

Experiences of Minorities in a Secular country like Bangladesh

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Experiences as Minorities in a Secular country like Bangladesh

Taylor, as quoted in Bahn (2012) said history is not a catalogue but a version of events. A version of events, meaning some several or/and different versions of an event. The versions are recorded in accordance with the pace of time. Events happening on a specific time period give testimonies about the socio-political condition of that specific timelines. For instance, the subject of this study- attack on minority- has happened throughout the history and those events are embedded on the time frame of the timeline. Majoritarian authorities have always depressed and demeaned the minorities in every means along the history for several communal purposes. In Bangladesh the scenario has also been same over the period of time.

The minorities have always been under threats of the majoritarian voices in Bangladesh. Be it religious minority or ethnic minority, their voices are always unheard and are left behind in several sectors. Though the constitution of Bangladesh declares it as a secular country but that is only a bookish term and has no practical use in today's world. The community where people lives are varied with people from all religions, community and ethnicity and are seen living in harmony but things turn out to be opposite when rumors spreads regarding the disrespect of anyone favor. Without thinking much one group attacks the other causing terrible bloodshed. Sometimes people from one community attacks their own neighbors on the basis of that news without being concerned about anything, furthermore, some attacks has no such logical grounds as well. One of such incidents happened when a group of people whose religious belief was Islam shouted to the Hinduism practicing neighbors next door. Islam practicing people claimed that

when Hindu practitioners chant evening *arati* during *Maghrib waqt* it brings disrespect to the Muslims living around them. Later on the rhythmic chanting and tinkle of the bell was never heard.

However, on the other hand, the religious festivals and ritualistic occasions are celebrated with enormous enthusiasm through active participation of the common people. The celebration of Durga Puja one of the biggest of all the celebrations of Bengal and Bangladesh calls for an assimilation of people regardless of religion and caste. Even, lots of people from different community, faith and religion are seen on the eve of the festival. The same thing happened during other rituals as well. For instance, the *Baishabi* or *Biju* festivals of the Buddhist community mostly celebrated by the Buddhist people of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is joined by people outside of their own community nowadays. These festivals have even got a commercial important as several corporate houses are sponsoring. But along with the wrapping up of the event the harmony vanishes up as well. One priest sighed after Durga puja, *Ma o jai, Shanti o jai* (as Mother goes, so goes the peace) i.e. along with the sacrifice of goddess Durga on *Dashami* peace also gets sacrificed as well.

On a different note; rituals, customs, rites, beliefs and superstitions constitute a very recognizable substratum in the religion and social life of the people of a country. The adoptions of cultural practices are done differently and depend on geological ambiance as well. After all, livelihood is what determines the life of peoples. The people of this basin were accustomed to those practices which were very closely related to their livelihood. A large portion of cultural practices have emerged from their agrarian way of life. The

trees, the forests, the beasts and birds, the flora and fauna, the rivers, the streams and the supernatural spirits constitute the composite folklore of Bengal in general. Another point is, the adoption of religion was very social rather than theological, so as the religious practices, because traces of practicing different vows are found which have no association with the religion they are following whatsoever. Different customs, rituals and festivities celebrated around the community had no specific emerging force rather than the livelihood system. For example: *vanjo*, a vow wishing good crops. This used to be practiced by everyone in that agrarian community regardless of any boundary. Other than this practices accustomed with specific religion were celebrated with same emotions and togetherness and the testimonies are found in several *puthi*, *baul song*, and other rural literatures.

There was no specific identity of religion with such strong notion but as days go they came to be into the play. However, constitutionally this is also to be claimed as a secular country having a state religion. The sense of Nationalism which was the basis of 1971 Liberation War has become the same case for treating the Indigenous people of this country. Being in a county of Muslim majority with Bengali ethnicity is making it hard for 'others' to live as citizens with all their rights and freedom intact. Moreover, there are several attacks are being recorded recently but festivities are celebrated as one. So what is going wrong here? How does it feel to live in 'exile' in 'own' country? My study on the conditions of minority, being a minority, should be another building block among the worker on minorities. This study will explore the internal and external experiences of the minorities they face every day on a regular basis being an 'infected body' in Bangladesh.

Methodology

The study has been done using Ethnography. In order to 'cover as much territory as possible' (Fetterman, 1989) i.e. to grasp a holistic view ethnographic method was carried on. Several tools from this method was used to operate the study. Later on after collecting the data, quantitative data was used in order to support the information gathered from the field.

Fieldwork. Fieldwork was conducted in Jessore, Satkhira, Dhaka and Jahanpur union of Naogaon district. Jessore was taken into account because several people from Hindu community converted to Christianity as their faith. The same thing happened in Satkhira where the scheduled caste people converted to Christianity. These two things led to some tensions around the locale; and also several attacked on those peoples were recorded as well. Dhaka was chosen as it is the capital and a handsome number of Christian, Buddhist and Hindu along with several groups of minorities among Islam i.e. Ahmadiyahs are living here. Many indigenous people who practice Christianity are living in this metropolis as well. Their living community is little different from the community the Bengalis live in, which made me interested to knock their condition as well. Last but not the least, Jahanpur union was taken as a field for quite abruptly. As I went there for another work I observed that most of the villagers were either Hindu or Indigenous and they are being treated as the worst section of mankind, retaining all government and non-governmental facilities out of their reach by the people of Muslim community

Participant Observation. Participant observation was done in Dhaka and Jahanpur. The case of Dhaka is different though because I live in this setting

and it was easy for me to grasp the situations. Observation was done for 4 days in a row in Jahanpur Union of Naogaon district. I did not live in Jessore and Satkhira for a long time but went there several times for interviews and having a general conception of the area.

