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Editor's Note

The world has observed a series of major developments in international affairs in the last few months. During this period, we have witnessed several incidents, such as the military coup in Egypt, the national elections in Pakistan, enlargement of the European Union, high level exchanges between India and China among others. These events and the consequent changes in the international order have a substantial impact on Bangladesh. The current issue is focused on issues concerning Bangladesh. The first two articles unravel the aspect of identity politics and state formation in Bangladesh. The subsequent articles look at some of the non-traditional security issues confronting Bangladesh and how the state needs to deal with it effectively.

In this issue, Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury offers his viewpoint on the historical trajectory of the roots of Bangladeshi National identity and their impacts on the state behavior. He argues that, the birth of Bangladesh in 1971 has finally paved a way to the development of a unique social and political identity for the Bengali Muslims that took more than two centuries to take shape. The backdrop of the British colonial rule and the schisms within society led to the emergence of the subsequent Bengali Muslim leaderships under 'Muslim League'. With a strong historical legacy of protests and movements against the political and economic deprivation, Bengali Muslim leaders of the then Eastern Part of Indian Subcontinent once had made the British rulers convince to formulate the Bengal Partition in 1905, but it was ultimately taken away in 1911. After the 'partition' of 1947, however, the central problem of the East Bengalis remained constant. This was once again the translation of their demographic majority into political power, now within the framework of Pakistan. By the time of Bangladesh's emergence as an independent nation state in 1971, all these historical factors, such as identity politics, thus, facilitated to form a concrete liberal Muslim identity for the Bengali Muslim community.

In the second article, Asad-ul Iqbal Latif provides a '*Ghoti*' view to analyze the Bengal Partition and identity politics, which serves as a accompaniment to the previous article. While bringing up a historical legacy of identity politics between these two sides of Bengal, the writer proposes strengthening cultural ties as an effective tool in resolving differences that have emerged over the years.

In the third article, Major General Muniruzzaman (Retd.) discusses about the issues covering the food security in Bangladesh. Through a comprehensive

analysis, the writer offers a broad range of analysis on the conceptual and empirical aspects of the issue, including the present condition of food security in Bangladesh, the ongoing scenario of food crisis throughout the country, the factors responsible for food crisis, the future vulnerabilities. He also argues that, to reduce food deficiency, the government of Bangladesh has taken some active initiatives such as National Livestock Development Policy, Climate Change Strategic Action Plan, the National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Program, Duty Free Rice Import, National Climate Change Fund, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Agriculture and Rural Development, enhancing regional cooperation in South Asia to ensure food security, and so on. The article, at the end, comes up with a series of policy prescriptions for the different stakeholders of the issue.

In the fourth article of this issue, Noor Mohammad Sarker and Sultana Yesmin together offer a comprehensive analysis of domestic violence in Bangladesh from the contemporary peace and security perspectives. With some vibrant conceptual and theoretical analyses, the article offers a well-built empirical understanding over the entire issue of domestic violence as a form of human rights abuse. The manuscript explores the different aspects of domestic violence in Bangladesh, including its types, causes, contemporary scenario, and interrelated legal and institutional mechanisms. Writers argue that, domestic violence has been one of the major problems that affect the lives of many women both in urban and rural areas of Bangladesh. Major forms of domestic violence in Bangladesh include physical, sexual, economic and psychological violence. However, the patriarchal social structure, the culture of acceptance and the wide practice of community violence are considered as the key factors promoting domestic violence in the country. At the end, the article offers a number of short, medium and long terms policy prescriptions to overcome the threats of domestic violence.

We are appreciative of the support lent to us by our international editorial board and are indebted to the authors who contributed to this issue. We are grateful to the reviewers, whose proficiency and hard work has clearly paid off, culminating in the accomplishment of this issue. We also thank our readers and subscribers who have provided us with valuable feedback at various times.

Indeed, we hope our readers will continue giving us their support and suggestions. We welcome lively responses on the articles presented in our journal as that can only be positive.

Major General ANM Muniruzzaman, ndc, psc (Retd.)
Editor

* The word ‘Ghoti’ refers to a social group native to West Bengal, India. The families who came from East Bengal are called ‘Bangals’ whereas the families originated in West Bengal are termed ‘Ghotis’. During and after the Partition of Bengal in 1947, the term came into greater use due to migration of many people from then East Bengal and later East Pakistan to West Bengal. Now, people living in Districts like Hooghly, Howrah, Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, Burdwan, Bankura, Birbhum, etc are called ‘Ghoti’.

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The Roots of Bangladeshi National Identity: Their Impact on State Behaviour^{*}

Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury^{**}

Abstract

The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 has finally paved a way to the development of a unique social and political identity for the Bengali Muslims that took more than two centuries to take shape. The backdrop of the British colonial rule and the schisms within society led to the emergence of the subsequent Bengali Muslim leaderships under ‘Muslim League’. With a strong historical legacy of protests and movements against the political and economic deprivation, Bengali Muslim leaders of the then Eastern Part of Indian Subcontinent once had made the British rulers convince to formulate the Bengal Partition in 1905, but it was ultimately taken away in 1911. After the ‘partition’ of 1947, however, the central problem of the East Bengalis remained constant. This was once again the translation of their demographic majority into political power, now within the framework of Pakistan. By the time of Bangladesh’s emergence as an independent nation state in 1971, all these historical factors, such as identity politics, thus, facilitated to form a concrete liberal Muslim identity for the Bengali Muslim community.

Introduction

The growth of the consciousness of the Bengali Muslims as a distinct social and political entity that found fruition in their carving out for themselves a separate and sovereign state in 1971 was the product of a historical evolution over a period of two centuries. Their past experience is important in as much as it continues to condition their external behaviour pattern even in contemporary times.

The Colonial Period

Two factors assisted the process that led to the partition of British India in 1947 into the sovereign dominions of India and Pakistan. One was the British

^{*} The article is reprinted with the permission of the author. It was previously published as ISAS Working Paper, no. 63, on June 10, 2009.

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policies during the colonial period, starting perhaps with Governor-General Lord Cornwallis' Permanent Settlement scheme in 1793. The other was a series of social and political developments within the two major communities of pre-partition Bengal – the Hindus and the Muslims.¹

British Colonial Policies

As a result of the Permanent Settlement scheme, the government's revenue demands were fixed in perpetuity with the incumbent landholders. This policy had several important effects on the two major communities in Bengal.

First, as the fixed quantum of revenues were high and the collection by the British was far more efficient than from the peasants by the landlords, many of whom were Muslims – remnants of the period of rule by Muslim *Nawabs* – these landlords or *Zamindars* fell into arrears and were compelled to alienate their properties. This the *Zamindars* did to mainly two Hindu groups, one the city-based class of rising businessmen,² and the other, those employed in tax collection establishments of the larger *Zamindaris* (estates) or the British East India Company.³

Secondly, as it was the revenue to the government that was fixed in perpetuity and not the rent from the peasants to the *Zamindars*, the new class of *Zamindars* endeavoured to extract as much as possible from the peasants, who were mostly Muslims. This was not conducive to inter-communal harmony for it tended to get enmeshed with class conflict as the sense of deprivation of the Muslim peasants, including the *Jotedars* or richer peasants, sharpened.⁴

¹ The population of the eastern region, known as *Vanga*, was predominantly of Buddhist and Mongoloid extraction. It was here that Islam gained most of the converts largely through the efforts of various Sufi orders. The population of western Bengal, known as *Gauda*, was of mixed Aryan stock and was predominantly Hindu. (Ishtiaq Ahmed, *State, Nation and Ethnicity in Contemporary South Asia*, Pinter, London and New York, 1996, p. 223). Conversions to Islam in parts of Bengal were facilitated by 'a rigid system of caste discipline' (E. A. Gait, *Census of India, 1909*, Vol. 6, Part 1, Report, p. 165). Eventually, a majority of the population of the whole of Bengal became Muslims. (See Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, 'Politics and Society in Bengal', in Robin Blackburn (ed.) *Explosion in a Subcontinent*, Penguin, 1975, pp. 80-82.

² Addy and Azad in Blackburn (ed) op. cit., pp. 87-88.

³ See Rajat and Ratna Ray, 'The Dynamics of Continuity in Rural Bengal under the British Imperialism: A Study of Quasi-stable Equilibrium in Underdeveloped Societies in a Changing World', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. X (1973), p. 106.

⁴ Rajat and Ratna Ray state that "the social peculiarity of East Bengal which fed the growing political conflict in the province was that the *Zamindars* and *Talukdars* (bigger landlords) in the area were mostly high caste Hindus while the large *Jotedars* under them were invariably Muslims of peasant stock." Rajat and Ratna Ray, 'Zamindars and Jotedars: A Study of Rural Politics in Bengal', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1975, p. 101.

Thirdly, the *nouveau riche* commercial-class *Zamindars* preferred to be 'absentee landlords', further adversely affecting the *Ryots* or peasants.⁵ Sub-infeudation also resulted from the fact that the British sealed off the apex of the feudal hierarchy with their corps of civil servants, permitting only undergrowth.⁶

A second policy that affected the Muslims was the shift from the use of the Persian language in government offices to the English language and Bengali. This led to a loss of influence in the administration in Bengal on the part of mainly the high-born *Ashraf* class.⁷ This tradition-bound aristocracy displayed no eagerness, at least at this stage, to learn English.⁸ Nor did they receive much encouragement to do so, either from the authorities or the Bengali upper caste-Hindus, as evidenced in the fact that when the Hindu College was established, its charter limited admission to only the members of that community.⁹

The Census of 1871 reports:

Hindus, with exceptions of course, are the principal *Zamindars*, *Talukdars* (owners of large sub-infeudatory estates), public officers, men of learning, moneylenders, traders, shopkeepers, and [are] engaging in most active pursuits of life and coming directly and frequently under notice of the rulers of the country; while the Muslims with exceptions also, form a very large majority of the cultivators of the ground and day

⁵ N. K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, (Calcutta, 1962), Ch V.11 passim.

⁶ Dietmar Rothermund, *The Phases of Indian nationalism and other Essays*, (Bombay: Nachiketa Publications Ltd., pp. 177-178. Rothermund argues that while the European bourgeoisie overthrew feudalism in their own countries, they did not perform the same service as colonial rulers in Asia. For instance, in India, while reserving capitalist mode of production for themselves, they sought to keep the rest of the country at the level of pre-capitalist production, which required the maintenance of 'the stunted and ossified remnants of feudalism, capped by a salaried and efficient bureaucracy', p. 177.

⁷ Initially, the *Ashraf* Muslims who claimed descent from the Turco-Afghans spoke Persian or Urdu, and the *Atraf*, or functional groups, spoke Bengali. The latter were, of course, numerically superior and eventually, by early twentieth century, Bengali became the mother tongue of most Bengal Muslims. However, in the course of the nineteenth century, a special patois came into vogue especially in eastern Bengal, known as *Mussalmani Bangla*. Amalendu De, *Roots of Separatism in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Calcutta: Ratna Prakashan, 1974, p. 14.

⁸ A. R. Mullick, *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal, 1775-1856*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961, p. 200.

⁹ M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, London: John Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1966, p. 521. In fact, even lower caste Hindus were also excluded from this privately-funded institution. Eventually, in the middle of the nineteenth century, British authorities intervened and the College, later known as the Presidency College, was thrown open to all castes and communities. R. C. Majumdar, *Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century*, Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyaya, 1960, p. 48.

labourers; and others engaged in the humblest form of mechanical skills and of buying and selling.¹⁰

This social decline engendered disaffection among different Muslim classes whose interests appeared to blend for a while with and found expression in three peasant uprisings – the *Faraizi* Movement (1810-1831), the ‘Indigo’ riots (1859-1860) and the Pabna Rent Revolt (1873) as well as in the communal violence in Calcutta in the 1890s. The *Faraizi* Movement was the Bengali version of the Pan-Islamic Wahabi movement that sought to revive the pristine glories of Islam. Initially, the content was religious but eventually the bias became socio-economic. It aimed at the two-fold objective of ‘protecting’ the largely Muslim peasantry from ‘the Hindu *Zamindars*’ and of ‘securing social justice for the masses of the Muslims’.¹¹ The ‘Indigo’ riots resulted from the coercion of the indigo planters to produce the crop at a loss.¹² The Pabna Rent Revolt was a protest by the largely Muslim peasantry in that district of eastern Bengal directed against absentee landlordism.¹³ The communal violence in Calcutta or ‘the Calcutta Riots’ in the 1890s resulted from the rise of ‘community consciousness’ among jute labourers of Calcutta, especially after the influx of Urdu-speaking labour migrants from northern India into Bengal.¹⁴ The Hindus participated in those movements where the thrust was clearly against the British, but quite understandably, they tended to remain uninvolved when the Islamic features were emphasised.¹⁵

Two traits became evident at this stage. First, the growing formation of a loose alliance between the *Ashraf*, the old aristocracy, and the *Atraf*, the more indigent segments of the Muslim community, poised against the British state

¹⁰ Quoted in Abdul Majeed Khan, ‘Research about Muslim Aristocracy in East Pakistan’, in Pierre Bessaignet (ed.) *Social Research in East Pakistan*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961, p. 19.

¹¹ Muin-ud-din Ahmed Khan, Social Organization of the Faraidis’, *Pakistan Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 12, 1964, p. 195.

¹² Chittabrata Palit, *Tensions in Bengal Rural Society: Landlords, Planters, and Colonial Rule 1830 1860*, Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1975, pp. 140-151.

¹³ There were, however, some Hindus among the leaders of the revolt. See, Kalyan Kumar Sengupta, ‘The Agrarian League of Pabna, 1873’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2, June 1970, pp. 253-270. Later, the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1985 attempted to remove some of the grievances. Initially, the British tended to favour the landlords and their legislations facilitated rent extraction. The tenancy protection that gradually emerged, and which aimed to forestall peasant agitation, flowed from the Rent Recovery Acts. Dietmar Rothermund, *Government, Landlord, and Peasant in India: Agrarian Relations under British Rule*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMHH, 1978, p. 89.

¹⁴ See Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal’s jute Mill Hands in the 1890s’, *Past and Present*, 1981.

¹⁵ Addy and Azad, Blackburn, op. cit., p. 104.

authority and the burgeoning Hindu middle class, the *Bhadralok*.¹⁶ The second was the power of religion as a means of rousing Muslims of all classes.

The simmering discontent among the Muslims that had begun to foster the development of a separatist consciousness was yet unarticulated in any major way except for the occasional local ‘uprisings’. However, yet another policy decision of the colonial powers brought this ‘community consciousness’ a step closer to ‘nationalism’. This was the partition of Bengal in 1905 that gave a ‘territorial’ content to these sentiments. By then, the British had become somewhat wary of the growing clout of the *Bhadralok*. Also, Muslim aspirations were beginning to find some resonance among the British, particularly in the Viceroy, Lord Curzon. The animosities between the Muslims and the British, generated by the ‘Sepoy Mutiny’ of 1857, now seemed behind them.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 (Partition Mark I) ostensibly had a two-fold objective – ‘the reinvigoration of Assam and the relief of Bengal’.¹⁷ Eastern Bengal was hived off and joined to Assam, thereby creating a separate province. It was hoped that the reduction of the size of Bengal would render it more governable. Also, enhancing Assam’s access to the port of Chittagong in East Bengal would invigorate the rather neglected Assam province which, together with its now larger size and population, would make it attractive for covenanted civil servants.¹⁸

¹⁶ Contemporary historians and sociologists have assigned the description of a ‘Weberian status group’ to the powerful *Bhadralok* who, unrelated to the processes of production, were not seen as strictly constituting a class. According to J. H. Broomfield, they were ‘distinguishable by many aspects of their behaviour, their deportment, their speech and their dress, their style of housing, their eating habits their occupations, and their associations and quite as frequently by their cultural values and their sense of propriety’. *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society*, University of California Press, 1968, pp. 5-6. John McGwire saw them as a composite group of the middle and the rentier class of Calcutta who continued to retain strong residual ties with their own pre-capitalist past. He noted the absence of any industrial bourgeoisie among them as the paradox of the colonial situation where the latter was to be found in Britain only. Development and Underdevelopment: Calcutta and the *Bhadralok*, 1857-1885, Australian National University Conference Paper, December, 1979, p. 11. However, S. N. Mukherjee has argued that to describe the *Bhadralok* as a mere ‘status group’ or even as a ‘category’ would be to ignore the economic changes and social mobility in nineteenth century Bengal. Mukherjee would even go further and call the *Bhadralok* a ‘class’. S. N. Mukerjee, ‘Class, Caste, and Politics in Calcutta, 1815-1818’, in Edmund Leach and S.N. Mukherjee (eds.) *Elites in South Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 1970, p. 51. Incidentally, the *Bhadralok* have been seen as both ‘collaborators’ and ‘critics’ of the British Raj.

¹⁷ Minute by Curzon, June 1903, para 49, cited in John R. Mc Farlene, ‘The Decision to partition Bengal in 1905’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, July 1965, p. 223.

¹⁸ Mc Lane, op. cit., pp. 222-223.

In making his decision, Curzon was certainly motivated by a desire to curb the rising influence of the Calcutta *Bhadralok*. A senior British official, H. H. Risley, recorded that:

Bengal united is power. Bengal divided will pull in different ways. That is what the Congress leaders feel; their apprehensions are perfectly correct and they form one of the great merits of the scheme...one of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule.¹⁹

Apart from dividing up Bengal, another way of minimising the *Bhadralok* power was to encourage the Muslims by giving them a province where they would be dominant. In fact, Curzon himself urged Nawab Salimullah of Dacca, a Muslim leader, that:

By means of their numerical strength and superior culture, the Mussalmans would have the preponderant voice in the Province that would be created and that would invest the Mussalmans of East Bengal with a unity they had not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussalman Kings.²⁰

A period of good relations between the British Raj and the Muslim leaders in Bengal began. The All-India Muslim League was established in Dacca (now Dhaka) with the stipulation of loyalty to the government.²¹ The anti-British stirrings of the nineteenth century among the Muslims were now, to a large extent, calmed.²²

The partition of Bengal provoked convulsive and, at times, violent outbursts from the *Bhadralok*. This drew adverse reaction from the Muslim community. The resultant polarisation had the effect of politicising and galvanising Muslim opinion. Added impetus towards communalism was provided by journals such as *Lal Ishtihar*, literally ‘Red Pamphlet’, and *Krishak Bandhu*, meaning ‘Friend of the Peasants’.²³ This polarisation was so complete that even when the

¹⁹ Quoted in Amales Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge: India between 1890 and 1910*, Bombay: Great Longman’s, 1967, p. 157.

²⁰ Quoted in Abul Hayat, *Musulmans of Bengal*, Calcutta: Zahed Ali, 1966, p. 18.

²¹ See Abdul Hamid, *Muslim Separatism in India: A Brief Survey, 1858-1947*, Lahore: Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 78.

²² This period of improved relations between the British and the Muslim community also saw a more intense development of the process of what D. A. Low has called the ‘neo-darbari’ politics which involved, on the part of the British, a multiplicity of initiatives to associate non-official Indian notables with the workings of the higher levels of the Raj so as to extend the linkages through which the Indian society could be controlled. D. A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj*, London: Arnold-Heinemann, 1977, p. 5.

²³ *Lal Ishtihar*, for instance, urged the Muslims that, despite being the majority community, they have been cheated and that they should rise up against it. Cited in Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*, Delhi: Peoples’ Publishing House, 1973, p. 209. *Krishak Bandhu* also made similar exhortations. Sarkar, op. cit., p. 214.

partition was revoked in 1911, the deep shock of the Bengali Muslims found expression, not in any anti-British fury, but in antipathy directed more towards the Hindu community in Bengal.

This suited the Bengali Muslim leadership, conservative and feudal, in background. Salimullah and his ilk had clearly seen the advantage of remaining on the right side of the authorities. The strategy was to secure as much advantage as possible by portraying the Bengali Muslims as the aggrieved party without resorting to any lawlessness. As a sop, the British authorities agreed to establish a university in Dacca.²⁴ Secondly, the decision to shift the capital from Calcutta to New Delhi was a blow to the *Bhadralok* power, which was not unpalatable to Bengal’s Muslim leaders. Thirdly, the Indian Councils Act of 1909 recognised Bengal’s political maturity and signalled the commencement of a series of reforms that could gradually lead to the devolution of power in Bengal as well as increased legislative politics. The Muslims, being the overall majority, stood to gain from this. For all these reasons, it was the Hindu community rather than the British which began to be viewed as the major source of threat in Bengal. Indeed, this feeling was so strong that the Bengali Muslim leadership reacted adversely to the Lucknow Pact of 1916 between the Congress and the Muslim League, which reflected an understanding between India’s two major communities at an all-India level.

The Lucknow Pact, based on the principle that the minority communities ought to have weightage in representation, granted major concessions to the Hindus in the Muslim-majority province of Bengal. There the Muslims, with 52.6 percent of the population, were to have only 40 percent of the seats.²⁵ This was, of course, due to the fact that the Muslims were provided advantages in the provinces where they were minorities. Clearly this went against the interest of the Bengali Muslims. Salimullah was now dead and leadership had passed on to conservatives such as Nawab Nawabaly Chowdhury who argued that the Muslim League could not, and did not, represent the interests of the Bengali Muslims.²⁶ This position stiffened with the Hindu-Muslim communal riots in Bihar in 1917, and more significantly, in Calcutta the following year.²⁷ It was beginning to be perceived that the interests of the Bengali Muslims did not necessarily coincide with and, at times, were even distinct from those of their

²⁴ Abdul Hakim, ‘University of Dacca’, *The Journal of the Pakistan Historical and Social Review*, Vol. 16, January 1968, Part 1, p. 50.

²⁵ Broomfield, op. cit., p.114.

²⁶ *Octennial Report of the Central National Mohammedan Association 1917-1924*, Calcutta, 1925, pp. 35-37

²⁷ See J. H. Broomfield, ‘The Forgotten Majority’: The Bengal Muslims and September 1918’, in D. A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, London: The Camelot Press Ltd., 1968, pp. 196-220.

coreligionists in other parts of the subcontinent, a perception with considerable ramifications for subsequent political developments for the region.

This partly explains the rather lukewarm response of Bengali Muslims to the call for the “Khilafat Movement” as a mark of protest against the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Such all-India Muslim causes still generated some support among the Urdu-speaking Muslim Calcuttans such as Mowlana Abul Kalam Azad but were, by and large, peripheral to those representing the more indigenous Bengali-speaking Muslims.

Finally, British policies, with regard to the gradual devolution of power and the extension of legislative politics in Bengal, were leading inexorably to the solution of the major problem that confronted the Bengali Muslims, which was the translation of their demographic majority into political power, the same challenge they would confront later in Pakistan. The reforms that came into operation in 1921 introduced a system of ‘dyarchy’ in the provinces, *viz* a division of powers between the Executive Councillors responsible to the Governor administering ‘reserved’ subjects and the ministers answerable to the legislature controlling ‘transferred’ subjects. Besides the principle of transferring responsibility for certain functions while reserving control over others, the idea was also to establish substantial provincial autonomy.²⁸

This autonomy worked to somewhat insulate Bengal from the rest of India, with communal politics there developing dynamics of their own. Muslim politicians entered into an alliance with the *Swarajists* or seekers of self-rule on the eve of the 1923 elections.²⁹ However, when the government was formed, two of the three ministers turned out to be Muslims. So when the *Swarajists* assumed the role of opposition and attacked the cabinet, it was interpreted as threatening a Muslim-majority ministry by a Hindu-majority *Swaraj* Party.³⁰ Ultimately, the government was defeated and the Governor suspended the constitution until after the 1927 elections. The prospects of Hindu-Muslim unity received a severe jolt and Muslim politicians closed ranks for the elections, in which only one out of 39 Muslims elected to the Bengal council was a *Swarajist*.³¹ This short-lived *Swarajist*-Muslim alliance showed how brittle such understandings were when confronted by communalist sentiments.

²⁸ L. F. Rushbrook Williams, *India in the Years 1917-1918: A Report prepared for presentation to the Parliament in accordance with the 26th Section of the Government of India Act, Calcutta: 1919*, pp. 192-193.

²⁹ This section of the Congress, led by C. R. Das, aimed at achieving *Swaraj* or self-rule through participation in electoral bodies.

³⁰ See Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society*, op. cit., p. 253.

³¹ *A Short History of Hind Pakistan* (Prepared by Pakistan History Board, Pakistan Historical Society, Publication No. 3, 1963), p. 396.

It was now clear that, as the scope of legislative politics broadened, Muslim domination of such politics was inevitable.³² This shift of power resulted once again in the expression of the *Bhadralok* discontent through terrorism, as was the case during the partition of Bengal (1905). In April 1930, they raided the Chittagong armoury.³³ The disturbances assumed communal proportions when a Muslim police inspector was killed by a Hindu boy in August.

