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Image of Bangladesh through the Imageries of Bangladeshi Currency

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Abstract

Purpose of the Research: This research tried to explore the trend of the images printed on Bangladeshi 'Taka' and tried to open up the probable reason behind selecting the significant images by identifying the chronological change of circulated images in Taka.

Methodology: In this research, analysis of transition of images on Taka in different time periods after independence (1971) in respect of the political and economic state of Bangladesh has been portrayed. Chronological developments of Taka and the comparisons with international currency images have been done to reveal the 'image of Bangladesh'. To perform these, several instruments are applied like field survey, observation and literature review. Only paper notes have been considered for the research.

Core findings: There will hardly be a country in the world that does not have its own currency. Images on that currency definitely are the most applied advertisement for that country which we may overlook mostly. This paper addressed that our Taka not only represent our living heritage where we can discover agrarian society, uniqueness of landscape, architecture, national emblems, national heroes, but also reveal our culture, religion, economy and development with nationalist ideology.

Research Implications: Each country has its own unique currency. Inevitably we all have to use currency on a daily basis and willingly or not willingly have to glance at the note and the images on it. These images of the currency of each country represent their own history, identity, culture over time. Bangladesh is also not behind in this learning. These illustrations create an image on the user's mind where they find the agrarian, riverine Bangladesh through the imageries of Bangladeshi currency. This analytical paper may reveal a new source to understand Bangladeshi culture and nationalistic spirit and can become a resource for the anthropologist and historian.

Limitation and future directions: It is a critical and theoretical analysis on an intriguing topic which we usually overlook mostly. Firsthand interviews with the decision makers, who are authorized to select the images on Taka could make the research deeper.

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1. Introduction

As digital technologies are implanted deeper in the world, making more and more aspects of life intangible, it's hard to imagine the world without any kind of notes. In the dramatic history of our world, money became not just generic objects of payment, but also symbols of societies and their individuality. Designs on a note of a country have meanings. Some have pictures of their heroes, some have their national symbols, and some have great structures & architecture and so on. With every symbol on it, it represents the country's background or their proud history. Whatever the figures on the note it has a special value. It carries different meanings as well as individual characteristics. These images and motifs portray a country's context.

At some time in the future, notes may be absolute. As credit card and crypto currency is getting popular day by day as an alternative for note, one may envisage that it would only be exhibited on the wall of a museum. The images on the notes would be the imagery documents and records of the then country. Chronological and methodical study of the images of note can be a curious theme to carry out research as it would help us to focus on a nation's narration, its pride, political and religious stand etc.

As it is known 'notaphily is the collection of banknotes as a hobby'(Black, 2011) but the study of this note that is used as a currency can open up an unexplored treasure of political, economic, and historical testimonials of a country.

The taka (Bengali: টাকা, sign: ট or Tk, code: BDT) is the currency of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Bangladesh Bank has the sole authority to issue banknotes in Bangladesh. Bangladesh Bank, like other central banks the world over, changes the design of banknotes from time to time. Until 1971, the currency was called as both Rupee and Taka. Taka has a long history in Bengal. After the liberation war, Taka became the official currency of Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi taka came into existence since 1972, a year after the independence (Bangladesh Bank, n.d.). Currently there are ৳2, ৳5, ৳10, ৳20, ৳50, ৳100, ৳200, ৳500 & ৳1000 banknotes and ৳1, ৳2 & ৳5 coins available.

1. Objectives

Generally, while selecting images for note, any government tries to express their heritage, culture, politics and development through the images. Very often it is seen political ideology expression in this process. There could be a modified/ incorrect history established for instance. Similar case may happen while portraying culture, development in fact anything. As currency is strong medium of representing a country, it is an utmost necessity to perform research on it. In light of this, objective of this paper is to contribute to research of taka as a nation's narration that is society, landscape, heritage, culture, religion, economy and development by a comprehensive understanding of Bangladeshi Taka images. Depending on these, this research attempts:

- Identify the trend of chronological change of circulated images in Bangladeshi Taka
- Identify the probable reasons behind selecting the images on Bangladeshi Taka by the authority.
- Illuminate some observation of images of foreign currency notes.

2. Methodology

This is exploratory research as it seeks to investigate the context of currency, with reference to specific case of Bangladeshi Taka to disclose the unexplored. To perform this exploratory research a number of instruments are applied like field survey, observation and literature review. Only paper notes have been considered for the research.

- Field survey: Bangladeshi Taka Museum have been surveyed with field notes, photographs and all other information regarding Taka.
- Observation: A major part of this research has done with critical and close observations of Taka and its chronological transformation.