Formal interview. This came out to be one of the most important data collecting techniques. Several in-depth interviews were conducted for understanding the minority problem from a personal point of experience. Individual experiences were helpful to create the big picture of the event. This has also been helpful to bring out different personal opinion and insights regarding their association with the minorities, their rationale behind living together or to attack as well were able to know how things actually work. In order to justify the statements as methodology, three people were interviewed who has converted to Christianity. A Pahan family was interviewed in order to know the difficulties they face.

Along with this, two Imams were interviewed in Dhaka. One Christian priest was interviewed who works in Satkhira and gave baptism to several scheduled caste who converted to Christianity.

Informal interview. Most informal interviews were done in tea stalls mainly. People of Satkhira and Jessore when saw me as an outsider, eventually they asked the reason of being there. When they know my purpose of visiting there they let the discussion began automatically. They started saying the conditions of the religious minorities of their area. Another informal interview took place while I went to visit a *smasan* in Barishal, the priest their told about their experiences of being a religious minority. Several informal interviews

took place in Dhaka after the mass in Church when people were talking about living in a Muslim majoritarian country and their experiences on the eve of several attacks on religious minorities.

Case Study. Several case studies were analyzed in order to get a clear picture of the whole event. Most importantly, Ramu incident and Nasirnagar incident were analyzed. In addition to that, a parallel case on VGD card distribution among the villagers in Jahanpur Unipon Parishad was studied as well.

Photographs and newspaper clippings. Numerous photographs were taken during the event which has analyzed the level of vandalism too place, the way it happened. Also the housing conditions of the people of minority groups were taken into account. In addition to this, some videos were also used for a clear analytical conclusion.

Literature Review

Before digging deep into further discussion some conceptions needs to be discussed here in order for a rigors understanding later on. The discussion starts with one of the mostly used word in this country anywhere and anytime, Secularism. According to Bandhopadhyay (2011) secularism is used as a literal meaning of *Dharmanirapekshata* (ধর্মনিরপেক্ষতা) meaning an alienation or seperation from religion whatsoever. But he also has warned not to estimate the term as distant from religion. He has added that at the time of the speading of this idea in 18th century the connotation carried a meaning of having no dependancy and faith over religion and state has nothing or in other way

around religion has nothing to interfere in one another's business. State and religion was seen as two different entities. However, in this part of the world this conception was first intook by the constitution makers of India who placed this word as a meaning: "Mutual co-existence of each and every faith" (Bandhopadhyay S. K., 2010). But Bandyopadhyaya (2008) has argued that that should not be marked as secularism; he rather labled it as Catholicism. However, Bandhopadhyay (2010) has elonged the discussion by adding that no democratic country should promote any specific religion and none would be brought into the light of penalty unless anyone is disturbing another's faith and emotion. Most importantly everyone is equal to law. Ayub (1978) has remarked that the adoption of the concept secularism is not as same as it happed in the West because Churchs (read religious institutions) has not entirely cut their cord with State rather religion play an importatnt role in shaping and reforming state and socociety within its boundary. Quoting Radhakrishana he added "I want a state authrotiviely that secularim does not mean irreligion. It means we respect all faiths and religions. Our state does not identify itself with any particular religion" (Ayub, 1978). Secularim in modern state however has a relation with religion as Bandyopadhyay (2008) has mentioned that modern state has adopted religion in order to make people belief and have faith on religion in order to keep a social moral ground which was good in a sense. But the fundamentalists and extremists has taken those things as a hint and a way to spread their ideology in society (Bandyopadhyaya, 2008). In context of Bangladesh not only the fundamentalist but also several people take this as their weapon to have dominance over others and spread this idea among general people.

In Bangladesh, secularism was taken as one of the four pillars of constitution i.e. fundamental principals of state policy. The act of secularism and freedom of religion in constitution says:

¹The principal of secularism shall be realized by the elimination of-

- a. Communalism in all its forms;
- b. The granting by the State of political status in favor of any religion;
- c. The abuse of religion for political purposes
- d. Any discrimination against, or persuasion of, persons practicing a particular religion.

Several preambles of the Constitution of Bangladesh projects an secularist view towards its citizens. Starting with Preamble 8 where in Fundamental Principles of State Policy has been declared and secularism is one of the four main principles along with Nationalism, Socialism and Democracy. Secularism has been explained in Preamble 12 as communalism in all its forms. It also allows ‘the granting by the State of political status in favor of any religion’, ‘the abuse of religion for political purposes’ and ‘any discrimination against, or persecution of, persons practicing a particular religion’. In addition to this, Preamble 28 under the section Fundamental Rights says that ‘the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth’. Along with this the same preamble adds that none should be kept underprivileged on the basis of the theme stated above. Preamble 38 aware that no such association in group

¹ Substituted for the former article 12 by the Constitution (Fifteenth Amendment) Act, 2011 (Act XIV of 2011), section 11. (MoL). II

should be allowed if it is for the ‘purpose of destroying the religious social and communal harmony among the citizens’ and creating prejudice on the basis of religion, race, sex, caste, language and place of birth. Also grouping for any terrorizing purpose or any militant activities has been regarded as non-righted according to the constitution of Bangladesh. It also adds that ‘its formation and objects are inconsistent with the Constitution’. The Freedom of Religion (Preamble 41) allows every citizen to have the freedom of ‘profess, practice or propagate any religion’. It also has allowed all religious community or denomination in establishing, maintaining and managing its religious institutions. It furthermore adds:

“No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or to take part in or to attend any religious ceremony or worship, if that instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own.”

