

The Islamic Resurgence
Why Bangladesh is a Case Apart

Moinul Khan

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Center for Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism (PICT), Faculty of Arts

Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia

November 2013



Declaration

I declare that this thesis is the product of my own research and contains no material that has been presented for a degree at this or any other university, or any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.



Moinul Khan

Sydney, November 2013

Acknowledgement

This thesis has become an exciting intellectual exercise on my part. The work has drawn many ideas and much encouragement from many people and institutions. I can mention a few of them to acknowledge their contribution.

My first and foremost debt goes to my supervisor, Dr Peter W. Searle, for his support during the last three and a half years. He has been a great source of inspiration in shaping this thesis. I offer my sincere gratitude to him for his responsible and personal intervention throughout that period. At the same time, I would like to express my heartiest thanks to my co-supervisor, and later my principal supervisor Dr Julian Droogan, who has also given me academic support. On many occasions, he gave valuable feedback and critical food for thought for the completion of this thesis.

The Centre for Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism (PICT) and its faculty and staff members were particularly helpful all through my PhD candidature. Particularly, I am very grateful for the active encouragement from Professor Peter Anderson, Director of PICT, who has shown keen interest in my thesis. Professor Anderson also organized tutoring for me at PICT to help develop my teaching skills while giving financial support. I also owe thanks to other staff members of PICT, particularly Andrew McNeil, Annabel Vosey, Louise Hutchence and Matt Weddis for their departmental support. I would also pay high regard to Associate Dean (Higher Degree Research) and her/his staff members of the Arts Faculty. At the same time, I am also indebted to other members of the university including the Higher Degree Research Office (HDRO) and the scholarship unit for organizing the tuition fees and stipends.

With the support of PICT, I paid a field trip to Bangladesh for data collection. During that trip, I interviewed many people including some prominent personalities who have expertise and professional experiences in my area of study. I like to extend special thanks for their valuable time

and contribution to my work. I also received support from persons who were in charge of different libraries and people whom I interviewed while I was in Bangladesh in 2011.

In the course of my research, I contributed a number of articles to the *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* (JPICT), the *BISSS Journal* and other media. In all these I acknowledge the active support of my supervisor and co-supervisor and would like to thank the anonymous peer-reviewers who made valuable comments on my articles. I also attended two conferences, one in Adelaide and the other in Dunedin (New Zealand), and received support from the university that facilitated valuable exchange of views.

Last, but not least, I would particularly refer to the support of my family members. My wife Farhana Rahman (Tusi) and two beloved little daughters, Joanna Khan and Oydan Khan, offered me personal encouragement and made sacrifices for the timely completion of the thesis. I would only state that it would not have been possible for me to reach this stage without their terrific cooperation and good cheer.

Moinul Khan

Sydney, November 2013

Abstract

From 1999 to 2005 Bangladesh, the world's third largest Muslim country, was swept by a wave of Islamic militancy that triggered an outpouring of media and academic analysis that Bangladesh would likely soon fall prey to Islamists. This thesis argues that the Islamist extremism that Bangladesh experienced during those years was largely the result of an ideology and tactics brought back to Bangladesh by some returnees of the Afghan war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s and by a few individuals and groups in Bangladesh who surfaced in response to very specific issues and circumstances. The former believed that the radical ideology they encountered (and imbibed) in Afghanistan could be transplanted to the Muslim community of Bangladesh. But the relative ease by which the Bangladesh Government's anti-terrorism campaign contained the outbreak of that militancy demonstrated how seriously the radical groups had misunderstood Islam in the Bengali context, a context in which Islam is intimately woven with deeper traditions of tolerance and secularism in Bengali culture, nationalism and identity. Secondly, and further in this vein, the thesis argues that there was no direct linkage between that outbreak of Islamic militancy and the higher profile of Islam in the Bengali polity from 1975 to 1990 or that that development was a manifestation of the Islamic revival in the context of Bangladesh. A third argument of this thesis is that factors which have contributed to the Islamic resurgence elsewhere in South and Southeast Asia, including the national character of Islam, the role of nationalism and identity, culture and modernization, and the role of religion in contemporary politics, have, in the case of Bangladesh, produced a quite different outcome, which prompts the central question that frames this thesis: What is the explanation for the 'Bangladesh paradox' – i.e. that while an Islamic agenda has become more apparent or prominent elsewhere in the region, not only has a more conservative Islamic agenda not taken root in Bangladesh but, on the contrary, the secular state and civil society has retained its strength and resilience vis-à-vis Islam-based politics? Broadly, the research provides an insight in that regard in reconstructing perceptions of Islam and Muslim countries, particularly Bangladesh.

Research output from this thesis

1. "Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it failed to take root", *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism (JPICT)*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2011. pp. 54–61.
2. "Low Profile of Islamist Politics in Indonesia: Explaining the 'Demographic Paradox'", *Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) Journal*, vol. 34, no. 2, April, 2013, pp. 128–44.
3. "Political Islam in Malaysia: Context Precedes Ideology", paper accepted for publication in *Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) Journal*, 2013.
4. "Reinforcement of Secularism in Bangladesh", *Asian Conflicts Report*, Issue 13, September–October, 2011.
5. "Explaining the Removal of Professor Yunus from Grameen Bank", *Asian Conflicts Report*, issue 17, May–June, 2011.
6. "Future of Political Islam in Bangladesh", *Uttarayan*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012.

Conference presentations

1. Paper presented on “Syncretism and Containment of Islamist Extremism in Bangladesh” at a conference on *Re-orienting Colonialities and Islam* held at the Muslim and Non-Muslim (MnM) Centre, University of South Australia, from November 22–24, 2011.
2. Paper presented on “Cultural Tolerance and the Defeat of Islamist Extremism in Bangladesh” at a conference on *Citizenship in an Era of Global Crisis*, held at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, from November 28–30, 2011.

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Abbreviations

ABIM	Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement
AIML	All India Muslim League
AL	Awami League
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
DI	Darul Islam
FEER	Far Eastern Economic Review
FPI	Front Pembala Islam
HUJIB	Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh
ICMI	Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals
JI	Jemah Islamiyah
JIB	Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh
JMB	Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh
JMJB	Jagrota Muslim Janata Bangladesh
KPP	Peasant Tenant Party
LJ	Lasker Jihad
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
ML	Muslim League
MMA	Mutahhida Majlis Amal
MUI	Majelis Ulama Indonesia
NEP	New Economic Policy
NGOs	Non-government organizations
NU	Nadhatul Ulama

OIC	Organisation of Islamic Conference
PAN	National Mandate Party
Parmusi	Partai Muslimin Indonesia
PAS	Parti Islam Se Malaysia
PKB	National Awakening Party
PKS	Justice Prosperous Party
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PML	Pakistan Muslim League
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
PPP	Development Unity Party
UMNO	United Malay National Organization

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Since the late 1990s, Bangladesh, the world's third largest Muslim majority country,¹ witnessed a wave of Islamist militancy throughout the country, raising questions about its posture on Islam and the future of secular democracy. (Karim and Fair, 2007, p. 1). International media linked such incidents to the global extremist Islamist agenda. In that regard, *The Economist* and the *New York Times* raised alarm bells about the "spectre of an impending Islamic revolution in Bangladesh, safe haven of Islamic terrorists." (cited in Hannan, 2009, p. 12). There were similar stories published in other international media (Eliza, 2005, Linter, 2002, Pipes and Schanzer, 2002 etc.) alluding to the possibility of Bangladesh falling into the hands of Islamist extremists.

Opposing the largely secular basis of Bengali culture and identity, mainly two groups² targeted the traditional Bengali New Year Festival on 4 April 2001, killing 10 and injuring many others in a bomb attack. (Karlekar, 2008). Another target was the judicial system since such groups claimed man-made laws were inferior to Sharia law. On 29 November 2005, two suicide bomb attacks killed nine people, including two lawyers and a police constable, while 78 others were killed in attacks on the court premises at Gazipur and Chittagong. (Hossain and Curtis, 2010, pp. 5–7). The country's democratic political parties were also targeted with an attempt to assassinate the chief of the then

¹ Bangladesh is geo-strategically significant for a number of reasons. It is the world's 7th most populous country, with more than 150 million people. It is also the third largest Muslim majority country in terms of demographic strength with 88.3 percent of the people being Muslim after Indonesia and Pakistan. (The World Factbook, 2012; Islam, 2011; Hossain & Curtis, 2010). It is also important to note that when Bangladesh was part of Pakistan, it constituted the largest Muslim country having 132 million people in 1971. (Schanberg, 1971, p. 129). The country sits in close proximity to two 'would be' superpowers: India and China. It is also located in the Bay of Bengal off the Indian Ocean. The country is also considered a "bridge between South and South East Asia". (Muniruzzaman, 2008, pp. 1–2). The essence of Western concern is that any rise of Islamism in Bangladesh may transcend to its borders, particularly to the South and Southeast Asia where Islamists are already considered a problem. (Kapila, 2004, p. 1).

² These are *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh* (HUJIB) and *Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh*.

Opposition party (Awami League) and then Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina.³ (Riaz, 2006, p. 108; Muniruzzaman, 2008, p. 7). A summary of such incidents is given in Appendix 1. The identity and the ideological stance of these groups is also furnished in Appendix 2.

These incidents and certain constitutional changes which occurred during the period 1975–1990 also appeared to reflect signs of an Islamic resurgence in Bangladesh. More particularly pertinent in that regard was the declaration by the military regime of General Ershad that inserted Islam in the Constitution as the ‘state religion’ of Bangladesh. (Husain, 2001). It was against this background that many in the media and various authors and public commentators, such as Riaz (2008), Sabur (2011, personal communication), Umar (2011, personal communication), Hussain (2011, personal communication) and Ambassador Sobhan (2011, personal communication), also expressed the view that the higher profile of Islam in the state was connected and conducive to the growth of Islamic extremism in Bangladesh.

Research issues

This thesis argues that a closer examination of the situation in Bangladesh reveals a different picture than that presented by sections of the media and other public commentary regarding the causes and significance of the outbreak of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh from the late 1990s to 2005. It argues that the rise of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh was the result of two factors. One was the return of Afghan war veterans infused with Jihadi ideology in their fight against the Soviets while the other arose from very specific local-level politics and personal rivalries confined to the country’s northern district. In that regard the thesis will seek to highlight the specific and local nature of Islamic militancy and its isolation from mainstream society which, in turn, meant that such militancy lacked any traction in the Bangladesh context as it was antipathetical to

³ In the later case, militants launched grenade attacks on the party’s rally on 21 August 2001, killing about 16 people and injuring over 200 others. Such incidents, and particularly the serial blasts on 63 districts, indicated that the militants had a well-organized command structure and significant capability.

deeper strains in Bengali culture, nationalism and political history and was therefore easily and ruthlessly suppressed.

Secondly, the thesis analyzes the disconnect between the higher profile of Islam in the state and the outbreak of Islamic extremism. In that regard it argues that the military regime played the 'Islamic card' essentially for utilitarian and political purposes, that is, to obtain sorely needed petro dollars from the Middle East, as a hedge against Indian/Hindu pressure and, as very much a third order priority, to bolster the legitimacy of the military-backed regime. Significantly, as the thesis will show, the employment of the 'Islamic card' failed to garner the support of the military.

Finally, and at a broader level, the thesis analyzes how and why those factors which have contributed to the Islamic resurgence elsewhere in South and Southeast Asia – including the national character of Islam, the role of nationalism and identity, culture and modernization and the role of religion in contemporary politics – have not prompted a similar resurgence in Bangladesh. On the contrary such factors in the context of Bangladesh strengthened the resilience of the secular state and society vis-à-vis Islam-based politics and so in that regard Bangladesh remains a case apart.

Methodology

The research is based on qualitative analysis. Both primary and secondary sources were used in this study. Since the thesis is primarily based on historical investigation of the cultural, social and political factors that provided the insularity of the state from being Islamized, published books, articles in journals and newspapers and documents provided significant information for the analysis. The researcher has used the facilities of libraries including Macquarie University, the National Library of Australia, the University of Dhaka, the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), and the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI). The researcher conducted open-ended semi-structured interviews of key and prominent persons who have expertise or experience in the area. This

process is well-recognized in political research and is better known as 'elite interviewing'. (Burnham et al., 2004, pp. 205–20). The researcher relied on these sources of information as a framework for further investigation. The interviews actually led the researcher to seek answers through secondary and primary sources.

The key player interviewees, including members of civil society, security personnel, religious leaders, lawyers, and media and cultural activists were chosen for this exercise on the basis of the chain referral method.⁴ The rationale of this method was that an expert knows other persons who already made important contributions in similar or relevant fields. Such referral is also effective in approaching other experts and seeking their consent to participate in the interview. (Heckathorn, 2011; Campbell, 2010). This research involved 38 participants from different broad categories of people and organizations.⁵ At least two participants have been selected from each of the categories to ensure representative views of the area.⁶ The list of the participants and interview questions and forms are given in Appendix 3A, B and C.

⁴ This method is widely recognized in contemporary research where sensitivity is involved and participants are rarely reachable. The key advantage of this method is that the respondents have their own peers in their areas of expertise or interests and refer to each other. While interviewing, the researcher asks for assistance for referral to other experts. On their nomination, the interview continues until obtaining a sufficient number is reached. In such interviews, 20–30 participants are usually a reasonable target. (Burnham et al., 2004, p. 208). The other advantage of this process is that it is simple and cost-efficient, mainly because the sampling does not involve major planning and a large workforce compared to other techniques.

⁵ In conducting the interviews, the researcher has sought the written permission from the participants and recorded their interview with their consent. However, two police officers, one army officer and a female researcher declined to sign the consent form and asked not to be recorded and preferred being anonymous. In that case the researcher took notes while interviewing. He did not have any other major problem in the process and information gathering.

⁶ One of the disadvantages of this technique involves the problem of bias and lack of representation. The main reason for this disadvantage is that the researcher has no or a little control over the subjects. The participants may refer to those who share the same opinion. (Heckathorn, 2011; Campbell, 2010). To minimize this disadvantage, this research has chosen at least two participants from among broad categories of participants. The categories are researchers, policy-makers, members of law-enforcement agencies, clerics, women leaders, minorities, teachers, cultural activists, lawyers, members of civil society etc. Such categorization and the number of participants from each category ensure representative views.

In gaining access to information and key personnel for the thesis, the researcher has had the advantages of both being a Bangladeshi citizen and a senior civil servant of the Bangladesh Government.⁷

Structure: The chapters

The thesis begins with a brief overview of the literature (Chapter 2) concerned with the complex phenomenon of the Islamic resurgence. Overall, it concludes that context is critical and in that regard a variety of factors including culture, the national character of Islam, nationalism and identity and the role of religion in contemporary politics have, to a greater or lesser degree, been important in the resurgence that has taken place in other Muslim countries in South and Southeast Asia, notably Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. Those same factors, by contrast, have had little or no impact in the case of Bangladesh and so such factors – culture, nationalism etc – became the subject of subsequent chapters.

In Chapter 3, 'Islam in Bangladesh: Cultural Dimensions' provides an overview of the cultural diversity of Bengal from ancient times to the present. Its purpose is to highlight the depth, diversity and strength of myriad influences that over time have been absorbed by or contributed to and defined a unique and robust culture. A distinguishing feature of Bengali culture, identified throughout the chapter, is the strength and durability of its secular and tolerant traditions

Chapter 4, 'Islam in Bangladesh: Bengalized Character', shows how, over a long period, Islam has been subsumed within a deeper and broader identity encompassing a strong indigenous Bengali culture, language and secular tradition. As a consequence, Bengali culture, language and traditions, rather than Islam *per se*, have remained prominent in both state and society.

⁷ The researcher has worked for the National Board of Revenue (Customs) of the Government of Bangladesh for about 18 years as a senior civil servant. In Bangladesh, civil servants are a highly regarded profession in society where the recruitment process is rigorous. The researcher is at present working as Director General, Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate, Government of Bangladesh.

At the same time, Chapter 5, 'Islam in Bangladesh: Socio-economic Dimensions', while highlighting the socio-economic considerations, shows that while during the colonial period Islam played something of a mobilizing role in Bengali antipathy to exploitation by Hindu *Zamindars* and money-lenders, in the contemporary period Islam became associated with the political and economic exploitation of East Pakistan/Bengal by the West Pakistani elites. Thus, the creation of Bangladesh was a clear repudiation of a religion-based state and society in favor of Bengali history, culture, language and traditions including secularism.

In a similar vein, Chapter 6, 'Islam in Bangladesh: Impact of Bengali Nationalism', considers the many foreign elements that have contributed to and given vibrancy to Bengali culture, identity and nationalism. Culture, language and literature have all contributed to a spirit of 'Bengaliness' and Bengali nationalism has been described as a 'state of mind with deep historical roots in the psyche and mindset of the Bengali people'. A particular focus of the chapter is how, during the Pakistani period, the cultural context gained prominence over the religious/Islamic component in the rise of Bengali nationalism.

Chapter 7, 'Contemporary Islamist Politics in Bangladesh (1971–2012)', examines contemporary politics in Bangladesh from Independence in 1971 to the present (2012). In doing so it traces the relationship between religion/Islam, Bengali identity and the identity of the state. The theme throughout is the strength and durability of secularism and democracy in contemporary politics. Particularly significant in that regard was changes made that strengthened the secular character of the Constitution and the state.

Finally, Chapter 8, while drawing the conclusions, summarizes the main findings of the dissertation. The thesis shows that the assertion of some media and academic analysis that Bangladesh would become another Islamist country did not happen. The terrorist incidents of 1999–2005 and the use of Islamic values post-1975 were largely in response to a host of local, political and utilitarian considerations, often unrelated to Islamist ideology. In that regard, while

Islam and Islam-based politics are apparent in other Muslim countries, particularly Pakistan and Malaysia, Bangladesh presents a 'paradox' in retaining and strengthening its secular traditions. The key finding is to demonstrate that the deeper local cultural basis, the syncretization of Islam in the Bengali context, socio-economic considerations and Bengali nationalism have all contributed to powerful constraints on the rise of conservative Islam in contemporary politics. The broader implication of this thesis highlights the mosaic nature rather than monolithic characterization of Islam.

Chapter 2

Literature Review:

The Islamic Resurgence in South and Southeast Asia

Introduction

This chapter begins by identifying some of the obvious manifestations of the Islamic revival. It then proceeds to give an overview of the literature that addresses the complex phenomena known as the 'Islamic resurgence'. In that regard it examines two schools of thought regarding the causes of that revival. First, the chapter considers the 'ideological view' that perceives the resurgence of Islamic universal/monolithic terms or as a 'blue-print for action based on the Quran – whose relevance is boundless'. Juxtaposed to this view is that of scholars who argue that the Islamic revival can best be understood as a response to local issues and challenges facing particular Muslim communities, i.e. context is critical. With regard to the latter, the survey of the literature identifies a number of key factors in the Islamic revival, notably the importance of context and its implications for the character of Islam; identity and nationalism; the role of culture and modernization; the socio-economic dimension; and, finally, the role of Islam in contemporary politics.

After a brief section outlining events or catalysts in the Islamic revival, the chapter considers three case studies of Muslim countries in South and Southeast Asia: Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. The purpose of the case studies is to highlight the impact those factors (identified in the literature review as significant in the Islamic revival) had on each of those countries. All were affected to a greater or lesser degree – context determined which factors were particularly important. The critical point here is that while those factors had a significant impact elsewhere in South and Southeast Asia, those same factors had, by contrast, little or no impact in the case of Bangladesh

and its contrary path towards greater secularism. In this way the chapter seeks to directly link the findings of the literature review to the case studies in South and Southeast Asia, and then, in turn, to the dissertation itself – which seeks to explain why the Islamic revival, apparent elsewhere in the region, had little or no impact in Bangladesh.

The Islamic resurgence and its manifestations

Since the 1970s, a variety of forces have contributed to the higher profile of Islam within Muslim countries and beyond – a development that has had profound political implications for both. This phenomenon has often been termed as “resurgence”⁸ to refer to the rising trends of Islam in private and public life and is equated with revival, re-awakening, reassertion or re-Islamization. Chandra Muzaffar (1986, p. 57) characterizes the phenomenon, known as the Islamic resurgence, as having a number of manifestations which include an effort to bring “Islamic values, practices, institutions, laws, indeed Islam in its entirety, in the lives of Muslims everywhere”. The objective is to recreate a social order based on Islamic religious values dictated in the Qur’an and *Hadith*. According to Hafez (2000, p. 3), the increasing use of religious symbols, efforts to build Islamic society, the controversy over the Rushdie affair, the Gulf War, the Algerian crisis and the Bosnian conflict all demonstrate the political and cultural antithesis of the West and indicates the resurgence of Islam. The main objective of the resurgence is to achieve the ‘Islamic ideal’ which has been defined by Khurshid Ahamad (1995, p. 111) as: “1) intellectual and religious reconstruction of Islamic thought; 2) reconstruction of Muslim society and polity; and 3) approximation of some kind of Islamic cooperation, Islamic unity, Islamic solidarity, i.e. closeness between the different peoples who make up the Muslim Ummah.” While some organized groups have sought these ends by challenging the status quo, and even through violence, others chose to achieve them through peaceful and democratic means. Focusing on Southeast Asia, Nagata (2010,

⁸ The term resurgence has three main elements: first, it is associated with the increasing importance of Islam in the life of Muslims. Second is the connection of the present with the past glory of Islam with a focus of recreating the “cherished path” during the time of the Prophet. Last but not the least is the notion of challenging existing world views, particularly in order to replace the dominant social systems with the Islamic way of life. (Muzaffar, 1987, pp. 2–3).

p. 19) finds a great variety of in the Islamic response to power and politics, including ranging from “accommodation to confrontation, from passivity to violence, and some mutate several times over their lifetime”.

The Islamic revival took a dramatic turn when the Iranian revolution took place in 1979 ousting a pro-Western and secular government through a mass movement driven by Islamic ideology. This had far reaching implications in the international arena with fears of a challenge to ‘the West’ in particular. Dermant (2006, p. 89) comments:

The Islamic world today is in turmoil, and its consequences affect the rest of the world. Although many contradictory currents tug at them, Muslims worldwide are generally returning to religion. Within this trend, a growing minority identifies with a politicized, anti-Western, and anti-modern reading of their religion, called Islamism. Among the Islamists, a minority endorses the use of violence and terrorism against the West to attain their goals.

Husain (2001, p. 137) asserts that the nature of the Islamic resurgence is debatable but it is a fact that many Muslim countries show an increasing tilt towards Islam in the form of an effort to search for national identity and a reconstruction of socio-economic priorities in those countries. According to Husain (2001, p. 138), this trend began in the 1970s; for example, in Pakistan, late President Ziaul Huq undertook various measures of Islamization of the society and aligned with the conservative Islamist groups including Jamaat-i-Islami. Islam has become more prominent in other nations including Turkey, Egypt, Kuwait, Libya, the Sudan, Syria and Indonesia. Regarding manifestations of the Islamic revival, Esposito (1999, p. 10) makes a pertinent observation:

The indices of Islamic reawakening in personal life are many: increased attention to religious observances (mosque attendance, prayer, fasting), proliferation of religious-programming and publications, more emphasis on Islamic dress and values, the revitalization of Sufism (mysticism). This broad-based renewal has also been accompanied by Islam’s reassertion in public life: an

increase in Islamically oriented governments, organizations, laws, banks, social welfare services, and educational institutions. (also cited in Carvalho, 2009, p. 4).

Before the 1970s, the secularization thesis, which postulates that broader industrial and other economic development would result in the decline in religiosity and institutions, appeared to work well in Muslim societies with a shift away from religious activities and values. This was particularly true in Turkey⁹, Syria, Iran and Egypt where the governments confirmed secularization in state and polity, which provided a secular basis for those societies. Islam was considered “an inherited culture rather than a source of practical guidance by a large part of the educated elite” in such countries. (Carvalho, 2009, p. 1). As Hourani (2005, pp. 365–66) argues, most people were outside the framework of state-imposed Sharia law and their personal religious activities and values were not noticeable. However, a clear upsurge has been evident since the 1970s with regard to religiosity in many Muslim societies. Esposito et al. (1991) document “a 111-page bibliography of historical and ethnographic accounts of the contemporary Islamic revival” (cited in Carvalho, 2009, p. 4). Mutulu (1996) by conducting a survey of students at the University of Ankara shows a distinction between the years 1978 and 1991 in terms of religious attachment. The survey reveals that students were more prone to religious commitments and beliefs (expressing the belief in God, existence of heaven and hell, the Day of Judgment and the divine revelation of the Qur’an) in 1991 than they were in 1978. (cited in Carvalho, 2009, pp. 4–5). According to Bayat (2007), the Muslim world saw an increasing trend of women veiling as a symbol of religious conviction. In Egypt in 1969, veiling was not common, but by 2000 there was a rapid shift which saw about 80 percent of women wearing some form of veil. (cited in Carvalho, 2009, p. 1).

⁹ For example, in Turkey, Mostofa Kamal Atatürk after coming to power declared secularism as the basis of state policy and as part of it he undertook several measures including banning Islamic schools in 1924; prohibiting the veil in public schools, universities and government institutions in 1926; banning traditional fez; replacing the Islamic calendar by Christian Gregorian calendar in 1925; replacing Arabic script with Latin in 1928; switching the weekly holiday from Friday, the traditional Islamic day, to Sunday in 1935; and adopting Swiss civic code and Italian penal code instead of Sharia law. (Carvalho, 2009, pp. 1–6; Gregorian, 2003, p. 58–59).

This Islamic resurgence was not only limited to religious participation, values and identification at the personal level, but also spread to social and political levels. There was also a surge of Islamic social organizations which provided welfare services including health care, education and charitable functions throughout Muslim countries. Some of these organizations received funds from oil-rich Middle Eastern countries while others operated on their own. For example, Bayat (2002, p. 12 as cited in Carvalho, 2009, p. 8) estimates about half of the welfare organizations were Islamic in nature in Egypt by the late 1990s and the number of beneficiaries of these Islamic services rose from 4.5 million in 1980 to 15 million in 1992. In a similar vein, Wickham (2002, p. 98) points out that the number of independent mosques increased to more than 46,000 in 1981 from 2000 in 1970. Islamization was also apparent amongst students. Before (in 1970) the student unions at universities in Cairo were represented by secular and leftist organizations, but by the late 1970s were replaced by pro-Islamist student leaders. Professions saw a similar trend with the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist party, gaining control of many professional bodies including doctors, engineers, lawyers, pharmacist and scientists. (Wickham, 2002, p. 2). Islamism was also manifest more broadly at an economic level. The Islamic economy including banking¹⁰ also became an important area where Islamic principles came into force and made an important contribution to the national economy of some Muslim countries. In that regard, some banks operated on an alternative to traditional banking interest, which runs against Islamic norms. State support for wealth collection and distribution through the *Zakat* has also been common in Muslim countries, notably Pakistan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and the Sudan. (cited in Carvalho, 2009, p. 9).

Besides the individual and social manifestations of the Islamic revival, indicated earlier, that revival also had profound implications at a political level. An important catalyst in that regard was the Arab defeat at the hands of the Israelis in the Six Day War of 1967. For many Muslims the Arab

¹⁰ The Islamic economy is the brainchild of Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi (1903–79), an Indian-origin influential Islamist thinker of the contemporary world. For example, monetary interest is prohibited in a strict interpretation of Islam and this restriction has been accommodated in the concept of Islamic banking. (Hannan, 2011, personal communication).

defeat showed that the pro-Western secular forces in their societies were incapable of providing security, protection and effective governance from the onslaught of the West and its allies, most notably Israel. This led many Muslims to see Islam as a better vehicle to assert their identity and achieve socio-economic emancipation. Esposito (1992, p. 21) highlights this trend with reference to such leaders as Ziaul Huq of Pakistan, Muammar Al Gaddafi of Libya, Mohammad Ershad of Bangladesh and Mahathir Mohammad of Malaysia – all of whom increasingly used Islamic symbols, principles and values to legitimize their rule. He also points to the gains made by Islamist parties in local and national elections – notably in Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Sudan, Pakistan and of course Iran. Research by Carvalho (2009, pp. 7–8), furnished in Appendix 4 and 5, shows the rising trend of religious-based political developments.

A related but widely debated development to the flourishing of religion-based politics in the Muslim world was the emergence of Islam-inspired terrorism. Extremist groups, some of which envisaged the establishment of an Islamic state or restoration of an Islamic *Caliphate*,¹¹ resorted to attacks on Western interests which they perceived as inimical to Islam. From the 1970s onwards, there was a series of such terrorist acts including civilian killing, hostage taking,¹² plane hijacking and suicide bombing etc. (Husain, 2002, p. 14).¹³ Appendix 6 and 7 show the rise in such incidents, particularly in the 1980s, culminating in the 9/11 terrorist attack – the most notable terrorist act perpetrated against the United States.

¹¹ It commonly refers to the establishment of an Islamic empire with a *Caliph* or *Imam* as supreme authority who is considered as successor to the Prophet of Islam and representative of Allah (God). The empire is ruled on the Islamic laws, Sharia, as the basis of governance. Such empire existed during the Prophet's time (7th century) and continued till 1924 mostly under different titles, namely the Rashidun, Umayyad, Fatimid and Ottoman. The *Caliphate* is effectively a constitutional theocracy. The key to this theocracy, where divine rule governs, is that the sovereignty lies with God, not the people.

¹² The hostage-taking of the United States embassy in Iran in 1980 is an example of such incidents and was committed in order to get the United States to change its policy toward Iran and secure frozen assets of Iran in the United States.

¹³ There are a number of groups operating throughout the world to stage such terrorist attacks. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI, 2002) lists 28 groups, including Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Laskar-e-Jihad, Jemah Islamiyah etc. designated as threats to the US. (cited in Garrison, 2003, p. 39). According to the FBI (2005), although the terrorist incidents are on the decline, the threat has not disappeared, as evident in Appendix 6 and 7.

Factors contributing to the Islamic resurgence

The so-called 'Islamic resurgence' is a complex phenomenon. There are broadly two schools of thought on its underlying nature and causes. One view shared by scholars like Lewis (1990, 1993, 2002, 2003), Pipes (2001), Dalacoura (2003), Barton (2005), Feder (cited in Khan, 2006), and Radu (2010) often see Islam as a radical ideology and Islamism as a political design for action based on the Qur'an and *Hadith* (sayings of Prophet Muhammad, Muslims utter his name with 'Peace Be Upon Him'). These scholars have a tendency to perceive Islam in universal/monolithic terms and emphasize the ideological nature of its revival to replace the world order with Islamic values.

Juxtaposed to this view, other scholars, notably Gregorian (2003), Khan (2006), Baxter and Akbarzadeh (2005), argue that Islam is a mosaic rather than a monolith and that the Islamic revival can be better understood as a response to local issues and challenges facing Muslim communities. In short, context is critical.

Besides examining these two broader explanations for the Islamic revival, this chapter shall also analyze more specific factors – though doing so with the importance of context in mind. Key factors to the Islamic revival may be summarized: 1. The ideological dimension, 2. The importance of context, 3. Crisis of identity: Nationalism and disillusionment with the West, 4. Cultural factors and modernization and 5. The economic and social dimension.

1. The ideological dimension

One school of thought argues that the contemporary Islamic resurgence is primarily a result of its historical link to politics and power. Esposito (2000, p. 2) argues that Islamism/Islamic revival has grown in response to the perceived failures of ruling regimes to deliver "the goods to the people", maintain good governance and protect their cultural pride and integrity. Pipes (2001, p. 1) equates Islamism with a "body of ideas that takes the religion of Islam and makes it the basis of a radical

utopian ideology along the lines of fascism and Marxism-Leninism.”¹⁴ Further in this vein, Baxter and Akbarzadeh (2005, p. 26) emphasize that “Islamism extracts a political blueprint of action from the Qur’an and the *Hadith*. Islamism or political Islam is therefore a political ideology with its own perspective on the world.” This is a theme also broadly echoed by the Orientalist and neo-Orientalist school of thought which emphasize the universal character of Islam and place it on a common ideological platform based on Islamic values.¹⁵

While Islamist groups have differences of approach, they share common goals. Such groups believe the early Islamic values, particularly those of the first four *Caliphs*, represent the ideal model to restore a “golden age” of “pure Islam”. Radu (2010, p. 35) documents six broad goals of Islamists:

- 1) Eliminating all non-Islamic, especially Christian and Jewish, influences in the Islamic world;
- 2) Re-creating a worldwide caliphate, or Islamic state;
- 3) Recovering all the territories that were ever under Islamic occupation (including the Iberian Peninsula, Sicily, Crete, most of the Balkans, and most of India [also Western China];
- 4) Applying a strict interpretation of Islamic law for all Muslims everywhere;
- 5) Overthrowing governments in Muslim-majority countries that do not accept and apply these conditions; and
- 6) Embarking on a holy war to enforce these goals.

¹⁴ Like other ‘isms’, such as communism, capitalism and fascism, Islamism is also an ideology that moves its followers into action for a particular course of political programmes. It primarily aims at capturing political power with the objective of bringing about changes in social and political structures in line with its professed principles.

¹⁵ The most current debate centered on Islam is the discourse of Orientalism which is regarded as a “paradigm shift” in the scholarship of Islamic studies and politics. (Burke & Prochaska, 2008, p. 1). The notable proponent of this school is Edward Said whose thoughts are contained in his famous book *Orientalism* (1978) where he outlined the Western (‘the Occident’) conceptions of the eastern culture (‘the Orient’) contributing to the formation of prejudices known as “Orientalism”. He argues that the West views the Orient as “the mysterious Orient” and as “Other” (Said, 1978, p. 26) that lacks rationality and is opposed to modernity. According to this view, the West is projected as ‘superior’ while the East as ‘inferior’: “We in the West are rational, the Orient is violent and inexplicable; we are moderate, they are extreme; we practice good administration, they live under oppression and tyranny” (cited in Crook, 2006, p. 1). Singh (2007, p. 173) and Milton-Edwards, 2002, p. 33 also hold this view. For further discussion of the Orientalist debate, see Appendix 8.

Islamism does not recognize the national demarcation of states¹⁶ and looks to transnational authority. The Islamist goal is to establish the supranational arrangement based on Islamic society. The *Hizb al-Tahir* (Liberation Party)¹⁷ and *Al-Muhajiroun* (The Migrants)¹⁸ are two such Islamist organizations operating in Europe, the Middle East and other parts of the Muslim world. These organizations have an explicit commitment to foster unity among the Muslim population and a return to the *Caliphate* which represents the “vicegerency of God on earth” and “image of power and glory” for the Muslims. According to the Hizb al-Tahir and al-Muhajiroun, the present ills of Muslims are a result of the deviation from the path of authentic Islam by giving predominance to the man-made laws over the laws of God (Sharia). The solution lies in the return to the true path of Islam to resolve endemic problems in Muslim societies.¹⁹

The most notable characteristics of Islamist ideology is its radical nature and determination to bring about a change in the existing social and political order. From a Western point of view, Islamists present a real challenge to international security. Although they constitute what Wolny (2009, p. 14) calls a “small minority”, their political ideology is primarily concerned with

¹⁶ The conservative Islamists are opposed to secular nationalism and view it as a foreign transplant in the Muslim world. They advocate the unity of Muslims based on Islam and seek to establish a transnational authority similar to that of the *Caliphate*.

¹⁷ The party was founded in Jordanian-controlled East Jerusalem in 1953. It remains operative in a number of countries in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. It focuses on the supremacy of divine laws and rejection of man-made laws. The party and its operation are banned in some countries, including Bangladesh.

¹⁸ The *Al-Muhajiroun* is an offshoot of the *Hizb al-Tahir* and was founded in Saudi Arabia in 1983 by its leader Omar Muhammad Bakri. The name seeks legitimacy by invoking the memories of *Hijra* (migration) of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina.

¹⁹ However, while Islamism rejects secular nationalism, it has embraced national issues and adapted to the existing parameters of nation-states. Even the Iranian revolution, which remains an important source of inspiration for Islamists, is not an exception. Its leader Ayatullah Khomeini acknowledged that “the requirements of government supersede every tenet [of Islam], including even those of prayer, fasting and pilgrimage to Mecca.” (cited in Baxter and Akbarzadeh, 2005, p. 27). Hafez (2000, p. 5) adds that Islamic Iran has not given up the liberal ideals including “constitutionalism, parliamentarism, technology and industry” despite its anti-West rhetoric. This clearly suggests that a true Islamic society as propagated by Islamists does not exist even as a model. The ideal of the *Caliphate* as presented by the Islamists as a panacea to end the Muslim problems may look attractive, but it ignores the political divisions and schism within the early Muslim leadership. The dispute over the claim to the title of the *Caliphate* by the Abbasids in Baghdad, the Fatimids in Egypt and Abd al-Rahman and his descendants in Spain (10th–12th centuries) are some of the examples of dispute amongst different groups. This also applies between the Mughal and the Ottomans over the ownership of the *Caliphate* for two centuries. (Baxter and Akbarzadeh, 2005, p. 27).

restructuring society by political means in conformity with a radical interpretation of Islam. This includes, among other things, formalizing the state's constitutional and legislative recognition of Islam and the introduction of the Sharia laws. Barton (2005, pp. 118–19) echoes this concern succinctly:

The problem with radical Islamism is that it seeks to impose a 'tyranny of a minority over a majority' and is unconcerned with trespassing on the rights of others. In practice, aggressive legalism and the application of a narrow understanding of the Shari'a can lead to serious erosion of human rights, especially those of women and of the poor and the weak. Radical Islamists would take issue with this objective, preferring instead to argue that they are simply working out the will and purpose of God on earth. Islam is, after all, by definition a path by which one submits to God.

Daniel Pipes (2001, p. 1) asserts that Islam as the "basis of a radical utopian ideology" sets itself to "replace capitalism and liberalism as the reigning world system". In that regard, Islamism is revolutionary in character and has the zeal to change and reconstruct the existing global order of Western liberal ideals to confirm what it preaches as a "true Islamic society". This assertion reinforces the Western view of Islam as a challenge to Western security. Garrison (2003, p. 48) also shares this view and claims that the goal of Islamism is to return to the 7th century interpretation of the Qur'an governing the society "either through conversion or destruction" of the West.²⁰

In that regard, the debate on Islam's links to politics and particularly terrorism is a reflection of a general mindset of people living in the West. A common view in the West is that Islam is inherently opposed to modernity and secularism and looks towards the past. This view also claims that Islam is intolerant of other faiths and always confronts the people whom it consider 'infidel'. It also views

²⁰ Garrison (2003, p. 48) argues that Islamism aims to establish Islamic rule based on 7th century Islamic society. He identifies two components of this political vision of Islam: those who believe in an Islamic world through converting the infidels and those who support the removal of the infidels from the world through the use of force.

political Islam and radicalism as one, disregarding their dynamics and differences *per se*. (Khan, 2006, pp. 71–72).²¹

The ideological debate has also taken a cultural line between Islam and the West. Bernard Lewis in his books *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (2002), *The Crisis of Islam* (2003) and *Islam and the West* (1993) identifies Islam as a “failed civilization” resisting to adaptation to modernity. Earlier, Lewis highlighted the cultural differences between the West and Islam in his article, “The Roots of Muslim Rage”, published in the *Atlantic Magazine* (September, 1990). The key element of Lewis’s thought is that the civilization conflict is largely an outcome of the widening gap between the West which prospered enormously and the Islamic societies that fell into backwardness. (Lewis, 2002). According to Lewis, this failure was largely a result of Islam’s inherent mix with politics which hindered the exposure of Islam to democracy and liberal thought which are essential for modernity. Unlike Christianity²² and Judaism²³, Islam experienced triumphalism²⁴ even during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad who ruled a sovereign state and a religious community. When the Muslim conquest occurred, they brought their own faith, scripture, language (Arabic), set of laws and rules and imperial structures, which became customary as

²¹ The London-based independent research and social policy agency, The Runnymede Trust, constituted a commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia and published a 75-page report in 1997 highlighting the perceptions which are prevalent in the West. The report documents the “closed views” and “open views” of Islam and asserts that the “closed views” are related to Islamophobia and its consequences with regard to the prejudices towards Muslims. The main themes of these perceptions include among other things are Islam as a “monolithic bloc” that includes all Muslims within its uniform structure and Islam as a static religion and unresponsive to new realities. A further discussion of such closed views is furnished in Appendix 9.

²² In Christianity, the religion did not see the triumph of faith in a polity. Christ was crucified and remained a religion for the downtrodden people for centuries until the emperor Constantine, Caesar himself became Christian. The new emperor brought about a series of changes for the empire and transformed its civilization. Christianity came to Europe on an existing Roman state and polity and adapted to the circumstances using existing Latin language. The founder of Christianity bade his followers: “render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God things which are God’s”. (cited in Lewis, 2003, p. 5).

²³ Moses also did not see the polity based on Judaism. He died without entering the “promised land”.

²⁴ Lewis (2002) argues that Prophet Muhammad established a sovereign state in his lifetime. This was followed by a victory in conflicts with unjust and tyrannical societies. This victory gave him the Promised Land where he promulgated his own laws and made decisions for the community according to the scripture. All state affairs ranging from collecting taxes, war and peace to day-to-day administrations fell under his leadership. As a result, the laws, decisions, life-styles and stories during this time became sanctified in Muslim scripture and amplified in Muslim traditions.

“God’s approval” for those who belong to the faith. (Lewis, 2002, p. 5). Since the Prophet, Islamic faith inspired two important traditions: one was ruling (relating to power), and the other was resisting (activism or radicalism) that judged to be unjust or tyrannical. Islam was thus inexorably connected to politics. Lewis (2003, p. 13) calls this connection “the unique Muslim attitude to politics” and asserts that “Islam is not only a matter of faith and practice; it is also an identity and loyalty – for many, an identity and a loyalty that transcends all others”. This view is similar to that of Marsot (1992, pp. 157–58) who argues that Islam does not allow the separation of the religion from politics, unlike Christianity.²⁵ Due to varied contexts of history, geography and culture, the connection between religion and politics may have waned over time. But in some Muslim countries this connection may appear to “reassert itself” when Muslim societies find themselves under pressure. (Marsot, 1992, p. 158).

The most provocative thesis highlighting the Islamic revival and its implications for international relations is Samuel P. Huntington’s (1996) book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* in which he proposed an inherent conflict between Islam and the West along cultural lines. His theory was first published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993 and became a book later in 1996. It remains an important reference of contemporary international studies and world politics today. Huntington argues that the end of the East–West conflict (Cold War) means the end of ideological, primarily political and economic, conflict. That ideological conflict, he argues, has been replaced by a cultural schism so that conflict and clashes would shift from inter-state conflict to conflicts between cultures. According to Huntington, the world is divided into seven or eight civilizations, namely the West, Confucianism, Japan, Islam, Hinduism, the Slavic-Orthodox East, Latin America and possibly Africa. However, Islam and the West are essentially antagonistic and likely to be in

²⁵ Although the New Testament dictates the separation of the religion and politics (“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s”), this also found contradiction in the history of Christianity, particularly evident in the Two Swords in the medieval age and the war of religions in the age of Renaissance and reformation. (Marsot, 1992, p. 157).

future confrontation and clashes and constitute one of the important fault lines for future international conflicts. (also cited in Hafez, 2000, p. 3).²⁶

Having given an overview of the alleged ideological well-springs of the Islamic revival, this chapter turns to what might be termed the importance of the contextual dimension in that regard.

2. The importance of context: Implications for the character of Islam and contemporary politics

Juxtaposed to the view that the Islamic revival is primarily a result of the historical link between Islam to politics and power is the view that emphasizes the importance of context. A view succinctly encapsulated by Vartan Gregorian (2003) in his seminal work *Islam: A Mosaic, Not A Monolith*. Gregorian focuses especially on the significance of diversity within Islam and Muslim societies. As Saikal (2003, p. 275) observes, since all societies are internally diverse one should not homogenize them, generalize about them or allow anyone the sole authority to speak for them.

Echoing the themes of context and diversity more broadly, Esposito (1997, pp. 3–4) argues that despite the role Islam plays as a “source of political development and mobilization”, it remains far from the uniform label of “Islamic fundamentalism”, challenging the thesis of monolithic characterization. He contends that the rise of Islam is primarily connected with local circumstances and reflects the assertion of Islam in diverse ways by the contending parties. He observes:

²⁶ However, this broad categorization does not incorporate the myriad divisions within Islam in regard to its political philosophy. For example, for Islamists there are groups who seek to create an appeal to the electorates through the use of democratic and peaceful means. Barton (2005, pp. 119–20) terms this group “conservative” and characterizes their political philosophy as “modest” and “essentially symbolic”. The *Jamaat-i-Islami* (JI) is such a political party operating in Bangladesh. The Indonesian United Development Party (PPP) is a similar Islamist political party that does not subscribe to radical Islamist views. Other groups externalize a narrow interpretation of Jihad, giving it a religious connotation in their efforts to materialize their revolutionary political ends. This Jihadi Islamism gained currency during the 1980s when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. For a further discussion regarding the divisions within Islam, ‘the revival’ and responses to the West, please see Appendix 10.

State implementation of Islam has varied markedly in terms of its forms of government, domestic programs, and foreign policies. Monarchies, military rulers, presidents and clergy have ruled governments as diverse as Saudi Arabia's conservative monarchy, Libya's populist socialist state, Iran's clerical republic, and Sudan and Pakistan's military regimes. Within some countries, contending voices and groups have vied for power in the name of Islam. Moreover, the appeal to Islam has also served as two-edged sword. Those who wield it run the risk of being judged, strongly challenged, or even toppled by that very same Islamic yardstick. ... Islamic politics must be viewed within specific country contexts, because, far from a monolithic reality, it manifests a rich diversity of leaders, organizations, strategies, and tactics. (Esposito, 1997, pp. 3–4).

Esposito (1997, p. 4) gives examples of such schism within Islam when the House of Saud's claim to Islamic legitimacy was challenged domestically in the 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, by Iran in the 1980s, and by militant critics in the 1990s. Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak came under an assassination attempt by his fellow men. Although he survived his predecessor, Anwar al-Sadat, had to die.

Bearing Esposito's argument regarding the importance of context in mind, other factors identified as contributing to the Islamic revival will now be considered, notably the crisis of identity; nationalism (and disillusionment with the West); cultural factors and modernization; and, finally, the economic and social dimension.

3. Crisis of identity: Nationalism and disillusionment with the West

Bernard Lewis (2003, p. 17), in his seminal work *The Crisis of Islam*, maintains that the resurgence phenomenon flourished mainly in response to "intensification of strains" and a sense of disasters in the Muslim societies. Islam offered alternative advantages in formulating Muslim group identity in the face of attack on their perceived sense of insecurity and injustice. Muslims sought the symbols and slogans of Islam for mobilization in favor or against a regime or a cause.

The main sources of alienation for many Muslims, according to Carvalho (2009, p. 7), lie in the sense of demoralization due to continued political and military conflicts in the Middle East. The Arab–Israeli conflict and the particularly humiliating defeats of the Arabs at the hands of the Israelis in the 1967 Six-Day War are often marked as “a major historical turning point”. (Carvalho, 2009, p. 7). The loss of East Jerusalem, which is considered as the third holiest city in Islam, particularly became a cause of great concern and injury to Muslim pride and faith. The defeat was a “traumatic experience”²⁷ for the psyche of the Arabs and Muslims and resulted in a devaluation of their pride and moral strength. In this vein, so the argument goes, Muslims came to realize that the ideology of Arab nationalism or socialism (as envisioned by Nasser or Egypt) proved futile in meeting the challenges of post-colonial rule. As a consequence, many Muslims turned to a conservative interpretation of Islam as an alternative to redress their deteriorating conditions. This situation is echoed in the writing of Esposito (1988, p. 165):

If Islamic belief and history taught that success and power were signs of a faithful community, many again asked, as they had during the colonial period, “What has gone wrong in Islam? Why has God seemingly abandoned His community?” While some blamed the hold of an outmoded traditional way of life and saw religion as the culprit, religious leaders asserted that Islam had not failed the Muslims. Muslims had failed Islam by relying on the West for their guidance and development. ...For these religious leaders, the lessons of faith and history were clear. ...Massive failure could only be sign of waywardness and faithlessness. Coping with modernity did not require new, foreign-inspired alternatives when the community (*Ummah*²⁸) had a tried and true faith and way of life.

In terms of identity, Baxter and Akbarzadeh (2008, p. 85) highlight another important reason for the Islamic resurgence. In that regard, they emphasize the space Islam filled in galvanizing

²⁷ The 1967 war between the Arabs and the Israelis was so painstaking that most of the Arabs considered it as “the disaster” and the deteriorating conditions of their dignity. Such feeling is evident in Arab literature which represents the declining conditions vis-à-vis the Israelis and their allies. They remember this event as one of the turning points of self-realization in Muslim history and look inward to find the answer. (Esposito, 1988, p. 164).

²⁸ The *Ummah* denotes the sense of fraternity more specifically unity based on the Islamic religion. The adherents, Muslims, are said to perceive themselves as one and their religion is the criteria to bind themselves under a common platform.

opposition to authoritarian regimes, and the use of Islam by the West as a bulwark in its ideological battle against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. They argue:

In societies under authoritarian rule there is often little political space for the expression of dissent. This is particularly true of the Cold War-era Middle East, in which the United States, caught in a bipolar mindset, encouraged the suppression of any forces that appeared to be natural allies of the Soviet Union – that is, left-leaning parties. An unintended consequence of this policy was the empowering of Islam as the only form through which dissent could be articulated. The employment of the language of Islam in the expression of political dissent had, as demonstrated in Iran in the late 1970s, cultural and historical currency in the Middle East. A return to Islam was presented as empowering in societies that were still being rehabilitated from the colonial period and in which communal identity was increasingly conflicted. Seen in this way, political Islam or Islamism can be conceived of as a form of ‘identity politics’ in a region that is in a state of political flux. (Baxter and Akbarzadeh, 2008, p. 85).

4. Cultural factor: Modernization

The Islamic resurgence also had what might broadly be called a cultural/modernization dimension. As part of modernization programs, the secular governments brought about massive changes in society and introduced new social behavior. Turkey under Kamal Atatürk and Iran under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi undertook such initiatives in order to de-Islamize the society, such as banning the veil, discouraging religious education, introducing modern education and replacing Arabic script with Latin (Turkey). The objective was to infuse Western-style modernity in line with the principles of secularism in those countries. As a result, many traditional social and family values, which were integral to their culture, began to recede or be mixed with Western ideals. This process was seen by many Muslims as a main contributor to the growing “breakdown of the Muslim family”, “promiscuous society” and “spiritual malaise”. (Esposito, 1999, p. 14).

According to this view, the secular regimes of some Muslim countries (e.g. Egypt) were seen as agents of the West who represented the interests of the West “at the expense of their [own]

citizens". (Carvalho, 2009, p. 11). Such leaders also opened up the Muslim societies to foreign influences and eroded traditional values, all of which resulted in the sense of Muslim culture being "under siege" due to the aggressive incursion of Western influences. Such developments, so the argument goes, led some Muslim societies to respond to the sense of attack on their culture by strengthening their commitment to traditional beliefs and values. Esposito (1988, p. 166) argues:

The negative impact of modernization on village and family life, traditional religious and social values, seemed to threaten the religious and moral fabric of society. The adoption of a Western lifestyle (its institutions, values, dress, music, cinema), was now increasingly criticized as responsible for the Westernization and secularization of Muslim societies, a threat to cultural identity, and the cause of moral decline and spiritual malaise. Many revivalist themes reemerged: emphasis on the need for greater self-reliance, and a desire to reclaim the accomplishments of the past and root individual and national self-identity more indigenously (to find pride and strength inside, not outside, the community) [but] in an Islamic tradition that had once been a dominant world power and civilization. The prevailing mood and language was one of authenticity (*Asala*), religiocultural revival (*Tajdid*), reform (*Islah*), and renaissance (*Nahda*).

Where there is a sense of attack on their religious beliefs, Muslims tend to have to respond in two ways. One response is an attempt to seek inspiration from the 'authentic Islam' following the Prophet and his *Caliphs*, while the other comes out of the 'traditional Islam' seeking strength through modernization. The Islamic resurgence is partly a result of both of these responses.

5. Economic and social dimension

Besides a cultural/modernization dimension to the Islamic resurgence, various scholars also draw attention to the important aspects of an economic and social dimension with the widening gap (post-independence) between the masses and the middle class in many Muslim societies. During the colonial period, many Muslim societies despaired at their lack of control over resources, employment and status. During the post-colonial phase, many expected the economic situation would sharply improve. However, the ruling elites who adopted modernity and secular ideals failed

the expectations of the rising middle class. Esposito (1988, p. 166) sums up this scenario prevalent in most of the Muslim countries in the post-colonial period thus:

Government promises and development programs had created rising and often unfulfilled expectations. Poverty and illiteracy remained unchecked. Modernization seemed to benefit a disproportionate few, the new urban-based middle and upper classes fostering conspicuous consumption and corruption.

Such a situation contributed to the accumulation of frustration and disappointment of many poor and lower and middle class people and led them to turn to Islam as an antidote to the poverty associated with the ruling elites, secularism and modernity. The Iranian revolution, for example, was primarily a reaction to the failure of the post-modernity and secular model of development, and represents an outburst of their frustrations grown out of injustice, inequality, unemployment and poverty. In this regard, Islam presented an alternative model for many Muslim youths both in a real and symbolic sense as they have tried to find inspiration from religious ideals with the hope of improving their socio-economic conditions and egalitarian ideals. (Hafez, 2000, pp. 5–6).

Provision of welfare services by Islamic social organizations has also contributed to the Islamic revival. Wickham (2008, pp. 99–109) highlights a number of Islamic social organizations and their increased welfare activities in Muslim societies, including healthcare, education, financial assistance with generous funds available from the oil-rich Middle Eastern countries, particularly from Saudi Arab and Gulf states following the oil boom in the 1970s. This was accentuated by a general trend of state withdrawal from social services and of subsidies for many essential goods including food, oil and transportation. (Bayat, 2002). In that regard, the Welfare Party in Turkey, the FIS in Algeria and Hezbollah in Lebanon were believed to have secured considerable support at grass-root level through their welfare services. (cited in Carvalho, 2009, pp. 12–3).

The inter-class aspect in the provision of social services has also had important consequences for the Islamic revival, though the evidence is mixed. Referring to the study done by Clark (2004) in

Jordan, Cairo and Yemen, Carvalho (2009) points out that the Islamic social organizations, which provide services to the poor, draw members mainly from the middle and lower-middle classes as volunteers and employees (e.g. doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers) who also act as an important conduit between donors and users. So, Clark (2004) argues, it is not the poverty alone, but rather “inequality combined with the impoverishment of the educated middle class” which gave rise to the Islamic resurgence. (Carvalho, 2009, p. 13). On the other hand, the literature on the economics of religion does not provide sufficient explanation as to why religious commitments increase with income inequality. For example, the religious club goods model (as proposed by Iannaccone, 1992) proposes that the religiosity increases with the real wages and subsidies for religious groups. However, in some Muslim countries, real wages decreased since the 1970s and subsidies declined for religious groups. At the same time, the secular regimes in those countries (Egypt, Iran, Algeria and Turkey) were repressive towards the religious groups. Despite this, those countries saw a dramatic rise of religious commitment. (cited in Carvalhoe, 2009, pp. 12–4).

As has been discussed, how rapid socio-economic change (modernization) and disappointed expectations have contributed to a return/re-emphasis of Islamic values – further in that vein is a psychological dimension to the Islamic revival. Significant in that regard is the decline in upward social mobility and greater income inequality among university graduates and the extremely low wages of the educated lower-middle class in many Muslim countries. A development that creates a situation of “relative deprivation” is a factor (among others) that has led many Muslims to opt out of the income/status race and embrace religion. Carvalho (2009, pp. 3–41) argues that religious values not only de-emphasize material possessions but for the large number of recent migrants to urban areas, including many unemployed graduates, such a situation provides a sense of moral superiority to help cope with their relative deprivation.

Disillusionment with the West

Finally, one other aspect of the Islamic revival touched on in other contexts (identity and modernization) concerns a disillusionment with the 'West' and alleged or perceived Western values. A negative image of the Western culture is often held responsible for many Muslims looking inward and finding answers in the Islamic belief system. According to this view, the Western virtues of humanism, individualism, scientific innovations, and so on, are often portrayed as being overshadowed by social vices such as lack of ethical and spiritual norms. The stereotype of egoism, materialism, moral degeneration and absence of community spirit are, it is believed, a direct by-product of Western culture. This situation has been aptly expressed by Lewis (2003, p. 17): "On closer acquaintance with Europe and America, Muslim visitors began to observe and describe what they saw as the moral degeneracy and consequent weakness of Western civilization." Such an assertion found resonance in the Islamic resurgence. (Hafez, 2000, p. 9).

Catalyst events of Islamic resurgence

Before concluding this section outlining some of the factors behind the Islamic revival, brief mention should also be made of some events that were important catalysts in that revival. Notable in that regard were the 1973 Arab oil cartel, the 1979 Iranian revolution and the Afghan victory over the Soviets in 1989.

1. The Arab oil crisis in 1973

In 1973, the oil producing Arab countries created a cartel in response to Western support for Israel in the Arab-Israel conflict. Lewis (2003, p. 17) terms this event "a very effective weapon" which was used by the Arab and Muslim countries in support of Egypt in the war against Israel and its allies. The result was that the Arabs proved their new economic muscle vis-a-vis the West through their price hike. At the same time, they amassed huge wealth out of this crisis and made the West dependent on them. The Arab states began to have a feeling that they were no longer "client states" but had earned a bargaining capacity with the West. Esposito (1988, p. 167) terms this new economic power the "source of enormous pride and a sign of a return to God's blessings". Muslims

seemed to have gained the worth lost in the 1967 war with Israel and came closer to “God’s favour”. Thus, the crisis not only helped some Muslim states accumulate wealth, but also gave a moral boost to their convictions and encouraged greater religious participation. This also facilitated the Islamic revival through the provision of funds for schools, hospitals, mosques and various social services. (Esposito, 1988, p, 167). Lewis (2003, p. 17) argues that through the Arab oil crisis the Arabs and Muslims found “wealth, pride, and self-assurance” which added a “new confidence and sense of power” necessary to the resurgence of Islam.