1931, which led to rioting in the bazaars.³⁴ Chittagong’s district magistrate imposed a curfew on ‘Hindu *Bhadralok* youths’ who had organised themselves into a terrorist organisation named the ‘Indian Republican Army’.³⁵ At the level of constitutional politics, the *Bhadralok* demanded a second chamber so as “to form a backwater against sudden storms, sudden tidal waves” of extended franchise.³⁶ In other words, the *Bhadralok* asked for an institutional check against the power of a Lower House increasingly dominated by lower caste Hindus and Muslims. Muslim leaders such as A. K. Fazlul Huq vigorously opposed this, and when put to the vote, the motion was lost by 46 to 44.³⁷

The Government of India Act 1935 enlarged the electorate and further enfranchised the lower caste Hindus and Muslims. It was obvious that the Muslims would be the dominant force in legislative politics and their energies would now be directed towards ameliorating the problems and grievances of

³² Initially, the Muslims felt that their interest lay in the continuation of ‘consultative politics’ rather than in the extension of legislative politics, and that any system of open elections would be dominated by the powerful *Bhadralok*. It was only a gradual realisation on their part that “they had many technical advantages in the new system, and that the sheer size of their community gave them great agitational and electoral strength, which only awaited the perfection of those techniques for its realisation”. Broomfield in D. A. Low (ed.) *Soundings in South Asia*, op. cit., p. 220.

³³ *India in 1931-1932*, A statement prepared for presentation to Parliament in accordance with the requirement of the 26th Section of the Government of India Act, Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication

Branch, 1933, p. 32.

³⁴ *Terrorism in India 1917-1936*. Compiled in the Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India, New Delhi: Deep Publications, Reprinted in 1974, p. 32.

³⁵ *Indian Recorder*, October-December 1932, p. 32.

³⁶ The *Bhadralok* leader, S. M. Bose, called for such a House ‘representing an aristocracy of intellect, men of education and experience in the service of the state, men representing the great social and industrial interests in the country, men of sufficient strength to avoid the evils which might possibly flow from the unabridged powers of an autocratic lower chamber’. Bose’s fears of the ‘rule of majority is obvious. Interestingly, he only speaks of ‘men’, though by now the feminine counterpart of the ‘*Bhadralok*’, that is, the ‘*Bhadramahila*’ or ‘gentlewomen’ were coming to the fore already. For a study of this phenomenon, see G. Murshid, ‘Reluctant Debutante: Response of Bengali Women to Modernization, 1849-1905, Rajshahi: Shahitya Samsad, Rajshahi University, 1983.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 815.

the tenants and peasantry. The policy of ‘separate electorates’ gave, in a House of 250, 117 seats to the Muslims, 78 to the Hindus and 30 to the ‘Scheduled Castes’ (Lower Castes). The Muslims thus received a ‘built-in’ bias to power.³⁸ Also, it is noteworthy that separate electorates further engendered separatist tendencies in both communities.

An opportunity for improved communal relations was lost immediately after the 1937 elections. Huq, who had floated the Krishak Praja Party (KPP), having fought the Muslim League led by Khwaja Nazimuddin, turned to the Congress to form a coalition.³⁹

The Congress turned him down, and with it, the opportunity for an understanding with the ‘most secular segment of the Muslim leadership’ as well as ‘progressive Hindu elements’.⁴⁰

Huq thereafter sought the Muslim League’s support for a coalition, a move that had significant long-term impact on Bengal’s future politics. First, Huq’s alliance with the Muslim League once again led to a closing of ranks of the Bengali Muslims of both the progressive and conservative nature. Secondly, the Muslim League, as a result of its association with the various reforms that followed, gained a radical flavour that it never really possessed, and this aided its image as of a friend of the impoverished Muslim tenants. Thirdly, as the Congress was unresponsive to Huq, the latter turned to the more extremist Hindu groups for alliance when he fell out with the Muslim League, thus exposing himself, a progressive and secular Muslim leader, to criticism from a majority of Bengali Muslims.

The Muslim victory in Bengal led the Urdu poet-philosopher, Sir Muhammed Iqbal, to ask of M. A. Jinnah, later to be the founder of Pakistan, as to why the Muslims of north-west India and Bengal should not be entitled to self-government just as other nations.⁴¹ Huq, who himself joined the Muslim League in October 1937, was used by Jinnah in March 1940 to move the famous Lahore Resolution which demanded:

³⁸ Shapan Adnan, ‘Fazlul Huq and Bengal Muslim Leadership 1937-1943’, *Bangladesh Historical Studies*, Vol. 1, Dacca: Journal of Bangladesh Itihash Samiti, 1976, pp. 4-5.

³⁹ Though the League had 43 seats, and the Congress 52, Fazlul Huq, with 36 KPP seats, was best placed to lead a coalition either in alliance with one of the above or with support from the 108 Independents and some others (statistics of results from Humaira Momen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal: A Study of the KPP and the Elections of 1937*, Dacca, 1972, p. 77.

⁴⁰ Shila Sen, Some Aspects of Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937-1946, *Bangladesh Historical Studies*, op. cit., p. 30.

⁴¹ Iqbal asked, ‘Why should not the Muslims of North-West India and Bengal be considered as nations entitled to self-government just as other nations?’ Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Social History of Bengal*, Dacca, 1970, Edition 3, p. 31. Iqbal’s use of the plural ‘nations’ indicates that in his mind Bengal was a potential sovereign Muslim entity.

That the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North Western and Eastern Zones in India should be grouped to constitute *independent states* in which the *constituent units* shall be *autonomous* and *sovereign*.⁴² [Italics by author]

Two points emerge from this – first, that the partition should be on communal lines; and, secondly that the new units should be ‘autonomous’ and ‘sovereign’ rather than a part of a single national entity. It may, therefore, be well argued that the solution in the subcontinent in 1971 was more in conformity with the original Lahore Resolution than the partition of 1947. In other words, what eventually happened in 1971, that is, the emergence of Bangladesh, could, therefore, be viewed as the second and final phase of the realisation of the original Lahore Resolution.

When Jinnah wanted Huq to resign from the Defence Council, the two leaders fell out.⁴³ Huq was the receiving threat perceptions from his co-religionists in north-western India. Prominent Muslim Leaguers such as Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy and Nazimuddin quit the ministry. Huq was somewhat cornered. He began to talk of Hindu-Muslim unity. In June 1942, he said in Calcutta:

Hindus and Muslims must realise ... that they have got to live together, sink or swim together, and if need be, lay down their lives together for the good of their common motherkind.⁴⁴

Deserted by the Leaguers and rebuffed by the Congress, Huq turned to his Hindu-extremist arch-rival, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, for an alliance. Once again, to counter the threat perceptions from his north-western co-religionists and their allies in Bengal, the indigenous Muslim Bengalis forged an alliance with a section of the Hindu *Bhadralok*, a tactic or phenomenon that was to repeat years later during the ‘Bangladesh Liberation War’ in 1971.

Mukherjee left the ministry in protest against the government’s failure to heed his advice on food procurement prior to the 1943 ‘Bengal Famine’. Huq, unsupported by all major political elements, was edged out of office by the Governor, Sir John Herbert.

In May 1943, the Muslim League, with Nazimuddin as Premier, was in full command and Bengal came into line with the All-India Muslim League. In the

⁴² Quoted in Sharifuddin Pirzada (ed), *Foundations of Pakistan 1923-1947*, Karachi: National Publishing House, 1970, p. 341.

⁴³ See M. A. H. Ispahani, *Quaide Azam Jinnah As I Knew Him*, Karachi: Forward Publications Trust, 1966, pp. 48-49.

⁴⁴ *Hindustan Standard*, Calcutta, 21 June 1942, cited in Shyamoli Ghosh: ‘Fazlul Huq and Muslim Politics in Prepartition Bengal’, *International Studies*, Vol. 13, New Delhi, 1974, p. 457.

elections of 1946, the Muslim League, basing its campaign on the All-India Muslim League demand for ‘Pakistan’, won all the six Muslim seats from Bengal in the Central Assembly, and 113 out of 121 territorial Muslim seats in the Provincial Assembly. Shila Sen has argued:

The election results also proved that in Bengal, the Pakistan movement was mass based and democratic. They reflected the aspirations of Bengali Muslims for a Muslim majority state in northern India.⁴⁵

However, Suhrawardy, who succeeded Nazimuddin as Premier in April 1946, had a vision of Bengal as an independent sovereign unit. He was supported in this project by a number of Bengali Muslim politicians such as Abul Hashim and Fazlur Rahman. Even a document was drawn up – a blueprint – for a ‘Socialist Republic in Bengal’, which implied that they had more than a ‘dominion’ status in mind for the proposed unit.⁴⁶ However, opposition came from the *Bhadralok* who, fearing a perennial domination by the Muslims of a United Bengal, preferred ‘partition’ along the lines of the ‘Radcliffe Award’.⁴⁷ On June 1947, the Council of the All-India Muslim League in New Delhi accepted a partition of Bengal as a compromise solution. East Bengal was to be separated once again from West Bengal (Partition Mark II), this time to join some provinces of northwest India to constitute Pakistan.⁴⁸

Development within the Two Communities

The communal separatism in Bengal engendered over the decades by colonial policies periodically received simultaneous impetus from certain developments within both the Hindu and Muslim communities during the colonial period. The first was a series of ‘revivalist’ movements in the latter half of the nineteenth century within each community. The whole of India was undergoing a spell of Hindu revivalism that found expression in the

⁴⁵ *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, New Delhi: Impex India, 1976, pp. 197-198.

⁴⁶ Interview with M. Masood, Director, Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, Karachi, 10 May 1978. Masood was a Private Secretary to Suhrawardy during that period.

⁴⁷ Shyama Prasad Mukherjee wrote to the Central Congress leader, Sardar Patel, ‘We demand the creation of two provinces out of the boundaries of Bengal, Pakistan or no Pakistan’. Shila Sen. *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, op. cit., p. 227.

⁴⁸ It seems for a while the fate of the *Bhadralok* stronghold, Calcutta, was in doubt. A government circular in February 1946 read, ‘The question whether Calcutta should be included in Eastern Bengal raises some very serious issues. If Calcutta is not so included, Eastern Bengal would obviously be a very poor thing, and Pakistan as a whole will be heavily unbalanced as between agriculture on the one hand, and industry, commerce and finance on the other’. Note by Pethick-Laurence, India Office, 13 February 1946, in Nicholas Mansergh (ed), *Constitutional Relations Between Pakistan and India: The Transfer of Power 1942-47*, Vol. VI, London, 1976, p. 953.

establishment of such institutions as the *Arya Samaj* in Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1875. The *Samajists* carried out *Shuddhi* (purification) and *Shanghatan* (union) programmes that naturally clashed with the proselytising work of the Muslim revivalists.⁴⁹ The conflict in Bengal would have been sharper had it not been for the fact that ‘the need of a re-examination, re-explanation and re-interpretation of the traditional religion of the people by their contact with modern European thought and culture, and the conflict between Hinduism and the evangelical Christian missions had been met by the *Brahma Samaj*’,⁵⁰ a reformist movement started by Raja Rammohan Roy.

The Muslims had revivalist movements of their own. The *Faraizi* movement had a religious component as evidenced by the *Dini* (religious) branch in their organisation, as opposed to the *Siyasi* (political) branch.⁵¹ Eventually, this orthodoxy gave way to a more liberal trend initiated in northern India by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan.⁵² In Bengal, contemporary flag bearers advocating similar lines were Nawab Abdul Latif and Sir Syed Amir Ali.⁵³ While the orthodox revivalists sought to restore Islam’s ‘lost glories’, the modernists just cited emphasised the material aspect of the competition with the Hindus. Both, however, had the same effect of acting as a catalyst to instill into the Muslim mind a sense of distinctiveness from the Hindu community.

A second development would be the rise of the *Bhadralok*, the category from whom the Muslims were, by and large, excluded. The attitude of this group towards the Muslims has been summed up by the writer Nirad C. Choudhury who, recalling his boyhood days, wrote:

In the first place, we felt a retrospective hostility toward the Muslim for his one-time domination of us, the Hindus; secondly, on the plane of thought we were utterly indifferent to the Muslims as an element in contemporary society; thirdly, we had friendliness for the Muslims of our own economic and social status with whom we came into contact; our fourth feeling was mixed, concern and contempt for the Muslim peasant whom we saw in the same light as we saw our low-caste Hindu tenants, as in other words, our livestock.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ K. P. Karunakaran, *Religion and Political Awakening in India*, Calcutta: Minakshi Prakashan, 1965, p. 99.

⁵⁰ Bipen Chandra Pal, *Memories of My Life and Times*, Calcutta: Yugantri Prashak Ltd., 1951, Vol. 2, p. 71.

⁵¹ Muin-ud-din Ahmed, op. cit., p. 195.

⁵² See his passionate appeal to the Indian Muslims in ‘In support of Western education, art and science’, Appendix F in Karunakaran, op. cit.

⁵³ S. M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*, Lahore: Sh. Mohammed Ashraf Second Edition, 1970, pp. 90-99.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Sumit Sarkar, ‘Hindu Muslim Relations in Swadeshi Bengal, 1903-1908’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 9, 1972, pp. 167-168.

A third development would be the migration of Muslims from other Indian provinces to Bengal in the latter half of the nineteenth century. They represented an extension of non- indigenous Muslim ethos into Bengal, throwing into relief certain inter-communal differences that had eroded in Bengal over centuries but were very much alive in the rest of India. One evidence of this was the sudden emergence of ‘cow sacrifice’ as a factor of dispute among the factory hands in Calcutta.⁵⁵

A fourth factor was the *Bengal Renaissance* and certain directions that it assumed.⁵⁶ It was largely expressed through literature, the luminaries being Henry Derozio, Isvar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dinabandhu Mitra, Bankim Chatterjee, Debendranath and Rabindranath Tagore. *Shahitya Shadhak Charitmala*, a list of 102 literary figures of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal, includes only one Muslim, Meer Mosharraf Hussain.⁵⁷ In the absence of Muslim participation, many of these literary works were open to criticism by the Muslims. An example was Bankim Chandra’s *Anand Math*, a pseudo-historical novel published in 1882, depicting the struggle of Hindu ‘patriots’ against Muslim ‘intruders’. In the words of a later writer, such authors ‘instilled in the minds of the Muslims, suspicion and fear that subsequent events did not eradicate’.⁵⁸ The symbols and heroes of the *Renaissance* literature were largely alien to the Muslim tradition.⁵⁹ Muslims of the day were extremely sensitive to the treatment they received in contemporary literature and endeavoured to retaliate in kind in their own, though minimal, literary activities.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, op. cit., p. 9.

⁵⁶ Susobhan Sarkar has compared Bengal’s role in the awakening of India to that of Italy in the European Renaissance. *Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays*, New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1970, p. 3. The author believes it would be more correct to compare it to the English Renaissance, which, like Bengal’s, was literary in flavour rather than the Italian counterpart, which was more focused on the fine arts and whose literary expression was only classical.

⁵⁷ Sumit Sarkar, op. cit., p. 166.

⁵⁸ T. W. Clark, ‘The Role of Bankim Chandra on the Development of Nationalism’ in C. H. Philips (ed), *Historians of India, Pakistan, Ceylon*, London: Oxford University Press, 1962, pp. 439-440.

⁵⁹ There was, for instance, adoration of heroes identified with the glories of Hindu history such as the Mahratta Chief Shivaji, who opposed the orthodox Muslim Emperor Aurangzeb. B. C. Pal wrote of Shivaji, ‘[He was] the symbol of a grand idea, the memory of a noble sentiment, the mouthpiece of a grand movement. The idea was the idea of a Hindu *Rashtra* (state) which would unite under one political bond the whole Hindu people united already by communities of tradition and scriptures’. Quoted in Nimai Sadhan Bose, *The Indian Awakening and Bengal*, Calcutta, 1969, p. 245.

⁶⁰ Ghulam Murshid, ‘Coexistence in a Plural society under Colonial Rule: Hindu-Muslim Relations in Bengal 1757-1913’, *The Journal of Bangladesh Studies*, Vol.1, Institute of Bangladesh Studies, University of Rajshahi, 1976, p. 137.

These were the various economic, social and political factors that were at the roots of the evolution of the consciousness of the Bengali Muslims as being distinct from the other major community in Bengal, the Hindus. The identity of interest that appeared to exist with their co- religionists outside Bengal in India led to an alliance, the experiment of Pakistan that flowed from the ‘partition’ (for Bengal, Mark II) of the subcontinent in 1947 which in reality was a ‘trifurcation of British India, masquerading as a bifurcation’.⁶¹

The Pakistan Experiment

After the ‘partition’ of 1947, the central problem of the East Bengalis remained constant. This was once again the translation of their demographic majority into political power, now within the framework of Pakistan. From the very outset, this proved to be a difficult task. First, there was the overriding personality of Pakistan’s Karachi-based Governor-General, Mohamed Ali Jinnah.⁶² Secondly, since the central constituent assembly comprised entirely of Muslim Leaguers, all local aspirations were subordinated to the ‘central theme of Pakistan’. Also, many of East Bengal’s representatives to the central legislature were not ‘sons of the soil, but Muslim migrants from northern India’.⁶³ Thirdly, in a ‘society heavily reliant on its permanent bureaucracy’⁶⁴ (and as was to be the case later, on its military), the East Bengalis were disadvantaged by their minimal representation in the upper reaches of the civil service’ (and the military).⁶⁵ Finally, the focal point of political power, the capital, was located in West Pakistan, first in Karachi and later in Rawalpindi, Islamabad, both over a thousand miles away from East Bengal. It was not surprising, therefore, that the honeymoon period was brief.

⁶¹ Peter Lyon ‘Bangladesh Fashioning a Foreign policy’, *South Asian Review*, (April 1972), p. 231.

⁶² A contemporary observer, Alan Campbell-Johnson, described Jinnah thus, ‘If Jinnah’s personality is cold and remote, it also has a magnetic quality. The sense of leadership is almost overpowering. He makes only the most superficial attempts to disguise himself as a constitutional Governor-General...Here indeed is Pakistan’s King-Emperor, Archbishop of Canterbury, Speaker and Prime Minister concentrated into one formidable *Quaid-e-Azam* (Father of the Nation)’ *Mission with Mountbatten*, London: Robert Hale Ltd., Reprinted 1953, p. 156.

⁶³ Sisir Gupta, ‘From Pakistan to Yahya Khan’ in Pran Chopra (ed), *The Challenge of Bangladesh*, New York: Humanities Press, Reprinted 1973, p. 21.

⁶⁴ Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Enquiry into the Poverty of Nations*, Three Volumes, Vol. 2, New York: Pantheon, 1968, p. 318. Also for an analysis of the ‘rising power of the bureaucracy’ in Pakistan, see Hamid Yusuf *Pakistan: A Study of Political Developments 1947-97*, Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1999, pp. 36-37.

⁶⁵ In 1959, out of 690 senior civil servants, only 51 were East Pakistanis. See Ramkrishna Mukherjee, ‘The Social Background of Bangladesh’ in Kathleen Gough and Hari Sharma (eds), *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973, p. 419.

The attempt to impose Urdu as the state language acted as a catalyst for East Bengali protest, in very much the same way as the ‘partition’ of Bengal in 1905 had done in *Swadeshi* Bengal, particularly among the *Bhadralok*. As the ‘Language Movement’, which demanded the recognition of ‘Bangla’ as the state language, starting from among the students, was brewing, a new party, the Awami League, was born under the aegis of Mowlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani.⁶⁶ The movement assumed significant proportions after the police opened fire on student demonstrators on 21 February 1952, creating martyrs (*Ekushey*, literally ‘twenty-first’ February has been observed as ‘language martyrs day’ ever since). It now appeared that the ‘Bengali’ component of the East Bengali Muslims was under perceived threat.

Anti-Muslim League sentiments were now running high. Meanwhile the ‘Zamindari Abolition Act’ of 1951 eliminated the feudal class in East Bengal. These developments encouraged Fazlul Huq to revive his old KPP under the new name, ‘Krishak Sramik Party’ (Peasants Workers Party), which combined with the Awami League and others, formed the *Jukto Front* (United Front) that dislodged the Muslim League from the government in the 1954 provincial elections in East Bengal. The rejection of the Muslim League in East Bengal initiated a period of conflictual relations between the provincial and central governments. Once again, East Bengali Muslims were pitted against their north-western co-religionists.

The provincial government, now representing the more indigenous urges of the East Bengalis, became suspect in the eyes of the centre. Huq’s coalition was short-lived, soon to be dismissed by the centre, ostensibly for his ‘treasonable’ views.⁶⁷ Not long afterwards, the United Front disintegrated and eventually the Awami League, which had left the Front in 1955, emerged as the party in power in East Bengal (East Pakistan since 1955). At the centre, after a period of instability, the Awami Leaguer, Suhrawardy, held the prime ministership for a period of 13 months in 1956-57.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ M. Rashiduzzaman, ‘The Awami League in the Political Development of Pakistan’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 10, No. 7, August 1970, p. 576. With the Muslim League in power, the Awami League was, therefore, the first major opposition party in East Bengal.

⁶⁷ After a closed door meeting with the Prime Minister in Karachi, Huq was said to have issued a statement that East Bengalis desired to be independent. *New York Times* 23 May 1954. Also, Huq was accused of making ‘anti-Pakistani’ remarks on a stopover in Calcutta during his travel.

⁶⁸ Around this time, Mowlana Bhashani left the Awami League in protest against the pro-western foreign policy and formed his own left-wing National Awami Party. M. Rashiduzzaman, ‘The National Awami Party of Pakistan: Leftist politics in Crisis’, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol XLIII, No. 3, Fall 1970, p. 395. Suhrawardy had justified his foreign policy on the grounds that sentiments aside ‘zero plus zero equals zero’, meaning that Muslim states were insufficient to ‘offset Indian power’. Wayne Wilcox, Leo E. Rose, David Boyd (eds), *Asia and the International System*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Winthrop Publishers, 1972, pp. 100-1001.

The Awami League, with its avowed policy of obtaining ‘autonomy’ for the regional units, was now caught between the horns of a dilemma by being in power in the centre as well.⁶⁹ It thus lay itself bare to the National Awami Party’s criticism that it had failed to give ‘autonomy’ to the provinces.⁷⁰ Provincial autonomy became the major demand of both these parties who, henceforth, vied with each other with regard to its extent.

The imposition of martial law in October 1958 and the assumption of power by General Ayub Khan had significant impact in eroding the prospects of such autonomy. If legislative politics were allowed to run their course, it was likely that the Bengalis would have been able to achieve power in the polity as Bengali Muslims had done in pre-partition Bengal. It was in the representative institutions, now dissolved in Pakistan, where the Bengalis with their majority, could wield some clout. Now, in its place, the civil-military bureaucracy clearly emerged as the dominant ruling elite. The East Pakistanis, with their limited representation in this group, were clearly disadvantaged.⁷¹

To Samuel Huntington, Ayub had come close to filling the role of “a Solon, or Lycurgus or Great Legislator on the Platonic and Rousseauan model”.⁷² Though it is indeed true that major reforms were initiated by the regime during the martial law period, there was an unequal progress in different regions, creating an “imbalance which inevitably intensified Bengali alienation”,⁷³ Ayub, in pursuance of a stated goal to take politics directly to the people, introduced a system of ‘Basic Democracy’, “the cornerstone” of his policy “which also proved to be its tombstone”.⁷⁴ By this time, there was a rising middle class in the cities, particularly in Dacca and Chittagong, the new East Pakistani *Bhadralok*, now Muslims, unlike their earlier Calcutta counterparts, in many ways a product of the partition. The involvement of the rural masses by superseding them, as Ayub appeared to be doing, did not appeal to them. In fact, eventually, it was they who led the anti-Ayub movement in East Pakistan. By limiting franchise to the ‘Basic Democrats’, who were his creation, Ayub ensured his victory in the 1962 elections.

⁶⁹ Shamoli Ghosh, *The Awami League in East Pakistan's Political Development*, New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, Unpublished M.Phil thesis, p. 16.

⁷⁰ *Pakistan Observer*, Dacca, 24 July 1957.

⁷¹ In 1956, in the Pakistan Army, among 26 Major and Lieutenant Generals, there was not a single East Pakistani. *Dawn*, Karachi, 9 January 1956.

⁷² Quoted in Laurence Ziring, *The Ayub Khan Era Politics in Pakistan 1958-59*, Syracuse University Press, 1971, pp. 1-2.

⁷³ Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration*, New York Columbia University Press, 1972, p. 6.

⁷⁴ Mushtaq Ahmed, *Politics without Social Change*, Karachi: Space Publishers, 1971, p. 48.

Throughout his term, Ayub had been in favour of reducing ‘provincialism’ to the ‘minimum’;⁷⁵ inevitably headed for a collision with the East Pakistanis. Though the 1965 war with India appeared to paper over these differences, in effect, it exacerbated them. The rising political star of East Pakistan, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (who as *Bangabandhu* or ‘Friend of Bengal’ was later to inspire the Bangladesh Liberation Movement in 1971), Suhrawardy’s successor as Awami League leader after his death in 1963, was bitterly critical of the reliance on China for East Pakistan’s defence and argued for self-sufficiency of his province in this respect.⁷⁶ Secondly, the closure of trade with India, especially West Bengal, was perceived to have been detrimental to East Pakistan’s interests, for the province was seen to have been rendered into a closed market for West Pakistani products.⁷⁷ Thirdly, West Pakistan’s sharp reaction to the ‘Tashkent Declaration’ of January 1966 that formally ended the Indo-Pakistan hostilities through Soviet mediation was not shared by the Bengalis who felt they had more to lose from the continuation of the belligerency.⁷⁸

The feeling that the East Pakistanis had a set of interests distinct from that of West Pakistan, intensified and culminated in Mujibur’s ‘Six-Point Programme’ announced in Lahore in February 1966.⁷⁹ The central government reacted by charging Mujibur with sedition, in what was known as the ‘Agartala Conspiracy Case’, and jailed him. This led to violent protests in East Pakistan. The protesters were able to secure Mujibur’s release. The events catapulted Mujibur into the position of East Pakistan’s foremost and undisputed leader.