And most importantly the Constitution of Bangladesh has declared all citizens equal before law ‘and are entitled to equal protection of law’ in Preamble 27 sectioned as Equality before Law. Although, after having so much of constitutional framework Bangladesh still face attacks on minorities resulting a great number of decreases in their number.

In this circumstances, Umar as cited in Dey (2014) wrote that Awami League adopted idea of Secularism had as such which can address the term *Dharmanirapekshata*. He rather explained the point saying that their idea of secularism was to give freedom to all religious groups and letting religion play a part on policy making (Dey, 2014, p. 50). This allowance of letting all

religion come to a common ground in a political sense is what they had wanted to do but later on they failed and some major changes occurred. For instance, as Umar wrote, forgiving and being nice to the war criminals of 1971, utteration of 'Khoda Hafiz' by the end of any TV or radio show, arranging *Milad Mahfil* in *Ganabhabana* (Prime Ministers Residence), running the Madrasa curriculum along with Bengali curriculum and allotting money for that and most important of all this thing brought a fundamentalistic ideology i.e. a sense of Islamic community behind the general veil of Nationalism. Umar thinks that the kind of Nationalism which is spread in Bangladesh brings (helps to bring) the idea of fundamentalism. He added that this approach is quite similar to the idea of Jinnah's Two Nations Theory (Umar, 1987, pp. 29-31). He has agreed upon the fact that though Bangladesh started with a secular mind but failed in the long run when Zia and Ershad were in power.

The approach of this study will be Foucault's "History of the Present". To Foucault writing of the present needs an account of the past in order to know how the present is different from the past. Writing of the past needs an 'archaeological' approach. Foucault thought it as 'about examining the discursive traces and orders left by the past' (O'Farrell, 2007). Therefore the exploration idea of this study will be to analyze the past incidents of the attacks on minorities in order to get an essence of the present. In addition to that, the notion of 'Governmentality' will also be used which Foucault has remarked as the art of government. Governmentality to Foucault it is actually a strategy, organized practices and rationality adopted and used by the government to produce citizenry best to fulfill its ultimate goals which in another way is its technique of power. Therefore this refers to some practices

which are maintained, ruled and propagated by specific governments. This brings the idea of bio-power in this arena. To put it briefly, governmentalization or governmentality are those tools used by the State to regulate its population and bring under a common authority for ease ruling. Now if we put the notion of Secularism into the framework of governmentality then it clears our view that this is nothing but 'eye-wash' to the people and of courses a ruling tool. Moreover, in this ground secularism becomes a notion which cannot be measured in a normative scale. It cannot be judge on the basis of any criteria but it becomes what a State does or how a State reacts to the actions of religiosity. In a post colonial country where State defines culture, religion and all those factors of superstructure; therefore when the ideology of secularism is adopted by the government it generally gives priority to the majority though it was supposed to be for the minorities as well. Nation State controls power of what the Religion is and what the Secularism is. Secularism inherently contains indeterminacy and it's a project of the State (Agoerma). Thus, it promulgates its own narrative and rights of minority are ignored. Admitting with this idea Sharif has echoed that secularism in constitution is not what secularism means and the secular government stops people from having beef in order to won the heart of the higher class and caste Hindus. Through this they aim for a governmentalized body perfect to retain the sovereignty of the country. However, the pursuit of the State sovereignty power leads to a constant drawing of the line between religion and politics i.e. private vs. public.

Bangladesh, though proclaim it be a secular State but always has been participating in different Islamic minded sites. Sharif exemplified that during

Awami League's ruling period it has participated in 'Islamic' conferences and the President attended and donated knowing it was against the constitution. He moreover added that in this country still 'Muslims' are in practical and imaginary field of our community and there is no sign of other communities there. They do not even belong to our psyche. The minorities are not even aware and strong to stand up for their rights commented Sharif, lastly, in his piece on Secularism.

Limitations

The limitations of this study stood up while interviewing the victims of the attacks. They were hesitating to give information because of security issues. Peoples who converted from other religions to Christianity gave so much biased information which came out to be imaginary while cross checking and it was a hindrance for reaching to the authentic data. Furthermore, the incident on Ramu, though the issue of indigenous community is included, I however looked the incident from a 'religious attack' platform. Issues of Dhaka were consciously avoided because the demography of the people living in this urban settlement was hard to locate somewhat, especially in a community size. While the key actors were providing expressive autobiographical interviews it was hard for me to verify the data.

While writing the historical portion the line was drawn from the partition. Ancient historical sections were deliberately shunned. This was done to capture the political play of this Indian sub continent only.

In addition to this, using the definitions was quite hard for me as well. In order to avoid any disturbance specific definitions that match with the study

was used only. Others were avoided though they were brought into account while arguing with the case.

Moreover, although an expert ethnographic study demands a longtime fieldwork but because of the limitations of time that could not be done.

Other than these the study could have revealed some more areas but because of the dearth of time this could not be done. Some more interviews and much analytical scopes are still remaining unexcavated.

Discussion

A study like this is quite meaningless unless the study of the past. Political plays since 1947 and then again in 1971 has really changed the lives of the people. And after incidents of 1971 and turmoil Bangladesh has result a different view into the lives of the religious minorities. Thus these two theme will be discussed in order to analyze the experiences into two broad sections: historical background and the experiences.

Historical Background.

Though this easy can start visiting the past since very early, however, for several bindings I will bind my work from 1947 to 1971. Time of British Colonialism will get some spotlights as well in some cases. And later on the second section of this chapter will discuss on the things going on in Present Bangladesh.