2. The Iranian revolution of 1979

The Iranian revolution of 1979, which ousted the pro-Western and secular regime of the Shah, also became a powerful source of strength to the rise of Islam and Islamism in some Muslim countries. In terms of ideology, the convictions of the leadership and its mass mobilization, the revolution took the character of an “Islamic revolution”. Esposito (1988) maintains that the revolution came to “validate Islamic activist claims that a return to Islam would restore religious identity and vitality and enable Muslims, with God’s guidance, to implement a more autonomous and self-reliant way of life despite a regime’s military power and Western allies”. (Esposito, 1988, p. 167). Baxter and Akbarzadeh (2005, p. 31) point out that the Iranian revolution had a “ripple effect throughout the Middle East” as it was considered as a “catalyst for a change” in the region. This event brought Islam into direct conflict with the West both theoretically and practically compared to the earlier decades of the 20th century. Arkoun and Steinbach (2000, p. xiii) comment, “By removing the Shah, a movement dominated by Islamic ideology had “dared” to destroy an important component in the edifice of Western political, economic and security interests. This could only mean that the tectonics of international politics was changing.” One important lesson, which spread throughout the Muslim world, was to seek inspiration through “less dependence on outside forces, greater self-reliance, and reaffirmation of Islam” as “an alternative” for the failures of their governments. (Esposito, 1988, p. 169).

3. The Afghan Mujahidin victory over the Soviets in 1989

The Afghan war against the Soviet Union is also considered an important landmark in the Islamic resurgence. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 changed the geo-political realities in the whole region and brought the Americans, conservative Muslims states and Islamist militants together. These three interest groups formed what Gregorian (2003, p. 67) calls “an alliance of convenience” in the fight against the Soviet Union. To bolster the resistance, the war was given an “Islamic character” based on its ideological framework. (Amin, 1982, p. 15). The US provided, through its Arab allies and Pakistan, support (in the form of money and sophisticated war machines) to the Afghan Mujahidin who in turn drew inspiration from the narrow interpretation of “holy war” (Jihad) to fight the “infidel” communists and the imperialist Soviets. (Gregorian, 2003, p. 68; Hartman, 2002, p. 47). Khan (2006, p. 83) argues that the Afghan war also gave Saudi Arabia and other conservative Arab countries the opportunity to export to the Mujahidin camps their conservative variety of Islam, Wahabism, which is often branded as contributory to present day militant Islam. This was tacitly approved by the Americans for a greater interest during the Cold War. US support also included the recruitment of thousands of Muslim members of what Gregorian (2003, p. 68) calls “holy warriors” from both Arabian and non-Arabian Muslim societies to join the Mujahidin. Thus, the Islamist militants strengthened their ideological cause with tacit support from the Americans and the conservative Arab states. The eventual withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan in 1979 was seen by many Islamists as an ideological victory over the “Godless” communists – a development which gave an enormous moral boost to the militant Islamists and their ideological aspirations to institute social change and establish the *Caliphate*. With the Soviet withdrawal, the Taliban, a militant Islamist group, gradually took control of Afghanistan and established an Islamic state and introduced Sharia law. More significantly, the

Taliban also helped to create a network among the worldwide militant groups including Al-Qaeda, Harkat-ul-Jihad (HUJI) and Jemah Islamiyah.²⁹

Finally, it is important to note in the context of the Cold War that militant Islam became an instrument in the fight against the USSR. The US was motivated by its interests in Central Asia and its determination to undermine Iran's influence in Afghanistan and initially, until 11 September 2001, largely turned a blind eye to the human rights violations of the Taliban. Such double standards based on interests discredited the West in the eyes of many Muslims and inspired some to distance themselves from the West and strengthen their Islamic values and ideals. (Arkoun and Steinbach, 2000, p. xiv).

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the manifestations of the Islamic revival and the literature and debates concerning the factors and events that prompted it. The next section examines three case studies/countries in South and Southeast Asia – all of which have been affected to varying degrees by the Islamic revival: Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia.

It is not, however, the purpose of this thesis to provide a comprehensive account of the Islamic revival in each of these countries. The purpose is more specific – to examine how each of the key factors identified in this chapter as prompting the Islamic revival have contributed to the Islamic revival in each of those different contexts. In short, the comparative overview that follows will serve to highlight the main concern of later chapters of this thesis: that is, why whose same factors have not (in the context of Bangladesh) prompted a similar revival but, to the contrary, a reassertion of secular values.

²⁹ The Taliban were mainly the creation of the Afghan war out of support from the Americans and the Saudi conservative brand of Islam to fight the Soviets. However, they later turned monster to the American interests. Professor Ekbal Ahmed (1988) terms this situation a classic example of "chickens coming home to roost". During the Afghan war, the Taliban were identified as the "moral equivalent of America's founding fathers". However, the same Talibans provided sanctuary to Al-Qaeda and other militants and hit back American interests. One explanation was that the Cold War realities forced the Americans to extend their support to these militants using the concept of Islamist strategy of *Jihad*. Khan (2006, pp. 83–4) finds this consequence as an obvious reality.

The Islamic resurgence in South and Southeast Asia

As noted, Islamic revival is a complex phenomenon. This overview of the phenomenon in Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia will, as indicated earlier, confine itself to those key factors identified in the literature review as particularly important in that revival. By doing so, the importance of context will be emphasized while comparing and contrasting factors that more directly resonate with the case of Bangladesh and will serve, later, to highlight the unique features of that case.

Pakistan

The importance of context: Implications for the character of Islam and contemporary politics

Pakistan came into existence as a result of the 'two nation' theory as propagated by Muhammad Ali Jinnah.³⁰ The theory put forward the view that the Hindus and Muslims of the Indian subcontinent were separate nations and the Muslims should achieve their own state, mainly because of the fear of "permanent political hegemony of upper class Hindus due to the numerical strength of the Hindu majority." (Inayatullah et al. 1997, p. 963). While Jinnah was in favor of pursuing liberal democracy and a liberal interpretation of Islam, at the outset conservative groups wished the state and society to conform to and mirror Islamic values. As a result, ever since independence in 1947, Pakistan witnessed an uneven tussle between pro-Islamic and secular forces as the gradual Islamization of state and society proceeded apace. As Ziring (2001, p. 24) observes with the Islamic revival of the 1970s and 1980s, Islam in Pakistan became more prominent and institutionalized, "being trapped by external and internal forces".

With regard to the latter, the weak state was particularly significant and was preyed upon both by the military and civilian politicians. In that context both the military and civilian politicians used Islam for short-term political advantage while neither, least of all the military, were inclined or able to strengthen secular society – all of which strengthened the profile of Islam in state and society.

³⁰ Jinnah was the architect of Muslim nationalism and played an important role in the creation of Pakistan. He defined the Muslims of India as a "distinctive culture and civilisation, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature [with a] sense of values and proportion, legal laws and moral codes, customs and calendar, history and tradition, aptitude and ambition." (cited in Hussain, 2000, p. 132).

Thus, as Hussain (2000, p. 150) pertinently observes, “It is important to emphasize that much of the Islamisation of Pakistan has taken place on the back of autocracy.” With specific reference to the role of the military, Haqqani (2004, p. 7) asserts:

The military does not allow politics to take its course, periodically accusing elected leaders of compromising national security or of corruption. Repeated military intervention has deprived Pakistan of political leaders with experience of governing, leading to severe lapses under civilian rule. Because the military co-opts or fires civilian politicians, established and accepted rules for political conduct have failed to evolve. Issues such as the role of religion ... are not settled by constitutional means or through a vote.

Jawed (1999, p. 53) argues that since the 1970s Pakistan showed an increasing commitment to Islamic values and norms. The civilian government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was not immune to the trend of Islamization. Despite his “secular and socialist protestations”, Bhutto, in a bid for popular support, framed the first Constitution based on Islamic principles in 1973 after Pakistan lost East Pakistan in the 1971 war. (Ahmad, 1997, p. 950). For example, Article 2 of the Constitution stipulates that “Islam shall be the state religion of Pakistan.” (Redding, 2004, p. 767). This marked a clear departure from the previous Constitutions and had a “serious effect on Pakistan’s future political, economic and social development”. (Milam, 2011, p. 41).

Islamization took a further and radical turn during the military regime of General Zia-ul Huq who seized power in 1977 through a coup d’état. Hussain (2000, p. 150) argues Zia expedited the process of Islamization “out of a mixture of personal piety and political cunning”.³¹ Gregorian

³¹ Zia’s Islamization covered four major areas: legal, judicial, economic and social. For example, he introduced a series of changes in the criminal laws in line with orthodox Islamic injunctions, called the Hudoud Ordinances. These spelled out rules for punishments including amputation of limbs, flogging, stoning (later ruled out by the High Court) in accordance with the Qur’an and Sunnah (traditional injunctions derived from the example of Prophet Muhammad and of the first two or four *Caliphs*). However, these laws were often seen as an instrument for a systematic “discrimination” against religious minorities and women. (Milam, 2011, pp. 84–6; ICG, 2003, p. 28). Zia’s Islamization had also impacted on the education system to transform Pakistan into an “ideological state”. For example, madrassah education was given state support both financially and politically. Milam (2011, p. 86) maintains that many of these religious schools later contributed to the greening for Islamists. (Milam, 2011, pp. 86, 179).

(2003, p. 65) asserts two international events favored Zia to give real impetus to his Islamizing society: first, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 that posed a possible spread to neighboring countries and, second, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 that tilted the balance towards the Soviet Union in the Middle East and West Asia in the Cold War. In that context Zia's alignment with the Islamists was seen as a move to save his regime from a crisis of legitimacy on the one hand and demonstrate that his regime was better than the incapable and corrupt politicians. Milam (2011, p. 82) concludes that Islamization made "creeping progress" in Zia's time, covering the legal, political and economic system and the psyche of the nation so deeply that subsequent governments found it hard to back out "whether they wanted to or not".

After Zia's death in 1988, two civilian governments were in power for 11 years: the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) under Benazir Bhutto and the Pakistan Muslim League led by Nawaz Sharif who shared power alternatively during the period. Focusing on short-term political interests, neither of these governments facilitated "a democratic culture to take root in the polity of Pakistan". (Khan, 2009, p. 86). Both governments used their supposed adherence to Islamic principles as a way of presenting themselves as more attractive to the populace than their rivals, including the military. Regarding those regimes, Milam (2011, p. 232) concludes: "During the elected regimes of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, Islamist influence at best remained where it was when Zia ul-Haq and the military left office in 1988."³²

Following another coup in 1999, the military under General Musharraf returned to power. Despite Musharraf's professed aim to associate his regime with "enlightened moderation", he found it hard to roll back the long historical legacy of Islamist influence and succumbed to the Islamists to

³² Rather, both of them used the Islamist issue as "a way of driving a wedge between the Islamists and the military as well as getting an edge on the opposition", believing that a compromise with the Islamists would bring a political advantage. (Milam, 2011, p. 169). For example, Nawaz Sharif proposed to introduce Sharia law as the law of the land through the 15th Amendment of the Constitution in an apparent move to curtail the "support and the legitimacy of the military as the major political force". (Milam, 2011, p. 232). However, it did not happen as the military under General Pervez Musharraf took over in 1999 through another coup.

gain an edge over his rivals the civilian politicians. By restricting the secular forces belonging to the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) during the 2002 elections, Musharraf was able to announce that in a 'democratic environment' the Islamists, Mutahhida Majlis Amal (MMA), were gaining. This was a tactic intended to minimize international pressure on his regime to undertake democratic reform. Thus, the position of the Islamists was again strengthened largely due to the short-term and parochial interests of the military regime. Milam (2011, pp. 179–80) aptly sums up the relationship between both the civilian and military governments with the Islamists as "Faustian bargains" that facilitated ever greater political space to the Islamists vis-a-vis secular forces.

Crisis of identity: Nationalism

While the character of Islam and its progress in contemporary politics was facilitated by a weak state in the Pakistani context, Islam has also been a key factor in Pakistan's national integration, identity and nationalism. As Hussain (2000, p. 144) states, "Pakistan's Islamic identity is writ large, in its flag, title Islamic republic, state rituals, laws and international relations".

Since independence, the state of Pakistan was deeply fragmented along ethnic and cultural lines. These cleavages were exacerbated over a host of issues including the question of sovereignty and the role of the central government vis-a-vis provincial autonomy, allocation of resources between different groups and questions of language and culture. Yet, from the very beginning, the ruling elites of Pakistan ignored the reality of a multilingual, multicultural and multiethnic society and sought to suppress diversity and consolidate the power of the center.³³

³³ Ahmed (1998, xii–xiii) argues that Pakistan is a "multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society" and this demands the state ensures equal rights to every ethnic group and promotes their culture and language with "mutual respect and tolerance". However, from the very beginning the ruling elites of Pakistan ignored this reality and encouraged the suppression of diversity. The state policy greatly aimed at consolidating the power of the center. The consequence is the alienation and disengagement in the statehood by these groups who lived in different regions for centuries and developed their own culture and language and were sometimes in a state of their own. The state policy of Pakistan towards diversity has mainly been limited to a

The breakup with Bangladesh in 1971 dramatically exposed the challenges of integration over questions of politics, culture, language and economic rights. The spectre of secession has continued to haunt the Pakistan ruling elite. Ahmed (1998, pp. 272–73) highlights the cleavages within Pakistani society thus:

A review of Pakistan's ethnic-cum-regional issues reveals that the central problem in Pakistan is the positive correlation between asymmetries in power and asymmetries in size, coupled with a negative correlation with asymmetries in resources. ... The ethnic asymmetries within Pakistan's 'elite' and the substantial overlapping of class and ethnicity pose the greatest challenge to removing ethnic disparities and promotion harmony and national integration. Given the ethnic specificity of the armed forces ... a more equitable distribution of resources among ethnic communities is unthinkable without drastically altering the ethnic composition of the military and/or reducing the military budget.

The fundamental cleavages within Pakistani society underline the centrality of Islam in the public life of the state as reflected in Islamic provisions and promulgations in the polity. The ruling elites resolutely identified Islam as the single most important factor that could hold the different parts of Pakistan together. Those elites, often not represented by "the majority of Pakistan's ethnically disparate population", were, as Haqqani (2004, p. 88) argues, always in control and determined the direction of Pakistan's policies in the name of Islam. In employing the 'Islamic card' in governance the Pakistani elites time and again ignored local and regional diversity. While India managed such ethnic problems largely through democratic practices, Pakistani elites assumed the role of protecting the state's identity through a mix of coercion and religious affiliation (Islam). In short, ethnicity was contrary to religion and national unity; thus the Pakistani elites used Islam as a rallying cry to strengthen national unity in the ongoing communal antagonism between Islamic Pakistan and Hindu India. (Haqqani, 2004, p. 89).

"problem of regionalism" rather than recognizing and accommodating their concerns for rights and existence.

Pertinent here also is a comparison with Bangladesh. In contrast to Pakistan, a distinguishing feature of Bangladesh is primarily the homogeneity of its people. In terms of language, Bangladesh is also effectively monolingual. Thus, as future chapters will show, a striking difference between Pakistan and Bangladesh is the role of religion/Islam in state and society. In Bangladesh, Islam was not required to cement national integration or define Bengali identity or nationalism.

Cultural factors and modernization

In the Pakistani context, cultural factors and challenges associated with ‘modernization’ have also enhanced an Islamic agenda. The lack of consensus on key social issues has been complicated by the rise of Islam in Pakistani public life while, at the same time, it has given further impetus to an Islamic agenda. The centralization of government and Pakistan’s heterogeneous society are important factors thwarting consensus on social issues. With regard to the former, the central government holds all powers to control local and regional bodies and communities, a situation that has exacerbated the existing fissures among those communities and further weakened national unity. The benefit of such a lack of cohesion has inevitably gone to Islamists whose support is necessarily sought/bargained for by the ruling elites to consolidate their power.³⁴

Centralization and heterogeneity have been significant impediments to consensus building on important social issues. As Milam (2011, p. 207) comments:

³⁴ Haqqani (2004, p. 88) argues that Pakistan has been plagued by inter-provincial and ethnic differences without political resolution by the “highly centralized and unrepresentative governance” that gave rise to “grievances among different ethnic groups”. The state has not developed any “institutional mechanism” or constitutional provisions to resolve questions of regional autonomy or local self-governance to deal with such differences. This underlines the importance of Islam in the public life in Pakistan as reflected in the Islamic provisions and promulgations in the polity. As a result, the ruling elites identified Islam as the single most important factor that could hold the different parts of Pakistan together. These elites, often not represented by “the majority of Pakistan’s ethnically disparate population”, as Haqqani (2004, p. 88) argues, were always in control and determined the direction of Pakistan’s policies in the name of Islam. While using the ‘Islamic card’ in governance, these elites time and again ignored the local and regional diversity to recognize ‘community of communities’. While India managed such ethnic problems largely through democratic practices, Pakistani elites assumed the role of protecting the state’s identity through a mix of religious affiliation and convictions to Islam. (Metcalf, 2009, p. 28).

A heterogeneous society, such as Pakistan, finds it harder to form a national consensus around social objectives. ... Pakistani rulers, whether civilian or military, have consistently been ambiguous and often uninterested in social development. For example, family planning has not been a social objective that had complete support in society. In practical terms, this meant that NGOs have been less effective in promoting demand for contraception, and that the cacophony of the many vested interests that oppose family planning, including many religious leaders, as well as the leaders of feudal society, have inhibited the government from providing unwavering support for such programs.

In short, the ruling elites, by relying on Islam/Islamic support to mitigate problems of national integration, have been wary in implementing programs of social and regional development 'modernization' lest they offend more conservative Islamic agendas.

Economic and social dimension

Heterogeneity and a lack of consensus regarding social issues have had other economic and social consequences that, in turn, have contributed to the increased prominence of the Islamic profile in Pakistan. Noting the confluence between social factors and religion, Milam (2011, p. 244) argues that the lamentable lack of progress in social development is also responsible for the rise of Islamists in Pakistani politics. The lack of access to education, poor social service delivery and pitiable social and human rights are reflected in the large pool of illiterate, unemployed and poor – the constituency from which Islamists draw political support. This is a situation exacerbated by the attitudes of the ruling elites, military or civilian, who consider social development a low priority and milk the bulk of state resources for their own benefit. The connection between socio-economic issues and growing Islamic influence can be seen in three areas – population, education and the role of women in Pakistani society.

Courbage and Todd (2007) draw a connection between growth of population and that of religiosity – an argument drawn from the European context of the 18th century (before the industrial revolution) and presently applied to developing states. In 1970 West Pakistan's population was 61

million while that of East Pakistan was 66 million. (Abdullah, 2010, p. 9). According to the World Factbook 2012, by 2011, there was a dramatic turnaround: Pakistan's population leapt to 191 million while that of Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) was 161 million. Courbage and Todd (2007) hypothesize that high population growth shows lack of female emancipation, and thus traditional religiously oriented society, but necessarily a fundamentalist one. This is, however, not the case in the context of Bangladesh as the population growth significantly declined compared to Pakistan.

In the Pakistani context, religious/Islamic conservatism has also gained momentum through education. According to World Bank figures, throughout the 1990s the allocation of funds as a percentage of GDP for health care and education, especially for women, was amongst the lowest of third world countries.³⁵ Filling this vacuum has been the rapid growth of religious education, the madrassah system, particularly in rural areas where public education is inaccessible for the poor. Scripturalist-oriented clergy who propagate a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam have dominated the curriculum of many madrassah schools and in some cases have provided what Milam (2010, p. 211) calls recruitment centers for extremist activity.

Labor force structure has also facilitated Islamic conservatism, particularly among women in Pakistan's male-dominated society. According to World Bank studies, women comprise only 22 percent of Pakistan's labor force compared to 57 percent in Bangladesh.³⁶ In contrast to Bangladesh there is no large sector specific to women where they can work and earn income. In Pakistan there is not a significant NGO presence or the provision of micro-credit – factors which

³⁵ The area of public education is a far cry for the rural areas of Pakistan. The poor allocation for women was considered as the lowest among the developing countries and much of the funds were eaten up due to "institutional corruption". This resulted in the mushroom growth of religious education, madrassah system, in those areas where public education is inaccessible for poor people. Some of the madrassahs have taken up their own agenda, aligning more with "scripturalist-oriented clergy" which creates the ground for the Islamists. (cited in Milam, 2011, pp. 208–11).

³⁶ The studies were undertaken in 2012 for the 2008–12 period. Source: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS> accessed on 10 March 2013.

have enabled women in Bangladesh to become self-sufficient. Consequently, as Milam (2011, p. 212) notes, the potential for women to participate in the workforce or assert themselves more broadly in the social sphere is increasingly limited by Pakistan's patriarchal Muslim society and has reinforced such a society.

As has been seen before in the Pakistani context, nationalism and identity, culture and modernization, the socio-economic dimension and contemporary politics have all been powerful and mutually reinforcing factors in the Islamic resurgence and/or higher profile of Islam in that country. How have these same factors played out in the Malaysian context?

Malaysia

Importance of context: Malaysia's plural society and implications for the character of Islam

Since the 1970s a more conservative form of Islam has become apparent in Malaysia while Islam has become more prominent in Malaysia's social and political life.³⁷ Three factors were especially important in that regard: first, Malaysia's plural society; second, rapid socio-economic change; and, finally, political competition between the two main Malay political parties, UMNO³⁸ (the dominant

³⁷ Malaysia saw a resurgence in Islam since the 1970s, particularly with the advent of *Dakwah* (proselytizing) movement in late 1960s, an initiative of university students led by Anwar Ibrahim (who later became Deputy Prime Minister of a Dr Mahathir Mohammad-led cabinet). The movement got momentum with the establishment of *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM, Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement) in 1971. There were other similar groups who advocated conservative approaches of Islam at the personal and political levels. As Funston (2006, pp. 56–7) notes, this *Dakwah* movement gave rise to the adoption of living in accordance with rigid interpretation of Islam in the society and polity. Anwar (1987, p. 33) notes that by the 1980s many Malay women wore Islamic attires including mini-*telekung*. A similar picture was also evident in other personal life of most Malay Muslims. (Wain, 2009, pp. 219–20). Funston (2006, p. 57) also notes the rise of Islam is evident at public level including the change of the Constitution where Islam was made 'the' religion of the country and leaving the responsibility of Islam in the hands of the states rather than the federal government. These provisions provided a space to 'green' the Islamic profile in the public life of Malaysia.

³⁸ Malaysian politics are dominated by two main opposing political parties, UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) and PAS (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party), which have different views on Islam. The UMNO, formed in 1946, emerged as the largest political party which ruled the country since its independence in 1957 in alliance with other ethnic groups, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). The UMNO leadership mainly comes from the urban middle class professionals who hold secular interpretations of Islam and Western ideals including capitalism, culture and modernization. (Napi, 2007, p. 20).

Malay party and dominant party in the National Front Coalition government) and the Opposition PAS,³⁹ to 'out Islamize' the other in the quest for Malay votes/support.

Plural society, religion and identity

Of Malaysia's 28.3 million population 67.4 percent are Malays, 24.6 percent are Chinese, 7.3 percent Indian, plus others.⁴⁰ In this plural society religion constitutes a key element in defining ethnic identity, so, where the two main groups are concerned, all Malays are Muslims while most Chinese are Buddhist, Christian, Taoist or Confucian. In the context of Malaysia's plural society, Ratnam (1985, pp. 149–50) then gets to the nub of the relationship between religion and politics with the observation that:

... religion does not derive its political significance in Malaya from the conflict between different faiths.

The issue must be viewed primarily as a component of the more general rivalry between the Malays and the non-Malays ... the most crucial factors that explain the political importance of religion are to be found not in the traditional versus modern but rather in the Malay versus non-Malay continuum. The conflict between traditional and modernizing interests might have become the dominant factor only if the Malays had constituted the entire population (or at least a very substantial part of it), or if the communal differences between the Malays and non-Malays had failed to assume much political significance.

Crisis of identity, economic and social factors, nationalism

As Crouch (1996, p. 171) observes, the Malay elite had, of course, always been Muslim; but explicitly Islamic ideas were not prominent in the political philosophy of most English-educated UMNO leaders and senior civil servants in the 1960s. In the 1970s Islamic consciousness, perhaps

³⁹ On the other hand, the PAS which was formed in 1951 by the defection of UMNO's religious department is mainly represented by the conservative religious elites. The PAS leadership aims at establishing an Islamic state but is vague as to its implementation. PAS also believes in the Islamic doctrine of "one Ummah" regardless of ethnic background and interprets the state and nation in religious terms, having no regard to the territorial boundaries of individual states. (Napi, 2007, p. 24; Ratnam, 1985, pp. 144–47).

⁴⁰ Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2010 at http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=263&Itemid=156&lang=en accessed on 10 March 2013.

reflecting the tide of Islamic revivalism elsewhere, became much stronger in the Malay community. In the case of Malaysia, however, two country-specific factors, bloody racial riots and rapid socio-economic change that occurred as a result of those riots, gave a particular and sharp fillip to the Islamic consciousness of the Malays.

The riots after elections in 1969 sprang from economic disparities between the poor indigenous Malays and, comparatively, wealthier immigrant Chinese. As a response to the riots, the government introduced a New Economic Policy (NEP) to bridge the socio-economic gap between Malays and Chinese.⁴¹ Crouch (1996, p. 171) notes, the increased identification of Malays with Islam coincided with the implementation of the NEP as rural Malays moved into cities, including many students in tertiary institutions, with the result that a new type of Malay entered the urban world during a time of racial polarization and suspicion. In that atmosphere Malays tended to emphasize those characteristics that distinguished them from non-Malays – the most important of which was Islam.

The rise in Islamic consciousness therefore was part of a general strengthening of communal identity – i.e. ‘us’/Malays against ‘them’ the Chinese – so Islam became a rallying cry for the Malays and the key factor defining Malay identity rather than language or culture. It increasingly defined Malaysian nationalism and identity more broadly.⁴² At a social level, these changes were also reflected in dress as “Malay women took to covering their heads with various versions of the veil while many men grew beards and some also wore robes, to emulate the Prophet Muhammed and his companions”. (Wain 2009, p. 220).

⁴¹ Mahathir thought that Islam remained central to the Malay value system. However, in his view, it is also an impediment to progress and material benefits of the country. The Malay interpretation of Islam is often equated with fatalistic traditions and beliefs that are not consistent with modernity. So Mahathir emphasized a redefinition of Islamic teachings which are compatible with the “pursuit of materialism” and modernity, a concept often called as the Malaysian model of Islam. (Wain, 2009, pp. 221–23).

⁴² A good example being the obviously ‘Islamic architecture’ defining the character and identity of the new administrative capital, is Putra Jaya.

The increased religious commitment of many young Malays was also due to contact with new religious ideas and various *Dakwah* or missionary groups (inspired to some extent by the Iranian revolution) who sought to transform Malaya (and Malaysian society more broadly) to bring it fully into accord with the tenets of Islam. As Wain (2009, p. 220) notes, many rural-born Malays who migrated to the cities under rapid industrialization were prospective members of such organizations that could give them a sense of belonging, and where they could renew their commitment to an Islamic way of life. The groups – tolerant and liberal at first, though some became more militant later – looked to Islam for what its teachings could offer as solutions for Malay problems, such as poverty, lack of education and corruption.⁴³ The most significant of these organizations was the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement, popularly known by its acronym ABIM, led by Anwar Ibrahim until he joined UMNO in 1982.

Contemporary politics: Implications for Islam in Malaysia

The increasing self-conscious commitment of young urban Malays to Islam was a development to which the major Malay political parties had to respond. In this context UMNO, under the leadership of Dr Mahathir since 1982, launched its Islamization drive. UMNO's motives in embarking on such a drive were mixed. On the one hand, it enabled UMNO, to some extent, to undercut the criticisms of its radical Muslim opponents, particularly the Islamic Opposition party, PAS, – that is, to “out Islamize” the opposition while at the same time appeasing the consciences of

⁴³ However, the NEP-led development produced mixed results in the social structure of the traditional Malay community. The government has often been charged that the development benefitted “a small group of local and foreign capitalists” and they needed reforms in accordance with Islamic social justice. The capitalist development created an uneven distribution of wealth in most of the states, resulting in “the growth of an acquisitive, egoistic and materialistic culture” which is the “antithesis of religion and religious values”. (Muzaffar, 1986, pp. 68–9). While Malaysia saw remarkable development, the gains were not evenly distributed among the common people. On the other hand, the financial corruption and scandals endemic to the Malaysian-styled development have created frustration among the people. (Wain, 2009, p. 230; Abuza, 1991, p. 223; Anwar, 1987, p. 10). Muzaffar (1986, pp. 67–8) asserts that a portion of the Malay ‘have-nots’ would choose to react to capitalist inequalities through Islam often seen as associated with the quest for justice.

its own increasingly self-conscious Muslim members. (Abuza, 1991, pp. 224–25; Nagata, 1994, pp. 69–70; Ratnam, 1985, p. 146; Hassan, 2008, p. 23).

The Islamic program or drive included the building/refurbishing of mosques, creation of an Islamic University, a system of banking and finance, introducing the *Azan* (the call to prayer) over state-run radio and TV, and sponsoring a plethora of Islamic conferences. Further in this vein, the government banned the import of non-*Halal* beef, prohibited Muslims from entering the country's only casino at Genting Highlands and introduced compulsory courses in Islamic civilization in universities. (Wain, 2009, p. 222). In foreign policy, the Islamization program meant a higher profile adopted by Malaysia in bodies such as the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and more forthright support for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). It also involved the recruitment of Anwar Ibrahim, former head of the Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) and a critic of UMNO, to the party. Anwar's Islamic credentials, it was hoped, would also bolster those of UMNO.

What were the results of two decades of UMNO's Islamization campaign? Put bluntly, UMNO's campaign to out-Islamize the Opposition, i.e. PAS, backfired. In short, UMNO became PAS's 'handmaiden' in the greater Islamization of Malaysian society. A 'secular' party, after all, was unlikely to beat a 'religious' party on religious issues. UMNO's campaign produced a more conservative or Islamized bureaucracy, education system, police and judiciary – all such key institutions of state were 'greened'. As Barton has observed, an important consequence of the battle (between UMNO and PAS) was that it "opened the way for a vast expansion and empowerment of the religious bureaucracies at state and federal level, all filled with graduates of conservative Middle East institutions whose understanding of Islam was a good deal more reactionary and narrow than that of the Prime Minister." (cited in Wain, 2009, p. 229). Such officialdom increasingly devised new laws and intruded ever more into the private lives of Malaysia's Malay Muslim citizens. As a consequence, "rather than contributing to the opening of

the Muslim mind in Malaysia, the Islamization race actually restricted it further". (Noor, 2002, p. 15).⁴⁴

The concentration of power by Dr Mahathir in the executive (essentially in his own hands) dramatically weakened the independence and expertise of those institutions and their capacity to contain growing Islamic influence. Particularly significant in that regard were changes made to the Constitution with regard to Islam. At the time of Independence in 1957, one of the symbols of the Malay character of the state was the adoption of Islam as 'the religion of the Federation'. A White Paper dealing with the constitutional proposals specified that Islam's status would "in no way affect the present position of the Federation as a secular state." (Wain, 2009, p. 218). But the language ultimately adopted was thought sufficient to convey the notion without actually mentioning the word 'secular'. (Funston, 2006, p. 54).

However, by designating Islam an official religion, Malaysia's Constitution allowed the government to fund such activities as Qur'an reading competitions, building mosques and organizing the Hajj. In the context of the 1960s when Malaysia's political and bureaucratic elite were English-educated, it was expected that Islam would play a declining role in national affairs. It was not foreseen that Islam would become more important in Malaysia's politics and the lives of its Muslim citizens, which it did following the dramatic political and socio-economic change associated with the NEP and the increasing success of PAS in attracting the Malay vote away from UMNO.

In response, Dr Mahathir, rather than attempting to recover Malay support through addressing more complex socio-economic obstacles to Malay development, tried to do so by outbidding PAS on religion. In 1988, in a fateful intervention, he amended the Constitution to raise the Sharia (Islamic religious) courts to 'co-equal' status with the civil law courts. (The new Article 121(a) stated that the High Court shall have no jurisdiction in respect of any matter within the jurisdiction

⁴⁴ This view is also held by scholars like Saravanamuttu (2010, pp. 1–7) and Mohamad (2010, pp. 65–70).

of the Sharia courts.) Thus, in future, Sharia court decisions in their own area of jurisdiction could not be appealed or therefore reversed by any action in a civil court. (Wain, 2009, pp. 218–34).

UMNO-PAS rivalry, constitutional change and the interpretation of the Constitution from an Islamic perspective gained a further huge fillip with a declaration by Dr Mahathir in late 2001 that “Malaysia was, in fact, already an Islamic state”. (Wain, 2009, pp. 217). Later, in this context, further fuel was added to the fire by then Deputy Prime Minister (now Prime Minister) Najib Razak’s statement of 17 July 2007 that “Malaysia was an Islamic state and had never been secular”. (Wain, 2009, p. 237). Such a statement denied the historical record, deeply divided Malaysia’s multi-ethnic community and starkly demonstrated the extent to which Islamic values now permeated Malaysian politics and society.

Cultural factors and modernization

Social and political change in the Malaysian context also gave a sharp fillip to Islamic values and the profile of Islam more generally. As noted earlier, the younger generation of Malays that flooded into urban areas in the 1970s to attend tertiary institutions became immersed in a narrower interpretation of Islam and one that became central to their identity – superseding other definers, notably language and custom. Thus, it was through an Islamic lens that they judged the NEP, the affirmative action policy whose principle aim was to lift the standard of living and economic prospects of young Malays. But, in the context of the NEP, politics and business became fused during the Mahathir era – an era almost synonymous with rampant corruption, cronyism and financial scandals. Clearly the economic gains were not being distributed fairly. Those with the right political/business connections prospered mightily, while the poor and deprived struggled and social justice, the key principle of governance in Islam, was missing.

As an authority on Islam in Malaysia, Patricia Martinez (2004, p. 24) argues, “It is Islam that defines Malay identity and Islam that proscribes perceptions of wrong doing ... Islam deployed as “catalyst and legitimacy” for the objectives of the Mahathir administration came home to roost as the

“idiom and metaphor” for Malay disgruntlement”. (Martinez, 2004, p. 28). In other words, in its promotion of Islam (particularly in the cause of the socio-economic uplifting of the Malays), the Mahathir administration was hoist on its own petard. Disillusioned and disenchanted young Malays, many the best educated of their generation, deserted UMNO in droves and, especially since the 1999 general elections, flocked to the Islamic opposition party PAS. Previously a party associated with only a provincial base (in the states of Kelantan and Trengganu), PAS leapt from that base to become a national party and formal leader of the Opposition in parliament.

In this context of disillusionment with the rampant corruption that had become a hallmark of the Mahathir administration, large numbers of Malay Muslims were shocked in 1998 by the abrupt sacking of Anwar Ibrahim, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance. Anwar Ibrahim, it will be recalled, was the former leader of the Islamic Youth Movement ABIM and was brought into UMNO to polish UMNO’s Islamic credentials. Mahathir, believing Anwar had become a lightning rod for critique of his regime and posed a threat to it, had him dismissed and jailed on trumped-up charges of sodomy and corruption. Dr Mahathir’s treatment of Anwar further galvanized the Malay community, particularly many young middle-class (and Islamically conscious professionals) against UMNO and confirmed their belief that the administration had lost its moral authority – an authority and mantle they then sought in PAS.

Overall, Malay identity in the context of racial competition between Malay Muslims and non-Malays in an era of rapid socio-economic change has combined with developments in contemporary Malaysian politics to fundamentally change and enhance the profile of Islam in Malaysia’s polity and society. Finally, we turn to the case of Indonesia.

Indonesia

Low profile of Islam: A 'demographic paradox'

Indonesia is the world's largest 'Muslim' country with 248 million people of which 86.1 percent profess to Muslim beliefs.⁴⁵ The size of the Muslim population might suggest that Islam would be a determinative factor in Indonesian politics, yet this is not the case. The Islamic profile has not perceptibly been pronounced in the state and polity compared to other Muslim countries. Fealy et al. (2006, p. 44) maintains that the impact of Islam on politics and the state has not been significant considering the statistical numerical majority of the Muslim population. In that regard, Islamist groups have largely failed in the effort to Islamize the country, and their electoral performance has been confined to between 10 to 44 percent in the general elections since independence. Kusuma (2006, p. 1) contends that in the Indonesian context this is a 'demographic paradox'.

Cultural plurality and identity

Indonesia consists of varied ethnic groups, languages, and cultures in an archipelago stretching from the islands of Sumatra to Papua. Choi (1996), p. 19) notes that the country is one of the extended archipelagos with about 13,677 tropical islands spreading over 3,300 miles, consisting of about 325 ethnic or cultural groups. They are also different in dialects, having divisions into 18 language groups. Choi (1996, p. 19) comments:

In a country so far-flung and so segmented not only by sea, jungle, mountain, and swamp, but also by language, tradition, and culture, it is no wonder that diversity is inherent, and indeed, the ideal of unity is extremely difficult to accomplish.

Kusuma (2006, p. 1) argues that plurality is the very texture of Indonesian society and the state. This has actually led the Indonesians to promote the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, or unity in

⁴⁵ Among the population, the Muslim constitutes 86.1 percent, the Protestant 5.7 percent, the Roman Catholic 3 percent, the Hindu 1.8 percent, the other or unspecified 3.4 percent (2000 census). Source: The World Factbook 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/id.html>

diversity,⁴⁶ in recognition of this multiplicity. Although Indonesia is predominantly a Muslim country, the promotion of this principle was mainly intended to represent the secular values and a “workable arrangement” to recognize differences and diversity within the country. (Pakpahan, 2010, p. 1; Nagata, 2010, p. 36).

This recognition was reflected in the adoption of *Pancasila*⁴⁷ as the national ideology in the Indonesian Constitution. One of the principles of this ideology is the belief in ‘One God’. However, it does not specify what the name of God is, indicating His (God’s) identity is open to all. Thus, Muslims interpret Him as Allah while to Christians He (specified in the Constitution) is God. (Mancall, 2002, p. 116). The underlying message of this ideology is its religious neutrality, leaving little space for the role of Islam in the public life. The other objective is to achieve national cohesion among the different groups of Indonesians. The promotion of *Pancasila* serves two purposes. One is to diminish the tension between the role of Islam and the secular national state and to prevent disintegration within the state.

According to Nagata (2010, pp. 18–20), characterizing the Indonesian population as a plurality negates any opportunity of using Islam as the monopoly by any ethnic group. According to her view, all ethnic groups without Islam are minorities. In Indonesia, unlike Malaysia, there is no official recognition or privileged relations between religion and ethnic groups. No religion is singled out or acknowledged constitutionally or by any legal provision to claim any state sponsored concessions.⁴⁸ Saravanamuttu (2010, p. 7) asserts that in contrast to Malaysia there are no

⁴⁶ That is why a strong national leadership should now seriously embark on the implementation of *Pancasila* values. The first step to make is the realization of the nation’s motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Eka* or Unity in Diversity. It means the respect for the place and freedom of the Individual in harmony with the need for social unity. It also means the recognition of the importance of each ethnic and religious group within the national unity. Nationalism should flower in the garden of Internationalism, as stated by Bung Karno. *Pancasila* therefore means harmony and not conflict in life.

⁴⁷ The *Pancasila* includes five basic principles which were adopted in the Constitution in 1945. Since then, the Five Principles have become the blueprint of the Indonesian nation. The Five Principles are: the belief in one God, just and civilized humanity, Indonesian unity, democracy under the wise guidance of representative consultations, and social justice for all the peoples of Indonesia. Source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/440932/Pancasila> accessed on 23 November 2012.

⁴⁸ The original Constitution recognizes five religions – Islam, Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism and Hindu-Bali. In 2006, Confucianism was included in the list. (Nagata, 2010, p. 35).

“competing discourses” between the secular and Islamist forces. Thus, Indonesia’s Constitution reflects the plural nature of the society and the state upholds secularism as its innate ideology. When in 1945 the Jakarta Charter⁴⁹ containing Islamic provisions was drafted reflecting demands of some Islamist groups, other moderate and ethnic groups opposed it, arguing that the Islamic agenda would make integration problematic. Kusuma (2006, p. 1) thus asserts that this ideology guarantees every citizen an equal footing and rejects the imposition of any conservative Islamic agenda and thus reflects political reality.

Pancasila also brings out another important paradox in the Indonesian case. In a Muslim or Islamic society, non-Muslims are treated as *Dhimmi*⁵⁰ who enjoy protection from the state in lieu of taxes or other sacrifices. However, the *Pancasila* ideology is an exception to this rule in Indonesia. The non-Muslims are not considered as *Dhimmi*s but as citizens of equal standing as far as the constitutional and legal rights are concerned. This offers the adoption of an inclusive policy by the Indonesian state. (Kusuma, 2006, p. 1).

The syncretic character of Islam

Islam in Indonesia is largely characterized as syncretistic in that it has blended with local customs. Before Islamic contact, there existed powerful Buddhist and Hindu cultures throughout the archipelago. According to Geertz (1960), in about 400 AD Hinduism and then Buddhism began to penetrate in Java until about 1500 when Islam began to become established. Rabasa (2005, p. 27)

⁴⁹ The Jakarta Charter was drafted in 1945 which allowed the inclusion of Islamic values including the mandatory requirement of the President to be Muslim and introduction of Islamic laws in the state. However, this was rejected in view of the diverse nature of the fledgling state. (Fealy et al., 2006, p. 47).

⁵⁰ This *Pancasila* definition of monotheism is a clear-cut deviation from the traditional Islamic *Dhimmi* principle. A *Dhimmi* may be defined as a person with accountability and inviolability, granted human rights and constitutional rights. In classical Islamic jurisprudence the term *Dhimma* means accountability and inviolability, which is usually termed personhood in modern legal discourse. *Dhimma* is also commonly understood as ‘protection’, ‘treaty’ and ‘peace’ because it is a treaty that puts non-Muslims under the protection of Muslims (it is the concept of the rights of minorities), but used to be understood as second-class citizens. (Durie, 2010).

comments that Islam spread to Southeast Asia including now Indonesia mainly through Arab Muslim trader's contacts, and conversion of the local elites was peaceful and by Sufi influence.⁵¹

However, before the advent of these religions, the Javanese were wedded to animist traditions. The impact of Islam was about 'only' five hundred years while the other traditions were a thousand years old, a situation that actually made Indonesian Islam "remarkably malleable, syncretic, multivocal and multilayered".⁵² (Hassan, 2008, p. 9).

The key implication of this syncretism is that Islam marked the face of the Indonesian character on the surface. However, it did not alter the very basic cultural textures and skeleton of the Javanese⁵³ society. This in a sense facilitates the formation of a tolerant, accommodative and flexible culture. Rabasa (2005, p. 27) also brings to light this tolerant version of Indonesian Islam. In another sense, the Indonesians were open to other incoming religions and took the necessary ingredients in accordance with their own fundamental folk traditions or beliefs to constitute a new synthesis. Safitri (2011, p. 153) maintains that "many Javanese still practice it [the influence of pre-Islamic elements] due to their pride of Javanese culture and the endeavour to perpetuate their ancestors' beliefs". Consequently, the pressure for greater orthodoxy towards Islam may have a "distasteful

⁵¹ According to Choi (1996, pp. 12–3), there are three dominant theories that explain how Islam became preponderant in Indonesia. The first theory is the role of the Sufi missionaries who mostly came from South India and Bengal, and preached Islam in line with the local traditions and belief system. The local people found convergence in the new religion with their folk traditions. The second theory is the role of the merchants who came from the Middle East and came into contact with the local rulers of Indonesian coasts or ports and impressed them with their knowledge, products and skills. Gradually, they formed alliances with the rulers who converted to Islam, often to gain their support against rival kingdoms. Once the local rulers converted, the local subjects also followed them. The third theory is that the value of Islam was interpreted by the common people as worthy for individual and social justice, which was absent in the then village-scaled societies. The key point is that Islam came to Indonesia peacefully, not by force.

⁵² This view is also supported by authors like Muhaimen (2005, p. 1) and Bekki (1975, cited in Muhaimen, 2005, p. 1).

⁵³ Java is the most populous island where about 60 percent of the total Indonesian people live. It was the center of Indonesian history during the Hindu-Buddhist-Muslim-Dutch periods. The Javanese are dominant economically, politically and culturally. Hassan (2008, p. 9) notes that Indonesian Islam is largely blended with the social structure of Java where images and metaphors of the local culture became dominant in it.

intrusion” in the spiritual lives of the Indonesian people.⁵⁴ As a result, Indonesian Islam remains what Sudarsono (2003, p. 1) calls “proud and confident of its syncretic blend with national and local traditions as well as healthy eclecticism with the liberating values of foreign influences” that rules out the possibility of being trapped into any religious radicalism.

Contemporary politics: Suppression of Islam-based politics

Since independence in 1945, Indonesia followed secularism in the polity and strictly limited the role of religion in state affairs. However, being the largest Muslim country, Indonesia has always been under pressure from some Islamist groups to establish an Islamic state. (Pakpahan, 2010, p. 1). Rabasa (2005, p. 27) notes that historically orthodox Muslim movements spearheaded opposition to the foreign/infidel rule of the Dutch.⁵⁵

After independence, the new republic was challenged by the *Darul Islam* (DI) (1949–62) which espoused armed rebellion against the secular government and sought to establish an Islamic state. However, in the face of firm commitment of the government to secular values, the organization failed to gain broad-based support among the Indonesian people and ceased to exist after it was banned and its prominent leaders were captured in 1962. (Rabasa, 2005, p. 27). Similar measures were taken to suppress the other Islamist groups. For example, *Masyumi*, an influential group, was perceived as threatening to the secular regime when its members joined rebel military groups in Sumatra and Sulawesi in 1958 using violent political Islam as their ideology. The government

⁵⁴ Most Javanese people consider the relationship between one’s God and one’s soul as essentially an internal and sacred matter. This actually negates the orthodox interpretation of compulsion and force as per the rigid form of Islam.

⁵⁵ This is evident both in the colonial and post-independence periods of Indonesian history. In the colonial period, the more radical form of Islamist movements included the *Padri* movement in Sumatra in the 1820s and 1830s when Islamist clerics who returned from Mecca made an effort to introduce puritanical Islam in the form of *Wahhabism* to Indonesia. Major struggles were organized, with Islam as the rallying ground for discontent against the colonial Dutch rule. One of them was the Deponegoro’s Revolt against the Dutch in 1825. Deponegoro, a prince and a royal family based in Jogjakarta in Java, proclaimed Jihad to drive the Dutch out of Java, which resulted in the Java War (1825–30) that claimed about 15,000 Dutch and 200,000 Javanese lives. (Choi, 1996, p. 16).

contained them through the use of force. Later, in 1960, *Masyumi* was banned. (Bertrand, 2010, p. 48).

It is important to note that for most of recent Indonesian history, Indonesia was ruled by two prominent authoritarian regimes – those of Sukarno (1950–65) and Suharto (1967–98). These two rulers strongly promoted the ideology of *Pancasila* as an instrument to marginalize the role of Islam. They always used the state machinery to subordinate Islam in the public discourse. The key to their strategies were policies to limit the activities of the Islamist movements, ranging from persuasion to using force in order to contain them. Nagata (2010, p. 36) highlights these two strategies:

One method was to incorporate Muslims into a controlled electorate process, like PAS in Malaysia, and a sequence of religious political parties were created, from Masyumi to the PPP (United Development Party), all as coalitions of several religious groups more easily manageable by the government. Another strategy was Suharto's co-optation of the most prominent (and possibly subversive) Muslim intellectual [s] and students in government managed organizations, [such as the] Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI). By this means, even students overseas were kept under permanent, indirect, control. Arguably, Suharto was master of an authoritarian democracy at the time, in anticipation of a political Islam yet to materialize.

The regimes in fear of an Islamic revival applied restrictive policies on the Islamist organizations that supported the establishment of an Islamic state.⁵⁶ The amalgamation of all Islamists parties into the PPP was an effective tactic of control by the government. The merged party was not even allowed to take a name referring to Islam. Similarly, the creation of ICMI was also intended to “channel and control” the mobilization of certain Islamist groups. At the same time, these government supported groups also saw an opportunity to gain greater power in cooperating with the regimes. (Bertrand, 2010, p. 49; Berno, 2009, p. 1).

⁵⁶ The adoption of authoritarian measures including the use of force was common to both Sukarno and Suharto. The repression and ban on *Darul Islam* and *Masyumi* are examples of such measures.

The authoritarian strategies of the government, including repressive measures to control the Islamist groups, worked well to restrain their agenda of establishing an Islamic state. Although the Sukarno and Suharto regimes used authoritarian measures, they also successfully manipulated to subordinate the Islamic agenda to the *Pancasila*. The government made every effort to domesticate the Islamists in the society by framing legislation in 1985 that required all organizations to adopt *Pancasila* as their basis of ideological posture.⁵⁷ Such measures by Suharto were labelled what Nagata (2010, p. 36) calls “authoritarian democracy” to restrict the voice of the Islamists and the role of Islam in the polity.

Social and economic dimension: The upsurge of Islamic piety

During the later period of Suharto in the 1990s, Indonesia saw the upsurge of Islam within the legal and politically acceptable boundaries of the state. The state became a major promoter of Islamic institutions in the form of subsidizing numerous Muslim activities. The country saw a gradual process of *Santri-isation* (Islamization).⁵⁸ This in part occurred as Suharto’s support amongst key elements of the polity declined and he needed to court Muslim support. This process became intensified in the wake of the fall of Suharto and the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Fealy et al. (2006, p. 41) notes that since the 1970s the number of *Santri* Muslims has grown considerably as a result of “accelerating Islamization” mostly in the urban areas. Many of these Muslims have adopted the Islamic way life by praying five times a day, fasting in the month of *Ramadan* and following other rituals as per the strict prescriptions of Islam. Mackie (2007, pp. 70–71) sums up this trend:

Islamic prayers are now uttered at the beginning and end of school classes and university lectures and nearly all public functions. Mosques, religious schools (*pesantren*, madrasah, and IAIN) and Islamic newspapers, pamphlets and books have multiplied. The number of pilgrims making the *hajj* to Mecca, the principal sign of devout belief, has increased sharply among the well to do. What this

⁵⁷ The law also allowed the government to supervise, intervene and if necessary ban an organization in order to ensure compliance. The new legislation limited the practices of Islam only to the individual level at family and mosque, restricting embracing Islam as a complete code of conduct including political activities. (Nagata, 2010, p. 36).

⁵⁸ The *Santri-isation*, commonly known as adherence to rigorous practices of Islam, actually began in the 1960s when a backlash against communism began following 1965, and a nation-wide emphasis was given to the avoidance of communist commitment by religious conformity. (Mackie, 2007, p. 70).

has meant in terms of religious belief and actual daily behaviour is hard to assess accurately, but Islam has certainly become a far more prominent element in both personal and national identity. Nothing like that was occurring before about 1970. (Mackie, 2007, pp. 70–71).

At the same time, the steady growth of Islamic education has been noticeable. The number of religious schools and students has increased in recent years. The country has also seen a growing number of Indonesians studying in the Middle East including Cairo and other cities. Substantial funding has also been available and channelled from the oil-rich Middle Eastern countries including Saudi Arabia. Such developments have had an impact on the growing interest in the new thinking on Islam flowing back to the Indonesian context. (Mackie, 2007, p. 71). The key point of such religious activism is that the country, once known as the advocate of secularism, has been under constant pressure from the Islamist groups to seek a 'state-favour' for Islam.

The rise of new extremist groups in the late 1990s, however, exposed the country to terrorism, challenging its resilience to demands for an Islamist agenda. The *Jemah Islamiyah* (JI)⁵⁹ and other extremist groups⁶⁰ constituted the most important terrorist organizations which were responsible for major terror acts including the Bali bombing of October 2002⁶¹, the bombing of the Marriott hotel in August 2003 and the bombing of the Australian embassy in Jakarta on 9 September 2004.

⁵⁹ The JI primarily focused on domestic issues including the Muslim–Christian conflicts and participated in a number of attacks on Christian interests, particularly in Maluku and Sulawesi. However, the US 'war on terror' shifted its focus from domestic to international terrorism. The group envisages a region-based *Caliphate* encompassing Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. Following 9/11, the JI began to establish networks including the *Darul Islam* and Afghan war returnees throughout the archipelago for recruitment and gaining strength in order to instigate damage to Western interests in an apparent response to the interests of the Islamic *Ummah* as against the US attacks in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, they failed to obtain deep rooted support from among the people. (Bertrand, 2010, pp. 57–8).

⁶⁰ The other groups are *Laskar Jihad* and *Front Pembela Islam*. The *Laskar Jihad* was formed in early 2000 mainly to defend the Muslims against Christian attacks in parts of the Moluccan islands. Although the organization condemned the US attack on Afghanistan, the leaders were opposed to the ideals of Bin Laden for his alleged rebellion against Saudi Arabia. They recruited fighters and sent them to the Christian dominated islands to protect fellow Muslims. However, their link to Al-Qaeda was not supported by hard evidence. Their activities were soon contained by the government forces. The *Front Pembela Islam* was founded in 1998 and mainly characterized by a campaign against what they considered "immoral" as per the strict interpretation of Islam. As part of their activities, they resorted to raiding bars, disco, brothels, alcohol sales etc. However, they fell short of being a threatening factor to the secular character of the state. (Crouch, 2001, pp. 1–2).

⁶¹ Among the terrorist acts, the Bali bombing was considered notorious. In the incident, 88 Australians and seven Americans were killed. (*The Jakarta Post*, 10 October 2012).

However, terrorism did not turn the country into a safe heaven or base for building a further network to carry out the Islamist agenda. Crouch (2001, p. 1) argues these militant organizations represent “only a tiny proportion” of the total population and are not linked to a major international terrorism network, thus not posing a serious threat to the secular fabric of the state. The Indonesian Government condemned the terrorist acts perpetrated in the name of Islam and brought the accused to trial to show its commitment to secular values. The government response limited the capacity of the radical Islamist groups to grow and commit further violence. Sudarsono (2003, p. 1) comments that “radical Islamists are actually losing ground in the battle for the hearts and minds of most Muslims in Indonesia”.

However, some analysts like Abuza (2002, pp. 427-45) argue that the radical Islamists took root as a “base-of-operations and source for recruits” in Indonesia for international terrorist networks including Al-Qaeda. This posed a “potent” and “great concern” to security in the whole of Southeast Asia. In his book *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, Gunaratna (2002, pp. 118–20) finds such links to international terrorism. Cobboy (2006) holds a similar view.

Significantly, though suspected, Indonesian scholars, notably Fealy (2009 and 2005) and Crouch (2001) firmly reject the views of Abuzza and Gunaratna et al. Crouch (2001, p. 1) argues that “It is probable that radical Islamic groups have received financial support from Al-Qaida. But evidence is lacking to show that such links have decisively influenced their behaviour”.⁶² Ricklefs (2003, p. 1) also rules out the extremist fears of some press reports and argues that the extremist organizations including JI, Lasker Jihad and FPI were inspired mostly by local issues, have now been “beheaded, shut down or suspended”, resulting in their inability to rise effectively against the

⁶² Surette (2009, pp. 3–4) argues that the broad motivations and operations of JI are different from that of Al-Qaeda. For example, Al Qaeda’s struggle is global in nature and its leadership are interested in exporting its fight anywhere in the world. However, the JI’s focus is strictly local, i.e. to replace the government with Islam as its ideology. While Al-Qaeda pushes for a greater role in Southeast Asia, JI limits its activities over the structure of the government.

secular government of Indonesia.⁶³ This is also echoed by Bertrand (2010, p. 60) who comments that, since 2004, radical groups lost their capability to wage further terrorist attacks or gain major popular support.

Kivimaki (2003, p. 16) asserts that terrorism in Indonesia is not driven solely by religious motivation. He argues that such terrorism is at least related in part to the “hatred caused by the Western humiliation” of the Indonesian. For example, Indonesians felt alone in the wake of the end of the Cold War where the US used to consider them as an important ally and sided with them in the fight against the communist threat. However, after the Cold War, Indonesia suffered a severe economic crisis in 1997 and they had to “crawl in front of the USA, the Western financial institutions to get help”. Indonesia had to comply with the conditions imposed, many of which were considered derogatory to them. Another instance of Indonesian humiliation was the Western pressure to separate East Timor from Indonesia through a referendum, which also fuelled their alienation from the West. This sense of loss of dignity actually invited reactions from some sections of the Islamist groups through the terrorist means.

Although the post-Suharto period was open to what Nagata (2010, p. 36) calls “a surge of religious freedom and experimentation, including dakwah and Wahhbi influences”, Indonesia as a whole remained committed to secular values as its state ideology.⁶⁴ While it is true that in the later days of Suharto, some signs of Islamic values were manifested in both public and private life, the Indonesian state was largely insulated from the influence of Islamist activism. The growing discontent among the urban middle-class Muslims was mainly not with the secularization, but relating more to the government policies and practices, including the corruption. This is evident in

⁶³ Rickfels (2003, p. 2) brings out an analogy with that of the *Baader-Meinhof* gang of West Germany, which emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s. At times, they were popular with 10–20 percent public support in opinion polls. However, in the face of firm action by the secular government, the public support for the gang declined sharply and the leaders were captured in 1972. The main leader, Andreas Baader, committed suicide in 1977, causing a permanent blow to the organization.

⁶⁴ Unlike Malaysia, the religious courts are subordinate to the Supreme Court. (Fealy et al., 2006, p. 47).

the general election results in 1999, 2004 and 2009, indicating the decrease of support for the Islamist parties despite their growing discontent against misgovernance. Significantly, electoral performance of the Islamist parties was no higher than it had been in the elections of 1955 and 1971.⁶⁵ This clearly shows no increase of appeal of the Muslim political parties despite the signs of upsurge of Islam in the Indonesian context.⁶⁶ Mackie (2007, p. 71) notes that although following the fall of Suharto Indonesia saw the proliferation of political parties with an Islamist agenda, this did not radically alter their level of acceptance to the common people. The electoral performances of the Islamist parties are exhibited in Appendix 11.

What are the likely reasons for the decline of these Islamist parties? Fealy (2009, p. 1) asserts that the main reason for their failure to attract voters is their perceived inability to address “pressing socio-economic issues” in the Indonesian context. Although the Islamist parties profess a complete code of life, they have not presented any effective model to resolve the material problems of the Indonesian people. According a survey conducted by the Indonesian Survey Institute, there exists an inverse correlation between perceived “Islamic-ness” and the competence and ability to put the country on track for prosperity. (Fealy, 2009, p. 1).

Diversity with Islamist groups and the implications for modernization

The diversity of the Islamic community in Indonesia is quite extraordinary. The categorization of this community is also very complex. Based on Islamic piety, an important distinction has been drawn by Geertz in his famous book *The Religion of Java* (1960) which identified two major groups, i.e. *Abangan* and *Santri*. The first category is identified by its commitment to the syncretistic traditions and pre-Islamic elements drawn largely from Buddhism and Hinduism. On the other

⁶⁵ Despite the largest size of the Muslim population, the Islamist parties did not gain more than 44 percent of the total votes in any of the general elections. They also failed to amass pressure on the government to Islamize the Indonesian Constitution and state. (Fealy et al., 2006, p. 44).

