

The Biharis of Bangladesh: History, Politics and Society

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A minority's sense of identity is shaped by its understanding of its own history. Its self-image is influenced, no less, by the image the majority groups have of the minority, an image shaped in turn, by their understanding of history. Major focus of this writing is on the history of Biharis, with particular emphasis on Bangladesh episode. This write-up investigates the way the Bihari communities experience antagonisms in locations they perceive as 'exilic imagine places' in which those antagonisms will be extirpated and their identities fully realized.

In Bangladesh the Biharis are not a homogeneous community. Usually, the Urdu-speaking non-Bengali Muslim people who migrated from the present part of India as the consequence of Partition in 1947, are called Biharis. The term Biharis is often used since a large portion of the immigrants has come from present Indian state Bihar, some also argued that the term derived from the Bahar -means outside, since the Biharis were the outsiders of this land they were designated as Biharis. Whatever the term is rooted in, the Biharis are commonly identified as related to Bihar and migration during the Partition. The reality is different indeed, since there are people who migrated from different parts of modern India, and of course in different times. There are people who migrated not only from Bihar, but also from many parts of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, even from South India. Some non-Bengali artisan who resided nearby Kolkata also migrated at that time. As such, the Bihari does not mean that all the people designated under this term are from Bihar only; rather they vary in their origin, language, culture, profession and others(Ilias:2003).

People, who have been living in the camps since 1971, are also known as 'Stranded Pakistanis' because this term is a platform that unites them with a vision to migrate to Pakistan. Nevertheless, many people, who did not enter the camp and some left the camp within this long forty eight years, are not included among the stranded Pakistanis. Unlike the camp-dwellers, they are slowly integrated with the Bengali population.

Background of the Muslim Community of Bihar

Bihar, the ancient land of Buddha has a long and possibly the most colourful heritage of Indian history. It is the land where the first republic emerged in 500 BC. Such fertile is the soil that has given birth to innumerable intellectuals who enkindle the light of knowledge and wisdom not only in the subcontinent but in the whole world. The Ganges is the major feature that directs many courses of history.

The history of the Bihar is very ancient. In fact, it extends to the very dawn of human civilization. Earliest myths and legends of Hinduism the Sanatana (Eternal) Dharma - are associated with Bihar. Maharishi Valmiki the original author of the Hindu epic 'The Ramayana' lived in ancient Bihar.

The place where Prince Gautam attained buddhahood, became the Buddha- at the present Bodh Gaya- a town in central Bihar; and the great religion of Buddhism was born. It is here also that Lord Mahavira, the founder of another great religion, Jainism, was born and attained nirvana (death). It is here that the tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh was born and attained the sainthood of Sikhism.

The ancient kingdoms of Magadh and of Licchavis, around about 7-8th century B.C., produced rulers who devised a system of administration that truly is progenitor of the modern art of statecraft, and of the linkage of statecraft with economics. Kautilya, the author of 'Arthashastra', the first treatise of the modern science of Economics, lived here. Indeed, he brought about amicable co-existence between the Greeks and the Mauryan Empire. Megasthenes, an emissary of Alexander's General, Seleucus Nicator, lived in Pataliputra (ancient name of Patna, the Mauryan capital) around 302 B.C. He left behind a chronicle of life in and around Patliputra. This is the first recorded account by a foreign traveler in India (Allan ,1996).

Another Mauryan king, Ashoka, (also known as Priyadarshi or Priyadassi), around 270 B.C., was the first to formulate firm tenets for the governance of a people. He had these tenets, the so called 'Edicts of Ashoka', inscribed on stone pillars which were planted across his kingdom. The pillar were crowned with the statue of one or more lions sitting on top of a pedestal which was inscribed with symbols of wheels. As the lion denoted strength, the wheel denoted the eternal (endless) nature of truth (dharma), hence the name Dharma (or Dhamma) Chakra. This figure of lions, atop a pedestal, with inscription of a wheel, was adopted as the Official Seal of the independent Republic of India (1947). Ashoka's empire extended from what is now the North West Frontier Province (in Pakistan) in the west, to the eastern boundaries of present India in the north, and certainly, up to the Vindhyan Range in the south. Ashok was responsible also for the widespread conversion of people into Buddhism.

At Nalanda, the world's first seat of higher learning, a university, was established during the Gupta period. It continued as a seat of learning till the middle ages when the Muslim invaders burned it down. This glorious history of Bihar lasted till around the middle of the 7th or 8th century A.D. - the Gupta Period - when, with the conquest of almost all of northern India by invaders from the middle-east, the Gupta dynasty also fell a victim.

In medieval times Bihar lost its honour as the political and cultural center of India. The Mughal period was a period of unremarkable provincial administration from Delhi. The only remarkable person of these times in Bihar was Sher Shah, or Sher Khan Sur, an Afghan. Through his conquest, Sher Shah became the ruler of a territory that, again, extended all the way to the Punjab. He was noted as a ferocious warrior but also a noble administrator - in the tradition of Ashoka and the Gupta kings. Several acts of land reform are attributed to him. Consequently, conversions seem to have started later than in Bihar and had a different character (Ghosh 1998: 229). Though a few religious souls, army personnel and merchants must have travelled through its jungles and hills much before, it is only with the accession of Akbar to the throne of Delhi in 1556 that Muslim influence penetrated Jharkhand, also known to the Mughals as Kokrah. Nevertheless, even 'the enormous power of the Moughals was strictly limited in the hilly tracts of Chotanagpur where their orders could not always be easily enforced' (Kumar 1969: 42-44). Yet, in 1585, Akbar sent a force to Chotanagpur and reduced the Raja of Chotanagpur to the position of a tributary. Kokrah was included in the Subah of Bihar and in 1632 Chotanagpur was given as a Jagir to the Governor of Patna (Ibid.).

