messages were broadcast from mosques in different neighbourhoods. Realizing the situation had spiralled out of control, the student leaders halted the victory procession. With people injured and under fire, they instructed everyone to return home and postponed the victory march to the following day. The injured were rushed to the hospital, where doctors and interns provided exceptional care throughout the day.

Looting and theft were reported in various areas during this period. Both Jamaat-BNP affiliates and opportunistic thieves took advantage of the situation. Attacks and looting were carried out not only against individuals affiliated with the Awami League but also against ordinary citizens who became unintended targets. Students directly involved in the movement repeatedly urged the public to refrain from participating in such activities.

Addressing the Anarchy and Restoring Order: 5 August Onwards

After the chaos of 5 August, attention shifted to preventing attacks on minorities and temples, as fears of nationwide communal violence spread. A program was announced for 6 August at 11 a.m. at the Satkhira Government College campus, aimed at resisting these attacks and ensuring the safety of minority communities. The initiative was well-received and saw significant participation. Over the following two weeks, students contributed to the public good by managing traffic, cleaning the city, and painting graffiti on walls throughout Satkhira.

During this period, imposter coordinators began emerging at locations such as the Education Office, Passport Office, DC Office, SP Office, and police station. Individuals who had not participated in the movement falsely claimed to be coordinators and began engaging in power abuses, extortion, and bribery. In response, the main leaders of Satkhira contacted the central coordinators and

requested intervention. The central authority clarified that there were no official coordinators appointed. Another troubling development was the increasing effort by various political parties to take credit for the movement. The original student leaders—those who had fought from the beginning—were being sidelined.

Chapter Four

Current Situation of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM) Platform in Satkhira

Volunteer Activities

Following the post-movement anarchy, law enforcement agencies—paralyzed by fear and disorganization—became largely inactive. Students stepped in to fill this vacuum, offering crucial support to administrative authorities. Reports of attacks on minority households and the looting and vandalism of temples in the district prompted student activists to organize patrols in minority-inhabited areas and provide security for temples. Students also worked to prevent retaliatory violence against individuals affiliated with the ousted ruling party, many of whom had previously been accused of oppressing opposition members and ordinary citizens. As traffic police vacated key intersections, students assumed responsibility for traffic management across the district, with both male and female students actively participating.

This period also coincided with a severe flood in Feni. In response, students in Satkhira joined Dhaka University’s TSC-led fundraising efforts to collect local contributions. Later, when floods struck Paikgachha in Khulna, ADSM allocated BDT 1.8 million from its central relief fund (previously collected) to Satkhira. In collaboration with the district administration, students used these funds—alongside additional local contributions—to procure and distribute relief materials in Paikgachha.

Following the establishment of the interim government, students initiated market monitoring activities. These included enforcing the display of price lists in shops, advocating for reduced plastic use, and raising public awareness about hygiene and cleanliness. They also led the cleaning and decongestion of a canal in Satkhira town that had become polluted and obstructed due to encroachment and waste disposal. To address rising commodity prices and dismantle monopolistic practices, students established non-profit outlets that sourced products directly from farmers and sold them at minimal margins. However, this initiative faced setbacks due to agricultural losses caused by adverse weather conditions. They also proposed the creation of “Farmer Corners,” designed to enable farmers to sell their produce directly at fair prices, ensuring greater profitability.

These volunteer initiatives received support not only from students but also from their families and leaders of political groups, notably Jamaat-e-Islami and the BNP.

Treatment of the Injured

On 5 August, immediately following the resignation announcement of the former prime minister, clashes with law enforcement left several students injured by gunfire. Students worked to secure treatment for the injured the same day. In a separate incident, gunfire from a pro-Awami

League chairman resulted in multiple injuries and three fatalities, leading to the chairman's death at the hands of an enraged mob. Initially, the injured bore their medical expenses with assistance from well-wishers. Following the formation of the interim government, arrangements were made for the free treatment of the injured in government hospitals. Efforts are underway to provide one-time compensation, with BDT 500,000 pledged for the families of the deceased and BDT 100,000 for injured individuals. To claim this compensation, applicants must submit identity documents, certified medical records, and photographic evidence of their injuries.

However, injured individuals have demanded long-term rehabilitation support from the government. As one injured participant stated, *"We have been incapacitated and can no longer engage in strenuous labour. How are we to sustain ourselves in the future? Our subsequent generations will also inherit this hardship. Hence, we demand rehabilitation."* As of now, the government has not announced any measures to address this demand.