⁶⁶ The only ‘Islamist’ party, PKS, made substantial progress in the elections. It obtained 1.36 percent in 1999, 7.34 in 2004 and 7.8 in 2009. However, this individual progress is mainly due to its clean, pro-reform policies and its campaigns against corruption. Its moderate posture also helped to attract the urban middle class. The leadership made a number of compromises on the Islamist agenda and retains a pluralist orientation. (Fealy, 2009, p. 1).

hand, the *Santri* group is associated with a conservative interpretation of Islam. *Santri* seek to observe the rituals and practices as enshrined in the scriptures. For *Santri*, Islam is a key to the day-to-day lives of the Muslims.⁶⁷ (Fealy et al., 2006, pp. 30–40).

Significantly, even among the *Santri* Muslims, there are traditionalist and modernist groups. They are divided on doctrinal interpretations and practices of the Islamic prescriptions. The traditionalist group is led by *Nadhatul Ulama* (NU) which was formed in 1926 by K. H. Hasyim Asy'ari and K. H. Wahab Chasbullah and now has a membership of about 40 million Muslims of which most of them are from Java. This group mainly seeks to preserve the local customs while practising the traditional medieval Islamic scholarship.⁶⁸ On the other hand, the modernists known as *Muhammadiyah*⁶⁹ consider the traditional practices as impure and want to cleanse the faith by returning to the pristine teaching found in the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet. They also seek to apply the modern advances and concepts as long as it does not contradict the key Islamic teaching. This organization now claims to have about 30 million members throughout Indonesia.⁷⁰ Although both these organizations seek to confirm the Islamic rituals in different doctrinal directions, they have in general shown their moderate posture on politics and eschew extremism. (Barton, 2005, p. 115).

⁶⁷ For example, they pray five times, fast during the month of Ramadan, pay the wealth tax (*Zakat*) and if possible perform pilgrimage to Mecca. (Liddle, 2005, p. 6).

⁶⁸ Traditionalists continue to adhere to the Syafi'i school of legal interpretation, which is taught by charismatic *Ulama* (scholars and teachers), in thousands of boarding schools (called *Pesantren*) throughout the archipelago. On Java and in a few other regions the largest and most politically influential traditionalist organization is Nahdlatul Ulama or NU (The Awakening of the Religious Scholars and Teachers), which claims more than 50 million members.

⁶⁹ Muhammadiyah, founded in 1912, has membership of about 25–30 million.

⁷⁰ Modernists tend to be more urban and Western-educated than traditionalists. They are greatly influenced by such 19th and early 20th century Middle Eastern thinkers as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, abjure the Syafi'i and other classical schools in favor of direct reading of the Qur'an and *Hadith*, sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. Considerably fewer in number than traditionalists, modernists are scattered throughout the archipelago, with the greatest concentrations in Yogyakarta and West Sumatra. (Liddle, 2005, p. 6).

Even within the Islamist parties⁷¹, there are two groups: Islamist and pluralist parties. The 'Islamists' proclaim Islamic identity and seek to establish an Islamist agenda while the pluralist parties have adopted the religiously neutral state ideology, *Pancasila*, as their basis and eschew a Sharia-based agenda. Of such parties, seven are Islamist while the other three are pluralist in their 'Islamic' posture. Such distinction is important, mainly because a party ideology and moderate posture drew the level of popular support. In the 2009 election, the seven Islamist parties obtained 17 percent of the total votes while the pluralist parties received 12 percent. This was a decline by 5 percent and 3 percent in that order from the 2004 election. In the 1999 election, these figures were 16 percent and 24 percent respectively. On the other hand, the secular parties, i.e. Democratic Party and Justice Party, secured a proportionate increase of popular votes. The key issue here is that, amongst Indonesian voters, the Islamist agenda is "stagnant and limited to a very small minority of the Islamic community" (Fealy, 2009, p. 1) and they have shown inclinations more towards secular ideals. (Liddle, 2005, pp. 5–7).

Moreover, many of the Islamist parties, notably PKB, PPP and PAN, have suffered (like most political parties) internal tension and divisions over ideology, leadership and clashes of personality, leading Liddle (2005, pp. 7–8) to note that as a result Islamic parties have failed to present or consolidate one Islamic platform for Indonesians. In addition, unlike Pakistan and Malaysia, there is no domestic or external issue that can stir domestic debate concerning Islam and national identity or create a sense of threat from without to the religion itself.⁷² At the same time, the state has

⁷¹ The main Islamist parties are the National Awakening Party (PKB), Justice Prosperous Party (PKS), PPP (Development Unity Party), PBB (Crescent Moon and Star Party) and National Mandate Party (PAN).

⁷² In Malaysia, the ethnic conflict between 'not-so-majority' Malays and 'not-so-minority' non-Malays has elevated the public role of Islam. The Malay communities began to link their identity with Islam when they saw their communal interests being marginalized by the non-Malays. Hence the rise of Islam is inherently connected with the communal political interests between two communities. (Mohamad, 2010, pp. 65–70). Similarly, in Pakistan due to heterogeneity in the social structure, Islam was instrumental as the unifying factor of the state. The ruling elites, particularly the military, also used the 'Islamic card' to legitimize their authority. Fair (2011, p. 1) points out that Pakistan's army was given the impression that the Bengali liberation forces, *Mukthi Bahini*, in 1971 were a "*Kafir* army" (infidels) and "to defend Pakistan" was equated with "to defend Islam". (Ahamed, 1983, p. 1117; Rahman, 1997, p. 1; Fair, 2011, p. 1; ICG, 2003, pp. 7–8).

shown a firm commitment to *Pancasila* and, for the most part, vigorously suppressed Islamic extremism. So while Indonesians have increasingly chosen Islamic pietism in recent years, this has not translated into electoral support for political Islam; and extremism, where it has occurred, has, as we shall later see in the case of Bangladesh, been inspired by local issues and failed to gain broad support. (Hefner, 2000, p. 15; Fealy, 2009, p. 1; Berno, 2009, p. 1).

Overall, cultural pluralism, the syncretization of Indonesian Islam with earlier faiths and deeper forces of Javanese culture, the strength of a secular Indonesian identity, and developments in contemporary politics have all contributed to the comparatively more restrained profile of Islam in Indonesia. In that regard, Indonesia shares, as later chapters will show, some important attributes of the Bangladesh response to the Islamic resurgence.

Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia: The ideological dimension

This chapter has highlighted the important, indeed central, context or country-specific environments in the determination of the character and extent of the Islamic revival in South and Southeast Asia. Key factors such as nationalism, identity, culture, contemporary politics and the role of socio-economic issues and/or modernization have been examined in that regard. But what has been the contribution at a more general level, if any, of the ideological dimension, i.e. Islam perceived in universal and monolithic terms – as a blueprint for action based on the Qur'an – to the profile of Islam in Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia? The ideological dimension has, in the particular circumstances of Pakistan, had some impact on the Islamization of some sections of the society and polity in Pakistan but little or none in Malaysia and Indonesia where such influence has been confined to small extremist groups.

Milam (2011, p. 82) argues that Zia (1978–88) also used the Islamization project for the same purpose that the subsequent governments found hard to back out “whether they wanted it or not”.

In the case of Pakistan, as we have seen, Islam has been a key factor in the country's identity, nationalism and national integration. Autocracy and a weak state further facilitated the progress of Islamic over secularist forces in the Islamization of Pakistan and movement towards an Islamic state. However the external environment, and in particular the US strategic alliance with Pakistan in containing (during the Cold War) communist expansion, notably that of the Soviets in Afghanistan, gave a fillip to the ideological or Jihadi dimension and its contribution to the higher profile of Islam in Pakistan. As Wirsing (2004, p. 170) argues, the war in Afghanistan provided an important propellant to the role of Islam in Pakistan using the strategy of Islamic Jihad (holy war). This created the conditions for the Islamists to encroach the Jihadi culture into Pakistani society and attract sympathy towards Islamic activism in the state. (Milam, 2011, p. 82).

General Zia, in particular, it has been argued, turned Pakistan into an "important ideological and organizational centre of the global Islamic movement" and allowed recruitment of co-religionists from the Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries to join the Mujahidin with indoctrination in Islamic ideology. (Haqqani, 2004, p. 91). Particularly significant in that regard was the influence or world-view of Al-Qaeda that was adopted, with some variations, by various extremist Pakistani groups such as Lashkar-e-Toiba and Lashkar-e-Omar. More pertinently, arms of the Pakistani state itself, notably the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), have been accused of supporting Taliban forces and recruiting and training Mujahedeen to fight in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Haqqani (2004, p. 94) argues that the success of the Afghan war encouraged Pakistan for a "broader Jihad to expand Pakistan's influence in the region and to use these forces (Mujahidin) to further its strategic regional objectives in Afghanistan and India".

While the ideological dimension has touched elements of the Islamic revival in the Middle East and West Asia, it has been largely absent in Southeast Asia, Malaysia and Indonesia, where it had been confined to small extremist groups or individuals. Gunaratna (1996, p. 7) claims that an organization called Kumpulan Mudahidin Malaysia (KMM) posed a Jihadist threat to Malaysia and

regional security. However, Gunaratna has not produced any convincing evidence and KMM, whose very nomenclature kept changing, appears to have been little more than a convenient umbrella term used by Malaysian authorities to cover a few extremist groups and individuals. (Indeed the government has since dropped the term.) When occasional extremist incidents have occurred, the extremist acts, such as in 1985 in the remote village of Memali (Kedah state), have invariably been the result of very local and parochial factors rather than any commitment to a broader ideological or Jihadist philosophy. (Wain, 2009, p. 226).

It is a similar state of affairs in Indonesia. Indonesia's radical Muslim organizations represent only a tiny proportion of the population of 210 million and the vast majority of those draw their inspiration from or have been spawned by local factors, not by ideological or universal Jihadist views beyond Indonesia. The exception is Jemaah Islamiah (JI), the group formerly led by the radical cleric Abu Bakar Bashir and responsible for the 2002 bombing in Bali in which 202 people died. Since 2010, however, the group has been decimated by effective government action compounded by disunity and ill-discipline within its own meager ranks. Moreover, JI no longer has a meaningful link with the leadership of Al-Qaeda (and evidence was always lacking to show that such links decisively influenced JI's behaviour) while Al-Qaeda itself has been decimated. (Crouch, 2001, p. 1).

Conclusion

At a broad level, the purpose of this chapter has been to show how key factors behind the Islamic resurgence, identified in the literature review, have all, albeit in different ways, contributed to the higher profile of Islam in the Muslim societies of South and Southeast Asia, notably Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. Thus, the literature review and case studies will provide necessary background, a link and, most importantly, contrast in the explanation of the unique case of Bangladesh where those same factors in the Islamic resurgence have failed to gain traction.

The literature review began by focusing on the debate between those scholars who perceived the Islamic resurgence (and Islam) in universal/monolithic terms and emphasized its ideological nature, and those who argue that the Islamic revival can best be understood as a response to local issues and challenges facing particular societies (i.e. that context is critical). With regard to the former, it was found that only in Pakistan, and largely as a result of Pakistan's role in containing communist expansion (Soviets in Afghanistan), was the ideological or Jihadist dimension contributing to the higher profile of Islam in that country.

With regard to those who argued the centrality of context as an explanation for the Islamic resurgence, the literature review identified a number of factors that were critical in that regard, notably: Islam, nationalism and identity, culture and modernization, the socio-economic dimension and Islam and contemporary politics. Under each of these headings it is now worthwhile to summarize the findings with regard to Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia which later will be juxtaposed with Bangladesh. The purpose of such a comparison is to show that while the Islamic resurgence had a varying impact in other states of South and Southeast Asia, notably Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia, Bangladesh remains a case apart where the impact of the Islamic revival is concerned.

Islam, nationalism and identity: In the context of a weak state, and one deeply fragmented along ethnic and cultural lines, Islam has been a key factor in Pakistan's national integration, identity and nationalism. In Malaysia's ethnically and culturally divided society, religion also constitutes an important element in defining ethnic identity – in that context Malay identity and religion/Islam have become synonymous. However, Indonesian identity/nationalism is rather different in this regard. Indonesian ethnic and cultural plurality has been recognized right from the beginning, mainly through the national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* or 'unity in diversity', and the national philosophy *Panacila*, one element of which is belief in 'One God' – but whose identity is open.

Culture and modernization: In terms of culture and modernization, the centralization of government and Pakistan's heterogeneous society are important factors thwarting modernization and consensus on important social issues. Islamic influences are able to exploit this situation since the ruling elites need their support and are wary of offending conservative Islamic agendas. In Malaysia, rampant corruption and cronyism associated with the New Economic Policy (NEP), particularly during the Mahathir era, deeply offended many Malay notions of Islamic social justice. Unlike Pakistan and Malaysia, the religion of the majority people has not become an important issue for national politics to create an appeal to the common people. In contrast to Pakistan and Malaysia, Islam in Indonesia has undergone a long process of syncretization with elements of Hinduism, Buddhism and deeper currents of Javanese culture, all of which have reinforced a tolerant and moderate form of Islam.

The socio-economic dimension: In Pakistan, the connection between socio-economic issues and growing Islamic influence is especially evident in three areas – population, education and the role of women in Pakistani society. The large pool of illiterate, unemployed, poor and often disenfranchised women is the constituency from which Islamists draw their support, a situation exacerbated by autocratic ruling elites who all too often exploit state resources for their own benefit. In the case of Malaysia the increased identification of Malays with Islam coincided with rapid socio-economic development associated with the NEP and contact with new religious ideas and *dakwah* (missionary groups). In Indonesia, while there has been a rise in Islamic piety concurrent with the rapid growth of the middle class, this has, overall, not been reflected in the Indonesian polity. Moreover, as we have seen, the radical groups and their terrorist acts mainly resulted from inter-ethnic conflicts over material gains in the eastern islands and to some extent a sense of 'humiliation' on the loss of East Timor and the severity of the Asian Financial Crisis in Indonesia.

Islam and contemporary politics: Contemporary politics in Pakistan is characterized by a weak state preyed upon by both military and civilian politicians, neither of whom have been inclined to strengthen civil society, while at the same time playing the 'Islamic card' for short-term political gain. The relationship between civilian and military governments and the Islamists has been aptly described as a 'Faustian bargain' that facilitated ever-greater political space to the Islamists at the expense of secular forces. In the Malaysian context we saw how, during the 1970s, the increasing self-conscious commitment of young urban Malays to Islam was a development that prompted the major Malay political parties, UMNO and PAS, to outbid or 'out Islamize' one another in the quest for Malay votes/support. The result of such rivalry over two decades was the greater Islamization of Malaysian institutions and society. Of particular significance in that regard was constitutional change and the interpretation of the Constitution from an increasingly Islamic perspective. Again Indonesia presents an interesting contrast. Both the autocratic rulers, Soekarno and Suharto, were firmly committed to the secular ideals of *Pancasila* and since the fall of Suharto Islamist parties, in a democratic Indonesia, have failed to make significant headway.

At a broader level, where the Islamic revival is concerned, Indonesia presents some interesting parallels with Bangladesh. Particularly important in that regard has been the syncretization of Islam with deeper cultural forces in both societies and the extent to which nationalism and identity have been interwoven with religion. In that regard, in a crude continuum depicting the impact of the 'Islamic resurgence', Pakistan might be placed at the more extreme end of the spectrum with Malaysia less extreme/more moderate and Indonesia more moderate; still with Bangladesh, as the thesis will show, a case apart. The remainder of the dissertation will show the impact of those same factors (i.e. Islam; nationalism and identity; culture and modernization etc.) with regard to the status of Islam in Bangladesh. The aim is to highlight how and why, in that particular context, such factors have combined to produce a very different outcome, i.e. the strengthening of secularism and civil society. The following chapters begin with an analysis of Islam and the cultural dimension of Bangladesh.

Chapter 3

Islam in Bangladesh: Cultural Dimensions

Introduction

This chapter examines some distinguishing features of Bengali culture. It argues that syncretism, pluralism and a strong thread of secularism have, historically, been hallmarks of Bengali culture. A brief overview of some key phases of Bengali cultural history will serve to underline the importance and durability of these values before the colonial period, during the colonial period (when such values were further strengthened with the gradual infusion of Western liberal ideals), and after. The chapter argues that these salient characteristics of Bengali culture have been a central factor in significantly limiting the impact of the Islamic revival in the Bangladeshi context.

Pre-Muslim rule: Diversity and tolerance

Since ancient times, the land (now Bangladesh) attracted foreigners and invaders of different races and creeds attracted by its strategic location and the fertility of its riverine alluvial soils. (Rashid, 2004, p. 12). These people included Austric-speakers, Mongols, Dravidians, Aryans, Turko-Afghans, Pathans, Arabs, Persians and Abyssinians (East Africans). Some people came for commercial and trade opportunities, some were conquerors, while others were simply migrants. Many such people chose to settle permanently and merged with the local people, their beliefs and cultural traditions. Over time, through a process of assimilation, the indigenous culture developed a considerable richness and diversity. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 4). Notwithstanding this diversity, Bengal experienced a cultural tradition of often harmonious co-existence between people professing different faiths and having differences in caste and creed.

Bengal's cultural tolerance dates back to the ancient period of Ashoka (304–232 BC), who ruled much of present-day India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Sen (2005, p. 274) singles out his rule for its “religious neutrality” which remained a common tradition for the subsequent

periods in the broader Indian context. This ancient king ruled about 80 percent of the Indian subcontinent including Bengal and created the first proto secular state with his administration. He left the legacy of pluralism and religious tolerance which he expressed through a number of publically visible inscriptions and edicts.⁷³ Drawing from Buddhist thought, Ashoka introduced into governance many critical moral values such as non-violence (the very antithesis of war and aggression), religious tolerance, environmental conservation, respect for life and upholding human rights. (Spear, 1961, p. 57; Kulke and Rothurmund, 2004, p. 71). Although this tradition applies to the whole of the present-day Indian subcontinent, Bengali culture owed much to this ancient past.⁷⁴

The most notable influence on the mindset of the Bengali common people was that of the Pala dynasty which ruled Bengal for about four centuries from the mid-8th century. According to Islam (2011, p. 26), in the period preceding the 8th century, Bengal was divided into many parts and divisions forming small kingdoms. However, at the beginning of the 8th century it was the Pala dynasty which gave “a proper shape to Bengal”. This period was known as the “golden chapter” in the history of Bengal and left a period of humanism, stable governments, peace and stability. (Chowdhury, 2004, p. 59). The Pala rulers were Buddhists, while the common people were Hindus. The rulers adopted secularism in their state policies and practised religious toleration towards other faiths. The rulers, Buddhists and indigenous people all lived in relative harmony and inter-religious unity was promoted. (Islam, 2011, p. 26). The development of Nalanda University⁷⁵ was

⁷³ Ashoka left a series of inscriptions such as the rock edicts, minor rock edicts and pillar edicts. These are a great source of records of his rule. Ashoka reigned in India over three decades and was well documented through these inscriptions. His religious neutrality is also evident in these records. (Kulke and Rothermund, 2004, p. 65).

⁷⁴ Ashoka’s rule is not the only influence on Bengal to advance religious toleration; later cultural, political and historical developments also contributed to shape a separate identity, known as Bengali tradition. This will be highlighted in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 with greater detail.

⁷⁵ Nalanda is located in the Indian state of Bihar and the university is considered one of the oldest in recorded history. During the Pala dynasty, the place became the center of learning and received patronage from the Pala rulers.

symbolic of a broader commitment to knowledge and education during this period. (Majumder, 1943, p. 101).

Although devout Buddhists, the Pala rulers nevertheless extended patronage to the Hindu gods and goddesses and employed the *Brahmins* of the Hindus in important portfolios of government. (Majumder, 1943, p. 116). The Pala rulers also granted land for the temples of Hindu gods and goddesses or *Brahmins*. According to historians, there was no evidence of any conflict on religious grounds in this long Buddhist period. Local Bengali language and literature rose to prominence and the Pala dynasty promoted its culture and development. This long rule of the Buddhist Pala dynasty left a deep impact and legacy in creating “a spirit of toleration and mutual co-existence” on the land, people and formation of culture in Bengal. (Chowdhury, 2004, p. 62).

However, after the Pala dynasty, *Senas* from the South Indian region ruled Bengal until the beginning of the 13th century. The *Senas* were orthodox Hindus and this period witnessed a revival of Hinduism, reversing the trends of tolerance in the society. The *Senas* tried to establish a *Brahmanical* interpretation of the Hindu religion which emphasized a rigid caste system with the majority of the people belonging to the lower caste. According to historians, this rigid version of the Hindu religion was at odds with the religious toleration of the Pala dynasty and did not take firm social root in the land. As Islam (2011, p. 26) comments, the common people at large became the subject of suppression and oppression by these *Sena* rulers. The social conditions of this period were largely marked by disintegration and alienation of these people from the rulers who promoted the practice of untouchability, gross social inequality and distinctions, and an inequitable position of women. The caste system caused many “social evils” including child marriage, female infanticide, the *Devdasi* system and the practice of *Sati*, forbidding marriage of widowed women. (Sharma, 1987, pp. 24–5). These developments led to alienation between the ruler and the ruled and facilitated the conquest by foreigners. When Iktiar Uddin Muhammad Bakhtiar Khalji, the Turk warrior of Muslim origin, attacked Bengal in the beginning of the 13th

century with only a handful soldiers, he was successful in driving out the then hated *Sena* ruler, Lakkhan Sen, who could not muster the support of the common people. (Islam, 2011, p. 26).

Although the conquest of Khaljii facilitated Muslim rule in Bengal, Islam originally came to the region now known as Bangladesh peacefully, not through the imposition or force. Muslims became the majority in the land mainly through the large-scale conversion of local lower caste Hindu Bengali people. According to historians, during the 8th century (712 AD) Islam first came to Western India and by the 13th century it had reached Bengal. Sufism⁷⁶ and saints from Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran came to the region to preach Islam. Another school of historians claims Islam first entered the region through the country's Chittagong Port on the Bay of Bengal, a port used by Arab merchants who were trading with China and the Kingdoms of South East Asia. Arabian traders coming into contact with the Bengali people in this way preached Islam whilst also engaging in their trading activities. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 2). As will be argued in Chapter 4, by whichever route Islam came, the key point is that it came peacefully. The conquest was primarily a political and not necessarily an Islamic-led expedition. The conquest and spread of Islam did occur at different times and contexts.

Islam's popularity in India and Bengal increased with its message of equality among people in an age when the majority of Hindus under a caste-ridden society suffered inequality and a lack of social respect. It was in this context that the message of Islam appealed to the masses with its absolute unity of God and its egalitarian approach. As a result many voluntarily became Muslims. There are other social and economic considerations that contributed to the spread of Islam in Bengal. The next chapter (Chapter 4) brings out this issue in greater detail. It is pertinent to note here, however, that from the 14th century until the arrival of the British, Islam in Bengal continued to absorb existing cultural values including, most importantly, that of religious tolerance.

⁷⁶ Sufism represents a mystical dimension of Islam. It professes the love of God through the love of God's creation and emphasizes truth, tolerance and humanism. For details, see Banglapaedia (2006, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh: Dhaka).

Muslim rule (1205–1757): Continuity of religious tolerance

Baktiyar Khalji's conquest in 1204–05 began a period of Muslim rule and that continued until the Battle of Palassey in 1757.⁷⁷ This period of Muslim rule had broadly two phases: Sultanate and the Mughal. The Sultanate period came to an end in 1576, when the last Afghan Sultan Daud Khan Karrani of Bengal was subdued by Khan Jahan, the army general of the Great Mughal Emperor Akbar, in the battle of Rajmahal on July 12.⁷⁸ After the battle, the Mughal army began to establish its authority over the rest of Bengal by subduing independent and semi-independent military chiefs, the Afghans, and Bengali Bhuiyans and Rajas, both Muslim and Hindu. The Mughal ruler was in firm control during the reign of Akbar's son Emperor Jahangir by an expeditious effort of his energetic Subahdar, Islam Khan Chisti. (Karim, 2004, p. 108).

From the 14th century until British colonial rule (about 500 years) Bengal remained a largely independent *Sultanat* under different Muslim rulers, mainly Turkish and Afghan in origin. According to historians, these rulers were mostly warriors and a political force rather than religious leaders. The control of Bengal was facilitated largely by geography and distance from the power center of Delhi. As a result, two Muslim *Sultanats*⁷⁹, one in Delhi and the other in Bengal, emerged in the Indian subcontinent on a parallel line during these periods, from the early 14th to late 16th centuries. (Aktharuzzaman, 2002, pp. 341–42).

These *Sultanat* periods saw an attempt to build an integrated society where respect towards different faiths figured prominently. According to historians, this tolerance was a necessary product of the type of Muslim administrations involved, i.e. the Muslim rulers were a political force rather than religious leaders and mostly secular in outlook. They exhibited a liberal attitude

⁷⁷ Even after the battle, Muslim rule of the society at large continued for some years, though the British East India Company controlled the administration. This rule was carried on in the name of puppet local rulers, *Nawabs*.

⁷⁸ In the battle, Daud Khan Karrani was killed and his capital Tanda was seized. Bengal began to lose control to the Delhi-based Mughal rule.

⁷⁹ *Sultanat* refers to be an independent administrative unit in a designated area of the Indian subcontinent by the Muslim rulers during the middle age.

towards the local people who mostly belonged to different faiths. Besides the significant secular strain in their outlook, self-interest and pragmatism also contributed to the tolerant and liberal attitude of the Muslim rulers. Under constant threat of attack and conquest from their coreligionists in Delhi, the Muslim rulers of Bengal needed the loyalty and support of the local people. The Muslim rulers also depended on the local people for the smooth functioning of both the military and civil administration. The historical sources indicate the collection of revenue, at least from rural areas, was exclusively in the hands of the local people who also, though frequently Hindu, supported local Muslim rulers in resisting invasion from Delhi. (Islam, 2011, personal communication). Thus, while Delhi-based Muslim rulers made frequent attempts to invade Bengal and shatter its territorial unity and sovereignty, they failed in the face of a local population (mainly Hindus) whose loyalty to the Muslim Sultanat was largely premised on the protection it gave to a (comparatively) cosmopolitan and religiously tolerant Bengal⁸⁰ (Akhtaruzzaman, 2002, p. 340; Islam, 2011, personal communication).

The Muslim period from the middle of the 14th century till the middle of the 18th century witnessed the nurturing of religious tolerance among different religious faiths and was actively promoted by the rulers. The Ilyas Shahi dynasty which lasted from the middle of the 14th to the end of the 15th century (1342 to 1486 AD) and then the Hussain Shahi dynasty (1494–1538) were specifically known for “a great reputation of tolerance”. (Custers, 2009b, p. 1). According to Mohsin (2004), Ilyas Shahi rulers pursued an “enlightened and liberal policy” in order to master the support of the common people. This included appointment of non-Muslims to the top state positions and patronage for the local language, scholars and local religious culture. Alauddin Hussain Shah of Hussain Shahi’s dynasty added a “glorious chapter in the history of medieval Bengal” by not only

⁸⁰ This is best evident in the case of a *Nishan* (a sacred order or letter of medieval rulers) served by Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq (1352–1389 AD) of Delhi. In that *Nishan*, the Delhi ruler made an appeal to various socio-political classes of Bengal, including local chiefs and their people, urging them to take sides with Delhi against Sultan Ilyas Shah (1342–1358 AD) of Bengal. This actually did not happen and the support of the locals towards the Bengal ruler helped to thwart the conquest attempts of the Delhi ruler. (Akhtaruzzaman, 2002, p. 340).

bringing stability and prosperity but also treating equally the people belonging to different faiths across the board. He was also known to have employed local Hindus to top bureaucratic and state positions including ministers, personal physicians, mint masters and advisers. Under his patronage, Hindu holy books *Mahabhrata* and *Bagabata Gita* were translated into local Bengali. The religious tolerance of Alauddin Hussain Shah earned him the respect of Sri Chitannaya Dev, the founder of Vaishansim (Hindu reformist movement). Worship of “Sattya Pir”⁸¹ during Alauddin Hussain Shah’s reign was another example of his liberal views. Throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, many high positions in Bengal were occupied by non-Muslims who constituted the landed aristocracy of that period. The Sultans made important contributions to the growth of a Hindu middle-class with all its economic and cultural paraphernalia. During most of the Muslim periods including the Mughals, the local Bengal Muslims were not the part of the ruling elite. It was mainly the Hindu elite and the non-Bengali migrated Muslims (*Ashraf*) who formed an alliance and ruled Bengal for centuries. (Islam, 2007, p.16).

Muslim rule: The Mughal period – reinforcing religious tolerance and secularism

After the fall of the *Sultanat* in the 16th century, Bengal came under the suzerainty of the Mughal regime of Delhi with *Subahdars* as the provincial head of Bengal.⁸² The Mughals, while Muslim/Sunni, were also known as “secular and worldly” compared to the early Muslim (Turko-Afghan) invaders of India and they largely quarantined religion from the state affairs. Emperor Akbar (1542–1605 AD), in particular, made a significant contribution to religious harmony in the entire Indian empire including Bengal. Akbar solidified his rule by pursuing diplomacy with the powerful Hindu Rajput caste, and by marrying Rajput princesses. During his reign, he exercised tolerance towards non-Islamic faiths by rolling back some of the strict Sharia laws. His administration included numerous Hindu landlords, courtiers and military generals. He began a

⁸¹ *Satya Pir* represents a traditional belief in Bengal created by the fusion of Islam and local Hindu religion. People from both the religions used to pay reverence to this super-national agent. The Hindu version of *Satya Pir* was *Satya Narayan*. However, both were essentially the same rituals.

⁸² There were about 35 *Subahdars* (provincial head) of the Mughal Empire. The first was Munim Khan (1574–1575) and the last was Sirja-ud Daula (1756–57. (cited in Karim, 2004, pp. 123–24).

series of religious debates where Muslim scholars would debate religious matters with Hindus, Jains, Zoroastrians and Portuguese Roman Catholic Jesuits. He treated these religious leaders with consideration, irrespective of their faith, and revered them. He not only granted lands and money for the mosques but the list of the recipients included a huge number of Hindu temples in north and central India, Christian churches in Goa and a land grant to the newly born Sikh faith for the construction of a place of worship.

When the Mughals brought Bengal under their control, they created a deep impact on its administrative, social, economic and cultural life. Bengal's life and thought witnessed radical changes compared to earlier periods when the region enjoyed a large degree of independence. Bengal became a province, called *Subah*, under the centralized Mughal empire based in Delhi and fell under "one law, one official language and uniform cadre and uniform currency". (Karim, 2004, p. 115). The principal administration of Bengal was deeply permeated by the outlook and policy of the Mughals in which religious toleration was combined with a strong strand of secularism. O'Connell (2011, p. 52) observes the rulers were Muslims but the non-Muslims occupied a prominent place in business, the learned professions, revenue collection and key positions in the administration. As evidence, during the reign of Suja Uddin Muhammad Khan (1725–1739), while creating a council of advisers for his administration, he incorporated non-Muslim members including Diwan Rai Rayan Alam Chand and the great banker Jagat Shet. The Hindus were already placed in high government positions including the bureaucracy and were also admitted to the advisory council. (Karim, 2004, p. 113). In the latter part of the Mughal period, particularly the Nawabi period, Hindus were seen as part and parcel of the administration and occupied important positions in all branches of the secretariat. (Karim, 2004, p. 118). Akbar's secular policy was demonstrated when in 1562 he withdrew the *Jizya* tax which all non-Muslims were required to pay in the name of protection from the state.⁸³ Maddison (1971, p. 10) comments, "At the height of its

⁸³ This tax was, however, re-introduced by another Emperor Aurangzeb (1618-1707) in 1679, a move which was considered symbolic of vigorous Islamic orthodoxy. However, this policy, often interpreted as a

power under Akbar, the Moghul Empire exercised religious toleration. This is [was] one of the reasons why it [the Mughal Emire] was more successful in maintaining an extensive domain than the earlier Muslim sultanates of Delhi”.

It was mutual interest that led both ruler and ruled to show respect and tolerance to each other. The Muslim rulers did not want to lose loyalty of the subjects for fear that it might unleash rivals, a pretext for coups or foreign invasions. In addition, this might also result in the withdrawal of their services and expertise or immigration to other places. As noted historian Sirajul Islam (2011, personal communication) comments, the subjects were predominantly Hindu and in Hinduism it is ritualistic to show respect to power manifested in the form of rulers. He adds that Bengal was known as a ‘cultural land’ as compared to the warlike lands of the Middle East and Central Asia. As a result Bengalis submitted their loyalty to foreign rulers who ensured protection and their wellbeing.

Sen (2005), while highlighting the tradition of tolerance in Indian history, made a special reference to Emperor Akbar. According to Sen, Akbar was not only keen to establish the priority of tolerance but also laid the foundations of a secular legal structure and state. But the reason Sen singles out Akbar was his “defense of a tolerant and pluralist society” and “the role of reasoning” in his approach. Even in deciding on one's faith, one should be, Akbar argued, guided by 'the path of reason' (*Rahi Aql*) rather than led by 'blind faith'. (Sen, 2005, p.76). Sen (2005) also refers to the introduction of *Din-e-Elahi* of Akbar in which the Muslim Emperor tried to institute an ethical system, with a ban on common sins such as lust, sensuality, slander and pride, and emphasis on the virtues of piety, prudence, abstinence and kindness. The *Din-e-Elahi* was basically a synthesis of various other religions which Akbar had learnt through theological debates and heavily borrowed

necessary tool to replenish the treasury to face manyfold challenges on the empire, was an exception to the overall moderate outlook of the Mughols.

the best things from each and synthesized them into that new system.⁸⁴ Sen pointed out that Akbar's employment of Maan Singh of Hindu faith as army general of the huge imperial Mughal force was an obvious example of the Mughal's secular ethos by entrusting the responsibility with the person of a different religious belief. (cited in Imam, 2012, p. 6).

Akbar was opposed to the orthodox Islamic scholars (*Ulama*) of whom he was critical for their medieval outlook. (Kulke & Rothermund, 2004, p. 206). However, as Ahmed (2007, p. 9) observes, Akbar's policy of religious tolerance was largely a result of "practical considerations" given the political realities prevailing in India at that time. The Mughals had to face challenges to their empire from fellow Afghan Muslim warriors. To protect the newly established power, the Mughals had to seek allies primarily from the local Hindus in order to fight the conspiracy and attack of the rival Afghans. (Karim, 2007, p. 43).

Former Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, in his book *The Discovery of India* (1981, p. 260), makes a similar assessment of Mughal rule. He notes that Akbar had his council of advisors, from different faiths and religions, who were devoted to him and his ideals. The liberal attitude of the emperor was evident in his introduction of a "new synthetic faith" in order to satisfy the people of all religions. His rule also saw an amalgamation of culture between Hindus and Muslims. Akbar also formed an alliance with the local Hindu elite through matrimonial and secular ideals and such cooperation continued in subsequent reigns and influenced every sector of his governance, including administration, bureaucracy, art, culture and ways of living leading to the "progressively Indianised" culture. (Nehru, 1981, p. 259). Nehru (1981, p. 241) prefers to term the Muslim

⁸⁴ The new belief system aimed at purifying oneself through yearning for God (similar to mysticism); celibacy was disregarded (as Catholicism preaches); and slaughtering animals was banned (similar to Jainism). It did not prescribe any sacred scriptures or holy book or a priestly hierarchy. Akbar adopted some rituals similar to Zoroastrianism, such as worshipping light (Sun and fire) as a divine object and reciting as prescribed in Hinduism the names of Sanskrit origin of the Sun as source of divinity. Akbar withdrew *Jjiya*, the tax on Hindus, despite the traditional practice in Islam to impose it on non-believers. Akbar got married to girls of different religious origins with an intention to have a strategic union with the followers of other faiths and give a feeling that they were also a part of the royal household. Although the *Din-e-Elahi* did not survive Akbar, the system initiated a sharp debate on fundamental interpretations of religious beliefs, both in Islam and Hinduism.

conquest in India with Turko-Afghan synonym rather than 'Islamic' invasion unlike Christian rule to British India. Those Muslim rulers were primarily political warriors (not chiefly religious) and later merged with the conquered lands.

The implication of these Muslim rules is that Bengal experienced toleration from their rulers. The minority people hardly experienced discriminatory policy or pressure from them to practise their own religion, including conversion to Islam. The peaceful co-existence between different faiths and communities was a resultant outcome, leaving a powerful legacy, along with other developments, as we will see in the next chapters, on the Bengali mindset.

British colonial period (1757–1947): Infusion of Western secular and liberal ideals

During the British colonial period of about 200 years (1757–1947), the evolution of Islam also accommodated much of the secular ideals and policies introduced by the British, most notably in law, education and administration. (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 3–4). By 1947, when British rule ended, Bengal was a Muslim majority province within British India and, on partition, the eastern half of Bengal became the eastern part of Pakistan. British colonial rule was also therefore another important influence in the evolution of Islam with secular values imbibed in it in the context of a diverse and rich Bengali culture.

With the introduction of British colonial rule following the Palassey battle of 1757, Bengal saw a gradual elimination of Muslim rule and the Perso-Islamic structure was replaced by British colonial rule. As Maddison (1971, p. 3) comments, "The biggest change the British made in the social structure was to replace the warlord aristocracy by an efficient bureaucracy and army". Islam (2007, p. 10) documents some of the most important changes as including introduction of all-white bureaucratic government, the creation of a Western-style landowning class at the expense of rights of *Raiyats* (peasantry) under the Permanent Settlement and the establishment of new system of justice and magistracy. British rule had a significant impact on the development of infrastructure, particularly in communications and education, throughout the Indian subcontinent

including Bengal. The Persian language was also replaced by English as the official and court language. The education system saw major reforms and Western ideas and ideology came into contact with local context.⁸⁵ A new middle class comprising lawyers, suppliers, real estate owners, teachers, doctors, bureaucrats, clerks, traders, manufacturers, middlemen and such others emerged under British colonial patronage. Locals mainly from Hindus were recruited to the government office and new opportunities emerged in non-official sectors such as navigation, inland and export trade and the commercialization of agriculture.

These urban-based professionals played a key role in facilitating interaction between the local and the Western system. An important consequence of these developments was the infusion of Western concepts in Bengali Islam. The new Bengali middle class chose to identify themselves on the basis of their professions rather than religious and social caste and creed, which marked a significant departure from the age-old tradition of Bengal. Middle class Bengalis were more concerned with their new professional and economic activities and status rather than religious rituals, and constituted a powerful group in the society. These professionals became instrumental in popularizing Western liberal ideals mainly through their associations and the press, and made a deep impact on the mindset of Bengal through their emphasis on rationality rather than just religious traditions. This shift in attitude was aptly termed by some a “political awakening” while others called it a “political realignment”. (Islam, 2007, p. 15). The long period of British colonial rule (1757–1947) contributed to the legacy of Western liberal ideals in the psyche of the people of Bengal which was the main center of power during the British period. It is also important to note

⁸⁵ As an attempt to “Westernize India”, the British rulers began reforms in the education sector and introduced a “modified version of English education” in India. Macaulay’s 1835 ‘Minute on Education’ was an important initiative which offered a “rational approach to Indian civilization”. Prior to British rule, the Mughals used Persian as the court language and the elite Muslims (mainly *Ashrafs*) spoke Urdu, a blend of three main languages, namely Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit. The whole education system was largely characterized by religious emphasis and the knowledge of Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. British rulers replaced Persian with English as the official and court language and its new education system accommodated secular values like rationality, reason, and innovations of science and technology, replacing the age-old religious traditions. (Maddison, 1971, p. 5).

that the eastern part of Bengal (now Bangladesh), as will be highlighted in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, was known as more liberal mainly due to a lack of rigid social and religious structures (i.e. caste system), that facilitated the absorption of foreign elements.

The British impact was particularly evident in the socio-political sphere. The emergence of the *Bhadrolok* elite, educated in English, employed in colonial professions and loyal to the British rule, became a powerful agent in spreading Western liberal ideals in Indian society in general and was felt even in the post-colonial era. (Alam, 2002, p. 297). As cited in Maddison (1971, p. 5), notable British writer Macaulay made the observations about this class of people that:

It is impossible for us, with our limited means to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

This observation offers a succinct explanation of how Western ideals were suffused into the colonial social values and their impact, in turn, on Bengali Islam.⁸⁶ It was primarily this class of people who championed the cause of Western values of reason and secularism and transmitted them to the wider society. According to Maddison (1971, p. 4), the British felt an urge to carry out some radical changes in social customs to “Westernize India” during the period from the 1820s to the 1850s. Responding to the pluralist realities of India, British law enshrined the principle of secularism, as in the Queen’s Proclamation of 1858⁸⁷, which was an order to introduce a fair and uniform legal system. (Rajan, 1969, p. 97). The penal code of 1860 was an important example of

⁸⁶ This is considered in the next section of this chapter – Reconstructing the Islamic thoughts – to document its impact in eastern Bengal.

⁸⁷ By the Queen’s Proclamation of 1858, the British Government gave an order to its servants “not to interfere in the religious affairs of the Indians”. The British declared equal rights for the Indian subjects with that of other parts of the empire. It also assured Indians maintain the religious sanctity of the different communities.

this unified law.⁸⁸ Such laws worked to bind the people under regulations with equal treatment beyond social and religious prejudices.⁸⁹ In the words of Rajan (1969, p. 90), “Old beliefs were given a fresh interpretation, either in order to bring them into conformity with modern requirements or to give them a valid position in a modern context”.

British colonial rule also made an important impact in the economic sphere. Colonial rule fostered a *Laissez-faire* economy and was loathe to interfere with market forces even in a crisis like a famine. This policy of *Laissez-faire* became a matter of tradition and was deeply embedded in the British Indian economy which was further strengthened by the pillars of private property, rule of law and modern education. These developments resulted in the free “circulation of capital, productive enterprise and a system of large-scale production” and the growth of a powerful business class. (Shan-Loong, 2000, pp. 1–3). This class later became the native bourgeois exerting a powerful influence on the polity.

Besides the social and economic spheres, the British rulers undertook radical changes in the political culture and shaped its transition from the fragmented remains of an empire to a modern parliamentary democracy. The British transformed the local institutions and governing structures to suit the Western liberal political culture. (Shan-Loong, 2000, pp. 1–3). As Engineer (2011, p. 2) argues, with British rule new political institutions developed and, most importantly, the “sword was replaced by franchise” with the source of power vested in the people, though it was limited in the colonial period. This ushered in the era of democratic values in British India that ultimately led to the adoption of a parliamentary system of government after the Westminster model. Rajan

⁸⁸ This Penal Code of 1860 is still in use in Bangladesh with some amendments. The Code is the main substantive law in criminal matters and specifies a list of offences and punishments. This law has been supplemented by the Code of Criminal Procedure which was adopted in 1898. This covers the provisions and procedures relating to the establishment of courts, trials, hearings, bail and other related matters.

⁸⁹ Before British law, according to an old Hindu law, if a high caste *Brahmin* committed a murder he could not be given death sentence while a lower caste, *Sudra*, was liable to execution for the same offence. The new law ensured equal treatment to everyone for the same offence irrespective of their religious and social affiliations and status. (Maddison, 1971, p. 5).

(1969, p. 101) asserts that the British had a lasting impact in fostering Western liberal values, particularly in the areas of “democratic form of government, individual liberty and equality, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary”.

British colonial period (1757–1947): The Western and liberal impact on reconstructing Islamic thought

Robinson (1988, pp. 8–9), while documenting the variety of South Asian Islam, notes that the modernist approach, developed in Islamic thought in British India during the 19th century, first originated with Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898)⁹⁰, the ‘father of Muslim renaissance’, who argued that non-cooperation by Muslims with the British colonial power was the root cause of their ills and advocated that they “reconcile them [-selves] to British rule and western civilization”. Sayyid Ahmad Khan emphasized “reasoning” and “common sense” where religious doctrines and interpretations were concerned. He argued that the Western civilization and ideals were not in conflict with Islam and urged fellow Muslims to be open to accept Western education and learn English. Regarding religious practices, he took a pragmatic view on many of the issues, such as Jihad, polygamy and slavery, and had a positive attitude towards the British legal system instead of strict Sharia law. He was in favor of giving “rationalistic interpretations of the holy Qur’an” and found no contradiction “between the word of God (Qur’an) and the work of God, that is, nature.” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 61). Engineer (2011) observes that Sayyid Ahmad Khan had a “perceptive mind” and founded the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College which became the center of modern and

⁹⁰ Syed Ahmad Khan was known as the descendant of high ranking *Mughal* service families. By profession, he was a historian and archaeologist and worked as a minor judicial official under the British rule. He was acclaimed as the “father of Muslim renaissance” in British India for his contribution to modernity in Islamic thought in British India. (Ahmed, 2007, p. 61). Khan witnessed the distressed condition of the Muslims in late 19th century in British India. The Indian Muslims who were at the helms of power for centuries were demoralized because of poor conditions and lowering social status. Their suffering was mainly the result of “superstitious mystification and myopic dogmatism”. This led them to withdraw from the reforms and modernity of the new colonial rule, which resulted from their “hatred of the English rulers” and “refusal to co-operate with the English, to study in their schools and colleges of higher education and, above all, to acquire modern science and technology which was imparted in these institutions.” (Khaliq, 1995). In this backdrop and following the 1857 failed Sepoy Mutiny, Sayyid Ahmad Khan realized the necessity of reconstructing Islamic thought that would appreciate the changing realities of modern science and knowledge and improve the material conditions of the Indian Muslims.

secular education for Indian Muslims. Sayyid Ahmad Khan sought an analogy of the reconciliation of orthodoxy and modernity in earlier Islamic history with Greek philosophy by arguing that:

... in the present we are in need of a modern ilm al-Kalam by which we may either refute the doctrines of modern sciences or declare them to be doubtful or show that the articles of Islamic faith are in conformity with them. Those who are capable of the job but do not actually try their utmost to do it ... are sinners all of them, surely and definitely ... There is none at present, ... who is aware of modern science and philosophy and (in spite of this awareness) does not entertain in his heart of hearts doubts about the doctrines of Islam which are to-day accepted as such ... though I am equally sure that it will not, in the least, affect the original glory of Islam". (cited in Khaliq, 1995, p. 1).

According to Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the "physical universe" is not different from "the work of God" and "Islam is nature and nature is Islam". This view gave an emphasis on natural science. Based on this philosophy he explained that "God Himself holds on to naturalism: He can initially enact any laws of nature He likes but once they are so enacted absolutely nothing can happen against them". Sayyid Ahmad Khan also made an appeal to the Muslims to shun the "so-called supernatural component in phenomena like miracles, prayers and their acceptance by God, Sufistic illuminations, prophetic visions, angels, heaven and hell, and so on" and adapt to the changing realities. (Khaliq, 1995). C. W. Troll summed up the methodology of Sayyid Ahmad Khan in his interpretation of the Qur'an in the following way:

1. A close enquiry be [is] made into the use, meaning and etymology of Quranic language so as to yield the true meaning of the word and passage in question.
2. The criterion employed to decide whether a given passage needed metaphorical interpretation, and which of the several interpretations ought to be selected, is the truth established by science. Such truth is arrived at by *aqli dalil* (rational proof) and demands firm belief.
3. If the apparent meaning of the Scripture conflicts with [a] demonstrable conclusion, it must be interpreted metaphysically. In this, Sir Syed follows Ibn Rushd in his problem of reconciling *maaqul* (demonstrative truth) with *manqul* (scripture truth). Yet he makes clear that such

metaphorical and allegorical interpretation is precisely what the Author of the Scripture intended. (cited in Habib, 2000, p. 72).

The religious view of Sayyid Ahmad Khan was instrumental in the reconstruction of Islamic thought in British India and modification of the Muslim way of life in later days. In this outlook, some organizations such as the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh (1877), the All-India Muslim Educational Conference (1886) and the All-India Muslim League (1906) offered “the institutional forces of the Modernist orientation”. Later Muslim leaders like Abdul Latif, Syed Ameer Ali⁹¹, Allama Iqbal, Abdur Rahim, Keramat Ali and Delwar Hossain came forward and supported modernist thought. These leaders advocated the adoption of modernism and the development of science and rationality and emphasized secular ideals in the way of life of the Muslims.

Abdul Latif (1828–1893), the then most prominent Muslim leader in Bengal and who held a considerable influence in the Muslim politics in Bengal, also held the same views of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, particularly on the question of renouncing anti-Western attitudes and urged Muslims to learn English. He established the Muhammadan Literary Society in the 1860s for these purposes and argued Islam was not in contradiction with the knowledge of science. While arguing in favor of the study of science, Abdul Latif asserted that the early period of the Muslims was marked by “flowering of rationalism and science”, but their decline resulted largely from “ignorance of this intellectual heritage”. (Habib, 2000, p. 65). After the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny/uprising, he made the appeal to the Muslims to live harmoniously with the English institutions of learning. However, despite his openness to the Western learning, Abdul Latif remained a conservative reformist unlike his fellow modernist Islamic reformers. While he was open to the English education and adoption of science and knowledge, he remained conservative regarding Western liberal ideals. Abdul Latif was not willing to give up “Muslim prejudice” and argued for traditional religious education (the

⁹¹ Both Abdul Latif and Syed Ameer Ali hailed from Bengal and were known as social reformers and Islamic thinkers.

madrassah system) for the Muslims and opposed the replacement of English education as propagated by other reformers such as Syed Ameer Ali. Nonetheless, he made an important contribution to bringing about reforms with regard to the change of outlook of the Muslims towards modernity. (Ahmed, 2007, pp. 57–58).

Another prominent reformer Syed Ameer Ali (1847–1928) also sought to reinterpret Islam in the light of contemporary challenges and development of science and knowledge. He too was opposed to the orthodox version of Islam. In his famous book, *The Spirit of Islam: A History of the Evolution and Ideals of Islam with a Life of the Prophet (1967)*, Syed Ameer Ali was renowned for his liberal ideas and support for reform consistent with modern realities and the local cultural contexts. He made an important observation in this regard:

In the Western world, the Reformation was ushered in by the Renaissance and the progress of Europe commenced when it threw off the shackles of Ecclesiasticism. In Islam also, enlightenment must precede reform; and, before there can be a renovation of religious life, the mind must first escape from the “conformity” have imposed upon it. The formalism that does not appeal to the heart of the worshipper must be abandoned; externals must be subordinated to the inner feelings; and the lessons of ethics must be impressed upon the plastic mind; then alone can we hope for that enthusiasm in the principles of duty taught by the Prophet of Islam. The reformation of Islam will begin when once it is recognized that divine words rendered into any language retain their divine character and that devotions offered in any tongue are acceptable to God (Ali, 1967, pp. 185–86; also cited in Ahmed 2007, pp. 61–2).

Both Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Syed Ameer Ali regarded Islam “as a dynamic religion inherently capable of progress and development as the cultural environments grow and evolve”. (Khaliq, 1995, p. 1).

Another important response to modernity was articulated in the thought of Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938)⁹². Iqbal thought that a scientist's observation of nature is equivalent to praying to God who has created it. A noted writer Wajed Ali made an analysis of Iqbal's thought on Islam vis-à-vis modernity as follows:

Islam [,] according to Iqbal [,] is not a static religion and the Qur'an is not a book that has ceased to be a living force. In every age the true believer will find new message in the Holy Qur'an suited to the requirement of the age and that message he must affirm and announce to his generation. There will be new 'Ijtehad' from age to age. That is the substance of the message of the great poet. (cited in Dil and Dil, 2009, p. 1).

Iqbal realized the importance of Western values and education and urged Muslims to adapt to the new realities. In his words, "The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but INDEPENDENT attitude". In one of his famous poems, he wrote,

The Secret of the West's strength is not in the lute and guitar,
Nor in the promiscuous dancing of her daughters.
Nor in the charms of her bright-faced beauties,
Nor in bare shins, nor in bobbed hair.
Her strength is not from irreligiousness
Nor is her rise due to Latin script.
The strength of the West is due to knowledge and science,

⁹² Muhammad Iqbal was a philosopher, poet and politician in British India. He was one of the architects of Muslim nationalism that led to the creation of Pakistan. Although he was born in the Western part of India, his thought remained influential in the reconstruction of Islamic ideology in the wider Muslim community in India. Iqbal's primary emphasis, expressed in his book *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, is "the adaptation of knowledge to Islam". He observed that there are three main sources of knowledge – history, nature, and self. While explaining history, he meant the historical process, not merely the "stories of exploits of kings and conquerors and feelings and thoughts of saints, poets and thinkers". Similarly, the source of nature was described as a "living force" rather than only "sense-perception". The third source of knowledge from self was related to the study of "human personality" in its depth. (Ajmal, 1989, p. 1). Such modernism grown during this period has been felt right to the present time in "bridging of the gulf between Islamic universalism and the modern national state ... [and] between the sovereignty of God and that of the people in his transference of the pillar supporting the Sharia from the consensus of the ulama to that of the people as a whole." (Robinson, 1988, p. 9).

Her lamp is alight from this fire only.

Knowledge does not depend on the style of your garments. (cited in Ahmad, 1962, p. 3).

Actually, the state of a separate homeland was a brainchild of Iqbal who contributed to the consciousness of the Muslims in India through his poetry and thought.

A distinguishing feature shared by prominent Muslim moderate thinkers and leaders cited here was that all carefully distanced themselves from the “confrontational politics” with the colonial power. These influential Muslim leaders extended their cooperation in dealing with the British ruler on the ground that their interests would best be served through reconciliation with the West. Thus, in the words of Aziz Ahmad, Sayyid Ahmad Khan termed the 1857 sepoy mutiny as:

... the end of the medieval phase of Indian Muslim revivalism ... The ‘archaic’ resistance had failed ... Sayiid Ahmad turned to ‘futuristic’ adjustment, to alignment with the dynamics of modernism and to rehabilitation within the opportunities provided by the unchallengeable foreign rule. This implied rejection of revivalism. (cited in Habib, 2000, p. 89).

Apart from the modernist thinkers, another school of thought developed in British India, known as the “secular rationalist”. Among those prominent who fall under this category were Abdur Rahim Dhari⁹³ and Delwar Hossain. (Habib, 2000, p. 65). Abdur Rahim Dhari was influenced by the doctrine of *Mutat’-zila*⁹⁴ of the 9th and 10th century in the Arabian lands, emphasizing the reconciliation of “faith with reason”. (Ahmed, 2007, pp. 62–64).

Such a rationalist idea was further carried forward by another radical reformer Delwar Hossain (1840–1913). In his famous book entitled *Essays on Muhammadan Social Reform* (1889), he advocated instituting secularism in the state and polity, emphasizing that the decadence of the Muslims owed much to the influence of their religion in the political and social structures while the

⁹³ Abdur Rahim was given the title *Dhari*, meaning non-believer or sceptic, for his secular thought on religion.

⁹⁴ This doctrine existed in the early Islamic thought which propagated rationality and logic. It emphasized reconciling faith with reason. This doctrine was influenced by Greek rationalist thought and Aristotelian logic and arguments. However, this doctrine did not survive for long due to the challenge of orthodox versions of Islam. (Ahmed, 2007, p. 62).

West made advancement largely due to their success of separating religion from political and social life. According to Delwar Hossain:

... union of religion with social customs and civil laws has done the most serious injury to the Muhammadans in every part of the world and unless soon and timely dissolved there is every probability of the Muhammadan name becoming a by-word and the Muhammadan races a laughing stock among civilized nations. (cited in Ahmed, 2007, p. 64).

Delwar Hossain was critical about the sovereign power of the Muslim ruler and advocated the introduction of the rule of law in order to integrate the secularist ideals of the West. He advocated reforming the existing laws and institutions accordance with such ideals. In his words:

No Muhammadan nation has ever been able to provide any constitutional means of checking the immense authority and arbitrary power of kings. In the most advanced Christian countries the power of the sovereign – whether designated Emperor, King or President – is more or less limited by law; but in Muhammadan countries the sovereign is above the law and is responsible to none for what he may choose to do or not to do. (cited in Ahmed, 2007, p. 65).

On the question of social reforms, Delwar Hossain was also keen to adopt secular values. For example, he was critical of the Islamic law of inheritance which allowed a restriction to dispose of the property as per the will of the owner. He wished to replace this particular law with secular law similar to the Indian Succession Act. He also raised his voice for women rights and stood against the “seclusion of women (*Purdah*) and polygamy”. In addition to the above, Delwar also emphasized the importance of modern education and access to science and technology and urged the Muslims to learn English. At the same, he also stressed the importance of the local language and urged Bengalis to adopt Bengali language as the vernacular to the exclusion of Urdu. His argument was that since the majority people were not literate and lived in the rural areas, the imparting of modern education was necessary through the vernacular to close the gap between the urban elite and the vast majority of the rural population. (Ahmed, 2007, p. 66).

In line with such modernist thinkers, women's rights were also advanced during this period. A prominent Bengali Muslim women leader Begum Rokeya (1880–1932) came forward to raise the consciousness of women's rights in a male dominated Muslim society. She understood that the lack of education and the conservative social situation were mainly responsible for the backwardness of women. In her writing, Begum Rokeya placed education for women as a “prerequisite for escape from slave status” in the society and freeing “women from the clutches of superstition, enabling them to initiate and contribute to change”. (Hossain, 1992, p. 14). She founded a school for girls in Calcutta named Shakhawat Memorial Girl's School to impart education to Muslims girls. Begum Rokeya stated, “I want the kind of education which will equip women to claim their role as exemplary citizens and I will prepare you with that education which will prevent your dependence on men for the basics of life.” (cited in Hossain, 1992, pp. 18–19). Her primary goal was to ensure the rights of women through raising awareness and economic independence beyond the religious and social restrictions.

Begum Rokeya pointed out that the existing laws which were framed by men aimed to enslave women. She held that men were responsible for treating women as inferior beings. She advocated revolutionary reforms in the laws which caused the degradation of women. She urged the Muslims to rise above religious bigotry to uphold the cause of the degraded Muslim women. In an observation, she made it clear:

The main reason of our not being able to rise against our slavery is that whenever any woman tried to raise her head, it was smashed in the name of religion or with the help of religious laws ... We had to accept many unacceptable things because these were ordained by religion ... when a mother tries to make her unwilling child sleep she tells him; “Sleep, or the huge lions will get you”. This makes him keep his eyes shut. In like manner, whenever we raised our heads and look at the past and the present, the society yells: “Sleep, else the purgatory”. This makes us keep silent even though we might not believe in it. ...Whatever it is, we can no longer tolerate the overlordship of menfolk imposed in the name of religion ... (cited in Ahmed, 2007, p. 68).