During the most period of British India, Bihar was a part of the Presidency of Bengal, and was governed from Calcutta. As such, this was a territory very much dominated by the people of Bengal. All leading educational and medical centers were in Bengal. When separated from the Bengal Presidency in 1912, Bihar and Orissa comprised a single province. Later, under the Government of India Act of 1935, the Division of Orissa became a separate province; and the Province of Bihar came into being as an administrative unit of British India. At Independence in 1947, the State of Bihar, with the same geographic boundary, formed a part of the Republic of India, until 1956. At that time, an area in the south-east, predominantly the district of Purulia, was separated and incorporated into West Bengal as part of the Linguistic Reorganization of Indian States.

Resurgence in the history of Bihar came during the struggle for India's independence. It was from Bihar that Mahatma Gandhi launched his civil-disobedience movement, which ultimately led to India's independence.

The Rise of Hindu and Muslim Nationalism

The task to trace back the history of nationalism is a difficult one. Before the nineteenth

century, two factors shaped the formation of the community and its ideological arena. One is the spread of Islam, and the other is the local encounter of the religious formation for traditional Hinduism and Hindu societies.

Many of the identity debates seem to invoke an origin in an historical past to the separate and distinct civilizational identity of the Muslims. This was the corner stone of two-nation theory of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad argued in his 'India Wins Freedom' regarding the demand of separate states for Hindus and Muslims "they (Muslims) will be weaker than they are today in the Hindu majority provinces they have had their homelands in these regions for almost which people continue to correspond. Actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being (Turner: 1967) .Though the Muslim invasion into India and proliferation of Islam in Subcontinent having almost thousand years past. The expression of Muslim identity has been widely in vague in the Indian subcontinent for well over a century. It was raised through Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's educational and reformist mission among the Muslims. Hasan (1988) stated 'All India Muslim League' invoked the 'separate' and 'distinct' Muslim Identity to stake the claim in the imperial system. (Hasan: 1988) Through the rise of Muslim nationalism division of a unified, pan-Indian Muslim community had been nurtured (Azad: 1989). In an important study published in 1989, Farzana Shaikh under lined "The profound sense of the distinctiveness of being Muslim." There was, according to her findings, an unmistakable awareness of the ideal of Muslim brotherhood, a belief in the superiority of Muslim culture and recognition of the belief that Muslim ought to live under Muslim government (Shaikh, 1989). It is the tradition. She concludes, "that imparted to Muslim in India the body of Assam plains concerning the pivotal role of the religious community". Ayesha Jalal on the other hand, points out that a decidedly elitist discourse should not be seen as reflective of Indian Muslim or their so-called communal consciousness (Bose and Jalal: 1997). In reality, the commitment of some Muslim groups to specifically Islamic ideas and symbols does not indicate a unified structure of consciousness of a community acting in unison (Mayer: 1981)

However, during the British period, the process of nation building has been hindered, among other factors, by disparity between Kolkata and other parts of Bengal province. Many parts of Bihar and East Bengal have been poorer and densely populous with Muslim inhabitants. But the middle class, the most important element in the effort to weld the nation into a whole, was overwhelmingly Hindu. Certainly, the Muslims fell in the paradox of identifying themselves between Muslims and Indians. By remaining aloof from the Western-oriented education system, the Muslims alienated themselves from the many new avenues opening up for the emerging middle class. Curiously, however, it was Muslim opposition to the extension of

representative government--a political stance taken out of fear of Hindu dominance--that helped to reestablish rapport with the British, who by 1900 welcomed any available support against mounting Hindu nationalism.

The rise of nationalism in the late nineteenth century has so many aspects to analyze. By the end of nineteenth century, the idea of a separate Muslim nationality, with separate interests and aspirations had begun to emerge. Along with consciousness of its distinct political interest, the educated Muslim middle class was also eager to find its distinct cultural identity. The decision of the Partition of Bengal in 1905 again made a clear division between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Many of the Muslim leaders supported the government, although there were few leaders, who were the passionate upholders of secular politics. The All India Muslim League, which was supposed to see the political and economic interests of the Muslims, was led by the urban Urdu-speaking elites. Therefore, the Muslim masses remained aloof in the national political arena.

Some scholars argue that the seeds of partition were sown long before the independence. It is claimed that the British, still fearful of the potential threat from the Muslims who had ruled the subcontinent for over 300 years under the Mughal Empire, followed the divide and rule policy. Organization of citizens into religious communities was also a feature of Mughal rule. When the Indians under the British rule started to organize for the independence, two main communal factions of the Indian nationalist movement, especially of the Indian National Congress, struggled for controlling the movement and eventually controlling of the country. The Muslims felt threatened by the Hindu majorities. The Hindus, in their turn, felt that the nationalist leaders were coddling the minority Muslims and slighting the majority Hindus.

The All India Muslim League (AIML) was formed in Dhaka in 1906 by the Muslims who were suspicious of the mainstream, secular but Hindu-majority dominated Indian National Congress. A number of different scenarios were proposed at various times. Among the first to make the demand for a separate state was the writer/philosopher Allama Iqbal, who, in his presidential address to the 1930 convention of the Muslim League said that he felt a separate nation for the Muslims that was essential in an otherwise Hindu-dominated subcontinent. The Sindh Assembly passed a resolution making it a demand in 1935. In this case the Muslims, with no generally acceptable eminent national leader at the helm till the mid-1930s. Iqbal, Jouhar and others then worked hard to draft charismatic Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who had till then worked for Hindu-Muslim unity, to lead the movement for this new nation. By 1930, Jinnah had begun to despair of the fate of minority communities in a united India and had begun to argue that mainstream parties such as the Congress (of which he was once a member) were insensitive to Muslim interests. At the 1940 AIML conference in Lahore, Jinnah made clear his commitment to two separate states, a position from which the League never wavered :

However, Hindu organisations such as the Hindu Mahasabha, though against the division of the country, were also insisting on the same chasm between the Hindus and Muslims.