⁷⁵ Mohammed Ahmed, *My Chief*, Lahore: Longman’s Green & Co., 1960, p. 89. Ayub’s negative predilections for East Pakistanis come through clearly in his personal diaries, published in 2007 long after his death.

⁷⁶ D. N. Bannerjee, *East Pakistan: A Case study in Muslim Politics*, Calcutta: Vikas Publications, 1969, p. 152.

⁷⁷ Most manufacturing industries were located in West Pakistan, while East Pakistan was largely agricultural. More on this later in the paper.

⁷⁸ *Holiday*, Dacca, 6 February 1966. Also *The Economist*, London, 21 May 1966.

⁷⁹ Briefly, the salient features of the ‘Six Points’ were demands for 1) a Federal Constitution and Parliamentary form of government with the supremacy of Legislature directly elected by universal adult franchise; 2) only two subjects, Defence and Foreign Affairs, to be dealt with by the centre and the residuary subjects by the provinces; 3) either two separate but freely convertible currencies for the two wings, or one currency to be maintained with effective constitutional provisions to check flight of capital from East to West Pakistan, in which case Separate Banking Reserves to be created and separate fiscal and monetary policies to be adopted for East Pakistan; 4) powers of taxation and revenue collection to vest in the federating units; 5) two separate accounts of foreign exchange earnings of the two wings, with the earnings of each wing under its control with the requirements of the centre being met either equally or in a ratio to be fixed; and 6) a militia or a para-military force for East Pakistan. See *Bangladesh Contemporary Events and Documents*, Dhaka: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, u. d., pp.16-28.

A combined movement against Ayub in both wings of Pakistan resulted in his resignation in 1969 and the assumption of his mantle by the commander-in-chief of the army, General Yahya Khan. Yahya promised elections on a ‘one-man one-vote’ and adult franchise basis to an assembly that was to frame a new constitution for Pakistan. However, he foreclosed the proposed assembly’s options by issuing a Legal Framework Order (LFO) that was to guide the constitution-making. This purported to ensure: a) Islamic ideology; b) territorial integrity; c) independence of the judiciary; d) the federal principle; and e) full opportunity of participation in government of all regions. Also, the new constitution would have to be authenticated by the President (that is, Yahya himself).⁸⁰ Clearly, now that the passage of power to the demographically superior Bengalis was almost certain, steps were being taken to preserve and protect West Pakistani interests by the entrenched interests in the centre. Mujibur’s Awami League found the LFO ‘restrictive’, but nevertheless decided to participate in the forthcoming elections announced for 1970.⁸¹

In the elections, the Awami League won 167 out of 168 East Pakistani seats in the national assembly. In West Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s Pakistan Peoples’ Party (PPP) secured 85 seats, by far the largest number in that wing. Neither party won any seats in the other wing. By the logic of parliamentary politics, Mujibur was ready to become prime minister. However, this was not to be. The demographic and political majority once again could not be translated into political power. William Barnds points out that the elections demonstrated that Pakistan was ‘two separate polities’ – on the one hand, there was Awami League in East Pakistan with its advocacy of normalising relations with India, provincial autonomy and moderate socialism; and on the other hand, there was the PPP in the west with its manifesto of extreme socialisation, a harsh anti-Indian policy, and a stronger central government.⁸²

Mujibur and Bhutto fell out on the ‘Six-Point’ issue, and taking advantage of this, Yahya postponed *sine die*, the scheduled national assembly session on 1 March 1970, thereby also indefinitely delaying Mujibur’s assumption of office as prime minister and power. This triggered off a mass movement in East Pakistan where Mujibur was in virtual control of almost all segments of public life. A well known Bengali economist, Rehman Sobhan, wrote:

Yahya’s decision on 1 March to save Bhutto’s crumbling position in the West by postponing the assembly session *sine die* brought to the surface the fear that had been

⁸⁰ Rashiduzzaman, *Awami League in the Political Development of Pakistan*, op. cit., p. 586.

⁸¹ *Bangladesh: Contemporary Events and Documents*, op. cit., p. 56.

⁸² William J. Barnds, ‘Pakistan’s Disintegration’, *World Today*, Vol. 27, 1971, p. 321.

dormant in Bengal since the successful completion of the elections that the generals never really wanted to transfer power.⁸³

Yahya initiated tripartite negotiations with Mujibur and Bhutto on 15 March 1971 which ended with the military crackdown and the arrest of Mujibur on the night following 25 March 1971.⁸⁴ The war for a sovereign Bangladesh began and a declaration of independence was made in Chittagong by Major Ziaur Rahman (later to be the President of Bangladesh in 1977, and founder of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party [BNP]). Sovereignty was achieved with Indian assistance in December that year, and the identity of Bangladesh was established as a distinct international entity.

Thus, within the structure of Pakistan, while political developments as analysed above fanned the nationalist sentiments of the Bengalis, a deep sense of economic deprivation provided added fuel. There were, first, complaints about the comparative minimal share of central government expenditure for East Pakistan. Despite comprising 56 percent of the population of Pakistan, the East's share of central development expenditure over the First Five-Year Plan period (1951-1955) was only 20 percent. There was an upward trend in the plans to follow but even during the Third-Plan Period (1965-1970) it did not exceed 36 percent with private investments being less than 25 percent.⁸⁵

Secondly, only a small percentage of the total quantum of foreign aid was disbursed in East Pakistan. For instance, the bulk of the US\$3 billion received from the United States was spent in the western wing.⁸⁶

Thirdly, East Pakistan economists pointed to a massive transfer of resources from the eastern to the western wing since the partition in 1947. One group suggested a figure of 31,120 million Rupees.⁸⁷ A. R Khan, a prominent

⁸³ Rehman Sobhan, 'Negotiations for Bangladesh: A Participant's View', *South Asian Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4, July 1971, p. 319.

⁸⁴ For details of the negotiations, see Ibid, pp. 315-326. Also, for a different view, see G. W. Choudhury, *The Last Days of United Pakistan*, London: C. Hurst & Co., 1974, pp. 161-179.

⁸⁵ *Report of the Advisory Panels for the Fourth Five Year Plan 1970-1975*, Islamabad Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan, Vol. 1, July 1970, p. 6.

⁸⁶ See M. A. Sattar, *United States Aid and Pakistan's Economic Development*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, Tufts University, 1969.

⁸⁷ *Report of the Advisory Panels for the Fourth Five Year Plan*, op. cit., p. 75. This panel was chaired by an East Pakistani economist, Professor Nurul Islam Faaland, and Parkinson however contends that this figure almost nearly represents the upper limit but nevertheless agrees that the transfer was considerable. They suggest a figure between Rs15,000 million and Rs 30,000 million, which in terms of US dollars, range from US\$1.5 billion to US\$3 billion. Just Faaland and J. R. Parkinson, *Bangladesh: A Test Case for Development* (Dacca: The University press Ltd., 1976), pp. 7-8. The figures, though not the substance, was also contested by another panel, chaired by a West Pakistani economist, Dr Pervez Hassan.

Bangladeshi economist, has argued that the rural population of East Pakistan was 'subjected to high rate of primitive capital accumulation which was transferred to finance growth of West Pakistan capitalism and industrialisation.'⁸⁸

Fourthly, there was discontent regarding what was perceived to be internal colonialism⁸⁹ perpetrated in East Pakistan by the western wing. This was seen to assume three principal forms – a) utilising East Pakistan's cash crops, mainly jute but also tea as the major foreign exchange earner and awarding that province only 25-30 percent of the total imports; b) penetration of West Pakistan-based industry into East Pakistan to exploit its raw materials and cheap labour; and c) use of East Pakistan as 'a market for the mother country's manufactures'.⁹⁰ These perceptions were not limited to the intelligentsia and the economists. It was also shared by other members of the newly-emerging East Bengali *Bhadralok*, including senior government officials.⁹¹

Partha Chatterjee has argued that "when there is a perceptible uneven development within the political boundaries of a nation state" and "the lines of division between the developed and backward regions are perceived along the lines of division of the ethno-cultural communities of nationality", the result is "the growth of separatist national movements".⁹² Michael Hechter has concluded that ethnic solidarity will be bred in groups relegated to inferior

⁸⁸ Azizur Rahman Khan, *The Economy of Bangladesh*, London: MacMillan, 1972, p. 29.

⁸⁹ This term connotes a process of domination and exploitation of one ethnic group by another within the same country. See, Zillur Rahman Khan, 'Leadership, Parties, and Politics in Bangladesh', *Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. XXIX (1976), p. 102.

⁹⁰ Feroz Ahmed, 'The Structural Matrix of the Struggle in Bangladesh', in Gough and Sharma (eds), *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*, Karachi: Monthly Review Press, 1973, p. 423.

⁹¹ The current Finance Minister of the Awami League-led Government in Bangladesh, and then senior Civil Servant, M. A. Muhith, had observed, "Through a system of tight control of trade a colonial relationship was established between the two regions. The policy of industrialization followed in West Pakistan demanded heavy import of capital goods, spares and industrial raw materials, foreign aid and export earnings of the country were utilized to meet these demands. The products of these industries were marketed in Bangladesh under heavy protective cover. The export earnings of Bangladesh and its large market were harnessed for the development of West Pakistan's industries. Even in the import of consumer goods, West Pakistan was given preferential treatment. By depressing consumption in Bangladesh and raising unduly excessive revenues from these, the claims of Bangladesh were neutralized". A. M. A. Muhith, *Bangladesh: The Emergence of a Nation*, Dacca: Bangladesh Books International Ltd., 1978, p. 90.

⁹² Partha Chatterjee, *Stability and Change in the Indian Political System*, Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, unpublished, p. 8. The eventual dismemberment of Yugoslavia in Europe in the 1990s is a good example.

cultural and economic positions.⁹³ That has been the case with the growth of the consciousness of the distinctive identity of the Bengali Muslims through the colonial period of the British Raj as well as through the Pakistan experiment, springing from a “sense of alienation...aggravated and strengthened by the awareness of economic differences but with the root in political and cultural discontinuities”.⁹⁴ As this era drew to a close, the Bengali middle classes, the emerging new *Bhadralok*, were “ready and willing to accept the newly fashioned...materially more tolerant social philosophy of a modern secular, territorial nationalism bred on, language and culture”,⁹⁵ though these values also faced challenges as the future unfolded.

Conclusion

Thus, the “justification for Bangladesh’s political independence from Pakistan and (earlier) India...was to be found in the identity of the nation-state as both Bengali and Muslim”.⁹⁶

There was, thus, this “duality of heritage”⁹⁷ that, among other things, contributed to shaping the external behaviour of Bangladesh. Historically then, what is now the Bangladesh nation evolved through its having to deal with the West Bengali Hindu community, now a part of India, and their fellow Muslims in the rest of South Asia, most of the latter eventually assuming the form of Pakistan. It had taken three ‘partitions’ to reach this point – ‘Partition Mark I’ in 1905 when East Bengal was hived off from Bengal and connected to Assam; ‘Partition Mark II’ in 1947 when East Bengal was once again separated from West Bengal, this time to create Pakistan; and finally ‘Partition Mark III’ when East Bengal or East Pakistan was bifurcated from West Pakistan, leading to the birth of a sovereign and independent state, Bangladesh.

After experience had indicated a distinct set of interests for Bengali Muslims, their basic strategy in countering threat perceptions from one

⁹³ Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966*, London Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, passim.

⁹⁴ W. H. Morris-Jones, ‘Pakistan Post-Mortem and the Roots of Bangladesh’, *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1972, p. 192.

⁹⁵ Mizanur Rahman, *Emergence of a New Nation in a Multi-Polar World: Bangladesh*, Durham, North Carolina: University Press of America, 1978, p. 132.

⁹⁶ Naureen Chowdhury Fink, *On the Borderlines: Politics, Religion and Violence in Bangladesh*, New York: International Peace Academy, 2009, forthcoming, p. 1.

⁹⁷ Ali Riaz, “God Willing”: The Politics and Ideology of Islamism in Bangladesh, Project Muse, Chicago: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 23: 1 & 2, 2003, p. 2.

community was to seek an alliance with the other. The perceived threats were seen to be to one or the other of their attributes – to their *Bengaliness* or to their *Muslimness*. These two streams of their nationhood found political expression in the two political parties that currently dominate the national scene – the Awami League, led by the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, assassinated in 1975, Sheikh Hasina, which emphasises the former ethos, and the BNP, led by Begum Khaleda Zia, the widow of President Ziaur Rahman, assassinated in 1981.

Despite the fact that the relationship between the two ladies, who have alternated in leading the government remains volatile to say the least, the ideological divide is perhaps more in nuances than in substance. It is difficult to place the contemporary Bangladeshi “in rigidly separate boxes, linked with religion or community”.⁹⁸ Thanks to a Socratic or an argumentative intellectual tradition that often delights in challenging received wisdom, developed through decades of having to protect its flanks, the average Bangladeshi tends to be moderate and tolerant, though extremist fringes are not non-existent. The political presence of far-right non-secular elements such as the *Jamaat-e-Islami* was reduced to minimal in the elections of December 2007 when it managed to secure only two seats in the Parliament.

Importantly, Bangladesh is now a ‘sated’ or ‘satisfied’ nation, secure in the knowledge that neither of its two attributes of *Muslimness* or *Bengaliness* is being seriously threatened by external actors or elements, given the country’s sovereign status. It is, therefore, well poised to play a constructive role as a bridge-builder in regional politics as it did when it initiated the concept of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in the late 1970s.⁹⁹ This has been the major impact of its historical experience on Bangladesh’s state behaviour. Not surprisingly, it has an extremely vibrant civil society which has given birth to concepts such as ‘micro-credit’ and ‘non-formal education’ for women that are being widely replicated in many parts of the world. Indeed, there was great national jubilation when, in 2006, Professor Mohammed Yunus and his ‘Grameen Bank’ received the Nobel Peace Prize, for somehow they were also seen to be representing ‘essential Bangladesh values’ associated with

⁹⁸ For an interesting study of multi-dimensional identities, see a report by a Committee chaired by Amartya Sen, *Civil Paths to Peace: Report of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding*, London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2007.

⁹⁹ For an insight into Bangladesh’s behaviour pattern in South Asia, see Iftekhhar A. Chowdhury, ‘Strategy of a Small Power in A Sub-System: Bangladesh’s External Relations, *Australian Outlook*, April 1980, Vol. 34., No.1, pp. 85-98.

social advancement and poverty alleviation. It is also well recognised that ‘female empowerment is a reality in Bangladesh’.¹⁰⁰ These features of Bangladesh, that have helped it secure a modicum of societal stability, are its assets. However, the challenges to this nation of 150 million people with a per capita income of US\$690,¹⁰¹ in terms of poverty and underdevelopment, are also legion. The manner in which these are tackled by its leadership and people will determine and define Bangladesh’s role in rising Asia.

¹⁰⁰ Farooq Sobhan, ‘Bangladesh: The Present Situation and Future Outlook,’ in Tan Tai Yong (ed), *Socio- Political and Economic Challenges in South Asia*, Singapore: SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd, 2009, p. 97. Women in Bangladesh are the main beneficiaries of micro-credit and ‘non-formal education’ schemes. Also Bangladesh is a major producer of ready-made garments, and this industry and other NGOs non-government organisations) employ more than 14 million women.

¹⁰¹ *The Daily Star*, 11 May 2009.

The Bengal Partition and Identity Politics: *A Ghoti* View* *Asad-ul Iqbal Latif***

Abstract

Over the decades, the panorama of bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and India has seen a number of ups and downs. Issues like water sharing, border dispute, exchange of enclaves, transnational terrorism, illegal migration, human and drug smuggling etc. have played a vital role to characterize this relationship. Despite all these issues and perspectives, there is also a constant identity politics between West Bengal and Bangladesh, since before the second half of twentieth century, Bengal was not even an organic whole that could give rise to the sense of being an imagined nation. However, with the escalation of a broader Bengali identity through an extensive sharing of cultural aspects between the two sides of Bengal, the continuation of a peaceful and prospective relationship between these countries could be ensured. Culturally, with a particular focus on the literary contributions, there are already a number of remarkable examples made by the Bengali novelists, scholars and activists which have not only strengthen the broader Bengali identity but also contributed as pioneers of a peaceful bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and India.

* The word ‘Ghoti’ refers to a social group native to West Bengal, India. The families who came from East Bengal are called ‘Bangals’ whereas the families originated in West Bengal are termed ‘Ghotis’. During and after the Partition of Bengal in 1947, the term came into greater use due to migration of many people from then East Bengal and later East Pakistan to West Bengal. Now, people living in Districts like Hooghly, Howrah, Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, Burdwan, Bankura, Birbhum, etc are called ‘Ghoti’.

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Preface

Several sources of discord mar relations between Bangladesh and India. They include long-standing Bangladeshi complaints over their share of Ganga waters, and the related issue of India's construction and operation of the Farakka Barrage; Bangladeshi dissatisfaction over the indefinite nature of the Indian lease covering the corridor between the Teen Bigha enclave and mainland Bangladesh; Indian complaints over cross-border terrorist activities originating in Bangladesh; Indian allegations that Dhaka grants asylum, and even provides training camps, to wanted secessionists from India's Northeast; Bangladeshi anger over India's response to illegal immigration, which led it to fence off a substantial part of its border with Bangladesh; continuing smuggling across that border, with each side blaming the other; human smuggling of women and girls from Bangladesh into India; and the actions of India's Border Security Force, accused of firing on innocent Bangladeshi civilians, and likewise of Bangladesh Rifles *vis-à-vis* Indian citizens, which have flared occasionally into large-scale exchange of fire between the two border forces. There is also the spectre of involvement in each other's internal affairs in alleged pursuit of revisionist and expansionist agendas or to destabilise politics.

Bangladeshi fears of Indian hegemony are reciprocated by Indian wariness over Bangladesh's relations with China and Pakistan, which India sees as attempts to circumvent and hence constrain its legitimate freedom of action in the region. The scholar-diplomat Iftekhhar Ahmed Chowdhury notes there are three ways in which India's neighbours seek to come to terms with its power. One way is to keep close to it in order to preserve their sovereignty, Bhutan and the Maldives being possible examples. The opposite way is for a state to make it as difficult as possible for India to overcome it militarily: Pakistan's nuclear deterrent is the obvious example. The third way is to live in concord with India but to live distinct from it. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal have chosen this path.¹

Differences between Dhaka and New Delhi are reflected in the state of ties between Bangladesh and West Bengal, which are far from being as warm as relation between the two parts of Bengal should be. A cold truce prevails between the two wings of Bengal, which are frozen in the legacy of three Partitions of the sub-continent. Indeed, Bengal's borders were redrawn no less than five times in the century before the Partition of 1947. In 1835, the North-Western Provinces were taken out of the Presidency of Bengal, and Arakan became a part of Burma. In 1874, nine districts in the east were split off from Bengal to form the province of Assam. In 1892, two more districts in the

¹ Iftekhhar Ahmed Chowdhury, "How neighbours see the elephant", *Straits Times*, Singapore, 29 May 2009.

southeast, Chittagong and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, were transferred from Bengal to Assam.

In 1905, of course, Curzon's Partition involved a gigantic excision of all the eastern districts of Bengal to create the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. When that division was revoked in 1911, Bihar and Orissa were removed from the province. Finally, Bengal's new frontiers remained untouched for only three-and-a-half decades before the Partition of 1947. Bengal was not an organic whole that could give rise to the sense of being an imagined nation. Even in the 19th century, Bengali intellectuals had only the vaguest idea of the territorial reach of their ideal *desh*, or homeland, and of the social groups that it might include. Indeed, even though Curzon's Partition engendered solidarity of Hindu sentiment, Joya Chatterjee finds it debatable whether a Bengali national identity emerged from the anti-Partition campaign.² She does not subscribe to the thesis that the Partition of 1947 destroyed any natural unity or intrinsic nationhood in Bengal.

Partitions

*But in seven weeks it was done, the frontiers decided,
A continent for better or worse divided.*

– W. H. Auden, *Partition*

The emergence of a sovereign and independent Bangladesh marked the culmination of three immediate Partitions – of Bengal in 1905, of India in 1947 and of Pakistan in 1971. The Indian state of West Bengal is the repository of the first two acts of separation. For the conceivable future, the political division of

² Ajit Kumar Neogy, *Partitions of Bengal* (Calcutta: A. Mukherjee & Co., 1987), cited in Joya Chatterjee, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 4-5. Chatterjee's seminal work, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), contributed to the revisionist turn that is transforming the study of South Asian history. Ayesha Jalal inhabits a key moment in that transformation in *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, The Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For a sensitive reading of the interplay of religions and religious symbols in the cultural identities of Hindu and Muslim nationalists, among both masses and elites, see Sugata Bose, "Between Monolith and Fragment: A Note on Historiography of Nationalism in Bengal", in Sekhar Bandyopadhyaya (ed.), *Bengal: Rethinking History. Essays in Historiography* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001). Rajeev Bhargava, "History, Nation and Community: Reflections on Nationalist Historiography of India and Pakistan", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 35, No.4, 22 January 2000, pp. 193-200, studies the lack of political imagination in the failure to prevent Partition. See also Partha Chatterjee, "The Second Partition of Bengal" in *The Present History of West Bengal: Essays in Political Criticism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997). Shashi Joshi, *The Last Durbar: A Dramatic Presentation of the Division of British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) wonderfully captures the mood of the moment.

historical Bengal appears durable. Although the Partition of 1905 was annulled in 1911, the forces that had set it in motion – primarily, Bengali Muslims’ quest for a separate identity – culminated irreversibly in 1971, when the Bengali Muslim majority of Bangladesh registered the state’s linguistic and religious identity in distinction to both Urdu-dominant Pakistan and Hindu-majority India. Given the agency of religion in the partitions of 1905 and 1911 and that of language in the partition of 1971, the national arrangement achieved in 1971 represented the best of all possible worlds for most Bangladeshis: the combination of linguistic and religious security in a state of their own.

Bangladesh is a sated or satisfied nation, “secure in the knowledge that neither of its two attributes of *Bengaliness* or *Muslimness* is being seriously threatened by external actors or elements, given the country’s sovereign status,” Chowdhury writes.³ Notwithstanding centrifugal tendencies, notably in the suppressed secessionism of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, intra-national loyalties have easily superseded extra-territorial allegiances among most Bangladeshis. This superseding has contributed immeasurably to the ontological security of the Bangladeshi state. In West Bengal, too, the *status quo* has held. Its Bengali majority is comfortable, on the whole, with its identity as Indian. The demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland, to be carved out of West Bengal but remaining in India, does incense Bengali feelings. However, even if the demand were successful, it would not alter West Bengal’s sense of belonging to India

Where Bangladeshis are concerned, West Bengali sentiments inherent in an endearing relationship between *Epaar Bangla* and *Opaar Bangla* pay but only symbolic homage to a departed past rather than express a lived reality today. The longing for *Opaar Bangla* is strongest among refugees who fled East Bengal/East Pakistan for *Epaar Bangla* in India in 1947 and thereafter. By contrast, few Bengalis migrated to East Pakistan; the bulk of refugees there were drawn from Bihari and other communities that had not been particularly attached to West Bengal. Following the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, a self-confident Bengali elite emerged and consolidated itself in the country. The members of this political, economic and cultural elite carried neither the baggage of cultural inferiority and economic insecurity that had scarred the lives of Bengali Muslims in undivided Bengal before 1947, nor the cultural and economic burden under which Bengali Muslims had laboured *vis-à-vis* Punjabi and other communities in the Pakistan period. What 1971 had done was to mark a decisive break with a history of two cultural subjugations: one on account of religion-based culture, and the other on account of language-based culture. The self-confidence of Bangladeshis makes it unnecessary for them to

³ Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, “The Roots of Bangladeshi National Identity: Their Impact on State Behaviour”, Institute of South Asian Studies, Singapore, ISAS Working Paper 63, 10 June 2009, p. 17.

seek cultural strength in links with West Bengal. Bangladesh does not see West Bengal as in any sense completing it culturally.⁴ This is an attitude that many Bengalis in West Bengal reciprocate fully.

The difference between the two parts of Bengal is clear in their divergent approaches to the Partition of India in 1947. To some Bangladeshis, the break-up of Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh in 1971 repudiated the two-nation theory on which Pakistan had come into being. Mijarul Qayes argues that the emergence of Bangladesh negated the *de jure* rationale for the formation of Pakistan itself, although rump Pakistan in 1971 continued to inherit, *de facto*, the *raison d’être* of 1947.