Begum Rokey was opposed to the *Purdah*⁹⁵ which was customary for women to wear in conservative Muslim society. She believed that such a veil was an obstacle to their advancement. She urged women to come out of this “evil custom” and receive education which was a key to their consciousness of their rights and economic independence. In her book, *Motichur*, she observed,

We shall do whatever is needed to be done to attain equality with men. If earning our livelihood independently ensures our freedom, we shall do that. If necessary, we shall be lady-clerk, lady-magistrate, lady-barrister, lady-judge – everything ... if we cannot get employment in the offices of the government, we will take to agriculture; why do you cry for not being able to find bridegrooms for your daughters? Give proper education to your daughters and let them earn their own livelihood. (cited in Ahmed, 2007, p. 69).

Begum wrote a number of books and articles for women’s rights. She was one of the foremost pioneers of the feminist movement in Asia. Her work and movement worked to break the conservative outlook of the Muslim society regarding women and their rights. It brought about a revolutionary impact on the subsequent Bengal society right to the present time.

The influential writings of prominent modernist Islamic thinkers such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Abdul Latif, Syed Ameer Ali, Muhammad Iqbal, Abdul Rahim Dhar, Delwar Hossain and Begum Rokeya reflected a profound impact of Western and liberal values on Islamic thought in Bengal. The rationalist and modernist ideas of these Muslim leaders were transmitted to subsequent generations of Muslim intellectuals who carried forward the social and political reforms known as the “renaissance” in Muslim Bengal. But, at the same time, these rationalist and modernist ideas had to contend with the revivalist movement whose initial strength was derived from a more puritanical form of Islam (Wahhabi thought) which some saw as the only solution to the increasingly parlous socio-economic and political conditions of Muslims. One of the most prominent movements in this regard was the *Faraizi* movement and *Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya*⁹⁶.

⁹⁵ It refers to the concealing of women from men under a veil.

⁹⁶ The following chapter will have a greater detail on this issue.

Significantly, however, such puritanical/fundamentalist movements failed to halt the progress and underlying power of secularism in Bengal. Nevertheless, Muslim society in Bengal, in common with many Muslim societies elsewhere, experienced the pressures of being pulled from two directions: the one pulling backward to an imagined past and the other forward to respond to present realities. The outcome of this defining struggle for the values and outlook of Islam in Bangladesh will be examined in greater detail in the following section.

Pakistan period (1947–1971): Deviation of secular values and conflict on religious identity with Bengalis

As will be argued in Chapters 5 and 6, the state of Pakistan was founded largely on the basis of Muslim nationalism. It was not a result of an Islamic religious movement. There were a number of reasons as to why Muslim leaders at the time saw Islam as a problematic vehicle for the expression of Pakistani nationalism. First, a number of the most prominent ‘Muslim’ leaders were not themselves devout Muslims and did not uphold traditional Islam in rituals in their personal lives and so were often ‘targets’ of the more conservative Muslim groups in India. Second, there were significant religious and ethnic divisions within the Muslim leadership itself. For example, prominent Muslim League leader Aga Khan was the head of the *Ismaili Shias* which constituted a small minority of the Indian Muslims. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the architect of Pakistan, came from the *Bohra* community, a small Shia sect of Western India. Muhammad Iqbal, the poet and philosopher of Pakistan, was originally from a Sunni background but by many was viewed as a heretic, his religious views seen as deviating from ‘traditional Islam’. Compounding this variety and division was a further division between the Muslim leadership, ‘the elite’ and the Muslim masses, who themselves, were also divided by ethnic origin, culture and background. Finally, the great majority of Muslims in British India and particularly those in East Bengal were deeply influenced by a more syncretic Islam, and their social and cultural values (discussed in the following chapter) differed significantly from the strict form of Islam associated with the Middle East. Any brand of

Islamic ideology would therefore have frustrated the already developed nationalism based on Muslim socio-economic interests. However, there were attempts by a few leaders to put forward some vague ideas like “Islamic social justice”, “Islamic democracy”, “Islamic values” and “Islamic socialism”. However, these were never defined or given any concrete shape for the future state ideology of Pakistan. (Ahmed, 1986, p. 139).

After the creation of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah assumed the role of Governor-General and made a policy statement regarding the nature of the state. In his presidential address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 11 August 1947, he clearly asserted that Pakistan was not a religious state. With regard to the existence of the different religious communities, Jinnah categorically pointed out:

You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed ... that has nothing to do with the business of the state ... We are starting with the fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state ... Now, I think we should keep that in front of us our ideal and you will find that in 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. (cited in History of Bangladesh War of Independence, 1982, vol. 1, p. 42; Hussain, 2000, p. 145; Metcalf, 2009, p. 28; Parveen, 2010, p. 145).

However, as differences began to surface on various issues, the Pakistani leaders were increasingly relying on the religious affiliations with the state. Schanberg (1971) in an article in *Foreign Affairs* highlighted these differences between the “two wings of Pakistan”, i.e. East and West. She noted:

... the peoples of the two wings of Pakistan, separated by over 1,000 miles of Indian territory, are ethnically more different than most enemy nations – which they now, in fact, are. They speak different languages (Urdu in the West, Bengali in the East), eat different foods (meat and grain in the West, fish and rice in the East), and have opposite cultures; the Punjabis are stolid types who

prefer soldiering and government, while the Bengalis are volatile and love politics and literature. The lighter-skinned and taller West Pakistanis have their roots in the Middle East; the Bengalis with the lithe, slim brown people of Southeast Asia. The only thing they have in common is their religion, Islam, the shaky reason for the creation of the improbable two-part nation in 1947, when British rule ended on the subcontinent. (cited in Singh et. al., 1971).

The death of Jinnah in 1948 and the emergence of a host of other problems of governance⁹⁷ added to the problem of the absence of political philosophy and a concrete governance plan. This led the country to a state of anarchy and enabled the political leaders to interpret the state affairs as per what Ahmed (1986, p. 141) terms “their own convenience, intellectual limitations and personal and group interests”. The theologian groups, Muslim *Ulema*, came forward and began to argue that Pakistan should be administered on the basis of Islamic tenets as it was created on the basis of a division between Muslims and non-Muslims. They also favored the promotion of Islamic tradition and history giving a new character to the concept of Pakistan. Some motivated by this religious interpretation desired to create an Islamic power based on a ‘glorious past’. In one of the speeches, a Muslim League leader said, “Muslim India is going to regain her lost empire”. (cited in Kamal, 2007, pp. 336–7). The political leadership was also seen to make compromises with this interpretation to find a justification of the state of Pakistan. Such influence was clearly manifested in the concept of “Islamic solidarity”, “Islamic brotherhood” and “Islamic language” in different policy statements with the aim of promoting religious fraternity and assimilation between the two wings of Pakistan.⁹⁸ The influence of the *Ulema* was also evident in the adoption of the Objectives Resolution in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in Karachi on 12 March 1949. According to this resolution, Pakistan was referred to as a state “wherein the Muslims shall be enabled to order their

⁹⁷ Immediately after independence, Pakistan faced an exodus of millions of refugees from the neighboring country, particularly from Punjab and North India. This presented an enormous burden for integration into the society. The Muslim leadership on the other hand was lacking vision and statesmanship and indulged in inefficient and corrupt practices. (Ahmed, 1986, pp. 140–41).

⁹⁸ These concepts were often used to forge unity between the two wings physically separated by 1000 miles. For example, in the case of the language question, the Pakistani leadership argued for Urdu as lingua franca, identifying it as “Islamic language”. This was reflected in the speech of the then Pakistan Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. (History of Bangladesh War of Independence, 1982, vol. 1).

lives in the individual and collective spheres in accord with the teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran and Sunnah". (cited in Ahmed, 1986, p. 141). This resolution was also embodied in the preamble of the Constitution of 1956 which proclaimed Pakistan as an Islamic Republic.

However, such Islamic overtures did not have any significant appeal to the people of East Pakistan. As will be pointed out in Chapter 4, the growing middle class and the masses viewed the Pakistan movement as a means to ameliorate their sense of deprivations by the local Hindu elite. After Pakistan was created, this threat perception declined, mainly with the migration of the high class Hindus, e.g. *Zamindars* and money-lenders, to India. The oppression by the Hindus, which was a unifying factor for the rise of Muslim nationalism, showed signs of receding from the psyche of the Bengali people. Bengalis no longer had to compete with their Hindu counterparts for employment, business and trading activities. In that regard, religion/Islam became less of an issue. With the growing differences between East and West Pakistan, there was an urge felt for Hindu–Muslim unity against the rulers of West Pakistan. Due to the declining appeal of the religion, secular and non-communal forces⁹⁹ became more significant. These forces paid particular attention to issues of culture and language as a source of inspiration to rise against new perceived threats from Pakistani rulers. This was most evident in the language movement¹⁰⁰ where they primarily viewed the imposition of Urdu in the name of Islam as an assault on their culture and their quest for autonomy and socio-economic emancipation.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ The middle class, who were aggrieved due to the non-accommodation by the Muslim League leadership, formed the Awami Muslim League in 1949 with leaders like Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani (1880–1976) and Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy (1892–1963). Later as religion began to lose appeal, it changed its name from Awami Muslim League to Awami League in 1955 to accommodate members of other religions including the Hindus. It was a clear indication of a shift in national identity from religion towards Bengali culture. (Kabir, 1994, p. 147).

¹⁰⁰ The issue will be dealt with in the following chapter on Bengali nationalism.

¹⁰¹ The relative decline of religion and the growth of secular and cultural factors as increasingly determinative in the Bengal polity is comprehensively discussed in Chapter 5.

The spirit of a non-communal and secular appeal was articulated by various Bengali leaders in the 1950s and 1960s. On Hindu–Muslim unity, such leaders advocated “joint electorate”¹⁰² with the Hindus for national integration. Bengali leaders such as Suhrawardy raised this demand in the National Assembly of Pakistan in 1956:

The “two-nation theory” was advanced by the Muslims as justification for the partition of India and the creation of a state made of geographically contiguous units where the Muslims were numerically in a majority. Once that state was created, the two-nation theory lost its force even for the Muslims ... Circumstances thus have changed, and so must our political attitude change with the establishment of Pakistan. ...I, therefore, advocate joint electorate because this will help in welding all people together into a one great Pakistani nation, in creating mutual confidence and cooperation in the service of the country and in destroying the seeds of suspicion, distrust, hatred between the citizens professing different religions. (cited in Kabir, 1994, pp. 154–55).

From this statement, three things appear to be noteworthy. First, the two-nation theory which gave independence and justification for the state of Pakistan no longer attracted the people of East Pakistan. Second, a more democratic system was emphasized. Finally, Hindu–Muslim trust figured prominently in the concerns of East Pakistan leaders concerned about unity and integration in Bengal. A similar statement was also made by another Bengali leader, Abul Mansur Ahmad. He also disagreed with the two-nation theory and highlighted the waning fervor of Pakistani-based Muslim nationalism:

These two wings differ in all matters, except two things, namely, that they have a common religion, barring a section of the people in East Pakistan, and that we achieved our independence by a common struggle... all other factors, viz., the language, the tradition, the culture, the costume, the custom, the dietary, the calendar, the standard time, particularly everything is [are] different. There is, in fact, nothing [in] common in [between] the two wings, practically, in respect of those factors

¹⁰² Before the adoption of the 1956 Constitution, Bengali leaders demanded joint electorates with the Hindus. They feared that if a separate electorate was formed, they would become a permanent minority. In the united Pakistan, the Bengali population comprised the majority while the separate electorate for the Hindus, who constituted about 20 percent, would reduce their number of electorate vis-à-vis the West Pakistanis. (Kabir, 1994, p. 154).

which are the *sine qua non* to form a nation ... It is a country which in reality is not a one country. We are going to form one State out two countries. We are going to form one nation out of two peoples. Therefore, Sir, the situation requires closest attention, widest range of vision and the most delicate handling. (cited in Kabir, 1994, pp. 156–7).

Yet another statement is representative of the mindset of the Bengali people, dismissing the two-nation theory in the face of growing political and economic issues. Nurur Rahman, another Bengali leader, declared in the National Assembly of Parliament in 1956:

I categorically state from the point of my party that we believe in one nation and that is the Pakistani nation. Sir, it is not we who believe in two nations or three nations or five nations theory, but it is parties like the *Jamaat-e-Ulema-e-Hind* and Muslim League who say that Pakistan is inhabited by as many as five nations. They say Hindus are one nation; Muslims are one nation; Parsees are one nation; Christians are one nation; Buddhists are one nation; ... I want to state categorically here what are the cementing materials causing the unity of our nationhood. No.1, Sir, is the history of our common struggle to liberate ourselves from foreign domination ... No.2 ... our mutual material advantage in our co-existence which is synonymous with co-prosperity, and last of all, I say, Sir, is our common will to remain together. (cited in Kabir, 1994, p. 156).

From the statements above it is evident that the appeal of religion as a central ‘cementing’ factor in the state of Pakistan was, at best, marginal for the Bengali leadership who did not consider Islam as the viable factor in the governance for unifying the two wings. The priorities of that leadership (as the statement above indicates), was “mutual ... advantage”. In that framework, religious fraternity did not have any major role as far as Bengali interests were concerned. For the Bengali leadership, a more consociation agreement appeared a right of way to proceed as a basis of state affairs for Pakistan – a state of affairs absent throughout the Pakistani period (1947–71). Throughout that period, Bengalis became increasingly concerned about the use of Islamic slogans and reliance on religious identity by the West Pakistani ruling elite as “a convenient way to exploit and deceive the Bengalis.” (Kabir, 1994, p. 161). The main response of the Bengalis was to look inward and seek sources of secularism from Bengali culture and language that gave them a broad-

based unity. This was apparent in the 1964 anti-riot campaign when Bengali leaders maintained communal harmony in the face of provocation by the Muslim League leaders over the issue of the missing sacred hair of the Prophet from *Hazratbal* mosque in the Indian part of Kashmir. Bengali leaders and people from all walks of life resisted the provocation by creating a strong anti-rioting campaign. An All Party Riot Resistance Committee was constituted with members from different political parties, student organizations and trade unions. The committee vigorously staged the campaign, including a peace march to maintain communal amity. This was an example of the emergence of a secular basis of Bengali identity. (Kabir, 1994, pp. 171–2).

Bengali concern about the use of Islam was also manifested in the reaction of the press to the 1965 India–Pakistan war. While both wings supported the war efforts, the West Pakistani press used the symbol of Islam to arouse the glory and brilliance of their religious heritage in order to stir the passions of the Pakistani people. On the other hand, the East Pakistani press made an appeal in more general and ethical terms to fight the ‘aggressive’ Indian forces. Such examples were powerful indicators of the erosion (shortly after independence had been achieved) of the ‘religious/Islamic’ appeal. Simply, the Bengalis did not consider the Hindus as ‘an enemy’; quite the contrary, Hindu–Muslim unity, based mainly on local culture and language, was forged in the quest for self-determination in Bengali symbols, and slogans were also increasingly employed by the press and became a factor in forging Bengali identity and fuelling Bengali nationalism in the 1970s. (Kabir, 1994, pp. 171–2).

The transitory utility of Islamic symbols in Bengal in the quest for independence was underlined by a more fundamental division between East and West (Pakistan) where the character of Islam was concerned. In that regard the West Pakistan ruling elite gave less importance to appreciate the syncretized nature of Islam in Bengal which accommodated local Hindu influences within a broader Bengali identity. According to Zillur R. Khan (1985, pp. 836–7), the origin of Islam in Bengal lay in its ideological and socio-economic appeal for the lower caste people of Bengal – as a result of which conversion did not affect hitherto amicable relations between Bengali Muslims and Hindus. In that

regard the West Pakistan ruling elite not only failed to appreciate these fundamental socio-economic and religious realities in Bengal but directly challenged and antagonized them through such policies as, for example, the imposition of the Urdu language. The ruling elite considered Bengali language as “non-Islamic”.¹⁰³ They also imposed a ban on Bengali songs on state run radio and television of Tagore, who was Hindu and won the Nobel Prize in Bengali literature in 1914 and was highly regarded in East Bengal, and restricted the import of printed materials from Indian West Bengal.¹⁰⁴ This also reflected the narrow religious prejudice of the West Pakistani elite. The most notable example of this consequence was the war of 1971 where about three million people were killed, one of the worst genocides in history apparently in the name of Islam.¹⁰⁵ Bengali Muslims were often tainted as “inferior Muslims”. During that war, there were reports that West Pakistani army soldiers were trained with the impression that the Bengalis were not true Muslims and they were “Hindus in disguise” and fighting against these infidels would “serve the interests of Islam”. (cited in Khan, 1985, p. 844)

Once independence, through Pakistan, was achieved, Bengalis believed their cultural traditions, religious and secular values and socio-economic aspirations would be realized. But when they saw that the West Pakistani ruling elite continued to assert, what they perceived, its more narrow interpretation of Islam in defiance of Bengal’s deep cultural and religious traditions, Bengalis – both Hindu and Muslim – forged a common front against the excesses by the Pakistani ruling elite.

¹⁰³ We will take up this issue in the chapter on Bengali nationalism (Chapter 6).

¹⁰⁴ Tagore was Hindu and hailed from West Bengal of India. He is well regarded in East Bengal as he was the one who earned respect for Bengali language in the world. Through his work, Tagore reveals the common mindset, loves, sorrows, happiness, nature, feelings and emotions of the Bengali people. His songs and poetry stirred the whole of Bengal during their struggle for self-determination. In the War of Liberation in 1971, he was a great source of inspiration for the Bengalis to fight against the West Pakistani forces.

¹⁰⁵ According to an estimate, about 3 million people were killed in the 1971 war, about 300,000 women were raped and 10 million people took refuge in neighboring India to escape the holocaust. (cited in Rahman, 2013, p. 1).

Conclusion

As noted, the secular tradition is deeply embedded in the history of Bengal and its culture. Since ancient times, Bengali histories, particularly during the Buddhist rule of the Ashoka and Pala dynasty, reflected the cultural tradition and legacy of secularism. This tradition was further reinforced during the Muslim rule of Turko-Afghan origin and later Mughal period for 600 years. Significantly in terms of their continuity of this tradition was primarily concerned with defending themselves from external conquest. Hence their religious toleration was a matter of pragmatic consideration. It has also been seen, in their administrations, the Hindus were given more importance than local converted Muslims whom they considered *Atraf* – lower caste – and were kept out of state favor for the fear of losing their aristocracy. The local language and culture were also supported by Muslim rulers in order to facilitate assimilation between the rulers and the ruled. This resulted in the rulers assuming “an indigenous character” and hence they were not considered “alien”. (Engineer, 2000, p. 2). During the British rule, the Western and liberal values made an impact in Bengal. Rationalism, reasoning, democracy, scientific innovations and naturalism were some of the values which became characteristic and integral to Islam in the Bengali context. However, Muslim Bengal saw a deviation from the age-old tradition of toleration and secularism in the state during the Pakistani period when the West Pakistani ruling elite used religious fraternity/Islam to impose its rule. Resistance to such rule ultimately led to the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 and a state which embodied the core values of secularism. So the religious toleration and secular values in the Bengali context are, in the words of Sen (2005, p. 274), “not abrupt”; rather, a reflection of continuity, originating from ancient times and nurtured and reinforced in different phases throughout its cultural and political history. In order to further illuminate these significant characteristics of Bengali culture, this thesis now turns attention to the transformation of one key element in that regard – Islam in Bengal.

Chapter 4

Islam in Bangladesh: Bengalized Character

Introduction

Bengal came into contact with Islam first by Arabian traders in the 7th century and Islam was later spread mainly by Sufi saints from the eastern part of India, East Bengal. When Islam arrived, there was already a rich Bengali culture within a broad Indian civilization in existence. A central question for scholars of South Asia is how was Islam able to become the dominant religion in a region which was surrounded by Hinduism and Buddhism. This chapter examines the theories as to how Islam gained preponderance in Bengal – whether by force (the sword theory) or through peaceful means – mainly by Sufi saints. The chapter argues that the spread of Islam through peaceful means, and the central role played by Sufi saints in that process, were, along with the liberal and flexible/adaptive character of Bengali culture, key factors in the emergence of a syncretic and egalitarian form of Islam in Bengal. Bengalis were attracted to the Sufi saints and Pirs more for their alleged superhuman power and welfare-oriented works than scriptural Islam. Thus, conversion was considered more a form of social transition from one group to another rather than involving a fundamental spiritual or religious shift. So, when Bengalis converted, they retained many elements of indigenous culture. As a result there was a cultural continuity in Bengali literature, and mysticism was prominent in Bengali Islam, all of which resulted in the characterization of Islam in the Bengali context as “Bengalized Islam” with folk Islam¹⁰⁶ at its core. In short, Bengalized Islam has been imbued/synchronized/enmeshed with local secular, tolerant and modernist traditions which are at odds with conservative Islam. These key features and

¹⁰⁶ Folk Islam refers to a blend of local beliefs, traditions and practices with Islam in a non-orthodox way. It is often considered as “popular”, “informal”, “low” and “common” Islam as against the more theological “formal”, “official”, “high” and “ideal” Islam. The basic difference between the two is that high Islam concentrates more on eternity and cosmology while the folk Islam is concerned with the issues of everyday life to deal with practical needs. According to Hiebert, the high Islam seeks eternal salvation through a set of rigid rituals and practices and deals with theological doctrines. But the folk religion is more interested in seeking solutions for everyday questions depending on local earthbound spirits, ancestors, witchcraft, magic, evil eye and other unseen powers to explain and respond to human dilemmas. (Hadaway, 2010, pp. 12–63).

traditions of Islam in Bengal have, it will be argued, been central to the inability of conservative or purist interpretations of Islam (and associated extremism in some other Islamic societies) gaining traction in contemporary Bangladesh.

Bengal: The setting

Bangladesh is situated at the periphery of the Islamic world. The country is considered “an outlier to the domain of Islam” (Khan, 2001, p. 83) which is separated from and surrounded by different faiths. The physical formation and the social structures of Bengal are also different from the majority of Muslim countries. The heartland of Islam is often marked by arid and semi-arid desert. As cited in Khan (2001, p. 83), noted writer Xavier de Planhol described Islam as “a religion of town-dwellers and merchants propagated by the nomads, scornful of the land and those who work it”. By contrast, Bengal is characterized by a wet delta intersected by innumerable rivers, a monsoon climate and inhabited mainly by farmers and fishermen. Notwithstanding those contrasts of geography and demography, there was a widespread diffusion of Islam in Bengal through those differences and the manner by which Islam came to Bengal had a profound effect on the character of Islam in the delta.

The spread of Islam in Bengal

This section deals with the manner by which Islam spread in Bengal; whether it was by force (sword theory) or peaceful conversion/diffusion had a profound effect on the character of the religion in that context. Conversion by force is associated with a more purist, fundamental interpretation and a close following of scripture/the Qur’an, whereas peaceful conversion in Bangladesh or elsewhere (Indonesia for instance) is related to a more syncretic form of Islam as it absorbs and integrates local values, cultures and traditions.

By way of background, the debate over whether Islam came to Bengal through force or peaceful conversion began with the first census conducted in 1871 by the British, and the discovery, in that census, of a large Muslim population in Bengal, which recorded 16.3 million out of 36.7 million population in the whole of Bengal (both East and West) (Ahmed, 2010, p. 2). Before this and

subsequent census reports (1881 and 1891), there was a popular perception that the Muslims in Bengal constituted what M. Mohar Ali calls a “handful of foreigners” similar to other regions of India. (Ali, vol. IB, p. 750). However, the British rulers began to feel the pressure of anti-colonial uprisings in the form of the indigo revolt of 1859–60 and the 1857 mutiny and revolts, which were believed to have originated from mass discontent in rural areas. These led them to make a proper assessment of the population based on religion.

As will be detailed below, proponents of the sword/force view argue that a combination of coercion of low caste Hindus and the attraction of state patronage brought Islam to Bengal. Proponents of the opposing view that the spread of Islam was peaceful argue that the Muslim rulers of Bengal needed local support to maintain their independence from central rule based in Delhi and, as a consequence, forged a political and economically beneficial relationship with their Bengali subjects. An important corollary to this situation (being the so-called egalitarian theory as documented in the next paragraphs) was that on conversion Muslim rulers made little or no attempt to change the culture and traditions of the converts. In addition, that conversion in Bengal was peaceful and ‘indigenous’ and is supported by the so-called ‘immigration theory’ (also detailed in the next paragraphs). This chapter will briefly examine each of these arguments in turn.

As noted earlier, proponents of the ‘sword theory’ claimed that Islam was forcibly imposed on the lower caste Hindu people of Bengal by their Muslim rulers. Arguing this case from an anthropological point of view, H.H. Risley and Henry Beverely (Superintendent of the 1882 Census) claimed that the Muslims appeared similar to that of the lower caste Hindus of Bengal in their social position, physique, manners and customs and concluded that the spread of Islam took place due to large-scale conversion of numerous low caste Hindus. (cited in Khan, 2001, p. 84). According to this thesis, these lower caste people were subjected to conversion through coercive measures by the Muslim rulers. They did not have any option but to surrender to the will of the rulers. The use of force in some form or another was a common policy of the Muslim rulers to propagate their

faith in order to convert the infidel subjects in Bengal. As Beverley points out, “The Mohammadans were ever ready to make conquests with the Koran (Qur’an) as with the sword. Under Sultan Jalaluddin (Jadu) for instance, it is said that the Hindus were persecuted almost to extermination”. (Khan, 2001, pp. 84–91).

That the converts were lower caste Hindus is supported by other anthropological studies.¹⁰⁷ For example, a serological survey was conducted by D.N. Majumdar and C.R. Rao in 1947.¹⁰⁸ According to this survey report, blood cells and groups, largely determined by heredity not by environment, indicated local/Bengali Muslims were different from the Muslims outside of India and coreligionists in Uttar Pradesh, but were similar to those of the local lower caste Hindus. Such evidence indicates that the majority of the Muslims in Bengal originated from the descendants of the local Hindu people (Eaton, 1994, pp. 126–27), though that of itself does not ipso facto ‘prove’ forcible conversion. Supporters of the ‘sword theory’ also argue that the Muslim rulers actively encouraged conversion through “royal patronage” (Alam, 2001, p. 142) which they claim suggests that, in the pre-Muslim period, there was no significant proselytization to Islam before the conquest of Bengal by Muslim rulers. ‘Evidence’ of this thesis was advanced in the accounts of the Portuguese merchant Barbosa who noted that the Hindus in 16th century Bengal turned into Muslims “to obtain favour of the King and the governors”. (Khan, 2001, p. 91). In short, state support facilitated the spread of Islam in Bengal.

Directly at odds with this view, however, is that of Khan (2001, p. 95) who argues that in the caste dominated society of Bengal the local Muslim converts continued their age-old professions even after their conversion. This picture was found in the literature of the poet Mukundaram of the 16th

¹⁰⁷ According to Eaton (1994, pp. 126–127), at least three study reports are available to support the view. The first was done in 1938 by Eileen Macfarlane, the second one by B.K. Chatterji and A.K. Mitra in 1941 and the final one by D.N Majumdar and C.R. Rao in 1947. There were differences in methodology, technique, sampling size and areas among these studies. However, all the survey studies drew the similar broad conclusion that the Muslim population of East Bengal were descendants of indigenous origin and not outside communities.

¹⁰⁸ The survey was done in 1947 and published in 1960 in their famous book, *Race Elements in Bengal* (Calcutta: Asia Publishing House, 1960).

century. The Muslim converts included lower-level occupations like milkmen, weavers, loom-makers, tailors, butchers, hazzam (performs circumcision) and qalandar (wandering *Darvishes*). (Karim, 1985, pp. 204–05). So the conversion to Islam did not attract any economic benefit to the new local Muslims. This suggests that there was no systematic policy of conversion on the part of the Muslim rulers.

Proponents of the peaceful conversion of Bengal to Islam, and the consequences of that in terms of the evolution of a syncretic Islam, have a stronger case. Maddison (1971, p. 11) views the conversion of the local Hindu people to Islam *en mass* as a consequence of their perception of Islam as a “liberator” from the tyranny of the then Hindu rulers. He rejected the forceful theory of this mass conversion of the indigenous people in East Bengal. These indigenous people were akin to “Buddhist tradition” in terms of egalitarian belief. As Ahmed (2010, p. 2) points out, the forceful conversion did not affect the higher caste Hindus, based in West Bengal and other parts of India, who were more opposed to the alien religion. Since they were at odds with Islam, they would have been “more vulnerable to forceful conversion”. He also adds that other parts of South Asia were also marked by a rigid caste-ridden society and the lower caste people of these regions should also have been subjected to conversion. As this was not the case, the explanation lies elsewhere. Khan (2001, p. 92) also argues that the distribution of Muslims in different regions of South Asia challenges the sword theory. If this hypothesis was correct there would have been a Muslim preponderance in areas around the seats of Muslim rule in India. The fact that the Muslims remained an insignificant minority in the Delhi region where Muslims ruled for about six hundred years clearly suggests that Islam by and large was not imposed from above. Moreover, in Bengal, the share of Muslims in the total population was higher in areas which were remote from the seats of Muslim power.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Thus, Bogra and Noakhali districts of Bengal had proportionately more Muslims than Malda, Dhaka and Murshidabad districts where the capitals of Muslim rulers were located. (cited in Khan, 2001, p. 92).

A second argument in support of peaceful conversion is put by Khan (2001, pp. 91–92) who observes that Islam came to Bengal about six hundred years after its advent and by that time the “fiery zeal of the faithful for proselytization” was diluted by political and circumstantial considerations. The Muslim rulers in Bengal were mostly rebellious against the central rule based in Delhi and remained independent of their coreligionists. It was in their best interest to seek support of the local people to fight against their counterparts in Delhi. For instance, Sultan Ilyas Shah (1339–1358 AD) had to bank on the support of the local Hindu people to rise against Firuz Shah Tughluq of Delhi for his regime’s survival. He also employed Shahdeo, a Hindu general in his army, to gain the support of the common people. At the same time, local Hindus were recruited into the bureaucracy and administration where they exercised considerable power during the Muslim rule of Bengal. Even 300 years after the establishment of Muslim rule, powerful Hindu landlords like Pratapaditya of Jessore, Kandarpa Narayan of Barisal, Lakshman Mnikya of Noakhali, Kedar Raj of Vikrampur, Madhu Rai of Pabna, Binod Rai of Manikganj and Ram Chandra of Barisal dominated the rural areas of Bengal. Khan (2001, pp. 93–94) also emphasizes that Hindu–Muslim amity was mutually beneficial. The Muslim rulers courted the support of the Hindus in lieu of the adoption of tolerant and secular policies towards them. The Muslim rulers also patronized the translations of Hindu scriptures into Bengali, including *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Bhagavata*. Regarding Barbosa’s observation, Khan (2001, p. 94) points out that instances of patronizing Muslim converts in the form of royal gifts were not common. Moreover, he contends that Muslim rulers were apathetic to Muslim missionary efforts. Indeed, Mirza Nathan noted that on one occasion Mughal governor Islam Khan (17th century) punished his officers for converting Hindus to Islam. (cited in Khan, 2001, p. 94). Indeed, Mughal emperor Shahjahan rejected the request from Muslim clergy to prosecute Manrique, the Augustinian missionary who visited Dhaka in 1640, on the charge of defying Islamic customs by eating pork and drinking wine.

In the caste dominated society of Bengal, the local Muslim converts continued their age-old professions even after their conversion. This situation was found in the literature of the poet

Mukundaram of the 16th century. The Muslim converts included lower-level employment groups. (Karim, 1985, pp. 204–5). So the conversion to Islam did not attract any economic benefit to the new local Muslims. This suggests that there was no systematic policy of conversion of Bengalis by the Muslim rulers.

As noted, mutual benefit (political and economic) combined with tolerance was a hallmark of the Hindu–Muslim relationship in Bengal. A third argument in support of peaceful conversion and emphasizing the importance of the latter, i.e. ‘tolerance’, is known as the ‘egalitarian theory’. James (1980, p. xi) succinctly puts this view. He argues that “The oneness, equality and brotherhood of Islam appealed to low caste Hindus when [they] were spurned by caste Hindus”. The proponents of this hypothesis argue that the society in Bengal was caste ridden and the majority people belonged to the lower caste and were subjected to suppression and oppression by the higher caste people. When Muslim saints, mainly Sufis, preached the egalitarian message of Islam without orthodox interpretation, this created an appeal to the local people who converted to Islam without changing their original culture. Some other historians also included the Buddhists in the mass conversion to Islam. According to this view, during the *Sena* rule the Buddhists were subjected to suppression and oppression and welcomed Islam, converting *en mass* in order to overcome the cruelty they suffered at the hands of the Hindu rulers. It should be pointed out, however, that other historians (e.g. Eaton, 1994) argue that the ‘egalitarian theory’ may be exaggerated, that the cruelty of the Hindu caste system may be overstated and that, while conversion did not require a change of culture, arguments of mass conversion should be treated with some caution.

Finally, historians argue that conversion to Islam was peaceful because it was essentially indigenous (Bengali) and not imposed by outsiders, i.e. the Muslim military. Such historians refute the immigration theory, i.e. that the Muslims of the delta mainly originated from the large-scale migration of Muslims from the Middle East and West and Central Asia during the Muslim rule of

Bengal. According to this interpretation, the number of immigrant Muslims of Bengal is “considerably higher than the local converts” (Ali, 1985, vol. IB, p. 787). Rahim (1963) also advanced this theory and gave an estimate of the Muslim population of Bengal in 1570 as 2.7 million of which 1.9 million were local and 0.8 million were immigrants. He also accounted for a total of 10.6 million in 1770 of which 3.27 million were of foreign origin. Rahim (1963) argues that in the period between 1220 to 1756 AD about 337,000 Muslim soldiers, mostly from outside the region, were employed in the army of the Muslim rulers and later settled in Bengal. He also adds that these immigrants contributed to the expansion of the Muslim population at a faster rate than the local Hindu people, mainly through their “polygamous family structure” (cited in Husain, 2010, p. 3). This theory has been refuted, however, on the grounds that the invading armies by nature of their origin preferred urban rather than rural areas where the majority of the population lived. (Khan, 2001, p. 88). Moreover, if the fertility rate was determinative in the expansion of the Muslim population, then Delhi and Agra, where the bulk of the Muslim immigrants settled, would have constituted the Muslim majority. In short, the immigration theory is not persuasive in the explanation of the Muslim preponderance in Bengal. (Karim, 1985, p. 1985).

Islam in Bengal: Significance of Sufi saints

The foregoing convincing arguments support the case that conversion to Islam in Bengal was peaceful, and that there was a mutually beneficial relationship (political/socio-economic) between Muslim rulers and their Bengali subjects. Moreover, ‘conversion’ did not entail the loss of Bengali values and culture, but rather these were absorbed, under a tolerant regime, into a syncretic Islam over many centuries in Bengal. While the way by which Islam came to Bengal had a significant effect on the character of the religion that developed in the Delta, more profound was the influence of those central to its spread. Of particular importance in this regard were the role, values and outlook of Sufi saints and the reasons why their influence was more profound in Bengal

than elsewhere in South Asia.¹¹⁰ Khan (2001, pp. 99–100) says that the distribution of such major shrines in Bengal indicates that these saints started their preaching long before the Muslim rulers came to Bengal and the process of conversion was gradual and continued over a long time¹¹¹ (see also Rahim, 1963, p. 123). However, this Sufi explanation of itself does not substantiate the actual reason for Muslim concentration in Bengal, mainly because other parts of South Asia also saw the presence of numerous saints and Sufis through their impact there was much less. But those areas could arrest the flow of conversion to Islam by these saints and Sufis. Four hypotheses have been put forward to explain why these saints attained such success in their proselytizing efforts in Bengal.

1. Syncretistic explanation

According to Asim Roy (1983), a unique brand of spiritualism of the saints known as Pirs played a key role in the preponderance of Muslims in Bengal. These Pirs refer to “a spiritual director or guide” and Pirism became a powerful institution in meeting the “exigencies of the local frontier situations” (Roy, 1983, p. 50). According to Roy, Bengal was beset with “ferocity of nature”, “anarchical conditions” and lacked adequacy of institutional supports for the common people who thus relied on animistic spirits like the tiger-god, the serpent goddess and the crocodile-goddess for salvation. However, they were desperately in need of some authoritative and spiritual guidance and the Pirs catered to this need. Pirism also amalgamated animistic spirits and Hindu–Buddhist popular deities and so conversion to Islam was not a result of changing inner religious consciousness, but rather a shift from one social community to another. Roy (1983) also maintains Pirs engaged with both material and spiritual needs of the deltaic folk people, including clearing wastelands, curing sickness and distributing gifts to the poor. The *Astanah* (place of Pirs) and *Dargah* (tomb) were also open to lower class and untouchable people who were denied access to

¹¹⁰ In that regard, Rahim (1963, p. 123) points out that Bengal saw a flock of many saints and Sufis coming from different parts of the Middle East and made their “habitation and home” even before the conquest of Bengal by the Muslim rulers. These saints still hold a special respect from the devotees in the form of a tomb or memorial in and around their graveyards. They have still remained in the form of historical and legendary characters and elements.

¹¹¹ These saints spread the message of Islam throughout the land.

temples or Brahmin priests. These twin institutions of Pirism with open and total access were attractive to the people who sought material and religious-emotional satisfaction in the *Astanahs*.

2. Entrepreneurial ‘frontier theory’

While the Pirs forged a bridge between animistic spiritualism and a higher religious consciousness, i.e. Islam, they also played a key role as pioneers in Bengal. In that regard another hypothesis, ‘frontier theory’, has been advanced to explain the significance of the role of Sufi saints/Pirs in the spread of Islam in Bengal. This frontier theory was advanced by Eaton (1994). While Roy emphasized the spiritualism of the Pirs, Eaton’s theory is mainly based on the “entrepreneurship” of the Pirs who acted as “charismatic pioneers of the agrarian frontier” in Bengal. (Eaton, 1994, p. 207). As Eaton (1994) argues, the spread of Islam to Bengal occurred in tandem with the ecological changes in the late 16th century which saw the shifting of the main course of the Ganges linking to the eastern Padma that flowed directly from the western delta to the east. This change brought “silt and fresh water necessary for wet rice agriculture”, resulting in the new “agrarian civilization” which in turn saw large-scale migration from the west and north Indian parts of the Mughal Empire. (Eaton, 1994, pp. 306–7). Consequently, the western part of Bengal turned into a “moribund delta” while eastern Bengal, an “active delta”, became a healthy place for habitation due to the production of a “surplus of grain” and an overall “agricultural boom”. (Eaton, 1994, pp. 197–205).

During the Mughal Empire, such lands were granted to religious communities including Hindus for temples; this task was pioneered by the Sufis and Pirs who with their “superior organizational skills and abundant manpower” led the transforming of forests into productive lands. (Eaton, 1994, p. 210). These saints became “mythico-historical figures” in rural Bengal and served as a “metaphor” for the expansion of both agriculture and religion. (Eaton, 1994, p. 207). In the newly accreted lands, they built mosques, constructed roads and pathways and developed new settlements along with agricultural fields. In Eaton’s view, this exerted a considerable influence on the diffusion of

Islamic ideals in the eastern frontier and in this way Islam “became associated with economic development and agricultural productivity”. (Eaton, 1994, p. 308).

3. ‘Open village theory’ and Islam in Bengal

While supporting the thesis of peaceful conversion, noted historian Akbar Ali Khan (2001) differs on certain interpretations of Asim Roy’s syncretistic thesis and the entrepreneurial frontier theory of Eaton. He argues that Pirism in Bengal was not significantly different from other parts of South Asia where some of the mythical Pirs were glorified/venerated in the same manner as in Bengal. He cites the Panch Pir as an example, who was worshiped in Bengal as Pir Badr and glorified throughout the Muslim world. Ghazi Miyan, who is respected in Bengal as the saint of marriage and fertility, is also venerated in the Uttar Pradesh and the Panjab in India. Khan (2001) also points out that there was little historical evidence of mass conversion in Bengal which was always free from social aggregation including tribe, village community, caste group or professional group. He observes that it would be difficult to find a village without Hindu families, indicating that if mass conversion was a dominant method, Hinduism would have been wiped out from Muslim areas. There were instances where the conversion was individual and, if someone embraced Islam, his or her family members remained Hindus.

Khan (2001) is critical of the entrepreneurial frontier theory by saying that the premise of this theory is not supported by historical evidence. According to Khan, the ecological effect of the changes in the course of the Ganges was exaggerated by Eaton and such changes were not unusual in the deltas. These deltas were wetlands and the effects of changing river course were very slow. The causal relationship between the change of course in the Ganges and the spread of Islam in the 16th and 17th centuries was not well established and it can best be explained by “the culmination of proselytization effort[s] of [the] previous three hundred years”. (Khan, 2001, p. 109). Khan (2001) also argues that Eaton ignored the traditional emotional attachments to the ancestral lands by Hindus who had always been reluctant to move to other places. The new lands saw migration from

within the active deltas due to population growth and the movement of displaced people. He adds that, had there been any significant migration from the west and north of India, the dialects would have been different in the active delta. But in reality, there is a great similarity in local dialects in the contiguous areas in southern and eastern Bengal, which weakens the Eaton hypothesis.

Akbar Ali Khan (2001) developed his own hypothesis known as the 'open village' theory to explain the spread of Islam in Bengal. He emphasized that the villages in Bengal had weak social, political and religious institutions and were different from other parts of South Asia in this respect. Mainly due to continuous migration of people from the rest of South Asia, Bengal settlements lacked "corporateness". Villages did not function as administrative and economic units. Solidarity among the villagers was deficient. In such a situation, ostracism was possible and more painful than other areas of South Asia where strong Brahmanism was in control to resist any alien faiths. According to Khan (2001), two important consequences flowed from this. First, the Western part of Bengal became an important area for Brahmins who built a strong caste system through village institutions. As Nihar Ranjan Roy comments, "The strongest hold of this orthodoxy (Brahmanical) was in Bengal, west of the Ganges, at least up to the southern bank of the Ajah with its citadel presumably at Nvadvipa. The more east and north of the country lay from the centre of Brahmanical orthodoxy lesser was (and even today), its grip on the social organizations". (cited in Khan, 2001, p. 114). Second, the weakness in social structure of the village system resulted in "unbridled individualism" in different parts of Bengal and so the people had choice as far as their beliefs were concerned. In addition, the geographical setting of Bengal with fresh settlements on newly emerged lands due to the continuous erosions of deltaic rivers provided the conditions of individualism free from rigid social structures. This also created "a congenial environment for heresy, heterodoxy and esoteric practices" (Khan, 2001, p. 114), and more importantly such an environment was conducive to the missionary efforts of Sufis and the syncretic/folk Islam they preached.

4. 'Regional personality character theory' and Bengali Islam

A fourth hypothesis accounting for the influence of Suf saints and the attraction of their syncretic /folk Islam in Bengal, known as 'regional personality character theory' has been put forward by Abdul Momin Chowdhury (2011). According to Chowdhury, Bengali people are of "flexible character" and they interpret Islam in the light of their own experience while retaining old traditions. (Chowdhury, 2011, p. 47). He argues that the people of the eastern part of Bengal remained outside the "pale of the Hindu caste-ridden society" of Aryan origin, unlike other parts of South Asia, mainly because of their less rigid character. (Chowdhury, 2011, p. 47). In the early centuries of the Christian era, Bengalis embraced Buddhism because of the attraction of its liberal ideals and ultimately converted to an Islam with an egalitarian message which had a particular appeal in the context of a rigid caste-system introduced by the Hindu orthodox Sena rulers following the decline of the Buddhist Pala dynasty in the 12th century. As Chowdhury points out, when these people accepted Islam by Sufi saints, they created their own rituals and practices different from Muslims elsewhere.¹¹²

Bengalization of Islam

The hypotheses outlined above not only indicates the peaceful and evolutionary progress of Islam in Bengal but, just as importantly, the central role of liberal *Sufi* and Pirs in that process. These saints used local imagery and characters in a way that created an appeal in a society where the caste system was rigorous and the indigenous people belonging to the lower castes were socially relegated. Such a system where these people felt alienated, combined with loose bondage of the village structures, was also favorable to Islam. Yet, at the same, while converting to Islam, Bengalis did not need to discard their own culture and practices. Roy (1983) characterizes the process as a

¹¹² For example, the worship of Buddhist's footprints took the form of veneration of the holy prophet's footprints (*Qudam Rasul*) and the five *Badhisattvas* was said to have influenced the concept of *Pancha-Pir* (five saints) in eastern Bengal. "Love, respect and extreme eagerness for humanism" are the common traits of the personality among the people of Bengal, which developed through "the long practice of catholicity and tolerance spirit of religion". This personality trait of the common people could find "asylum in the liberal brotherhood of Islam" (Chowdhury, 2011, pp. 48–49).

“syncretistic tradition” and asserts “syncretism remained integral to the process of Islamization in Bengal as a result of an interaction between “an intrusive religion and an indigenous culture” that formulated the religious, social and cultural life pattern of Bengali Muslims”. (Roy, 1983, p. 248). The formation of Islam in the context of Bengal therefore had room for a wide variety of local religio-cultural elements. The traditional cultural and religious practices of the Hindu-Buddhist people took refuge in the characteristics of Bengali Islam. When Bengalis switched their social camp to Islam, they “retained their old ideas and customs and assimilated to a new faith their earlier socio-religious experience” (Chowdhury, 2011, p. 46).

Further along these lines, Mohsin (2004) asserts that Islam in Bengal was under constant “action and reaction” with local Hinduism throughout its formation. The liberal policies by some Muslim rulers facilitated these interactions which resulted in the evolution of Islam being further “Bengalized” through the accommodation of Islamic elements with local traditions and practices. The *Sufi* saints constructed these traditions and practices in Islamic rituals analogous to the indigenous people. Thus, the observance of the *Tazia* on *Maharram* festival was similar to the preparation of Hindu *Durga* sacrifice and *Rathjarta*. The worship of *PanchaPir*, *Satya Pir*, saint worship and *Tirtha* or visits to the shrines of Sufis are some of the examples of such syncretistic characteristics of the society. (Mohsin, 2004, pp. 105–6).

Another very important feature of Bengalized Islam was the accommodation of local music and dance not approved or forbidden by traditional and orthodox versions of Islam. Ahmed (2007, pp. 12–13) points out that during Muslim rule these arts were cultivated and a distinct school in that regard emerged as a result of the active support of the Muslim rulers. This took place because of “a happy synthesis” between internal (Hinduism) and external (Arabic, Persian, Central Asian) elements. (Ahmed, 2007, p. 13). New tunes and *Ragas* were composed and the introduction of new instruments added a variety and richness to the development of these arts. Such music and dance became a great source of entertainment not only for the nobles and princes but also for the

common people. The Sufi saints, particularly the *Chishtiya* order, also subscribed to these arts and emphasized that the music was a “means of revelation attained through ecstasy” (cited in Ahmed, 2007, p. 14). Such music and dance performances remained integral to Bengali culture and intermingled with local Islamic traditions. This will be considered later in this chapter.

In that regard, Roy (1983, p. 249) observes that the Sufis and Islamic saints acted as “cultural mediators” who overcame the language barriers and made Islamic traditions more attractive to the common people by using syncretistic symbols, imageries and forms. Such syncretism was a necessary strategy for the mediators to serve the purpose of Islamization for what Roy calls “a significant historical function” and “conscious efforts” on the part of these mediators. (p. 251). This tradition continued until the purist movements came into picture in the 19th and 20th centuries to challenge the “non-Islamic accretions” as happened elsewhere in the Muslim world. These movements, such as the *Faraizi* movement, attempted to assert a Muslim consciousness based on puritan ideals of Islam and emphasized only an Islamic identity. Significantly, however, these purificatory ideas did not find easy acceptance in the Bengal context as indicated by, for instance, the popularity of *Puthi* literature in the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Syncretism remained central in the historical evolution of Bengal Islam even in the post-1947 era. In a survey of the popular beliefs among some Muslims of the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), A.K.N Karim observed that the life of average Hindu people was colorful and in their festivals they used popular dramas, singing and dancing related to Hindu saints and epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, which also attracted many neighboring Muslims for amusement despite religious restrictions on such non-Islamic performances by Hindus. (cited in Roy, 1983, pp. 250–53).

Eaton (1994) emphasizes that Islamization in Bengal took place gradually over a long period of time. He opposes the applicability of the term “conversion” which usually denotes a “sudden and total transformation” from the existing belief system to a new one. (p. 269). According to Eaton

(1994), the Islamization process involved three distinct aspects, namely inclusion, identification and displacement. In the inclusion process, exogenous Islamic superhuman agencies did not challenge the local deities and divinities; rather, they were incorporated in Islam in a way they believed. Thus, local emphasis in Bengal on divine power in female agencies, namely Mother Isamati, Mother Earth, Sita and Radha, also had room for reverence to Amina and Fatima, the Prophets' mother and daughter respectively as "mother" to all except to their husbands. Islamization did not require the local people to abandon outright their belief system or techniques. When the Muslim Pirs or saints came to villages, they were seen as a superhuman power and well-regarded for their occult skills and ability to solve local problems including curing sickness, controlling wild animals including tigers and crocodiles, clearing deep jungles for habitation and reading the minds of others. In this process of identification with 'Islam', superhuman beings were used interchangeably with each other. Islamic superhuman agencies coexisted alongside the local Bengali agencies. Thus, the Arabic name of God, Allah, was used interchangeably with the Sanskrit *Niranjan*. Finally, in the displacement process, Islamic superhuman agencies took over the local deities and divine forces. This was a result of a 19th and 20th century phenomenon itself the result of waves of Muslim consciousness grown out of Muslim nationalism throughout Bengal. However, despite the attempts by conservative elements to displace the non-Islamic elements from the Bengali culture, the people at large were not willing to surrender their indigenous character and resisted such conservative elements. This was particularly true in the Pakistan period when they protested and opposed the move by the Pakistani elite to impose Urdu on Bengal under the garb of "Islamic language" and ban the songs of Tagore. This thesis will explore these issues in further details in chapters 5 and 6.

Influence of mysticism

So far this chapter has demonstrated that the spread of Islam in Bengal was by peaceful rather than violent means and the implication of that in terms of an Islam imbued with the values and beliefs inherent in Bengali culture. This has also highlighted how this process of syncretism was

overlaid by the fact that Bengal was, for a variety of reasons (or hypotheses), particularly hospitable to an interpretation of Islam or 'folk Islam' spread by Sufi saints which also recognized and incorporated Bengali culture and beliefs. To this syncretization of Islam in the Bengali context or 'Bengalization of Islam' a further, and very significant, element should be added – that of mysticism.

According to Custers (2006, p. 4), Bangladesh's Islam was also largely influenced by the "mystical currents" of three major religions: Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. In each of the currents, the spiritual and more liberal traditions were dominant in their contribution to the unique brand of Islam that emerged in Bengal. The *Shahjiya*, a critical trend in Buddhism, resulted from the contribution of Bengali language to the Buddhist spiritual teachers. This was found in the *Charyapada* lyrics (950–1150) which were mainly based on societal oppression and injustice. The Vaishnava of Chaitanya (1486–1533) from Hinduism became a popular movement among the common people against the existing social ills including the caste system and was propagated for more social equality and tolerance in society. This movement also strengthened the Bengali language as it became the medium for the propagation of mysticism known as *Bhakti* which emphasized the ardent love and devotion of one God and equality of all worshippers. (Mohsin, 2004, p. 105; Karim, 2004, p. 122).

Finally, Muslim mystics known as Sufis became intermingled with the folk religion with many Sufis regarded as saints or folk deities.¹¹³ The influence of Muslim mystics was also evident in composing many songs and stories on the miraculous life of the Sufis saints. (Banglapedia, 2006). While preaching Islam, many of these Sufis did not convey the orthodox interpretation or stand for strict adherence to rigid Sharia law. Their emphasis was on absorbing the local elements with which the

¹¹³ For example, praying to *Pir Badar* as *Badar Badar* while sailing through storms during maritime journeys was a long-held tradition as a reflection of folk Islam.

people were identified and they were opposed to the imposition of Islamic laws as held by the orthodox version of the religion prevailing in the center of Islam. Custers (2009c, p. 3) remarks:

Instead, they combined their narratives on the history of Middle Eastern prophets, and their didactic statements on the stages towards mystical fulfillment, the *maqam*, with numerous allusions and references to the religious traditions that were then prevalent in Bengal. Here, they adopted imagery derived from the Hindu mystical current of *Vashnavism*, but also from the more worldly-oriented current which in the literature is termed *Yoga-tantra*.

The role of mysticism and Sufi tradition in the formulation and character of Islam in Bengal is particularly evident through the influence and traditions of the Chishtiya¹¹⁴ order. Custers (2009b, pp. 1–2) asserts that this Chistiya order was a “tolerant and liberal form of Islam”. Among those prominent Chistiya saints were Moinuddin Chishti, Nizamuddin Auliya¹¹⁵ and Ala Al-Haq who were great proselytizers of this mystic brand of Islam. They also developed political influence with their popular brand and support among the people who thronged in pilgrimage to their places, *Khanqah*, and tombs even today. The founder of Ilyas Shahi dynasty had special reverence for the Chishti saints when they initiated their work in Bengal. Chishti saint Al Al-Haq established a settlement in Sonargaon, near Dhaka, and was accorded a welcome reception. Historian Richard Eaton (1994) points out that the Bengali Muslim rulers considered themselves as the followers of the Chishti saints. One such ruler, Hussain Shahi, made annual pilgrimages to the shrine of Ala Al-Haq. (Custers, 2009b, p. 2). Eaton (1994) adds that Mughal officials in Bengal were also in close contact with the Chishtis and were influenced by their secular ideals and maintained neutrality as far as the religion was concerned.

¹¹⁴ The Sufis were named after the place called Chisti, near Herat in Afghanistan. The prominent Sufis of this order include Moinuddin Chisti who hailed from this village. His disciples Nizamuddin Auliya and Ala Al-Haq also spearheaded this brand of mystic faith.

¹¹⁵ According to Custers (2009a, p. 2), their prominence was evident in the presence of Moinuddin Chishti and Nizamuddin Auliya of the 17th century miniature painting at the Hermitage museum in St Petersburg.

Custers (2009a, pp. 1–3) identifies three main characteristics of the ideals of the Chishti order which subscribed to their liberal views. First, the Chishtis believed in the “Ibn Arabi’s theory of Wahdad Al Wajud”, meaning unity in being. According to this theory of Abn Arabi (1165–1240) which surfaced in the Middle East when Sufism was at its peak in the Muslim world, the spirit of God was present in all living and non-living beings and the people of all religions must be respected. Although it encountered opposition from some Sufis, the Chishtis accepted this interpretation and extended the practice of its ideals. Second, the Chishtis promoted the *Sama*, gathering of disciples, where Sufi poetry and songs were used as a means towards salvation. The Chishti saints were themselves proponents of this Sama and were well conversant with the mystic poetry and songs of Persian and local origins. Despite the orthodox *Ulama* who opposed this blend and urged the Muslim King to intervene, in this debate the ruler refused to participate. This *Sama* also found its similarity with the liberal trends in Bengal with the Hindu mysticism Vaishnabism¹¹⁶ which used collective chanting and dancing to accomplish ecstasy. Finally, the Chishtis were known for their openness vis-à-vis the mystic currents of the local people. According to Custers (2009a, p. 3), the knowledge of mystical currents was gathered by Islamic scholars long before the proselytizing effort took place by the Sufis. This was evident in the work of Al Biruni, ‘Tahliq ma li’l

¹¹⁶ O’Connell (2011) indicates that the medieval age of pre-colonial Bengal was influenced by Chaitanya Vaishnavas’s *Bhakti* movement with his socio-cultural integrative ideals. From the 12th century onwards a *Bhakti* renaissance spread waves of devotional sentiment with the concept of a single God. This movement centered on the devotion to Krishna, an interior commitment of the heart in the form of loving devotion to God, expressed in the simple and pleasing forms of song, dance and above all recital of Krishna’s names, *Nama-kirtana* (nam kirtan). As O’Connell (2011, p. 55) puts it, “Chaitanya Vishnabas, accordingly, live with a certain excitement and sense of religious purpose in the conviction that one’s current human birth is a wonderful, though fleeting, opportunity to change the course of one’s destiny, to put an end to mundane rebirths and redeaths.” This could only be done with the mercy of the God Krishna and changing one’s self-image and behavior with the help of Krishna or his close devotees. The *Bhakti* traditions broke through caste barriers and attracted millions of followers and were in close contact with the Muslim ruler Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493–1519 AD) and received his patronagen. Among many *Bhakti* saints are a number of notable women such as Andal and Mirabai. In addition to his deep influence on Hinduism, Chaitanya’s cultural legacy in Bengal and Orissa remains deep, with many residents performing daily worship to him as an avatar of Krishna. Some attributed to him a Renaissance in Bengal, different from the well-known 19th century Bengal renaissance. Salimullah Khan, a noted linguist, maintains that the “Sixteenth century is the time of Chaitanya Dev, and it is the beginning of Modernism in Bengal. The concept of ‘humanity’ that came into fruition is contemporaneous with that of Europe” (cited in Zaman, 2005). Their ethical virtues include “humility, non-violence and control of sensual appetites”. (O’Connell, 2011, p. 57). The ethos and ethics of Chaitanya Vaishnava devotion underlined the importance of mutual respect, tolerance and non-violence, which were evident in much of its literature, music and artworks.

Hind', which had a mention of the Vaishnab tradition of the Indian mystical currents. Thus Chishtis absorbed some of these currents to popularize their interpretation of Islam. The yogatantra and Vashnavism became merged with this particular interpretation. The Chistis encouraged the reciting of Vaishnab poetry and yogis at *Sama* gatherings, further intermingling rituals and practices between the two faiths. Other characteristics of the Chistis also contributed to the strength of civil society in Bengal. In that regard a notable feature of the Chishtis was their social work through rendering welfare services to the common people. They accepted people from all walks of life and belonging to different classes and castes as disciples, and established *Langarkhana*¹¹⁷ where they organized communal kitchens for free distribution of food to the poor people. The Chishtis also distanced themselves from the Muslim rulers with regard to land grants. While some Sufis accepted the land grants by the Muslim rulers, the Chistis were opposed to this generosity with a view to work free from any influence from them.¹¹⁸ Moreover, they also contributed to the creation of a civil society by imparting literacy and education through madrassahs. This helped to raise people's knowledge and awareness, standard of living, and promote cultural tolerance. (Custers, 2009a, p. 3).