Memorials and Discussions

Recently, under directives from the interim government, educational institutions and public offices have begun organizing memorials and discussion sessions. These events bring together injured individuals, families of the deceased, and movement leaders to commemorate the sacrifices made during the protests and to discuss their implications for the nation's future.

Forced Resignation of Teachers and Elected Representatives

During the uprising, significant dissatisfaction emerged among students toward certain teachers and elected representatives. Teachers who discouraged or threatened protesting students were met with strong resentment. Likewise, elected representatives associated with prior corruption, suppression of dissent, and acts of oppression faced widespread disapproval. As a

result, there were incidents in which teachers were forced to resign from their institutions by students operating under the banner of ADSM. This same banner was also used in attempts to force the resignations of elected representatives.

While these actions were often attributed to general student frustration, the leadership of the movement explicitly disapproved of such measures. As one movement leader explained, *"Most of those involved in these actions were participants in the movement but not in leadership roles. No one instructed them to act this way, nor does ADSM support such actions. Those who engaged in these activities did so out of personal grievances or external provocation."* In some cases, both movement leaders and administrative authorities intervened to prevent these incidents from escalating.

The Emergence of New Coordinators and Central Leadership Visits to Satkhira

Following the conclusion of the movement on 5 August—marked by victory rallies—a new group of students emerged as active participants in post-movement activities. These individuals, many of whom had not played prominent roles during the protests, became involved in efforts such as traffic control and the distribution of relief in flood-affected areas. They also engaged in extensive promotion of their activities on social media platforms, thereby shaping a public perception of their significant involvement in the movement. Notably, some of these individuals were known to have political affiliations with the Chhatra League.

This growing visibility of new coordinators raised concerns among the original movement leaders. One of them remarked, *"Everywhere now—education offices, passport offices, district commissioner offices, superintendent of police offices—there are just coordinators."* By mid-August, rumours began circulating about the potential transformation of ADSM into a political party. In response, central leaders launched

district tours, holding public discussions on issues such as corruption, extortion, and terrorism, and meeting with the families of martyrs.

However, tensions emerged during a central leadership visit to Satkhira on 16 September. Many of the students who had actively participated in organizing the movement were not informed about the program, leading to considerable dissatisfaction. The discontent escalated when some of these students expressed their anger at the venue, ultimately resulting in the cancellation of the event.

Leadership, Political Affiliations, and Internal Conflicts

Many individuals who undertook leadership roles during the movement had prior affiliations with student political parties. However, during the movement, participants were largely unconcerned with the identities or affiliations of those leading the initiative. Participants engaged autonomously, joining the movement from their respective locations and later returning without delving into the dynamics of leadership. After the events of 5 August, the political identities of these leaders became publicly known, sparking a “cold war” among the leadership as they sought to claim credit for the movement’s success.

The movement in Satkhira initially gained momentum with support from the Chhatra Adhikar Parishad. After the arrest of its leader Salam on 18 July, the leadership transitioned to Jony of Islami Chhatra Shibir, who played a pivotal role in sustaining the movement through August. Rivalry between these two groups escalated, particularly during the visit of central coordinators to Satkhira on 16 September. Local administrative actors contributed significantly to intensifying tensions by engaging with both groups separately. During these interactions, both factions accused each other, further deepening divisions within the movement. As rumours spread, many of the movement’s leaders voluntarily allowed themselves to be arrested to avoid further complications.

A lawyer remarked, “After Salam’s arrest, the movement nearly came to a halt due to curfews and internet shutdowns. Later, rumours spread that he had willingly gotten himself arrested. Chhatra Shibir claimed they continued the movement and demanded credit for its leadership.” These internal conflicts played a significant role in the withdrawal of general student participation, reducing the movement to a small group of politically affiliated individuals and former leaders.

Plans for District Committees and Rehabilitating Student League Members

Efforts to institutionalize the movement through district-level ADSM committees began with the formation of a convening committee in Kushtia. Membership criteria required participants to be apolitical or to resign from existing political affiliations. This stipulation posed challenges in regions like Satkhira, where most active participants had prior political connections and were unwilling to sever ties with their organizations.