The Past: 1947 is an important year in the history of this subcontinent which has played a significant role in changing and setting the course of the partitioned countries i.e. India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. It was 1947 when

British ruled Indian Sub-continent was partitioned and two different countries were born: Indian and Pakistan. Pakistan had two different locations one on the east and other on the west having remaining Indian landscape between those two. The division of the whole region was done on the basis of 'Two Nations Theory' which was essentially on the basis of two religions, Islam and Hinduism. However, the theory proposed by Muhammad Ali Jinnah suggested the basis of religion should not be the basic of nationhood, he remarked, as quoted,

“... you would find that in the course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state.” (Nayar, 2003).

On the same piece Nayer (2003) cleared it that Jinnah envisioned religion as a private affair and never counted as a part of the State. However, just before the partition, in 1946 there had a ruthless clash between the Muslim and Hindu community on 16th August, named as 'Calcutta Riot'. It was the outcome of two torment minds of people from both the community. However, this thing of course has a root deepen into the soil of history when British took *Divide et impera* (Divide and Rule in Latin) as a tool of ruling this large land of 15 core lives. In 1858 Lord Elphinstone confessed about using this tool as a part of ruling strategy in India (Bandhopadhyay S. K., 2010).

On another note, Sepoy Mutiny was an attempt for independence which was organized and operated together by Muslims and Hindus. This unity was somewhat problematic to the British and for which they segregated

the battalion on the basis of race (Bandhopadhyay S. K., 2010). However, the unity which was built among the higher class Hindus and Muslims during the time the revolt started deteriorating as higher class and higher caste Hindus charged up for taking all the advantages from the British Government in order to keep the then Mughal administration away from the central power. This was an incident which went against the Muslims and consequently they lagged behind. This was admitted by Fuller during the division of Bengal in 1905, “Muslims became the victims of Imperial administrative decision” as remarked by Bandhomadhaya (2010). However an important point needs to be taken into account that, it was not the whole group of Muslims in general but only the upper class Muslims who were essentially the opponent of the upper Hindu class had that experience. Other lower class Muslims remain unchanged in the rural Bengal alike the Hindus. Bandhopadhyay (2010) quoted Sharif, saying,

“lower caste Hindus were directly linked with the life of the Muslims due to their profession. But this thing never triggered anything rather they were unnoticed. For this reason, though they had not that much mutual respect but never attacked those people in rural area.”
(Bandhopadhyay S. K., 2010)

Therefore the main clash was between the power grabbing factions of Muslims and Hindus from higher class; where the presence and activity of others were consciously ignored. This ignorance though worked as a blessing for a period of time but turned out to be a serious factor during clashes of those two groups. The losses of lives were higher among the layman

compared to that of those higher class personnel. Roychowdhury (2013) has commented that in Muslim and Hindu kasbah people were targeted to mass killing and there was not resistant from the higher classes of any parties. He added that several students burnt Muslims slums and raped Muslim women for showcasing their 'Hindu Fallacy' (Roychowdhury, 2013). But there are different scenarios as well when Muslim women sacrificed their veiling for saving the lives of the Hindu women and stood against the men of their own community. In other parts of India Hindus as well was prone to the same experiences. So it was evident that the power aspiring groups of both communities faced nothing weigh against the lower class peoples, point to be noted.

1947 has caused the greatest eviction of all times. Hindus from East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) moved to India to a great extent. On the other, several Muslims moved to Pakistan for which they had supported the partition on the basis of Two Nations Theory² proposed by Jinnah. Land was one of the most desired things. Several homes left by the Hindus and Muslims were taken over by the evicted peoples. Waliullah (1965) shows a glimpse of what actually happened during that time of taking over. Movie *Chitra Nodir Pare* also shows how Muslims took over the left over home and land of the Hindus. Some little but very important things were there, for example after taking over they had changed the name of the house and sealed the year of establishment

² Jinnah proposed two states for two separate nations. But he was opposed by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad but when Congress and British accepted the division, Jinnah redefined nationhood which was not on the basis of religion. Nayer (2003) quoted from a speech of Jinnah that "You would find that in the course of time, hindus would cease to be hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state". Nayer further added on the same writing that what Jinnah envisaged was religion as a private affair and wouldn't be counted as a part of the State.

as 1947. Attainment of such huge amount of land and wealth allowed them to be in a 'respectable' position in society. Though they do not have to be a higher class Muslim but the possession of such property helped them to climb the ladder of social status. However, this was not the general case, evidence of living 5/6 people in one small room was there as well (Waliullah, 1965). On the other hand the Hindus over there had to face the same thing as well but as there prevailed a strong sense of caste; the Hindus were subjected to several discriminations.

The Hindus who remained here and the Muslims of India were very less in number compared to others. The Hindu community here faced extreme sufferings after the partition, so as the Muslims over there. But this never hampered the upper class rather the lower class experienced the whole scenario with great misery.