Pakistan was created with the partition of British India on the premise that the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent constituted a distinct nation vis-à-vis the rest of the population. Geographical regions within the subcontinent were identified on the basis of Muslim majority to create a notional cognitive region, sans nation formation, sans a ‘national’ consciousness and sans a ‘national’ memory.⁵

That experiment in state-making did not last long. Quayes notes that “although the state persona of the Pakistan state, created on 14 August 1947 continues *de jure* in today’s Pakistan, it was effectively dissolved when the majority in that state (the Bengalis) chose to create a Bengali republic on ethos antithetical to the two-nation theory”.⁶ He points out that the “trauma of the Partition, especially in terms of mass movement and relocation of large population groups notwithstanding, today’s India is home to a larger Muslim population than Islamic Pakistan or Muslim majority secular Bangladesh”.⁷

However, it is equally true that Bangladesh’s statehood would have been inconceivable without the earlier Partition of India – or at least the Lahore Resolution of 1940 that revealed the Muslim League’s blueprint for Partition. Chowdhury argues that the emergence of Bangladesh attested to the “second and final phase of the realization” of the Lahore Resolution of 1940, which spoke of Muslim-majority areas in Northwestern and Eastern India being grouped to constitute *independent* states in which the constituent units would be *autonomous* and *sovereign*. The formation of Pakistan in 1947 as a single, independent state went against the idea of separate states envisaged in the Lahore Resolution. The appearance of Bangladesh in 1971 reflected the sub-continental diversities recognised in the Resolution that were papered over in

⁴ Conversation with a Bangladeshi scholar in Singapore, mid-2009.

⁵ Mijarul Quayes, “The Westphalian State in South Asia and Future Directions”, in Navnita Chadha Behera (ed.), *International Relations in South Asia: Search for an Alternative Paradigm* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008), p. 131.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

the creation of Pakistan.⁸ Bangladesh, via the detour of Pakistan, fulfilled the sub-continental destiny presaged in the Lahore Declaration.

These facts of history pit the patriotic Bangladeshi squarely against the overwhelming nature of public opinion, in West Bengal as in the rest of India, that the Partition of 1947 – demanded in the Lahore Resolution, no matter that it spoke of “states” and not a state of Pakistan – was a calamity visited on India. This point of departure in 1947 – between India and Pakistan – and a further point of departure in 1971 – between Pakistan and Bangladesh – collectively debunk the two-nation theory, but they do not necessarily affirm a one-nation theory. To that extent, and a significant extent it is, 1947 remains a fundamental point of contention between Bangladeshis, no matter how anti-Pakistan they are, and Indians, no matter how pro-Bangladesh they might be.

The weight of history, inherited from 1905, revisited in 1947 and reaffirmed in 1971, bears down on the *bangal* of East Bengal and the *ghoti* of West Bengal as they view each other across the Indo-Bangladesh border that divides historical Bengal.⁹

The past, indeed, is another country. Bangladesh is a nation ensconced confidently within the coterminous borders of the eponymous state; although West Bengal’s name invokes the eastern half of historical Bengal, this is a valediction, as much as it is an invocation, to something that is acknowledged to have departed permanently. The Bengalis of West Bengal are free to preserve their sub-national identity within the capacious boundaries of the Indian state. The Muslim majority of Bangladesh is too firm in its Muslim identity for the Hindu majority of West Bengal to consider the creation of a united Bangla state in which Muslims will form the national majority. Indeed, a renewed emphasis on the religious identity of Bangladesh’s Muslims was apparent as early as 1975, when Bengali nationalism was replaced by Bangladeshi nationalism. The *raison d’être* of Bangladesh’s struggle for independence had lain in the growth of Bengali nationalism, an ethno-linguistic consciousness that had led to the

⁸ Iftekhhar Ahmed Chowdhury, “The Roots of Bangladeshi National Identity”, op cit, p. 8. Arguably, the Lahore Resolution envisaged a union of the two independent states in the Northeastern and Eastern zones, evident in its use of the word “grouped” to describe their relationship. The phrase “grouped together” was adopted at the Muslim League’s annual session in Madras in 1941, making the unitary intent behind Pakistan clearer. However, both still spoke of independent states. It was a resolution passed at the Muslim League Legislators’ Convention in April 1946 that clarified that the term “Pakistan” in the Lahore Resolution meant the creation of a single sovereign state and did not imply the formation of two independent states. See Khalid bin Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857-1948* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 1968), pp. 116-7.

⁹ For a masterly analysis of the local realities of cross-border relations, see Willem van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia* (London: Anthem Press, 2005).

Language Movement. The brutal suppression of that movement on 22 February 1952 had turned a linguistic demand into a political struggle for autonomy, which, suppressed in turn, had led to a full-fledged war of independence in 1971.

True, Bengali nationalism had been problematic because of the limitations inherent in its character as an example of ethnic nationalism, which rests on the accident of ethnicity: It had excluded by definition non-Bengalis such as Bihari Muslims. However, Bangladeshi nationalism, too, faced problems. In spite of its efforts to include non-Bengalis, it hardly amounted to being a form civic nationalism, a higher order of nationalism than the ethnic variety and one which rests on the conscious exercise of the rights and duties of citizenship centred on allegiance to the state and its institutions. Bangladeshi nationalism veered towards religion even as it tried to play down Bengalianness. The deletion from the Constitution of secularism, another defining characteristic, along with language, of the Bangladeshi state at its inception, reinforced the Islamic turn in the national imagination. Although Bangladesh is not an Islamic state – it is a People’s Republic whose state religion is Islam – 1975 marked a beak with 1971.

Problematically, Bangladeshi nationalism held the possibility of marginalizing religious minorities, although that was not its stated aim. “At the time of its inauguration, Bangladeshi nationalism had two objectives: to incorporate all Bangladeshi citizens, whether Bengali or not, under one national identity; [and] to articulate a new Bengali identity that was distinct from the identity of Bengalis living in West Bengal in India,” Lamia Karim writes,

Unfortunately, Bangladeshi nationalism paved the way for a hyper Islam-identified nationalism and became a tool in the nation-making project of the military dictators. It also led to the political disenfranchisement of citizens who were not Bengali or Muslim (the Adivasis and Hindus for example), thereby, raising a whole set of questions about the nature of the Bangladeshi state and the rights of ethnic and religious minorities.¹⁰

The nascent years of Bangladesh reaffirmed the truth of 1947, that a fundamental parting of ways had occurred between the religious majorities of *Epaar Bangla* and *Opaar Bangla* no matter how closely they were tied by that other motif of Bengali identity: language. That rupture remains the case today. Indeed, even language has not necessarily been a source of solidarity for the two parts of Bengal. Speaking on the *Ekushey* Movement in 2004, Enayetullah Khan asked, if a little rhetorically, why West Bengal had not undergone a

¹⁰ Lamia Karim, “In Search on an Identity: The Rise of Political Islam and Bangladeshi Nationalism”, Asian Nationalisms Project, <http://web.uvic.ca/~anp/Public/abstrcts01/Karim.html>

similar upheaval. His answer was that history “had invested a distinct badge of identity” in eastern Bengal.¹¹ He made an important point, although it must be added that West Bengal did not experience an *Ekushey* because Bengali had not been suppressed there, as it had been in East Bengal.

Kazi Nazrul Islam was not turned into *persona non grata* in West Bengal because of his Muslim name, in the way that Rabindranath Tagore had been in East Bengal because of his Hindu name. Even today, the linguistic and economic encroachment of Hindi into West Bengal notwithstanding, it is possible for a West Bengali to take pride in her cultural heritage without being branded anti-Indian. There is not in West Bengal the kind of internal cultural colonisation that provoked *Ekushey* in East Bengal. True, Bengali speakers number only 51 per cent in the Kolkata metropolitan district; they account for only 40 per cent in the old municipal area (against 63 per cent in 1961). Also, while 22 per cent of the city’s population are migrants from other Indian states, only 12 per cent are drawn from other parts of West Bengal.¹²

However, as Partha Chatterjee notes in *The Politics of the Governed*, West Bengal’s political leadership has begun to “assert a new Bengali-ness, beginning with changing by law the English and Hindustani names of Calcutta to Kolkata and threatening to enforce several other measures to reinscribe the cultural dominance of the Bengali middle class over a city that it has physically abandoned”.¹³ In any case, West Bengal’s redoubtable *bhadralok* class proclaims its cultural identity indirectly by speaking some of the most awful Hindi imaginable. No doubt, speaking Hindi badly represents a lack of linguistic ability, but it may also reflect a deliberate attempt to circumscribe the patriarchal influence of the national language in favour of the mother-tongue. If the latter, bad Hindi might well be among the “weapons of the weak” available in the Bengali *babu*’s armoury of cultural subterfuge. That said, thanks to the pan-Indian sweep of popular media such as Zee Television, young Bengalis in West Bengal have jettisoned the linguistic defensiveness of their elders and are speaking much better Hindi than they did. They can also speak good Bengali.

All in all, Hanne-Ruth Thompson encapsulates the state of play between Bangladesh and West Bengal rather well when she writes:

Bangladeshis present themselves with enthusiasm as from a young, proud, up-and-coming nation, West Bengalis with an easy sense of age-old superiority as being from India, the real thing. Bengalis from Bangladesh and West Bengal will communicate

¹¹ “Bangla the core of our national identity”, *Banglamusic.com*, <http://banglamusic.com/articles/ekushey/bangla-the-core-of-our-national-identity-455.html>

¹² Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p.145.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

and even form friendships when they are far from home, but on their home ground they see themselves as competitors (Bangladesh) or as superiors (West Bengalis).¹⁴

The border between *Epaar Bangla* and *Opaar Bangla* runs through the self-perceptions that mould – and mar – both sides.

More Partitions?

All this suggests that that the acts of national imagination that shape Bengal have been consummated forever in the states of Bangladesh and India. However, identities, including those of the ethnic kind, are not fixed: Unlike the borders that demarcate states and contain nations (real or putative), identities are situational. Ayesha Jalal and Anil Seal remark that

Since time immemorial, a great deal of Indian political life was organized in ways which cut across community, so that political choices, particularly in the localities, were determined by solidarities and interests other than those of a specifically religious sort... The communities which the British were supposed to have divided and ruled were at least in part the invention of the rulers.¹⁵

In the same vein, Hamza Alavi notes that the Bengali Muslim identity in East Bengal did not evolve independently of the way in which the balance of political forces worked out in the fateful months leading up to the Partition of 1947. Had the Indian National Congress accepted the United Independent Bengal plan to which the Bengal Muslim League and the Bengal Congress had agreed as late as in May 1947, August that year might have told a different tale. “With shifts in interests or circumstances, ethnic realignments take place and identities change.”¹⁶ Leonard Gordon reinforces that point in his essay, “Divided Bengal: Problems of Nationalism and Identity in the 1947 Partition”, where he dwells at length on thwarted efforts by Sarat Chandra Bose of the Bengal Congress and A.K. Fazlul Huq of the Krishak Praja Party to forge a Hindu-Muslim alliance in Bengal that could have prevented the province’s partition. Writing after the independence of Bangladesh, Gordon argues that,

¹⁴ Hanne-Ruth Thompson, “Bangladesh”, in Andrew Simpson (ed.), *Language and National Identity in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 51.

¹⁵ Ayesha Jalal and Anil Seal, “Alternative to Partition: Muslim Politics Between the Wars”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, July 1981, p. 416. Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal Since 1770*, The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. 3.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), provides a grand overview of the political economy of the political economy in which questions of class and community came to the fore. See also Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 165-89

¹⁶ Hamza Alavi, “Politics of Ethnicity in India and Pakistan”, in Hamza Alavi and John Harriss (eds.), *Sociology of “Developing Societies”: South Asia* (London, Macmillan, 1989), pp. 224-5. See also Hamza Alavi, “Misreading Partition Road Signs”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, Nos. 44-55, 2-9 November 2002, pp. 4515-23.

..the division of Pakistan has suggested anew that national and ethnic identities are not fixed essences. Men may make one choice in a period of crisis and other choices at another time... Some Bengalis – meaning for the moment those living in the Bengal Presidency as it existed from 1912 to 1947, who spoke Bengali and participated in the economy of Bengal – who were pushed in a time of crisis to identify with one political community having a particular national design, demanded new choices in later circumstances”.¹⁷

He concludes: “All Bengalis, then, whether Hindu or Muslim, whether in Bangladesh or in India, have multiple identities. At different moments, especially 1947 and 1971, members of both communities have had to make choices about their primary identifications and their nationalities.”¹⁸ Problematically, neither the establishment of Pakistan nor the establishment of Bangladesh resolved problems of community and identity for Bengalis on both sides of the international border. What these new states did was to internationalise the problem.¹⁹

Recent developments bear out Gordon’s assertion. Clearly, so close is the compact achieved between nation and state in Bangladesh that some of its citizens are aghast at the very notion of the reunification of Bengal, no matter how removed that idea is from empirical reality. They see in the very notion the imperial hand of an India that is bent on recreating the political contours of the British Raj.²⁰ However, occasional eruptions across the border, although emerging from gratuitous acts of fantasy more than anything else, feed their paranoia. For example, a news report from Kolkata in February 2003, on a so-

¹⁷ Leonard A. Gordon, “Divided Bengal: Problems of Nationalism and Identity in the 1947 Partition”, *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 2, July 1978, p. 136.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 160.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 159. See also T.N. Madan, “Two Faces of Bengali Ethnicity: Muslim Bengali or Bengali Muslim”, in *Pathways: Approaches to the Study of Society in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

²⁰ For a sampling of such views, see Mohammad Zainal Abedin, “Bengal reunification movement: A new game to delete Bangladesh”, *News From Bangladesh*, 13 March 2008, <http://www.bangladesh-web.com/preview.php?hidDate=2009-05-26&hidType=&hidRecord=0000000000000000191002>; Khodeza Begum, “Indian move to establish United India through United Bengal”, <http://www.globalpolitician.com/print.asp?id=1944>; Mohammad Zainal Abedin, “RAW-1: India’s Attack on Bangladeshi Culture, Ideology and Existence”, <http://www.globalpolitician.com/print.asp?id=1382>; and Mohammad Zainal Abedin, “RAW-3: Nationalism – Bangladeshi and Bengali”, <http://www.globalpolitician.com/print.asp?id=1392>. Conspiracy theories have become a political genre in South Asia. The degree of complicity and success they accord to RAW, India’s external intelligence wing, in real or presumed attempts to change the character of Bangladesh is astonishing. Likewise for the almost magical attributes ascribed to Pakistan’s ISI in the affairs of India’s Northeastern states, particularly Assam, and Bangladesh, whose own DGDI appears to be entering espionage’s hall of fame *via* Assam.

called Provisional Government of the Hindu Republic of Bir Banga, said that a provisional Hindu republic had been established in Bangladesh six months earlier to form a “Hindu Republic of Bir Banga” with its capital at Shaktigarh, in the Chittagong hills. A “supreme revolutionary council” and a 17-member “interim government in exile” had been formed to launch an armed struggle, partition Bangladesh, and form the Hindu republic, which would comprise almost the entire southern half of the country. “Following the example of the persecuted Tibetan refugees sheltered at Dharamsala in India, forming their own government in exile, we too have begun this noble initial process,” the provisional government declared. “We do hereby declare ourselves as a separate independent Hindu nation. Our share of land will comprise territories south of rivers Padma, Meghna and Teetash.” Interestingly, the right-wing Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) lauded the effort. Its international secretary-general, Praveen Togadia, had said during a visit to Kolkata that it favoured a partition of Bangladesh and the creation of a homeland for persecuted minorities there as well as those living in exile in India.²¹ It is important to note, though, that although the VHP is a part of the Sangh Parivar that was influential in the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government at the Centre then, New Delhi did not adopt the VHP’s position on dismembering Bangladesh.

Also known as the Bangabhumi movement, the idea of Bir Banga was floated in 1973 in protest against the Pakistani army’s brutal targeting of Hindus in Bengal’s eastern wing the war of independence for Bangladesh. The movement re-emerged in 2003 as a consequence of concerted attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi government is concerned also over the activities of at least five separatist groups: the Banga Sena, Bir Banga Hindu Prajatantra, the Bangladesh Udbastu Unnayan Parishad, the Bangladesh Udbastu Mancha, and the Bir Banga Sena. Dhaka accuses these groups of causing communal tension in southwestern Bangladesh.²²

Bir Banga cuts both ways. India-sceptic Bangladeshis taunt West Bengalis who are genuinely keen on reuniting Bengal to break away from India and join Bangladesh. Such offers are declined in telling silence. Instead, Indians are troubled by alleged attempts by “utopian fundamentalist Islamic agencies” to carve an Islamic state out of Northeast India and assimilate it into Bangladesh to form a “Greater Bangladesh” or “Brihot Bangladesh” or “Bangistan”.²³ Indian accusations of large-scale and sustained illegal Bangladeshi migration into Assam were based on fears that the illegal Muslim settlers – avowedly encouraged by Bangladesh, if not actually forced, to move into Assam – were part of a conspiracy to change the state’s demographic profile in order to favour

²¹ Alope Banerjee, “Hindu republic ‘born’ in Bangladesh”, *Times of India*, 4 February 2003.

²² See Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangabhumi>

²³ “The Greater Bangladesh Dream”, <http://islamicterrorism.wordpress.com/2008/05/26/the-greater-bangladesh-dream/>

Assamese Muslims desirous of joining Dhaka in a loose political confederation. Disquiet over immigration became a major political and electoral issue in Assam, among the northeastern Indian states to be wracked by a long-running and brutal separatist movement that has been met by harsh counter-insurgency measures. Bangladeshis see in the Indian accusation a plot to discredit the spread of Muslim sentiment within Bangladesh by holding the country responsible for growing insecurity in India's sensitive northeastern border region. Criticising India for its "paranoia" over the concept of Brihot Bangladesh, one Bangladeshi asserts that the concept was invented by Indian intelligence and has "virtually no basis within Bangladesh".²⁴

Whether in the form of Bir Banga or in that of Brihot Bangladesh, Bengal mocks Bengalis, if only as reification – as the fallacy of treating an abstraction as if it were something real. But Bengal could not have been reified without a reason. That reason is that there was a Bengal that once existed, that was lost, and that lives on in the very memory of its absence.

Seeking Bengal

To see the integrity of Bengal, it is necessary to first un-see its division. To un-see the absence of Bengal is to imbibe that habit of dialectical thinking that Walter Benjamin describes elegantly in his essay on his visit to Moscow. "In Russia above all, you can only see if you have already decided... Only he who, by decision, has made his dialectical peace with the world can grasp the concrete. But someone who wishes to decide 'on the basis of facts' will find no basis in the facts."²⁵ The reason for making this dialectical peace is that "every step one takes here is on named ground".²⁶

Bengal is named ground. Only he who has made his dialectical peace with Bengal can walk on that ground. Only he can grasp the concrete ability of Bengal to exist in spite of the differences that run through its history. Unfortunately, few Bengalis walk on the named ground of Bengal: Their constitutionals are limited to safely indulgent sojourns on their sides of the border. The irony is that it is the refugee, ejected by one side and rejected by the other, who straddles the two parts of Bengal in the restless wanderings of his mind across the man-made border. Conceived in the violence of Partition and born in the soil- and soul-churning transfer of populations, the refugee is the true child of Bengal. Bengal takes refuge in him.

²⁴ M.B. I. Munshi, "Politics Over Dead Bodies – A Result of India's Fear of a 'Brihot Bangladesh'?", http://www.sonarbangladesh.com/Brihot_Bangladesh.htm. Munshi is the author of *The India Doctrine 1947-2007* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Research Forum, 2007).

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), pp. 97-8.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 99.

While much work has been done on Partition and its aftermath in Punjab, it is only lately that scholarly attention has focused on Bengal as well.²⁷ After all, from 1947 to 1967, at least six million Hindu refugees crossed over from East Bengal to West Bengal.²⁸ Once the object of responses ranging from pity through indifference to annoyance and ridicule, the East Bengali refugee in West Bengal has come into his own as an historical subject. Today, he represents the resilience *Epaar Bangla* in *Opaar Bangla*, the permanence of Bengal's East in the imagination of Bengal's West. Likewise, West Bengal has a permanent presence in the Bangladeshi imagination.

The East in the West: The Udvastu

*Yet we have gone on living,
Living and partly living.*

– T.S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*

In *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, Gyandendra Pandey distinguishes among the three partitions of 1947: the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan; the partition of Punjab and Bengal; and the slaughter, the rape and the involuntary migrations that constituted the physical partition. He investigates the interplay of history and memory, how populations and their pasts are nationalised, and how violent events are reconfigured to ensure the collective unity of communities and nations at the expense of the human subject and her suffering.²⁹ In the same vein, Mushirul Hasan declares that, without "being swayed by the paradigms set by the two-nation theory or the rhetoric of Indian nationalism, it is important to examine why most people, who had so much in common and had lived together for generations, could turn against their neighbors, friends and members of the same caste and class within hours and days... Such an exercise can be undertaken without calling into question the legitimacy of one or the other varieties of nationalisms".³⁰

The literature on Partition, both scholarly and creative, reveals the human dimension of lives lost, destroyed or displaced, thus broadening the focus of attention beyond who did (or did not do) what in chancelleries and corridors of power to the millions who paid the price for those patrician decisions.³¹ Ritwik Ghatak immortalised this aspect of Partition in his films, particularly

²⁷ See Ananya Jahanara Kabir, "The Necessity of Anti-Sentimentalism", *Countercurrents*, 23 July 2003, <http://www.countercurrents.org/arts-kabir230703.htm>

²⁸ Joya Chatterjee, *The Spoils of Partition*, op cit, p. 2.

²⁹ Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³⁰ Mushirul Hasan, "Memories of a Fragmented Nation: Rewriting the Histories of India's Partition", p. 271; p. 272.

the trilogy, *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), *Komal Gandhar* (1961) and *Subarnarekha* (1962). He insisted that he was not speaking of Bengal's political re-unification because history could not be altered, but that he refused defiantly to be reconciled to the cultural segregation caused by political and economic separation. "Being a Bengali from East Bengal, I have seen the untold miseries inflicted on my people in the name of independence – which is a fake and a sham. I have reacted violently towards this and I have tried to portray different aspects of this [in my films]."³²

The figure of the refugee is central to this larger story. Bearing the scars of uprooting, dispossession and exile, it embodies a pain that lasts long after the immediate horror of enforced migration has passed. "Partition marked the high point in the fragmentation not only of Bengal's landscape but also of the identities of its people," Gyanesh Kudaisya writes.³³ The East Bengali Hindu refugee in India carried with him this dual loss: the loss of a known and loved landscape, and the loss of an identity that had been rooted in that landscape.

In a sensitive reading of *Chere asha gram* (The Abandoned Village), a compilation of essays written by refugees that were serialised in the vernacular West Bengal newspaper *Jugantar* from 1950 and compiled into a book under the editorship of Dakshinaranjan Basu in 1975, Dipesh Chakrabarty situates the longing for a lost homeland in a linguistic *oeuvre* of great emotive appeal to the Bengali. One of the two Bengali words for "refugee" is *sharanarthi*: someone who seeks refuge in and protection from a higher power, including God. The other word is *udvastu* (or *vastuhara*): a homeless man, "home" here signifying not only a physical edifice but a "foundation" as well, with the added connotation that the site or foundation of the house is also the source of male ancestry and social identity anchored deeply in lived tradition.

³¹ Tan Tai Yong and Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2000), as its name indicates, focuses attention importantly on the consequences of separation. For a masterly analysis of how Partition affected the Bengali psyche, and yet of how that same mindset holds out hope for cultural unity amidst political disunion, see Nitish Sengupta, *Bengal Divided: The Unmaking of a Nation* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2007). Rila Mukherjee, "Annotated Bibliography – Bengal Partition", offers a useful overview of the scholarly literature, particularly of recent works: <http://www.safhr.org/pdf/Partition/Bengal%20Annotated%20Bibliography.doc> For a compelling study of creative writings on Partition, see Shivam Vij, "Borders and Boundaries in Partition Literature", <http://www.sacw.net/partition/SVij092003.html>

³² Interview, cited in cited in Erin O'Donnell, "'Woman' and 'homeland' in Ritwik Ghatak's films: Constructing post-Independence Bengali Cultural Identity", *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc47.2005/ghatak/index.html>

³³ Gyanesh Kudaisya, "Divided Landscapes, Fragmented Identities: East Bengal Refugees and Their Rehabilitation in India, 1947-79", in D.A. Low and Howard Brasted (eds.), *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence* (New Delhi: Sage, 1998), p. 105.

Unlike *basha*, which is a temporary place of residence no matter how long one has lived there, *bari* is a foundational abode that is inherited from ancestors and is to be passed down the generations. The ancestral *bari* is interchangeable with *desh*, one's native land.³⁴ It is this spatial and temporal unity of home, tradition, locale and land that Partition sundered, undermining the Bengali's very sense of self, both personal and collective. Unlike the loss of a *basha*, which could be replaced by the sanctuary of another *basha*, East Bengal was a *bari* whose loss could never be compensated by a home in West Bengal, which would always remain a *basha*. The *udvastu* or *vastuhara* from East Bengal, turned into a *sharanarthi* in West Bengal, invested Partition – particularly the violence that had caused, accompanied and followed it – with the character of a malignant force that had led to traumatic break with a mythic past, a vile contagion that had ejected him from a pastoral Bengal that was idyllic in its nostalgic remembrance. In place of the utopian memories of the abandoned but remembered village, the *udvastu* had to contend with what Nilanajana Chatterjee brilliantly calls "epistemological denial in India"³⁵, in the metropolitan dystopia of Calcutta and the other new terrains of the refugee's exile as a *sharanarthi*.