Concerns arose over the inclusion of individuals with prior affiliations to the Chhatra League in these committees. Allegations surfaced that these individuals sought to leverage their positions to shield themselves from legal repercussions. One movement leader noted, “They didn’t actively participate in the movement; they are opportunists. In Satkhira, they are trying to rehabilitate Chhatra League members by incorporating them into the committees.”

Political Parties and the Struggle for Control

Following Sheikh Hasina’s resignation on 5 August, political parties sought to co-opt the movement’s achievements. Leaders from two major political parties, BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, joined victory rallies and attempted to claim credit, only to be rejected by student participants, who deferred to

the movement's leader for the announcement of victory.

Over time, political parties continued to exert influence over the movement at both national and local levels. For example, on 13 December, ADSM organized a video exhibition titled “উদ্বোধনী ১৬

রবি” in Satkhira's Tala Upazila. The event was dominated by political party leaders, undermining the platform's non-political objectives.

While the movement aspired to act as a pressure group for systemic reform, it was increasingly co-opted as a political tool by established parties. This alienated many general students. Although ADSM sought to serve as a pressure force for reform, political parties continued trying to maintain dominance over the platform.

ADSM highlights the challenges of sustaining a non-political platform in a deeply politicized environment. Initially pivotal in uniting diverse

factions during a period of national upheaval, the movement successfully addressed pressing local issues, including community security, disaster relief, and market regulation. However, the post-movement period exposed significant vulnerabilities, including internal conflicts, the political affiliations of leaders, and co-optation by external political actors. These dynamics eroded cohesion and undermined the movement's credibility. Despite its achievements, such as fostering community resilience and advocating for systemic reform, the platform's trajectory underscores the difficulties of maintaining a collective grassroots initiative in the face of entrenched political interests. Consequently, while the movement leaves a legacy of activism and volunteerism, its future remains precarious amid growing political and organizational fragmentation.

Chapter Five

Ambitions and Future Plans of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM) Platform in Satkhira

ADSM in Satkhira stands as a powerful example of grassroots activism. Born from widespread grievances over systemic inequalities, it has galvanized students from diverse backgrounds to challenge entrenched injustices. The movement aims not only for immediate reforms but also aspires to become a sustainable force advocating for a more equitable society. Its ambitions and future plans reveal a transformative vision rooted in the values of fairness, inclusivity, and meritocracy.

Political Ambitions of the Platform

Political ambitions add a complex layer to ADSM. While the platform has largely maintained a non-partisan stance, internal and external pressures are shaping debates about its future direction. Some activists argue that systemic change requires political representation. *“Our struggles have shown us that systemic change often necessitates political representation. To ensure our voices are heard, forming a political party might be the logical next step,”* remarked a student coordinator. This perspective reflects the growing realization that grassroots protests alone may not suffice to influence policy on a national scale.

However, scepticism persists within the platform. Many fear that transitioning into a political entity

could compromise its grassroots ethos and expose it to the corrupting influences of power. *“The strength of ADSM lies in its ability to unite diverse groups under a common cause. Turning it into a political party risks fracturing this unity,”* warned a movement participant. This concern is echoed by student leaders who emphasize that the movement’s apolitical identity has been central to its success in rallying widespread support across ideological divides.

In contrast, some participants see potential in the movement evolving into a political force. *“A formal political role could give the movement a stronger voice in governance,”* argued one coordinator. Yet, stakeholders like politically affiliated student leaders remain cautious, stressing the importance of balancing political ambitions with the movement’s core values. These diverging perspectives highlight the delicate balancing act the movement faces as it considers its next steps.

The emergence of the National Citizens Committee as a political platform has further influenced this debate. Formed after the public uprisings of July–August 2024, it aims to create a new political framework for Bangladesh, emphasizing participatory democracy and institutional reform. With leadership from figures such as Nasir Uddin Patwari (Convener), Akhtar Hossain (Member Secretary), Samanta Sharmin (Spokesperson),

and Sarjis Alam (Organizer), the committee shares many ideological overlaps with ADSM. “*Both platforms envision an inclusive democracy and justice for past atrocities,*” noted a student leader affiliated with both groups.

In a recent meeting, the leaders of the National Citizens Committee in Satkhira outlined a framework for establishing their committee across all units of the district. The proposed structure includes the following guidelines:

1. Formation of Representative Committees:

- Eight representative committees will be established, one for each thana.
- A convening committee will be announced within two months of the initial formation, with further details to follow.