While highlighting the influence of mysticism, it is also important to note the evidence of public reasoning in Islam in the Bengali context. As Ahmed (2010, p. 3) notes, public reasoning is a long tradition to Bengal, which can be summed up by one of the very popular songs of Bengal's Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore:

We are all kings in the kingdom of our King.
Were it not so, how could we hope in our heart to meet him!

Tagore also pronounced these values in a poem in his famous work *Gitanjali*:

¹¹⁷ A langarkhana is a Sufi place where food is distributed free to the poor people. This activity is still prevailing in many places in and around the tombs of the Sufis. The concept also has gained currency in Bangladesh at times when there are national crises, e.g. the famine of 1974, to help destitute people by distributing basic needs including food and clothes.

¹¹⁸ However, they relied mostly on the free grants by members of the public and often from the local chieftains.

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; where knowledge is free; Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; ... Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit; ... Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.” (cited in Sen, 2005, p. 98).

Sen (2005, p. 274) also emphasized the traditions of public reasoning in the broader Indian context and specifically referred to Mughal emperor Akbar’s practice of critical reasoning which guided moral judgments to address many difficult social problems, giving importance over religious commands in the “marshy land of tradition”. This was culturally supportive of the presence of freedom of thought and conducive to the emergence of the diversified nature of public reasoning. This aptly explains the blend of all kinds of social and religious discourses, including Brahmanism, Buddhism and Islam, in Bengali culture along with strong traditions of diversity and tolerance of faiths and opinions in the context of a developing civil society. (Ahmed, 2010, pp. 3–4). This brings a survey of key factors in the ‘Bengalization’ of Islam to one final but significant point – the important contribution of literature in this regard.

‘Bengalized’ Islam in literature

Bengali literature dates back a thousand years and has a rich cultural history. According to Banglapedia (2006), the history of Bengali literature can be divided into three periods: ancient (700–1200 AD), medieval (1200–1800 AD) and modern (1800–present). The common themes of this literature in all phases were marked broadly by traditions of humanism, tolerance and secular ideals. The earliest literary work is *Charyapada*, a collection of the oldest verses from pre-modern Bengal. This work mainly dealt with the then sufferings of the common people and emphasized a clear opposition to social inequality and injustice based on a traditional rigid caste-ridden Brahmanism. (Gosh, 2009, pp. 10–13; Ahmad, 2009, pp. 367–70; Sharif, 2009; Ahsan, 2009).

In the medieval age (1200–1800 AD), Bengali literature was focused on issues of communal harmony, tolerance, humanism and intermingling between different faiths. During this period,

Bengal was under Muslim rule, mainly of Turkish and Afghan origin. These rulers were mostly tolerant and encouraged local language to flourish in their kingdoms. Renowned Muslim ruler Alauddin Hussain Shah patronized the translation of Hindu holy books including *Mahabharat* into Bengali. During this period, Bengali literature was also influenced by the Vaishnava philosophy of Hinduism, which emphasized equality, humanism and love. One of the noted Bengali poets influenced by this philosophy, Chandidas, asserted, “Hey mankind listen! Man is true and nothing lies beyond that”.¹¹⁹ Ahmed (2004, pp. 2–3) notes that the Muslim rule of the Sultanat Bengal went through a “remarkable religious and intellectual ferment” during this period (13th to 16th centuries) and was reflected in the emergence of the spiritual humanism of Chaitanya (1448–1553) propagating the Vaishava *Bhakti* cult and the humanist mysticism of the Muslim Sufi saints, resulting in the creation of a “composite culture of harmonious co-existence”. Such a blend was evident in the contemporary literature, particularly of the 16th and 17th centuries. The notable Muslim poet Abdul Hakim and his work *Nur-nama* exemplify syncretistic devotion.¹²⁰ (Ahmed, 2004, p. 3; Anisuzzaman, personal communication, 2011; Gosh, 2011, personal communication).

The poems written by Muslims during the middle Ages can be divided into several groups: narrative poems (based on Muslim and Indian stories), religious poems, poems on cultural links, dirges and poems on astrology, and poems on musicology. The greatest contribution of the Muslims to Bengali literature during this period was, however, the introduction of narrative and romantic poems, many of them being free translations or adaptations of Arabic or Persian romances.¹²¹ (Gosh, personal communication, 2011; Banglapedia, 2006). These narrative poems

¹¹⁹ The original Bengali verse is: *Shuno He Manush Bhai, Shober Upore Manush Shatya, Tahar Upare Nai*.

¹²⁰ In this work, poet Abdul Hakim composed: *Allah khuda Gosain all bear the same name of the Great Lord who is the repository of all noble virtues*. The original Bengali verse was: *Allah Khoda Gosai Sakal tar naam/ Sarba goone niranjan pravu goonadham*. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 3).

¹²¹ Donagazi's *Saifulmuluk Badiuzzamal* (mid-16th century) is written in simple language and reveals the influence of *Prakrit*. Sheikh Faizullah occupies an important place among the Muslim poets of the medieval period with *Goraksavijay*, *Gazivijay*, *Satya Pir* (1575), *Zainaber Chautisha* and *Ragnama*. *Goraksavijay*, which is based on Kavindra's poem, is in two parts. Part one describes how Gorakhnath rescued his guru, Minanath, while part two describes the ascetic life of King Gopichandra. *Zainaber Chautisa* narrates the sad story of Karbala in the form of Zainab's lament. Daulat Uzir Bahram Khan's only extant work, *Laily-Majnu*, evidently

contributed significantly to the transfusion of cultural links between the local stories and the alien religion, Islam. According to Eaton (1994), such translations were an attempt to adapt the Perso-Islamic civilization to the Bengali context. Most of these works were based on Islamic aesthetic and literary sensibilities, as well as conceptions of Muslim divinity and superhuman agency.¹²²

In this period of the medieval age, Bengali literature was often characterized by the use of indigenous deities and divinities incorporating new superhuman agencies introduced by foreign Muslims.¹²³ (Anisuzzaman, 2004, pp. 362–64). The application of local divinities was also found in the rich tradition of folk ballads in Bengal. These ballads were passed from generations orally by professional bards and became popular for entertainment in rural Bengal. These ballads began with invocations (*Bandana*) in which the rustic bards sang with respect to the local deities which also included Muslim cults and saints. Shah (2007, p. 568) points out that many Muslim rural singers and poets began their performances with words of praise to both Hindu and Muslim superhuman agencies or spirits while entertaining the public.¹²⁴ According to noted historian Dinesh Chandra Sen as cited in Eaton (1994, pp. 271–2), in the opening lines of “Nizam Dacoit”, the ballads of Chittagong region of the 17th to 18th centuries revealed reverence to the Muslim Prophet, Mohammed, and Muslim saints, and at the same time showed respect to the Hindu gods and goddesses. The opening lines of the ballad are furnished in Appendix 12.

composed between 1560 and 1575, is a thematic translation of the Persian poet Zami's *Laily-Majnu*. (Banglapaedia, 2006).

¹²² Thus, the Nile River was identified with the Ganges, and a story set in biblical Egypt alludes to dark forests filled with tigers and elephants. The countryside in such stories was highlighted as plentiful with banana and mango trees, peacocks and chirping parrots; people eat fish, curried rice, ghee and sweet yoghurt, and chew betel; women adorn themselves with sandal paste and glitter in silk saris and glass and gold bangles; everywhere one smells the sweet aroma of fresh rice plants.

¹²³ Thus, we see this use in the case of local agencies such as *Manasa*, *Chandi*, *Satya Pir*, *Dharma* or *Daksin Ray*. In a poem composed in 1686, ‘Ray-Mangala’, both Bengali tiger god *Daksin Ray* (King of the South) and a Muslim pioneer named *Badi Ghazi Khan* were revered in the same way and both of them held dual authority over the Sundarban forests of Southern Bengal. According to the poem, the conflict between the two was resolved with peaceful co-existence not as a single figure but as mutually distinct religious personages. (Anisuzzaman, 2011, personal communication; Anisuzzaman, 2004, pp. 362-4).

¹²⁴ As cited in Shah (2007, p. 568), these singers and poets offered such *Bandana* to the Hindu gods and goddesses and holy places like Kasi, Brindabana and the Himalaya, similar to the Muslim’s God, saints and places of Mecca and Medina

This ballad demonstrates how both local and Hindu deities were used side by side with Muslim and superhuman agencies. This ballad demonstrates key images of then Bengal's religious life. First, the Muslim saints and Pirs were accepted in rural Bengal as divine powers to encounter local and natural challenges in their day-to-day lives. They were also highly regarded as they met their spiritual and worldly needs. Second, both Hinduism and Islam co-existed with mutual respect. Both Amina and Fatema were depicted as a motherly and divine power similar to the pre-existing mother Hindu goddess such as Mother *Isamati*, Mother *Earth*, *Sita* and *Radha*. Finally, while Islam intermingled with the indigenous religion, both remained separate and distinct with mutually exclusive agents.

Similarly, such influence of local customs and manners in Muslim belief was evident in rural poetic fairytale stories called *Puthis* which were primarily used for education and entertainment purposes in rural areas in the Muslim period.¹²⁵ In most such works, Hindu gods and goddesses were respected as equal to the Muslim God and Prophet.¹²⁶ (Shah, 2007, pp. 567–8).

Bengali literature also saw a blend of words, rituals and practices between Hinduism and Islam. This is evident in the 16th century's romances, epics, narratives, and the devotional poems.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ One of the popular *Puthis* was *Gazi Kalu O Champavati* where Hindu goddess *Durga* was narrated as the aunt of Muslim *Gazi*. In another such *Puthi*, *Jebul Mulk Shama Rukh Kavya*, Hindu goddesses were equated as Muslim saints or Sufis.

¹²⁶ This found evidence in *Puthi Kavya*, which was written by Muhammad Akbar (1657) as Muslim God Allah with Ishwar (Hindu god) of Hinduism, Hawa (wife of Adam) with Kali (Hindu goddess), Ashab (companions of the Prophet) with Dvadas Rakhala (12 companions of the Sri Krishna) and the holy Qur'an with the *Puranas*.

¹²⁷ Poet Haji Muhammad used Arabic Allah with *Gosai* (Sanskrit, "Master"), Saiyid Murtaza imaged the Prophet's daughter Fatima with *Jagat-Janani* (Sanskrit, "Mother of the World"), Saiyid Sultan portrayed the God of Adam, Abraham, and Moses with Prabhu (Sanskrit, "Lord") or, more frequently, Niranjana (Sanskrit, "One without colour", i.e. without qualities). Later the 18th century poet Ali Raja portrayed Allah with Niranjana, Ishwar (Sanskrit, "God"), Jagat Ishwar (Sanskrit, "God of the Universe"), and Kartar (Sanskrit, "Creator"). (Eaton, 1994, p. 276). In another work, *Nabi-Bangsho*, written by Saiyid Sultan in the 16th century, was known as the national religious epic which had about twenty-two thousand rhymed couplets. In this epic, the poet identified major local Hindu deities Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Rama and Krishna as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad respectively who were the successive prophets of God. The epic also claimed that Islam was not only the heir to Judaism and Christianity but also to the religious traditions of pre-Muslim Bengal, namely Vedic, Vaishnava and Saiva divinities. Such a work was a reflection of the realities of the pre-modern Bengal where demographically the majority of the people were adherents to the pre-existing creeds, which were conducive to literary creativity of this period. This was a conscious strategy adopted not to challenge the local belief systems, but rather to establish vital connections between Islam

Such a mode of transmission was an important feature of literary work of this period. The Hindu epics were familiar to the common people. A poet of the 16th century observed that “Muslims as well as Hindus in every home” would read *Mahabharata*, a great religious epic of classical India. Another poet of that time wrote that Muslims were also moved to tears on hearing of Rama’s loss of his beloved Sita in the epic *Ramayana*. Moreover, the people of this period were also saturated with the *Mangala-Kavya* literature that marked the exploits, power and grace of specifically Bengali folk deities like Manasa and Chandi. In all these works, the portrayal of characters and stories found resemblance with the indigenous cultural contexts. (Gosh, 2011, personal communication).

During the period of Muslim rule (from 13th to 18th century), Persian was used as the official and court language. The Bengali literature came into contact with Persian-Arabic culture as translations from Persian into Bengali gained prominence. The Persian romance and Islamic values were characteristic of this literature. Many local Hindus learnt Persian and were influenced with Persian civilization. As a result of such Persianization, many Persian words and phrases entered the Bengali language and became indigenized. About nine thousand words and expressions of Persian origin were absorbed into Bengali. (Eaton, 1994, pp. 276–7). Such vocabulary not only enriched Bengali language but also created a space for Perso-Islamic influence in the formation of Bengali culture.

Mir Mosharraf Hossain (1847–1912), a Muslim novelist, was noted for secular ideals. He was perhaps most famous for his novel *Bishad Shindhu* (Ocean of Sorrow), depicting the tale of Martyrdom of Hossain or Husayn bin Ali in Karbala. Hossain’s secular outlook and cry for Hindu–Muslim unity was best reflected in his work, *Gojiban*, where he portrayed non-communalism¹²⁸ and promoted peace between the Hindus and Muslims. His other major work was *Jamindar Darpan* (Reflections on Zamindars), a play which portrayed the plight of common people under the

and the larger community based on socio-religious traditions. (Eaton, 1994; Anisuzzaman, 2011, personal communication).

¹²⁸ In the Indian subcontinent, this term commonly refers to a lack of conflict and division on the basis of religious belief and caste.

Zamindars (landlords installed by the British colonial rulers) and their struggle against them. (Gosh, 2011, personal communication). This trend has become a common feature of Bengali literature even in the modern age.¹²⁹

The use of metaphors, imagery and symbols from both Hinduism and Islam in the literature of Bengali Muslims suggests that Islam in the Bengali context was not contradictory to the local culture and belief system; rather, each was complimentary to the other at certain points. Many of these elements stemmed from and were reinforced through the intermingling of indigenous religion with Islam and were integrated into the daily life of many Muslims. Huq (2009, pp. 159–62) terms this transfusion “Bengali folk Islam”¹³⁰ which was evident in the evolution and characterization in the early Muslim literary works. Huq asserts that this folk Islam in the Bengali context created an appeal to the indigenous people, mainly because it did not prescribe an emphasis on the centrality of scripturalism. Bengali Islamic literature reflects this trend and substantiates the existence of folk Islam in Bengal.

At this point a brief survey of the central themes of two particularly influential Bengali literary personalities, Lalon and Nazrul, will serve to demonstrate the pervasive influence of “folk Islam” in the mind-set of the Bengali people historically and today.

¹²⁹ There are many literary works that highlight the non-communal character, Hindu–Muslim unity and humanism. The poets who composed poetry on secular and humanistic themes were Ashraf Siddiqui, with *Biskanya* (1955), *Sat Bhai Champa* (1955) and *Uttar Akasher Tara* (1958); Mazharul Islam with *Matir Fasal* (1955); Matiul Islam with *Saptakanya* (1957); and Begum Sufia Kamal with *Man O Jiban* (1957). This humanistic trend is also reflected in *Natun Kavita* (1950), edited by Ashraf Siddiqui and Abdur Rashid Khan. Among poets who contributed to this edition were Shamsur Rahman, Hasan Hafizur Rahman, Alauddin Al-Azad and Borhanuddin Khan Jahangir.

¹³⁰ According to Huq (2009, pp. 160–1) folk Islam emerged in Bengal mainly for three reasons. First, in the process of conversion to Islam, the indigenous people were attracted to the supernatural power and welfare-oriented work of the Sufi saints rather than the Islamic tenets. As a result, they retained the local beliefs, traditions, practices and superstitions, which later took refuge in their way of life. Second, the indigenous people were mostly Hindus and they used to maintain peaceful co-existence even after they converted to Islam. Through continuous contacts and communications with neighboring Hindus, they often saw transfusion of ideals and practices. Such Hinduism influenced the local people in their day-to-day life and rituals which formed part of their religion. Third, the origin of Bengali Muslims was Hinduism. Many of them converted to Islam more as a matter of switching social camps from one group to another than spiritual conversion. So even after their conversion, they remained open and tolerant to the local Hindu culture and traditions.

Bengalized Islam: Impact of Lalon's thought

In the medieval period, Fakir Lalon Shah (1774–1890), a philosopher poet, had a profound impact on Bengali culture and the nature of Islam in that context. His emphasis on the values of tolerance, humanism and egalitarianism and ability to convey these values in a popular Bengali medium (song) found deep roots in the Bengali psyche. His work, which was articulated in songs, forms important pillars of the secular origin of Bengali culture. Shah (2007, p. 567) asserts that Lalon Shah stood against traditional religious bigotry and orthodoxy and made an appeal for societal harmony to millions of followers – beyond religious beliefs and the caste system. He was opposed to a society of hierarchy and fragmentation based on religion and caste. There is a controversy among conservative religious groups as to Lalon's religious faith – Muslim or Hindu – Lalon, however, was in favor of identities beyond politics and social divisions.¹³¹ (James, 1987, p. 43).

According to Siraj (2007, p. 1), the adoration of humanity was a central theme of Lalon's work. Worshipping human beings was the central theme of Lalon's work. The superiority of humanism was manifested in his songs: "He who searches God in human; Is a Baul; Inside the matter God lies; There is [?] He is found". (cited in Hossain, 2009, p. 33). Lalon sought the shadow of God in humanity and thought that respect for humanity should be the ultimate worship – beyond caste, creed and religions. According to Lalon, the main virtue of God is love and his principle can only be fulfilled through "loving man and establishing harmony in the society". (Hossain, 2009, p. 45).

Lalon emphasized the importance of worldly affairs rather than what might follow in an afterlife and was opposed to ritualistic bonds of religion¹³² that divide people in society to the detriment of their humanity. He perceived hypocrisy behind religious rituals and scolded the fake and priests

¹³¹ In one of his songs, he composed, "Everyone asks, what religion Lalon follows?" Lalon says, "I have never been able to formulate an outward appearance of religion." He adds, "When a male is circumcised, he is said to be a Muslim, but what rule applies to women? We recognize a *Brahmin* [Hindu clergy] by the sacred thread he wears; but how am I to recognize a *Brahmin* woman?" (cited in James, 1987, p. 43).

¹³² In a verse, Lalon reiterated his opposition to ritualism. He composed: 'All the worships and prayers are nothing but man-made rituals. Human does not conceive the image of invisible phenomenon'. (Hossain 2009, p. 124).

who misinterpreted the true meaning of religious tenets.¹³³ (Hossain, 2009, p. 54). Lalon saw ritualistic religious activities as a reflection of a narrow interpretation of the rules of the scriptures in the hands of some unscrupulous priests and religious leaders. These religious people had their own agenda to impose their will on the society and dominate uneducated and ignorant people. As a result, the society is affected by the ills of discrimination, disparity and disharmony. His voice was clearly opposed to all these narrow and ritualistic religious interpretations and practices, often termed religious dogmatism and zealotry. He instead stood for a liberal outlook towards religion in order to promote humanity and social peace. According to this philosophy, divinity is not located in the religious places like mosques, temples, churches or pagodas. There is no absolute truth about sin and piety, which is an imposition by society and differs largely from one to another in the name of religion. The human mind is the source of all religions and a salvation lies in worshipping humanity. (Professor Serajul Islam Chowdhury, 2011, personal communication).

Lalon firmly believed that ritualism was a consequence of human need and a response to fear of nature. This was a view close to anthropological interpretation on the origin of religion and ritualism. (Hossain, 2009, pp. 123–24). Such a perspective reflected a modernism in outlook. Other central tenets of his philosophy were a belief in science and rationalism and a rejection of parochialism and superstition.¹³⁴

In a socio-economic context, Lalon rejected hierarchy, caste, class, and gender and any forms of politics based on race or nationality. He was opposed to divisions according to *jat* (caste), path (hierarchies by which who can accept food and water from whom), class, patriarchy, religion and nation. According to Lalon, the caste system was a curse on the society because it caused segregation into different strata with some born holy while others treated as pariahs. Lalon raised

¹³³ In one of the verses, Lalon composed that there may exist a mischievous attempt to show an act of good deed by observing rituals. However, in real terms, he or she is a hypocrat. (Hossain, 2009, p. 54).

¹³⁴ This is evident in his composition of another song: “The earth is glob[e]/ And it orbits around/ Reason why, day and night occurs./ If one portion of the glob[e]/ Get the flash of light/ Another portion remain [s] in dark plight/ That is endorsed by the scholar...”. (cited, in Hossain, 2009, pp. 47–48).

his voice against a system and condemned it as a means of discrimination and exploitation by the upper class people. He sang: 'All ask what caste Lalon belongs in the word' [*Sob Loke Koy Lalon Ki Jat Songsare*]; 'Don't cry for caste' [*Jat Gelo Jat Gelo Bole*]; 'The edifice of caste is going to crumble in this modern age' [*Lalon bole kaali kale, Jaat banchano day*]. (Hossain, 2009, pp. 50–52; Tofayell, 1968, pp. 124–27).

At the same time, Lalon was a materialist and a realistic philosopher. Religious clerics often preached to the people that performing religious rituals would bring reward after death. So their intention was to persuade the followers to stick to the rituals in return for a divine reward in the post-death life. However, Lalon did not believe in the invisible world and was a supporter of earthly rewards for deeds. Hence he stood for realization of life in this world.¹³⁵

Lalon also was known for his philosophy in public reasoning; what Sen (2005, p. 12) calls "the roots of democracy across the globe".¹³⁶ Lalon always cherished this freedom of mind and body beyond any religious or other forms of social restrictions, which remained an important source of free-thinking. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 5). Lalon envisaged "self-inquiry" through a logical mind as the ultimate knowledge. He is often equated with other great philosophers like Socrates who professed "know thy-self". His "thy-self" lies in the search for God in the human body. Such a philosophy is generally associated with a modernist outlook reflected in rationalism.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ He did not believe in after-death life and went beyond utopian trend of life. In his words, he sang: 'After death I will be in the heaven as reward/ But I am not convinced with that all/ Who the stupid spare certain achievement/ In hope of ambiguous result?' (cited in Hossain, 2009, p. 65).

¹³⁶ Such reasoning got a special emphasis in his work. As his verse goes: 'Nobody can tell me whence the bird unknown to the cage [comes] and goes out./ If I could touch, I would put fetters of mind round its feet.' (Ahmed, 2010, pp. 4–5).

¹³⁷ On the the concept God, Lalon questioned the universality of the creator. He said: 'In Arabic term He is Allah/ In Persian language is Khodata/ The followers of Jesus Christ called Him God/ He is differed in different name in different land and languages.' (cited in Hossain, 2009, p. 123). On the question of religious matters, he interpreted in logical terms. Thus, he composed in another verse: 'If anybody husks on chaff/ Does he get rice from it?/ My vanity mind is like this chaff/ A grain-less priceless matter.' (cited in Hossain, 2009, p. 114). This demonstrates his outlook on a logical mind and that belief and rituals cannot materialize cherished goals.

A key element of Lalon's thought that marked him out as a significant secular and modern philosopher was his stand on the issue of women vis-à-vis men. Lalon was insightful in his raising very fundamental issues concerning woman-man relationships – playing on the margin between biological and social construction of this relationship. He focused on the biological difference between men and women and the social meaning they produce in different social contexts constituting various forms of patriarchal hierarchies between women and men. The famous song 'If you pay worship to your mother, you will find a home of your father'¹³⁸ is such an example. The claim is that the meaning of the Father is revealed only through calling the name of the Mother and that is indeed the task of real wisdom. Mother signifies the origin of all beings both as the ceaseless process (Prakriti, a Hindu Sanskrit term), as well as the subject of the process. Father or Shiva is not an independent entity outside Mother, or Parvati, but integral to the notion of Mother. (Mazhar, 2005, p. 3).

Lalon's legacy was the enhancement of some key elements and values of Bengali culture – most notably tolerance that was also strongly associated with strong threads of humanism, secularism and egalitarianism. As a commanding figure in Bengali culture, Lalon's life is celebrated by both Hindus and Muslims and so in that regard he and the values he represents epitomize the Bengalization of Islam.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ The Bengali version of the verse is *mayere bhajile hoy tar baper thikana* (To find the father one should worship his/her mother). The philosophical twist of the Bengali word 'bhajana' is almost impossible to translate into other languages. 'Mayere bhajile' literally means 'worshipping mothers' but Lalon used the term in deifying the women as *Devi* (goddess, a feminine power with great respect in Hinduism).

¹³⁹ The songs of the Bauls and their lifestyle influence a large swath of Bengali culture even today, particularly in different Bengali cultural manifestations and festivals. His ideals influenced the work of many philosophers. Noble poet Rabindranath Tagore also talked of Bauls in a number of speeches in Europe in the 1940s and an essay based on these was compiled into his English book *Religion of Man*. In his 1930 Hibbert Lectures at Oxford University, Tagore specifically made an important reference to Lalon's philosophy. (Tofyaell, 1968, p. 96). Allen Ginsberg (1994) was influenced also by Lalon's work. Ginsberg (1994) composed a poem, *After Lalon*, in his work "Cosmopolitan Greetings". In that work, he eulogized Lalon's work through a poetic style similar to Lalon.

Bengalized Islam: Impact of Nazrul's thought

Lalon's legacy and values and their impact on Islam and Bengali culture are further amplified by another influential literary personality (an officially recognized national poet of Bangladesh), Nazrul Islam (1899–1976). He also left a profound mark on the secular mindset of the Bengali people. The central tenets of Nazrul's influence were the breadth of his appeal and trenchant critique of religious prejudices.

By giving priority to native Bengali, Sanskrit and derivative words, as well as Arabic-Farsi-Urdu words and expressions, he reduced the use of English to a serviceable sideshow. The fact that he was able to do it without premeditation showed how deeply he was connected to the culture of the multitude.

Nazrul was an advocate of humanism and critic of religious divides and extremism. According to Choudhury (1974, p. 40), although Nazrul was born in a Muslim family, he demonstrated his personal aptitude towards non-communal values. He married a Hindu woman, Pramila Sengupta (1908–1962), without converting her to Islam – a religious trend that he sought to break. Khan Mohammad Moinuddin (1901–81) who was present during the wedding as his personal guest noted that Nazrul was opposed to the religious obligation for the bride to adopt Islam. (Mitra, 2007, p. 199). Kazi (2009, p. A23) notes that such a marriage was not received well by the then conservative Hindu and Muslim groups. However, Nazrul and Pramila lived together until their death. Nazrul named his sons both from Hindu and Muslim origin to prove his equal treatment of the religions. The first child was named Krishna (Hindu God) Muhammad (Muslim Prophet) and the second as Arindam (Sanskrit origin) Khaled (Muslim origin).¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ His two other sons were also named from Hindu sources as Sabyasachi (an epithet of Arjuna, a Hindu mythological hero) and Aniruddha (Irresistible, name of a grandson of Hindu God Krishna). This personal life symbolized his conviction to rise beyond religious bigotry and move more towards religious blending and Hindu–Muslim unity.

In 1920, Nazrul expressed his vision of religious harmony in an editorial in *Joog Bani*: 'Come brother Hindu! Come Musalman! Come Buddhist! Come Christian! Let us transcend all barriers, let us forsake forever all smallness, all lies, all selfishness and let us call brothers as brothers. We shall quarrel no more.' In another article entitled 'Hindu Mussalman' published in the *Ganabani* on September 2, 1922 he wrote:

I can tolerate Hinduism and Muslims but I cannot tolerate the Tikism (Tiki is a tuft of never cut hair kept on the head by certain Hindus to maintain personal Holiness) and beardism...Today's fighting is also between the Pundit [having tiki] and the Mullah [having beard]: It is not between the Hindus and the Muslims. No prophet has said, 'I have come for Hindus I have come for Muslims I have come for Christians.' They have said, 'I have come for the humanity for everyone, like light'. But the devotees of Krishna say, 'Krishna is for Hindus.' The followers of Muhammad (Sm) say, 'Muhammad (Sm) is for the Muslims.' The Disciples of Christ say, 'Christ is for the Christians'. Krishna-Muhammad-Christ has become national property. This property is the root of all trouble. Men do not quarrel for light but they quarrel over cattle. (cited in Moniruzzaman, 2000, pp. 153–54).

During the colonial period, Hindu–Muslim tensions were stoked by the then British policy of divide and rule. Against this backdrop of tolerance, Nazrul championed the ideals of equality and communal harmony. He wanted to transcend not only the religious boundaries but also the social and economic barriers, and he dreamt of the day when all inequality between people shall cease to exist. This was bitterly resented by orthodox quarters of both the communities.

Nazrul saw the image of the Creator in every human being. He (Nazrul) vanquished ignorance, leading to the victory of knowledge. He was inspired by the immortal message of the Qur'an: 'Oh my Sustainer, extend the orbit of my knowledge. Let me not despise the Beautiful, or grow contempt for man.' Nazrul's poetry is animated by a powerful heroic energy. His rejection of all pettiness and communalism finds exquisite expression in the poem *Samyabadi* (the Socialist) where Nazrul asked:

Who are you? A Parsee? A Jain? A Jew?

A Santal, a Bheel or a Garo?

A Confucian? A disciple of Charvak?

Go on – tell me what else are you.

Whoever you are, my friend, ...¹⁴¹ (cited in Islam, 2011, p. 2).

In the poem 'Mora Dui Sahodor Bhai' (We are Two Brothers of the Same Mother), Nazrul reiterated his voice for Hindu–Muslim unity and peaceful co-existence.¹⁴² He composed:

Hindu-Muslim, we are brothers

Two flowers from the same stem.

And Bharat is our motherland. (cited in Islam, 2011a, p. 2).

Nazrul visualized a day when Hindus and Muslims shall hug each other in warmest embrace as though they were each other's kin. It is with this noble goal in view that Nazrul came out with the proclamation: 'Let a Hindu remain Hindu, a Muslim remain Muslim. Let them all come together under the infinite sky and pronounce the pristine words of creation – that I am a human being, my religion is the religion of humanity.' Nazrul's ideal of Hindu–Muslim unity has served as a powerful impetus for the attainment of universal brotherhood. (Islam, 2011a, p. 1).

¹⁴¹ The remainder of the poem is:

'Whatever holy books or scriptures
You stomach or carry on your shoulder
Or stuff your brains with – the Quran, the Puranas,
The Vedas, the Bible, the Tripitaka, the Zend-Avesta,
The Grantha Saheb – why do you waste your labour?
Why inject all this into your brain?
Why all this – like petty bargaining in a shop
When the roads are adorned with blossoming flowers?
Open your heart – within you lie
All the scriptures,
All the wisdom of all ages.
Within you lie all the religions,
All the prophets – your heart
Is the universal temple
Of all the gods and goddesses...'

¹⁴² In a famous song Nazrul sang: 'We are two flowers on the same stem – Hindu-Mussulman!/ Muslim its pearl of the eye, Hindu its life!!'. (cited in Islam, 2011, p. 2). In the backdrop of Hindu–Muslim riots, Nazrul composed his famous 'Kandari Hushiar' (Be aware Captain). He urged the younger generation to rise above the Hindu–Muslim question by understanding the high values of humanism. In this poem he again said: 'Hindu or Muslim?' who asks this question?/ Captain, say: 'drowning fellows are/ The children of my mother'. (cited in Islam, 2011a, p. 2).

Besides his championing of religious tolerance and humanism, Chowdhury (1974, p. 11) points out that Nazrul also added a new vigor and strength to the Bengali language while at the same time he furthered the ideals of secularism. As previously indicated, the reason his work had such an impact was his free use of both Hindu and Muslim pantheons and words and myths from Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit origins. Mitra (2007, p. 198) asserts that Nazrul drew symbols, images and references from both Hindu and Islamic traditions and other elements of Bengal culture – and Western ideas – which created a unique synthesis in his literature. Such a synthesis had a great appeal to the common people irrespective of religions.¹⁴³

At another level, Nazrul's secular ideology was also echoed in the movement for liberation of the intellect ('Buddhir Mukti') among the progressive Muslim intellectuals in the 1970s. This was a movement which began in Dhaka in 1926 with the objective of promoting free thinking and intellectual emancipation, mainly through emancipation of mind through practising 'human sensibilities'. Nazrul, through his work, acted as precursor to the movement of free thinking. (Khan, 2002, pp. 8–10).

Nazrul was a staunch supporter of the secular nationalism of Mustafa Kamal Pasha (1881–1938) of Turkey in the 1920s. During that time, British India experienced a rise of the Pan Islamism movement in the name of *Khilafat Andolon*. The main objective of this movement was to create pressure on the British to respect the integrity of the *Caliphate* in Turkey, the last Islamic representative governance.¹⁴⁴ Nazrul disapproved of the Khilafat Movement and was opposed to the idea of Pan Islamism. He composed several poems in support of Turkish secular nationalism.

¹⁴³ Nazrul's poem, 'Bidrohi' (Rebellion), is representative of this fusion, where he composed: 'I am the huge roar of the trumpet of Angel Israfil/ I am the tabour and trident of the Pinak-wielding Shiva/ And the scepter of Yama, the god of death. .../ I embrace the hood of Vasuki, king of serpents –/ And hug the fiery wings of Jibrail [Gabriel], The envoy of heaven". (cited in Mitra, 2007, p. 198).

¹⁴⁴ At one stage, this movement joined hands with the Indian National Congress following the Lucknow Pact (1916), which became stronger than before against the British colonial power in the 1920s. However, this unity did not last long due to lack of trust among the leaders and with the rise of pro-Western and secular nationalists in Turkey under the leadership of Kamal Ataturk.

(Mitra, 2007). In one of these poems, 'Kamal Pasha', he demonstrated the convergence of his ideology with that of Kamal's secularism of modern Turkey.¹⁴⁵

This brief survey of the central themes of the two particularly influential philosophers, Laon and Nazrul, highlights a number of key values in Bengali culture, most notably an abhorrence of religious dogmatism and zealotry associated with strong threads of humanism, secularism and egalitarianism.

Conclusion

Although Islam has its origin in the Middle East, it spread to Bengal in a modified way. Essentially, Islam came through peaceful means largely by Sufi saints and Pirs who preached its liberal version in the local context of Bengali culture. In the process of Islamization, local beliefs and practices were not made conflictual to the message of Islam. Thus, Islam imbibed the core values of the indigenous people. As a result, Islam did not conquer Bengali culture; rather, it was blended into the fabric of broader Bengali culture and remained as a mere component of the totality. Thus, 'Islam' became "Bengalized Islam" with folk Islam in its core, making itself distinct from the scriptural Islam of the Middle East. Such characteristics suggest the incorporation of some of the Bengali values such as secularism, tolerance and humanism as well. These values were also evident in the mainstream of Muslim literature of the middle ages and modern times when Islam gained preponderance. The works of Lalon and Nazrul are a representative reflection of these values and left an important legacy regarding contemporary cultural manifestations including celebrations and festivals in independent Bangladesh. This largely explains why Islam in its puritanical form was not attractive to the Bengali Muslims despite the efforts of the revivalists in the 19th century and the

¹⁴⁵ The poem begins with a short prose introduction, in the style of a dramatic introduction. The 'poetry' part of the poem begins with a direct reference to 'Kamal Bhai', a very Bengali expression where a set of close community relations are conventionalized in familial terms. Thus, Kamal Pasha becomes brother Kamal to his soldier-comrades and the readers with a mark of his respect to Kamal's ideology of secularism. In just two opening lines ('Oi khepeche pagli mayer damal chele Kamal Bhai/ Oshur pure shore utechhe jorese shamal shamal tai') Nazrul uses pure Bengali words (e.g. Shamal Shamal), Sanskritized words (e.g. Oshurpure), and Arabic-Persian-Urdu words (e.g. Shore, Jorese).

use of Islam in the state and polity by the West Pakistani elites during the Pakistan period and more recently by the Islamist extremists (as shown by the incidents of 1999 to 2005) in present-day Bangladesh. In all these instances, Islam in the Bengali context was greatly misunderstood as being tuned to the Islamic *Ummah* without proper assessment of its formation and emerging character. Thus, the core of Bengalized Islam, i.e. is its syncretistic nature, contradicts the portrayal of Islam as a universal and monolithic ideology for state and polity.

The distinctive character of 'Bengalized Islam' was, as the following chapter will show, further supported by a unique relationship between religion, class and socio-economic circumstances in the Bengali context.

Chapter 5

Islam in Bangladesh: Socio-economic Dimensions

Introduction

This chapter examines the role of Islam in the Bengali struggle against British colonialism and later the Pakistani state. A striking feature of those struggles was that, while the flexible nature of Bengali Islam was, at various points, a motivating force or focus for the profound socio-economic grievances of Bengalis, it was replaced by other forces, primarily cultural, linguistic and class, and associated poverty played a key role in the history of Bengali communal relations. In the pre-colonial era, Muslim–Hindu relations were, as discussed previously, for the most part amicable – a situation disturbed by British colonial policy, first by land reform in 1793 which worsened the poverty of the Bengali Muslim masses while facilitating the emergence of a Hindu class of nouveau riche who accumulated wealth through partnership with colonial interests. Similar colonial policy elsewhere in Asia also exacerbated economic cleavages which in the case of Bengal also exacerbated the deterioration of ethnic/religious cleavages between Muslims and Hindus.¹⁴⁶ Religion, Islamic revivalism, briefly became a vehicle for Muslim discontent. Significantly, however, the movement failed to attract support from the Muslim masses and nascent middle class as the ideals of the Islamic revivalism were at odds with the syncretistic and folk Islam of rural Bengal as outlined in the previous chapter. Subsequently the socio-economic divide between Muslims and Hindus was further widened by the partition of Bengal in 1905 and its later annulment in 1911. Later Muslim separatism, expressed through the movement for Pakistan, saw religion/Islam again

¹⁴⁶ For instance, in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) where the first organisation with mass appeal dealing with broad political and economic issues was the Sarekat Islam (Islamic association), founded in 1912. Its focus of activity was economic and therefore anti-Chinese. The Islamic appeal of Sarekat Islam provided a common link, a welding force binding the divergent/indigenous communities together. However, the heterogeneous nature of the organisation soon brought conflict within it over the long-range goals of the organisation and the methods to achieve them. (SarDesai, 2003, p. 168). This example gives a comparative picture on the ethnic-religious relations when Bangladesh's case is studied vis-a-vis other South and Southeast Asian Muslim countries.

providing a rallying point particularly for the socio-economically oppressed Bengalis against Hindu landlords and money-lenders. Significantly, the disgruntled Bengali peasantry and middle class again lost any emotional or intellectual attachment to Muslim nationalism, as Islam in the context of Pakistan became associated with a new force of socio-economic exploitation and internal colonialism.

I. First phase: Colonial period (1757–1947) – socio-economic impact on Bengali society

In Bengal colonial rule transformed class and ethnic-religious relationships from one characterized by religious amity and tolerance to one featured by competition and antagonism. The economic condition of the Muslim peasantry and artisan class (*Atrafs*) worsened in relation to the local Hindu community, whether traders or land-owning families. (Shah, 2007, p. 570).

Prior to conquest by the British, Bengal was known as one of the richest regions in the Indian subcontinent. Its merchant community engaged in the export of products, notably textiles, muslin, sugar, silk, rice, cottons, spices, butter and other manufacturing goods to Persia, Arabia and Europe. Indeed Bengal's wealth and economic activity was comparable to some European cities. Regarding the prosperity of Bengal, W.W. Hunter commented: "Until 1772 Bengal was regarded by the British public as a vast warehouse, in which a number of adventurous Englishmen carried on business with great profit and on an enormous scale". (cited in Kabir, 1994, p. 33). However while the British acquired great wealth, the affluence of many Bengalis came to an abrupt halt in the face of colonial policies – the effect of which were to monopolize and export Bengal's rich cache of raw materials while displacing local manufacturers with imported British goods. Many of the Bengali towns were adversely affected by these developments. (Kabir, 1994, p. 34).

When Bishop Heber visited Dhaka in 1824, he noticed that most of the areas were "filled with ruins". (Kabir, 1994, p. 34). Colonial policy particularly affected the lower class of Muslim society,

known as *Atrafs*.¹⁴⁷ This class of artisans was particularly hard hit by the effects of colonial rule. On the other hand, the local Hindu community, already dominant in trading and commerce, became “junior partners” to British commercial interests. The colonial power needed such local middlemen for their ventures in a foreign land and formed an alliance with these Hindu merchants and traders who in turn utilized this as an opportunity to flourish and acquire wealth. In the context of Bengal, Hindu merchants performed the ‘middleman role’ in much the same way as Chinese did in colonial Malaya and Indonesia and with similar results in terms of growing antagonism between them and the indigenous merchants/community. In Bengal while the Muslim artisan groups collapsed, the Hindu community saw the emergence of an energetic class of *nouveau riche* that acquired wealth from the trading partnership with the colonial interest groups – at least until the end of the 18th century when the British interests penetrated more deeply into the economic life of Bengal. (Kabir, 1994, pp. 33–36).

Class and ethnic/indigenous relations in Bengal were further and fundamentally transformed by colonial land reform which culminated in the introduction of the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 by Lord Cornwallis. The main source of revenue in the Indian subcontinent was land. In the new system a new land ownership was introduced to maximize revenue for colonial rule. The old system of ownership was replaced with a permanent lease and was made open to the highest bidders. Those who had money in hand could compete and win the bid. The rising class of Hindu who accumulated wealth became successful and reaped the benefits of the new system. This dealt a big blow not only to the elite upper Muslim class but also to lower class Muslim society. Under

¹⁴⁷ The Muslim community in Bengal was not a monolithic body and represented two distinct classes, *Ashraf* and *Atraf*. The *Atrafs* were the vast majority living in rural areas and mostly belonged to the peasantry and artisan groups. They were the indigenous and native people and Bengali-speaking. They were similar to their Hindu counterparts in culture and history. On the other hand, the *Ashrafs* were alien to the local culture and spoke Urdu and migrated from the Middle East and Central Asia. Although both of the classes belonged to the same religion, they differed fundamentally in terms of culture, manners, practices, languages and dress. As Ahmed argues, “The Muslim community in Bengal was thus in every sense a fragmented society even at the turn of the century. Admittedly, they were vaguely united by a common allegiance to the essentials of the faith and certain common ritual practices, supposed to be binding on all its members. But the internal divisions were often so rigid that the superficial unity helped little to bridge the gap between the different social and sectarian groups.” (cited in Kabir, 1994, p. 33).

the new system, most of the existing Muslim and Hindu land owning families, *Zamindari*, were displaced and most went in the possession of the new Hindu class who had accumulated wealth out of partnership with the colonial commercial interests. The Hindu *nouveau riches* were merchants, manufacturers, agents, land holders or government officers. (Mallick & Husain, 2004, p. 187). The new system of land ownership displaced a more flexible and peasant-friendly land settlement situation that had long been in existence. As Zaheda Ahmad (2004, pp. 129–30) argues, in the old system the peasants paid a tolerable amount as revenue either in cash or kind, usually one-third of their produce, to the *Zamindars* who also constituted a backbone of a provincial aristocracy¹⁴⁸ while the new system vested the absolute ownership of the lands in the possession of the new Hindu class. The new system required the peasants, against their interests, to pay a more rigorous and fixed amount as land revenue to the collectors. According to Hunter, in the 1870s out of 60,000 *Zamindaries* only 15 percent belonged to the Muslims who formed only 9 percent of the total revenue raised in spite of the fact that the Muslims constituted about 65 percent of the population in East Bengal. In the district of Barisal, the Muslim population comprised of 64.8 percent of the total population while they owned less than 10 percent *Zamindaris* and paid less than 9 percent of the total land revenue. (cited in Kabir, 1994, p. 39). These new predominantly Hindu *Zamindars* were growing richer and more powerful and became one of the pillars of British colonialism.

The land tenure system made a deep impact on the socio-economic landscape of Bengal. The new “bania-comprador classes” reaped the benefits of the system. The *Zamindars* enjoyed the absolute rights over the lands while the peasants (most of whom were lower class local Muslims) lost traditional occupational rights to cultivate these lands. Gradually, they became “the worst victims of the oppression and exploitation at the hand of this parasitical landlord class”. (Ahmad, 2004, p. 130).

¹⁴⁸ They were not the absolute owners of the lands, but acted as middlemen as collectors of revenue. They also had the responsibility of maintaining public order.

More broadly, however, the displacement of the Muslim elite class was also attributed to the consolidation of the colonial rule in Bengal. As Hunter points out, the Muslim elites were employed in three main occupations: military appointments, revenue collections and positions in the judiciary system.¹⁴⁹ The decline of the Muslim elite that began with colonial rule and British dominance of military and revenue functions was followed by a further major setback when in 1837 the British colonial ruler replaced Persian with English as the official language. The Muslim elites previously enjoyed an advantageous position in the judiciary because of their facility in Persian. So its replacement meant both loss of employment and status for them compared to their Hindu contemporaries who learnt and benefitted from an English education. (cited in Kabir, 1994, pp. 36–37). As Mallick contends:

The obvious conclusion that suggest itself in respect of education under state patronage up to 1835 is that the Muslims who cared for education were not in any way prejudiced against receiving English or western education, but they had very limited opportunities for acquiring this education ... Again, the early efforts ... to educate the people were made in the city of Calcutta where the Hindus predominated. The overwhelming Muslim majority districts of East and North Bengal did not receive the much needed attention of the Government till very late. Another factor was the known poverty of the Muslims which made it impossible for them to educate themselves without help from the government. (cited in Kabir, 1994, p. 37).

The money-lending system also added to the miseries of the Muslim peasant population. Most of the money-lenders were from the Hindu community who acquired wealth through quick adjustment with the colonial business interests. Since traditional banking did not operate in the rural areas in those days (the 1800s), Hindu money-lenders exploited the extreme economic needs of the poor people by charging high interest rates with harsh terms and conditions. The interest rates were sometimes more than 100 percent. Many Muslim peasants acquired large debts that left them destitute. The *Al-Eslam*, a newspaper, reported in 1919: “Debt causes an average of

¹⁴⁹ As has been shown, these elites originally migrated from outside and settled in Bengal and mostly relied on aristocracy related to the ruling elites. These elites had the least interest in trade and commerce.

three hundred Muslims a day to lose their property in auction to non-Muslims.” Such a situation led to a deterioration in the relationship between the Muslim peasants and the *Zamindar*-moneylenders. (cited in Kabir, 1994, pp. 39–41).

British colonial rule thus had dire economic and social consequences for the Muslim community – both upper and lower class. The Muslim elite became unemployed and fell into extreme poverty. As Hunter points out: “In fact there is scarcely a government office in Calcutta in which a Muhammadan can hope for any post above the rank of porter, messenger, filler of inkpots and the mender of pens.” The conditions of the peasants also deteriorated and they too fell into extreme poverty. Such dire hardship was exacerbated by the Great Bengali Famine of 1770. The famine was considered a direct result of the exploitation by the colonial rulers and the native *zamindar*-moneylender class. According to official records, about one-third of the population of Bengal died.¹⁵⁰ But the government imposed an additional surcharge to raise 10 percent revenue collection in the year after the famine. (Kabir, 1994, pp. 37–38).

The increasingly dire social and economic position of the Muslim community in the Indian subcontinent was exacerbated both by the community’s conservatism and relative rural isolation from vehicles of modernity – education and urban employment. As cited in Ahmed (2007, p. 55), a contemporary author observes, “An ancient conquering race cannot divest itself of the traditions of its nobler days.” Instead, the Muslim community preferred to distance themselves from modernity and an English education. At the same time, in the early stages of the British colonial rule, administrators viewed the Muslim elite as a threat to their rule and pursued discriminatory policies towards them. (Uddin, 2006, p. 48). In social and commercial terms, the combination of these factors was disastrous for the Muslim community. For example, according to the 1911

¹⁵⁰ Hunter in his book *Indian Mussalman* gives an account of the consequence of this famine. According to him, “the streets were blocked up with promiscuous heaps of the dying and the dead. Internment could not do its work quick enough; even the dogs and jackals, the public scavengers of the East, became unable to accomplish their revolting work, and the multitude of mangled and festering corpses at length threatened the existence of the citizens.” (cited in Kabir, 1994, pp. 37–38).

Census of India Report¹⁵¹, only four percent of Muslims were literate while only 0.25 percent were educated in English. In the same census, the corresponding rates for the Hindus were 11.9 percent literate and 1.8 percent English educated. The situation in higher education was similar. According to the Calcutta University Calendar of 1901, only 4 percent awardees of bachelor degrees were Muslim in 1900 despite the fact they constituted the majority of the population. On the other hand, two groups of Hindu Brahmins, Banarjees and Mukherjees, produced more than 12 percent of the total graduates. This disparity was also reflected in their ethnic share of jobs in different professions. The ratio of Muslims in proportion to Hindus in important public services were: 2:7 in civil service, 1:9 as lawyers, 1:5 in medicine, 7:2 in teaching, and 29:1 in police service. With regard to the trade and commerce professions, a similar picture was also apparent. In 1911, out of 24 million employed in the sector, only 3177 were Muslims. The proportion of living in urban vs rural areas was also significant. In the same year (1911), only 3.6 percent of the population living in urban areas was Muslim while this figure for Hindus was 9.6 percent. Most of these urban Muslims were non-Bengali.¹⁵² (cited in Kabir, 1994, pp. 40–45).

A result of this increasing socio-economic marginalization was the growth of a communal identity by the Muslims in Bengal and a growing communal divide between Muslims and Hindus on the Indian subcontinent. (Mallick & Hussain, 2004, p. 186).

Responses of the Muslims to the colonial policies

The Muslim response to their parlous economic state and the role of Islam played in it were critical to the nascent Muslim nationalist movement vis-à-vis British and Hindu dominance. Their response took two forms: rebellion and cooperation.

¹⁵¹ General Report on the Census of India, 1911. For details, please see,

http://www.archive.org/stream/censusofindiav12pt1indi/censusofindiav12pt1indi_djvu.txt

¹⁵² This identification of ethnicity with geography, urban/rural, and with economic function was a feature of other colonial societies, e.g. in British Malaya where indigenous people were isolated in rural areas from the modern sector vis-a-vis immigrant Chinese – which later would have profound consequences for communal harmony in an independent Malaysia.

A significant development in Muslim rebellion¹⁵³ was the role of Islam as a motivating force or foci for the profound socio-economic grievances of Bengali Muslims. The Faraizi Movement¹⁵⁴ which mobilized the support of the rural people was prominent in this regard. This movement was largely influenced by the ideals of Islamic revivalism aimed at “purging all un-Islamic practices from the life of Muslims of Bengal” (Kabir, 1994, p. 46) and preached “a return to a more fundamentalist Islam, shorn of ritualistic appendages” (Khan, 1985, p. 840). Faraizi leaders later turned this movement into a popular uprising against the oppression of the local *Zamindars*, money-lenders, traders, and the equally oppressive practices of European indigo planters. Faraizi leaders presented the peasants with a convincing case that these classes were responsible for their ill condition. The Muslim peasantry supported the movement for two main reasons. First was the credibility of the *Faraizi* message that the Hindu *Zamindar* class was exploitative. Second, the leaders of the movement also advocated the establishment of an egalitarian *Panchayat* system which was a fusion of Islamic egalitarian principles with politics, promising a greater voice of the peasants. Soon the Faraizis Movement was transformed into “a full-fledged agrarian movement” with a command¹⁵⁵ over the weavers and the peasants. (Iqbal, 2011, p. 66). Although the Faraizis were Islamic-inspired, from the perspective of the Muslim peasantry the movement embodied their socio-economic grievances and agrarian protest. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 156).

¹⁵³ Muslims engaged in protest and rebellion against the new local Hindu *Zamindars* for their repressive tax system and oppressive behavior against the local peasants. The rebellions included Faqir – Sannasis (1760–1800), Aga Mohammad Reza (1799) in Sylhet, the Chakmas in Southern Chittagong (1777–1787), the Pagalpanthi rebellion (1825–1833) in Mymensingh, the Faraizi uprising (1804–1857), Titumir’s rebellion (1825–1831) in Jessore-Nadia, and the Indigo Revolt (1855–1856) in several Bengal districts (Ahmad, 2004, p. 133). In addition to these rebellions, there were many other instances of violent conflicts as a result of perceived colonial and *Zamindar* oppression. These were violent conflicts with Rajas of Budwan and Bishanapur (1760–06), armed conflict of Faudar Muhammed Ali of Noakhali-Comilla (1762), uprising of Abu Turab Chaudhury of Sandwip (1764), armed confrontation of Ali Gazi and Muzaffar Gazi of Homna in Comilla (1780), resistance of the Chaudhuris of Dandra in Noakhali (1781), resistance of Muhammed Akbar Chaudhury of Hatia (1787), declaration of independence by Mirza Muhammed Reza Beg of Sylhet (1799) and secret plans of Nawab Shamsuddaula of Dhaka for a national war of independence (1794–1799) with the help of *Zamindars*. (Islam, 2007, vol. 1, p. 12).

¹⁵⁴ This movement was spearheaded by Haji Shariatulla (1781–1840) of Faridpur district and his son Mohammad Mohsin known as Dudu Miah (1819–1860).

¹⁵⁵ For instance, Shariatullah reportedly had a command over about 12,000 weavers who became unemployed due to colonial policies and engaged in agriculture, while his son Dudu Miah had about 300,000 followers. (cited in Iqbal, 2011, pp. 65–66).

The rapid rise of the Faraizi Movement was accompanied by an equally rapid fall, however, with the death of Dudu Miah in 1860. Significantly, Ahmed (2007, p. 58) argues that the movement failed because it was led by leaders who were imbued with the ideals of Islamic revivalism and advocated a more purist Islam at odds with the syncretistic and folk Islam characteristic of rural Bengal. As a result the ultimate appeal of the Farazi Movement withered as it failed to retain the support of Bengali Muslims – whether the masses in the rural areas or the urban middle class. Nevertheless, as Khan (1985, p. 840) asserts, the Faraizi Movement did raise the consciousness of Bengali Muslims regarding their exploitation by British colonialism, the Hindu *Zamindars* and others and contributed to the growing separatist trend between Muslims and Hindus.

As indicated earlier, while rebellion was one response to oppression, cooperation was the other. What prompted that significant change in attitude was the brutal crushing of the Sepoy Mutiny¹⁵⁶ in 1857 after which the Muslim elites believed that non-cooperation would only serve to pauperize the Muslim society.¹⁵⁷ Some members of the Muslim elite came forward and made positive overtures towards the colonial rulers while the British, on the other hand, were anxious to conciliate with the Muslims who were regarded as what W.W. Hunter calls “a persistently belligerent class” and “a permanent danger to the Indian empire” (cited in Ahmed, 2004, p. 157). Muslim leaders began to advocate the benefits of English education to members of their community so they could better compete with their Hindu counterparts – who already had advantageous positions in professions and government employment. Abdul Latif (1828–1893) was prominent among those who pioneered English education among the Muslims through the formation of the Mohamedan Literary and Scientific Society. Syed Ameer Ali (1847–1928), on the

¹⁵⁶ The local Indians recruited in the British colonial army revolted in 1857 for a variety of political, social and religious reasons. It dealt a severe jolt to the colonial rule. It was considered as the first war of independence in India against the British rule. Both Muslim and Hindu soldiers took part in it. Although the rebellion was ruthlessly crushed, it left many implications. It led to the dissolution of the British East India Company in 1858. The British ruler also took steps to reorganize the army and the policies with regard to the financial system and administration for colonial India. India was vested directly with the Crown for governance as the British Raj.

¹⁵⁷ The Muslim elites realized that the British rule could not be overthrown and was going to stay. It was therefore wise for them to cultivate British patronage rather than wrath.

other hand, formed the National Muhammadan Association to promote a Muslim political consciousness through highlighting Muslim demands and grievances. A similar platform, *Anjuman-i-Islam*, was founded in 1855 with the objective of promoting the welfare of the Muslim community through adopting a strategy of cooperation with the British rulers. Such initiatives resulted in the end of political isolation of the Muslims and brought them closer to the colonial rulers. Significantly, in the meeting of the Mohammedan Literary Society held in Calcutta on 23 November 1870, another prominent leader Maulana Keramat Ali (1800–1876) issued a fatwa declaring British India as *Dar-ul-Islam* since the British rulers allowed the Muslims to exercise their religion freely and hence it was not religious to wage Jihad against them. In addition to cooperation with the British, other Muslim leaders¹⁵⁸ reinterpreted Islam in the light of modern science and rationality and accepted reason as the basis of Islamic thought – a clear departure from orthodox Islam. In return, the British rulers began to patronize the Muslims and encouraged them to organize themselves as a separate community. Such patronage was reflected in concessions in education, employment and even in representation in local bodies. These changes were also accompanied by an improvement of Muslim socio-economic conditions which were mainly attributed to the general economic prosperity of rural Bengal and emergence of jute and paddy as cash crops fetching hard cash. This contributed to the rise of middle class (rich Muslim peasants)¹⁵⁹ in rural areas, who became allies of the urban Muslim leadership in the assertion of Muslim identity and quest to map out broader Muslim political interests in the context of the growing Hindu–Muslim divide. (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 156–57; Ahmed, 2004, pp. 188–9; Molla, 2001, pp. 188–9).

¹⁵⁸ These leaders included Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817–1898), Syed Ameer Ali (1847–1928), Delwar Hussain Ahmed (1840–1913). For details, see Ahmed (2007, pp. 60–69).

¹⁵⁹ Many of these rich peasants acquired new tenurial rights and became landed interest groups. Their new wealth enabled them to send their children to the English educational institutions look for professional jobs in employment and make business or commercial investments. By the first quarter of the 20th century, these rich peasants became a powerful force for the Muslim political interests.