- Secondary sources: Literature review has been done with reports, publications, internet etc.

3. Chronological Development of Taka

Tracing back to ancient Bengal, some non-duplicable elements have been functioning as medium of exchange. The smallest unit of currency all throughout ancient times was cowrie (kadi) which is a shell. Even in the late nineteenth century, cowrie as medium has been used in rural areas. Cowrie has to be imported from Maldives in exchange of rice then. Cowrie, a glossy brightly marked marine shell was extensively used as coin in Bengal up to the end of eighteenth century (Banglapedia, n. d.).



Figure 1: Cowrie as a purchase currency

We could find metal coins for internal and external trade and commerce on the later periods. Famous Moorish traveler Ibn Batuta noticed that in Bengal, people described gold coin (dinar) as gold tanka and silver coin as silver tanka. In fact, whatever might be the metallic content of the coin, the people called it Taka. It is indeed noteworthy that the Bengali nation has borrowed two crucial things from the very heart of its history and heritage - the name of the state, Bangladesh; and the name of its currency, Taka (Banglapedia, n.d.).

As cowrie is a natural complex form, it was impossible to make any replica. Similarly, metal coins could not be reproduced by general people for as they have heavily ornamented with metal carving. Whenever the printed paper note appeared we nation's narration in many ways by many images.



Figure 2: Silver Taka from the Sultanate of Bengal, circa 1417 and a pre-1971 Pakistani banknote called Taka in its Bengali script.



Figure 3: The first notes of Taka released on 4th March, 1972

Before the independence, paper notes had been published with the image of political national figure. The official introduction of Taka was on 4th March, 1972. □1, □5, □10 and □100 were the first notes of Taka (Fig 03). With very limited graphic images on the notes, they started to circulate throughout the country and since then the designs have changed quite a few times. Besides □1, □5, □10 and □100 notes, □2, □20, □50, □500 and □1000 were added later on (Wikipedia, n.d.). The chronological changes of Taka have been shown in table 01.

Table 01: The Chronological Changes of Taka

Taka	Year	Image CODE* (According to Index)	Image description	Representation
□1	1972	1a1972	-Woman husking rice -A hand holding rice paddy	-Focusing on our staple food, rice -Agrarian society
□1	1973	1b1973	-Image of Rice Plant - Logo of the People's Republic of Bangladesh	-Focusing on our staple food, rice -Agrarian society
□1	1982	1c1982	-Group of Deer from Sundarbans, the largest natural mangrove forest -Logo of the People's Republic of Bangladesh	- Natural resource and Landscape
□2	2010	2a2010	-The National Martyr's Memorial Shahid Minar, a memorial for Bangla Language Movement -Doyal (Magpie) The national bird of Bangladesh	-A significant event for the Bengali nation -Presenting national emblem
□2	2013	2b2013	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -The National Martyr's Memorial Shahid Minar	-Hero for the birth of a nation -A significant event for the Bengali nation
□5	1973	5a1973	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -Water Lilies	-National flower of Bangladesh

□5	1974	5b1974	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -Industrial building	-Economic growth and development from Industrial sector
□5	2005	5c2005	-Tara Masjid in Comilla -Industrial building	-Islamic architecture and living heritage
□5	2009	5d2009	-Ornamented Mihrab of a mosque -Industrial building	-Expression of national religion Islam
□10	1972	10a1972	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -A river flowing beside a village	-The landscape of riverine Bangladesh
□10	1974	10b1974	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -Farmers harvesting crops	-Agriculturally based country
□10	1976	10c1976	-Tara Mosque in Comilla -Farmers harvesting crops	-Islamic architecture and living heritage
□10	1978	10d1978	-Atia Mosque in Tangail -Farmers harvesting crops	-Islamic architecture and living heritage
□10	1997	10e1997	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -Mosoleum of Pori Bibi in Lalbagh Fort, Old Dhaka	- Architectural Heritage of colonial period
□10	1998	10f1998	-Atia Mosque in Tangail -Kaptai hydroelectric power plant, the one in country	-Expressing nation's development
□10 **Only Polymer note	2002	10g2002	-Father of Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -Baitul Mokarram Mosque in Dhaka, the national mosque -National Parliament Building -The National Martyr's Memorial "Smriti Shoudho" for freedom fighters -Aerial	-Hero for the birth of a nation -National emblem -Iconic Architecture -A significant event for the Bengali nation relating to birth of nation -Advanced technology of communication
□10	2006	10h2006	-Baitul Mokarram Mosque in Dhaka, the national mosque -National Parliament Building -The National Martyr's Memorial "Smriti Shoudho" for freedom fighters -Aerial	-National emblem -Iconic Architecture -A significant event for the Bengali nation relating to birth of nation -Advanced technology of communication
□20	1978	20a1978	-Choto Shona Mosque in Chapai Nawabganj -Collecting Jute Fibre, which is considered as golden fibre in Bangladesh	-Islamic architecture and living heritage -Economic development
□20	2011	20b2011	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -Shait Gambuj mosque in Bagerhat	-Islamic architecture and living heritage
□50	1976	50a1976	-Tara Mosque in Armanitola, Dhaka -Tea workers in a Tea Garden, Bangladesh is one of the major countries exporting tea	-Islamic architecture and living heritage -Landscape of hilly areas and economic development in export sector