Most of the Congress leaders were secularists and resolutely opposed the division of India on the lines of religion. Mohandas Gandhi was both religious and irenic, believing that the Hindus and Muslims could and should live in amity. For years, Gandhi and his adherents struggled to keep Muslims in the Congress Party (a major exit of many Muslim activists began in the 1930s), in the process enraging both Hindu and Muslim extremists. (Gandhi was assassinated soon after the Partition by a Hindu extremist Nathuram Godse, who believed that Gandhi was appeasing the Muslims at the cost of the Hindus.) Politicians and community leaders on both sides whipped up mutual suspicion and fear, culminating in dreadful events such as the riots during the Muslim League's Direct Action Day of August 1946 in Calcutta, in which more than 5,000 people were killed and many more injured. As public order broke down all across northern India and Bengal, the pressure increased to seek a political partition of territories as a way to avoid a full-scale civil war (Das :2000).

Until 1946, the definition of Pakistan as demanded by the League was so flexible that it could have been interpreted as a sovereign nation Pakistan, or as a member of a confederated India. Some historians believe Jinnah intended to use the threat of partition as a bargaining chip in order to gain more independence for the Muslim dominated provinces in the west from the Hindu dominated center.

Other historians claim that Jinnah's real vision was for a Pakistan that extended into Hindu-majority areas of India, by demanding the inclusion of the East of Punjab and West of Bengal, including Assam, all Hindu-majority country. Jinnah also fought hard for the annexation of Kashmir a Muslim majority state with Hindu ruler; and the accession of Hyderabad and Junagadh Hindu-majority states with Muslim rulers.

The fear and envy of the Indian Muslims led to the movement for Pakistan, demanding a separate homeland. Islam was the only combining factor for the two geographically and culturally isolated communities. Unlike the West Pakistanis and non-Bengali emigrants, the majority Muslim and the other communities like Hindus, Buddhists of Bengal region always used to speak in the same language and share the same culture. After the establishment of Pakistan, the non-Bengali ruling elites sought to strengthen their

When Pakistan came into existence as a homeland for the Muslims of the India, Islam was inevitably invoked as the unifying principle of national identity, capable of transcending all differences between its geographically and culturally divided populations. The quest for the defining principles of 'Bengali Muslim' nationhood is complicated, however, by the fact that

while Islamic religion and Bengali culture are the very essence of the community's separate identity, its historical experience has prevented the two from being successfully molded into a coherent unity.

The Biharis as well as the Bengalis are maintaining their own expressions and these types of validation; boundary process is developed as component of identification. The Biharis are not a homogenous community. Still, if in a broader sense, the Urdu-speaking non-Bengali Muslims are considered Biharis, this community maintains specific boundary of particular cultural contents; share some common characteristics with the Bengalis because of residing in the same region.

For a balanced, objective and rounded view, it is necessary to explore the tension of those scholars, creative writers who contested the definition of Muslim Identity in purely religious terms and refuted the popular belief that Islamic values and symbols provide a key to understanding the Muslim world view (Mujeeb: 1967) He stated "we may well discover that they, more than anybody else, discovered elements of unity. Cohesion and integration in India's past sensed the bitter consequence of political Identity being built on religious ties and questioned the conviction (or Myth) in certain Muslim circles that the future of Islam was endangered by Hindu nationalism (Hasan: 1989) what Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had feared in 1887. He argued that under the one nation system of election was held the Hindu Members would be four times larger than the Muslim in the legislative Assembly (Ilias: 2003). The unity, fraternity of the Muslims as a religious and social community was gradually increased through Muslim Leagues political movements and demand of separate State for the Muslim became evident. But there were different scenario in the lives of Indian Muslims.

An often repeated claim by many British and other Western analysts and reporters has been that the Hindus and Muslims of the sub-continent have always been at war and there has been centuries of hatred between them. Therefore, the partition was inevitable, (perhaps even a historical necessity), and Pakistan can be seen as a logical outcome of that "ancient" animosity between the two peoples.

First, let us examine the proposition that religious commonality is the primary motive force behind modern nationhood. If religious commonality was the essential engine for nation-building, it is odd that Europe's Christian followers are divided into so many different nations. Even if we accept that it was denominational differences that divided them, we might still ask - why aren't all the followers of the Roman Catholic faith in Europe nationally unified? Why aren't they united in Central and South America? Why didn't all Protestants get together in one nation?

If religion alone could serve as the basis for national unity, how is it that in spite of several attempts at unity, Islam failed to unify the Arabic-speaking people of North Africa and the Middle East?

If Islam could not be developed as the primary basis of national identity in the Arab world, where Islam originated and had virtually universal following - isn't it peculiar that Islam should be viewed as the pre-eminent basis for defining national identity in the sub-continent?

If we were to go by the experiences of the European or other Asian nations, we would find that cultural and linguistic factors, and shared historical experiences have often been more decisive in forging the idea of nationhood.

The claim that the sub-continent comprises two nations the Hindus and the Muslims, is a stark exception to the general pattern of nation-building elsewhere in the world. Yet, many western intellectuals have promoted this claim as if it were within the ambit of a generally accepted or universally valid model.

Perhaps the legitimacy of the two nation claim arises from within the unique and specific experiences of the sub-continent as some Western analysts have attempted to suggest. They have argued that religion has played such a pre-eminent and overpowering role in the sub-continent, that unlike anywhere else in the world, religion is the only reasonable basis for defining nationhood in the sub-continent.

But even if these analysts could prove that the secular life of the Indian people were entirely subsumed by religious affiliation, or prove that religion played a substantially greater role in the life of the Indian people than anywhere else, that alone would not be sufficient to prove their two-nation claim. In theory, two people could be devoutly religious, practice different religions, but remain completely tolerant and respectful to each other's religions and wish to stay together in one nation.

To prove their claim, these intellectuals would also have to demonstrate that of all contradictions between the people - the religious contradiction was most germane. That not only did religion divide the Indian people in a manner that could not be easily reconciled, that it also bound people in a way that nothing else did. They would have to show that socio-economic relations, cultural activities and political actions were propelled by specific allegiance to either Hinduism or Islam. Though cultural, linguistic, economic and political antagonisms within Hinduism and Islam were minimal, conflicts between practitioners of the two distinct faiths were of such magnitude that no democratic framework could possibly resolve them. As evidence of "irreconcilable difference" they would need to show that there were none or few (and exceptional) instances of peaceful co-existence or mutual tolerance

between the two communities.