Just how powerful was the longing for an archetypal *desh* is seen in the haunting evocativeness of this passage, which invokes the *desh* through the physical desire to touch it,

There was a wound in the heart of my father, a raw wound. Many physicians were consulted – to no effect; consequently, the wound did not heal. He carried this wound with him until the eve of his death. Toward the end of his life, he used to sit quietly. He saw Ritwik's Meghe Dhaka Tara ten times, Subarnarekha eight times – and until the end of his life he carried with him Ritwik's Titas Ekti Nadir Nam. ["A River Called Titas"]... Father had no further opportunities to go to Bangladesh [formerly East Bengal]. This sorrow of not being able to return ate into him for the rest of his life. Father intentionally built his house close to the border [between West Bengal and Bangladesh]. He used to say that if I inhaled [the air] here, I would be able to smell the earth of Satkhira, Bagura and Jessore. And just to be able to smell this earth, Father

³⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Remembered Villages: Representations of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition", in Low and Brasted (eds.), *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities*, op cit, pp. 322-3. For a sensitive reading of terms that became keywords in the lead-up to Partition, see Swarupa Gupta, "Samaj, Jati and Desh: Reflections on Nationhood in Late Colonial Bengal", *Studies in History*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2007, pp. 177-203.

³⁵ Nilanajana Chatterjee, "Interrogating Victimhood: East Bengali Refugee Narratives of Communal Violence", p. 7, <http://www.swadhinata.org.uk/misc/chatterjeeEastBengal%20Refugee.pdf>

would repeatedly watch [Ritwik's] Meghe Dhaka Tara, *Subarnarekha* and *Komal Gandhaar*.³⁶

Pre-Partition Bengal is a mindscape that evokes a mode of being. The point is not whether the Bengal so imagined is utopian – it might well be – but that the refugee mind feels compelled to evoke it to sustain its sense of self. Therein lies the terrible beauty of a Bengal rent asunder but not destroyed by Partition.

It is telling commentary on Bengal that the refugee, facing epistemological denial in India – not least because of perceptions of him as an economic burden – should have contributed so richly to the intellectual, cultural and political life of West Bengal. Prafulla Chakrabarti shows in *The Marginal Men* how much the political ascendancy of the Left in that state, for example, owed to its involvement with refugees’ struggle for recognition and rehabilitation in the 1950s. The Left’s leadership of that struggle prevented Hindu Bengali refugees from drifting towards the religious Right, such as occurred elsewhere in India, and distinguished the state by the primacy of a secular culture that persists to this day. The refugees, in turn, became a part of the left and democratic vanguard that elevated the Communists to power in 1967.³⁷

This backdrop of relations between the refugees and the Left places in sharp relief the deterioration in those ties after the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front came to power in 1977. A case in point was the new government’s attitude towards refugees who had been settled in the inhospitable Dandakaranya forests, far away from West Bengal in today’s Chattisgarh state, and who wanted to return to the Bengali state. Their desertions from Dandakaranya led in 1978-79 to an “almost apocalyptic” event for the refugees, when the government in Calcutta destroyed a cooperative settlement that some of the refugees had set up in Marichjhanpi, transforming by means of their “exemplary enterprise” the uninhabited island in the Sunderbans through a cooperative settlement whose goal was complete self-reliance.³⁸ Kudaisya movingly places the desertions from Dandakaranya in the larger context of the refugees’ attachment to the landscape of their imagined Bengal:

The withdrawal from Dandakaranya showed a search for self-rehabilitation and for dignity by the refugees. It represented, above all, their desperate attempt to build a

³⁶ Loken Roy, *Modhhokhane Bera* (A Fence In Between), in Pratidin, September 1997, cited in O'Donnell, “‘Woman’ and ‘homeland’ in Ritwik Ghatak’s films: Constructing post-Independence Bengali Cultural Identity”, <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc47.2005/ghatak/notes.html>

³⁷ Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal* (Kalyani: Lumiere Books, 1990), p. 405.

³⁸ Gyanesh Kudaisya, “Divided Landscapes, Fragmented Identities”, op cit, p. 122.

home and recreate a world which lay in [a] shambles. The landscape on which this home was to be built was naturally conditioned by images of Sonar Bangla (‘Golden Bengal’). ‘This landscape was the work of the mind’ and was imprinted in the collective memory of the refugees. The El Dorado which the Bengal landscape represented to them, and their desire for an abode within it signified, not so much a precise geographical location, but a state of mind.³⁹

Admittedly, the refugee imagination and the narratives through which it expresses itself are limited by religion and gender. Speaking of their religious bias, Dipesh Chakraborty notes:

The home that the Hindu refugee has lost is meant to be more than his home alone; it is the home of the Bengali nationality, the village in which in the 1880s nationalist writers had found the heart of Bengal. But in doing this they illustrate a fundamental problem in the history of modern Bengali nationality, the fact that this nationalist construction of ‘home’ was a Hindu home... [For] all of their talk of harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims, there is not a single sentence in the memories described in *Chere asha gram* on how Islamic ideas of the sacred might have been of value to the Muslims in creating their own idea of a homeland or indeed how they might have helped create a sense of home for Bengalis as a whole. The Muslim did not do it, but nor did the Hindus.⁴⁰

Nilanjana Chatterjee goes further in speaking of the Hindu refugees’ “erasure of the Muslim in their nostalgic conceptualisation of East Bengal”.⁴¹ East Bengali Hindu refugees demonstrated the existence of a “collective cultural memory of ‘bad’ Muslims”. In the selective memories of the refugees, “not only was the good Muslim a product of condescension and erasure – and therefore of communalism”, but also, “East Bengali refugee identity was predicated on the claim to communal victimhood which explicitly demonised Muslims”.⁴²

The other problematic aspect of refugee tales has to do with gender. The representation of femininity in the refugee tales identifies the woman as “a Hindu man’s property and means of reproduction”, Nilanjana Chatterjee notes; what makes the identification worse is that “the rhetoric of sexual assault” of

³⁹ Ibid., p. 125. The reference to the landscape being a work of the mind is taken from Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

⁴⁰ Dipesh Chakraborty, “Remembered Villages”, op cit, p. 335.

⁴¹ Nilanjana Chatterjee, “Interrogating Victimhood”, op cit, p. 2.

⁴² Ibid., p. 22. Reece Jones, “Whose Homeland? Territoriality and Religious Nationalism in Pre-Partition Bengal”, *South Asia Research*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2006, pp. 115-31, argues that the territorialisation of a Hindu-based version of the national homeland during the Swadeshi period contributed to the development of communal difference in Bengal, in particular, and South Asia, more generally. Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908* (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1973) remains a classic.

Hindu women by Muslim men “was not so much concerned with the plight of the women in question – who were usually abandoned if they returned to the Hindu community – as with the protection of patriarchal Hindu society”.⁴³ One important strand of recent Partition studies is the effort to privilege the voices of women. A notable effort is the collection, *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India*, which draws on interviews, diaries, memoirs and creative literature to bring to the fore the experiences and perspectives of women who were uprooted from East Bengal.⁴⁴

The epilogue to the story of the refugees of 1947 was written in 1971, when it was the turn of Bengali Muslims from East Pakistan to join their Bengali Hindu brethren in seeking refuge in West Bengal. More than eight million refugees (of whom more than half were Hindus) joined the exodus. The influx, which was a major reason for the Indian military intervention in the East Pakistan civil war that contributed to the eventual independence of Bangladesh, witnessed a replay of the catastrophic human dislocation caused in 1947. While the vast majority of the refugees spent months in harrowing conditions, middle-class Bengalis in West Bengal who could afford to do so often played host to professional and other middle-class families that had been displaced from East Pakistan. It was not unknown for the family of a Bengali Hindu, who had been a refugee from East Bengal in 1947 himself, to share its *basha* in West Bengal with a Bengali Muslim family. The Bengali Muslim knew that he would return home if Bangladesh won its war. His Hindu host kept dreaming of a *bari* that would remain forever in nostalgia for the lay of a lost land.

Achintya Kumar Sengupta’s poem, *Udvastu*, comes to mind. It is profoundly unsettling precisely because of its unsentimental urgency. Rendered unforgettably in the recitation by Kazi Sabyasachi, the poem has become a part of an aural tradition without which it is impossible to imagine Bengal. What makes the refugee central to the idea of Bengal as a state of mind is that he embodies its unity and integrity in the very act of losing his place in its geography. The Partition of 1905 was reversed in 1911; the Partition of 1947 was revoked, after a fashion, in 1971. Only he, the refugee, remains embedded in the legacy of every Partition of Bengal. Yet, in the division of his self between *basha* and *bari*, he embodies the felt reality of a Bengal that refuses to go way, that refuses to allow mere mortals to divide, between *basha* and *bari*, a piece of land encompassed, nurtured and completed by the guardian skies above it.

⁴³ Nilanjana Chatterjee, “Interrogating Victimhood”, op cit, p. 16; p.19.

⁴⁴ Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (eds.), *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* (Kolkata: Stree, 2003).

There is no way to imagine Bengal without recognising and respecting the refugee as its first citizen.

Bengal Beyond Borders

To question the inevitability of Partition and cast a worried eye on its unfolding aftermath is not to indulge in the vicarious pursuit of counterfactuals with which to uphold some other theory of what India could have been in 1947. Today, what is more important than bemoaning Partition, as in India’s case, celebrating Partition, as in Pakistan’s case, and finding a rationale for Pakistan’s Partition, as in Bangladesh’s case, is to try and move beyond the ambit of the nation-state altogether in imagining South Asia. Certainly, Bengalis in *Epaar Bangla* and *Opaar Bangla* have to live *with* the reality of their nation-states, but they do not have to live *by* the nation-state and its mystifications. One of the chief mystifications of the nation-states in *Epaar Bangla* and *Opaar Bangla* is the insinuation that Bengal does not exist. Bengal has been incorporated into and almost absorbed by regimes of armies and borders; protocols of passports and fences; discourses of Hindu and Muslim; and narratives of historical right and wrong.⁴⁵

Quayes points to the limitations of the Westphalian nation-state, the template in which decolonisation produced successor-states in South Asia. “National unity in South Asian nations has often been established through brutality and force, and the newly created ‘Indian’, ‘Pakistani’ or ‘Bangladeshi’ had to actively forget his local, regional and other non-national roots and past by adopting a hegemonic national identity. The history of nation-building and nationalism therefore illustrates that identity-formation by definition involves active (and often enforced) collective amnesia,” he argues. His solution lies in the quest for a South Asian identity. “Maintaining and nurturing local and regional cultures is a prerequisite for developing a South Asian polity with grass-roots support, based on a supranational identity that develops parallel to other identities.”⁴⁶ He speaks of the “cognitive region” of Bengal⁴⁷ in the context of South Asia’s need to evolve beyond the Westphalian nation-state into a region that can take heart, in howsoever nascent a form, from the great experiment in European regionalism that is underway.

There is a great deal of truth here. What the European Union (EU) offers South Asia is a vision – admittedly, a distant one, but not an impossible one –

⁴⁵ See Willem van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*, op cit, particularly Chapters 12 and 13.

⁴⁶ Mijarul Quayes, “The Westphalian State in South Asia and Future Directions”, op cit, p. 145.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 131.

in which nation-states and units within nation-states can come closer, within the generous borders of a supranational identity, with raising doubts (or worse) about the sub-national units' loyalty to the nation-state of which they are a part. One of the benedictions of the EU was the way in which it made it possible for both Scots and non-Scots in the United Kingdom to imagine a "Scotland in Europe" as an acceptable political paradigm for the devolution of power from London to Glasgow without the subversion of British identity.

A similar vision of "Ireland in Europe" might help to draw the Irish Republic closer to Northern Ireland without subverting the latter's place in British identity. The parallel with Bangladesh and West Bengal is an obvious one. A "Bengal in South Asia" would take much of the sting out of relations between Bangladesh and West Bengal/India and normalise those relations to the point where it would be possible to speak of the indivisibility of human security across soft borders. If the model works in Bengal, is it idle to believe that it might be applicable in time to harder borders, such as those between the two parts of Punjab and the two parts of Kashmir? Regionalism does not replace the nation-state, but it transcends it. That transcendence must remain the hope for South Asia. Lying at the core of the hope is Edward Said's reassuring belief that "human beings, men and women, make their own history. And just as things are made, they can be unmade and re-made... What you need is a regard for the product of the human mind".⁴⁸

Should a breakthrough occur in the Westphalian hiatus in South Asia, C. Raja Mohan's call for a foreign policy for West Bengal would prove to be prescient. He asks the government of West Bengal to restore Kolkata's standing as the "hub of economic activity in a region that covers parts of the subcontinent, China, Myanmar and Southeast Asia". This effort, he recognises, would necessarily involve "greater activism" by West Bengal in shaping India's foreign policy. "Purists will raise their eyebrows at the suggestion of a foreign policy for Kolkata," he writes, "But for all the claims to monopoly from national governments on foreign policy making, interests of states – especially those on the borders – have always shaped diplomacy over the centuries. In India, too, politics in Tamil Nadu has always coloured the national policy towards Sri Lanka. Similarly political classes in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have long had influence on India's Nepal policy".

In this context, Raja Mohan notes that West Bengal shares a long border with Bangladesh and provides key trade and transport links to Nepal and Bhutan, and once was the natural outlet for goods and people from western

⁴⁸ Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969-1994* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 317.

China, including Tibet. West Bengal today should take the initiative in economic and cultural diplomacy to advance India's Look East policy.⁴⁹

For India to look east is to look first at Bangladesh. And West Bengal provides a vantage point like no other place for that act of looking east.

Epaar Bangla and *Opaar Bangla* await each other, not without borders but over them.

⁴⁹ C. Raja Mohan, "A foreign policy for Kolkata", *The Indian Express*, 23 August 2005. For a study of West Bengal's success in influencing Indian policy on Bangladeshi immigration, see Rafiq Dossani and Srinidhi Vijaykumar, *Indian Federalism and the Conduct of Foreign Policy in Border States: State Participation and Central Accommodation since 1990*, Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford University, March 2005.

Food Security in Bangladesh: A Comprehensive Analysis

*ANM Muniruzzaman**

Abstract

Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated countries in the world, has long been suffering from food deficiency. Food crisis has become a vulnerable threat for those people who live below the poverty line. Among all South Asian countries, Bangladesh faces the most severe food crisis due to current food security challenges resulted by cyclone, flood, salinity intrusion, high food prices, middlemen intervention in the market system, illegal trading of Bangladeshi food products across the Indian border, lack of food supply, and so on. These factors are severely affecting Bangladesh's

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He is a frequent speaker on international security and policy issues in the international conference and lecture circuit. He has spoken at conferences/events at UN, EU, ARF, NATO, Shangri-La Dialogue, ASPEN World Security Conference, Consultations on the future of Afghanistan, Climate Summit-COP15, IISS, RUSI etc. He is consulted by different governments, international organisations on security issues.

He was commissioned from the Pakistan Military Academy and has received advanced training from USA, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Austria, former Yugoslavia, Turkey, China etc. He is a graduate of the National University of Bangladesh, National Defence College, Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College and Legal Studies School of the US Naval War College.

agriculture, and its attempt to attain food security and self-sufficiency. In addition, inadequate food supply puts the poor as well as the middle-class people in great risk. To reduce food deficiency, the government of Bangladesh has taken some active initiatives such as National Livestock Development Policy, Climate Change Strategic Action Plan, the National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Program, Duty Free Rice Import, National Climate Change Fund, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Agriculture and Rural Development etc. Regionally, SAARC countries have also attempted some attempts to gain food sufficiency in the South Asian region. Among the major initiatives of SAARC, SAARC Food Security Reserve, SAARC Food Bank, SAARC Agricultural Information Centre and South Asia Food Security Program are remarkable.

Introduction

Why study Bangladesh's food security in the context of the current food crisis in South Asia as well as around the world? It can be analyzed from non-traditional security threats and human security perspectives.

If we look at the non-traditional security perspective, food security is a major concern not only in Bangladesh but also throughout the world, especially; in the third world as well as the developing countries where most people do not have the access to sufficient food supply. Increasing international oil prices, adverse weather conditions, Asia's strong demand for food imports as well as European financial crisis are contributing largely towards the depletion of world food stocks and emergence of new non-traditional security threat.¹

From the human security perspective, food crisis has become a vulnerable threat for those people who live below the poverty line. In terms of food security, food crisis affects millions of people around the world are suffering from the food crisis. Bangladesh also faces the severe problems from food crisis. In this country, 31.51 percent² of the total population live below the poverty and can not meet their basic human needs. Most people suffer from severe malnutrition, diseases, and poor health. Inadequate food supply puts the poor as well as the middle-class people in great risk.

This study conceptualizes the current food security challenges in Bangladesh and the socio-economic impact. The analysis of food security threats provides theoretical implication to ensure food security for all. The study also focuses on the initiatives of the government of Bangladesh as well as regional cooperation to overcome food crisis in the South Asian region.

¹ See: Food Price Watch", 2012, at <<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTPOVERTY/Resources/336991-1311966520397/Food-Price-Watch-April-2012.htm>> (accessed December 04, 2012).

² As estimated from the CIA, *The World Fact-book*, 2010.

Context

In the age of globalization, the concept of food security is a very alarming non traditional security threat, especially in South Asian countries. Now, migration and conflict situation add to several challenges besides food insecurity in the Asian region.³

Poverty and hunger are very common problems in South Asia. Demographic factors such as small country size, over population, and environmental pollution etc contribute to the reduction of food availability in the region. Food security threats afflict most of the South Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Afghanistan. For example, India produces 206 million tons of food everyday but it can not ensure food for its population. Only, in 2006, the per capita availability of food has declined to 390 grams per day in India itself against a requirement of 510 grams per capita per day that shows the severe alarming threat to the food security in India.⁴

The amount of food productivity is also not sufficient enough in Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. For the last 15 years, growth in food production in Bhutan has been lower than the population growth. Food production has decreased from 3.8 per cent in 1981-85 to 0.6 per cent (1986-90); rising briefly to 2.2 per cent (1991-95) and falling again to 1.1 per cent (1996-2000). Bhutan has consistently witnessed a declining trend in per capita food production. In Nepal, population is growing at an average rate of 2.5 per cent while food production is fluctuating from a high growth rate of 5 per cent in 1981-85 to 2.2 per cent in 1991-95 and 2.5 per cent in 1996-2000. In Sri Lanka, although population growth is not as high as in other countries of the region, yet food production is fluctuating erratically.⁵

In Bangladesh, the production of food is also not satisfactory. About 36 percent of the people of Bangladesh live below the poverty line who do not have access to the sufficient amount of food. Since the world food crisis of 2008, the agricultural production growth of Bangladesh declined 4.7 percent.⁶

At present, the gradual rising of food prices is creating a great challenge to the food security of Bangladesh.⁷ The London-based Economist Intelligence

³ Prodip K. Roy, “Food Security in South Asia”, 27 October , 2011, at <http://prodip.wordpress.com/2011/10/27/food-security-in-south-asia/> (accessed 12 December, 2012)

⁴ Amitava Mukherjee, “Food Insecurity: a Growing Threat in Asia”, UNESCAP/APCAEM, January 2008, at <http://www.unapcaem.org/publication/FoodInsecurityInAsia.pdf> (accessed 25 December, 2012).

⁵ Prodip K. Roy, op. cit.

⁶ See: <http://www.worldvision.org/our-work/international-work/bangladesh >

⁷ See: “Food Security in Bangladesh”, March 2011, at <http://uk.oneworld.net/guides/bangladesh/food_security > (accessed 22 December, 2012).

Unit (EIU) ranked Bangladesh as the least food secure country among the six South Asian countries according to the global food security Index. The index ranked Bangladesh at the 81st position with 34.6 points, while Sri Lanka was ranked as the most food-secure country in the region with 47.4 points.⁸

Bangladesh expects to achieve food self-sufficiency country by 2013, but to meet the target within the time frame is difficult because several factors such as fuel, electricity, gas, transport facilities indirectly hinder food availability for the poor who spend 70 percent of their income on food.⁹

Analytical Framework

Conceptual Issues

Food Security

The concept of food security originated in international development literatures in the 1960s and the 1970s at the time of global food crisis. Following the world oil crisis of 1972 to 1974 and the African famine since 1984 to 1945, the notion of food security had largely become a major issue in the public interest.¹⁰

The concept of food security developed over time and many organizations have come up with definitions from various perspectives. Food security was first officially defined in 1974 by the World Food Summit (WFS). It defines:

Availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices.¹¹

In 1983, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) expanded its concept with the following definition:

Food Security ensures that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need.¹²

⁸ *The Financial Express*, “Bangladesh Least Food Secure in South Asia”, 11 August, 2012, at <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/more.php?news_id=139876&date=2012-08-11> (accessed 25 January, 2013).

⁹ Goutam Gourab Barua, “Food Security and Bangladesh”, *The Financial Express*, October 24, 2012, at <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/index.php?ref=MjBfMTBfMjRfMTJfM V82XzE0Nzk1Mg==> (accessed 12 December, 2012).

¹⁰ See <http://www.toronto.ca/health/children/pdf/fsbp_ch_1.pdf> (accessed 26 December, 2013).

¹¹ See <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4671e/y4671e06.htm#TopOfPage> (accessed 09 December, 2012)

¹² Ibid

The World Bank (WB) report in 1986 introduced the following definition:

Food security means the access of all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life.¹³

In 1996, the World Food Summit (WFS) adopted a more complex definition:

Food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels is achieved when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.¹⁴

The World Health Organization (WHO) introduces three pillars of food security: food availability, food access, and food use. Food availability means sufficient quantities of food on a consistent basis, whereas food access refers to sufficient quantities of resources, both economic and physical, to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Food use refers to appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care, as well as adequate water and sanitation.

Non-traditional Security

After the end of the Cold War, a new security concept termed non-traditional security emerged in the international security discourse in contrast to the traditional security concept with waves of new emerging security studies such as security studies, strategic studies, peace studies, and non-state actors etc.

Non-traditional security threats are generally non-military in nature, as well as transnational in scope. These are neither totally domestic nor purely inter-state due to globalization and communication revolution. This implies that non-traditional security uses non-military means as well as comprehensive political, economic and social responses to resolve both national and international humanitarian crises.¹⁵

Food Security as Non-traditional Security

There are six broad branches of non-traditional security namely, international terrorism, transnational organized crime, environmental security, illegal security, illegal migration, energy security, and human security.¹⁶

Food security falls under the category of human security. From the human security perspective, poverty is regarded as a severe threat of human lives

¹³ See <<http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4671e/y4671e06.htm>> (accessed 25 December, 2012).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Mr. Saurabh Chaudhuri, “Defining Non-traditional Security Threats”, *Global India Foundation*, at <<http://www.globalindiafoundation.org/nontraditionalsecurity.htm>> (accessed 23 December, 2012).

¹⁶ Ibid.

through famine and hunger. Poverty is one of the major security issues because the state of food insecurity heightens the vulnerability to other threats by creating unfavourable structural condition.¹⁷

The lack of food security creates severe challenges to people’s livelihood of a country, especially, the poor who will bear the brunt from this human security threat. It can destroy human capital, the backbone of a country; because a malnourished population is generally more susceptible to diseases and the lack of health security may lead to a sluggish economy.

Theoretical Framework

Human Security Perspective

Since the 1990s, there has been a dramatic shift in the development of the security studies.¹⁸ The human security approach stresses that all people should have the right to their most essential needs such as access to food, shelter, education, treatment as well as to earn their own livelihood. The two most important measures of human security are ensuring freedom from fear and freedom from want of their basic needs.¹⁹

According to the final report of the Commission on Human Security (CHS), human security means “Protecting fundamental freedoms – freedoms that are the essence of life”.²⁰

The 1994 UNDP Human Development Report refers to human security as:

Human security means, first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life whether in homes, in jobs or in communities.²¹

As human security suggests that all human beings have the right to freedom and right to basic human needs irrespective of race, colour, religion and ethnicity, the notion is mostly applicable to ensure a country’s food security.

¹⁷ See “Is Everything a Security Issue?”, at <<http://archive.atlantic-community.org/app/webroot/files/articlepdf/Is%20everything%20a%20security%20issue.pdf>> (accessed 02 January, 2013).

¹⁸ “Dominant Theories of Security”, at <<http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/dnp/sub1.asp?ipage=sectheories>> (accessed 25 November, 2012).

¹⁹ United Nations Development Program, “Human Development Report”, 2010, at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_1994_en_chap2.pdf> (accessed 15 November, 2012).

²⁰ See “Human Security in Theory and Practices, Application of the Human Security Concept and the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security”, 2009, at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HS_Handbook_2009.pdf> (accessed 12 December, 2012).

²¹ See “Edward Newman, “Critical Human Security Studies”, *Review of International Studies* (36), 2010, at<[http://demo.sheruyasodha.com.np/uploads/Review_of_International_Studies_36_\[2010\]_77-94.pdf](http://demo.sheruyasodha.com.np/uploads/Review_of_International_Studies_36_[2010]_77-94.pdf)> (accessed 05 April, 2012).