□ 50	1982	50b1982	-The National Martyr's Memorial "Smriti Shoudho" for freedom fighters -National Parliament Building	-A significant event for the Bengali nation relating to birth of nation -Iconic Architecture
□ 50	2000	50c2000	-National Parliament Building -Bagha Mosque in Bagha	-Iconic Architecture -Islamic architecture and living heritage
□ 50	2011	50d2011	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -"Moi Deya" painting by famous painter Jaynal Abedin	-Hero for the birth of a nation -Agriculture based country
□ 100	1973	100a1973	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -Landscape showing village groves, river and collecting Jute Fibre	-Landscape of Bangladesh, culture and economic development
□ 100	1976	100b1976	-Tara Mosque in Armanitola, Dhaka -Landscape showing village groves, river and collecting Jute Fibre	-Islamic architecture and living heritage -Landscape of Bangladesh, culture and economic development
□ 100	1978	100c1978	-Tara Mosque in Armanitola, Dhaka -Lalbagh Fort Gate in Lalbagh Fort, Old Dhaka	-Islamic architecture and living heritage -Architectural Heritage of colonial period
□ 100	2000	100d2000	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -Jamuna Bridge	-Development in communication sector
□ 100	2002	100e2002	-The National Martyr's Memorial "Smriti Shoudho" for freedom fighters -Jamuna Bridge	-A significant event for the Bengali nation relating to birth of nation -Development in communication sector
□ 100	2011	100f2011	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -Tara Mosque in Armanitola, Dhaka	-Islamic architecture and living heritage
□ 200	2020	200a2020	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -Landscape showing village groves, river and Jute Fibre	-Hero for the birth of a nation -Landscape of Bangladesh, culture and economic development
□ 500	1976	500a1976	-Tara Mosque in Armanitola, Dhaka -High Court Building	-Significant colonial architecture
□ 500	1998	500b1998	-The National Martyr's Memorial "Smriti Shoudho" for freedom fighters -High Court Building	-A significant event for the Bengali nation relating to birth of nation -Significant colonial architecture
□ 500	2000	500c2000	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -High Court Building	-Hero for the birth of a nation -Significant colonial architecture
□ 500	2002	500d2002	The National Martyr's Memorial "Smriti Shoudho" for freedom fighters -High Court Building	-A significant event for the Bengali nation relating to birth of nation -Significant colonial architecture
□ 500	2011	500e2011	-Father of Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -Village landscape with farmers cultivating crops	--Hero for the birth of a nation -Agriculture based country
□ 1000	2009	1000a2009	-The National Martyr's Memorial Shahid Minar, a memorial for Bangla Language Movement -Karzon Hall, Dhaka	-A significant event for the Bengali nation -Architectural living heritage of Colonial period
□ 1000	2016	1000b2016	-Father of nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -National Parliament Building	-Hero for the birth of a nation -Iconic Architecture

*Image Code of Taka consists of:

Taka Value-Alphabetical Serial-Year of Publication



The printed images on the notes significantly represent a country and its journey and development over time. After a comparative observation of all the printed images published in Taka since 1972 after the liberation war could be broadly categorized in seven major typologies. They could be illustrated and represented as-




1. An agrarian society,
2. The landscape of Bangladesh
3. The economy and development,
4. Major significant events,
5. Heritage, culture and religion,
6. National emblem and
7. National figures/hero etc.

4. Foreign Currency Analysis

Hundreds of countries have thousands of types of paper currency. Each country has its own different unit paper notes and different types of images on it. Accordingly, a vast number of images on paper notes over the whole world could be found. Consequently, countries from different continents and few from neighbor countries of Bangladesh for comparison have been taken. The selected currencies from USA, UK, South Africa, India and Maldives as random selection. From these foreign notes identification of printed images of national figures, significant architecture, natural resources, local tradition and culture etc. have been done. As symbol of a nation's identity, notes are a window of a country. For example, National Geography published an article on historical imagery on notes where notes from around the world reflects their history through National figure or Royal faces (McKeever, 2021). All over the world, images on notes from individual countries represent its own individual identity, pride and heritage.