But even a cursory examination of the historical record disproves such a hypothesis. Not only did most of the Hindus and Muslims live in relative peace with each other, at several junctures, there are important instances of extended collaboration and unity between the two sects. The roots of the conflicts that divided people of the subcontinent have different phases - first, Hindus were separated from Muslims and then line of separation was drawn from different ethnic linguistic groups (Hasan: 1988). Consequently, the concept of nationalism, as developed in the subcontinent during the last one hundred odd years has been germinating conflict. In short, Hindu-Muslim, Bengali-Bihari and Bengali-ethnic minority groups' conflicts in Bangladesh are part of much larger conflicts and identify crises in the subcontinent.

Such political and literary descriptions make it clear that bounding is multiple, and that at no time is one boundary the sole definer of an identity. Yet at different times and for different reasons there is a "relevant boundary" that gains prominence and define the us/them divide. The us/them divide created by the institutional and bureaucratic structures introduced by the colonial government towards the end of nineteenth century eventually led to the partition of India along religious lines. It is doubtless true that economic discontent, coupled with escalating violence; riots lend weight to nations of identity and act as a catalyst to community based strategies (Hasan: 1988). The rivalry between the Hindus and the Muslims on the question of partition of India tensioned and provoked communal violence in many parts of India

Riots and the Partition

Communal riots have become a distinct feature of communalism in India. Whenever conflicting groups from two different religions, which are self-conscious communities, clash, it results in a communal riot. An event is identified as a communal riot if (a) there is violence, and (b) two or more communally identified groups confront each other or members of the other group at some point during the violence.¹ The reason for such a clash could be superficial and trivial, though underlying them are deeper considerations of political representation, control of and access to resources and power. There have been many incidents of riots recorded during the course of British rule and even before that. For example: In Ahmedabad there were riots in 1714, 1715, 1716 and 1750. But according to Bipan Chandra, in his book "Communalism in Modern India", communal tension and riots began to occur only in the last quarter of the 19th century, but they did not occur in India on any significant scale till 1946-47. Before that, the maximum communal rioting took place during 1923-26. A clear relationship between communal riots and politics was established for the first time in 1946, when the Muslim League gave its direct action call on August 16, 1946 .¹

This chronology reveals that communal riots are not caused spontaneously and also that they are rarely caused by religious animosity. They arise due to conflicting political interests, which are often linked to economic interests. There is a significant change in the pattern of communal riots since the 1990s which could be noticed in the later part of this chronology. This brings forth the shifts that have occurred in the nature of communal riots in India. Moreover, the aim is to underline that religion in the most of cases is not the reason of communal riots. The reason for the occurrence of communal violence has been different in the two different phases. During the time of the partition, it was the clash of political interests of the elite of two different communities which resulted in communal riots.

There were four days riots in Kolkata in August 1946. The Bihar riots in October November 1946 and huge blood shed generated immense feeling of Islamic brotherhood among the Muslims (Ilias, 2003). Within these circumstances and after the partition a large number of Biharis migrated to East Bengal with a dream of land where they could live a better life. The promise land Pakistan became the root metaphor to those Muslims. They expected the East Pakistan government to settle them there. Pakistan government was "averse to their miserable plight" and that 'the blood of the Bihari martyrs' which served as the foundation stone to Pakistan had been callously forgotten (Ghosh: 1988).

The Muslims of the Indian sub-continent demanded and eventually created a country for themselves. Before the British departed, India was partitioned into two countries. The Muslim majority areas became Pakistan and the rest became the present India. Pakistan consisted of two provinces East Pakistan and West Pakistan, more than a thousand miles apart. After the partition India went through a great turmoil, and a huge migration of population took place. Millions of Muslims of India moved either to West Pakistan (and are often referred to as "Mohajirs") or to East Pakistan (and are often referred to as "Biharis"). Although there were many languages among the émigrés from India, the majority spoke Urdu.

Tajul Islam Hashemi writes, "The large scale exodus of Muslims from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal started in the wake of the massacre of thousands of them in Bihar and Calcutta in late 1946 and in 1947 and 1950 by Hindu and Sikh extremists. The Great Bihar killings of October - November 1946, preceded by the Great Calcutta killings of August 1946, alone led to the extermination... Consequently, more than a million Bihari Muslims sought refuge in East Bengal after partition. Another thirty thousand entered East Bengal from other parts of eastern India, especially eastern Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. More migrants followed them from eastern India after the communal riots of 1950 and 1964".

Immediately following the Partition. Once the lines were established, about 14.5 million people crossed the borders ,massive population exchanges occurred between the two newly-

formed nations in the months that they hoped was the relative safety of religious majority. Based on 1951 Census in India of displaced persons, 7,226,000 Muslims went to Pakistan from India while 7,249,000 Hindus and Sikhs moved to India from Pakistan immediately after the partition.²

The Bihari community in East Pakistan : Migration and Reintegration

New country Pakistan was poor in every way imaginable, resources, trained personnel and infra-structure. Most of the machinery of government was located in what was now India. Pakistan was mostly agrarian, and economically underdeveloped with almost no industry. At a time like this the founders of the country considered it necessary to direct the new émigrés to go to areas of the country where their services could be best utilized. As a consequence a large number of Biharis who worked for the railway in India proceeded to East Pakistan and those employed with the central government in Delhi and elsewhere in India moved to Karachi. After the birth of Pakistan, Karachi was chosen as the capital, and Urdu was declared the official national language, the language identified by the Muslims of the sub-continent as theirs. Initially the arrival of Biharis and the positive discrimination of the Pakistan Government in terms of refugee rehabilitation were not resented by the Bengalis. However, the euphoria of the formation of Pakistan and the positive attitude of the Bengalis towards the Biharis was short-lived. It was over as early as March 1948 when Mohammad Ali Jinnah announced in Dhaka that "Urdu and Urdu alone shall be the State language of Pakistan." During the Language Movement, the Biharis instead of supporting the Bengalis, sided with the West Pakistani ruling elite. Further, in the 1954 provincial elections and in the 1970 general elections, they extended their support to the Muslim League which symbolized and championed the domination of the West Pakistanis over the Bengalis. They also supported the West Pakistani ruling elite and many of them actively participated in the military actions against the Bengalis in the 1971 during the Independence War of Bangladesh . The exclusive attitude of the Biharis and their pro-West Pakistani political activities culminated with the growth of an anti-Bihari sentiment among the Bengalis.