The scenario after 1947, when nations were formed based on two religiosities; Muslims of East Pakistan was again subjected to another colonialism of West Pakistan. As the days passed by, things started going at a direction which Jinnah might not even imagined. The two Pakistan's started to coming at bows. West Pakistan was heavily armed in military power and administrative decision makers were in a mood to rule Eastern side without giving them any opportunity whatsoever. The main reason remains as their difference in ethnicity (which played a big role later on in Independence War). In addition to that the lack of opportunities in job and education sector, extraction of wealth from this land, economic inequality and several other issues helped East Pakistanis to get out of the realm and continuous oppression

of its Western neighbors. Bringing the flag of ethnicity - Bengali ethnicity- which was the basis of nationalism, they fought a war which ultimately leads them to have a sovereign country Bangladesh. Though it was a war triggered from economic, ethnic and social inequality and oppression it somewhat led to communal dispute. The Hindu community and their places became a primary target of destruction. Time Magazine reported, "The Hindus who account for three-fourths of the refugees and a majority of the dead, have borne the brunt of the Muslim military hatred" (TIMES, 1971). Not only they were killed but also their belongings were looted and worship places were demolished. A report of Senator Edward Kennedy written as a testimony for United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations informs that the people of Hindu community were 'systematically slaughtered' and the military had painted "H" on the homes of the Hindus. The later on was also agreed upon by Sydney Schanberg (1994) who wrote that the army marked the houses with "H" and were the 'particular targets of the Muslim army'.

However, this incidence of Hindu and Muslim conflict has its root deep beyond the time of partition. Though from a long time Hindu and Muslim community lived in this area with harmony but on later days these two communities faced a real challenge against each other during the British Rule, to be exact. Economic decisions i.e. Permanent Settlement Act where Zamindars were mainly from Hindu community and Muslims being the peasants, social status of the Hindu community who ultimately were on the privileged side because of the adaption with new education system introduced by British, conversion of lower caste Hindus into Muslims, alienation of Muslim community from others but keeping a consistent relation with lower

class Muslims in order to keep solidarity and purity of their religion are some of the highlighted reasons for their clash on later days. These issues gradually grew significant inequality and annoyance among the Muslims and they were up for a separate land only for themselves. From this phase of history this land has experienced several struggles between the two main religions. It was around 1937 (BBC) when after the provincial election Muslim League refused to form alliance with the congress, relations between those two communities started worsening which resulted as Lahore Resolution in 1940 (BBC) and finally the partition in 1947. But all those things did not ended so smoothly. The whole thing resulted several communal violence between two religious groups.

The Present. Coming back to the context of Bangladesh, if the conflict framework of 1971 is analyzed it would be clear that there was of course a contestation was there between the Hindus and the Pakistanis. The baton of this conflict was later on passed in the hands of the associates of Pakistan Army i.e. Rajakars, conservative minded people. Jamaet e Isalami Bangladesh, an Islamic political party formed by Sayed Abul Ala Maududi, helped in spreading this idea in Bangladesh after the Liberation War. Moududi nor believed the governmental system by the people, for the people, of the people neither he thought the people associated with this system as Muslims rather preferred Islamic country and which ultimately had made people of other religion and faith as 'others'. In addition to that the post-independence violence on the Hindu community and occurrence of land grabbing has pushed the community into a backward position compared to Bengali Muslims. Though Sheikh Mujibar Raham had deleared this country as a secular one but

it did not went for long when in 1975 after his assassination Ziaur Rahman introduced multi-party system welcoming Jamaet e Islami and introducing different Islamic symbols in official papers and constitutional preambles, such as '*Bismillahi Rahmanir Rahim*' written in the beginning of the constitution. Later on, Hussain Muhammad Ershad declared Islam as state religion (New York Times, 1988) which has deepened the sense of minority among them resulted a massive attack on the Hindus during that time following the incident of Babri Mosque in India. JMB sponsored daily *Inqilab*'s headline story on Babri Mosque which fueled the anger (Roy D. , 2005). Azad (2001) remarked that during 1990 from 30 October to 2 November an attack on Hindus continued in Bangladesh on the following time (mainly) in Dhaka and Chittagong but several other places were fall prey to this event such as Jesore, Narail, Gaibandha, Mymenshingh, Sunamganj and Sylhet remarked Hossain (2012).

Generally the rise of Islamic extremist groups grew during the ruling period of BNP around 1992. This time HuJI (Harkatul Jihad) formed their organization by declaring it publicly in front of National Press Club. On later days of 1999 JMB and HuJI operated several bombings in different parts of the country. During 2001 some other Islamic groups such as *Islamic Saamaj*, *Hijbut Tawhid* were formed whereas during the reign of Awami League JMB and HuJI groups themselves in a better attire. This rise of Islamic groups not only terrorized with their actions but also spread their ideologies through *Bayan*, *Waaj Mahfil* and several other gatherings among the people. This led to misinterpretations of Quran and driving young souls towards terrorism. These young people were trained and set out for different operations

afterwards. As the groups spread their ideas and understandings into the rural level specially, people were amazed with their flamboyant ways and took their words for granted. (For a better understanding this needs to be clear out that most of the groups likes to follow the Moududi Ideology discussed above). The injection of the ideas helped the roots of fundamentalism and communalism to grow deeper. The big picture on the attacks on the religious minorities testifies the statement.

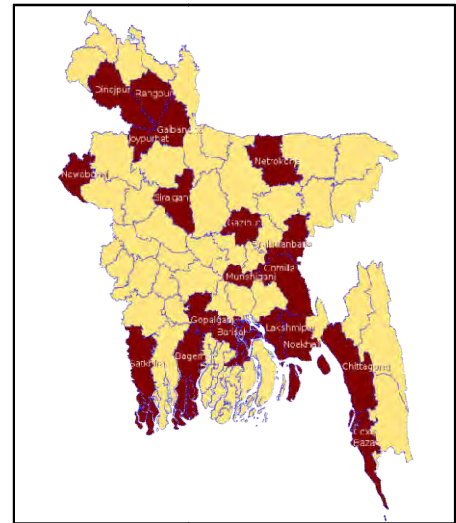
The experiences.