Table 02: Analysis of foreign currency

Currency	Country	Currency Image	Notable Person's Image	Other Images	Representation
100 Dollar	USA		Benjamin Franklin	- Independence hall	-National figure -Iconic architecture
100 Pound	UK		William Thomson	-Buckingham palace	- National figure as a scientist and mathematical physicist. -Royal administrative headquarters

Currency	Country	Currency Image	Notable Person's Image	Other Images	Representation
100 Rand	South Africa		Nelson Mandela	-Buffalo as a socio cultural useful animal	- National figure
100 Rupee	India		Mahatma Gandhi	-Himalaya range	-National figure -Natural resources
Banknotes of different countries	UK, Canada, South Africa, Hongkong		- Queen Elizabeth	NA	-Royal Figure

5. Observations and findings

Before independence Pakistani note was printed and published from the State Bank of Pakistan on West Pakistan and circulated throughout the whole East and West Pakistan. In 1972, the Taka became the official currency of Bangladesh. To understand the inimitability of the images on notes, it is very important to review the publishing /printing years of the Taka. A lot of versions have come out since the beginning, but every note reflects the image of Bangladesh. This study reveals the transition of images on currency, the transition of political and the economic state of Bangladesh as well. In fact, such an investigation is a desideratum for understanding the economic antiquity, and transition in one country.

“Wracked by war and political instability, the bank notes of Bangladesh during this period (1971-79) remain some of the more interesting notes for collectors of World Bank notes; and the story behind the issues gives an insight to the birth of a nation.” (Symes, 2012).

The first two notes published in independent Bangladesh were the denominations of 1 Taka and 100 Taka released on 4 March 1972. The third note of the first series to be introduced was the 10 Taka note and this was made available to the public on 2 May 1972. Then few notes were introduced in 1973. Again 1976 new notes were introduced in a new political setting. Third slot was in from December 1977 to September 1979. Again, new notes were introduced in 1981-1983. After that we find new notes on 1998, 2002-06, 2008, 2011-13 (Symes, 2012).

The transition of the images throughout the years illustrates the chronological development and changes of Bangladesh. Instead of the dominant geometric designs of the first series in 1972, the notes of the second issue 1974 carry distinctive patterns, ornamental guilloches, and illustrations on the backs of the notes. One can find strong presence of the national emblems of Bangladesh on most of the notes. The portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman dominates most of the notes but it was replaced in a certain period of time due to political reasons. The 5 Taka note issued in 1972 was the first note where the image of buildings had been introduced; it was for not as an object rather as a symbol of asset of Bangladesh. The back of the 5 taka note was printed in red lithographic ink and introduces a scene of an industrial scene of factories dominating the rest of the illustration.



Figure 4: 5 Taka note issued on 1972

Numismatic and epigraphic data relating to the coins and currency is a very significant and interesting knowledge to study history and civilization. ‘Numismatics is the study and collection of coins, tokens, and other coin-like objects that people used as currencies throughout history. The study is concerned with the physical aspects associated with the objects, including their appearance, year of production, metallurgy, place of manufacture, and the characteristics of the political, economic, and historical environment during the time of production. It is an auxiliary branch of archaeology. In fact, in the academic world numismatics and epigraphy – the discipline decoding the inscriptions found on a solid base, such as the metal and stone in tombstones and monuments, – are often part of the same subject.’(CFI, n.d.). In modern time this study may involves the research of imagery aspects associated with the image of the notes and the characteristics of the dogmatic, economic, and historical environment during the time of production. Museology has the responsibility to open up their research works about numismatics for the viewers and visitors, whether it is metal coins or note, or any kind of punch mark from historic period.

“Ancient coins, surviving into the present age, are living commentaries on the dead past. So, Coins of a given period and area constitute an important source of information about its history and culture. Bengal (now divided into West Bengal and Bangladesh) is no exception” (Mukherjee, 1992).

From the ancient civilization, kings of the different territories added, engraved, stamped their own portrait, or other symbols representing the royal images and pride into their currency. One can find the above-mentioned things in the museum. It was very apparent to find the King himself or pride/symbol of his powerful kingdom in the currency, one can find this convention in this present age as well. Father of the nations, leader of the nations, heroes of the history, significant events, buildings/architecture which represent the pride of the nation, momentous, unique landscape and its elements or the animals and birds of that inimitable landscape also express the identity of a nation. One can spot the traditions, history and the variances and individuality of the different nations of the world through the movement of the currency. One can find the painting ‘Liberty’ (about the French revolution) by French artist Delacroix in the paper note of France and find the Arch de Triumph (gate of the city) on the other side.