The Biharis, the Urdu speaking minority of East Pakistan, not only stood for a united Pakistan, they also identified with language and culture of West Pakistan. On the other hand, the Urdu speaking immigrants, once again became minority in their new home because of the language and cultural differences with the local populations and for their support to the "Ideology of Pakistan" which aimed at strengthening the 'Pakistani Nationalism.'

However a large segment of population, the Bengalis in East Pakistan were very unhappy with this decision and they made it known. The neglect of the aspirations of the East Pakistanis continued under many governments in Pakistan. The Politicians of East Pakistan spoke to these

and many other grievances of the people of East Pakistan and eventually achieved a convincing victory at the ballot box. The Government of Pakistan and West Pakistani politicians were unable to reach necessary compromises with respect to sharing of power which resulted in a civil war.

The inheritance of the Muslim identity created a sense of confidence, safety, and superiority as far as the legacy of culture and language was concerned among the Urdu speaking community when they arrived in a Muslim dominated state after the partition of 1947. Their dreams were shattered when the Bengali demanded for equal status of their language in the affairs of state functioning along side with the language-Urdu. After the partition of 1947, the two-nation theory lost its importance and significance. The Muslim League leadership had adopted the theory for the sake of argument to divide India for the creation of Pakistan. When the goal was achieved, Muslim League had no such political and economic policy that could favor the people of its eastern wing. The growing interests of the non-Bengalis in the economy of East Pakistan, made the Bengalis suspicious and with the passage of time the exploitation of East Pakistan was exposed.

During the 24 years of Pakistan's rule over the Bengali nation, only a handful of secular, liberal, democrat and progressive Bihari or Urdu speaking those who were the activists of left wing politics stood for the cause of Bengali's struggle for economic, cultural, and political emancipation. In 1952, the language movement took a violent turn for the majority and the choice was either supporting the people or siding with the establishment. The Urdu speaking linguistic minority, due to its ignorance of the characteristic of the Bengali society, lack of knowledge and understanding of history and for its own superiority complex, misjudged the consequences of the language movement.

During the period of united Pakistan (1947-1971), the Urdu-speaking Biharis were not assimilated with in the society of East Pakistan and remained as a distinct cultural-linguistic group. They generally associated and identified themselves with the West Pakistani society primarily based on a shared linguistic heritage and supported the West Pakistani governing elite in the process of capturing the economic and political power in East Pakistan. The Biharis, consequently, enjoyed government patronage and preferential treatment in various sectors of the East Pakistan economy

Such exile and re-establishments are not unusual in history. During the Babylonina exile, those who did go back did so with high expectations; Isaiah recounts the prophecies that Yahweh would lead them into a beautiful land flowing with milk and honey and that the mountains would level out to provide an easy path for their return. The prophecies also told that when the returnees arrived in Judah they would find an empty land wherein they would rebuild the cities,

erect temples to Yahweh, and live in peace and plenty. It didn't work out that way. H.M. Barstad, in his *The Myth of the Empty Land* (1996), marshals archaeological and textual evidence to show that throughout the period of the Babylonian exile.

Tension of 1971 and Hostility

In every human society, the range of experiences that are socially acknowledged and named is always much narrower than the range of experiences that people actually have. Despite the deep nationalistic emotions of the events of 1971, there has been little systematic effort on the violent conflicts that prevailed in the course of the nine-month long war. Popular attention has, so far, focused on the Pakistani army's action against the Bengalis. Looking back to history, it may become apparent that then East Pakistan in 1971 was simultaneously a battleground for many different kinds of violent conflict that included aggressive insurgence, mob violence, military crackdown on a civilian population, urban terrorism, guerrilla fight to full-scale war. The culture of violence fomented by the conflict of 1971 forms the context for much of Bangladesh's subsequent history. A careful, evidence-based approach to understanding the events of 1971 is fundamental if the different parties to the conflict are to be ever reconciled.

The postponement of the national assembly on March 1 followed by the call of observing "hartal" given by Sheikh Mujib led to widespread lawlessness during March, when the Pakistan government effectively lost control over much of the territory of East Pakistan. Many accounts shown both by Bangladeshi and Pakistani, have recorded the parallel government run on Sheikh Mujib's decrees. Apart from sporadic incidents of violence in Dhaka, there was arson, looting and attacks by Bengali mobs on non-Bengali people and property in many parts of the province, some with casualties. There can be no doubt that in many of the towns where there was a substantial Bihari population, the Bengalis turned against the 'Biharis' during the short period they were in control and some terrible massacres resulted. Among the places where this happened were Chittagong, Khulna, Jessore, Comilla, Rangpur, Phulbari, Dinajpur and Mymensingh. In areas where the non-Bengalis were in a majority, as in some of the railway towns, the 'Biharis' turned and attacked the Bengalis. For example, in Paksey nearly all the Bengalis who had not fled were murdered. The White Paper published by the Pakistan government in August 1971 lists such incidents, of which the worst loss of life appears to have occurred in Khulna and Chittagong in the first week of March. That "the government's writ had ceased to function in most parts of the province" and that there were attacks upon non-Bengalis by Bengalis on the rampage, is acknowledged by critics of the government too.³