2. Member Selection and Structure:

- Members of the representative committees will be assigned positions in the convening committees based on merit and performance.
- Thana committees will consist of at least 21 members, while metropolitan committees will require a minimum of 31 members. However, Satkhira will not have a metropolitan committee, as it lacks a metropolis.
- Membership numbers in the representative committees are flexible in special cases.

3. Inclusivity and Representation:

- The committee will be open to individuals whose goals align with those of the Citizens Committee.
- Women must comprise at least 25% of the delegation.
- Five per cent of total seats will be reserved for injured individuals, their family members, or families of martyrs, with priority given to martyrs’ families and seriously injured individuals (subject to medical certification).

- An additional 5% of seats will be reserved for minority groups, and another 5% for the peasant and labour class. Representation from other ethnic groups in the area will also be ensured.
- Teachers, lawyers, writers, engineers, journalists, housewives, and religious representatives (e.g., madrasa teachers, scholars, imams, and priests) will be included to make the committee more inclusive.

4. Age and Eligibility Requirements:

- Members must be between 18 and 50 years old.
- Students may join but must decide under which banner they wish to work, as separate platforms like ADSM are available for student involvement.
- Citizens over 50 will serve as advisors to the Citizens Committee.
- Members must be permanent residents of the respective thana to participate in the thana committee.

5. Restrictions and Organizational Discipline:

- Members of political groups such as the Awami League, Chhatra League, Jubo League, or their affiliates will not be allowed to join.
- If any member with ties to these groups infiltrates the committee, organizational action will be taken.
- Individuals with any connection to fascism will be strictly excluded.

7. Purpose and Future Direction:

- The National Citizens Committee is currently a political initiative aimed at uniting individuals for national reconstruction. While it is not yet a political party, it may evolve into one in the future.¹
- Recruitment Process:
- Resumes will be collected, verified, and evaluated for selection.

¹ The leaders of ADSM and the National Citizens Committee formed a political party called the National Citizens Party (NCP) on 28 February 2025.

This framework emphasizes inclusivity, merit-based selection, and a focus on national reconstruction while maintaining strict neutrality from existing political affiliations.

Some activists from ADSM have already joined the National Citizens Committee, leveraging their shared values to push for broader systemic change. However, this dual affiliation has sparked discussions about whether the student platform should remain independent or align more formally with the citizen-led political movement. As one member of both groups expressed, *“The National Citizens Committee offers a pathway for translating our ideals into actionable policies. But we must ensure our grassroots identity remains intact.”*

Challenges and Sustainability as a Political Force

If ADSM chooses to transition into a political entity, it will face significant challenges. Bangladesh’s polarized political landscape presents a formidable obstacle, as established parties often marginalize emerging forces. In addition, resource constraints and a lack of institutional experience may affect the movement’s ability to compete effectively in elections. These difficulties are further compounded by its commitment to integrity—an ethos that sharply contrasts with the entrenched culture of patronage and opportunism in mainstream politics.

Activists within the movement are acutely aware of these hurdles. A coordinator from Satkhira reflected on the difficulty of maintaining resilience under political pressure: *“Even in detention, our spirit was unbroken. We knew the stakes were high, but so were our convictions.”* This determination underscores the movement’s readiness to confront adversity, though the practicalities of sustaining a political platform remain daunting.

Financial independence will be crucial for long-term sustainability. Crowdfunding and partnerships with civic organizations are being explored as

potential solutions. *“The internet is our most powerful weapon against oppression,”* noted one coordinator, emphasizing the role of digital platforms in mobilizing resources and support. Additionally, the movement plans to launch training programs to cultivate leadership skills among members, creating a pipeline of capable representatives. The platform will also permit supporters, workers, and leaders from other political parties to join—provided they renounce their previous affiliations. However, all new entrants must undergo a rigorous recruitment process to exclude anyone who collaborated with the former regime in any capacity.

Maintaining non-partisanship in a highly politicized environment will be another major challenge. Critics fear that entering the political arena could alienate segments of the movement’s support base, especially those wary of political affiliations. *“Our focus should remain on justice and equity, not political power,”* argued one activist, reflecting the tension between advocacy and ambition.