Human security also suggests that protection from hunger along with diseases and repression should be given the first priority to promote human security. Thus this approach signifies the importance of ensuring availability of food for all.

Current Challenges of Food Security in Bangladesh

Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated countries in the world, has been suffering from food deficiency for a long time.²² Among all South Asian nations, Bangladesh faces the most severe food crisis due to current food security challenges such as cyclone, flood, salinity intrusion, high food prices, and middlemen intervention in the market system, illegal trading of Bangladeshi food products across the Indian border, lack of food supply etc.²³ These factors are severely affecting Bangladesh’s agriculture and its attempt to attain food security and self-sufficiency.²⁴

Environmental Challenges

Climate Change

Climate change is regarded as one of the most severe threats to the food security of Bangladesh. The changing monsoon, rising sea level, and increasing temperature cause damage to food production. Climate change also poses serious threats to the livelihoods of the Bangladeshi people.²⁵

Agricultural scientists have predicted that rice production in Bangladesh will decrease by 8 percent and wheat by 32 percent by 2050 due to the severe impact of climate change. Other food constituents, including vegetables, pulses and fish will also be adversely affected due to climate change and global warming.²⁶

²² See “Impact of Irrigation on Food Security in Bangladesh for the Past Three Decades”, at <<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Impact+of+irrigation+on+food+security+in+Bangladesh+for+the+past...-a0210520707>> (accessed 13 November, 2012).

²³ See “Bangladesh: Striving for Food Security”, October 2012, at <<http://www.saglobalaffairs.com/regional/1319-bangladesh-striving-for-food-security.html>> (accessed 23 November, 2012).

²⁴ Mehruna Islam Chowdhury, Mohamed Avdul Baten and Jabin Tahmina Haque, “Food Security in Crisis Period: Challenges for a Hunger Free Bangladesh”, 15 October, 2010, at <<http://www.unnayan.org/reports/food/FoodSecurityinCrisisPeriod.pdf>> (accessed 7 November, 2012).

²⁵ “Bangladesh: Striving for Food Security”, October 2012, *op. cit.*

²⁶ M. Abdul Latif Mondal, “Challenges to Our Food Security”, *The Daily Star*, 23 November, 2010, at <<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=163215>>(accessed 27 December, 2012).

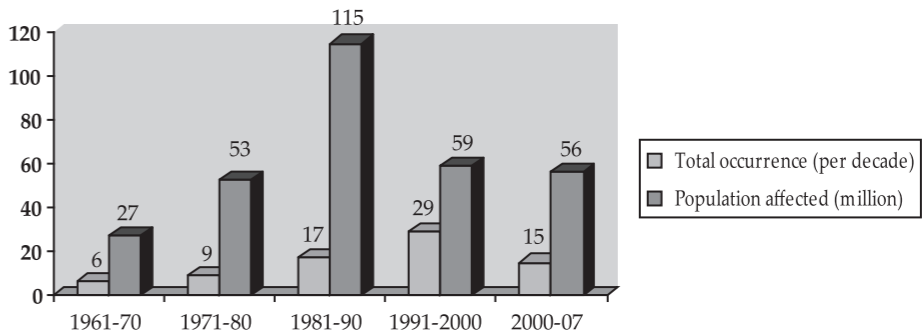
According to the Ministry of Agriculture, the country loses about 80,000 hectares of arable land due to the impact of climate change, such as through droughts, salinity and floods.²⁷

In a report, experts estimated that rice production in Bangladesh will fall by 80 million tons by 2050 or about 3.9 percent each year as a result of climate change.²⁸ In another report, scientists predicted that climate change may cost US\$26 billion to Bangladesh’s agricultural sectors during the 2005-2050 periods.²⁹

Frequency of Flood

Another environmental challenge to Bangladesh’s agricultural production is the tendency of flood. Bangladesh, a mostly low-lying country with the world's highest population density, is extremely vulnerable to frequent of floods. It is estimated that flood destroys about 20 percent of Bangladesh’s total agricultural output every year.³⁰

Decade-wise occurence of floods and the number of population affected in Bangladesh (1961-2007)



Source: Canter for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED).³¹

²⁷ See <<http://www.live-pr.com/en/bangladesh-agribusiness-report-q-r1049827715.htm>> (accessed 12 January, 2013).

²⁸ See <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/89920/BANGLADESH-Unemployment-food-prices-spur-growing-hunger>> (accessed 14 December, 2012).

²⁹ See: “Climate Change Risks and Food Security in Bangladesh”, 13 July, 2010, at <<http://www.farmingfirst.org/2010/07/climate-change-risks-and-food-security-in-bangladesh/>> (accessed 15 November, 2012).

³⁰ Please visit <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/7118970/Agriculture-in-BD>> (accessed 24 December, 2012).

³¹ See <www.wamis.org/agm/meetings/rsama08/Bari101-Yusuf-Climate-Change.pdf> (accessed 17 December, 2012).

Recently, the country faces severe loss in agricultural production because of frequent occurrence of floods. The 2011 monsoon floods affected over a million people and displaced some 200,000. Several areas in the south-western part of the country remained water-logged. In 2012, flash floods largely damaged the agricultural crops, habitat, water and sanitation facilities of the country. Around 1.3 million people lost their livelihood support because of this flood. At the end of June 2012 and in mid-July 2012, the flood resulted in large-scale food shortages. In September 2012, the north-western region of Bangladesh was again hit by floods.³²

Saline Intrusion and Soil Fertility Reduction

Extreme drought and contamination of paddy fields by salt water as a result of flash floods and storm surges have become very common in Bangladesh, being a low-lying country. Poor farmers suffer the most because continuous lifting of saline water causes permanent damage to soil fertility.³³

In January 2013, saline water coming with the sand had already flooded around 100 hectares of farmland affecting 500 families in Khajura village of Kuakata area. Sweet water sources like ponds have also been polluted due to the mixing of saline water. Farmers are now unable to complete the harvest of seasonal crops due to flooding of the cropland with saline water that comes with sand because of saline water coming with sand. The subsequent agricultural cultivation also faces uncertainty due to the increasing level of salinity in water in Kuakata area of Bangladesh.³⁴

Water Crisis

The lack of sweet water is one of the major challenges for food security in Bangladesh. Regional dispute regarding the unequal water distribution among the neighboring countries of South Asia is creating challenges to the availability of water access to the low-lying countries in this region. Currently, Bangladesh faces severe threats from getting access to water for irrigation and fertile cultivable lands.

After a water-sharing treaty of Ganges River signed with India for 30 years, India continues to control the flow of Farakka, which has ultimately resulted in deforestation and erosion of river-bank in Bangladesh. The fresh-water

³² Please visit <<http://politicalpress.eu/2012/11/flood-stricken-bangladeshi-to-get-food-aid-and-livelihood-support-thanks-to-new-eu-assistance/>> (accessed 15 December, 2012).

³³ Syful Islam, “Bangladesh Resistant Rice may not Fill Food Gap – Experts”, 25 October, 2012, at <<http://www.trust.org/alertnet/news/bangladesh-resistant-rice-may-not-fill-food-gap-experts>> (accessed 12 December, 2012).

³⁴ *The Daily Star*, “Saline Water Floods Farmland Due to Mindless Sand Lifting”, 02 January, 2013, at <<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=263505>> (accessed 25 November, 2012).

supply of the Ganges decreased considerably with several consequent effects in the south-western part of Bangladesh. The barrage has adversely affected agriculture, navigation, irrigation, fisheries, forestry, industrial activities, salinity intrusion of the coastal rivers, ground-water depletion, river silting, coastal erosion, sedimentation as well as normal economic activities.³⁵ Besides, inadequate flow of sediment free water affects the irrigation process severely during dry season.

At present, water availability in Bangladesh is around 90 billion cubic metres (BCM) during dry season against the demand of about 147 BCM. This is a large shortfall of nearly 40 percent that results in drought in most parts of the country.

Loss of Cultivable Land

The loss of agricultural lands has become a major concern for food security in Bangladesh. Almost one-third of the Bangladesh farmland have disappeared in the last 30 years because of unplanned urbanization and transfer of lands to other uses, for example, human settlements and industrial purposes.³⁶

Bangladesh is a land-scarce country where per capita cultivated land is only 12.5 decimals. It is claimed that every year about one percent of the farm-land in the country is being converted to non-agricultural uses. According to the 2009 report of the Planning Commission, 80,000 hectares of agricultural lands are being converted every year to non-agricultural uses mainly for the expansion of housing facilities, and building infrastructures such as roads, markets, educational institutions, electricity and industrial establishments.³⁷

In 1980, Bangladesh had nine million hectares of farmlands, which were reportedly reduced to about six million in 2012.³⁸ At present, the cultivable land has been declining by almost one percent per year, and everyday 325 bighas land are being lost to other uses due to increased demand for habitation, industrial and commercial establishments and transportation infrastructure that pose challenges to the country’s food security.³⁹ Bangladesh’s current

³⁵ Md. Shariful Islam, “Water Scarcity and Conflict: A Bangladesh Perspective”, *Forum* 5, no. 6, June 2011, at <<http://sharifulshuvo.blogspot.com/2012/05/water-scarcity-and-conflict-bangladesh.html>> (accessed 3 January 2013).

³⁶ Mamun Rashid, “Future of Farming and Farmers in Bangladesh”, *The Financial Express*, 12 September, 2012, at <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/more.php?news_id=143792&date=2012-09-18> (accessed 22 November, 2012).

³⁷ See “Conversion of Agricultural Land to Non-agricultural Uses in Bangladesh: Extent and Determinants”, *Bangladesh Development Studies*, Vol. XXXIV, March 2011, No.1, at <http://www.bdresearch.org/home/attachments/article/627/05_Conversion%20of%20Agricultural%20Land_Abul%20Qasem.pdf> (accessed 22 December, 2012).

³⁸ Mamun Rashid, September 12, 2012, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Goutam Gourab Barua, October 24, 2012, *op. cit.*

population growth rate is 1.42 percent against the decline of agricultural land area by one percent annually. Experts warn that at the rate that agricultural land declines against the growing population, it will be very difficult to ensure food security after 10 years.⁴⁰

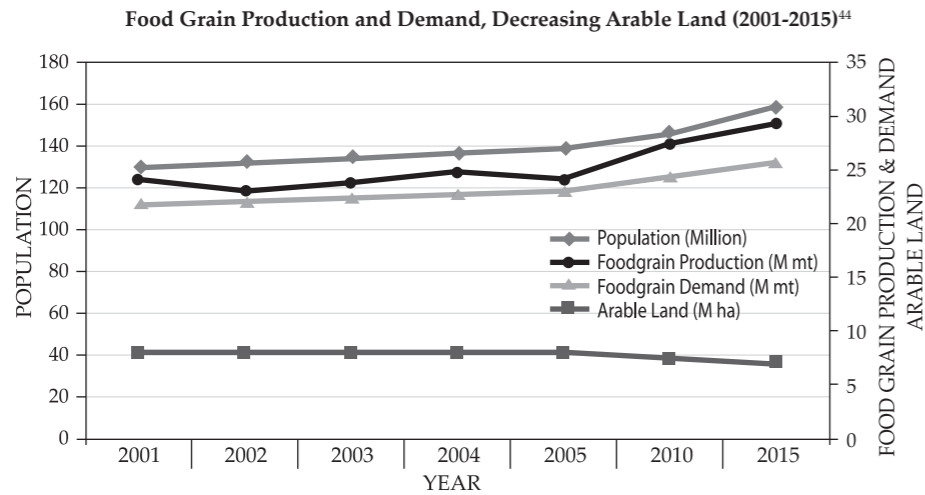
Socio-economic Challenges

Over-population, Over-consumption and Food Shortages

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world with a population of more than 164 million living in the in the small land area.⁴¹

According to a report of Unnayan Onneshan, a Dhaka-based research group, if the present trend of population growth of two million people per year continues, Bangladesh will undoubtedly face far severe food shortages in the next few years reaching a critical level by 2050.⁴²

Overpopulation in Bangladesh poses serious threat to food security leading to large-scale food shortages. For example, over the last 50 years, Bangladesh did not export rice except in 1974 because of the increase in population and over-consumption of food. It is estimated that to overcome food shortage, Bangladesh has to import about 2.5 million (25lac) ton of wheat each year.⁴³



⁴⁰ Mamun Rashid, September 12, 2012, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ Please visit <<http://www.partnersintl.org/blog/news/tribal-groups-in-bangladesh-facing-severe-food-shortagePrinter-Friendly>> (accessed 14 January, 2013).

⁴² See <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/89920/BANGLADESH-Unemployment-food-prices-spur-growing-hunger>> (accessed 14 January, 2013).

⁴³ See <<http://bdoza.wordpress.com/2008/06/06/overcoming-food-crisis-bangladesh-has-little-shortage-in-food-production/>> (accessed 17 December, 2013).

⁴⁴ See <<http://www.equitybd.org/onlinerecords/mnuagrifoodsov/daily-star-food-security-facing-the-hard-truth>> (accessed 13 January, 2013).

The aforementioned figure shows that since 2005, the arable land of Bangladesh has reduced and food demand has increased from this period in larger scale. The figure demonstrates that population growth increases at a faster rate than food production from 2005 onwards. This is due to the increasing demand for additional food by the middle-class people with rising income.

Food shortages are prevalent too because of fraudulent practices in Bangladesh's food market system and by middlemen. Food stock is aplenty in the market but the traders do not avail the stock in the open market in order to get extra profit. This also results large food imports. For example, only 1950 tons of rice was imported in first five months of 2012-2013 marketing years, 90 percent of which were by the private sector. The private sector also imports low-quality of rice and agricultural products from India because of the lower price. It is estimated that, rice import may rise to 250,000 tons in 2013, mostly by the private sectors. In 2012-2013 MY, wheat import may reach 3 million tons, of which 600,000 tons are imported by the government and 2.4 million tons by the private sectors.⁴⁵

Poverty

Most of the farmers in Bangladesh are poor and live below the poverty line. About 90 percent Of the farmers are small and marginal.⁴⁶ Over 60 percent of the rural population are classified as landless with less than 0.05 acres of land or functionally landless with 0.05 to 0.5 acres of land. Most of the poor farmers, thus, have to depend on the market to meet much of their food needs. Due to severe financial constraints, they also cannot afford high cost of agricultural production.⁴⁷

Inadequate Credit Support to Farmers

The credit amount is often inadequate and not issued in advance to poor farmers. They are also not eligible for micro credit of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that deal mainly with landless farmers. The situation compels these farmers to adopt low-quality methods for agricultural production due to high cost in fertilizers, thereby resulting in low yield production.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See <<http://www.thebioenergysite.com/reports/?category=39&id=1157>> (accessed 16 December, 2012).

⁴⁶ See Mohammad H. Mondal, "Crop Agriculture of Bangladesh: Challenges and Opportunities", *Bangladesh Journal of Agricultural Research*, Vol. 35, No. 2, June 2010, pp. 235-245.

⁴⁷ See: USAID Office for Food Peace Bangladesh Food Security Country Framework by 2010-2014, October 2009.

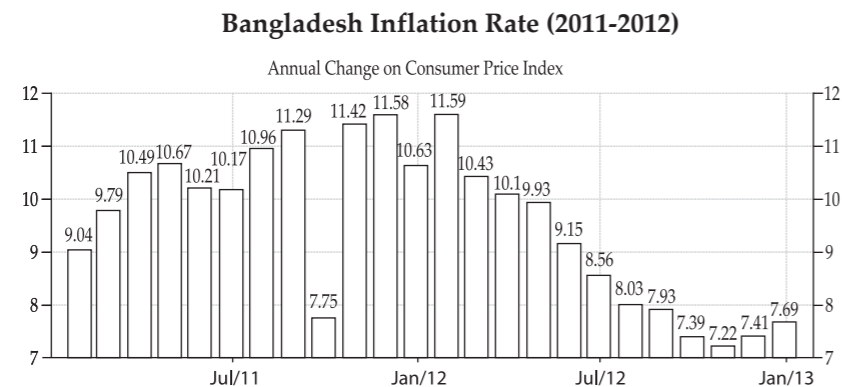
⁴⁸ Mohammad H. Mondal, June 2010, *op. cit.*

Food Adulteration

Food adulteration with poisonous chemicals has reached a dangerous proportion. Food adulteration has been happening on a massive scale for the past half a decade due to increased investment, an expanding market, and high consumer demand. In food market, basic food items like rice, fish, fruits, vegetables, and sweetmeats are adulterated with hazardous chemicals in an indiscriminate manner. In 2004, a random survey conducted by Public Health Laboratory of Dhaka City Corporation, reported that more than 76 percent food items on the market were found adulterated.⁴⁹

Rising Food Price

The increasing level of food price is one of the major current challenges of food security in Bangladesh. Since 2007, the food price of essential food commodities has been rising rapidly, reaching to a peak in the 2008 worldwide food crisis. If 2005 is taken as base year of food price hike, the increasing price of foods in 2011 and 2012 is also a startling. The prices of coarse, medium and fine rice have been nearly doubled in 2011 compared to those of 2005.⁵⁰



Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics⁵¹

The figure shows that in January, 2012, inflation rate reached the highest level though it reduced slightly in July 2012. The January 2013 reading indicates that during January, 2013, the inflation rate may reduce in Bangladesh.

⁴⁹ See: “Food Adulteration Rings Alarm Bell”, 11 August, 2011, at <<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=198096>> (accessed 22 December, 2012).

⁵⁰ Shamsu Uddin Shakib, “Impact of Price Hike over Lower Middle Class: A Case Study on Dhaka Metropolitan Area and Sylhet Division of Bangladesh”, *European Journal of Business and Management*, Vol 4, No.3, 2012.

⁵¹ See <<http://www.tradingeconomics.com/bangladesh/inflation-cpi>> (accessed 25 November, 2012)

In 2011, the overall inflation rate was 10.70 percent. Food inflation stood at 7.83 percent in 2012 while it was 12.83 percent in the previous year. Food inflation rose to 7.33 percent in December from 6.45 percent in November 2012.⁵² According FAO report, in 2012, food price was at record level, having risen from 1.4 percent in September following an increase of 6.0 percent in July 2012.⁵³

This food inflation rate increased to 7.91 percent in 2005 and at the same time nearly 0.2 million people lived under poverty line. Food inflation of 11.0 percent (12-month average) in April 2011 indicates that more people are likely to go under poverty line in the upcoming years.

Lack of Sufficient Fertilizer

Most of the arable lands in Bangladesh are deficient in fertilizers. Farmers normally use urea in their agricultural lands. They can not use P and K fertilizer at the recommended quantity due to high prices. Chemical fertilizers are not normally integrated with organic manures. The farmers also do not use balanced fertilizers that are necessary for high productivity. Insufficient amount of fertilizers is severely damaging the food production in Bangladesh.⁵⁴

In the past, Bangladesh witnessed fertilizer crisis in the years of 1974, 1984 and 1989. Recently, fertilizer crisis occurred in the years of 2005, 2007 and 2008. Still the poor farmers do not have access to the sufficient amount of fertilizers in sufficient for their agriculture.⁵⁵

Lack of Quality Seeds

The demand for quality of seeds in Bangladesh is still weak because there is a lack of costly seed preservation and processing facilities.⁵⁶ The Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) obtains subsidy from the government which allows it to provide seeds at a lower cost. Poor farmers, however, have less access to BADC seeds and thus they have to depend on private sectors to purchase quality rice seeds at a high price. On the other hand, home-grown seeds produced by poor farmers are of inferior quality than that of BADC research organization’s seed in terms of seed moisture, germination,

⁵² See <<http://news.priyo.com/2013/01/08/business-65320.html>> (accessed 12 February, 2013).

⁵³ Goutam Gourab Barua, October 24, 2012, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ Mohammad H. Mondal, June 2010, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ W. M. H. Jaim and Shaheen Akter, “Seed, Fertilizer and Innovation in Bangladesh: Industry and Policy Issues for the Future”, *International Food Policy Research Institute*, September 2012.

⁵⁶ Mohammad H. Mondal, June 2010, *op. cit.*

and vigour and seed health. In most of the cases, farmers do not adopt and apply recommended packages such as the use of quality seeds, balanced fertilizers, isolation, rouging, irrigation, plant protection and different post-harvest activities for rice and wheat seed production.⁵⁷

The supply of the good-quality of seeds is only 40 percent of its demand. Survey results have shown that 64 percent of Bangladeshi farmers use their own wheat seeds year after year. Twenty six percent of the farmers purchase from other farmers in local markets and only 10 percent of the seeds are purchased from the government's seed suppliers.⁵⁸

The Socio-economic Impacts of Food Insecurity on Bangladesh

Social Impacts of Food Insecurity

Malnourishment and Poor Health Condition

There is a clear link between malnutrition and household food insecurity. According to a government report, about 40 percent of Bangladesh's 160 million people live on less than US \$1 a day. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) reported that nearly 60 percent of food-insecure households were hit by hunger due to insufficient income.⁵⁹

Malnutrition also increases at alarming rate in Bangladesh affecting nearly 30 million women and 12 million children under five years old. Bangladesh has the world's highest proportion of newborns with low birth-weight.⁶⁰

Due to food shortage, rural areas present higher rates of three types of malnutrition such as wasting, stunting and underweight in comparison to urban areas.⁶¹ Demographic groups such as landless, agricultural day labourers, casual fishermen and beggars are the most vulnerable victims of malnutrition.

⁵⁷ Md. Najrul Islam and S. M. Altaf Hossain, "Studies on Policy Option for Quality Seed Production and Preservation of Cereal Crops at Farmer's Level for the Improvement of Food Security", National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Program, USAID, November 2010.

⁵⁸ Salina P. Banu, J.M. Duxbury, J.G. Lauren, Craig Meisner and Rafiqul Islam, "Wheat seed quality – A study on farmers' seed", 4th International Crop Science Congress, available at: http://www.cropscience.org.au/icsc2004/poster/2/3/1169_banus.htm

⁵⁹ Please visit: http://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media_4942.htm

⁶⁰ See <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/89920/BANGLADESH-Unemployment-food-prices-spur-growing-hunger>> (accessed 12 December, 2012).

⁶¹ Please visit <http://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media_4942.htm> (accessed 25 November, 2012).

Within households, children, the disabled, pregnant women and nursing mothers, and the elderly face relatively high nutritional risks. Over 60 percent of all pregnant and lactating women have insufficient caloric intake, and this implies birth of malnourished babies.⁶² At present, at least 46,000 indigenous people in Bandarban and Rangamati districts are foraging for food, even resorting to eating leaves from trees, on hillsides and forests.⁶³

Disease and Rate of Motherly Mortality

Malnutrition rates in Bangladesh are among the highest in the world. It contributes to poor maternal health and pregnancy outcomes for both mother and child. According to the 2004 World Bank report, 40 percent of adolescent girls, 46 percent of non-pregnant and 39 percent of pregnant women are anaemic. Around 36 percent of the births are birthed underweight in Bangladesh due to malnutrition. The report also highlights that approximately 50 percent of children under the age of five are stunted and underweight.⁶⁴

In Bangladesh, there is also the problem of bias during food crisis, because the female members of the household have to reduce their food intake in order to give more of their share to men and children to eat as normal.⁶⁵

Economic Impacts of Food Insecurity

Low Labour Income and Loss of Labour Productivity

Hunger is a major constraint to a country's immediate and long-term economic, social and political development. Due to hunger, the poor do not get access to sufficient food, ultimately causing them to be undernourished and lose the ability to work.

Dependency on agricultural wage labour leaves a household vulnerable to cyclical food insecurity as agricultural employment opportunities vary according to season. During the lean seasons, March-April and October-November, prior to harvesting the main rice crops, job opportunities are low. This results in low wage rates, while food prices are at their highest. Income derived from non-agricultural sources provides a possible safeguard against the cyclical nature of agricultural income and therefore can improve household food security.⁶⁶

⁶² WFP, "Food Security at a Glance" 2005, available at: <http://www.foodsecurityatlas.org/bgd/country/food-security-at-a-glance>

⁶³ Please visit: <http://philippines.ucanews.com/2012/04/08/food-crisis-hits-bangladesh-hill-tribes/>

⁶⁴ World Food Program, "Food Security at a Glance" 2005. *op. cit.*

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Unemployment and Lack of Economic Growth

According to World Food Program (WFP), in recent years, devastating cyclones and floods, the dramatic increase in food prices in 2008 and the global recession have all impacted economic growth in Bangladesh. All of these factors in turn have led to a deterioration of food security and nutritional situation in the country.⁶⁷

The lack of food security sometimes creates huge impact on the future of children, are being taken out of school to engage in income-generating activities to meet sufficient food supply. Male members are also migrating to cities in search of employment to cope with the high price hike of food and to meet their basic demand of food.⁶⁸

Debt Crisis

The increasing food prices have affected the poor in Bangladesh, deepening their debt level tremendously. For example, during the world food crisis in 2008, food expenditure represented 62 percent of total household expenditure, which was 10 percentage points higher than the national average in 2005. To reduce the gap between high price and food shortage, the poor have sunk deeper in debt.⁶⁹ Poor families take loans from their relatives and moneylenders to reduce food insecurity and meet the extra consumption of their families.⁷⁰

At present, meeting the demand of basic food needs takes up a large proportion of the household income of the poor and middle-class households. Specifically, after 2005 and world food price hike in 2008, debt crisis becomes more severe due to continuous impact of global financial crisis on the poor.⁷¹

Initiatives of the Government of Bangladesh on Food Security

Level of Production through Input Distribution Card

In 2012, the government of Bangladesh introduced an input distribution card to nine million small and marginal farmers. The card is now used to obtain

⁶⁷ See <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/89920/BANGLADESH-Unemployment-food-prices-spur-growing-hunger>> (accessed 19 December, 2012).