A description of the indiscriminate killing during this period has been given by an American engineer who was working on a construction project at Kaptai, near Chittagong.⁴ Anthony Mascarenhas gave another account of the 'Biharis' plight. According to him:

'Thousands of families of unfortunate Muslims, many of them refugees from Bihar who chose Pakistan at the time of the partition riots in 1947, were mercilessly wiped out. Women were raped, or had their breasts torn out with specially fashioned knives. Children did not escape the horror: the lucky ones were killed with their parents; but many thousands of others must go through what life remains for them with eyes gouged out and limbs amputated. More than 20,000 bodies of non-Bengalis have been found in the main towns, such as Chittagong, Khulna and Jessore. The real toll, I was told everywhere in East Bengal, may have been as high as 100,000, for thousands of non-Bengalis have vanished without a trace. The Government of Pakistan has let the world know about that first horror. What it has suppressed is the second and worse horror which followed when its own army took over the killing. West Pakistan officials privately calculate that altogether both sides have killed 250,000 people'.⁵

Eqbal Ahmed, a renowned political analyst and scholar, strongly opposed the cited figures of Bihari killing by the Bangalis, rather he raised logical accusation against Pakistani army who were responsible for the killings of Biharis in then East Pakistan. He was born in Bihar and very much sympathized to the Bihari people throughout his life and also lost some of his relatives in that time.⁶

A section of the 'Biharis' joined and collaborated with the Pakistani army, the killer of millions of Bengalis throughout the nine month long liberation war of 1971. It is very difficult to reckon or detect the number of killings of Bengali people by the Biharis themselves because of their supportive and collaborative role in killing mission in the war. They mainly supported the Pakistan Army's killing mission and a section of the Biharis also took part.

The roots of the conflicts that divided people of the subcontinent have different phases - first, Hindus were separated from the Muslims and then line of separation was drawn from different ethnic linguistic groups. Consequently, the concept of nationalism, as developed in the subcontinent during the last one hundred odd years has been germinating conflict. In short, The Hindu-Muslim, the Bengali-'Biharis' and the Bengali-ethnic minority groups' conflicts in Bangladesh are part of much larger conflicts and identify crises in the subcontinent.

It must be remembered that these incidents occurred in the immediate aftermath of a most brutal civil war, and took place at a time when no government had yet been established in Dhaka, let alone been able to take action to restore law and order. The prime target of the Bengali forces were the hated 'Razakars', Al-Shams and Al-Badrs. One incident which gained immediate world wide publicity as it occurred in front of the television cameras, was the stabbing to death at the Sports Ground of four Razakars. This was carried out by one of the irregular guerrilla units who were not under the control or orders of the Bangladesh government in exile. It was led by a Colonel Abdul Kadir Siddiqui.⁷ There were cases of large

scale massacres in Khalishpur of Khulna, Shantahar, Chittagong, Mymensingh and other areas. Nevertheless, rape and harassment of women, murders, jailing of youths were a common phenomenon after the independence.

Thousands more 'Biharis' were killed, all of their homes and businesses were confiscated, they were fired from their jobs, their bank accounts seized, their children expelled from schools and they once more had to seek refuge. International Red Cross created camps to save them from total annihilation. Most of them did not want to live in Bangladesh after the battering they had received. So half a million chose to leave for, what was left of their country, Pakistan.⁸

As soon as the new government was established and in particular after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned to Dhaka early in January to assume the office of the Prime Minister, all the authority of the new Government was brought to bear to stop these revenge killings and to leave the fate of collaborators to be determined by the courts with the due process of law. In general this policy has been successful, though feelings against the 'Biharis' are such that explosions of mob violence against them may recur. One such outburst occurred in Khulna in March 1972, when some 200 'Biharis' are believed to have been killed by a Bengali mob. International observers also pointed out that the 'nationalist local press' repeatedly fuelled the Bengalis hatred of the 'Biharis', leading to the mass looting and expropriation.⁹ An Indian observer wrote in 1973 :

Perhaps no other class of people in the world today is as ruined, economically and socially , as a mitten and smashed up as the community of the former Indian refugees in Bangladesh who are known here be the general term 'Bihari'... Today in Bangladesh, to be a Bihari is the worst crime.. thousands have been discharged from ...Many persons rejoined duty on the strength of 'clearence chits' given by Awami League MPs. But they did not return, even their bodies remained untraced.¹⁰

Against the above backdrop, and more importantly, because of their active anti-independence role (for example, their participation in the East Pakistan Civil Armed Forces, i.e. Razakars and Al-Shams, raised by the Pakistani authorities to carry out atrocities over the East Pakistanis), the 'Biharis' became subject to widespread political persecution preceding and during the Independence War, as well as in the aftermath of liberation. Following the independence, the Bihari political persecution continued and their properties and houses were taken over by the Bengalis During March-April 1971 the non-Bengali population mainly Urdu speaking were viciously attacked during which nearly 64,000 were killed and many more injured. Eventually the federal government called in the armed forces to restore law and order, and for a period of time they were successful. Due to recent disturbances the Biharis were also very afraid of the Bengali majority. Toward the end of 1971 the Bengali nationalists with over-whelming support

of the local population and Pakistan's chief rival India managed to militarily beat Pakistan.

Ahmad Ilias stated, "During the whole period of political and constitutional crisis, the Urdu-speaking immigrants in East Pakistan remained to the Muslim League. The labor riot in the industrial areas brought them more close to the central government. Movement of the autonomy and independence war further extended the distance between the two communities.

Anthony Mascarenhas gave another account of the Biharis' plight. According to him 'More than 20,000 bodies of the Non Bengalis have been found in the main towns). Just before the crackdown of 25th March (Mascarenhas: 1986). A portion of Biharis joined and collaborated with the Pakistani army during the liberation war of 1971 also killed numerous Bengalis.