Moreover, transitioning into a political force would require substantial groundwork to establish a nationwide organizational structure. Leaders recognize the importance of grassroots support and plan to form district and sub-district units to ensure broad-based representation. As one coordinator put it: *“If we move into politics, it must be through a bottom-up approach—where every voice is heard, and no one is left behind.”* However, this vision demands considerable resources and sustained effort, which could strain the movement’s current capacities.

Establishing a Pressure Group Against Inequality and Discrimination

For many within the movement, remaining a non-political platform dedicated to advocacy and activism is the preferred course. This approach positions ADSM as a pressure group capable of holding governments and institutions accountable for injustices. *“This is not just about quotas. It’s*

about dignity, fairness, and the future we want to create for ourselves and the generations to come,” said one activist, capturing the platform’s broader vision.

As a pressure group, the movement aims to institutionalize its efforts by forming local units and building alliances with civic organizations. These structures are expected to enable more effective responses to inequality and discrimination. Collaborations with entities like the National Citizens Committee have already borne fruit in initiatives such as flood relief and non-profit markets—demonstrating the power of collective action.

Education and awareness will remain central to the movement’s strategy. Workshops, seminars, and digital campaigns will continue to play a vital role in fostering a culture of civic engagement. *“In Satkhira, many students initially hesitated to join us, fearing reprisals. But when they saw others standing up, their courage grew. It is this collective spirit we want to nurture nationwide,”* recalled one coordinator.

The movement also seeks to broaden its advocacy to include wider social issues, leveraging its reputation as a credible voice for justice. By maintaining independence from political affiliations, it hopes to preserve the trust of its diverse support base. *“The key is to remain true to our values while adapting to the challenges of the future,”* emphasized a student leader, encapsulating the movement’s ethos.

One of the movement’s long-term goals is to institutionalize itself as a watchdog against systemic discrimination. By building a network of committed individuals and organizations, it aims to become a persistent voice for equity. *“Our dream is to ensure that no student or citizen ever has to fight the same battles we did,”* said an activist. This vision includes engaging with policymakers, conducting research on social inequalities, and amplifying marginalized voices.

ADSM stands at a crossroads, its future shaped by the competing demands of political ambition, sustainability, and advocacy. Whether it evolves into a political force or remains a pressure group, until now, its commitment to justice and equity remains unwavering. The movement’s resilience and its capacity to inspire collective action—as demonstrated in Satkhira—are testaments to its enduring impact.

Ultimately, the movement’s future will depend on its ability to navigate these challenges while staying true to its core mission. As one activist eloquently stated, *“This is not the end of our fight, but the beginning of a new chapter in the struggle for a fairer society.”* By institutionalizing its efforts, empowering students, and fostering collaborations, ADSM has the potential to leave a lasting mark on Bangladesh’s socio-political landscape—serving as both a beacon of hope and a catalyst for change.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The Anti-Discrimination Students Movement of 2024 demonstrated the profound power of grassroots mobilization in driving socio-political change. Sparked by widespread discontent over the reinstatement of a controversial public job quota, the movement rapidly transformed into a nationwide call for justice and equity. While the fall of a long-standing political regime marked a significant victory, the movement's deeper significance lies in its ability to foster unity across diverse populations and regions—from Dhaka to Satkhira.

In Satkhira, the movement's local dynamics illuminated the intersection of national grievances with regional struggles, underscoring the importance of peripheral voices in shaping collective action. Despite facing systemic barriers—including state repression and infiltration by opposing forces—activists in Satkhira displayed remarkable resilience. Their strategic adaptations, from leveraging social media to organizing decentralized protests, showcased the ingenuity and determination of grassroots efforts.

However, the movement also exposed significant challenges. Internal divisions, political co-optation,

and leadership disputes threatened its cohesion, revealing the fragility of large-scale mobilizations in highly polarized contexts. Sustaining momentum in the post-movement phase proved especially difficult, as conflicting ambitions—such as transitioning into a political entity versus remaining a pressure group—divided the platform's focus and direction.

Yet, despite these challenges, ADSM endures as a powerful symbol of civic empowerment and a catalyst for systemic reform. Its accomplishments, particularly in cultivating a culture of activism and advancing national conversations on equity and inclusion, stand as a testament to the power of collective action. Looking ahead, the movement's ability to resolve internal tensions while remaining steadfast in its commitment to justice will shape its long-term impact. Satkhira's experience highlights the crucial role of regional actors in influencing national movements, offering valuable lessons for future grassroots initiatives in Bangladesh and beyond.

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