The 1905 Bengal partition and the Hindu–Muslim divide

Two notable events that exacerbated the Hindu–Muslim divide were the partition of Bengal of 1905 and its annulment in 1911 and associated separate representation of Muslims in those arrangements. In 1905 by an imperial order the British rulers divided Bengal into two parts: West Bengal, currently the Indian part of Bengal comprising Hindu majority areas, and East Bengal, presently Bangladesh, comprising Assam and the eastern border of Indian territories with a population that was mostly Muslim. While the ostensible reason for partition was administrative, the real concern of the colonial power was to crush the growing nationalist¹⁶⁰ fervor among the Hindus in Bengal. As one British official H.H. Risley argued, “Bengal united is a power, Bengal divided will pull in several different ways ... One of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule.” (cited in Kabir, 1994, p. 50). Although British-inspired and not at the behest of Muslims, the effects of partition favored Muslim Bengal and saw a shift of industries and colonial services to Dhaka along with educational institutions, offices, and trade and business houses. Thus, Dhaka became a growing center for economic activity and administration under colonial rule.¹⁶¹ The partition scheme was overwhelmingly supported by the

¹⁶⁰ Bengal became the hub of Indian nationalism in the late 19th century. The growing Hindu middle class, who flourished out of accumulation of wealth in money-lending, landed aristocracy of new British *Zamindari* policies, and new trading and commercial opportunities by becoming junior partners with the British interests, aspired to a more dignified status in Indian politics. They progressively became vocal in Indian affairs with the colonial rulers. In 1885, they formed the Indian National Congress as a mark of national awakening in India. It was spearheaded by the intelligentsia with graduates from the universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. The lawyers, retired civil servants and other urban professionals educated in English joined the movement. However, the elite Muslims and the peasantry remained absent from this movement. The Hindu *Zamindars*, who lived in Calcutta, saw this as a scheme to dislocate their landed aristocracy, the lawyers viewed it as a loss of income as a result of the relocation of the High Court to Dhaka, business and traders considered it as a loss of markets and perceived competitors from the Muslims. The critical factor was that they feared a minority status in Muslim-dominated East Bengal and the West where Oriya and Bihar combined constituted the Muslim majority. Bengali Hindus dominated the formative leadership of the Indian Congress and advocated Indian nationalism rather than Bengali nationalism, mainly with an ambition of dominating the larger political arena. The nationalist fervor increasingly exhibited the signs of militancy and there were terrorist attacks on the British interests. *Anushilan* and *Jugantar*, two terrorist wings, were constituted in Bengal as part of the nationalist movement, which grew as an increasing threat to the British rulers. (Kabir, 1994, pp. 47–51).

¹⁶¹ According to the Report on the Census of India, 1911, in a short span of time, Eastern Bengal became a center of development. Before, Dhaka was considered as a periphery of the Hindu-dominated West Bengal capital, Calcutta. The educational institutions grew at a rapid rate. The rate of Muslim students in these

Muslims of East Bengal and their leaders including Nawab Salimullah, the Nawab Bahadur of Dhaka and Syed Nawab Ali Chaudhury, another wealthy landlord from East Bengal. Not surprisingly, such leaders firmly stood behind the British policy of partition. But it was not to be. Partition was not acceptable to the Calcutta-based Hindu nationalists who began to protest and launched the *Swadeshi*¹⁶² movement. The Hindu elite saw partition as a colonial strategy to promote a “divide and rule” policy and strongly opposed the scheme. In the face of severe agitation by Hindus, the colonial power annulled the partition of Bengal in 1911. (Molla, 2001, pp. 190–94; Ahmed 1986, pp. 136–37; Mallick & Husain, 2004, pp. 188–89).

The annulment came as a shock to the Muslims in East Bengal, who saw the Hindus’ attitude and nationalist agitation in favor of partition as detrimental to their interests. Broomfield (2007, p. 180) maintains that the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911 prompted feelings of alienation among the Muslims who tended to think that the real enemy was not the colonial British ruler, but rather their neighbors, the Hindu *Bhadralok*.¹⁶³ This led them to seek a strategy that would address their socio-economic plight. This view was also encouraged, according to Broomfield (2007, p. 180), by the colonial bureaucracy in its effort to “divide and rule”¹⁶⁴ through the notion that the Hindu *Bhadralok* were mainly responsible for “the ills of the Muslims”. This pattern of divisive

institutions also increased from 3 percent in 1905 to 14 percent in 1908. Dhaka’s importance increased and its population went up 25 percent. (cited in Kabir, 1994, p. 52).

¹⁶² *Swadeshi* was part of the Indian independence movement and formed an economic strategy to boycott the British goods and look for self-sufficiency in their own products. It was designed to put pressure on the British colonial government to meet the Indian nationalist demands. Its main architects were Aurobindo Ghosh, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Raj. Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi also adopted this strategy as a key focus against the colonial rulers.

¹⁶³ Broomfield (2007, p. 191) describes *Bhadralok* as “a socially privileged and consciously superior group, economically dependent upon landed rents and professional and clerical employment; keeping its distance from the masses by its acceptance of high-caste proscriptions and its command of education; sharing a pride in its language, its literate culture, and its history; and maintaining its communal integration through a fairly complex institutional structure that it had proved remarkably ready to adopt and augment to extend its social power and political opportunities.”

¹⁶⁴ The British colonial rule is often characterized by “divide and rule”, a strategy adopted to exploit the communal divisions and confrontational groups of different faiths, Hinduism and Islam, in the Indian subcontinent so that they were not in a position to stand together to resist the colonial master. During the British period, they chose one group to obtain their loyalty and encouraged them against the other. When the British came to India, many Hindus welcomed and supported their rule. However, later when they joined the nationalist movements and formed the Indian National Congress to press home their demand for independence, the British tried to court the support of the Muslims by fomenting feelings of inequality.

politics 'us' vs 'them', was to become the hallmark of 20th century politics in British India, particularly in Bengal.

Formation of Muslim League and the recognition of Muslim demands

In the face of Hindu opposition to the Bengal partition of 1905, the conservative Muslim leadership began to formulate a future political course to advance their interests. This coincided with the colonial plan to enlarge the Indian Legislative Councils¹⁶⁵ and as part of this administrative reform the British rulers announced limited elective offices in the provinces. The Muslim leadership was concerned that their minority status in the Indian provinces even in Bengal was due to their inferior socio-economic status. In October 1906, a high powered Muslim leadership headed by Aga Khan met the British Viceroy, Lord Minto, in Simla and presented a memorandum demanding separate electoral bodies for the Muslims at levels from municipalities to the legislative councils. The Viceroy in the meeting expressed sympathy to the demands of the Muslim leadership.¹⁶⁶ Under the circumstances, the Muslim leaders decided to form a separate political organization for the Muslims, the All Indian Muslim League, at a meeting of the Muhammadan Educational Conference held in Dhaka¹⁶⁷ on 31 December 1906. British concessions to the Muslim demands for a distinct political identity were evident in the adoption of the Moreley-Minto Reforms of 1909.¹⁶⁸ The Muslim leadership believed that they would better secure their interests if they could

¹⁶⁵ The plan was incorporated in the Indian Councils Act passed in the British Parliament in 1892. This was intended to strengthen the Legislative Council of the Governor-General and the Provincial Governors by expanding the number of additional non-official members.

¹⁶⁶ Lord Minto, the British Viceroy in India, said, "I am firmly convinced as I believe that any electoral representation in India would be doomed to mischievous failure which aimed at granting a personal enfranchisement regardless of the beliefs and traditions of the communities composing the population of this continent." (cited in Molla, 2001, p. 192).

¹⁶⁷ Dhaka became the center of Indian Muslim politics. Nawab Salimullah from Dhaka was one its architects. The formation of the Muslim League in 1906 gave a platform to solidify the ranks of Muslim leadership and also to press their demands.

¹⁶⁸ The reform scheme was planned by John Morley, the Secretary of State of India, and Lord Minto, Viceroy, and adopted in the British Parliament in the form of the India Act of 1909. The scheme was known as the Morlay-Minto Reforms of 1909. The scheme ensured the introduction of separate electorates for the Muslims, inclusion of an Indian on the central and provincial councils and also on the council of the Secretary of State for India. However, the scheme did not approve the idea of a representative government. The main purpose was to introduce limited representation in the local government bodies. (Banglapaedia, 2006).

guarantee their representation in the elected bodies. As Muslim League leader Nawab Salimullah observed:

We want to secure the adequate representation of our community and interests. Under the election system now obtaining, the inevitable result has been a preponderance of the Hindu element in all the bodies ... Numerically strong though we are, our voters, are, it is an open secret, under the influence of the landlords, legal advisers or money-lenders who are mostly Hindus ... Separate communal representation will not give either party the least opportunity of bringing about a friction, and bound finally to promote harmonious cooperation between the two communities. (cited in Molla, 2001, p. 193).

The far reaching implication of this scheme was to acknowledge the social and economic backwardness of the Muslims vis-à-vis the Hindus and their status as “a nation within a nation” in India. The grant of a separate electorate to the Muslim community contributed to the further politicization of Muslim socio-economic demands. (Banglapaedia, 2006; Molla, 2001, pp. 190-3; Kabir, 1994, pp. 53-4; Ahmed, 1986, pp. 136-7; Ahmad, 2004, pp. 132-3).

II. Muslim nationalism (1911–47)

The annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911 was viewed by the Muslims as “an indication of [a] Hindu-British conspiracy to continue to deprive Muslims of opportunities for advancement”. (Khan, 1985, p. 841). As a result, the Muslim League leadership sharply reacted against the annulment decision while the British tried to pacify the Muslims by promising to establish a university in Dhaka and granted concessions for the protection of Muslim interests. Against this background, however, an important change took place within the Muslim League itself as its hitherto elitist leadership was replaced by one more representative of the interests and aspirations of the mass of now rural-based peasantry and the emerging Muslim middle class. This was also marked by a shift of the Muslim leadership towards organized and broad-based politics involving

the vast majority of the rural-based peasantry.¹⁶⁹ A.K. Fazlul Huq (1873–1962) emerged as the spokesman of this class and subsequently dominated Muslim politics in the 1920s and 1930s to press demands for the amelioration of Muslim socio-economic conditions.

The growing divide between the two communities, Hindu and Muslim, was reflected in the election results of various local government and district bodies held between 1918 and 1937. (Mallick and Husain, 2004, p. 189). It should, however, be noted that there were some attempts to achieve Hindu–Muslim rapprochement. These included the Khilafat-Non-cooperation Movement (1919–1924)¹⁷⁰, the Lucknow Pact (1916)¹⁷¹ and the Bengal Pact (1926). For example, the Bengal Pact¹⁷² was devised by Indian Congress leader C.R. Das (1870–1925) to accommodate the Muslim demands in proportion to their numerical majority and guaranteeing Muslims proportionate jobs in government employment. Again, such measures were meant to address the disadvantaged position of the Muslim community and their rights as a separate community in India. However,

¹⁶⁹ The early Muslim League leaders were Syed Ameer Ali, Nawab Salimullah and Nawab Ali Chowdhury who were Urdu-speaking and identified as Ashrafs. They were loyal leaders to the British colonial rulers and represented the conservative political and economic interests. After the 1911 annulment of Bengal partition, this leadership was under challenge by the rural-based Muslim middle class under A.K. Fazlul Huq (1873–1962).

¹⁷⁰ The Khilafat movement was often viewed as a pan-Islamic movement by some Indian Muslim *Ulema* groups to press the British Government to ensure the integrity of Islamic Khilafat in Turkey. The Indian Congress formed an alliance with this movement to gain strength in its nationalist cause against the colonial rulers and pursued a policy of non-cooperation with the British Government. The Khilafat Movement died down with the call off of the movement, the signing of the treaty of Lausanne in Europe and the abolition of the Caliphate by Mustafa Kamal Pasha. The movement brought the masses of the Muslims into politics for further advancement of their interests. (Ahmed, 1986, p. 138).

¹⁷¹ The Lucknow Pact was reached in 1916 between the Muslim League and the Indian Congress to join hands as part of their nationalist movement against the British rule. Both the parties agreed to put pressure on the colonial government to pursue a more liberal approach to India and grant more authority to the locals in administering the governance.

¹⁷² The terms of the Pact included the following: representation in the Bengal Legislative Council would be on population basis with separate electorates; representation in the local bodies would be on the proportion of 60 percent to the majority community and 40 percent to the minority community; regarding government appointments, it was decided that 55 percent of the appointments should go to the Muslims. Until the above percentage was attained, 80 percent of posts would go to the Muslims and the remaining 20 percent should go to the Hindus; no resolution or enactment would be allowed to move without the consent of 75 percent of the elected members of the affected community; music in processions would not be allowed in front of the mosques; no legislation in respect of cow killing for food would be taken up in the Council and endeavor should be made outside the Council to bring about an understanding between the two communities. Cow killing should be taken up in such a manner as not to wound the religious feelings of the Hindus and cow killing for religious purposes should not be interfered with. (Banglapaedia, 2006).

such measures were opposed by the Indian Congress leadership and Hindu nationalists. The prospect of Hindu–Muslim conciliation was short-lived and again deteriorated in the 1930s and 1940s – mainly due to communal mistrust which often burst out in sporadic riots over what Islam (2007, vol. 1, p. 22) calls “who get[s] what”.

As mentioned earlier, in the 1920s and 1930s there was a shift in the loci of power and decision-making in both the Hindu and Muslim communities. At the secondary level, both mid-ranking and lower-ranking middle-class representatives began to exert influence on the leadership of both Hindus and Muslims. This was evident in two types of constituencies: one was the class belonging to the *Zamindars*, landlords, money-lenders, business and other professionals, while the other included tenants, artisans and the peasants. The first group was mostly the Hindus while the majority of the second category was the Muslims. So the Hindu and Muslim communities each represented different economic and social strata, interests and classes. This was reflected in subsequent negotiations and agreements in the legislative bodies. Not surprisingly, the Muslim politicians claimed that the Hindu politicians served the interests of the privileged and Hindu classes and ignored the rights of the peasants and the artisans while the Hindus were more concerned with the status-quo.

Articulation of Muslim rights

Such divisive politics centering on opposing interests was apparent with the introduction of several bills in the Legislative Council. Thus, the Dhaka University Bill (1925), which was intended to guarantee a fixed grant in order to keep the university going for the educational uplift of the Muslim masses, was supported by the Muslim members while it was opposed by the Hindus. Such a conflict of interest was also evident in the case of the Bengal Primary Education Bill (1930) – the purpose of which was to uplift standards in the rural areas where Muslims were the majority. At the same time, the Hindu members of the Council opposed the appointments of Muslims to government offices by a quota system and insisted on appointments by competitive examinations only. Hindu members also acted in favor of the *Zamindars* and their (*Zamindars*) interests by

passing the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Bill (1925) and acted in the interests of the money-lenders by passing the Moneylenders Bill (1940). Hindu–Muslim opposition was also reflected in the Communal Award (1932)¹⁷³ which was supported by the Muslim members but challenged by the Hindus. Hindu and Muslim members also took opposite stands on the Agricultural Debtors' Bill (1935). The position of the Hindu members served to fuel discontent about the indifference of the Hindus towards their legitimate rights and claims. (Shah, 2007, p. 593; Islam, 2007, vol. 1, pp. 22–3).

In all these legislative skirmishes, the primary objective of the Muslim leadership was to extract political and economic advantage vis-à-vis the Hindus. Muslim politics centered on organizing demands for a separate electorate, a bigger share of jobs and alleviating the sufferings of the rural people at the hands of the Hindu landlords and money-lenders. The Muslim leaders consolidated their rule by articulating Muslim socio-economic grievances. On the other hand, Hindu leaders, mainly from the dominant Indian Congress leadership, consolidated their leadership by blocking or ignoring Muslim demands. Such a response further aroused an already growing Muslim consciousness and aspirations for a separate political community. In short, both communities were moving sharply in different directions to protect their own communal interests. (Mallick & Husain, 2004, p. 190).

Hindu–Muslim polarization was particularly manifested in Bengal's politics during the 1937 election to the Bengal legislative body held under the British India Act of 1935. In that election, A.K. Fazlul Huq emerged as a popular Muslim leader who represented the middle class and the peasantry

¹⁷³ On 4 August 1932, the British Prime Minister announced the Communal Award to grant a status to minority communities in India, including Muslims, Sikhs, and *Dalit* (then known as the Depressed Classes or Untouchables) in India. This was intended to take into account the demographic realities in Bengal and in this award Muslims and the other minorities were at an advantage at the expense of the urban-based Hindus. Out of the 250 members in the new Bengal Legislative Assembly, 119 were Muslims, 58 were caste Hindus, 30 from the Scheduled Castes and 25 were British. The Muslim leadership welcomed it while the Hindus opposed it. This was a conspicuous indication of the rivalry of interests between the two communities. (Ahmad, 2004, p. 139).

from rural areas through his party Krishok Proja Party (Peasant Tenant Party, KPP). During the election campaign, he championed the interests of the peasants and advocated radical rural reforms, including the abolition of the *Zamindari* and its exploitation. On the other hand, the Muslim League, which essentially protected the interests of the landed aristocracy and Muslim business class, emphasized the appeal of Islam and Muslim solidarity. Although Huq did not win a landslide victory, he formed a government in alliance with the Muslim League. The differences between the KPP and the Muslim League were based on programs rather than principles in advancing the Muslim interest vis-à-vis that of the Hindus. The significance of this alliance was that the Muslim League leadership gained access to the rural support base, i.e. the peasant masses of Bengal, to propagate their cause. Molla (2001, p. 194) observes:

The two together represented the Bengal Muslim community which constituted the majority of the population in the province. It seemed then that it was the fear of the Congress political domination and Hindu economic exploitation that brought the Muslim political forces together; Islam provided the rallying cry essentially in a power struggle in which one of the parties happened to be Muslims.

What this ministry under Huq did in the first instance was seize the opportunity to promote the socio-economic interests of the Muslim community, especially the peasants. Thus, the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Act of 1938 was enacted in the legislative body with the intention to curb the power of the Hindu *Zamindars* or landlords. The ministry also took steps to set up Debt Settlement Boards which aimed to relieve the burden of debts owed to the money-lenders, mostly Hindus. This was heartily welcomed by the peasants who reaped the relief of millions of rupees in debts. The Agricultural Debtor's (Second Amendment) Act of 1940 and the Bengal Moneylenders Act in the same year were also passed in order to give relief to the peasants from the harsh terms and conditions of the money-lenders. The Huq ministry also took steps to increase the quotas for Muslims in government employment. The size of the Bengal Civil Service was reduced and the Bengal Junior Civil Service was expanded to accommodate Muslim recruitment into the higher levels of government employment. The Huq administration also took a decision to reserve two-

third posts from among the eligible Muslim candidates for the post of Deputy Superintendent of Police. The provincial government also ensured 50 percent reservation of jobs for Muslims in all appointments of the provincial government. The new government also turned its attention to the education of the Muslim community, given the backwardness in education particularly at secondary level in that community. A new Secondary Board was constituted, separated from Calcutta University (formerly dominated by the Hindu intelligentsia), which enacted the Secondary Education Board Bill of 1940 to address the problem of Muslims in secondary education. The government also made generous grants to Muslim educational institutions including madrassahs and increased the number of seats reserved for Muslims in different schools and colleges. Huq was also involved in the foundation of many educational institutions for Muslims, including Islamia College (now renamed Maulana Azad College) in Calcutta, Lady Brabourne College in Calcutta, Wajid Memorial Girls' High School and Chakhar College in Barisal. (Kabir, 1995, pp. 80–83; Ahmad, 2004, pp. 238–42).

The steps outlined above enhanced the popularity of the new Muslim leadership, particularly in rural areas where the oppressive behavior of the *Zamindars* and money-lenders was reined in and Muslim children were given greater access to education. Muslims were also better placed to occupy jobs in the government. Not surprisingly, such measures by the new provincial government met intense opposition from the Hindu leadership who feared that they would lose their power base in rural areas because the dependency of the peasants on the *Zamindars* and the money-lenders would sharply decrease. Hindu leaders also feared that the education policy of the Huq government would facilitate the influx of an increased number of Muslim candidates to compete for employment where the Hindus already faced intense competition. In this vein, the Hindu leadership also identified the Secondary Education Bill as a “sinister” move on the part of the government. The overall result of such opposition from the Hindu leadership was to further widen

the differences between the two communities and increase the bitterness between them. (Kabir, 1994, p. 82).

Lahore Resolution and Muslim separatism

Against this background, the Lahore Resolution¹⁷⁴ was adopted on 23 March 1940, its aim being to incorporate the idea of Muslim separatism in politics. The Lahore Resolution stood to create more than one separate homeland for the Muslim majority provinces in the Northwest and Northeast Indian regions (East Bengal now Bangladesh). It clearly delineated the future of a Muslim destiny to reflect Muslim nationalism. However, the Lahore resolution was later amended in a meeting in Delhi in 1946 at the insistence of Jinnah to incorporate singular state instead of “states” – despite much opposition raised by Bengali Muslim League General Secretary Abul Hashim. Jinnah argued that multiple Muslim countries would be subject to Indian domination whereas a united country would become stronger despite ignoring the important cultural differences between the two wings¹⁷⁵ (Ahmed, 2012, p. 1). This was a particularly significant event in Muslim politics which determined political developments in the 1940s and led to the creation of a separate homeland. Although Huq was ousted from mainstream politics due to personality and leadership conflicts, the Muslim League utilized Huq’s links and contacts with mass-based Muslim politics in their push for Pakistan. (Kabir, 1994, p. 86).

Significantly, as Ahmed (2012, p. 1) asserts, the original resolution for the Pakistan movement clearly made reference to “independent” and “sovereign” states, not “Muslim” or “Islamic states”. This resolution became the basis of Muslim separatism essentially for political and economic, not religious, reasons. Kabir (1995, p. 86) also emphasizes that the word “Islam” was not included in

¹⁷⁴ The historical resolution declares, “Resolved that it is the considered view of this Session of the All-India Muslim League that no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principles, viz., that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial re-adjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North-Western and Eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute ‘Independent States’ in which the constituted units shall be autonomous and sovereign.” (History of Bangladesh War of Independence, 1982, vol. 1, p. 2).

¹⁷⁵ Such differences will be elaborated in Chapter 6 on Bengali nationalism.

the separatist politics of the Muslims, signifying that the main thrust of Muslim nationalism grew out of socio-economic “grievances of a minority to a movement of self-determination”.

Through the Lahore Resolution, the Muslim League leader Jinnah asserted his well-known “two-nation” theory on which India and Pakistan were created. According to Jinnah:¹⁷⁶

The problem is [that] India is not of an inter-communal but manifestly of an international character, and it must be treated as [such] ... The Hindus and the Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social, customs, and literature. They neither intermarry, nor interdine together, and indeed belong to two different civilizations which are based on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Their aspects on life and of life are different. It is quite clear that Hindus and Musalmans derive their inspirations from different sources of history. They have different epics, their heroes are different, and they have different episodes. Very often the hero of one is foe of the other, and likewise, and victories and defeats overlap. (cited in Kabir, 1994, p. 87).

This two nation theory was also pronounced by Jinnah later in his speech, in which he argued:

We are a nation of hundred millions and what is more, we are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of value and proportion, legal laws and moral codes, customs, and calendar, history and traditions aptitudes, and ambitions, in short, we have our distinctive outlook on life and of life. By all canons of International Law we are a nation. (cited in Kabir, 1994, p. 87).

An eagerness for socio-economic emancipation and the creation of Pakistan for Muslims

Against the background of such pronouncements, the Muslim League increasingly concentrated its efforts on building a separate homeland for the Muslims. Thus, Muslim politics in the 1940s was seized by the idea of a separate state for the Muslims who believed that their interests, primarily socio-economic in nature, would be only or better served if they had their own homeland. The impetus for this goal was provided by growth of the lower-middle class and particularly the

¹⁷⁶ This speech was delivered in the All India Muslim League (AIML) session in 1940 as a presidential address.

increased number of Muslim students¹⁷⁷ who became the medium of connection for mass mobilization in the demands of the Muslim League. The idea of a territorially separate Muslim country as manifested in the historical Lahore Resolution worked to what Kabir (1995, p. 92) calls “electrifying effect” in visualizing the destiny of Muslim identity which they had long cherished. A homeland not only served to satisfy the Muslim emotional vision but also appeared materially promising. Importantly, for the middle class the attraction of an independent homeland was mainly motivated by material interests, not by religion. At the same time, however, Islam provided the common bond or foci to mobilize the masses and free them from the perceived exploitation of the Hindu middle class and ambitious Hindu aristocrats. As Ahmed (1986, p. 138) points out, the idea of Pakistan was not a religious movement; rather, it was essentially a political movement of the Muslim League, which had origins in the fears of Hindu domination affecting Muslim material interests. Significantly, this was evident in the vision of Pakistan which did not seek to establish an Islamic state or a theocracy. Indeed the leaders of the Muslim League themselves were not renowned for their Islamic credentials. As a result, orthodox Muslim organizations, including Majlish-i-Ahrar and Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind, and their leaders were critical of the Muslim League and stayed away from giving support to its cause on the grounds that its leaders were not Islamic.

In a broader context, Hindu–Muslim difference also served the British imperial interests. The British rulers took this state of affairs as an opportunity to play one group off against the other in order to perpetuate their broad colonial interests. Thus, a British official, John Stracey, wrote in 1888:

The truth plainly is that the existence side by side of these hostile creeds is one of the strong points in our political position in India. The better classes of Mohammedans are already a source to us of strength and not of weakness, and a continuously wise policy might, I believe, make them strong

¹⁷⁷ The partition of Bengal in 1905 already facilitated the increased number of Muslim students in educational institutions. The establishment of Dhaka University further boosted their number at higher education level. According to statistics, the total number of students increased by 100 percent between 1922 and 1937. Their share also rose sharply at the higher education level. The number of Muslim students grew 10 times in professional colleges from 1922 to 1937. This trend was further accelerated with the educational reforms undertaken by the Huq’s provincial ministry following the 1937 election. (Kabir, 1994, pp. 89–90).

and important supporters of our power. They constitute a small but energetic minority of the population, whose political interests are identical with us, and who, under no conceivable circumstances, would prefer Hindu dominion to our own. (cited in Ahmed, 1986, p. 136).

Such an attitude was representative of British colonial views towards Muslim politics in British India and was apparent in the introduction by the colonial rulers of policies and mechanisms such as the census and the allocation of resources. The allocation of resources along religious lines was a particularly potent way of securing the loyalties of colonial subjects. At a 'higher level' the British employed the strategy of 'divide and rule' by choosing to form an alliance with the Muslims who were already dissatisfied with the Hindu *Zamindars* and money-lenders. Such an *entente* also contributed to the separatist politics of the Muslims that ended up with the creation of Pakistan in 1947 where Eastern Bengal became a part.

Standing back from the detail above, this chapter has explored from the preceding discussions that a Muslim consciousness developed in the face of perceived attack from Hindu nationalists and Christian missionaries and the religion-based colonial policies. Significantly, however, such religious sentiment had its origin in the poor socio-economic conditions of the Muslim people vis-à-vis the Hindus. The Muslim middle class and peasants joined the struggle against the oppression of the Hindu landlords and money-lenders. Muslim support for Pakistan in the 1946 election arose mainly out of a desire to escape Hindu socio-economic oppression, certainly not to create an Islamic Pakistan that might deny their socio-economic aspirations. Religion became intertwined in the psyche of the Bengali Muslims, but religion was used as a vehicle for tactical purposes by the elite leadership to mobilize the masses. Noted author Kamruddin Ahmad summarized the situation thus:

Muslim officers who could not expect any promotion in India because of senior and more efficient Hindu officers, expected to get speedier promotions in Pakistan. The Muslim traders and industrialists, who could not hope to flourish competing with the more experienced and clever

Hindu traders and industrialists in India backed [the] Pakistan movement for the same reasons.

(cited in Mallick & Husain, 2004, p. 191).

Importantly, however, the movement for Pakistan did not develop any concrete plan for the future state nor constitute any intellectual basis for the formation and modalities of such a homeland. As a result, the Pakistan movement was negative nationalism. Indeed Kamal (2007, p. 336) termed Pakistanism a “euphemism for anti-colonialism and anti-Brahmanism” grown out of perceived socio-economic deprivations of the Muslim community. Beyond this negativism, there was no clear vision as to the character, ideology and religious identity of the imagined Pakistani state. This lack of political vision engulfed Pakistan right from the start.

The discussion will now focus the state of affairs in Pakistan from 1947 to 1971 in relation to Eastern Bengal, known as East Pakistan. In particular this will deal with the role played by Islam beyond the foci of Muslim marginalization and whether in the new context of Pakistan Islam, in turn, became from a Bengali point of view a new source of oppression and, ultimately, a profound negative in the definition of Bengali nationalism.

III. Pakistan period (1947–71) – struggle against ‘internal colonialism’

From the beginning of the creation of Pakistan, the Bengali people felt that their national aspirations were not taken into account. The Bengali people gave support to the concept of Pakistan based on the original Lahore Resolution¹⁷⁸ in favor of creating two autonomous and sovereign states instead of one state for the Muslims in India. Pakistani Muslim League leader Mohammad Ali Jinnah crafted his concept of a unitary “truncated Pakistan” in the last days of the

¹⁷⁸ The state of Pakistan deviated from the original Lahore Resolution adopted in 1940. The original resolution specified the creation of “independent states”, clearly one in the North-Western regions of Panjab, Sind, Baluchistan and the North Western Frontier Province and the other in the East comprising the whole of Bengal and Assam. However, in early 1946 at the Muslim League legislators’ convention held in Delhi, a change was made in the Lahore Resolution, undertaking an amendment for creating one state instead of two for the Muslims despite the opposition of the Muslim League leaders from Bengal. Abul Hashim, who was the General Secretary of Bengal Provincial Muslim League, was present in the meeting and raised objection to the amendment. The objection was, however, rejected by the Muslim Leader Mohammad Ali Jinnah. (Ahmed, 1986, p. 145).

separatism movements by the Muslims. However, with the creation of Pakistan, the Bengali people cherished the hope for what Islam (2007, vol. 1, p. 24) calls “equal partnership” with Pakistan to address the common causes which they stood for during the colonial period. But from its inception, this partnership did not develop; rather, it demonstrated incompatibility on most levels and issues. This was most apparent in the Bengali quest for identity, autonomy and economic parity with West Pakistan throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Some of the issues were deeply connected with the struggles of the Bengalis for their socio-economic emancipation during the British India period while a new dimension was added following Bengali disillusion with Pakistan and the quest for self-determination, leading to the birth of Bangladesh. Socio-economic and political disparities were major factors in the nationalist quest for self-determination – disparities along with the marginalization of Bengali identity and culture that shaped the character of Bengali nationalism. The discussion now turns to a survey of these issues.

Socio-economic disparity

Following the creation of Pakistan, there was an emigration of Hindu *Zaminidars* and businessmen, particularly from East Pakistan – the resulting gap being filled by Bengalis in the lower and middle strata of economic activity. The upper stratum was occupied by the non-Bengali West Pakistani Muslims. On the other hand, West Pakistan saw the influx of a rich Muslim class mainly from north India to various trading and business activities. The *Zamindari* system was abolished in East Pakistan but continued in the West where the powerful landlord class remained intact. Indeed this class also incorporated or at least was closely aligned, at the higher levels, with the interests of the army and civil administration. This ‘power elite’ in government and administration actively sought to protect and promote their own interests. The resulting disparity contributed to the sense of exploitation by the new non-Bengali groups.

The gulf between East and West was further widened by the centralization of government functions and the headquarters of major financial institutions in West Pakistan. Such a situation

enabled the West Pakistanis to use state machineries for their own interests. East Pakistan saw a number of industries established by West Pakistanis, which were of little benefit for Bengalis who were employed mainly as low level workers while managerial positions were occupied by West Pakistanis. The West Pakistanis also drained raw materials from the East at low cost for the benefit of the West. (Shah, 2007, p. 597).

Such exploitation and disparity led to a feeling that the East was subject to a form of 'internal colonialism' by the West. Such experience is every bit as odious, more so, than that under British colonial rule. This was aptly put in an article published in *Foreign Affairs* by noted analyst Sydney Schanberg (1971, p. 129) who observed:

Though the east [is the] the majority wing – 71 million people compared to the West's 61 population – the West, where the government is based, received the overwhelming proportion of development funds, factories, public-work projects, foreign aid, imports and defense facilities. Prices are higher in the East, but income lower. The jute and other exports from the East brought in more than half of Pakistan's foreign exchange and paid for the raw materials that kept the West's factories going. The East was also the main market for the West's products... Bengali nationalists complained that the colonial exploitation of their land under the West Pakistanis was worse than under the British a generation before. (also cited in Bangladesh Documents vol. I, pp. 1–6).

A brief survey will suffice to highlight the extent of the disparities between the economies of East and West Pakistan and the growth of those disparities since independence. When Pakistan was born, East Bengal was regarded as economically 'advanced' by many indicators. However, soon after independence, some key economic sectors in Bengal became stagnant, while others deteriorated. Conversely the economy of the West progressed often at the expense of the East. This picture was evident in a number of areas. According to government statistics¹⁷⁹, textile production in East Bengal was higher in 1947 compared to West Pakistan. But in two decades after independence, textile production did not grow at all and indeed declined sharply in East Bengal.

¹⁷⁹ The comparative figures were accounted for in *Twenty Years of Pakistan* by the Central Statistical Office published in Karachi in 1968.

Sugar production in East Bengal also fell while the West saw a dramatic increase of 300 percent in that commodity. This picture was also apparent in the other areas of industrial and agricultural development and in the concentration of wealth. The West Pakistani business community controlled the industrial bases of both East and West Pakistan. About 66 percent of industrial profits, 97 percent of the insurance funds and 80 percent of the banks were concentrated in the hands of some 20 families based in the West during the 1960s. This shift in resources and wealth occurred largely as a result of preferential treatment towards the West, mainly through granting licenses and permits and other protective measures by the ruling elite of the West. (Kabir, 1994, pp. 162–5).

A group of scholars based in Vienna prepared a detailed comparative picture of the two economies of East and West Pakistan in 1971. The report¹⁸⁰ was prepared in accordance with different official statistics. According to this account¹⁸¹, East Pakistan contributed about 60 percent as revenue to the annual budget; yet it was allocated only 25 percent for its expenditure. On the other hand, the West provided only 40 percent to the central exchequer and yet received about 75 percent as expenditure in the budget. Regarding foreign trade and earnings, the East earned 59 percent of the export income, while its imports constituted only 3 percent to cover expenses for basic consumer goods. Conversely, the West's contribution to the total export earnings was about 41 percent while it was allowed to spend about 70 percent of the foreign exchange. Of these funds, a major portion was spent on development projects in the West. Inter-zonal trade reflected an equally dim picture. In the period 1964–69, exports from the West to the East amounted to 5,292 million Pakistani rupees while from the East to the West it was 3,174 million rupees. Regarding the allocation of funds for development projects, West Pakistan received about 77

¹⁸⁰ This was published in the Bangladesh Documents (vol. 1) by Singh et al. (1971 pp. 15–22). The report was made in accordance with official and other sources, including National Planning Commission, *20 Years of Pakistan*, Central Bureau of Education, Central Board of Revenue, Department of Investment Promotion, *Pakistan Year Book, 1970*, Marine Fisheries Department, Pakistan Economic Survey, Government of Pakistan Budgets, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, and *Development Prospects of Pakistan* (by a Norwegian economist).

¹⁸¹ The detailed account has been furnished in Appendix 13.

percent of the total allocation for its 40 percent population while East Pakistan got only 40 percent allocation for the remaining population. This uneven allocation of funds boosted economic activities in West Pakistan while East Pakistan lagged further behind. In the field of new industries, the West saw new investments at the rate of 75 percent while in the East it was 25 percent and it was estimated that the total transfer of resources from East to West amounted to £3000 million during the Pakistani period, all of which highlights the huge transfer of resources from the East to the West. (cited in Bangladesh Documents, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 15–22).

The growing disparities between the two economies of East and West Pakistan and transfer of resources from the former to the latter were equally stark in the education and employment sectors. From the 1947–48 to 1968–69 period, the number of primary schools increased in West Pakistan from 8,413 to 39,418 (by 450 percent) while in the Eastern wing this figure actually decreased from 29,663 to 28,308. Such a shift again indicated the priority of the central government to allocate funds for the Western wing while neglecting the East, despite the fact that the population of East Pakistan was increasing. The growth of colleges and universities was also evident in the West wing. For example, at the university level the number of students increased from 654 students and two universities to 18,708 students and six universities in West Pakistan. On the other hand, in the Eastern wing, the statistics were 1620 students at one university to 8,831 students at four universities. In West Pakistan, student numbers rose by 30 times while in the East it was only five times. Such a disparity was reflected throughout the education system. (cited in Bangladesh Documents, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 15–22).

Employment presented the same grim picture of disparity and discrimination. Recruitment to government employment was in control of the West Pakistanis and, since the headquarters and head offices were based in the West, West Pakistanis favored their own candidates. It was also not practical for the Bengalis to compete for the vacant positions given the barrier of geography. As a result, Bengalis found little representation in the government and other such employment. For

example, in the central civil service 84 percent of positions were filled by the West Pakistanis while only 16 percent were occupied by the East Pakistanis. The same pattern was evident in the defense forces. In the army, the recruitment from the West was 95 percent while only 5 percent from East Pakistan. Out of the total budget, about 60 percent was spent on defense and of this total allocation about 80 percent went to the military contractors and armed personnel based in West Pakistan. (Bangladesh Documents, vol. 1, 1971, p. 15–22).

The growing and huge disparities between East and West and shift of resources from the former to the latter provoked a deep sense of alienation and disillusionment on the part of Bengalis with the Pakistani state which they saw as being as rapacious and exploitative as their former Hindu and British oppressors in colonial times. This feeling was compounded in the 1965 India-Pakistan war when all the defense forces were concentrated in the Western wing to protect West Pakistan while the Eastern wing remained unprotected. Although India did not launch an attack on the Eastern wing, it sent a clear message to the East that it was subject to the West even in matters of defense. All of which indicated to Bengalis that not only were they second class citizens but they had swapped one form of colonialism for another. (Islam, 2007, vol. 1, p. 25).

Quest for autonomy and democracy

Since its inception, the Pakistani ruling elite, who were mostly from the Western wing, showed no major sign of respecting democratic traditions and building institutions. The resultant alienation in the East culminated in the articulation of several movements for a quest first for autonomy and then democracy. The harsh reaction of the ruling elite to these movements only gave them further impetus that ultimately led to the secession of East Pakistan.

After independence in 1947, the Muslim League, which grew out of a mass-based middle class in Bengal which supported the Pakistan cause under the garb of Muslim nationalism, began to centralize its leadership and excluded Bengali leaders. Most notably was Bengali leader A.K. Fazlul Huq who emerged as the champion of Muslim nationalism in British Bengal. Other prominent

leaders like Suhrawardy were also sidelined. As a result, the growing Bengali middle class did not have any role or voice in the subsequent Muslim League leadership which was in control of the Urdu-speaking elite class of West Pakistan. Thus, the first central cabinet, which was constituted in 1947 by Jinnah, was essentially a “non-Bengali body”.¹⁸² In addition, Jinnah consolidated all the power in his own hands in his role of Governor-General.¹⁸³ The cabinet did not have any significant influence in the decision making. Such a centralization of power created frustration among the growing middle class including the newly mobilized peasants and workers in East Bengal, who did not have any avenue to articulate their grievances. (Kabir, 1994, pp. 144–45).

As the language controversy grew in 1948 out of the decision to impose Urdu as lingua franca, and the sense of marginalization and exploitation grew in the East, the disgruntled Bengali middle class began to lose its emotional attachment to Muslim nationalism, the euphoria of Pakistan and the slogans of Islam associated with it. Under the circumstances, the Bengali leadership felt pressure to form a parallel political organization to the Muslim League, the Awami Muslim League (later Awami League), in 1949, with Maolana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani as its President. Later this party led the mass mobilization that represented Bengali interests at different times of Pakistani rule. The Awami League challenged the Muslim League’s leadership of the Pakistani elites and defeated the Muslim League in the 1954 provincial election in Bengal where the United Front, an alliance of Bengali-interest parties, won a landslide victory.¹⁸⁴ In that election the United Front brought forth a 21-point program, which, among other things, demanded regional autonomy for East Bengal based on the Lahore Resolution (point 19)¹⁸⁵ and the acceptance of Bengali as a state language (point 1). This victory was a clear rejection of the Muslim League leadership, ideology and

¹⁸² The first cabinet incorporated two members from East Bengal; one was Jogendranath Mandal (1904–64), a Scheduled Caste Hindu, and the other did not represent the Bengali interests.

¹⁸³ The London-based *The Economist* in its 19 July 1947 issue commented, by assuming the position of Governor General Jinnah took over power in one hand and began his dictatorship.

¹⁸⁴ The Awami League formed an alliance with *Krishak Praja Party* (Peasants and Tenant Party) and won 300 seats out of 309. (Mallick & Husain, p. 142).

¹⁸⁵ The autonomy demand was raised on the basis of the Lahore Resolution of 1940 which envisaged a federal government to retain only three subjects, namely defense, foreign affairs and currency, with autonomy to the federal units.

the type of governance. The quest for such autonomy gained pace and became a broad-based movement. (Mallick and Husain, 2004, pp. 195–96; Ahmed, 1991, p. 31).

The reaction of the Muslim League leadership to these developments was suppression and a sidelining of the Eastern wing as the League “ruled by decrees”. Such a reaction and rejection of a constitutional framework only further antagonized and aroused the resentment of Bengalis. (Islam, 2007, vol. 1, p. 24). As Ahmed (1986, p. 142) observes, “The politics of Pakistan had degenerated into intrigue. The ruling clique which was predominantly West Pakistani in composition maintained itself in power by playing one group against the other and using the name of Islam for political purpose [s].”

Faced with this situation, the Bengali leadership continued to press for constitutional progress and institution-building to limit the dictatorial authority of the ruling elites. India framed its own Constitution within three years of its independence but Pakistan was not ready to initiate the process until the 1950s. The first concrete step in that direction was made in 1950 where an Interim Report on the Basic Principle Committee, known as the Liaquat Report, proposed an authoritarian central government with bicameral legislature – an arrangement, however, which denied adequate representation for the numerical majority of East Bengal.¹⁸⁶ Given the realities of geographical barriers and cultural and ethnic differences, this formulation limited autonomy and was not acceptable to the Bengali leadership who considered it a move to “impose a colonial type of administration in East Bengal” and called for a federal form of government based on the Lahore Resolution with adequate freedom for the province. (Kabir, 1994, p. 148). A Bengali newspaper, the *Daily Azad*, in its 30 September 1950 issue noted the report would have “turned [East Pakistan]

¹⁸⁶ The Liaquat Report envisaged a system of government with concentration of power at the center and a bicameral legislature which ignored the numerical majority of the Bengali population. It also declared Urdu as the state language although it represented the minority people’s language. The Bengali language was denied. Moreover, the central government was in firm control of the provincial government, having no significant scope for self-determination. Given the geographical distance and the cultural differences, such a limit on the provincial autonomy was not in accordance with their aspirations. (Ahmed, 1991; Kabir, 1994, p. 147).

into a colony and East Pakistanis would be forced to live like aliens in their own country". Such a situation sparked a vehement protest in East Bengal, particularly from the dissatisfied middle class and students, who aspired to secure their interests through constitutional means. In the face of such agitation, the report was cancelled and a new Constitution was adopted in 1956 which was a quasi-federal type¹⁸⁷, guaranteeing Bengali as one of the state languages. It also included a, in principle, goal to remove the economic disparity between the two provinces and ensure more equal development.¹⁸⁸ According to the new framework, an election was proposed to take place in 1959 in which the Bengalis would have elected their own President and formed a cabinet in the central government which would address their socio-economic plight vis-à-vis the West Pakistanis. (Ahmed, 1991, pp. 42–58).

Such hoped for progress was dealt a harsh blow, however, with the imposition of military rule by the West Pakistani army and its leader General Ayub Khan in 1958 which frustrated the democratic aspirations of the Bengali people. Earlier, the dismissal of the Huq ministry in 1954 immediately after the election, and the establishment of one unit in West Pakistan in 1956¹⁸⁹, was a harbinger of the West's policy of denial of rights of the Bengali people. The military ruler, Ayub Khan, introduced an authoritarian Constitution in 1962 and adopted a system of "Basic Democracy"¹⁹⁰ which virtually promoted a dictatorship under a democratic garb. It did not, however, ensure adequate power of the National Assembly or independence of the judiciary and made the executive all powerful. (Ahmed, 1986, p. 143).

¹⁸⁷ Although the Constitution was adopted in 1956, the demand for full autonomy was still vivid in the movements of Bengali leadership. Thus, Maolana Bhashani reiterated the demand for full autonomy in 1957 leaving only three subjects, i.e. foreign policy, defense and currency, with the central government. He remarked that if the demand for autonomy was not met he would be compelled to say, "*Assalamo Alaikum*" (to bid goodbye) to West Pakistan. (Kabir, 1994, p. 170). This was an indication of the growing frustration of the Bengali leadership who began to think of secession for their self-determination.

¹⁸⁸ The principles were incorporated in the Directive Principles of State Policy. These were, however, made constitutional obligations having no enforcement mechanism.

¹⁸⁹ The four provinces of West Pakistan were made one Unit as West Pakistan, and East Bengal as East Pakistan as the other unit. This was apparently intended to form an alliance among West Pakistanis against the growing democratic aspirations of the Bengalis.

¹⁹⁰ This was known as controlled democracy where the people did not have the right to elect their representatives in the parliament. This was intended to legitimize the authority of the central government and perpetuate the Ayub's military dictatorship.

In response to these developments Bengali leadership began agitation for a system of parliamentary democracy based on adult franchise and direct elections which it hoped would guarantee their due voice in the governance of the country. At this stage, the Awami League leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who emerged as the champion of Bengali interests, put forward the historic Six-Point Program on 23 March 1966, known as the charter of survival for political and economic development of the Bengali people within a broad democratic framework. The key Six-Point Demands¹⁹¹ were:

1. The Constitution should provide for a federation of Pakistan in the true sense on the basis of the Lahore resolution and for a Parliamentary form of Government based on the supremacy of [a] duly elected legislature on the basis of universal adult franchise.
2. The Federal Government shall deal with only two subjects – defence and foreign affairs – with all residuary subjects vested in the federating states.
3. There should be either two separate freely convertible currencies for the two wings or one currency with two separate Reserve Banks to prevent inter-wing flight of capital.
4. The power of taxation and revenue collection shall be vested in the federating units. The Federal Government will receive a share to meet its financial obligations.
5. Economic disparities between the two wings shall disappear through a series of economic, fiscal and legal reforms.
6. A militia or para-military force must be created in East Pakistan, which at present has no defence of its own. (cited in Bangladesh Documents, 1971, vol. 1, p. 2).

The Six-Point Demand was nothing new, but a continuation of Bengali demands over some time. This program captured the imagination of the Bengali middle class, particularly the students, professionals and entrepreneurs who found their aspirations encapsulated in it. Soon the Six-Point Demand sparked a mass movement and spontaneous mobilization¹⁹² which was evident in the

¹⁹¹ For details of the Six-Point Demands, see Bangladesh Documents (1971, vol. 1, pp. 22–33).

¹⁹² The mass movement reached its climax when a province-wide *Hartal* (general strike) was observed on 7 June 1966, which paralyzed East Pakistan. This event showed a direct confrontation between the ruling elites

observance of a general strike in East Pakistan on 7 June 1966. In the face of subsequent intense agitation, the Pakistani army dictator Ayub Khan had to bow to the mass movements¹⁹³ and hand over power to General Yahya Khan in 1969.

Towards Bangladesh

The agitation centering on the Six-Point Demands set the stage for the secession of East Pakistan. The new military ruler General Yahya conceded to the demands of Bengali agitation, declaring his assumption of power was temporary and that he would hold a general election for the national assembly that would be responsible for drafting a new Constitution. Schanberg (1971, pp. 128–29) asserts that two important events crystallized the bitterness between the two wings and the move towards Bangladesh.

The first was a catastrophic cyclone which hit the southern parts of East Bengal in November 1970. It left tens of thousands of people dead¹⁹⁴ and damaged much property. However, the central government showed “indifference and even callousness towards their [Bengalis] plight”. The poor response of the central government encouraged the Bengalis’ belief that West Pakistani ruling elites simply used the “religious fraternity” for their own interests and remained apathetic to the humanitarian needs of the Bengalis. These events greatly stoked anti-Pakistani feeling in the general election which was held in December 1970 in which the Awami League won a landslide victory. The Awami League, which ran on a single issue of autonomy for East Pakistan based on the Six-Point Demands, achieved 167 seats out of an allocated 300. The detail of results is given in Appendix 14.

The second event that also played a catalytic role towards independence was the election results themselves. The army junta General Yahya and his clique believed that the elections would not be

and the Bengalis, where a number of protesters were killed by the police. Soon the agitation spread to the countryside.

¹⁹³ Awami League leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was put behind bars for an alleged conspiracy known as the “Agartala Conspiracy”. Later he was released from jail in the face of the mass movements of 1968–69.

¹⁹⁴ According to an estimate, about 50,000 people were killed in one of worst cyclones. (cited in Kabir, 1994, p. 178).

favorable to any party that would challenge their continued command and control of power. The rising tide of Bengali nationalism¹⁹⁵ reflected in the 1970 election made the army junta what Ahmed (1986, p. 143) termed “unnerved” and “unwilling” to hand over power to Awami League leadership, despite it having won a majority and thereby a mandate to frame the future Constitution. Under the circumstances, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called for non-cooperation with the junta and in a public gathering on 7 March 1971 declared “the struggle this time is for liberation, the struggle of [for] us this time is for our independence”. (History of the Bangladesh War of Independence Documents, 1982, vol. 2, p. 702). In response, the ruling elite sought a military solution and staged a crackdown on 25 March 1971 that marked the final and decisive turning point in the long history of Bengali nationalism. After a nine month war, Bangladesh became independent on 16 December 1971.

Conclusion

British colonial policies in Bengal, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, transformed class and ethnic-religious relationships so that in the context of Bengal the economic conditions of the Muslim peasantry and artisan class (*Atrafs*) worsened in relation to their local Hindu counterpart peasantry and particularly *Zamindars* who accumulated wealth and position out of partnership with colonial interests. In these circumstances, religion/Islam provided a focus for the profound socio-economic grievances of Bengali Muslims. Significantly, however, that focus of discontent, most notably

¹⁹⁵ In the election, the Awami League invoked the passion for Bengali nationalism by using themes, symbols and slogans to reinforce their deep concern for Bengali identity and bitterness towards internal colonialism perpetrated by the West Pakistanis. The Awami League leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman resorted to a systematic use and manipulation of the symbols of linguistic identity and the sources of Bengali culture in the 1970s. In his speeches, he often used the term “Bangladesh”, “Joy Bangla” (Long Live Bangladesh). Some of the slogans used throughout the 1970s included “Tomar Amar Thikana, Padma, Meghna, Jamuna” (Your and my origin comes from Bengal’s mighty rivers, the Padma, Meghna and Jamuna), “Dhaka Na Pindi, Dhaka, Dhaka” (We stand for Dhaka, not for Pindi), “Punjab Na Bangla, Bangla, Bangla” (We stand for Bengal, not for the Punjab of West Pakistan), “Amar Desh Tomar Desh, Bangladesh, Bangladesh” (My country, your country, Bangladesh, Bangladesh). Tagore’s songs were often played at important meetings and gatherings. One of those songs was made the national anthem of independent Bangladesh. The Bengali nationalism evolved into a cultural fervour merging with the territorial notion, which was manifested in the use of these slogans. (Mallick & Husain, 2004, p. 199–200; Kabir, 1994, p. 177).

through the *Faraizi Movement*, frayed, as its leaders advocated a more purist Islam, at odds with the syncretistic and folk Islam characteristics of rural Bengal.

The partition by the British colonial power of Bengal in 1905 and its annulment in 1911 exacerbated the Hindu–Muslim divide, particularly as annulment prompted a further deterioration of the socio-economic position of Bengal Muslims. In those circumstances, Islam, again, became a focus for the socio-economic and political emancipation of Muslims in the ‘Pakistan movement’, itself a euphemism for anti-colonialism and anti-Brahmanism. However, in the new context of Pakistan, Islam, in turn, became, from a Bengali point of view, a new source of political and socio-economic suppression or internal colonialism.

Thus, religion/Islam has a mixed record in the political but particularly socio-economic emancipation of Bengalis, and more recently (during the Pakistan era and the struggle for independence) a particularly negative and oppressive one. This, as will be dealt with in the following chapter, has had important implications for the character of Bengali nationalism and the place of Islam within it.

Chapter 6

Islam in Bangladesh: Impact of Bengali Nationalism

Introduction

This chapter examines the basis of Bengali nationalism, how it defined the Bengali state and the broader implications for relations between the state and Islam. It begins with an exploration of the distinctive features that contributed to the formation of a homogenous society with a distinctive identity in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent. It then shows how the two main elements in the evolution of Bengali nationalism, Islam and Bengali culture, emerged at different points in response to challenges. Islam, as has been explained, assumed a higher profile in the Bengali response to colonial rule and associated exploitation by Hindu landlords but, as this chapter will highlight, Bengali culture more broadly (in its cultural, linguistic and secular components) assumed a higher profile during the Pakistan period of 1947–71. Those components came to the fore in the Bengali response to the imposition of Urdu in the name of Islam by the West Pakistan ruling elite on East Pakistan – a policy viewed by Bengalis as a form of ‘internal colonialism’. This would be determinative in the relationship between the Bengali people and state with perceived ‘foreign’ Islamic influences and their deep aversion to such influences.

Pre-colonial Bengal

A number of factors contributed to the growth of a distinctive Bengali culture and identity that would subsequently become important elements in the development of Bengali nationalism. Environment, occupation, exposure over a long period to other cultures and religions (particularly Islam) were important influences, as were other factors, notably geography, politics and divisions within Islam itself that contributed to Bengal’s independence status and a ‘Bengali state of mind’.

Since ancient times, the Bengalis were regarded by the non-Bengali Brahmins as deviated Hindus for not observing the strict rituals of Hinduism. Shah (2007, p. 566) opines that the ‘relaxed’

Bengali response to Brahmin rule was largely a result of the isolation of the region from the seat of Guptas (320 to 550 AD) and other Hindu rulers, which meant such rule was of necessity light and 'accommodative'.

The lush tropical environment of Bengal meant that most people were engaged in agricultural activities, fishing, boating, wood-cutting, cotton weaving, oil pressing and such like. People of different classes, castes and beliefs took on these occupations, all of which contributed to what Shah (2007, p. 70) calls "emergence of a Bengali ethnic unit" in the region. In his description of the southern part of Bengal, a European salt merchant, Meredith Parker (of the 19th century), noted:

It need scarcely be observed that everywhere people dwelling on the frontiers of great forests, the pioneers before whose patches these forests recede, people who dwell in islands surrounded by broad and dangerous rivers, or on the sea-shore, are noted, as compared with their fellow-countrymen in other parts of the same land, for hardihood and roughness of character, nor am I inclined to believe that Bengal offers any exception to this nearly general rule. (cited in Islam, vol. III, 2007, p. 14).

The environment, and the challenge of agricultural activity within it, shaped social and religious institutions in the village society and the disposition of the people – a people characterized as individualistic, adventurous and assertive, but who were also open and hospitable to alien culture and adapted it in their own way to what Islam (vol. III, 2007, p. 16) describes as an adjustment and fine-tuning on "everything from cow dung to philosophical and cosmological abstractions".

In this context, as has been noted previously (chapter 4), Bengal absorbed other cultural influences and religion, principally Islam, all of which added to and strengthened its unique and independent character. In that regard, Bengal came in contact with Arabic and Persian culture even before the Muslim conquest of the early 13th century. According to historians, various coins of the Abbasids from the 9th to 12th centuries were discovered from the ancient Buddhist monasteries at Paharpur and Mainamati. (Shah, 2007, p. 569). This demonstrates that Eastern Bengal had long and commercial relations with the Arabians and Persians during the ancient period. This was possible

because of the strategic importance of Chittagong Port of Bengal, which was mainly used by the Arabian and Persian merchants to further trade with China and Southeast Asia. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 2). According to noted historian Professor Sirajul Islam (personal communication, 2011), the primary interest of the Muslim traders was to promote trading and to win the hearts and minds of the local people. This positive image of the Arabians and the Persians facilitated, as discussed previously, the spread of Islam during the subsequent influx of Muslim missionaries or Sufi saints from the Middle East. Such circumstances were central to the evolution of Bengalized Islam.

On the political front, an important feature of Bengal was its independent status throughout its medieval history, particularly during the independent Sultanat period¹⁹⁶, when the provincial governors revolted against the central administration of Delhi when they found an opportunity. This status continued from the 14th century with some minor exceptions until the Mughals established their control in the late 16th century. Historians attributed this long and unique independent status of Bengal to a number of factors. First, Bengal was far away from Delhi and it was almost impossible for the Delhi-based rulers to subjugate Bengal. Second, Bengal was a vast area with immense resources marked by swamps and hundreds of rivers and deep jungles. This posed a significant geographical barrier to invasion as the difficulties of communications also added to the ability of local rulers to retain their independence. In such circumstances, mutual interdependence reinforced a liberal and tolerant relationship between rulers and ruled. (Karim, 2007, p. 49).

Divisions within Islam and the primary concern of Muslim rulers to safeguard their own parochial and territorial interests also contributed to Bengal's independent status. Although the rulers of Delhi and Bengal were Muslim, they had no interest in the concepts of Islamic brotherhood or pan-Islamism. The military and political interests of their own dynasty in the Indian subcontinent were

¹⁹⁶ From the middle of the 14th century, Bengal remained independent from Delhi-based Muslim rule up until 1576 when the Mughals under Emperor Akbar established their formal control. In most of its medieval age, Bengal could withstand the foreign conquests on several occasions, particularly from the Delhi-based Muslim rulers.

paramount. Akhtaruzzaman (2002, p. 341) argues parochialism and independence were mainly a result of “racial conflict between the Turks and the Khiljis” which was at odds with notions of Islamic fraternity as propagated by political Islam. The Khiljis of Afghan origin conquered Bengal in the 13th century in order to create a separate homeland of their own against Turkish rule based in Delhi. However, when the Turks controlled Bengal, the Khiljis ruled Delhi and kept their distance from each other, forming “two antagonistic camps”.¹⁹⁷

According to Karim (2007, pp. 49–51), Bengal was divided and ruled by different administrators during the Sultanat period until when Shams-ud-din Ilyas Shah who reigned 1342–1358 united the whole of Bengal under one unit independent from the central authority of Delhi. That independent status continued until 1576 when Daud Khan Karrani lost power to the Mughals who inherited this centralized administration of Bengal from the Karrani but gave Bengal the status of Subah¹⁹⁸ in the framework of the Mughal Empire. The importance the Mughals gave Bengal was evident in the appointment of the emperor’s sons, relatives or very trusted officers to the territory. But again in the latter period of the Delhi-based Mughal Empire, the central authority began to lose control over Bengal. The Nawabs became virtual rulers independent of the central authority until the British East India Company subdued and conquered Bengal in 1757 in the Battle of Plassey and the era of British colonial rule began.