Since then several attacks were there upon Hindu community and even the Buddhist and Christian community was not even beyond the reach of attackers. Even the democratic government has failed to pause or tackle this kind of incidents. During the democratic government the attack has got a different shape and issue. As International Crime Tribunal (ICT) is giving verdict about the war criminals, the sentences of those personnel are becoming the cause attack on Hindus. Moreover, post election violence also causes the minorities a great damage. Recent incidence shows a devastating destruction on Bhuddist community in Ramu on 29 and 30 September 2012. On the beginning of the same year in 10 February 2012 a series of attacks against the Hindu community took place in Chittagong. In 2016 the country has seen attacks on Hindus in Nasirabad, Bramhambaria. Not only them but also the little community of Christians are has also fell victim to violence. It was 2001 when an incident of bombing took place in 3 June 2001 in Baniyachong, Habiganj. After that, several incidents of hacking took place. Many converted

families were being attacked as well. Also the personnel of Church, the pastors and other officials were also attacked.

As the days are passing the rate of this incidents are increasing notably. The attack types of these incidents are generally firing, looting, vandalizing sacred worship places, destruction of idols, burning the whole neighboring places. All these attacks on the religious minorities are taking place ‘in the name of the Holy Quran’³.

This map has been derived from Wikipedia showcased the major places where violence against Hindu community had occurred. The reason for the attack was the death penalty of Delwar Hossain Sayeedi (vice president of Jamaat-e-Islam) given by ICT in 2013. However, the markings of the map won’t change much



if we want to make a big picture of the all anti-other religious attacks recently. According to recent time’s attacks on religious minorities, one against the Buddhist community took place in Chittagong. In addition to that, attacks on Christians occurred in the southern part of Bangladesh and scatter in Gaibandha, Netrokona, Pabna, Dhaka, Rangpur, Nilphamari and Jamalpur⁴. The map must have something to say about the concentration of attacks on

³ The disgrace to the Holy Quran happens when, according to one Imam I interviewed, any practice is observed against the words of the holy book. He added, but this thing is not maintained by the fundamentalist Mullahs they do whatever they want with the scripture and interpret the Holy book accordingly. They only mark those things as disgraces to Holy Quran which they find are problematic for themselves. But a practice from another religion cannot be a disgrace to Quran because that might be right according to their faith.

⁴ Based on the data since 2005 till date.

these areas. While asking an Imam about this issue he remarked that the spread of Islamic ideology was intense there though some places have a history of Hindu community living there for a long time. Christians victims from the northern part said that the attack mainly occurred in those places where people of other religion lives a little away from others. For instance, the converted Santanls of the Sahargachi, Dinajpur told that as their living place is a little far away from the general habitant of other people they have been always in a terrifying and terror situation. However the situation has worsened after attacks on Santals in Gaibandha on November 12, 2016. Though the people of Sahargachi are not anyhow related to that issue but they are in a terrified situation. They are seen mostly as non-believers of Islam rather than indigenous community.

Hindu communities on the other hand face much more harsh behavior from its Muslim neighbors. Recent incident in Nasirnagar of Bramhanbaria district occurred on October 30, 2016. Daily Star reported, “Around a hundred houses, 5 Hindu temples vandalized, dozens injured in attack by religious zealots over a Facebook post” (Star, 2016). BBC (2016) reported quoting one eye witness that an angry mob of hundreds of people suddenly came over and destroyed all those things. She also has added that a large number of Madrasa students took part in that vandalizing event. But she has admitted that their Muslim neighbors have helped them to keep the mob afar but they couldn’t stop the looting (of gold and money especially) and destruction of the worshipping places. Burning down of several temples was reported as well. Person who was accused in charge of posting an offensive photo on Facebook was

threatened and with continuation of that story several Hindu families has started to leave the country.

Converted Christians are one prime target of the Islamic extremists. Approximately 26.08% of the total attacks on Christian's occurred when people converted to Christianity. Especially people who convert to Christianity are mainly from the lower class Hindu and Muslim community. The list of violence against the converted Christians shows that the Muslim converted was more victimized than the Hindus (List of Islamic Terror Attacks).

Missionaries have certain incentives for the families who are enlisted under any church. However, the children are given special privileges regardless of any religion, caste or ethnicity. But this thing sometimes triggers towards an fuming mind meaning when a kid from a Muslim family is going to Church compound and attending all the programs articulated for them, parents think that they are guided towards a 'Christian mind' which also has lead to several clashes. Though this allegation is not fraud either; some denominations directly have intentions to convert in order to receive huge amount of donations from western donors. People on the other hand also had acknowledged that missionaries were good to them which have enabled them to lead a better life than previous. While coming to the converted Hindus, they said that before converting to Christianity they were in a terror of losing their land although they are from lower caste. But they have commented that after conversion they holds some power backed by the missionaries which has

helped them to get of that terrifying situations and they are well-off with their lands and wealth.

Ramu, incident has been the most ferocious attack on Buddhist community in Bangladesh. In accordance with the same incidents above the Ramu incident started when a Buddhist guy was accused for posting an offensive (which brought disgrace to the Holy Quran) photo on Facebook. A series of attack took place in Ramu from 18th of October to 18th of December (Barua, 2013).

According to the recent news papers of 2016, in the first three months total number of destruction of houses and temples, destroying the idol, looting of the idol is around 706, in July it was about 52, in August and September the number is about 42 and 34 respectively (Norrfika, 2016). Not only burning and vandalizing but the angry mob of the Islamic zealots also threats, rapes, burn alive and even kill people of the Hindu community. Several shops owned by Hindus are also fell victim to the anger of the religious zealots. In addition to that forced conversion was there as well including threatening to leave the country as well.