Post Liberation Period and the Biharis of Bangladesh

On December 16, 1971, ninety five thousand Pakistani armed forces and other personnel surrendered in Dhaka, and were taken to India. The minority, which cooperated with the Pakistani government, were now considered traitors and were under assault by the Bengali majority for their language and political views. For the protection of this population they were given sanctuary by the International Red Cross in certain areas of the country, which later came to be known as camps. There are still 70 camps in various parts of Bangladesh with a population of more then 250-300,000 people.¹¹

After the break-up of Pakistan, Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, hailed from the province of Sindh, became the President of the country and had the responsibility for negotiating release of prisoners and settlement of other outstanding issues such as transfer of population. By this time 535,000 Pakistanis had registered with the International Committee of the Red Cross in Bangladesh and had indicated their preference to move to West Pakistan. However the Pakistani administration introduced conditions upon who or how many, shall be accepted for repatriation to Pakistan. In the end Pakistan accepted the return of only 173,000 Pakistanis. Introduction of limitations and conditions on the repatriation of this population was not only unconstitutional (according to the constitution of Pakistan) i.e. illegal it was also an abuse of authority and an immoral act by the Pakistani head of state. Mr. Bhutto knew that the extermination of the citizens of his State was in progress in Bangladesh yet he chose to deny responsibility for protection of these citizens of the Pakistan.

These Pakistanis left in Bangladesh became the first group of stateless, because Bangladesh did not accept them as citizens either. Realizing the government of Pakistan was not going to repatriate them, Pakistanis in Bangladesh continued to repatriate themselves and their families by whatever means were available to them. Government of Pakistan issued a presidential ordinance in March 1978 stripping all Pakistanis left in Bangladesh after December 1971 of

their nationality, unilaterally, retroactively, arbitrarily and en masse . This ordinance was and is illegal and the sole purpose of the ordinance was to deprive a group of citizens, the common feature of the group being their language, of their basic right as citizens of Pakistan. There are around one hundred thousand Pakistanis who returned without the blessing of the Government of Pakistan, now living in Pakistan who are not recognized as citizens and are denied all amenities of citizenship. This is the second group of stateless citizens. We advocate for restoration of full rights of citizenship for both these groups.

The Biharis became subject to widespread political persecution preceding and during the Independence War as well as in the aftermath of liberation. Following independence, the Bihari political persecution continued and their properties and houses were taken over by the Bengalis. Several government promulgations [for example, the Acting President Order I of 1972, the Bangladesh Abandoned Property (Control, Management and Disposal) Order, 1972, President's Order 16 etc.] did facilitate the dispossession of the Biharis' properties. As a result, by the middle of 1972, a total of 1,008,680 Biharis were domiciled in various shanty camps spreading all over Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh Government announced the Presidential Order-149 in 1972 as a step towards offering the Bangladeshi citizenship to the Biharis. According to Bangladesh Government sources, 600,000 Biharis accepted the offer, (Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Government of Bangladesh, 1982, p. 3.) while 539,669 registered with the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) opting to return to their 'country of nationality' - Pakistan. Islamabad, however, was less interested and showed a lax attitude about the repatriation of the Biharis except those who joined the East Pakistan Civil Armed Forces and surrendered with the Pakistan Army. According to a Pakistani Foreign Ministry official: "What are we supposed to do with them (the Biharis)? We have enough problems already. Besides, you must remember that they are really Indian refugees." Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the first post-1971 civilian president of Pakistan, was even unwilling to admit any sizeable number of 'Bihari refugees' to be repatriated to Pakistan.

By late January 1974, some 90,000 people had been transported from Pakistan to Bangladesh, and over 44,000 from Bangladesh to Pakistan. By mid February 1974, over 200,000 people had been repatriated under the terms of the New Delhi Agreement. The implementation of the agreement played a role in Pakistan's decision on 22 February 1974 to recognise Bangladesh. On 1 July 1974, in agreement with the governments concerned, UNHCR phased out the repatriation which began in the previous September. By this time, some 9,000 people had been transported by sea between Bangladesh and Pakistan and some 270,000 airlifted across the subcontinent. Those airlifted included some 166,000 Bengalis returning from Pakistan to

Bangladesh and some 104,000 non-Bengalis going back from Bangladesh to Pakistan. This was the largest emergency airlift of civilians ever organized.

One of the unresolved issues at this time was the status and citizenship of Biharis who moved to East Pakistan at the time of partition in 1947. The problem still remains unresolved. Most of them spoke Urdu, which bound them to West Pakistan, but they fared relatively well in East Pakistan. During 1971, many Biharis joined the Pakistani militia or collaborated with the Pakistan Army. As a result, after the surrender of the Pakistan Army in mid-December 1971, the entire Bihari community faced the wrath of the Bengali nationalism.

Although Biharis were among those accepted by Pakistan under the August 1973 repatriation accord, Pakistan was slow in giving clearances. At a meeting of the foreign ministers of the three countries in New Delhi in April 1974, a new tripartite agreement on a second phase of repatriation was reached. More than 170,000 Biharis moved to Pakistan under the terms of these agreements. But Pakistan interpreted the categories of 'non-Bengalis' set out in the agreement restrictively and did not take back all Biharis. In addition to this earlier movement, nearly 9,900 Biharis repatriated to Pakistan between 1977 and 1979 and further, 4,800 more of them in 1982. In 1993, Pakistan accepted 53 more Bihari families but then the process stopped.

In 1999, over 200,000 Biharis were still living in 66 camps of Bangladesh with poor facilities. By this time, many of them have been naturalised in the country but because their citizenship is still an unresolved issue, they continue to face innumerable problems

Bangladesh in its formative phase insisted that it would establish formal diplomatic relations with Pakistan only if that country agreed to expeditious repatriation of the non-Bengalis including the Biharis from Bangladesh. This insistence forced the Pakistan Government to move back from its original stance and agreed to receive a sizeable number of Biharis in the 1973 New Delhi Agreement as well as in the Tripartite Agreement of 1974 in exchange for the return of the Bengalis from Pakistan. As the first step towards implementing these agreements, the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) registered 539,639 Biharis who intended to return to Pakistan. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) facilitated the return of 108,750 Bihari refugees by June 1974. After that date, the UNHCR had to suspend the repatriation process due to exhaustion of funds. The Bangladesh Government complained to Islamabad about the slow repatriation of the Biharis and raised the issue during the 1974 Mujib-Bhutto summit. The Pakistani side, as it was earlier, showed little interest in the matter.