Thus, it demonstrates how environment and a long period of exposure to other cultural influences (including Islam), geography and politics all contributed to the development of a homogeneous society which, for long periods of time, enjoyed an independent status. Such conditions forged a strong Bengali consciousness and a separate “state of mind” of which culture, language and

¹⁹⁷ Although both the rulers of Delhi and Bengal were Muslim, they were primarily inimical to each other for political reasons. The Delhi-based Muslim rulers made several attempts to conquer Bengal but those were resisted by Bengal’s Muslim rulers, mainly with the help of local subjects who were essentially of Hindu origin. The local rulers in Bengal courted the support of the local people due to their (Muslim rulers) tolerant attitude towards their (subjects) religious beliefs and local traditions. (Islam, 2010, personal communication).

¹⁹⁸ The Mughals divided the territories into several provinces and gave a name to each of the territories as Subah.

syncretistic Islam were key elements. These components of a nascent Bengali nationalism would develop further in response to British colonialism and during the period leading up to Pakistan and independence.

Pre-colonial of Bengal (1757–1947): Muslim consciousness and separatism

A number of key developments characterized the development of a nascent Bengali nationalism during the colonial period. As discussed, how hitherto amicable relations between Hindus and Muslims became polarized as Bengali Muslims reacted to their socio-economic marginalization – a situation due in part to local Hindu elites and a new class of Hindu middlemen traders and *Bhadroloks* who resorted to extreme measures to extract “excessive revenue and various illegal taxes” from the local peasants – the majority of whom were Muslim.

The British colonial practice of ‘divide and rule’, specifically relating to education, the establishment of separate electorates and civil service positions, further fuelled religious consciousness and affirmed communal associations on the basis of religion, Hindu and Muslim, to advance separate political interests. Religious reform movements within both Hindu and Muslim societies further contributed to the divisions between the two communities. In the Muslim context the discussion shows how these reformers often referred to the Islamic teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abi Al-Wahhab and Shah Wali Allah who identified “moral decay” as the main cause of decline of the Muslim community and emphasized in their reforms the importance of disassociating what they considered non-Islamic indigenous practices from the religion.

Significantly, however, a key point also emphasized earlier was that these reformers failed to connect with the Muslim masses, particularly in Bengal where their conservative, purist approach and perceived “fanatical character” was at odds with a Muslim identity that had become over a long period of time infused and syncretized with local cultural values and practices – in short, Bengalized. This process of fusion and particularly between language and religion would become critical later in the Bengali response to the imposition of Urdu. An important factor further

facilitating that fusion was a sense of attack on Islam through the efforts of Christian missionaries on the one hand and growing Hindu nationalism on the other. (Shah, 2007, p. 570; Mallick and Hussain, 2004, p. 186; Uddin, 2006, pp. 41–46; Ahmed, 2007, pp. 63–67).

Under British rule, Christian missionaries, like William Carey (1761–1834), made considerable efforts to spread the Christian Gospel among the colonized people, both Muslim and Hindus. Carey, in his book *An Enquiry in to the Obligation of Christians to Use Means or the Conversion of the Heathens* written in 1792, linked “Christianity with modernization”.¹⁹⁹ Such missionaries engaged in establishing schools²⁰⁰ and communicating the virtues of Christianity in literary form through the medium of print. They wrote many tracts²⁰¹ on the benefits of Christian life on the one hand and criticized the beliefs and practices of both Hinduism and Islam on the other. In some of their publications, the Prophet was identified as a “murderer” and “adulterer” and one who was not the real Prophet, who did not die for the sins of others and had many wives. In another such tract, *An Address to Mussulmans with an Appendix Containing Some Account of Mohomet*, Islam was pictured as a “lying religion” and perversion of God’s commandments, with advice to Muslims to convert to Christianity. Christian Father G.H. Rouse in his book *Forkan* (1884) argued that the Qur’an was not a revealed holy book. In 1885, J. Long in his Bengali-language written book, *MuhammaderJibonCharita* (Biography of Muhammad) similarly asserted that the Qur’an was not a revealed book and it was written by the Prophet. (Uddin, 2006, pp. 41–76; Shah, 2007, pp. 570–2).

This assault on Islam provoked a Muslim backlash while at the same time the growth of Hindu nationalism was also reflected in literary works aimed at discrediting Islam and highlighting Hindu

¹⁹⁹ The missionaries tried to convince the British Parliament that their efforts would go a long way to modernize India and hence Indian subjects would become consumers of British goods and services, which was the original objective of the British East India Company.

²⁰⁰ According to Uddin (2007, p. 51), by 1818 about 45 such schools were operated for boys and six for girls by 1824.

²⁰¹ Such tracts included translation of the *New Testament* in Bengali (1801), *Prophet’s Testimony of Christ* (1830), *Gods and Idols* (1833), *Praises of the Self Existent* (1833), *God’s Punishment of Sin* (1833), *Krishna and Christ Compared* (1802), *Jagannath Worship* (1812), and the weekly newspaper *SamacharDarpan*.

greatness vis-a-vis Muslims.²⁰² In response to these developments Muslims joined a literary movement at what Uddin (2006, p. 67) calls an unprecedented rate, in a bid to counter the attacks on Islam.²⁰³ Muslim writers also concentrated their works on the glories of the Muslims and Islamic praxis.²⁰⁴ While this outpouring of literary work heightened Muslim consciousness generally, in the case of Bengal, where these literary works and debates were communicated to the rural masses in Bengali language. They played a key role in defining and sharpening further a distinctive Muslim identity in the Bengali setting. It was this intimate association of language and religion in the context of Bengali nationalism that the argument now turns in the post-1947 period.

Post-1947 period: Growth of language-based Bengali nationalism

The previous chapter shows how the Bengali peasantry and middle class lost any emotional attachment to Muslim nationalism as Islam, in the context of Pakistan, became associated not with liberation (and particularly hoped for prosperity) but with a new form of perceived socio-economic exploitation. Immediately after the creation of Pakistan this was compounded in Bengali minds when Islam was associated with cultural exploitation and marginalization when the Pakistani rulers tried to impose Urdu as the state language despite the fact that the majority people spoke Bengali. At the same time, there was an attempt to replace Bengali script with Arabic script which further

²⁰² Some of these works include *PadminiUpakhyan* (the legend of Padmini) (1857) by RangalalBandopadhyay (1827–1887); *Birbabu* (heroic man) by Hemchandra; *SamajikPrabandha* (essay on society), *SwapnaladhaBharaterItihas* (a history of India revealed in a dream), *The Nineteenth Purana*, *AnguriyaBinimoy* (exchange of rings) by BhudevMkhopadhyay (1827–1894); *PalashirJudhyaKavya* (history of the battle of Palassey) (1875) by Navin Chandra Sen; *Anandamath* (happy field) (1882); *Rajsingha* (the king of lion) (1882), *Sitaram* (1887), *Durgeshnandini* (1865), *Krishnokanter Will* (the will of Krisnokanto) (1878) by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1839–1894); *Madhobi Kankan* by Ramesh Chandra Datta (1848–1909). (Shah, 2007, pp. 570–80).

²⁰³ For example, Islamail Hossain Siraji (1879–1931) countered Bankim's depiction of Muslim women desiring love with Hindu men. He sought to draw the opposite picture in his novels, including *Rainandini* (1915), *Tarabai* (1908) and *Nuruddin* (1923). Similarly, Matiur Rahman (1872–1937) also drew a contrary picture in his novels *Mokhshaprapiti* and *Jamuna*. He sought to highlight the conversion of Hindu girls to marry Muslim men.

²⁰⁴ These works include *ParitransKavya* (the epic of freedom) (1904) by ShaikhFazlulHuq; *MadinarGaurav* (glories of Madina) (1906) and *Moslem Viratva* (Muslim heroism) (1908) by Mir MosharrafHossain; *Islam Itibritta* (the account of Islam) (1910) by ShaikhAbdur Rahim; *SrihattaVijayaKavya* (the epic of the conquest of Sylhet) by Abdu Zekaria Mohammad Ibrahim Ali; *MahashmashanaKavya* (the epic on the wonderful exploits of Muslim heroes, such as Zober bin Awam, Fazal bin Abbas, Okaba, and Ahmad Shah Abdali) (1904) by Kaikobad (1858–1925); *Spain VijoyKavya* (conquest of Spain) (1914) by Ismail HossainSiraji; *Glory of Islam* (1929) by Maulvi Zamiruddin.

aroused the anger of the Bengali people of the Eastern Part of Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan also alienated the people of Bengal by disparaging their culture, their Islamic credentials and contribution to the independence struggle. These actions were an anathema to Bengalis and contributed to the unity within East Pakistan of a “rising tide of Bengali nationalism”. (Anisuzzaman, 2004, pp. 380–81).

The emotive issue of language for the new nation surfaced when the first leader of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, while visiting East Pakistan in March 1948 only six months after Pakistan gained independence in 1947, addressed a public gathering at the University Dhaka. He stated:

Let me restate my views on the question of a state language for Pakistan. For official use in [East Pakistan], the people of the province can choose any language they wish. The question will be decided solely in accordance with the wishes of this province alone, as freely expressed through their accredited representatives at the appropriate time and after full and dispassionate consideration. There can, however, be only one lingua franca – that is, the language for intercommunication between the various provinces of the state – and that language should be Urdu and cannot be any other. (cited in Chakravarti, 2000, p. 48; Uddin, 2006, p. 1; History of the Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents, vol. 1, p. 86).

Such a statement was to the dismay of Bengalis whose common expectation was that Bengali, the language of the majority of the people of East Pakistan, would be the state language of Pakistan. The gist of this statement was repeated and affirmed by other official statements and representatives of the Pakistan Government.

Not only did the Pakistani rulers adopt an elitist approach with regard to the already sensitive issue of language but they also added an Islamic coating to it. Urdu was mainly spoken by the Muslim elite of North India and some of parts of Pakistan, but also most particularly by the ruling class of the new state. Jinnah tried to argue that Urdu was closer to Islamic culture and hence Pakistan should follow this language as the medium of communication. Jinnah responded to the critics of East Pakistan by arguing that Urdu “has been nurtured by a hundred million of this subcontinent,

[it is] a language understood throughout the length and breadth of Pakistan and above all [it is] a language which, more than any other provincial language, embodies the best that is in Islamic culture and Muslim tradition and is nearest to the languages used in other Islamic countries". (cited in Chakravarti, 2000, p. 48; Uddin, 2006, p. 2; History of the Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents, vol. 1, p. 86). Thus, Pakistani rulers greatly exacerbated the sensitive language issue by inextricably enmeshing it with another – religion – and by doing so, at one stroke, made plain their disdain for key elements of Bengali culture and identity which they regarded as 'inferior'. In their view Bengali was not associated with or a part of the mosaic of Islamic and Muslim culture; indeed they rejected that it could be.

In line with this position, other Pakistani leaders also attempted to justify the argument in favor of Urdu for the Islamic cause. Dr Abdul Huq was prominent among those leaders who advocated Urdu as the sole official language for the new nation, as he argued it represented Muslim heritage and Islamic culture. He was also opposed to the idea of both Bengali and Urdu to be state languages. In a statement in 1954, immediately after the adoption of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan recognizing Bengali and Urdu as official languages, Dr Huq termed the new resolution as:

... totally unacceptable to us. To juxtapose two such languages as [which] are opposed to each other in genius and form is highly objectionable. The Bengali language has Nagri or Sanskrit script. Whereas Urdu is written in Arabic script. Bengali is written from left to right and Urdu from right to left. Bengali has been nurtured by famous poets and authors of Bengali and Urdu has had its growth and development in the tradition of Islamic culture and learning. The simile and metaphors, symbols and references of Bengali are mostly taken from the Hindu mythology, while Urdu derives its material and motive force from Arabic and Persian and [is] steeped in Islamic lore and religious tradition. (cited in History of the Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents, vol. 1, p. 399).

Such a view suggests that the notion of Islam, Pakistan and Urdu were synonymous and was the prevailing view of the ruling class of the new state of Pakistan. According to this view, Bengali did not represent the Islamic tradition and culture, and was not therefore acceptable to the majority

Muslim population for the purpose of unity. On the other hand, Urdu gained recognition and prominence among the North Indian and other South Asian educated Muslim population, mainly because of its Perso-Arabic script which was similar to the Quran. Muslim identity and tradition were interpreted through the lens of Urdu to represent Islam in the wider context of Pakistan. (Uddin, 2006, pp. 3–4). Pakistani Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan also put this view emphasizing that since Pakistan was a Muslim country, Urdu would be the language for the Muslims of Pakistan. He opposed the idea of Bengali as the state language of Pakistan since it had a “non-Islamic” overtone. On the move by Bengali leader Dharendra Nath Datta to adopt Bengali as the state language in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 25 February 1948, the then Pakistani Prime Minister asserted, “Pakistan has been created because of the demand of a hundred million Muslims in this subcontinent and the language of a hundred million Muslims is Urdu ... Pakistan is a Muslim state and it must have as its lingua franca the language of the Muslim nations.” (cited in Islam, 1986, p. 149). This line of argument was seen as ignoring the Bengali’s sensibility where Bengali language and culture were concerned. As Mascarenhas (1972, p. 17) argues:

Liaquat Ali Khan’s assertion that Urdu was the “language of the Muslim nation” betrayed a curious ideological contortion. Arabic, not Urdu, is the language of the Koran. The anti-Muslim or non-Muslim innuendo implicit in his statement did not apply to Baluchi, Sindhi, Punjabi or Pushto spoken in the provinces of West Pakistan. It was directed solely at Bengali. There [is] no apparent rationale for his argument, only blind prejudice. Even the ludicrous suggestion that Bengali had a Hindu connotation because of East Bengal holds no water. Punjabi is also spoken by vast numbers of Hindus, as it is by the Muslims of West Punjab.

The Bengali leaders saw the assertion by Pakistan Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan as full of fallacies on the grounds that the hundred million Muslims of the undivided India were never monolingual or spoke Urdu. They were historically multi-lingual and the Bengali-speaking people always outnumbered other language groups of the Muslim community of India. (Islam, 1986, p. 149).

Associated with this argument was the vilification on the piety of Bengali Muslims. The Panjabi Governor of West Pakistan, Malik Feroze Khan Noon, in a remark in 1952 portrayed the Bengalis as “half Muslims” and accused them of not bothering to *Halal*²⁰⁵ their chickens. This remark outraged Bengalis. Bengali venerable leader Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani expressed his dismay over the West Pakistani accusations and belittling of Bengali piety as Muslims when he replied to the remark of the West Pakistani leader by saying, “Have we to lift our *Lungi*²⁰⁶ (loin-cloth) to prove we are Muslims?” Such language indicated the extent to which the West Pakistani elites were prepared to go in questioning the Islamic credentials of Bengalis. This attitude was manifest when Mascarenhas (1972, p. 18), a foreign journalist, visited Pakistan’s Ninth Division Headquarters of the Army in Comilla in 1971. He observed in an account in his book, *The Rape of Bangladesh*, “I found ... Punjabi officers unceasingly questioning the loyalty of the Bengalis to Islam. They denounced them as Kafirs (unbelievers) and Hindus, their real sin being support of Bengali nationalism against West Pakistani domination.”

The *raison d’être* from the West Pakistan view was that Urdu and Islam were synonymous. Therefore Urdu alone should be placed as its official language. The demand for Bengali to be the official language was therefore seen as anti-Islamic and anti-Pakistan. Jinnah himself held this view, believing resistance to Urdu was as an attempt to “split among [?] the Muslims of this [Pakistan] state” and saw the dispute as created by the “enemies of Pakistan”. (History of the Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents, vol. 1, p. 87). Khan (1985, p. 839) points out that the Pakistani elite interpreted Bengali as “the language of [the] Hindu elite of Bengal”.

In line with this view, Pakistani leaders also attempted to introduce Arabic scripts to Bengali. This move was initiated in 1947 by the Central Minister of Pakistan Fazlur Rahman. On a number of

²⁰⁵ In Islamic practice, animals and birds including chickens are slaughtered in the name of the Muslim God, Allah. Without following this process, meat and meat products are forbidden for eating. This process is called *Halal* in Islam.

²⁰⁶ It is a traditional Bengali garment to cover the lower parts for men. According to Islamic rituals, Muslim men are circumcised. Bengali leader Maulana Bhashani saw the remark of the West Pakistani leader as derogatory and expressed his discontent to show the circumcision as a proof of being Muslim.

occasions, he proposed to change the Bengali script into Arabic which is the 'language of the Quran' for the better Islamization process of Pakistan. His argument was that the other provincial languages, i.e. Sindhi, Posthu, Panjabi and Urdu, were Arabic scripted and the new Arabic scripted Bengali would serve the cause of cultural and political harmony between East and West Pakistan. (Conspiracy to Implement Arabic Script in Bengali, p. 1). Such adoption of Arabic scripts was mainly intended for the assimilation of Arabic vocabulary and to advance a psychological bond among the Muslims. Earlier in the 17th century, there were several attempts to do the same in Bengal. According to Eaton (1994, pp. 293–4), the Dhaka Museum has a manuscript work composed in 1645 entitled *Maqtul Husain* – a tract treating the death of Husain at Karbala – written in Bengali but using the Arabic, and not the Bengali, script. However, such attempts failed to obtain support from the Bengali people. The new Pakistani effort in this regard prompted a severe backlash from the people of East Bengal and caused further alienation of the Bengali people from the Pakistani state. (Khan, 1985, p. 843).

In concert with these developments, there was also an attempt to eliminate the “non-Islamic traditions” in Bengali culture. Instead, Perso-Arabic elements were introduced into Bengali culture in an attempt to assimilate it with “Islamic traditions” as an ideology of the state of Pakistan. During the Pakistani period, a ban was imposed on the performances of Rabindranath Tagore, the first Noble Laureate, on the state-run radio with the argument that his work did not reflect “Pakistan values” and “Islamic principles”. (Anam, 2011, p. 1; Custers, 2002, p. 2). Tagore, who is often identified as the “very embodiment of Bangladesh’s culture” and “unequalled in having offered an expression for the emotions and moods” of the Bengali people (Custers, 2002, p. 2), was singled out as a non-Muslim whose work was at odds with Islamic traditions and the state ideals of Pakistan. (Anisuzzaman, 2004, p. 381).

Opposing the 'attack' on Bengali language

The imposition of Urdu as the official language of Pakistan in the name of Islam met intense resistance from the Bengali people. It was seen as an attack on their culture and language which they had cherished for centuries. The Bengali argument against Urdu was that the majority (about 54 percent) of the people of united Pakistan spoke Bengali and it was only natural that it should be the lingua-franca of the state. Mallick and Hussain (2004, p. 194) tellingly argue that since the Urdu speakers in Pakistan were in fact “the core of the ruling elite”, while being a “miniscule minority” with only 3.3 percent of the total population, they nevertheless attempted to impose this language on the non-Urdu who formed about 54 percent majority of Pakistan. Shah (2007, p. 597) saw this imposition as an attempt to “effect cultural domination” by this minority ruling elite and to destroy the “cultural distinctiveness” of Bengal. In short, it was viewed as a form of cultural domination.

For their part, the Bengalis were not also ready to accept that their language was non-Islamic and non-Muslim. Bengali Muslims made enormous contributions to the development of Bengali literature and the language itself became an important medium for communicating Islamic tenets among the local Bengali Muslims.²⁰⁷

Particularly pertinent in that regard was a section of the Muslim religious gentry who came forward and composed literary work in Bengali on Islamic themes, mostly in the form of verse for

²⁰⁷ Linguist Dr Muhammad Shahidullah asserts that Bengali language became an essential medium when the Muslim rulers began patronization throughout their time (in the middle ages) to that local language. Among those prominent rulers were Yusuf Shah, Hossain Shah, Nasrat Shah, Firoj Shah, Nizam Shashur, Chut Kha, and Paragal Kha. (History of the Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents, vol. 1, pp. 113–14). Both Hindu and Muslim literary work developed with translations and using religious imagery and symbols. In their work, Muslims used Islamic narratives using Persian and Arabic words in accordance with the local belief system that made an appeal to the local Bengali Muslims who were not conversant in languages other than Bengali. (Eaton, 1994). However, Uddin (2006, p. 18) qualifies this assertion and argues that the Muslim rulers in the pre-colonial period were interested more in their Arabic and Persian literature and patronized the Hindu-based work and local language. Uddin identifies the ruling migrant Muslim class as *Ashraf* (high class) and the local converted Muslim as *Atraf* (low class). The ruling class distanced themselves from the *Atrafs* despite their similar identity as an obvious “distinct community”. (Uddin, 2006, p. 31). In those times, Persian was made the official and more specifically the court language. They did it purposefully to gain loyalty of the local noble Hindu people and therefore widespread legitimacy in the Bengali population.

this growing indigenous population of local Muslim people.²⁰⁸ Uddin (2007, pp. 31–32) categorized such Bengali literature into three main streams: *risalas* (Muslim tales), *yoga-kalandar* (love stories) and *marsiya*s (Imam Husayn elegies). What was important about this trend in Bengali literature was that most of the Islamic concepts and ideas were presented within the local belief system using familiar indigenous terms. Thus, the Prophet Muhammad was compared with an *Avatar*, Allah with *Prabhu*, *Gosai* and *Niranjan* which are Bengali words referring to a god. This resulted in establishing a powerful link between local cultural values and Islam through such Muslim literature communicating in Bengali. As Eaton (1994) argues, Bengali Muslim literature began to flourish as the landscape became populated with mosques, tombs and shrines. As the religious class organized the people to clear the forests for cultivation and inhabitation, they built religious places where many of the poems and tracts were composed in local language. Thus, this body of literature articulated Islamic scholarship in the Bengali language mainly through depicting important figures in the Qur'an and a great deal of Sufi philosophy mostly in metaphorical terms suitable for indigenous people, all of which served to enhance the Bengali Muslim identification with the Bengali language. (Uddin, 2006, pp. 17–40).

During the colonial period when the reformists were trying to discard “non-Islamic practices” and purify Islam in the Bengali context, Bengali Muslim identity with the Bengali language was once again articulated through contesting debates, movements and publications in order to resist the British colonial penetration and efforts by Christian missionaries and the Hindu elite to undermine Islam.²⁰⁹ All such literary works were intended for the particular Bengali-speaking Muslim audience

²⁰⁸ *Yusuf-Zulekha* is, for example, one of such Bengali version of the Persian tale which dealt with the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) mentioned in the Qur'an. Another such story is *Laily-Majnun*, a love story written in Bengali from Persian and Arabic origins. Other major works include *Nasihatinama* (admonitions and instruction on religious duties and obligations), *Namazerkitab* (on the usefulness of prayer), *Musar-sawal* (a dialogue between Moses and God), *Shariatnama* (a work on Islamic prescriptions and prohibitions), *Kifayat al-musallin* (manual on prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and so forth), *Hidayat al-Islam* (advice to Muslims to abstain from un-Islamic activities), *Namaz-mahatamya* (on the usefulness of prayer), *Nabibamsa* (a history of the prophets from Adam to Muhammad) and *Rasulbijay* (accounts of the miracles of the Prophet). (Uddin, 2006, pp. 31–33).

²⁰⁹ Such literature was flooded with publications with the introduction of the printing press which helped to create a new literary movement particularly for Islamic scholarship by Muslim intellectuals in the field of

and further contributed to the enrichment of the local culture and language. The development of the Bengali language and the creation of such literary genres created a newly imagined “religioethnic” community in Bengal based on the local language and expressed an identity which was both Muslim and Bengali. Uddin (2006, p. 60) observes, “Out of necessity rather than desire, Bengal vernacular language, an ethnic marker, became a medium for communicating ideas about membership in a wider religious community”. This Bengali-speaking community known as Bengali Muslims thus considered their language as a critical basis for their imagined community and were not ready to give it up simply on the basis of it being defined as “non-Islamic” by others.

From a linguistic point of view, countering the argument in favor of Urdu, the East Pakistani-based organization *Islami Bratrisangha* in a declaration published in May 1952, wrote that the majority languages of the Indian subcontinent originated from Sanskrit, and Urdu itself accommodated many Sanskrit words. Bengali evolved into a distinct language with a mixture of many languages and cultures over the centuries and became a language of the Bengali Muslim population. To prove one to be a Muslim, the declaration argued, one does not need to forget his or her own language and learn a foreign language in the name of Islam. So the use of local language is only natural; thus, advocating for Urdu in the name of Islam and discarding Bengali was not based on objective and balanced realities. The document also emphasized the unity of Pakistan based on an ideology for specific rights and obligations, not on imposing language. (History of the Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents, vol. 1, pp. 268–71).

Broadening the argument Dr Muhammad Shahidullah said, “It is true that we are Hindus and Muslims; but it is truer that we are all Bengalis. It is not a matter of ideology, it is a fact. Mother Nature has put a permanent mark on our appearance and language so that we cannot hide our

prose-poetry, debates and stories. As has been mentioned before, such literary work emerged in “creative responses” (p. 43) to a number of factors including the disappointment as a consequence of the decline of Muslim power. (Uddin, 2006, p. 43).

Hindu- Muslim external markings or symbols ignoring this basic reality”²¹⁰ (History of the Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents, vol. 1, p. 116.). Shahidullah was critical of the attempt of the Pakistani ruling elite to impose Urdu in the name of Islam and so marginalize the majority people’s language on the pretext that it was a “non-Muslim” medium. He was also opposed to the attempt to introduce Arabic script to Bengali by arguing that Arabic script would deprive people of the rich stocks of Bengali literature and would distort the spirit and natural flow of the language. Earlier, he also registered his protest against the idea of Urdu as the future language of Pakistan when he argued for Bengali as its lingua franca. He wrote, “If Urdu or Hindi instead of Bengali is used in our law courts and universities, that would be tantamount to political slavery.” (cited in Islam, 1986, p. 147). Two important messages flow from his position on the language issue. First, Bengalis felt a sense of attack on their pride and richness in their culture and particularly their language, and were not willing to give priority to broader religious community issues over local cultural richness. Second, Bengalis sensed exploitative motives behind the using of Islam in order to impose the minority language, Urdu, on the majority of the people.²¹¹

Bengali Muslim leader Abdul Mansur Ahmad differentiated the Muslims of the West and Eastern wings of Pakistan. He argued:

Hindus and Muslims in India are not one nation, their culture is not same also – but are the Muslims or Hindus a nation? Religion and culture are not the same. Religion can cross the geographical boundaries; but culture cannot do so. Culture rather grows in a geographical boundary – That is how the inhabitants of East Pakistan are different not only from the inhabitants of the rest of the

²¹⁰ The speech was in Bengali and has been translated by this researcher from the original source.

²¹¹ Another noted Bengali educationist, Kazi Abdul Wadud (1894–1970), in his work *SashvataBanga* also expressed a similar representative view on the issue of religion and culture of the new state of Pakistan. He asserted that the Bengali Muslims wished to identify themselves as human beings first by way of their right of birth, then a Muslim and preferably “Bengali Muslim”. It was also not necessary to go to Arab lands to prove that he or she was a Muslim. It was possible for a human being to remain Muslim even in a “thatched cottage of Bengal in the midst of relatives and neighbours” (cited in Shah, 2007, p. 596). This clearly reflects the essence of the preference of Bengali Muslims on the question of identity vis-à-vis the religion and the state. The language decision by Pakistani ruling elite put a compulsion on Bengali youth to learn Urdu, English and Arabic in addition to Bengali in order to compete for employment opportunities, imposing an “additional burden” on them. (Shah, 2007, p. 598).

Indian nation, but also from their co-religionists in West Pakistan, as a nation. (cited in Shah, 2007, p. 596).

This clearly indicates that the state of Pakistan and the identity of that state, not only with Islam as a central tenet but an interpretation of Islam, was fundamentally at odds with Bengali culture, language and tradition which meant that right from the start there were two diametrically opposed views between East and West Pakistan regarding nationhood and the very identity of the state itself.

The incident on 21 February 1952 and the emergence of Bengali nationalism

The decision to impose Urdu as lingua franca provoked an enormous protest among the people of East Pakistan. They considered it offensive to their culture, language and very identity. There were widespread demonstrations throughout the Eastern wing of Pakistan from an aroused Bengali people.²¹² Bengali sentiment was expressed at the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in February 1948 by Bengali Member Direndra Nath Datta²¹³ who registered a vehement protest against a move that an address to the House had to be either in English or Urdu. Many political parties based in East Pakistan joined this demand. Jinnah's declaration of 21 March 1948 to make Urdu the state language because of its association with "Islamic traditions" created uproar in East Pakistan. His speech was greeted by students chanting "No. No. Never" when Jinnah was at the University of Dhaka on 24 March 1947. Jinnah's sentiments were also echoed in other policy statements by

²¹² Since the Bengali-speaking people were the majority, there was a demand to make it the state language even before the creation of Pakistan on 15 August 1947. Noted educationist from East Pakistan Dr Muhammad Shahidullah in July 1947 made this demand which was also echoed in a draft manifesto prepared by the provincial Bengali Muslim League party. Another important demand was raised by a cultural organization called *Tamaddin Majlish*, which published a leaflet regarding their demand and campaigned for making Bengali the state language of Pakistan. *Tamaddin Majlish* was founded on 2 September 1947 with teachers and students in order to press home the demand of making Bengali as lingua franca of Pakistan. Their role in the language movement was critical to the initiation of the movement. In a leaflet entitled 'Should Pakistan state language be Urdu or Bengali?', the organization made this demand. (History of the Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents, vol. 1, p. 49).

²¹³ In the second session of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan held on 25 February 1948, Dharendra Nath Datta sought to give Bengali equal status along with Urdu and English as the state language of Pakistan. He said, "Bengali is a provincial language but so far as our state is concerned, it is the language of the majority of the people of the state ... Out of sixty-nine million people in Pakistan, forty-four million people speak the Bengali language ... The state language of the state should be the language which is used by the majority of the people of the state, and for that, I consider that Bengali language is a lingua franca of our sate ..." (cited in Islam, 1986, pp. 148–49).

members of the ruling elite of Pakistan, including Pakistan Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan (1948) and Khaja Nazimuddin (1952).

A series of protest rallies and strikes followed throughout East Pakistan with the formation of an All-Party Action Committee comprising mainly members of the student community. The Pakistani ruling elite responded by branding this movement as “anti-Islamic” and an act of conspiracy to create divisions among the Muslim brotherhood of the two wings of Pakistan. (History of the Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents, vol. 1, pp. 67, 76).

The movement soon grew rapidly throughout the Eastern Wing of Pakistan. On 21 February 1952, protesting students on the streets of Dhaka were shot by police. Some were killed, many were injured. A fierce backlash ensured the language movement swelled with widespread mass support both from urban and village areas and soon engulfed the whole Bengali people. (History of the Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents, vol. 1, pp. 268–71; Umar, 2007, pp. 352–78).

This incident sent a shockwave throughout East Pakistan and galvanized a sentiment of alienation against the rulers of Pakistan. An important feature of this movement was the forging of unity between Hindus and Muslims and on the basis of ‘Bengaliness’, which was a marked departure from the 19th century Muslim nationalism in Bengal. A new feeling swept the whole of Bengal that Pakistan was created not to serve the cause of Bengalis.²¹⁴ As noted earlier, how Bengali Muslim nationalism was a result of a conflict between the Hindu *Bhadrolok* and the Muslim intelligentsia on a number of issues and were manifested in literature, education, employment and politics. In the Pakistani period, this Muslim nationalism was reshaped and redefined in the face of ‘a sense of attack’ on Bengali culture, language and, in that context, Islam. The ruling elite of Pakistan seems to have misunderstood or ignored the fact that supposed “Islamic fraternity” could not bridge the geographical barrier of thousands of miles and cultural differences between the two wings. (Shah, 2007, pp. 597–99; Uddin, 2006, p. 151; Islam, 2007, pp. 24–25; Umar, 2007, pp. 356–57).

²¹⁴ A new sense of consciousness, being different from what the ruling elite of Pakistan perceived in the name of Islam, aroused out of a sense of attack on their culture and Bengaliness, resulting in the birth of ‘Bengali nationalism’ replacing ‘Bengali Muslim nationalism’.

As Azim (2002, p. 352) argues, the new Bengali nationalism took account of two key broad elements. One was the numerical majority of the Bengali-speaking population within Pakistan, and the other was the sense of cultural richness and the literary heritage of Bengal. This marked a heightening of the non-communal and secular elements of Bengali nationalism and identity. Mallick and Hussain (2002, pp. 194–95) noted the prominence of these elements as a “renewal of the traditional non-communal and secular psyche of the Bengalis” and asserted that “It was indeed a going back to the roots that had been lost for some time by the euphoria that attended the Pakistan movement”. Another noted writer Badruddin Umar considered this new nationalism as characteristic of the Bengalis’ historical origin and culture and described it as a “home coming of Bengali Muslims” (cited in Mallick and Hussain, 2002, p. 194).

The language movement of 1947 to 1952 actually culminated in the birth of Bangladesh in 1971 and later was manifested in the struggle for independence. The landslide victory of an alliance of Bengali-based political parties, *Jukto Front*, in the 1954 election and the popular uprising in 1969 were political manifestations of this sentiment against the West Pakistani rulers. Although in the 1956 Constitution Bengali was given the status of one of the state languages of Pakistan as per the demand of the language movement, the Bengali nationalism it had sparked developed and grew stronger.

The language movement emphasized the linguistic, cultural and secular components of Bengali nationalism and identity. This was evident in the creation of new symbols, slogans and myths for the new nationalism. Such fervour was reflected in the construction of a martyr’s monument, *Shaheed Minar*, to commemorate the death of those killed in the Language Movement of 1952 to which homage is paid every year.²¹⁵ Leaders and people from all walks of life gather at other such monuments, built in educational institutions even in remote villages, every year to pay respect and make pledges in the name of the heroes of the movement. (Kabir, 1994, p. 137). In this way,

²¹⁵ This also saw a massive number of commemorative volumes published highlighting this ethnic consciousness.

Bengali culture and language became emblems of the new nationalistic spirit and as a means to protest against perceived injustice.²¹⁶ As noted politician Ataur Rahman Khan comments:

... the Language Movement of 1948–1952 was a milestone in the growing demand for cultural self-determination of the Bengalis in Pakistan. It helped to fix their perceptions towards the immigrant north Indian and West Pakistani elite and led to the growth of increased assertiveness among them about their cultural identity. (cited in Mallick and Hussain, 2004, p. 195).

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the roots of Bengali nationalism, how they defined the Bengali state and the implications of that for the relations between Bengali society, the state and religion (Islam). The key point is that the two main elements in that evolution of Bengali nationalism – Islam and Bengali culture – emerged at different points in response to external challenges. Religion (Bengalized Islam) assumed a higher profile in response to the “divide and rule” colonial policies of the British, exploitation by Hindu landlords and the challenges posed by Christian missionaries, while Bengali culture, more broadly, assumed a higher profile later in the Pakistan period (1947–1971). During that period the West Pakistani ruling elite attempted to impose Urdu on East Pakistan, defining Urdu as the “Islamic language” of the Pakistani state. In that phase of the struggle other elements – cultural, linguistic, non-communal and secular rather than religious affiliation – increasingly defined the character of Bengali nationalism.

Since language is inextricably tied to culture and identity, the attempt to impose Urdu ‘in the name of Islam’ constituted a sense of attack on core notions and values associated with Bengali society and the state. Thus, in that context, Islam and the way it defined the new national state of Pakistan became, in Bengali minds, associated with a new form of cultural and political ‘internal colonialism’ foisted on them by the West Pakistani ruling elite. What the junta of West Pakistan could not, or

²¹⁶ Anam (2011, p. 1) argues, for example, that Tagore’s poetry and songs were identified as the symbol of a separatist movement against Pakistani forces and he was a mark of respect and love for being a Bengali. This demonstrates the urge to look at linguistic ethnicity renewed in the new nationalism spirit.

would not, accept was that Muslimness and Bengalianness had become in East Pakistan one and the same. At a broader level, as a result of this historical experience, Islam *per se* and particularly 'foreign' Islamic influences would have little traction in the milieu of Bengali nationalism, state and society.

Chapter 7

Contemporary Islamist Politics in Bangladesh (1971–2012)

Introduction

Culture, the character of Islam in Bangladesh, the association of West Pakistan/Islam with economic and political oppression and the importance of language and secularism as components of Bengali nationalism, separately and together, have been powerful constraints on Islamic resurgence in Bangladesh as manifested in different periods since 1971. Yet, overlaying these fundamental influences, a combination of internal and external factors associated with the period 1975 to 1990 saw Islam assume a higher profile in Bangladeshi politics and society and the period between 1999 to 2007 a momentary rise of Islamist militancy. These two periods are, as will be explained, separate and had no or little connection to each other.

This chapter has two important concerns. The first is to explain why the Islamic resurgence, which continued at various levels in other South and Southeast Asian Muslim societies since the mid-1970s, in the case of Bangladesh did not. In that regard, it will be argued, that the factors behind the higher profile of Islam in Bangladesh (1975–1990) were transient and intimately related to the internal socio-economic and political dynamics of the military regime and the external environment which it/they had to deal with at the time. A second concern of this chapter is to explain the appearance of militant Islamist groups during the 1999–2005 period who engaged in terrorist attacks against the most prominent secular symbols of the Bengali state and culture. Their rise, which was largely responsible for a host of local politics, personal issues and the Afghan war connection, was relatively short-lived (1999–2005) and limited in terms of their operation and capability with their ideological stance. The key point is that in the face of resistance from within the broader polity their outbreak was largely contained to the extent that they failed to remain as a significant force in the Bangladeshi society.

There are two important points here. The first is that the militants, be they returnees from the Afghan war, or the product of manipulation by the broader polity in local politics, had no broad-based connections or support within Bangladeshi society. The second important point, and it highlights the former, is the disjunction between the appearance of militants (1999–2005) and the return of the Bengali state and society to democracy and increasing secularization. In short, militancy was not associated, as might be expected, with the period 1975 to 1990 when Islam temporarily assumed a higher profile in Bangladesh. Such a disjunction underlines, it will be argued, the transient nature of Bangladesh's brief experience of Islamist militancy and how the factors responsible for it, ultimately, could not override the more fundamental constraints on Islamist extremism in Bengali culture and nationalism.

Finally, this chapter turns to two other factors – resecularization of Bangladeshi state and society post-2008 and the empowerment of women – and examines their significance in containing the conservative agenda of some Islamist groups or an Islamic resurgence in Bangladesh.

1971–1975: Secularism in state and society

In the nine-month long war of independence, it is alleged that some three million people were killed by the West Pakistani forces in the name of Islam and one-tenth of the population were displaced and sought refuge in India. The brutal excesses of the West Pakistani army and their local allies to “save the integrity of Islamic Pakistan” (cited in Ahmed, 2001, p. 27) was a traumatic episode of Bengali history which had a profound effect on the Bengali psyche and subsequently on state and policy, particularly where the place of religion in politics is concerned. In responding to the aversion of religion in a political context and the concomitant rise in the appeal of the ethno-linguistic and cultural components of Bengali nationalism, the Bengali political leadership banned the use of religion for political purposes. (Maniruzzaman, 1986, p. 55; Kabir, 1994, pp. 183–84).

To quote Hashmi (2004, p. 44), “the people of East Pakistan distanced themselves from the Islamic identity of Pakistan based on Two Nation Theory and began to nurture the secular values including

democracy. The creation of Bangladesh delegitimized this theory which led to the communal partition of India and Pakistan based on religion". After a nine-month long war in 1971, the AL²¹⁷, the party which led the independence movement, captured power and introduced the 1972 Constitution within nine months of the birth of the state.²¹⁸ The 1972 Constitution was based on secularism and it banned the Islamic-based political parties for their alleged support of Pakistan during the independence war. (Riaz, 2006, p. 172). In Article 12, the 1972 Constitution affirmed the principle of "Secularism and Freedom of Religion". The principle of secularism, it read, 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 prosecution of persons practicing a particular religion. (Bangladesh Constitution, 1972).

In Article 8(1) of the 1972 Constitution, secularism²¹⁹ was adopted as one of the fundamental principles of state policy. The other critical aspect was the insertion of Article 38 which ensured:

Every citizen shall have the right to form associations or unions, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of morality or public order: Provided that no persons shall have the right to form, or be a member or otherwise take part in the activities of, any communal or other association or union which in the name or on the basis of any religion has or its object, or pursues, a political purpose. (Bangladesh Constitution, 1972).

By this provision, religious parties were banned.

²¹⁷ The Awami League, which led the independence movement in 1971, is mainly characterized as a center-left, secular democratic political party, drawing support from the urban-based middle class and minorities and is viewed as pro-Indian. On the other hand, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is viewed as right of center, nationalistic, conservative and business-oriented. The BNP takes an overtly hard-line approach to India. The BNP represents a mixture of traditional Bengali customs and nationalism with moderate Islam.

²¹⁸ During the Pakistan period, it took about nine years to adopt the first Constitution in 1956 which was again scrapped in 1958 by a Martial Law imposed by General Ayub Khan. The Bengali people engaged in struggles for their democratic rights in a constitutional framework. It was, therefore, one of the top priorities for the political leadership to adopt a Constitution immediately after independence.

²¹⁹ The constitutional provision asserts "that the high ideals of nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism ... shall be the fundamental principles of the constitution".

Since the rising Muslim middle class was not left with any “exogenous enemy” and did not fear competition from the Hindu elites, the minority religious communities were looked upon as an important ally of nation-building. The secularism provision brought the minority religious communities into mainstream society. However, in the Bangladesh context, the term secularism took a divergent meaning²²⁰ from the Western ideas regarding separation of religion from politics. The then Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujib, in a speech to the Constituent Assembly on 4 November 1972, clarified the term secularism in the local context:

Secularism does not mean absence of religion. The 7.5 million people [now 15 million] of Bengal will have the right to religion. We do not want to ban religion by law. We have no intention of that kind. Secularism does not mean absence of religion. Muslims will observe their religion and nobody in this state has the power to prevent that. Hindus will observe their religion and nobody has the power to prevent that. Buddhists and Christians will observe their respective religions and nobody can prevent that. Our only objection is that nobody will be allowed to use religion as a political weapon. (cited in Maniruzzaman, 1986, p. 49).

In this statement, the importance of religious tolerance was first and foremost while placing restriction on the use of religion for political purposes. The purpose was to dispel the apprehension of those who thought the provision of secularism represented a hindrance to practice of religion at an individual level, with some interpreting it as “anti-God and anti-Islamic”. (Ahmed, 2001, p. 26). This interpretation of secularism was similar to the first Pakistani Governor-General Jinnah’s concept of religious toleration vis-à-vis the state, as indicated previously. Jinnah’s concept was spelt out in his first speech to the Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947 when he made it clear that Pakistan was ‘not an Islamic country’ and everybody was free to practise their own religion.²²¹ (History of the War of Bangladesh Independence Documents, vol. 1, pp. 40–42). However, Sheikh Mujib was more comprehensive both in articulating the concept but also incorporating it in the

²²⁰ The Bengali term was incorporated as *Dharmoniropekkhata* which means religious neutrality. This was adopted apparently to take into account South Asian realities. This marks a departure from the Western concept of separating religion from politics.

²²¹ However, after Jinnah’s death, the West Pakistani leaders used Islamic rhetorics in order to legitimize what was known as “internal colonial” rule over East Bengal. (Kabir, 1994, p. 119).

Constitution. For example, the public media broadcast recitations from religious holy books, not only of Islam, but also Hindu, Buddhist and Christian texts and particularly when those religions were associated with public holidays or other major occasions of each of the religions. (Sabur, 2011, personal communication).

Thus, the contrast with West Pakistan was particularly acute with regard to the question of nationalism and identity of the state. While ethno-linguistic and cultural factors were the foundations of Bengali nationalism, religion was the basis of the nation state in West Pakistan. This, as Kabir (1994, p. 187) argues, caused alarm to the Indian leadership in 1971, who were concerned about the possible reunification of West Bengal with East Bengal on the basis of identical ethnicity. However, the East Bengali leadership assured India that they would carefully avoid the issue of reunification.²²² The imposition of language and culture as the basis of the new Bengali state and nation²²³ was expressed in the Constitution thus:

The unity and solidarity of the Bengali nation, which deriving its identity from its language and culture, attained a sovereign and independent Bangladesh through a united and determined struggle in the war of independence, shall be the basis of Bengali nationalism. (Bangladesh Constitution, 1972).

Clearly this statement emphasizes the linguistic and cultural components – religion was absent.²²⁴

Regarding the state language of Bangladesh, the provision is precise and simple: “The state

²²² During the war, India was delaying the decision to intervene in favor of East Bengal mainly on the apprehension that an independent Bangladesh would have a destabilizing effect on the bordering areas where Bengali people shared the same ethnicity. The Prime Minister of the interim government of Bangladesh, Tajuddin Ahmed, met Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and gave assurance that they would not push for Bengali nationalism incorporating the Indian states including West Bengal. (Kabir, 1994, pp. 185–7).

²²³ During the war of independence, there was an attempt to show a clear distinction between the two ethnic groups of India and Bangladesh. The Bengali leaders often referred to “75 million Bengalis” in speeches to indicate the people of East Bengal. The national flag of Bangladesh during the war included the map of East Bengal providing the geographical boundary of Bangladesh, showing the distinction between the two people of Bengalis (East and West). (History of the War of Bangladesh Independence Documents, vol. II).

²²⁴ The war of independence of 1971 becomes an important source of separate identity for Bangladesh. A prominent academic observes, “The great sacrifices made in the revolutionary war in 1971 have not gone in vain. The revolution created a nation of gallant men who wrested independence from the most brutal perpetrators of genocide. This traumatic birth of the nation is possibly the greatest force ensuring its continuity. The revolution has created heroes, myths, and a vision of *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal).

language of the Republic is Bengali". (Bangladesh Constitution, 1972). Since independence, the stress has been on the introduction of Bengali language at all levels of national life. Bengali is now widely used as a language of office, court and higher education. The war of independence of 1971 becomes an important source of separate identity for Bangladesh.

Such collective memory legitimized the existence of the new nation which was born out of a nine-month bloody war. The observance of Victory Day on 16 December 1971, the Independence Day on 26 March, and Martyr's Day on 21 February, the day students sacrificed lives for the sake of their mother language in 1952, all contributed to the depth and fervor of Bengali nationalism. On these days, the people of Bangladesh pay homage to the war memorials and martyrs' monuments and renew their pledge of nation-building. The annual observance of 21 February has been developed as a month-long commemoration of an independent Bangladesh. These events serve to affirm the secular national identity of Bengalis cutting across all religious beliefs and cement the natural bonds between the land and the people. Another critical pillar of Bengali nationalism in this regard is the celebration of *Pahela Baishakh* (Bengali New Year's day)²²⁵ which has assumed a secular character to show pride in Bengali language and the long history and traditions of Bengal. The day attracts millions of crowds with festivities, live Bengali music, dances, fairs and the wearing of national dress.²²⁶ Such celebrations have become increasingly popular in both rural and urban areas with people indicating the fervor with which the younger generations embrace Bengali cultural traditions, all of which shows the strength of nationalism and the extent to which past

Bangladesh 'generations yet unborn' will continue to be proud of the nation born of a heroic revolution and this will sustain them in their attempt to complete the unfinished task of realizing a Golden Bangladesh." (cited in Kabir, 1994, pp. 220–1).

²²⁵ The day is observed on the first day of Bengali new year (usually on 14 April) to mark the cropping and harvest seasons. The observance began when the Bengali Chief Minister of the United Front Provincial Government A. K. Fazlul Huq declared a public holiday in 1954. Since then the day has been marked as a symbol of resistance to what the Bengalis regarded as a cultural and communal domination by the West Pakistani rulers in the name of Islam. This has emerged as a widely popular and important national celebration throughout the country. The significance of this day is that it promotes inclusiveness and tolerance on the one hand and reinforces the local traditions (originated from Bengali culture) on the other (Banglapaedia, 2006).

²²⁶ The men wear traditional *Kurtas* and women in red and white *Sarees* with fresh flowers in the hair.

traditions are still alive and relevant to the present, reinforcing the “imagined community of Bengali identity based on traditions which are essentially secular”. (Uddin, 2006, pp. 124–36; Chowdhury, 2011a).

On the economic front during this period (1971–75), the Awami League embraced some demands of the poorer classes, apparently under the pressure of some leftist radical groups during the liberation war, proclaiming the goal of ending “exploitation of man by man”. (Ahmed, 2001, p. 28). Thus, socialism was adopted as government policy and incorporated in the Constitution.²²⁷ In implementing this policy, the government began the nationalization of big industries, banks, insurance companies and other major private enterprises and introduced state control over the economy including trade and commerce. Among the most notable changes was the adoption of the First Five Year Plan (1973–78) aiming at a series of socialist land and industrial reforms²²⁸ (Ahmed 1986, p. 23) and the “Second Revolution”²²⁹ in 1974 with the objective of making sweeping changes including the introduction of compulsory cooperatives at the village level to give the socialist agenda effect. (Chakravarty, 1986, p. 4). In foreign policy, the Awami League government adopted a pro-Indian and Soviet orientation. Alas, such changes did not bring the prosperity and equality hoped for – quite the opposite, such socialist postures backfired and plunged the country into dire economic crises largely due to inefficiency, large-scale corruption, nepotism and mismanagement by the government. The result was large-scale chaos including the decline of production, soaring prices, high inflation, unemployment, hoarding, black-marketeering and a

²²⁷ In the preamble, socialism was declared as one of the fundamental principles of state policy. Article 10 of the Constitution stipulated the definition of socialism as a “socialist economic system” with the aim of ensuring the achievement of a just and egalitarian society, free from the exploitation of man by man. (Huq, 1986, p. 50).

²²⁸ The investment strategy underlined the “need for land reforms along with extension of cooperatives and emphasis on small farmers and landless labourers”. (Ahmed, 1986, p.23).

²²⁹ The scheme was announced on 26 March 1974, which included introduction of compulsory cooperatives at the village level, upgrading of sub-divisions into districts, formation of district administrative councils with popular participation and creation of judicial tribunals. The compulsory cooperatives were intended to set up multi-purpose cooperative systems at 65,000 villages, with ownership of lands, orchards, fisheries and other economic properties in the hands of all able bodied members including the rural proletariat. These cooperatives would become the center of all economic, administrative and political activities of the villages. (Chakravarty, 1986, p. 4).

deteriorating law and order situation, which resulted in a catastrophic famine in 1974. (Ahmed, 1986, pp. 22–28; Ahmed, 2001, pp. 28–29). This created the conditions for anti-AL sentiment throughout the country.

On the political front, with independence ‘democracy’ was adopted as state policy.²³⁰ This was a clear reflection of the struggles for democratic rights throughout the Pakistani period. However, in the face of economic and political crises, Sheikh Mujib declared a state of emergency on 24 December 1974 and later instituted a one-party system named as *Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Party* (Bangladesh Peasant-Worker’s Party or BAKSAL), similar to the pattern of some African one-party states²³¹ and pursued some authoritarian policies such as banning all but four newspapers and creating special courts and tribunals directly responsible to him. (Ahmed, 1986, p. 32; Khan, 2001a, p. 54). This was a marked departure from the democratic traditions for which the AL fought against the Pakistani elites. Increasingly, the AL relied on the instruments of autocratic rule. For example, the party introduced the so-called “Second Revolution” in early 1975 which was seen as a “constitutional coup”. This was intended to launch a one-party socialist system replacing the multi-party democracy. It caused immense resentment among the people at large and created the conditions for an end to its rule in 1975. (Kabir, 1994, pp. 194–97).

The shift to authoritarianism and the economic and political crisis it provoked towards the end of the 1971–75 period heralded a new era characterized by military interventions and a higher profile of Islam in Bangladesh politics.

²³⁰ In the preamble, democracy was adopted as one of the fundamental principles. Article 11 envisaged democracy as a system in which fundamental human rights, freedoms and dignity were guaranteed and effective participation of the people through their elected representatives in administration at all levels was ensured. (Huq, 1986, p. 51).

²³¹ Such a pattern was evident in the party philosophy of Nkrumah of Ghana and Nyerere of Tanzania, particularly in the latter’s *Ujama* (African socialism) and the Soviet model of communist party. The Awami League introduced the one-party system through an amendment (Fourth Amendment, 1975) in the Constitution. (Riaz, 2008, pp. 9–11; Khan, 2001a, p. 54; Ahmed, 1986, p. 32).

1975–1990: A higher profile of Islam in state and society

Economic collapse and the increasingly authoritarian nature of the AL encouraged anti-government groups to organize themselves against the ruling party, which was overthrown by a military coup of pro-Islamist and pro-Western junior military officers on 15 August 1975.²³² Following a series of coups, General Ziaur Rahman²³³ came to power and began consolidating his authority. General Zia formed the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) which won the national elections in 1979. He also distanced Bangladesh from the Indo-Soviet axis and brought about a shift in policies with closer ties to the Muslim countries and Western bloc on the international stage. (Kabir, 2001b, 125). Khan (2001a, p. 58) argues that Zia initiated a “broad-based, and stable, political structure” in his governance, mainly by liberalizing policies in certain sectors, including the press and economy, which helped to win support of broad sections of the public. In that regard, he gave a civilian character to his rule and introduced liberal democracy, scrapping the one-party system.

Significantly, however, after coming to power, Zia commenced a political discourse employing Islam vis-à-vis the secular nature of the Constitution. This thesis will now chronicle the most important of these (Islamic values) before elucidating the economic, social, political and foreign policy factors behind this ‘Islamic tilt’ and then the extent to which that ‘tilt’ was driven by utilitarian and immediate socio-economic and political considerations.

One of important amendments Zia introduced in this regard was the insertion of ‘Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim’ (in the name of Allah, the beneficent and the merciful), and recitation of Qur’an verses in the preamble of the Constitution. (Lintner, 2002, p. 1). Zia also deleted Article 12 of the

²³² Sheikh Mujib, who was known as the Father of the Nation, was killed along with close associates and family members in the coup by several disgruntled mid-ranking military officers. The misrule of the AL reached such an extent that when the coup was staged, there was no reaction from the public in his support. (Ahmed, 2001a, pp. 28–29). When General Zia came to power through a military coup, he could create a popular base using the anti-Awami League sentiment prevalent throughout the country because of its misrule.

²³³ General Ziaur Rahman was a freedom fighter while he was a major of the Pakistani army and led one of the sectors in the fight against the Pakistani forces in 1971. After a series of coups, he came to power in 1975 and later he turned to civilian rule in 1977 by holding a referendum where he secured 76.67 percent of the votes. He also staged the parliamentary elections in 1979 where his party won a landslide victory over rivals. (Kabir, 1994, pp. 197–8).

Constitution, which ensured implementation of the ideal of secularism. His government also amended Article 8(1) of the Constitution which was replaced with a proclamation in 1977 with words asserting “absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah”. The Zia regime also inserted Article 25 to the Constitution which was concerned with “stabilizing, preserving and strengthening fraternal ties with the Muslim states on the basis of Islamic solidarity”. This was considered as a constitutional obligation for Bangladesh to pursue a foreign policy friendly towards the Muslim countries. At the same time, Article 38, which forbade any political activity of the religion-based parties, was withdrawn. (Bangladesh Constitution, 2010). This allowed the Islamists to engage in constitutional politics and allowed them to participate in the elections under Islamist banners and slogans. Article 6 was amended to accommodate the change of identity from “Bengalee” to “Bangladeshi” and Article 9, which dealt with the definition of Bengali nation, was substituted with a different issue relating to special representation. (Huq, 1986, pp. 63–4). By this provision, a more territorial definition of the Bengali identity was incorporated as Bangladeshi nationalism to distinguish from the Indian West Bengal and project a distinctive Bengali Muslim nation. (Kabir, 2001b, p. 47). This was seen as a move to shift away from the pre- and post-independence India–Bangladesh rapprochement on the question of struggle against Pakistani forces and more specifically underlining the religious component in Bengali nationalism.

During his rule, Zia introduced other significant political changes. The principle of socialism, which was adopted as one of the fundamental principles, was amended and given a new meaning as “economic and social justice” in the preamble and in Article 8 of the Constitution. At the same time, Articles 42 and 47 were changed which now required the state to nationalize or acquire private property only with compensation, and simplification of a compensation package to the private owners, while the original provisions empowered the government to nationalize any property with, or without, compensation and a complicated legislation process for denationalization or enhancement of compensation. All of this indicated a move from a socialist to

capitalist path. At the same time, Article 10 was substituted with a pledge for the “participation of women in all spheres of national life”. By the Fifth Amendment, the one-party system of the AL was abrogated and a multi-party democracy was restored with the retention of a Presidential form of government. (Huq, 1986, pp. 62–8).

General Zia was assassinated in 1981 by a group of disgruntled army officers and later in 1982 General Ershad seized power through a military coup. However, immediately after taking over, General Ershad made an effort to give his regime a popular image with some reforms in governance, including a fight against corruption and by taking a civilian character. But he could not create a popular base among the public, with major political parties protesting the regime. Then Ershad moved to utilize political Islam in the hope of winning some support from more conservative elements. He increasingly used Islamic symbols in state affairs and paid public visits to the shrines of Islamic saints.²³⁴ In that vein, General Ershad also increased allocation of resources²³⁵ to religious education in the hope of winning religious-based support for his government. Later he went on to insert a provision into the Constitution which declared “Islam as the state religion of Bangladesh”. (Lintner, 2002, p. 2; Riaz, 2006, pp. 173–4; Riaz, 2008, pp. 11–3). Thus, both Zia and Ershad brought “Islam in public life and in politics” (Riaz, 2008, p. 13).

Military regimes utilized Islam in these ways for essentially two reasons: socio-economic – the aspirations of a rising middle class; and foreign policy – mainly anti-Indian sentiment and the pursuit of petro-dollars. One of the correlations evident between the rise of an Islamic profile was the growth of a new middle class, creating pressure on the state to change its socialist orientation towards a more liberal economy and at least an Islamic tilt away from the Indo-Soviet (Hindu–Marxist) axis. More pertinently, Kabir (2001a, p. 127) argues that immediately after independence the AL government took possession of the abandoned properties of the Pakistanis and handed the

²³⁴ Ershad paid frequent visits to the saint at Atroshi, Faridpur, and shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal at Sylhet and offered prayer there with media exposure, apparently with an Islamic posture.

²³⁵ In the 1984–85 financial year, Ershad allocated Tk.1.7010 billion to religious institutions, a record high compared to the previous budgets. (Kabir, 2001a, p. 126).

management and control of them to party men who became rich as a result. At the same time, the Bengali entrepreneurs took the opportunities of the vacuum created as a result of large-scale migration of the Pakistanis from East Pakistan. This saw the growth of a new class that Kabir (2001a, p. 127) terms *nouveau riche* with new business and commercial interest. These groups put increasing pressure on the state to switch from a socialist orientation to liberalize the economy and open it up for business and commercial investment from Western and Muslim countries. These new business and commercial elements formed a powerful pressure group during the post-1975 period in initiating political and economic change. Such changes included a move to denationalize the public sector, the establishment of private banks, joint ownership of enterprises with Middle Eastern and Western entrepreneurs, liberalization of industrial policy and ensuring the flow of petro dollars for various infrastructure projects. These groups became the champions of a pro-Western and pro-Islamic tilt in the state and society and took advantage of the anti-AL sentiment of the pre-1975 period.