In a nutshell this was a overview of all the aggression against the religious minority community. A figure showing the total damaged family, individual and institution in together will be helpful to get a clear view.

Month	January	February	March	July	August	September
	80	60	9426	145	68	53

Figure 1: Number of total violence against religious minorities in 2006 (Norrfikka, 2016)

My fieldwork in Jahanpur opened another door of my study which I did not take into the account. That is the discrimination while giving access to

the facilities of the government. VGD card, a scheme offered by the government of Bangladesh to give 30kg of rice to the poor⁵ people. It is worthless to deny that the numbers of VGD card are very few compared to the demand exists. But a massive favoritism happens when it comes to distribution. Though it is the duty of union parishad to distribute that but several recommendations from different political leaders hampers it. Only the recommended people get the card and others do not. This is same for incentives for older people.

In Dhaka city religious minorities face it in a different way. One interviewee said, 'in a educated way'. Especially minority people are living in a community i.e. a big chunk of christians live in Monippuripara and Indira road near Farmgate, one of the busiest parts of Dhaka. When a church used to be established anywhere the Christian community is seen growing in its surroundings, as it happened in case of Farmgate. Coming back to the point, as they are living together the scale of any kind of aggression is less but when any family (for any reason) lives estranged from the community they are most likely to be a prone to attack as one of my interviewees experienced. The same thing applies for the indigenious as well. They are seen living in a community with people having the same characteristics. Very few are seen living outside.

⁵ Government has their own categories to define who are poor. They depend on household's economic and physical condition. Also the land acquired by the household and farming land is also taken into account.

FINDINGS

After all the field tours and interviews and analysis of the case studies has enabled me to conclude that (which is in fact an open secret) minorities are not in a good position in Bangladesh. In addition to that several others can be pointed as that Governments are in a position to overlook or neglect the incidents of the minorities. Conversely according to the analysis of the incidents two groups are being created in everyplace where there is an attack. One faction popped up in the name of saving the Buddhist under an organization, felt afflicted with the government and was paid with foreign trips and huge amount of money (Barua, 2013). They even have projected several false statements in favor of the government in order to retain its goodwill. This thing actually divides up the whole community which turns the community into a victim of next attack.

Another factor can be drawn down from this incidents is the Governments negligence. Though they are up with all kinds of rights and justice for the minority groups but in practicality they have failed. No government as such has done something for the minorities. However compared, Awami League is much more liberal to the minorities because of the ideology they held during the war of Independence in 1971 where the identity as Bengali was essential despite of any religion, caste or class. They gave secularism one of their priorities on later days as well. But today this only is prevailing in words and pages and no practical examples are there. Of course as the government they has shown some sympathy towards several attacks on the minorities and agreed to stay by their side, however, that is not

happening in real scenario. Rather, in local level several leaders of Awami League was reported joining with the angry mob for anti-Hindu attacks. Recent incident of Nasiragar in Bramhanbaria is one of such incidence. The cruel truth is that the minorities are counted just before the election only. They are then seen a pathway to grab the seat of the government. However, by the end of the election they are attacked as well. Therefore, election plays an important role in the lives of the religious minorities where they are just a trump card for election.

Another thing that has come into the field of findings; according to several victims is the link of 1947 and 1971. They are attacked because of their religion as this was supposed to be a Muslim country according to the partition of 1947. It was seen that wealth and land of the Hindus are quite aspiring to the well-off Muslims of the neighborhood. One survivor of the attack, a middle aged woman cried with sorrow that Hindu women are target of rape. It was seen that when any attack has occurred very few of them had happened without any rape case. So along with land and wealth women are one of the targets as well. However, this is not a nothing new as because women body has always been a battle field where all kinds of socio-political battle were fought. So one experience that minorities have is being a sufferer of the incidents of the past.

About the singling out in office, schools and other arenas can be the result of bringing up i.e. how a child is bring raised from childhood and what is said to them in those time of mental molding. A psychologist and teacher commented that previously people used to call the red ants as Hindu and the

black ones as Muslim; still that kind of thoughts prevails in the society and people are subscribing to that idea. But there need a class analysis, this happens regardless of any class, meaning, any Muslim regardless of his class feels free to harass any minority and if the person is a she then the scale grows only upwards towards negative. While finding out the reason for this the psychologist agreed with some points which have been discussed by Roy (2014) in one of his writings. Quoting Roy the points can be listed as:

- The fundamentalists think that they had lived in a fairly nice society in the past. But the reason for living in such horrific conditions is the derivation of people from religion.
- People who think like this are not interested take any other beliefs as truth without the one they follows. And in this circumstance, they do not want to be guided by any rationality.
- They want to bring back that beautiful past and for that reason in a most political way and for that they do not even hesitate becoming aggressive and show muscle power (Roy B. , 2014, p. 47).

And for completing their mission they are doing all the notorious things to others. However this is one single point of view only. But this is the ideology through which a large number of people gather for the mob. In addition to this, social inequality throughout the passage of history, bringing up in a religious biased mind is making it difficult for the minority people to live in this country. Moreover, though there is enough law but nothing is in action practically. And the lengthy process of judicial work is making it difficult for the cases to come to a conclusion.