Fig 05: The painting ‘Liberty’ on the French Note

After the liberation war it is found that printed notes of currency including the image of ‘father of the nation’ and different natural elements of newly independent Bangladesh. From that time, Bangladesh primarily has been an agriculture-based country. Inevitably, farmer, paddy and jute field, plough, hand holding paddy rice can be found mostly on notes. The only painting of Zainul Abedin is found in the 50 Taka note which also symbolizes the agricultural consequence (the farmer ploughing with the ox in the paddy field) of country. An illustration of a woman pounding grain in a raised mortar, with poultry and chicks around the base of the stand in one Taka note printed in 1973 is discovered. All these illustrations on the notes indicated the intention of a newly independent country which was trying to express its pride with its uniqueness and were not hesitant to illustrate that marginal people. It revealed the subaltern voice as well.



Fig 06: 1 Taka and 10 Taka Note Representing Bangladesh

Again, Bangladesh is a riverine country. Certainly, water lilies became the representational motif for this vast wetland. Subsequently, water lilies became the state emblem of Bangladesh, and we can find it in the notes. One can also find river scene, rural scene with river, fishermen, magpie, deer etc. as a natural heritage and a symbol of tranquility of the land.

Man-made heritage, symbol of struggle and success in the battle is also another element which got importance in the notes. ‘Sahid Minar’, ‘Jatio Smriti Shoudho’ and the ‘National Brain Centre’-Louis I Khan’s National Parliament Building is there in the illustrations. Muslims are the predominant community of Bangladesh, and they form the majority of the population in all eight divisions of Bangladesh. The evidence is so obvious on the bank note also. One can find Choto Shona Mosque, Tara Mosque, Aatiya Mosque, Baitul Mukarram Mosque in the note. But it is very hard to find a diverse religion’s structure though they have strong cultural identity or international recognition for heritage building. One can find Choto Shona Mosque, but one couldn’t find Kantagir Mondir or Shompur Bihara or Armenian Church in the bank note. Sometimes it arises a question why any man-made structure of other religions as we opted for a secular nationalist ideology cannot be found.

Mughal fort ‘Lalbag Durgo’ is there as a symbol of heritage building. New dam, factories, bridges, railway station also represent the transition of development and prosperity as well, so notes have illustrated these images to recognize the development in the economy through the movable notes.

As it is known that ‘notaphily as a branch of numismatics to record catalogs of paper money in the countries’⁸, it is a great opening to reveal the image of money as a media to carry the historical evidence. All these illustrations create images in the user’s minds. These imaginations and imaginings, such as the happy agrarian society of Bangladesh, the lovely riverine country abounding with crops, the blissful domestic life of the country, portray an imagery of Bangladesh on user’s thoughts.

6. Conclusion

This paper started with an objective of analyzing images of Taka and other foreign notes as well. After applying field survey, observation and secondary source method it reveals that, it's a living heritage where one can discover the uniqueness of landscape, national symbols, heritage, and development with nationalist ideology in Bangladesh. Illustration of notes represents the heroes and the mass people respectively.

The liveliest element in one country is its own currency. It moves from individual hands to hands, from its own country to other continents. It moved beyond its own borderline for vast trade and economic purposes and spread out its integral cultural identity silently through its printed image contents. On any occasion the images on the note are not less important than a significant artwork. As people used to admire any artwork through its time of creation, content of the subject and the purpose of the drawing -they may also appreciate the images of the currency through all these principles as well. And those images symbolize the nation's narration. It upholds the beliefs and context of any nation very strongly. Taka not only represents the unique landscape and cultural heritage, but also signifies the man-made heritage, national emblems, and national heroes too. The sublime images in the Taka are a living heritage which denotes the mass people and the mass culture.

Images on Taka didn't impose any utopian icons. The villages, the paddy fields, the jute fields, domestic environment, heritage buildings, the emerging development of the country portrays the image of Bangladesh for the user. The image is not like the developed first world, its soft fertile landscape, agrarian society, riverine Bangladesh. It evidently creates a positive impact, forms an image-an advert on users about the country, about the society.

Currency always has its own value. When it is a present currency it has its own price for trade, when it is a timeworn one it has its historic and antique value. There will be changes in the image in future too. But consequently, these images representing and will represent the voice of its own nation as well.

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Appendix

The Images of the Chronological Changes of Taka is given for more explicit reference. The Code No is created for referencing that consists of the Value of Taka- Phase-Year of Publication