⁶⁸ World Food Program, "Food Security at a Glance" 2005. *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ See: "Child Malnutrition and Household Food Insecurity Remain Major Concerns for Bangladesh", 19 March, 2009, at <http://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media_4942.htm> (accessed 18 December, 2012).

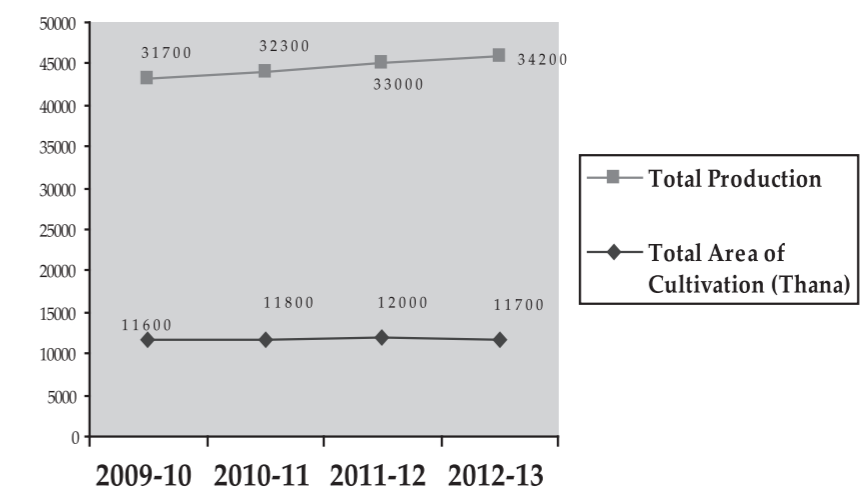
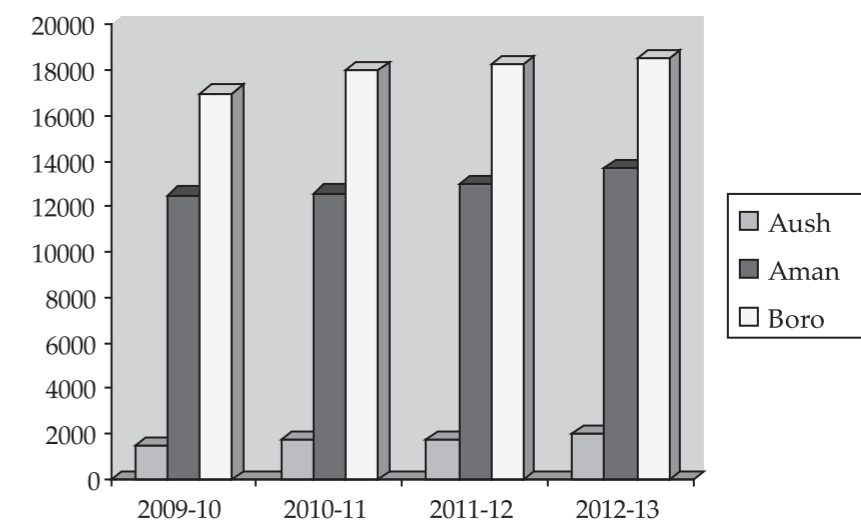
⁷⁰ World Food Program, "Food Security at a Glance" 2005. *op. cit.*

⁷¹ "Child Malnutrition and Household Food Insecurity Remain Major Concerns for Bangladesh", March 19, 2009, *op. cit.*

cash subsidies for electricity and for fuel irrigation, for purchasing fertilizers at government fixed prices and for other forms of government support.

Now, yields are increasing as more farmers adopt hybrid seeds varieties, invest in small-scale mechanization, and use fertilizers and agrochemicals more efficiently.

Bangladesh: Rice Area and Production by Season



Source: <<http://www.thebioenergysite.com/reports/?category=39&id=1157>>

These figures show that the production of crops has improved slightly in spite of some shortages after the Bangladeshi government launched its initiatives. In the 2012-2013 MY, production of Boro is estimated at 18.8 million tons. Production of Aus crop is estimated at 2.4 million tons. According to report by Ministry of Bangladesh, rice production in the 2011/2012 MY decreased to 33.7 million tons. In 2012/2013 MY, rice production has been revised marginally lower to 33.8 million tons, because production of Aman rice faced severe shortage of monsoon rainfall and was also affected by flash floods, especially in the north and southern region of the country.⁷²

National Livestock Development Policy

In 2007, Bangladeshi government formulated a very comprehensive National Livestock Development Policy (NLDP) to address the key challenges and opportunities for sustainable development of the livestock sub-sector and agricultural production of Bangladesh.⁷³

Climate Change Strategic Action Plan

In 2009, Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, adopted the Climate Change Strategic Action Plan with 44 programs to develop capacity for meeting the impacts of climate change of the next 25 years. The government also formed Multi-Donor Trust Fund to attract the support of developed countries.⁷⁴ Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has called for innovations to make crops adaptive to climate change and has reaffirmed her commitment to make Bangladesh self-sufficient in food.⁷⁵

The National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Program (NFPCSP)

The government of Bangladesh launched the National Food Policy (NFP) in 2005 as well as Plan of Action (POA) in 2010.⁷⁶ While the National Food Policy (NFP) ensures sustainable food security for all in the country, the National Food

⁷² See <<http://www.thebioenergysite.com/reports/?category=39&id=1157>> (accessed 17 January, 2013).

⁷³ “Ensuring Food Security through Increased Agricultural Production with Efficient Water Resource Management”, *Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh*, 15 February, 2010.

⁷⁴ See <<http://www.bangladeshnews.com.bd/2009/09/28/pm-outlines-ways-to-ensure-food-security/>> (accessed 15 December, 2012).

⁷⁵ “Bangladesh Commits to Food Security by 2013”, 28 July , 2010, at <<http://southasia.one.world.net/news/bangladesh-commits-to-food-security-by-2013>> (accessed 13 January, 2013).

⁷⁶ See <http://uk.oneworld.net/guides/bangladesh/food_security> (accessed 16 December, 2012).

Policy Plan of Action calls for irrigation projects, the development of microfinance associations, and specific indicators to measure the progress of certain programs. The plan also recognizes agricultural issues with gender, climate and nutritional issues.⁷⁷

The government of Bangladesh initiated the National Food Policy mainly for two objectives. These are:

- Adequate and stable supply of safe and nutritious food
- Increased purchasing power and access to food of the people⁷⁸

This POA has been taken by the government of Bangladesh with four major goals such as food availability; physical and social access to food; economic access to food; utilization of food for nutrition for the period of 2008-2015.⁷⁹

In 2010, it supported the formulation of a Food Security Investment Plan to further strengthen the fight against hunger and malnutrition. The program was jointly implemented by the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit under the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management of the government of Bangladesh and the FAO. It receives financial support from the European Union (EU) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Program helps build Bangladesh’s institutional and human capacities to design, implement, and monitor food security policies as well as to strengthen food security governance.⁸⁰

Duty Free Rice Import

To alleviate food shortage, the government has now allowed the import of food products in most cases to be duty-free. For example, rice imports are currently duty-free. There are also no quantitative restrictions on rice exports. It was in May 2008, that Bangladesh imposed a ban on rice exports. The government has taken action to make a balance between import and export of food products. The ministerial decision was taken on 13 February, 2011.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Loewenthal Massey, “U.S.-Bangladesh Partnership Advances Food Security”, 04 June , 2010, at <<http://www.weeklyblitz.net/768/us-bangladesh-partnership-advances-food-security>> (accessed 14 January, 2013).

⁷⁸ Please visit <<http://www.nfpcsp.org/agridrupal/national-food-policy>> (accessed 19 January, 2013).

⁷⁹ National Food Policy Plan of Action, (2008-2015), Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU) Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, Dhaka.

⁸⁰ Please visit <http://transition.usaid.gov/bd/programs/food_sec_response.html> (accessed 16 December, 2012).

⁸¹ Please visit < <http://www.thebioenergysite.com/reports/?category=39&id=1157>> (accessed December 2012).

Public Food Distribution System

Bangladesh is stepping up its efforts to address the seasonal food shortage particularly caused by flood, drought and other natural disasters. The Public Food Distribution System (PFDS) is the government's main mechanism for addressing shortfalls in household food. The government initiated this program to increase access to food for the vulnerable groups through price subsidies on food grain and targeted income transfer. But the system was reported faulty because of nepotism and corruption as well as high incidence of leakage and manipulation in distribution.⁸²

National Climate Change Fund

The government of Bangladesh has recently established the National Climate Change Fund (NCCF) which mainly focuses on adaptation. Bangladesh is also going beyond its borders to try to find common causes with its neighbours to manage climate change impacts through regional action plans. The country also seeks to enhance cooperation with its neighbours on key issues.⁸³

Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Agriculture and Rural Development

The government of Bangladesh has launched the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in 2005 to create sustainable environment and to support transformation of subsistence agriculture. The PRSP puts emphasis on achieving productivity and profitability gains, broad-based support to agriculture, diversification and commercialization of agricultural enterprises. This strategy also stresses on agricultural research and technology generation, farmers’ demand-led extension services, energizing the agricultural marketing and agro-processing, land use and involving women in agriculture.⁸⁴

Open Market System Program

The government of Bangladesh has introduced the Open Market System (OMS) program in order ensure affordable food for people of low-income group. The program launched the initiative of selling rice and wheat at lower prices for the poor farmers. In this system, a consumer can buy either rice or flour or both the items separately up to a maximum of five kilograms at a time from the designated OMS truck dealers. According to the Department of Food, the

⁸² Food Grain Marketing and Food Distribution System in Relation to Achieving Food Security in Bangladesh, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council.

⁸³ Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, 2009.

⁸⁴ C. Q. K. Mustaq Ahmed, “Agriculture in Bangladesh, Present position, Problems, Prospects and Policy”, March 01, 2010.

country currently has now 1.2 million tons of rice and 0.25 million tons of wheat at the public warehouses.⁸⁵

Agricultural Loan

The government of Bangladesh provides agricultural loan for the poor farmers. In the 2010-2011 fiscal years, the Bangladesh Bank, the central bank of Bangladesh, set a target of distributing US\$1616113744.075829 (taka 12,617 crore) that was six percent higher than the previous fiscal years. On 28 July, 2012, the Bangladesh Bank announced the agricultural loan policy for 2011-2012 fiscal years with a target to disburse US\$1767644421.67 (taka 13, 800 crore) 9.4 per cent higher than the target of previous fiscal year.⁸⁶

Agricultural Subsidy

The government of Bangladesh provides agricultural subsidies to the poor farmers to ensure food production of the country. Bangladesh has started providing subsidies to the agricultural sectors since 2001.

Subsidy Disbursement in Agriculture (2001-2011)

Year	Disbursement tk (in crore)	UD\$
2001-2012	100	12809017.54835404
2002-2003	200	25618035.09670808
2003-2004	300	38427052.64506212
2004-2005	600	76854105.29012425
2005-2006	1200	153708210.5802485
2006-2007	1541	197386960.4201358
2007-2008	2250	288202894.8379669
2008-2009	5789	741514025.8742154
2009-2010	4950	634046368.643525
2010-2011	4000	512360701.9341616

Sources: Bangladesh Economic Review, 2009; and budget speech, 2010; and Jhinuk Parvin, “Agricultural Input Assistance Card: Direct Input Subsidy Disbursement”, Unnayan Onneshan.

Government’s subsidies on agriculture have substantially increased over the years though it slightly declined in 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 fiscal years.

⁸⁵ Talha Bin Habib, “Food stock sufficient Govt plans to reduce OMS rice price”, *The Financial Express*, December 08, 2012, available at: <http://www.thefinancialexpressbd.com/index.php?ref=MjBfMTJfMDhfMTJfMV85MF8xNTI0NTE=>

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Agricultural Input Assistance Card

The government of Bangladesh has prepared an “Agriculture Input Assistance Card Program” to allow cash subsidies to the poor small and medium farmers and to ensure self sufficiency in food. The program conducts smooth cash transfers and reduces misappropriation of financial support. The card system is introduced, as the subsidy provided by the government has not always reached the genuine farmers in need. Middlemen or non-farmers embezzled a significant portion of the government assistance. Of the total 18.2 million farmers in Bangladesh, 9.1 million marginal, small and medium farmers will get the cash subsidy under the program.⁸⁷ In this system, farmers can receive incentives from banks through using the “Agriculture Input Assistance Card” and for drawing subsidy and monetary transactions, and the farmers need to open bank accounts for only US\$ 0.128 (tk 10). They do not need any identification to open a bank account.⁸⁸

Vision 2021 for Climate Change Management

The government of Bangladesh has prepared a plan titled Vision 2021 regarding the management of climate change. The foci of this program are to ensure food security, eradicate poverty, increase employment opportunities, provide access to energy and power, and to achieve economic and social well-being of all Bangladeshi citizens.

There are six pillars outlined in this program: (i) food security, (ii) comprehensive disaster management; (iii) infrastructure development; (iv) research and knowledge management; (v) mitigation and low carbon development; (vi) capacity building and institutional development.⁸⁹

Master Plan for Southern Region of Bangladesh

Recently, the Bangladeshi government has started working on a Master Plan for the South in order to address the key challenges of food security in the southern region. The goal of this project is to improve the productivity of crops, livestock and fisheries in the coastal zone, especially in southern delta of Bangladesh. This master plan also includes better use of technology, improved management practices with available knowledge in Bangladesh as well as from other countries.

In accordance with the Ministry of Agriculture, the government of Bangladesh is planning a road map to support the integrated development

⁸⁷ See <<http://southasia.oneworld.net/news/bangladesh-streamlines-agriculture-subsidy>> (accessed 15 January, 2013).

⁸⁸ Jhinuk Parvin, *op. cit.*

⁸⁹ Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, 2009.

efforts in the southern region of Bangladesh. Considering the water crisis, the country is trying to map out the areas for suitability of crops and use of surface water. The government foresees the multipurpose Padma Bridge as a way of rapid transformation of the agriculture sector in the concerned area. This initiative also focuses on higher crop productivity less use of water and on controlling salinity intrusion into water sources. To ensure continued inflow of fresh water for the southern region, including the Sundarban forest and the production for agriculture, the government is currently working on dredging of the Gorai River for steady inflow of water.

The master plan also intends to provide a road map for an integrated rehabilitation and development effort in Bangladesh’s coastal zone aiming at sustainable food security, poverty reduction and livelihood development for the poor.⁹⁰

Goal of Self-sufficiency in Food Production

Since 2010, the local government of Bangladesh has been active in subsidizing improved seed varieties and fertilizer, contributing to the record harvest of staple rice. In 2011, Bangladesh has opened discussions with some African countries and Cambodia with a view to leasing foreign land to grow food for import.⁹¹

At present, the government now has a clear goal of self-sufficiency in food production. The government has also given more attention on modernizing the country’s agriculture system to ensure food security and attain self-sufficiency in rice by 2013.⁹² The country has also set the goal of ensuring food security through a plan of availability, accessibility and nutrition support by 2017 and to goal of becoming a middle-income country by 2022.⁹³

Regional Cooperation on Food Security: Opportunities and Possibilities for Bangladesh

SAARC Food Security Reserve

From the beginning of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the regional cooperation within this region developed primarily on agriculture and rural development. One of the earliest regional mechanisms

⁹⁰ Please visit <<http://waterclubs.net/challenges-for-food-security-in-bangladesh-inclusive-dialogue-for-a-comprehensive-approach/>> (accessed 23 December, 2012).

⁹¹ See <http://uk.oneworld.net/guides/bangladesh/food_security> (accessed 17 January, 2013).

⁹² “Bangladesh Commits to Food Security by 2013”, July 28, 2010, *op. cit.*

⁹³ C. Q. K. Mustaq Ahmed, 01 March , 2010, *op. cit.*

set up by SAARC was on food reserve. In 1988, the SAARC Food Security Reserve entered into force in 1988, as ratified by the South Asian countries. Regional cooperation began to progress cooperation started moving on the two separate technical committees as early as in 1990.⁹⁴

SAARC Food Bank

SAARC Food Bank was established to collectively face supply shocks following natural calamities or otherwise at the 14th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit in New Delhi held on April 03 to April 04, 2007 through an agreement among the heads of the member states.⁹⁵

The fifth special meeting of the SAARC Food Bank Board was held in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh on 13 May, 2012. In this agreement, the member states came into an agreement to provide national efforts in ensuring food security in the region.⁹⁶ The council of ministers recommended for the establishment of a Regional Food Bank which was endorsed by the 12th SAARC Summit in order to overcome the inadequacies of the Reserve and to improve its functioning.⁹⁷

SAARC Food Bank provides a mechanism for governments to support each other during emergencies, natural disasters and even normal conditions. Through this mechanism the countries can also obtain an early assessment of production of major food grains in the region as well as beyond the region.⁹⁸ In spite of these initiatives, the lack of political will and other differences are responsible for the non-functioning of the long-desired SAARC food and seed banks.

SAARC Agricultural Information Centre (SAIC)

In 1989, SAARC Agricultural Centre (SAC) originally started its journey as SAARC Agricultural Information Centre (SAIC). Since the establishment, it has been serving to relevant agricultural research and information networks among the SAARC member states in order to exchange regionally generated technical

⁹⁴ See <http://www.saarc-sec.org/areaofcooperation/cat-detail.php?cat_id=44> (accessed 16 December, 2012).

⁹⁵ <<http://southasiamonitor.org/detail.php?type=sarc&nid=3976>> (accessed 24 January, 2013).

⁹⁶ Please visit <<http://dfpd.nic.in/?q=node/992>> (accessed 13 January, 2013).

⁹⁷ See <http://www.saarc-sec.org/areaofcooperation/cat-detail.php?cat_id=44> (accessed 12 January, 2012).

⁹⁸ Sheel Kant Sharma, “South Asian Regionalism: Prospects and Challenges”, *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 3, July-September 2011, pp. 305-314.

information and to strengthen agricultural research, development and innovations.⁹⁹

Asian Development Bank (ADB) is now assisting the SAARC secretariat to fully develop five projects regarding food security.¹⁰⁰ These involve:

- (i) enhancing the agricultural productivity of smallholder farmers in selected water-limited areas of South Asia;
- (ii) promoting the balanced use of agricultural inputs in selected intensively cropped areas of South Asia;
- (iii) pre- and post-harvest management and value chain development in South Asia;
- (iv) upgrading of food safety in SAARC member states; and
- (v) institutionalising SAARC mechanisms for the control of trans-boundary animal, aquatic animal and plant diseases.

South Asia Food Security Program

SAARC countries, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka had launched the South Asia Food Security Program with an estimated cost of US\$ 25 million. This program pools together scientific and natural resources in order to improve crop production and nutrition in the South Asian region. The South Asia Food Security Program receives assistance from Asian Development Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the UN Food and the FAO to ensure food security in the South Asian region.¹⁰¹

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Food Data System

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Food Data System (SAARCFOODS) was established in 1996 with seven countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan later became the member of this program. The main objective of this initiative is to develop and maintain authoritative national and regional food composition data of high quality. This system also attempts to develop linkages with other regional networks such as International Network of Food

⁹⁹ See <http://www.saarc-sec.org/areaofcooperation/cat-detail.php?cat_id=44> (accessed 14 January, 2013).

¹⁰⁰ See <<http://www.adb.org/news/speeches/final-workshop-saarc-initiatives-regional-food-security>> (accessed 22 January, 2013).

¹⁰¹ See < <http://southasia.oneworld.net/archive/Article/saarc-to-ensure-regional-food-security> > (accessed 22 January, 2013).

Data Systems (INFOODS), the United Nations University (UNU), FAO and others interested in food composition activities.¹⁰²

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Food security in Bangladesh has become a challenging issue even in the age of globalization. As its population increases day by day, the government of Bangladesh as well as the governmental and nongovernmental organizations should be more concerned about the current challenges of food security in the country. Food crisis has become a dangerous challenge as thousands of its indigenous people suffer from scarcity of nearly every basic need. Malnutrition and mortality rates are very high in the hilly areas of the country.¹⁰³ People from all sectors of Bangladesh as well member countries of the South Asian region should take some necessary measures to overcome food crisis not only in Bangladesh but also throughout the region.

First, there should be some specific laws and regulations to monitor the food crisis management mechanism in Bangladesh. Legal frameworks should be place to maintain a regular flow of food in the market, to balance between the import and export of the agricultural products, and to formulate disaster management mechanism. Law enforcement agencies and officials from the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management will have to be proactive in formulating these initiatives.

Second, the government should give more emphasis on developing scientific knowledge on food-based nutrition and adopt a multi-pronged strategy to attain self-sufficiency in non-cereal food grains, providing supplementary nutrition to children and pregnant women. The government should promote scientific study on how to develop agricultural products with limited access to agricultural land and water. Necessary steps should also be taken for optimum use of limited resources. Government, development partners, non-government agencies, local government, academic and research institutions and other stakeholders should engage in coordinated dialogue and also prepare master plan for agricultural development. They should focus on the sustainable development of the agricultural process.

Third, food adulteration is one of the growing threats for food security in Bangladesh. The country is losing a huge number of agricultural products and foods for illegal mixing of chemicals in vegetables, fishes, fruits and even in

¹⁰² Report of the SAARCFOODS Meeting, Held at the Medical Research Canter (MRI) in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on October 18-19, 2010.

¹⁰³ Amber Holloway, "Tribal Groups in Bangladesh Facing Severe Food Shortage", 05 June, 2012, at <<http://www.partnersintl.org/blog/news/tribal-groups-in-bangladesh-facing-severe-food-shortagePrinter-Friendly> > (accessed 02 February, 2013).

food for children. The government should enact strict laws and impose strong penalties on violators who engage in such illegal acts. The government should also launch regular operation of mobile court to stop these illegal killings. Regular monitoring system should also be introduced to prevent adulteration of food products.

Fourth, the government should take some initiatives to ensure food security for poor farmers. Local government should take interest in reducing their challenges. The government should provide some facilities to have to cope with natural disasters and fall victim to high cost in seeds and pesticides. Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) should provide training to farmers and supply fertilizers and other necessary aspects of agriculture as well as provide agricultural credit loan in simple-to-understand terms to farmers in remote areas.

Fifth, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) should devise a comprehensive policy dealing with food crisis in this region. The member countries of SAARC may formulate separate policies for the low riparian countries as well as for counties which do not have sufficient access to sweet water sources for agriculture. Water issue should be given more priority in SAARC meetings, because any unilateral treaty regarding unequal distribution of water may not only cause severe food crisis, but also damage the process of sustainable development in the region.

There are huge possibilities for Bangladesh to become an economic power. Ensuring food security may bring about many possibilities for this country. However, if the government of Bangladesh neglects the non-traditional security issue, it may turn into a great threat for human security of its people as well as for the security of the state.

Domestic Violence in Bangladesh Analyzing from the Contemporary Peace & Conflict Perspectives

Noor Mohammad Sarker* and Sultana Yesmin**

Abstract

Domestic Violence has been a common practice throughout the recorded history. Corresponding to the other parts of the world, domestic violence has been one of the major problems that affect the lives of many women both in the urban and the rural areas of Bangladesh. Now a day, Bangladesh ranks one of the highest in the world with respect to violence against women and, in terms of domestic violence, 50% to 70% of women in the country report being abused by their male partners. Major forms of domestic violence in Bangladesh include physical, sexual, economic and psychological violence. However, the patriarchal social structure, the culture of acceptance and the wide practice of community violence are considered as the key factors promoting domestic violence in the country. Existing legal and institutional mechanisms often seem inefficient and mal-functioning to protect the rights of the victims. Following rigorousness of the phenomena, there are several initiatives to be made by the stakeholders on the basis of short, medium and long run in order to stop domestic violence from Bangladesh.

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Introduction

Domestic violence on the female members of the family is not a new phenomenon at all. It has been a common incident throughout the recorded history. That inhuman practice varies across the societies and cultures in terms of physical and psychological dimensions of the violence. In many societies, women have been, and still now, traditionally considered as the property of the men. Therefore, it customarily seems to be a man’s duty to discipline his own wife often with thorough beatings, which, at the same time, have also got a profound social justification. Even, sometimes it has been frequently ignored that a woman has the general and natural obligation to enjoy the equal human rights as similar to a man. Most dangerously, the development of a country or of a society has always been measured through its external dynamics, like infrastructure building or lifestyle improving, where the internal dynamics, like family level repressions, have always remain undiscovered and, thus, ignored.