However, the harsh truth is very few of these attacks were taken into the light of Law. The process is so lengthy and very ineffective remarked one of the sufferers of the attack whose own land has been grabbed by the local political leader of his area. Many other cases were hung along with the case of burning of 11 people in their own home in 18 November 2003. This is 2016 and still the case hasn't seen any progress. After submission of the charge sheet for the 4th time as Kaler Kontho (2011) reported the chairman of that area was accused but on later days the case was shifted from several times in different courts. The plaintiff, Bimal Shil cried with sorrow that he has lost his acquaintances and now though he is spending money on getting the justice but there is no light of hope. He doubted if he would get the justice reported Kaler Kontho (2011) as quoted (NorrFika, 2016). Both the opposition and the government party though cried crocodile tears did nothing about the issue. This needs to taken into account that Awami League took it for granted that most of the minorities vote will be in their vote boxes where BNP (Bangladeesh Nationalistic Party) lacks this confidence. Moreover, BNP, as allied with Jamat-e-Islam, provokes minority people to keep away from voting the party for their own safety, admitted several people from religious minority groups.

However, one thing needs to be clarified here that is, attacks on minorities are not only happening through vandalism but in office, educational institutions minority people suffer the same. They are bullied for being a minority and are consider lower than others. Several school going students has confessed being bullied as minority. Even several university students interviewed in private universities were found the same.

Another point that can be made here is that the estranged condition of the minorities in accessing the facilities of the government. My visit to Jahanpur is a proof of that. The VGD card which is given to the poor (thus they can get 30kg of rice from the govt. for free) but they are not evenly distributed. Though the area has a high demography of Bengali Hindu and indigenous community most of the cards goes to the Muslim family. Even several well-off Muslim families were seen getting the card while many ultra-poor Hindu families and Indigenous families are not. It was also seen that they did not recognize Pahan as an indigenous group⁶.

To my observation the religious minorities deals with their issues in two ways: firstly, with/in their own community and secondly, with others. For instance, the living structure of minorities in a community; this thing mostly depends on the denomination and economy. Though many people lives in a community on the basis of same denomination for example, in Shadhan para, Indira Road people are mostly from Catholic denomination. They were seen to have more or less same economic conditions but the living pattern depends upon the economic power. Those who have access to the same facilities lives together. The same thing applies for Mirpur Christian community as well. Those who have more economic and social status lives apart from the community and it is the power of money and social status that safeguards them from any kind of misery. This living pattern is seen more or less in every minor religion.

⁶ Even they are not included in E.T. Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* or in H.H. Risley's *The Tribes and Castes in Bangal*. But Dalton just mentioned Pahan as the priests of Mundas. Even Pahans are not included in the scheduled indigenous list as well. But they claim to be Indigenous and protesting for their rights currently.

On the other hand the indigenous peoples are much more exposed to the community than others. They are being target of direct harass due to their food habit as well (as they have pork as their diet, they continuously harassed by majority people who do not have that). Hindus on the other hand same face the same treatment as well. They are not used to having beef because of their faith practice but in most cases they are assaulted. Even one person accounted that on the eve of Eid-ul-Azha the blood of the sacrificed cow was spread in front of their house. Moreover, for some person, if they can make a Hindu eat beef, see this as a credit to themselves.

Negotiations with others are done very systematically by these peoples i.e. keeping the majority group happy. The well-off people of the minority community sometimes behave like the majority class and give a pity look to them. However, they on the other hand, because of their social status they have several social connections beyond their community; this helps them to live more freely than others.

Students from minority are assaulted in education institutions as well. The writer of this study is one of those examples. They are being continuously harassed and ill talk is always heard by them.

On another note, the issue of VGD card, most of the Muslim family's women have got the card but none of the Hindu or indigenous community as got any. The reason behind it as they mentioned, as they work outside their home, the political leaders take this as an excuse and let the muslim women get those cards (even if they are well-off). One family was found where the husband has got a little business and both of their daughters have little jobs but

the woman has got the card. While surveying for the card others women were simply ignored but she was accounted as she does not go out for a work outside her home because of her religious identity. Religion here plays a very significant role. These people are continuously having been outliers for years after years. They are being kept as the poorest among the poor and lousy among the lousiest. But regardless to mention that, people locating to the rural parts of the country are more exposed to attacks than urban areas. If rural people face the attack physically, in urbanity the attack is more mental. But one thing that rural people face is the direct brainwashing lecture which leads to a mob of destruction while in town it is done in a most strategically educated way.

Conclusion

Religion was always been a sentimental and a tool of political play in this region since the very beginning of the colonial times. British colonial rules used it as a hegemonic tool and it was taken into the same way by the post colonial rulers as well. In Bangladesh the flourish of religion was done in an obnoxious way and the political plays by the governments were terrible either. These political plays turn out to be a lethal for the minorities. Though governments said several times that they are beside the minorities but never paid any kind of attention to them rather saw only as means of political advantages. Awami League, the most 'sensitive' party to the minorities has even avoided several issues as well. BNP and its 14 party alliance were also never been good to them. This thing resulted quite a lot of attacks after the 'democratic' election. The voice of the minorities was ignored all the time.

However, when even they have come up to fight for their rights they failed. They only live by the grace of the government where they are nothing but pawn to them.

The scholars and the intellectuals are howling for the idea of secularism but in reality that is blurred. There is no existence of that idea. Yes, there may be some 'blessed' stories co-existence but in reality that's never happen. The country is ultimate going for a Bengali Muslim one where minorities are scheduled as social castes. Minorities are like 'infected bodies' which is needed to be taken care of to have a healthy one. Going back to Foucault this is done through governmentalization.

However those people live in faith that they will be free one day from the bondage of 'others'. They really want to be a part of the family-Bangladesh but does it respond to them? If a nationalistic view is leaved then they wants to be the part of the larger community without being 'others' but does the society calls for that initiation? And so the question remains, how then 'religious minorities' can live in a 'secular' country? Or is this country even a 'secular' one? Questions still remains answered!

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