The post-Mujib Government undertook new diplomatic initiatives to persuade Islamabad to resume the repatriation of the Biharis. It approached the Islamic countries to exert pressure on

Pakistan as well as to provide assistance to resolve the matter. Despite initial reluctance, President Zia-ul Haq subsequently, however, desired a solution to the Bihari issue on humanitarian ground. He asserted during a visit to Dhaka in December 1985 that Pakistan was ready to accept the Bihari refugees if sufficient financial resources could be raised for their transfer and rehabilitation. In 1988, a trust agreement was signed between Pakistan and Rabita Al-Alam Al-Islami (an Islamic charity organization, hereafter Rabita) to expedite the process of Bihari resettlement in Pakistan. A repatriation and resettlement plan was drawn up which included the construction of 36,000 houses spread over 80 sites costing about \$278 million and with approximately \$30 million for community services and \$10 million for the transportation of the refugees. Despite elaborate preparations, the repatriation process could not get off the ground.

Benazir Bhutto was traditionally opposed to the idea of transferring the Biharis to Pakistan and followed the party politics (Pakistan Peoples Party or PPP) and the state policy of her father (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) after she came to power in 1988. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, it is noteworthy, introduced the restrictive entry regulations for the Bihari refugees in the early 1970s. During her tenure as Prime Minister, Benazir did not grant the citizenship rights either to the refugees in Bangladesh or to the 100,000 Biharis who moved to Pakistan illegally since 1977. During a visit to Bangladesh in October 1989, Benazir asserted that the Biharis should be permanently settled in Bangladesh and Pakistan would help to raise funds from the Muslim world for their settlement. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, was generally supportive to the repatriation of the Bihari refugees from Bangladesh. He undertook meaningful initiatives for the return of the Biharis. He was ready to rehabilitate them in his home province (Punjab) and officially domiciled them issuing identity cards. Although definite steps were taken for repatriation and a symbolic return of 235 Biharis did occur on 10 January 1993, it was subsequently shelved for 'logistical and practical' problems. All subsequent Pakistani governments showed disinterest in ending the Bihari issue that is indeed a political question rather than an economic problem. Historical accounts, even the scholarly accounts vary a great deal. The Historical accounts by the Hindu and Muslim scholars, or Congress and Muslim differ not in terms of fact rather in terms of highlighting and interpreting particular events.

Such political and literary description makes it clear that boundaries are multiple, and that at no time is one boundary the sole definer of an identity. Yet at different times and for different reasons there is a "relevant boundary" that gains prominence and defines the us/them divide. The us/them divide created by the institutional and bureaucratic structures introduced by the colonial government towards the end of nineteenth century eventually led to the partition of India along religious lines. It is undoubtedly true that economic discontent, coupled with escalating violence; riots lend weight to nations of identity and act as a catalyst to community

based strategies (Hasan: 1988). The rivalry between the Hindus and the Muslims on the question of partition of India tensioned and provoked communal violence in many parts of India. There were four days riots in Kolkata in August 1946. The Bihar riots in October November 1946 and huge bloodshed generated immense feeling of Islamic brotherhood among the Muslims (Ilias, 2003). Within these circumstances and after partition a large number of Biharis migrated to East Bengal with a dream of land when they could live a better life. The promise land Pakistan became the root metaphor to those Muslims. They expected the East Pakistan government to settle them there. Pakistan government was "averse to their miserable plight" and that 'the blood of the Bihari martyrs' which served as the foundation stone to Pakistan had been callously forgotten (Ghosh: 1988).

By all accounts after 1946, 1971 was the next watershed for the Biharis in East Pakistan stigmatized as collaborators of Pakistan Government. Biharis were identified as 'Stranded Pakistani' or "Stateless People"; Most of the Biharis had never experienced the culture and customs of the Bengalis though centuries ago Bihar had been part of Bengal. According to their belief, Bengal was a fabulous country where the wizard women live, there was a saying- that there are hundreds doors to enter Bengal but none to come out. (Ilias: 2003). Bearing a negative attitude to Bengali culture Bihari Muslims preferred the east for their future settlement. Hence "Pakistan" was not only simulative-- business, service, employment, education, better living were also the pull factors. Ahmed Ilias pointed out that the process of economic exploitation of East Pakistan began with the migration of Hindu Bengalis and arrivals of new capitalist class from India and West Pakistan that pushed the Bengali business community on the margin. Unlike the other refugee groups, Biharis were small businessmen and shopkeepers. Another group of Bihari refugees and optees obtained jobs in railway. Equally large was the number of Urdu speaking constables in police, mostly from Uttar Pradesh. The Pakistan government developed the province East Pakistan (Bengal) as a colonial hinterland of West Pakistan. (Chakkraborty: 1994). The Role of State was quite exploitation based to the Bengalis. Urdu speaking immigrants totally ignored the undercurrent of the politics and kept them isolated from the mainstream. Language movement of 1948-52 made socio cultural differences evident. The roots of the conflicts that divided people of the subcontinent have different phases - first, the Hindus were separated from Muslims and then line of separation was drawn from different ethnic linguistic groups (Hasan: 1988). Consequently, the concept of nationalism, as developed in the subcontinent during the last one hundred odd years has been germinating conflict. In short, Hindu-Muslim, Bengali-Biharis and Bengali-ethnic minority groups' conflicts in Bangladesh are part of much larger conflicts and identify crises in the subcontinent.

Three generations of Biharis have seen and passed their lives directly and indirectly in such

socio-political phenomena. Dreamers and defenders of Pakistan (1946), Stigmatized collaborators of Pakistan (1971) and Stateless Diaspora (1972-), into these three major phases partitions Biharis' lives are deeply connected.

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