Similar to the other parts of the world, domestic violence has been one of the major problems that affect the lives of many women both in the urban and the rural areas of Bangladesh. Throughout the last decade, a number of pathetic cases about the domestic violence on women have profoundly drawn the attention of the academicians and the practitioners to think about the negative effects of it on the society in general as well as to make some efficient measures against it. Today, Bangladesh ranks one of the highest in the world with respect to violence against women and, in terms of domestic violence, 50% to 70% of women in the country report being abused by their male partners.¹ Keeping all these in mind, it is merely essential, to make some sound initiatives to deracinate the domestic violence from Bangladeshi society. The present study, therefore, attempts to analyze the contemporary picture of the domestic violence in Bangladeshi societies, with the reference of both urban and rural areas, and seeks to identify the essential measurements that have to be made by the different levels of stakeholders to uproot that social disease.

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

The term ‘domestic violence’ usually refers to the physical oppression, battering, spousal abuse and putting psychological pressures, which occurs within the family sphere. This form of violence includes physical tortures, like punching, pushing, kicking, knocking about which are especially applicable in cases of wife-abuse and battering; acid throwing, beating or stabbing, dowry, murder, rape, and suicide (Jahan, 1988). In that sense, it is widely accepted as a form of the violence against women, since the Declaration on the Elimination

¹ “Domestic Violence”, *The Daily Star*, June 14, 2011, available at: <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=189857>. Accessed 12 October, 2012.

of Violence against Women, UN Resolution 48/104 also defines violence against women as any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether in public or private life (UN, 2003).

Domestic violence can generally be defined as a pattern of abusive behaviors by one or both partners in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating, family, or cohabitation (Shipway, 2004). Another view on the term asserts that, domestic violence is a form of physical, sexual, psychological or financial violence that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and that forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behavior (Randal, 2002). So, the awareness, perception, definition and documentation of domestic violence widely vary across cultures and times (WHO, 1997).

Violence in the domestic sphere is usually perpetrated by males, who have been in positions of trust and power including husbands, boyfriends, fathers, fathers-in-law, stepfathers, brothers, uncles, sons, or other relatives. Therefore, domestic violence is, in most of the cases, violence perpetrated by men against women. Women can also be violent, but their actions account for a small percentage of domestic violence (Johnson, 1997).

From the perspective of peace and conflict discourses, the issue of domestic violence can be analyzed from several theoretical strands, like positive peace theory, direct, structural and cultural violence.

To the discourse of peace studies, the issue of domestic violence clearly indicates to the unequal, underdeveloped and subordinated position of women in the societies like ours. According to Johan Galtung, positive peace refers to a transformative process where the stakeholders of the society are devoted to attain more satisfactory arrangements of social justice and equal development. Such changing process must be experienced in an equal basis among all the members of the society, whether male or female (Galtung, 1990). Any kind of disruption or unequal treatment, like violence against women conducted by the men, within the society, thus, usually interrupts the peace process to be maintained (Reardon, 1990). So, the domestic violence is an apparent barrier to the social peace.

From the perspective of the study of violence, the issue of domestic violence concurrently encourages the direct or personal, structural and cultural violence. Direct violence refers to the face-to-face violence where a victim can recognize or identify the guilty person through direct confrontation. For example, in many cases, where wives are beaten by their husbands, perpetrators or oppressors can easily be identified. On the other hand, structural violence manifests itself in the social norms and institutional structure, which

discriminate against people and prevent them from meeting their basic needs. That face of violence is latent into the society and, therefore, aggressor may not be identified (Galtung, 1990). For instance, if a woman commits suicide for she has faced domestic violence; her husband may not be directly accused as a perpetrator of that crime. It is then the social structure, which is, then, usually identified as the responsible for that incident.

Moreover, Johan Galtung has identified seven major components common in every culture, which promotes the direct and structural violence. These include religion, ideology, arts, language, empirical science, formal science and cosmology (Galtung, 1990). In the context of Bangladesh the religion plays key role in promoting and justifying cultural violence in the form of domestic violence. Religious fundamentalism in Bangladeshi societies supports the concept of male domination over female. Therefore, here, violence against women is accepted, tolerated and, in certain prescribed forms and given contexts, it is legitimated. So, gender inequality within the religious fundamentalism, leading to gender violence, is deeply embedded in the Bangladeshi social structure. All Bangladeshi social institutions permit it; even encourage the demonstration of unequal power relations between the sexes (Jahan, 1988).

In the essence, domestic violence, as peace studies assert, disrupts the development and gradual transformation of the society into a more satisfactory level. On the other hand, direct violence, as a single event; structural violence, as a process; and cultural violence as permanence can also encourage the domestic violence within the societies (Galtung, 1990).

Domestic Violence in Bangladesh: Contemporary Phenomena

The issue of the domestic violence is prevalent across all social and economic groups in the rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. In most of the cases, husband seems responsible for committing violence against wife here. In Bangladeshi societies, it has got a culture of acceptance, even, has grown and is being transmitted from generation to generation to the point of being institutionalized (Khan, 2005). It has serious damaging repercussions throughout the rest of society which is taught to accept the subjugation of women.

It is often argued that the rural women are tended to be more victims out of the domestic violence rather than urban women, because the urban women are more aware and conscious of their rights and the human rights organizations are more accessible to the urban people compared to the rural people (CPD, 2009). But, there is an equal probability for a woman lives in a rural area as well as another one lives in an urban area to be victimized by the domestic violence (WHO, 1997).

However, in rural areas, society is more engaged and hierarchical. Therefore, in rural societies, such issues are more open and often socially discussed (Khan, 2005). But, in the urban areas, often people do not even know what is happening in their neighborhood. It is because of that the families living in urban societies are loosely connected (UNICEF, 2000). In such cases, the information of domestic violence is not easily accessible and, therefore, often kept hidden. For Example, In the case of Rumana Manjoor, a University teacher, who had been pursuing a master's degree in political science at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver. She returned home to Dhaka in May to visit her family, including her five-year-old daughter, while completing her thesis. Some days before she returns, her husband told him to remain in the country. For this he intentionally accused her involvement in an extra-marital affair in Canada. This was strongly rejected by Rumana. For instance, in her own words, Rumana says, "he hated the idea that I would become educated." Ultimately, On June 5, 2011, 33-year-old Rumana Monzur was permanently blinded and disfigured by her husband. For 25 long minutes, he tortured Rumana, gouging out her eyes and chewing off her nose and parts of her face. Such inhuman activity had apparently thundered the whole nation and thriven the society to get justice for Rumana.²

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to Bangladesh, Bangladesh ranks fourth among the world's nations with respect to violence against women.³ It also observes that 65% of Bangladeshi males think it is justifiable to beat up their wives, 38% have no clear idea what constitutes physical violence and 40 % keeping women socially dormant.⁴

Moreover, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) observes that despite the 1997 statement by the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee expressing serious concern over the ability of the Bangladesh government to implement effective laws protecting women from violence in Bangladesh, the current situation remains same, as the violence against women continues unabated.⁵ For instance, a report by a prominent Bangladesh women's organization, Mahila Parishad , indicates that between January and October 2003, at least 3,625 women in Bangladesh were victims of violence.⁶

² "Barbaric Mutilation of Bangladeshi Woman", September 16, 2011, available at: <http://www.icl-fi.org/english/wv/986/bangladesh.html>. Accessed 19 April, 2013.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Over 1,000 Raped in Last 9 Months Odhikar Survey says", *The Daily Star*, October 1, 2003.

⁶ "3,625 Women Fall Prey to Violence", *The Daily Star*, December 1, 2003.

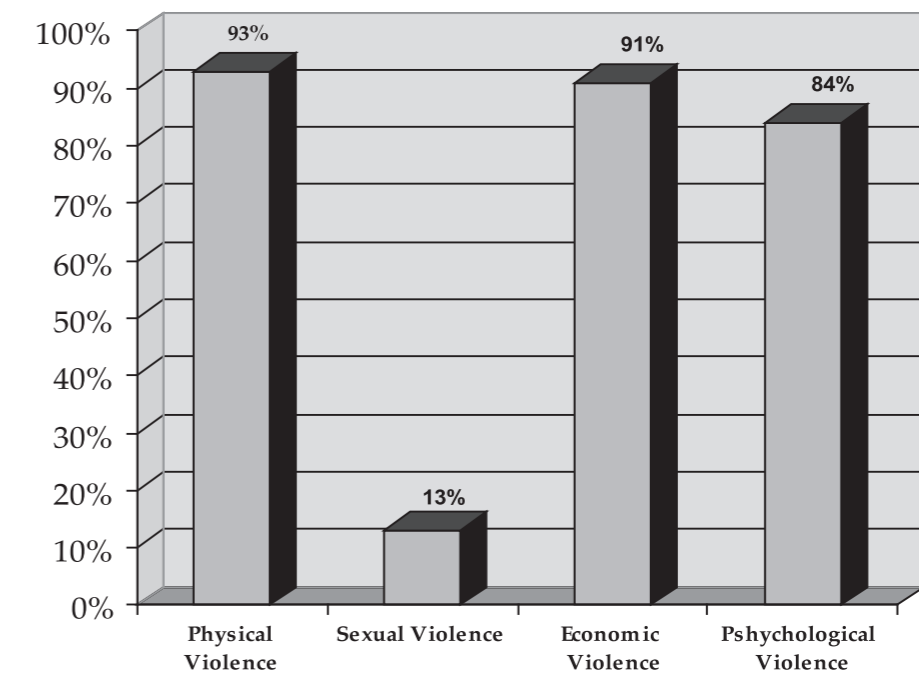
Types of Domestic Violence in Bangladesh

Bangladesh stands second in the world in terms of violence against women in different forms like women battering, wife beating, domestic and dowry-related violence, acid attack, rape, physical and verbal harassment, sexual harassment in the workplace, trafficking and prostitution, polygamy and child abuse.⁷

The study found that, there are mainly four kinds of domestic violence, these include:

1. Physical violence which included hitting, punching, kicking, burning, acid throwing, forced abortion.
2. Psychological violence included threat of physical violence, insult, restricting mobility, abandonment.
3. Sexual violence included marital rape, forced prostitution, refusal to have sex etc.
4. Economic violence included stopping food, stopping maintenance for victim, stopping maintenance for children, dowry demand, not permitting to earn income, forcing to earn etc.

Figure 1: Types of Domestic Violence in Bangladesh



Source: CPD (2007)

For example, a countrywide survey (see Figure 1), conducted by CPD in 2007 on 200 victims, shows that the 93% of victims reported that they had experienced physical violence, only 13% reported of having experience of sexual violence, 91% victims reported economic violence and 84% reported psychological violence committed by their husbands (CPD, 2009).

Among all the various types of domestic violence, acid throwing and dowry dispute remain the most concerned ones. For instance, according to lawyer Pramila Patten, an expert on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), who was speaking at a conference on gender discrimination and violence organized by the Bangladesh Human Rights Commission (BHRC) and the ICJ, acid throwing is one of the major forms of violence against women in Bangladesh.⁸

In a 10 March, 2003 report to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, representatives of the Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC), a non-governmental organization, also expressed their concern over the number of acid attacks on women in Bangladesh.⁹ Sulfuric acid able to burn through skin, muscle and bone is thrown on women for various reasons including:

- Refusal of marriage offers
- Dowry disputes
- Domestic fights
- Property disputes

The Bangladesh Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF), a charity established to support acid victims, has also revealed that 244 women and 25 children were assaulted with acid from 1 January to 3 December 2003.¹⁰ However, the ALRC maintains that the exact number of acid attacks against women is difficult to document because many cases go unreported as victims fear reprisals (ICDDR, 2006).

On the other hand, domestic violence resulting from dowry disputes has been recorded in several recent news reports as well as in the ALRC.¹¹ A report by Odhikar, a human rights coalition group in Bangladesh, states that 278 women were victims of violence related to dowry during the first nine months

⁷ “Poverty, Male Domination Blamed for Violence Against Women”, *The Daily Independent*, 12 June 2002.

⁸ “Enforce Law to End Gender Discrimination”, *The Daily Star*, September 16, 2003.

⁹ United Nations (UN), *Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective: Violence Against Women*, 2003. Available at: [http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/\(Symbol\)/E.CN.4.2003.NGO.96.En?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/(Symbol)/E.CN.4.2003.NGO.96.En?Opendocument) Accessed 17 April, 2013.

¹⁰ “Acid Attacks May Be Tried in Speedy Tribunals”. *The Daily Star*, December 9, 2003.

¹¹ Ibid.

of 2003. Of those women, 184 were killed, 20 committed suicide, 67 were physically tortured, 11 sustained injuries from acid attacks and two were divorced.¹²

Key Factors Promoting Domestic Violence in Bangladesh

There are some major factors, related with culture and religion, and interlinked with each other when operate within a society. These often play crucial role in promoting and sustaining the domestic violence. The following composition clarifies how these key social factors contribute to the domestic violence in Bangladeshi societies:

Patriarchal Social Structure

Bangladesh is a society which is characterized with stark patriarchal domination of women. This domination is clearly visible through women’s positions in families and subsequently in the society. Typically, in Bangladeshi families women’s statuses are determined by their marital statuses through the husbands (Zaman, 1999).

Women’s vulnerability in families is supported by Islamic laws. The precedence accorded to *sharia* (Islamic personal law) limit women’s rights in every personal or family matter (Zaman, 1999; Jahan, 1988). Men are given the right to polygamy, unilateral divorce, double share of inheritance, and guardianship over wife and children. The family law ordinance, amended in 1982, modified the *sharia* - personal laws to some extent, but women’s socio-economic vulnerability and lack of knowledge about rights, prevent proper implementation of such laws (Jahan, 1988).

Moreover, no matter how positively the law has been changed, religion still plays a vital role through the Islamic leaders in controlling people’s rights. Till this day, in the rural areas of Bangladesh, religious leaders in their personal village courts, shalish, solve the family and community disputes, mostly in favor of men (Jahan, 1988). Thus, in Bangladesh socio-cultural-religious norms and values clearly reflect strong patriarchal views, which support domestic violence on women.

Culture of Acceptance

Domestic violence has become a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. Here, is perhaps remains the most important example of structural violence. The existing expertise have identified the prevailing ‘culture of acceptance’, backed by religious loyalty, as the root cause of this occurrence in Bangladesh (Khan, 2005). For instance, now a day, it seems normal when parents beat their

¹² Ibid.

children, teachers beat their students at school, police become violent on the accused person in the police custody and, likewise, a wife is beaten by her husbands. Our culture is to accept all these behaviors, as this acceptance is being transmitted from generation to generation. It has become institutionalized thus leaving an alarming impact on the overall societal development (Tjaden, 2000).

Advocate Sultana Kamal, Executive Director, Ain o Shalish Kendro, has also acknowledged the significance of this culture of tolerance. In this connection she referred to the findings of the study that about 69% of the children do not have any reaction when they witness domestic violence. Later he may follow the behavior of his father in his own conjugal life and think it as a normal behavior and rights of him to commit such crime.

On the other hand, a child must be taught from his textbook about the division of labor, dignity of women and thus discouraging the domestic violence. A woman when experiences spousal violence from her husband whom she loves most, trusts more and thinks he may protect her from all the odds, it shakes her very existence. She then loses confidence in herself to fight back. This type of psychological cost of domestic violence cannot be measured in monetary terms.

Wide Practice of the Community Violence

Community violence occurs when community members collectively perpetrate violence on individuals of the same community. It is the outcome of a community decision to punish one of their members. Community violence in Bangladesh refers to communal violence based on religion, language and caste. It mainly emphasizes on the violence directed to women for sexually inappropriate behavior in the name of “fatwa” or so called religious edicts. A fatwa is a legal pronouncement only when given by recognized jurists or an official Mufti or scholar from various schools of Islamic jurisprudence in response to an inquiry about juristic problems (Randal, 2002). However, the practice of *Fatwa*, disguised as religious edicts, is often abused as a tool for torturing and suppressing women.

Fatwas are The above six forms of violence impair or nullify the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms under general international law and human rights conventions, which include:

- The right to life;
- The right not to be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- The right to equal protection according to humanitarian norms in time of international or internal armed conflict;

- The right to liberty and security of person;
- The right to equal protection under the law;
- The right to equality in the family;
- The right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health;
- The right to just and favorable conditions of work.

There are diversified reasons for community violence. Pre-marital pregnancy and pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relationship was found as the major cause of community violence during 1995-97 (Tjaden, 2000). Besides these, other causes include verbal divorce, love affairs, movement outside home without husband’s permission; husband pronounced divorce for dowry (UN, 2003).

Existing Legal Mechanisms to Check Domestic Violence

In recent years, the government of Bangladesh has enacted several laws intended to protect women who are survivors of violence. For instance, in its fifth periodic report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Government of Bangladesh describes the Prevention of Women and Child Repression Act (UN, 2003). According to the Government of Bangladesh, the law was formulated to protect women and children from heinous crimes such as rape, dowry etc.

The law makes provision for the punishment of sexual abuse and sexual harassment. It also has put restrictions on the media so that the victims’ privacy is protected. The introduction of the concept of the safe custody is one of the most important features of the law. This act introduced capital punishment in cases of rape, and grievous injuries. The important features of the Act (UN, 2003) are:

- Speedy investigation and trial of cases will be held in tribunals and all crimes under the ambit of the law are non-bailable, with few exceptions.
- A summary tribunal titled Women and Children Repression Tribunal would be formed for every district town to dispose of the related cases.
- The tribunal will complete the trial process within 180 days.
- The investigation should be completed within 60 days of the order by a magistrate or filing of the case.
- Under a provision of the law, a rapist will pay for the upkeep of a child born as consequence of rape.

In 2002, the government also enacted the Acid Crime Prevention Act and the Acid Control Act, which includes the following features (UN, 2003):

- Establishment of National Acid Control Council Fund
- Establishment of Rehabilitation Centre
- Treatment for the Acid victims
- Provision of Legal Aid for the acid victims
- Locking up shops of acid sale and ban on transport engaged in carrying acid
- Cancellation of acid selling License for the time being
- Capital punishment of acid thrower and penalty up to Tk 1 lakh (approximately US\$1,709)
- Judgment in special tribunals
- Judgment in the absence of the criminal
- Power of the Magistrate to take record of witnesses anywhere.

The Law Commission of Bangladesh also has taken the initiative of drafting a Bill on domestic violence. The Draft Bill has many strong positives. These include the following steps¹³:

- The Bill extends to the whole of Bangladesh and grants jurisdiction to Family Courts.
- The Bill is gender neutral, and includes a range of domestic relationships within its ambit.
- The Bill provides for a person other than the victim of domestic violence to make an application to the court on behalf of the victim.
- The definition of domestic violence extends beyond merely physical violence, to include sexual and psychological violence as well.
- The Bill provides for interim protection orders while an applicant's complaint is being investigated.
- The Bill provides for a range of measures that can be included in a protection order, including barring the abuser from entering the shared home.
- The Bill empowers the court to grant compensation to the victim where appropriate, of any amount.
- The Bill empowers the court to order counseling for the abuser and / or the victim.

But, despite these legal measures to stop violence against women, several sources, including the Bangladesh government in its report to CEDAW, maintain that there is a need for improved law enforcement and implementation. It has been observed that the enforcement of these laws was

¹³ *The Daily Star*, July 15, 2006.

weak, especially in rural areas, and the Government seldom prosecuted those cases that were filed (UN, 2003).

Policy Recommendations

In order to eliminate the domestic violence from Bangladeshi Societies, a number of steps must be made by the stakeholders. Government remains the key responsible actor in ensuring proper policy making and implementation mechanisms. Non-governmental actors, such as, civil society, business organizations, mass media etc., also have a shared responsibility with government to make the government aware on the issue when seems necessary and to monitor the policy implementation process.

The present study has divided this section of policy recommendations into three major parts based on the importance of the required policies, these are: short run, medium run and long run.

Short-run

Short run policies basically focus on the tactical policies that are targeted to be achieved within a short period of time and are cost effective. The result of these policies sought to be achieved within few months. Short-run policies include:

a. Quick Tribunals

Quick judgments on the part of the victims should be facilitated by the government in the broader level and the society in the local level while dealing with the issue of domestic violence. Government can facilitate mobile courts to give the victims justice and to punish the perpetrators as early as possible (ICDDR, B, 2006). Besides, society should also come foreword to ensure the justice through putting pressure on the local law enforcement agencies. Society can pressurize police to deal the case in a just way.

b. Rehabilitation of the Victims

Besides giving justice to the victims, it is essential to ensure social rehabilitation of those victims. Garnering community support for the women survivors should be facilitated. They should get the appropriate accommodation and security facilities for themselves and their children from the Government as well as from the society.

Medium-run

These policies required to be implemented within two or three years. Range of such policies should be much broader and effective. Reformation of institutions and regulations should be the major focus of these policies. Medium-run policies involve:

a. Reformation of Existing Rules and Regulations

The current rules and regulations should be reformed in two broad ways:

- There are some existing laws that are effective against domestic violence. But a particular set of law, entitled as ‘Anti-domestic Violence Act’ should be facilitated by the government in order to ensure more effectiveness of rules and regulations against the domestic violence (Khan, 2005).
- Some other laws should be reformed in order to ensure the easier access to government services by the people, especially, by the victims of domestic violence.

b. Proper Implementation of Law

Besides the reformation of the rules and regulations, government should also take necessary steps to make those initiatives fruitful. Proper implementation of those updated laws may ensure the elimination of domestic violence (Bhuiya, 1999). Accountability and efficiency of the responsible government institutions must be ensured at that point. Such initiatives may include:

- a. Educating the police to develop new attitudes and skills on gender violence.
- b. Pressurizing the police to enforce the law, follow suitable legal procedures and prosecute the perpetrators of domestic violence.
- c. Set up an accountability mechanism and monitoring police handling of violence cases and police behavior.
- d. Using litigations and test cases to improve the performance of the courts
- e. Challenge and confront the courts to comply with the laws.
- f. Networking and advocacy towards effective policy change and evolving support systems.
- g. Making the governmental secretariat more transparent and accountable to the matter.

Long-run

These policies should be made on a regular basis and, therefore, should be sustainable. Such policies would prevent to reemergence of the domestic violence. The major focus of these policies should concentrate, therefore, on the involvement of the greater part of the societies within these policies. People should be at the center of such policies rather than institutional reformations.

a. Creating Public Awareness

In order to make a social change, the perception of the society must be changed at first. Therefore, elimination of the domestic violence from the society needs

the creation of public awareness on the issue. Public awareness programs may include:

- a. Raising community or neighborhood opinion against wife beating
- b. Initiating collective community action against domestic violence
- c. Mobilizing men and women from other mass-based groups, trade unions, etc.
- d. Enhancing media publicity given to the issue of domestic violence.
- e. Campaigning for gender just laws and reform in the criminal justice mechanism (UNICEF, 2000).
- f. Business organizations should make all of their members aware about the rights of women workers.
- g. Business organizations should invest more to facilitate the public awareness programs against domestic violence.

b. Making a Part of Academic Education

It is necessary to make the whole nation aware about the particular roles, responsibilities and rights of women. That may attained by making the study on the rights of men and women as a part of regular academic education. Thus, a sense of honor will be built up among the soft-hearted students, whether male of female, which will ultimately lead to a greater cohesion and the elimination of social crimes, like domestic violence.

c. Ensuring Regular Psychological Treatments for Women

As the majority of women who are victims of domestic violence suffer from great mental trauma, they need to seek the help of mental health professionals. Routine questioning by the psychiatrist is very important because patients are not likely to disclose domestic violence spontaneously. All reported cases need a risk assessment. The presence of psychiatric illness, like morbid jealousy in the batterer, has to be born in mind as it is of great significance in risk assessment. The principles of management include establishing the victim’s safety, treating mental illness, providing information about local resources and assessing current and future risk.

d. Ensuring Women’s Empowerment

To make women free from oppression, ensuring their empowerment in the society is must. Women should be encouraged to make their role and position valuable at the political, economic, social, religious and familial levels. Government and non-governmental organizations should also provide:

- a. Extending material support to the women
- b. Enabling them to access economic resources, information, etc.

- c. Creating economic opportunities for women, such as employment.
- d. Empowering women with the knowledge of their rights.
- e. Providing them with information about the various government welfare programs and helping them to access them.
- f. Providing women with the necessary socio-cultural space to conceptualize and articulate their issues.

Concluding Remarks

Women in Bangladesh face double peril. Inside the barred doors, it is humiliation; outside there, it is public anger. Victim women due to the domestic violence are now going to court or police for protection. But even if appeals for protection are met, only disrespect greets them when they return home. Similarly, despite every stigma, dowry continues to be the signature of marriage and as one of the primary cause of domestic violence. Therefore, dowry death is a relatively easier crime than murder to prosecute and so the crime continues.

Religious stigma and customary cultural practices contribute greatly to sustain such kind of violence in our society. A single word is, therefore, not uttered by the victims, since the society does not authorize it at a natural basis. A majority of the victims belong to the under privileged classes and they have hardly any means to fight out the lengthy legal battles. While court appearance and seeking police protection in all these types of torture and violence by husbands and in-laws appear to be a painful experience. Therefore, most women prefer to sweep their bitter experience under the carpet, even to die in silent protest.

However, society has always been a progressive entity. It can not achieve progress while keeping a half of the total society in simply darkness. We have to understand that our existence in the world has come from our parents, comprised of a male and a female. Unless a female remains unable to play her role into the society, social progress will simply be stopped. Therefore, besides men, women should also be honored and valued in the society. They may need some strength apparently to figure the way out from the social oppressions. Then, their strength must come from the society and from the government.

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