Anti-Indian sentiment which grew in the Awami League period (1971–1975) also serves to explain the tilt towards Islam at this time. As Talukder Maniruzzaman (1986, pp. 70–71) argues, the encirclement of Bangladesh by Indian territories on three sides and the use of the Bay of Bengal by the Indian Navy as “its lake” and the deteriorating bilateral relations created conducive conditions for a more Islamic Bangladeshi profile vis-à-vis Hindu India. Kabir (2001b, p. 46) identified some of the sources of this anti-India sentiment, notably the controversial signing of the 25 Years Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace²³⁶ with India, the troubled trade agreement²³⁷ between the two countries, rumors about covert Indian intervention in the internal affairs of Bangladesh and the

²³⁶ The treaty concluded in March 1972; provisions specified that each party would come forward in the case of an attack from a third party. In Bangladesh there was no such fear of attack other than India while India perceived threats from its neighboring countries China and Pakistan whom she fought wars with in the past. This treaty was interpreted as favorable only to India at the expense of Bangladesh’s interests. (Kabir, 2001a, p. 123).

²³⁷ There was a trade agreement between India and Bangladesh and this worked to the favor of Indian interests, creating a gulf of trade balance between the two countries. This was seen as one of the reasons for the deterioration of the economy of the new state. (Kabir, 2001a, p. 123).

failure to resolve issues including the Indian construction of the Farakka barrage on the common river, the Ganges.²³⁸ Even the adoption of the provision of secularism as one of the fundamental state principles and the policy of friendship towards India by the Awami League government were seen as “synonymous with compromising the sovereignty of Bangladesh” and more specifically AL’s secularism was linked to its “pro-Indianism”. (Kabir, 2001a, p. 123). Such issues fuelled the growth of anti-India feeling and led the country to seek support from the Muslim states for its own national security. (Khan, 2011, personal communication). Thus, a more Islamist agenda and rhetoric found resonance in a political milieu “to save the Muslims” in the case of strained Indo-Bangladesh relations. Thus, in early August 1982 the then military ruler General Ershad employed the ‘Islamic card’ to defend Bangladesh’s sovereignty against the Indian threat. He said:

We do not want any understanding with our heads down. We stand erect and tell everybody that our relation with any other nation must be based only on sovereign equality. It is being said today that if we do not get water from Farakka the northern and Southern regions of Bangladesh will turn into deserts. I want to remind everybody concerned that Islam was born in desert, but Islam did not die. Islam could not be destroyed. (cited in Maniruzzaman, 1986, p. 71).

The other ‘foreign policy’ aspect of the military’s Islamic tilt had to do with a chase for petrodollars from the oil-rich Muslim countries of the Middle East, which had made windfall gains following the 1973 oil crisis. Bangladesh’s war ravaged economy and the economic crises that beset the Awami League government exposed a desperate need for foreign aid at a time when Western sources had, for a variety of reasons, dried up. The more Islamic posture of Zia’s regime was aimed at those oil-rich countries, particularly Saudi Arabia. It paid significant dividends.

In the 1971–75 period, the aid from the Middle Eastern countries including Saudi Arabia amounted to \$78.9 million while from 1975 to 1981 this increased to \$474.7 million from the same sources. (Kabir, 2001a, p. 125). Bangladesh also received concessional terms for its oil supply and

²³⁸ Bangladesh has 54 common rivers with India and argues for legitimate share of waters on these rivers protected under international law. However, India constructed barrages on some of the rivers including the Ganges and withdrew waters to the detriment of Bangladesh’s interests.

employment opportunities for Bangladeshi workers in the labor markets of those countries (both skilled and non-skilled), which remained an important source of foreign currency.²³⁹ Husain (2001, pp. 144–5) argues that this increased financial assistance from Middle Eastern sources provided justification for Bangladesh’s ‘Islamic tilt’ at this time. (also cited in Ahamed, 1983, p. 1118).

There were clear domestic and foreign policy benefits in the ‘tilt’ of the military regimes of Zia and Ershad towards Islam. Yet, at the same time, there was little public clamour for a higher profile of Islam in Bangladeshi public life, and, just as importantly, the policies of both Zia and Ershad went little beyond ‘window dressing’. Thus, although General Ershad, having failed after eight years (since 1982) to create a popular base for his rule, turned to Islam declaring it as “the state religion” in a last ditch attempt to legitimize his power base. He failed. In addition, such an appeal did not resonate with the wider Bengali community, in part because of Ershad’s own essentially Western lifestyle. (Umar, 2011, personal communication; Loffler-Lohmar, 1983, p. 237; Kabir, 1994, p. 206; Ahmed, 2001, p. 27; Ahamed, 1983, p. 1118).

At a more general level, while both the Zia and Ershad regimes adopted Islamic norms, including the insertion of Islam as the state religion, their efforts do not suggest a fundamental change regarding the position of Islam in the Bengali state or Constitution. (Ahmed, 2001, p. 27). Both regimes ensured the democratic rights of every citizen and the freedom of religion for minorities. Thus, according to Article 2A of the Constitution, the primacy of Islam was recognized, and freedom of religion for all communities was guaranteed in Article 41. Similarly, Article 11 provided that the country would be a democracy that respected all human rights and freedoms of all its citizens. Again Article 39 guaranteed the protection of freedom of speech and expression of every citizen while Articles 39a and 39b ensured the freedom of the press. (Bangladesh Constitution,

²³⁹ For Bangladesh, remittance inflows from migrant workers mainly from the Middle Eastern countries have been playing a major role in underpinning external sector viability of the balance of payments. With alignment with the Middle Eastern countries from Zia’s regime, the inflows have grown steadily. For example, the annual inflows increased nearly four-fold from US\$2.5 billion in 2001–02 to US\$9.7 billion in 2008–09. (Bangladesh Bank, accessed 13 February 2012 <http://www.bangladesh-bank.org/governor/speech/oct042009gs.pdf>).

2010). Despite the higher profile of Islam in politics during the 1975–1990 period, the governments of both General Zia and General Ershad followed essentially secular paths including areas of women’s empowerment.

Significantly, although the generals introduced some Islamic values in the Constitution, they did not attempt to turn the country into an Islamic state or introduce Sharia law. Quite the contrary, Zia championed women’s participation in public life and NGO programs for women. Moreover, women’s empowerment received impetus during this period. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs was established during his regime. He recruited women into the police force and reserved 30 parliamentary seats for women. (Karim, 2010, p. 5). Pertinently, it is also worth emphasizing that while some political parties used Islam for quite political purposes. (Hashmi, 2004, pp. 47–49). Overall they were avowedly secular in nature in the sense that they had no agenda to establish Sharia law or establish an Islamic state but used Islam in politics for their projected tactical benefit. Moreover, while the higher profile of Islam in Bangladesh politics and the Constitution from 1975–1990 may have provided some “oxygen” to Islamists, and more specifically to the militants in a later period, it is important to emphasize the short-term and utilitarian political and economic purposes for which Islam was briefly employed by the military regimes during that time.

Bangladesh’s tilt towards Islam had a dramatic and external dimension. Externally, it primarily resulted from an anti-Indian posture and perceived hostility on bilateral and border issues such as the sharing of waters of the common rivers (notably, the Ganges and the Tista). As Khan (personal communication, 2011) comments, “the more India–Bangladesh relations deteriorated, the more Islam assumed an ascendancy in state and society.” He argues that the post-1975 higher Islamic profile had its roots in anti-Indian sentiment arising out of a number of issues. Apart from anti-Indian sentiment, Ahmed (2001, pp. 20–27) asserts that following the 1973 oil crisis, the petro dollars amassed by some Muslim Middle Eastern countries and the Iranian Revolution of 1979

might have provided a fillip to the post-1975 regimes of Zia and Ershad to adopt a more Islamic profile.

More broadly, the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and world-wide Muslim support for the Afghan Mujahidin against the Soviets using the Islamic ideology, namely Jihad, in line with Cold War realities also added a positive environment for the Muslim countries to emphasize a more Islamic profile in the fight against communism. A global recruitment from the Muslim countries was also encouraged to join the Afghan Mujahidin with an apparent Islamic cause on the agenda. Bangladeshi unemployed youths were also recruited in that process. Sabur (2011, personal communication) estimates that about 3400 youths joined the Afghan war against the Soviets. With the end of the Afghan war, these youths, indoctrinated with the conservative Islamic ideology and Jihad in particular, returned to Bangladesh as what Sabur (2011, personal communication) terms “warriors without a war”, who attempted to initiate “Afghan-style” revolution to establish an “Islamic state” apparently without taking into considerations of the cultural and historical realities of the state and the society.

1991–2005: Restoration of democratic rule

Two important developments mark the 1991–2005 period in Bangladesh politics. First was the restoration of democratic rule and, second, the rise Islamist militancy and its containment. With the fall of General Ershad on 6 December 1990, democratic rule was restored.²⁴⁰ In that regard it is important to emphasize the strength of the mass discontent and demonstrations which forced the military from power and restored democracy through elections. The overthrow of military rule thus heralded a return of regular, free and fair elections.

²⁴⁰ General Ershad, who came to power through a military coup, faced mass-discontent for his autocratic rule. He tried to use the ‘Islamic card’ (i.e. the declaration of Islam as the ‘state religion’) to legitimize the regime. However, that card did not work to his favor and he had to step down in 1990 largely due to a popular upsurge against him, facilitating the democratic rule in subsequent periods. (Umar, 2011, personal communication).

Significant in the return to democracy was the consensus reached by political parties with regard to the return to the parliamentary form of government from the Presidential form, where the executive authority rests with the parliament. By this change, the President became constitutional head while the Prime Minister became the executive head of the government and he or she was made responsible to the parliament.²⁴¹ Before this change, the parliament was a “rubber stamp” with omnipotent executive power in the hands of the President. The other important development was a broad-based consensus reached by the political parties to hold a free and fair election. This was known as the Care-taker Government. (Fink, 2009). According to the provisions incorporated into the Constitution, a total of 10 members nominated by the political parties were to form an interim-government which would be responsible for holding general elections and handing down the power to the elected government.²⁴² This mechanism, by which a democratic rule would be restored, resulted mainly from the concern of major parties about rigged elections. The new system was non-partisan and meant to ensure free and fair general elections and a smooth transfer of power to the elected representatives for the people.

Under this arrangement, general elections were held in 1991, 1996 and 2001 during which the two major political parties, AL and BNP, came to power in alternate terms. The smooth transfer of power through such elections clearly indicated the broad commitment to democracy. According to a Gallup poll, a large majority of Bangladeshis (61 percent) expressed their opinion that a democratic government was important for them and “essential and something they cannot live without”. (Fink, 2009, p. 3). This period saw a number of positive trends which demonstrated the strengths and resilience of both state and society in the context of threats from undemocratic and

²⁴¹ Through an amendment of the Constitution in 1975 (the Fourth Amendment), the presidential form of government was instituted in place of the parliamentary form of government. In the new democratic environment, both the rival parties agreed to restore the parliamentary form of government through another amendment to the Constitution in 1991 (the Twelfth Amendment).

²⁴² The change was brought out in the Constitution through the Thirteenth Amendment in 1996. The provisions of the Constitution were detailed in Articles 58B, 58C, 58D and 58E as to the formation and responsibilities of the care-taker government. (Bangladesh Constitution, 2010).

more specifically religious extremism. Although Islam plays a major role in the private life of a large majority of the population, significantly electoral choice centered on the two major political parties, AL and BNP, which were essentially guided by secular ideology. During this period, Bangladesh also saw the growth of a vibrant civil society sector, including innovative non-governmental organizations to institute changes in the political and socio-economic conditions of the common people. These include NGOs (i.e. Grameen Bank, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee/BRAC), different media organizations, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), *Sujon* (a civil society organization) and different human and women's rights organisations. These groups undertook initiatives with the objective of ensuring that essential social services and public goods from the government including healthcare, education, women's empowerment and entrepreneurial opportunities were delivered to the people. Human rights advocates became active and the freedom of the press was also ensured. These organizations and initiatives became a powerful force with different socio-economic interests and exerted influence on the government. Such organizations also acted as a "watchdog against government excesses" and strengthened government commitment broadly to secularism and democracy. (Fink, 2009, pp. 2–3).

1991–2005: Islamist militancy and its containment

The second major development during the period was the appearance of Islamist militancy and its containment. A number of key features were associated with this development. First was the small number of extremists involved and the local, parochial, and even personal nature of their vendetta. That, in part, explains why such groups were so quickly contained. Just as importantly, the rapid demise of the extremists also indicated the extent to which they were external to deeper forces of Bengali culture, in particular nationalism and secularism, which were again in ascendancy in Bengali society and politics. In a survey of this period, an overview will be provided of the attacks carried out by the militants, the government response, the local and parochial

character of the militants and the extent to which they were external to and disconnected from broader, mainstream cultural values central to Bengali identity and nationalism.

During the late 1990s until 2005 a handful of Islamist extremists stepped up their activities throughout the country. These groups included *Jagrota Muslim Janata Bangladesh* (JMJB), *Hijbu-Tahir*, *Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh* (JMB), *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami* (HujiB) and *Shahadat-e al Hikma*.²⁴³ Opposing the largely secular basis of Bengali culture and identity, a number of these groups targeted the traditional Bengali New Year Festival on 4 April 2001, killing 10 and injuring many others in a bomb attack. (Karlekar, 2008). Another target was the judicial system since such groups claimed man-made laws were inferior to Sharia law. On 29 November 2005, two suicide bomb attacks killed nine people, including two lawyers and a police constable, while 78 others were killed in attacks on the Gazipur and Chittagong court premises. (Hossain and Curtis, 2010, pp. 5–7).

The administrative components of the country also came under attack. The most noteworthy of these were the serial blasts in August 2005, when 63 out of 64 administrative districts of the country were bombed almost simultaneously. The country's democratic political parties were also targeted with an attempt to assassinate the chief of the then Opposition Party and then Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina. In the latter case, militants launched grenade attacks on the Prime Minister's political rally on 21 August 2001, killing about 16 people and injuring over 200 others. Such incidents, and particularly the serial blasts on 63 districts, indicated that the militants had a well-organized command structure and significant capability (Riaz, 2006, p. 108; Muniruzzaman, 2008, p. 7). A list of these incidents has been furnished in Appendix 1.

In the face of Islamist extremism, the government mounted a counter-terrorism drive which included a four-strand strategy, i.e. 'prevent', 'pursue', 'protect' and 'prepare'. (Akter, 2010, pp.

²⁴³ Their avowed ideology was to establish an Islamist state through Jihad, discarding man made laws and introduce Sharia law. They particularly targeted the judicial and secular institutions of the state, considering such secular systems as an 'evil'.

53–34). More specifically, a tougher anti-terrorism law was introduced, which empowered the central bank to freeze the accounts of suspected terrorists while terrorism offences were liable to tougher penalties including the death sentence and life imprisonment. During October 2009 the government also outlawed one Islamist party, *Hijb-ut Tahir*, on security grounds. Earlier, in 2005, four other Islamist organizations, *Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh*, *Harkatul Jihad al Islami*, *Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh* and *Shahadat-e al Hikma*, were banned for their suspected militant connections. Riaz and Raji (2010) term these militants Jihadists while classifying Islamist political parties in Bangladesh according to their ideology and practices.²⁴⁴ After the execution of six prominent leaders of these groups, terrorist acts largely ceased, and radical Islamist groups were contained before they could pose a threat to Bengali society. (Mohammad et al., 2010, p. 69). According to Upadhyay (2007), this drive by the government was widely applauded both within and outside the country.

A close study of Islamists reveals that the terrorist incidents were largely a product of very local politics and the acts of certain elements that had no broad-based connections and support within Bangladesh society. The militants were divided into two broad groups. One was the home-grown elements who believed in rigid interpretation of Islam mainly under the influence of the *Ahle-Hadith* variety and concentrated in the local areas including Rajshahi, Naogan, Natore and Bogra districts, in the Northern part of Bangladesh. This group was led by Shaikh Abdur Rahman and his

²⁴⁴ Riaz and Raji (2010) categorized Islamist political parties in Bangladesh into five groups in terms of ideology, fundamental beliefs, aims, objectives and practices. These groups include (1) Pragmatist/Opportunist: Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) which is considered the largest platform of the Islamists and has had representation in the parliament since 1986. Their aim is to establish Islamic social order through peaceful and democratic means. In the 300 contested parliamentary elections, they secured 10 seats in 1986, 18 in 1991, three in 1996, 17 in 2001 and two in 2008. In recent years, their power base has declined with the decrease of number of seats in the parliament and a drop in their popular vote. (2) Idealist such as *Bangladesh Khilafat Andolon*, *Ahle Hadith*, *Jamaat-i-Ulema-e-Islami*, *Bangladesh Nizam-e-Islami Party* and *Islami Morcha Bangladesh*. Their support base is largely limited to *Qwami* madrassahs. (3) Pir (Preacher of Islam) Centric and Mazar (Shrines) based, such as *Bangladesh Islamic Movement*, *Zaker Party*, and *Bangladesh Tariqat Federation*. They are organized around individuals and have a weak support base. (4) Urban Elite Centric: *Hizb Ut Tahir Bangladesh*. Their objective was to establish *Khilafat* and they had international connections. The party was outlawed in 2009. (5) Jihadists: there were militant Islamists such as JMB, HujiB, JMJB, and *Shahadat-i-Al-Hiqma*. They wanted to establish an Islamic state through violence using the ideology of Jihad.

associate Siddikul Islam, popularly known as *Bangla Bhai* from the *Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh* (JMB). These groups were hired by different factions of the ruling and opposition parties to counter each other's influence in a remote locality of Rajshahi, where civil and local administration had little access and control. Particularly, this group proved effective in opposing the local leftist elements known as *Nakshalites* (Naxalites) who allegedly oppressed the local people through extortion, tolls and other repressive measures. Initially, the Islamists were welcomed by the local people on the understanding what Sultan (2011, personal communication) calls "a devil is eliminated by another devil". However, when the Islamist extremists went beyond the boundaries of their Bengali culture, traditions and laws by imposing some restrictions such as *Burqa* for women, banning alcohol etc, such measures attracted extensive media coverage and an alarmed government reacted with the tough and effective counter-terrorism measures noted earlier. (Sultan, 2011, personal communication; Superintendent of Police Y, 2010, personal communication; Lt. Colonel X, 2010, personal communication).

The second group of militants included those elements that returned from the Afghan war and became members of the *Harkatul Jihad al Islami Bangladesh* (HUJIB), an offshoot of global Islamist organization *Harkatul Jihad* (HUJI). This organization was constituted in Afghanistan following the end of the Afghan war and the Soviet withdrawal, with the main objective of giving support to those Muslims who engaged in the struggle for the cause of Islam. These returnees, often estimated at about 3400 as mentioned earlier, joined the Afghan Mujahidin as part of global-wide recruitment from the Muslim countries mainly with Saudi Arabian and American sponsorship to fight the "infidel" Soviets in the context of the Cold War. In that war they were indoctrinated with the Jihadi ideology and strategy in the cause of Islam. When these veterans returned, they became what Sabur (2011, personal communication) calls "warriors without wars" but believed that they could also wage "Afghan-style" revolution in Bangladesh on the assumption that they would win

the support from the Muslim majority.²⁴⁵ The targets of these militants were both political and personal and often became one and the same thing. (Sultan, 2011, personal communication). Pertinent in this regard were the motives of HUIB leader Mufti Hannan, revealed in his interrogation by Lt. Colonel X, Commander of a special elite force (Rapid Action Battalion – RAB). X's account of the interrogation revealed:

Mufti Hannan is one of the key figures of HUIB who waged militant attacks on the Opposition political party Awami League which led the independence war in 1971 against Pakistani forces. When he was a child, his father, a local level Muslim cleric, was kidnapped by members of the local Awami League in district of Faridapur, on the allegation that his father was a supporter of Pakistan. In his presence, his father was brutally tortured and at one stage his tongue was cut out and later he was killed by the local Awami League members. Mufti Hannan saw himself this brutality perpetrated on his father by the members of Awami League to whom he developed personal hatred and anger since his boyhood. This event always remained fresh in his memories and was eager to take revenge when there was an opportunity. This actually led him to attack the rally of the Awami League on 21 August, 2001, with an apparent move to kill the Leader of the Opposition.²⁴⁶ (Lt. Colonel X, 2011, personal communication).

In another incident, Sultan (2011, personal communication), a newspaper journalist who monitored the militants closely and participated in their activities as an observer, states that the attack on eminent poet Shamsur Rahman²⁴⁷ in 1999 was a personal decision on the part of one of its leaders Maulana Sheikh Farid who was himself accused of “homosexual” affairs and molesting a madrassah student. Sheikh Farid, as Sultan (2011, personal communication) points out, ordered his men to organize the attack on the poet on his personal choice with the objective of “diverting the

²⁴⁵ Initially, they tried to commence their operation through supporting the *Rohingyas* in bordering Myanmar areas. These Muslim *Rohingyas* fled to Bangladesh for the fear of persecution by the Myanmar authorities. According to UNHCR, about 200,000 *Rohingyas* took refuge in the bordering areas of Bangladesh. However, their missions failed due to encounters with the Myanmar security agencies.

²⁴⁶ On 21 August 2001, the HUIB launched a bomb blast on a political gathering by the Awami League. This incident left 24 people killed including some prominent leaders of the party. However, the party chief survived the attack. (*The Daily Jugantor*, 28 May 2012).

²⁴⁷ Shamsur Rahman was a famous poet and earned national awards in Bangladesh. The poet in some of his poems composed his themes against religious bigotry. He was later branded as “atheist” and accused of attacking Islam and the religious sentiments of the Muslims by the Islamist groups.

attention of the media towards the other issues from his personal accusation of homosexuality". However, this decision did not reflect the wishes of the highest body, *Surah*, of the HUIB. Fortunately, the attack failed and the poet survived the incident.

Apart from their personal anger, HUIB members also saw the Awami League as an "enemy" of Islam. During Awami League rule of 1996–2001, Islamic *fatwa* was banned by the High Court, an act seen as an attack on Islam. During that time, the Awami League government also dealt with the Islamists with a heavy hand on the streets. More pertinently, the Awami League also led a movement called *Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee* (Committee on the Elimination of Killers and Collaborators in the Independence War of 1971) which appeared to be a payback for acts committed by such groups during the bitter war for independence. (Lt. Colonel X, 2011, personal communication; Sultan, 2011, personal communication).

The appeal of an 'Islamic resurgence', much less of extremism, in Bangladesh during the 1999–2005 period was constrained by the strength of Bengali culture, the character of its nationalism and bloody experience at the hands of West Pakistani Islam in the war of independence. Significantly, when incidents of Islamist extremism occurred, they were divorced from broader trends, most notably the earlier 'tilt towards Islam' by the military regimes – driven, as noted earlier, by the anti-Indian sentiment or short-term utilitarian (particularly economic) gains associated with that period.

As for the Islamist militant groups themselves, as has been discussed, they had a number of distinguishing features. They were very small in numbers, either manipulated in particular local circumstances by the major parties, or were Afghan war returnees whose values and outlook lacked any resonance with Bengali society. It is particularly important to note that JMB's rise was mainly linked to a geographical area of remote northern part of the country. Although they were initially welcomed by local people in order to counter leftist groups, which were also known as 'evil', but were later resisted by the same people when they saw those groups were trying to

impose their conservative ideology. The local and parochial character of these individual groups was also underlined by Bangladeshi intelligence agencies which did not establish any clear connection between these individuals or groups and globalist terrorist organizations and their agenda such as Al-Qaeda and other groups. Their personal experience (e.g. Mufti Hannan's experience with AL) and issues (e.g. Maulana Farid's homosexuality) also influenced their militant activities. These were, often, unrelated to the religion. Their limited nature of capability has been manifested through their containment mainly by the execution of ring-leaders and their banning and the government's anti-terrorism drive. Finally, the failure by this relatively small number of Islamist individuals and groups to find any traction in Bengali society and politics was due to the increasing re-secularization of Bangladesh post-2008 – a process to which this thesis now turns.

2008–2012: Re-secularization

The years from 2005 to 2008 witnessed political turmoil in Bangladesh, mainly due to rivalry between the two main political parties, the AL and the BNP, which prevented the installation of a stable government. While the military backed a caretaker government during this period, it did not attempt to seize power in its own right, indicating that even the military appreciated the inherent strength of democratic institutions in Bangladesh and the limits of military power. The caretaker government paved the way for elections in 2008, which were won by the AL in a landslide victory. That victory gave the AL a powerful mandate to implement their election agenda, which included the restoration of the 1972 secular Constitution and a commitment to crushing terrorism and Islamist militancy. Ahsan and Banavar (2010, p. 87) viewed this election result as a rejection of “the idea of a state based on Islamic law and a union of religious and political authority”.

According to Ahmed (2010a), while Islamist militancy and terrorism remains a problem in some other areas of South and Southeast Asia, Bangladesh has “chosen to establish itself as a secular democracy.” In that regard the Supreme Court became a key player to restore secularism in the Constitution and reinforce the inherent secular values of Bengali culture. In recent years,

Bangladesh has experienced three important judicial interventions²⁴⁸ in this regard, which are generally often seen as a step towards enhancing counter-terrorism efforts and to thwart any process of Islamist radicalization in Bangladeshi politics.

The most important development was the verdict on religion and secularization given by the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, released on 28 July 2010. The Appellate Division's decision upheld the 2005 High Court's verdict that the Constitution's 1979 Fifth Amendment was illegal. Earlier in 1979, the Fifth Amendment was incorporated into the Constitution giving legality to military rule (between 1975 and 1979) and dropped secularism as one of the state principles, inserting, it will be recalled, certain Islamist values instead. In its verdict, the Supreme Court reinstated some of the provisions of the original 1972 Constitution, including those that outline the principles of secularism. In that judgment the court argued that secularism means religious tolerance as well as religious freedom, and that the state must not be seen to favor any particular belief system. Rather, the state should ensure protection to the followers of all faiths without any discrimination, including those of atheists. The verdict also paved the way for deleting Clause 2 of Article 25 that provides that the "State shall endeavor to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamist solidarity." (*The Daily Jugantor*, 29 July 2010). This was clearly a departure from foreign policy orientations towards the Middle Eastern and other Muslim countries and Islamic *Ummah*. The other critical issue was the restoration of a ban on religious political parties. According to the original 1972 Constitution, religious parties were banned, but this was withdrawn in the 1979 Amendment. This facilitated the ban on Islamist politics. All these changes were given effect in the Constitution by its Fifteenth Amendment on 29 June 2011. (*The Daily Star*, 30 June 2011; *The Hindu*, 30 June 2011).

²⁴⁸ The researcher wrote an article on this issue in CATR's *Asian Conflicts Reports*, Issue 13 (September–October), 2010.

A second important development was the ban on *Fatwa* by the High Court. *Fatwa*, interpreted as an Islamist decree on local arbitration or interpretation of aspects of religious law by respected clerics, is viewed as “intrinsically linked to the Islamists’ agenda”. (Riaz, 2005, p. 172). It is often misused, breaching human rights including the rights of women. For example, in the case of extra-marital affairs, such decrees often subject women to cruel punishments including caning, stoning and beating in public places. It was alleged in the petitions to the High Court that a number of deaths, suicides and incidents of grievous harm suffered by women were reported arising from punishments given in *Fatwa*. In the verdict on 8 July 2010, the High Court declared illegal all kinds of extrajudicial punishment including those made in the name of *Fatwa* in local arbitration. The court decreed that, according to the Constitution, ‘no citizens will be subject to cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment or punishment’. (*The Daily Star*, 9 July 2010).

A third important development in terms of what may be loosely termed the “re-secularization process” was a judicial intervention on matters of “Islamist attire” that declared the compulsory wearing of the *Burqa* by women against their will illegal. The High Court on 22 August 2010 issued a *suo moto* order giving the directive to the government to make sure that women are not under compulsion to wear the *Burqa* or religious dress at educational institutions and offices. The court also ordered the government to ensure that no cultural activities or sports in educational institutions be restricted in any manner to women because of their dress. Earlier, on 8 April 2010, the High Court ruled that women must not be forced to wear veils or cover their heads against their choice while working at public and private educational institutions. The court decreed that dress is a matter of personal choice and asked the Secretary in Charge of Education to ensure that women are not harassed by their superiors at educational institutions. (*The Daily Star*, 9 April 2010).

These three recent and very significant legal interventions by the highest judicial court in Bangladesh are extraordinary when set against the backdrop of more fundamentalist trends in

some other Muslim majority countries, and will likely play an important role in promoting secular values and women's rights in Bangladesh. These significant developments will also have profound implications in the future, as the Constitution and laws have been amended in accordance with the directives of the Supreme Court. In short, a change of government is unlikely to affect any of these constitutional amendments.

Another important trend of this period was the decline of Islamists in electoral politics. The table given in Appendix 15 shows the Islamists, mainly the *Jamaat-e-Islami* (JI), scored only 4.7 percent of electoral votes and secured only two seats in the 2008 parliamentary elections. The winning of two parliament seats constitutes less than 1 percent of the total 350 seats. Even the relative small number of votes obtained by JI does not reflect a belief in Islamist ideology as claimed by the Islamic political parties. People vote for parties for a variety of reasons and local factors and animosities are often paramount in this regard.²⁴⁹ Thus, Professor Hussain (2011, personal communication) argues that the electoral votes garnered by JI do not truly reflect the actual support base of the Islamists. Sometimes local politics and tactical alliances with other parties inflate the profile of parties such as JI.

Another notable scholar Sabur (2011, personal communication) asserts "the majority people of Bangladesh are essentially religious at the personal level, but when they vote they choose the secular parties". Another scholar Abdur Rab Khan (2011, personal communication) points out the Bengalis have a very fresh memories of the misuse of religion in the past by the West Pakistanis. Professor Ahmed (2011, personal communication) argues that "the strong sense of nationalism articulated through such events as the celebration of month-long Bengali culture in April and Victory Day in December, Independence Day in March, and Language Day in February all

²⁴⁹ For example, in the case of Malaysia, the very name Parti Islam (PAS) of the mainly Malay opposition party often prompts foreigners to misunderstand/exaggerate the nature of Malay support for PAS. Because its leaders and supporters are Muslims, PAS expresses itself in Islamic idiom/terminology but, besides Islam, support for PAS also derives from a host of factors pertinent in support for any political party such as village and family relationships, local factors, and personal disputes and so on.

demonstrate a powerful blow to the Islamist politics in Bangladesh.” He observes that if an election were held in and around these dates/months whatever little support the Islamists had would be at risk. This was evident in a poor performance of the Islamists in the 2008 general election which was held in the month of December, a time associated with the emotional attachment of the people at large to the spirit of the liberation war of 1971. Secularization and the lack of popular enthusiasm for the Islamist agenda are rather an outcome of Bangladesh’s secular history and the powerful national themes associated with the country’s traumatic birth in 1971. Eminent political scientist Professor Jahangir (2011, personal communication), who chairs the Institute of Social Studies, summed up this outcome while being interviewed:

How can we forget the killing of about three million people in the War of Independence in 1971 against the Pakistani forces? Here in Bangladesh almost every household had the bitter experience of the atrocities committed by the Pakistanis ... family members of Bengali households were killed, injured or affected badly. Besides, they had to leave their villages and many of them took refuge in bordering India in order to flee the brutality by those forces who did all these things in the name of Islam.²⁵⁰ This brutality was the culmination of their hatred towards the Bengali people whom they considered ‘lower Muslim’. They used to say publicly “you’re not [a] good Muslim; you don’t know the exact Islamic rituals, even how to pray”. Their intention was to stifle the national pride and cultural traditions of Bengali people in the name of Islam. This was absolutely an issue of abusing and insulting a nation. In the 40 years of independence, the Bengali people still have fresh memories of such use of Islam by the Pakistani elites. This led to a powerful sentiment associated with the war and nationalism which can hardly die down abruptly and always works in the background to determine Islamist politics even today.

Social issues: Empowerment of women

Another important development highlighting Bangladesh’s resistance to a more fundamentalist interpretation of Islam has to do with the empowerment of women. A democracy cannot function unless women’s rights are established. (Ahmed, 2010 a). The focus of such empowerment is found

²⁵⁰ About 10 million people took refuge in India to flee the atrocities by the Pakistani forces in 1971. (cited in Khan, 2009, p. 82).

in areas of labor and the economic role of women, increasing their literacy and political participation.

In Bangladesh a number of NGOs are active in promoting the empowerment of women through providing employment opportunities and income generation activities. The Grameen Bank²⁵¹ of Nobel Prize winner Professor Muhammad Yunus has had a significant impact in this regard. With this model, poor women are given micro-credit to set up a small enterprise to generate income and thereby become self-sufficient and independent. This model has achieved what Ahmed (2010a) called a “thundering success” and is being replicated in other countries. About 3.5 million women are the borrowers of this micro-credit facility and with their family members now constitute about 20 percent of the population. The beneficiaries of this scheme, not surprisingly, are opposed to the growth of fundamentalism which is seen as conflicting with women’s rights. In short, the economic empowerment of women in the Bangladesh context through access to credit and high employment (in sectors such as the textile industry) have been major factors in their independence and a significant bulwark against the conservative social agenda of fundamentalist groups.

Social scientist Rahul Amin, while evaluating the micro-credit programs, argues that micro-credit made a positive contribution to the overall social development of the country. According to him, micro-credit “not only increase[s] their [beneficiaries, mainly women] ... income and empowerment [mainly for women], but also ... overcome[s] the socio-economic barriers to fertility regulation and primary health care utilization ... [and that] many of these effects are likely to reinforce each other creating a self-sustaining momentum of socio-economic development.” (cited in Milam, 2011, p. 216). Numerous other studies also indicate a positive correlation between the

²⁵¹ Professor Muhammad Yunus devised the Grameen Bank model of micro-credit which is offered to those clients who are excluded from the traditional financial system on the ground of no or little collateral. The key difference between microfinance and the conventional credit disbursal mechanism lies in the joint liability concept. Microfinance has become very popular as it caters to the needs of poor people and their capacity to set up an enterprise for income generation. Micro lenders claim a default rate as low as between one and three percent.

availability of micro-credit and social development. Milam (2011, p. 217) lists these areas including a “sense of worth among women beneficiaries, female voter participation, reduced abuse in the household, and an increased sense of freedom”. With regard to the question as to what facilitates these developments, different explanations are found in academic studies. Perhaps most pertinently, the cultural explanation suggests that “a combination of historical, cultural and political circumstances” in the Bengali context is associated with “an openness to change and innovation” that creates the conditions of raising the indicators of social development. (Milam, 2011, p. 201).

In the context of women’s empowerment, prioritizing the labor intensive ready-made garments industry has also produced significant results. At present, Bangladesh is the second largest exporter of ready-made garments followed by China, which amounted to about \$20 billion worth of goods in 2011–2012. (cited in Mridha, 2013, p. 1). Participation in this industry is particularly sought after by women and of the 3.5 million workers employed in the apparel industry, about 80 percent are women. (Ahmed, 2010a; Mridha, 2012, p. 1). Such employment is considered a critical source of empowerment for women in Bangladesh and has had positive impacts in terms of their rights and choices. Such employment opportunities have created the condition of what is known as the “female-headed household” where women remain the sole source of income for families. This has increased the decision-making power of women not only at the family level, but also at work places where by forming unions they have realized their legitimate rights vis-à-vis their male counterparts. Statistics provide clear evidence of the improved living standards and human rights, now enjoyed by Bangladeshi women. (Ahmed, 2010a).

The net result of those initiatives, significant in this regard, was micro credit and ready-made garments whereby women increasingly become a large part of the labor force in Bangladesh. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in Pakistan where NGOs are not widespread. In the early years of Bangladesh, women made up about 40 percent of the labor force but by 1980 this increased to

over 47 percent. Out of this 47 percent, over 70 percent women took part in the labor force. Such household income has brought an opportunity for women to have control over family and social issues including social expenditures on areas to “see that children are sent to school, better clothed, better fed, provided better health care and generally raised with a promise of social uplift”. (Milam, 2011, p. 205). This control is particularly important in the political context as well, where they are better placed to assert themselves, particularly in choosing the leadership and representatives based on their preferences.

Fundamentalist notions regarding the status of women have also been dealt a heavy blow in the political arena, where women are active, and indeed lead some of the major political parties. Conservatives do not find the leadership of women in politics acceptable and indeed when Sheikh Hasina took over the leadership of AL and Begum Zia assumed the control of BNP there was opposition from such quarters. However, women have won power in alternate elections since 1991²⁵² reflecting a significant change in the patriarchal nature of Bangladesh society and the strength of Bengali culture including its secular tenets in the face of influences associated with Islamist fundamentalism. More broadly, women’s participation in state and society has been facilitated by women occupying the highest political offices – those of Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. This has encouraged women to participate in politics at national, local and regional levels.²⁵³ Each of these levels has designated seats for women in order to ensure their participation, signifying the progress and opportunity for greater equity in decision-making.²⁵⁴ The government established the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in 1978 solely to take care of

²⁵² Begum Zia of BNP won the elections in 1991 and 2001 while Sheikh Hasina was elected in 1996 and 2008.

²⁵³ According to the Election Commission, Bangladesh reserves 45 seats for women in the parliament on the basis of proportion of representation of political parties. Seats are also reserved at the local government levels. For example, the position of Vice Chairman (481 seats) has been created for women at *Upazilla Parishad* (local government body). In government recruitment, there is a 10 percent quota for women to ensure their participation in the bureaucracy. (Islam, 2009, pp. 14–15).

²⁵⁴ According to Islam (2009, pp. 14–15), women’s participation in the 2008 election has surpassed the past record, securing 64 seats in the parliament with 19 members directed elected and another 45 nominated by the parliament members. These women have also significant representation in the cabinet with six important portfolios.

women's rights, particularly in matters of literacy, health, economic conditions and their status in society. Numerous NGOs are also active in support of women's empowerment. This is also complemented by laws to ensure women's rights, including the laws relating to anti-dowry (1980), prevention of women and child abuses, citizen's rights (2009), prevention of domestic violence (2010), and adoption of national policy on women in development (2011). These are all legal measures specifically intended to protect women's rights. In contrast to Pakistan (e.g. the Hudood Ordinances), Bangladesh does not have any Islamic laws on the books that "foster violence" or discrimination towards women, particularly with regard to the dress code, being a witness in the courts, etc. (Milam, 2011, p. 207).

Overall, regarding the position of women in Bangladesh, Wassener (2012) in an article published in the *New York Times* on 9 April comments:

When it comes to the position of women, however, this country has made progress that would be unthinkable in many other Muslim societies. Bangladeshi women have served in United Nations peacekeeping missions. There are women ambassadors, doctors, engineers and pilots. Two powerful women – the prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, and her rival, Khaleda Zia – have taken turns at the country's helm for years. The proportion of parliamentary seats held by women is 19.7 percent, not much lower than the 22.3 percent in the British House of Commons.

More broadly, the personal and political empowerment of women in Bangladesh is apparent from a variety of statistics – decline in birth rate²⁵⁵, rise in female literacy²⁵⁶, participation in

²⁵⁵ One important effect of women's empowerment is the significant decline of the birth rate with implications for Islamist politics. For example, since women are employed, they cannot be made the subject for producing children as before. As a result, the birth rate has decreased sharply over the years. In the period of 1970–1975, the birth rate per woman was 6.8, but declined to 2.36 in 2005–2010. Associate Professor Alauddin Ahmed (2011, personal communication) highlights this particular achievement in fertility control and its linkage to a transition to modernity. He points out in 1970 the population of East Pakistan was higher than West Pakistan with about 61 million while the number of West Pakistanis was about 50 million. (also cited in Abdullah, 2010, p. 9). After 40 years of its independence, Bangladesh's population declined sharply to 161 million while Pakistan's population stands at about 191 million. (The World Fact Book, 2012). According to World Bank figures, the sharp decline was largely due to the formulation of a coherent family planning program taken up by the government that also allowed the NGOs and bilateral donors to integrate with the national objectives. This coordinated plan saw a sharp decline in fertility by 55 percent and population growth rate by 33 percent since 1975. (Milam, 2011, p. 202). Noble laureate Amartya Sen terms this success a sign of socio-economic transformation in Bangladesh. (Imam, 2011, p. 1). As shown before in

employment – all of which combined with the powerful trend towards re-secularization since 2008 presents a further and significant bulwark against the conservative social agenda of some Islamist groups or an ‘Islamic resurgence’ in the context of Bangladesh.

Conclusion

This chapter reveals the implications of the four important factors, as identified in the preceding chapters, in politics concerning Islam in contemporary times. The key finding is that Islam was subordinated in politics in independent Bangladesh, as evident in the adoption of the Constitution in 1972 which inserted secularism as one of the state principles, and this was mainly a result of an aversion by the Bengali people to the religious excesses of the West Pakistani ruling elite who resorted to both repressive and oppressive measures, including the killing of about three million people in the name of Islam. This traumatic episode is still relevant to the present context.

The chapter, however, also finds that the higher profile of Islam in the 1975–1990 period was mainly due to socio-economic dynamics of the military-backed regimes arising out of both internal and external environments. Particularly important was the opening up of new business opportunities and a competition for petro dollars from the Middle Eastern Muslim countries. The anti-Indian sentiment, resulting mainly from the strained bilateral relationship and the mis-rule of AL, equally contributed to the employment of religion in politics in that period. The chapter has also noted that the Islamic profile became irrelevant with the fall of General Ershad, who could not survive the street protests despite his attempt to use an ‘Islamic card’ (i.e. declaring Islam as ‘the state religion’), and a return to democratic rule in the 1990s. More importantly this chapter also

the study by Courbage and Todd (2007, p. 10), with such demographic change a process of “de-Islamization” is underway in Bangladesh in concert with women’s empowerment, particularly evident in a declining fertility rate similar to the situation of 18th century Europe.

²⁵⁶ Another indicator of women’s empowerment is the rise of female literacy in Bangladesh. According to a survey published in the newspaper *The Financial Express* (3 January 2009), the total literacy rate rose to 48.8 percent in 2008, with 49.1 for women which was largely due to the certain initiatives both at government and non-government levels including female stipends and food for education programs and non-formal education. (Kabir, 2009; Chowhdury et al. 2011, p. 17). Noble laureate Amartya Sen while speaking in Kolkata praised Bangladesh’s attainment of “the right to education” and increase of the number of girls going to school compared to boys as an indicator of “the activism of liberated Bangladeshi women”. (*The Hindu*, 18 February 2011).

records that the speculation by some media and policy makers that Bangladesh would fall prey to Islamist extremism, with the wave of Islamist militancy from 1999 to 2005, did not happen. The period of Islamic profile (1975–1990) did not directly cause the militancy in the latter period (1999–2005), indicating they were separate to each other.

The militancy, on the other hand, was relatively transient and limited in terms of their operation and capability to survive the government's counter-terrorism drive. With the execution of six ring leaders and banning their politics, the militant groups did not exhibit their visible presence. However, as this chapter has also shown, the Islamist militancy during that period was largely an outcome of an ideology and tactics brought back to Bangladesh by some returnees of the Afghan War against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s and by some conservative elements who rose mainly in response to a host of very local politics. The HUIB, was, in particular, formed with a group of Afghan war returnees who envisioned an 'Afghan style revolution' in line with what they themselves learnt in the war. However, they were ultimately treated as 'foreign' to the Bangladeshi context and met resistance from within the broader secular framework. The rise of JMB was also primarily a result of local politics in the context of countering leftist extremist groups in remote areas of greater Rajshahi, a northern part of the country. Their personal connection was also highlighted with regard to the confession of HUIB leader Mufti Hannan on his childhood experience with AL and the issue of homosexuality of Maulana Farid. This militancy, as the chapter highlights, was a brief manifestation and was largely resulted from local politics, personal issues and the Afghan war connection. This had no or little connection with the Islamic profile in the earlier period (1975–1990) and the broader secular fabric of the society.

The relative ease by which Bangladesh's anti-terrorism campaign largely contained that outbreak of militancy demonstrated how the militant Islamists had misunderstood Islam in the Bengali context, a context in which Islam is intimately interwoven with deeper traditions of tolerance, syncretism, nationalism and utilitarian socio-economic considerations in Bengali culture. In that

regard this chapter has sought to highlight the underlying strength and resilience of those traditions by reference to the diversity and tolerance of Bengali culture, the power of Bengali nationalism and the strength of secularism and democracy in contemporary Bangladesh's political history since its independence in 1971.

Recent developments, particularly the constitutional amendments regarding the secular provisions, women's empowerment mainly through micro-credit programs and growth of the apparel industry which provide employment to millions of women, and the holding of the highest political positions by women leaders (Prime Minister, Opposition Leader and Speaker of the Parliament), have further highlighted and strengthened these trends. As a result, Bangladesh as a Muslim country is somewhat at odds with the trend amongst other Muslim countries in South and South East Asia where an Islamist agenda has become more apparent or prominent.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

The terrorist incidents from 1999 to 2005 in Bangladesh attracted considerable media and academic speculation that the country would fall in the hands of the Islamists and become another *Taliban*-led Afghanistan. The main contention was that those radical Islamists, who targeted the symbols of secular values and institutions including the Bengali festival, administration and judiciary, had 'well-structured command and capability', leading to assumptions that the country would become a hub of the Islamist operations. In addition, it was considered that these terrorist events were indicative of the higher profile of Islam in the polity in the post-1975 period, which had been brought about by military-led regimes who introduced changes in the Constitution, replacing the principle of secularism with several Islamic values including Qur'anic verses and the inclusion of an obligation to maintain 'fraternal' relations with Muslim countries based on *Ummah*. The rise of Islam was thought to culminate when General Ershad inserted in the Constitution in 1988 the provision of Islam as the 'state religion' of Bangladesh. These changes led some academics to conclude that Islamist militancy was largely a consequence of the rise of Islam in that period (1995–1990).

This thesis has made a number of contributions to this debate. First, it has been argued that the specific contribution of this thesis is to confirm that the terrorist incidents that Bangladesh experienced during those years were largely the result of an ideology and tactics brought back to that country by a handful of returnees (i.e. HUJIB) of the Afghan war against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. It has also shown that other groups (i.e. JMB) had surfaced in response to a host of local, personal and political rivalries, often unrelated to conservative ideological interpretation of Islam. The other important issue is that these groups came to the surface in the remote areas of the northern part of the country mainly by manipulation of local politics. The key point is to note,

and this thesis has demonstrated, that these Islamist groups although operated militant activities for a brief period (1999–2005) they were fundamentally disconnected with the mainstream Bangladeshi society. Those groups believed that the radical Islamist ideology they encountered (and imbibed) in Afghanistan and a more conservative interpretation of Islam could be introduced in Bangladesh. However, this proved a misjudgement on their part. In fact, these groups have disappeared from the political scene and failed to remain as a significant force, mainly as a result of the rejection of their propagated ideology by the common people. The relative ease by which Bangladesh's anti-terrorism drive, including the execution of ring leaders, framing anti-terrorism laws, banning their politics, contained the outbreak of Islamist militancy has revealed how seriously the radical groups misunderstood Islam in the Bengali context, a context in which Islam is intimately interwoven with deeper traditions of tolerance and secularism in Bengali culture.

This thesis has also ruled out the possibility of a clear linkage between these terrorist activities and the use of Islam in the post-1975 period by the military-led regimes. Had this been the case, the Islamists would have risen earlier, but indeed this thesis has shown that the higher profile of Islam in politics and the limited outbreak of extremism did not coincide. The regimes of General Zia and General Ershad tilted to Islam due to certain utilitarian and political considerations. One of the motives was that the regimes used Islam to withstand the political, military and diplomatic pressure from a strong neighbour, India, on strained bilateral relations and to seek foreign assistance (petro dollars) from the Middle Eastern Muslim countries in order to address the war-torn economy. Another important motive was an attempt to employ Islam in order to legitimize their military-backed regimes by creating an appeal to the electorate. However, in the long run that strategy did not work well, particularly during the regime of Ershad who had to step down in the face of a mass movement in 1990 despite his declaration of Islam as the 'state religion'.

The tilt to Islam by the military-backed regimes, essentially motivated by utilitarian foreign policy and economic considerations, has not provided any major traction in the case of Bangladesh, as

evident in the consistent low votes for Islamists since independence in 1971. The Islamist groups, who are deeply divided on interpretations of Islam, remained confined to a limited section of the population. As shown, their support base stood between 4 to 10 percent in subsequent general election results (e.g. 1990, 1996, 2001 and 2008).

This thesis has juxtaposed Bangladesh's short-lived experiment with political Islam with the Islamic resurgence in three other Muslim majority countries (Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia) and argued that it is not appropriate in this type of analysis to perceive political Islam in universal or monolithic terms. The literature showed that only in Pakistan did the ideological or Jihadist dimension of political Islam contribute partly to the higher profile of Islam in politics, and this was largely a result of Pakistan's role in containing the communist expansion in Afghanistan. The review identified a number of key factors – culture, socio-economics, nationalism and domestic political pressures – that determined the extent of Islamic resurgence in those countries.

In the case of Pakistan, due to its deeply fragmented and heterogeneous society, Islam has been used as a unifying factor in the polity. The centralization of the ruling elites and disregarding of the diversity, which upset consensus-building on important social issues, provided the greening of the Islamists. The ruling elites, mostly autocratic, needed Islamic support to legitimize their rule and this resulted in the increased focus on conservative Islamic agendas. On the other hand, in Malaysia, Islam became an important determinant for the Malaysian identity in the context of an ethnically and culturally divided society. The majority of the local Muslim Malays, who were economically backward vis-à-vis the non-Malay population, sought to improve their conditions through increasing reliance on Islamic credentials. However, rampant corruption and cronyism associated with the NEP, particularly during the Mahathir era, deeply offended many Malays' perspective on Islamic social justice, leading the major Malay political parties, UMNO and PAS, to outbid or 'out Islamize' one another to create an appeal to Malay voters. The result of such rivalry has been the greater Islamization of Malaysian institutions and society. Indonesia has

accommodated ethnic and cultural plurality mainly through the principle of *Pancasila*, disregarding the role of Islam in public life. Unlike Pakistan and Malaysia, the religion of the majority people has not become an overly important issue in the polity. The indigenous traditions, particularly strong Javanese influences, have greatly worked to marginalize the radical groups who failed to gain support of the common people. More importantly, two autocratic regimes of Soekarno and Suharto committed to secular ideals mainly through measures ranging from persuasion to use of force. Although Indonesia saw the trend of Islamic piety due to socio-economic factors in the 1990s after the fall of Suharto, voting behavior did not reflect a major swing towards any political Islamist ideology. In addition, the main conservative groups have lost their strength significantly in the face of the government's anti-terrorism measures.

While highlighting the Bangladesh case, similar factors have combined to produce a very different outcome, in this case the strengthening of secularism and civil society. Bangladesh remains a case apart as far as the impact of the Islamic revival is concerned. Regarding the cultural factor, this thesis has shown that the secular tradition is deeply embedded in the history of Bengal and its people's sense of identity. Such values in the Bengali context originated in ancient times and were nurtured and reinforced in different phases of its cultural and political history. (Sen, 2005, p. 274). When Islam spread to Bengal mainly through peaceful means, it imbibed the local context, taking into consideration values of secularism, tolerance and something akin to humanism. Through this process, Islam became 'Bengalized', and syncretistic. Another important factor was socio-economic and related to the role of Islam vis-à-vis the state and society. As British colonial policies in Bengal worsened the socio-economic conditions of Muslims in relation to their local Hindu counterparts, Islam provided a focus for the profound socio-economic grievances of Bengali Muslims, often expressed in anti-colonialism and anti-Brahmanism. But during the Pakistani period, Islam, in turn, became, from a Bengali point of view, a new source of political and socio-economic suppression or internal colonialism. This negative experience of Islam provided a powerful context in shaping Bengali nationalism, often characterized as secular. The imposition of Urdu in the name of Islam

came as a direct attack on Bengali identity, leading to the eventual creation of Bangladesh in 1971. As a result, contemporary politics has sought to highlight the underlying strength and resilience of indigenous secular traditions in different phases since independence. Recent social developments, constitutional amendments and women's empowerment in particular have further strengthened these trends.

Unlike Pakistan, Malaysia or Indonesia, Bangladesh is effectively a homogeneous society in terms of ethnicity and language. In that context, the traumatic memories of the use of Islam by the West Pakistani elites and the killing of three million people in the war of 1971 have still remained fresh among many Bangladeshi people and made them suspicious of the role of Islam in public life. The higher profile of Islam in the post-1975 period by the military-backed governments and the later Islamist militancy, as has been seen, are momentary in nature and are understood as a response to a host of local, personal and political issues. The strengthening of civil society, consequent upon the restoration of democracy in 1990 with the fall of the military-backed regime, has also led to reinforcement of secular traditions vis-à-vis the role Islam in the Bengali political context.

The reinsertion of secularism in the Constitution, court's decision regarding a ban on Islamic *Fatwa* and *Burqa*, popularizing the Bengali festivals and the success in containing the Islamist militancy, are some of the examples that demonstrate that Bangladesh is somewhat at odds with either an Islamist agenda or revivalism. As far as the Islamic resurgence is concerned, Bangladesh's position, to some extent, presents an analogous case with Indonesia. Particularly important in that regard has been the syncretization of Islam with deeper cultural forces in both societies and the extent to which nationalism and identity have been interwoven with religion. However, in Indonesia autocratic measures have proved effective, particularly during the Soekarno and Suharto regimes to subordinate Islam, while in Bangladesh consensus-building is critical in promoting secular values. In that regard, Bangladesh is a case apart from other Muslim

countries where a rise of the importance of Islam in politics has been more or less apparent since the 1970s.

This thesis has shown that Bangladesh has largely remained immune not only to the resurgence phenomenon but has also experienced a different, if not opposite, trend. The same factors – culture, socio-economics, nationalism and domestic political pressures – have combined to produce a different outcome, i.e. strengthening of secularism and civil society.

Finally, this thesis has also made a contribution to the existing literature on the Islamic resurgence. As has been seen, context appears critical when examining or explaining the Islamic resurgence in those Muslim majority countries. This thesis challenges any monolithic interpretation of Islam, which propagates an ideological dimension to establish a universal Islamic order. The overall contention of this thesis has been an emphasis on recognizing the diversity within Islam, and its apparent resurgence is largely a result of a host of local circumstances and issues, i.e. context is determinant. This reinforces the view that Islam is not a monolith, but a rich and varied mosaic. More specifically, Islam is not necessarily antipathetical to secularism in Muslim majority countries, as is particularly evident in the case of Bangladesh.

Out of this work, it is also evident that there is a gap in research in the analysis of Islamist politics and their cases on Muslim countries. Particularly in Bangladesh, this research offers an insight to address the gap while dealing with political Islam and, more significantly, the extremist interpretation of Islamic ideology. For example, policy makers may use this output to identify the issues in that regard and take steps accordingly in order to retain the secular traditions which are historically, culturally and politically embedded in Bangladesh. This also provides an opportunity for academics to further the research in diagnosing issues relating to Islamist politics while setting the future course of action. Other Muslim countries may also learn from Bangladesh's context and experiences to cope with them as far as the Islamic resurgence is concerned. At the same time, the perception of Islam and Muslim countries simply for adopting certain Islamic values, and chiefly

the militant activities by some elements or groups in those countries, deserves a second thought in the wider milieu. Broadly, this, in particular, draws an attention to a paradigm shift from the one which views Islam as a conservative ideological platform to a more contextual framework, contributing to reconstruct that perception while recognizing the need for a balanced and comprehensive policy towards Islam and those Muslim countries.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Bomb Attacks in Bangladesh 1999–2005

1999	6 March	A bomb blast at a program organized by the Udichi, a secular cultural organization, at Jessore kills 10 and injures about 100.
	8 October	A bomb blast at an Ahmedia mosque in Khulna claims eight lives and wounds 30 others.
2001	20 January	Seven persons are killed and 50 injured in a bomb attack at a political rally of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (PB) in the capital Dhaka.
	14 April	A bomb attack on a gathering at a park in Dhaka on Pahela Baishakh (the Bengali New Year) kills 10 and injures 50.
	3 June	Ten persons are killed when a church is bombed at a Baniarchor in Gopalganj.
	16 June	Twenty-two persons are killed in a powerful explosion in the Awami League office in Narayanganj, an important river port city near Dhaka.
	23 September	Eight persons are killed and more than 100 injured in a bomb attack on an AL public meeting at Mollahat in Bagerhat.
	26 September	A bomb attack near an AL public meeting in Sunamganj, a northeastern district, kills four persons.
2002	28 September	A series of bomb blasts at a movie theater and inside a circus tent at Satkhira, a southwestern district, kills three persons and wounds more than 100 people.
	6 December	Bomb blasts in four movie theaters in Mymensingh, about 100 kilometers (64 miles) north of Dhaka, kills 27 and wounds more than 200.
2003	17 January	A bomb blast at a village fair in Tangail, in central region of the country, kills seven and injures 20.
	1 March	One police sergeant is murdered when unidentified assailants throw a targeted bomb at him in Khulna.
	11 March	Two police constables are killed in a bomb blast in southwestern town of Khulna.
	6 September	An Awami League leader is killed in a bomb attack in Khulna.
2004	15 January	A reporter for a Bengali-language newspaper is killed in a bomb attack in the south-western town of Khulna.
	21 May	British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury is wounded by a bomb while praying at a shrine in the north-eastern town of Sylhet; his bodyguard and two others are killed.
	21 August	Twenty-three people are killed in a series of grenade attacks on an AL rally in the capital Dhaka. Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed escapes with minor injuries.
	5 September	Two people are killed in a bomb blast outside a movie theater in Sylhet.
2005	27 January	A bomb blast kills four people, including former Finance Minister Shah Abu Mohammad Shamsul Kibria, at an opposition rally in the north-eastern town of Laskarpur close to Sylhet.
	5 February	A bomb explodes in the parking lot of the press club in the south-western city of Khulna, killing a journalist.
	17 August	Some 450 small bombs, many of them targeting government buildings, go off across Bangladesh, killing two people.
	3 October	Two people are killed when five bombs explode in three court buildings in various parts of the country.
	14 November	Two judges are killed when Islamist militants throw a bomb at their car in Jhalokathi, 250 km (155 miles) south of Dhaka.

	29 November	Eleven people are killed by suspected suicide bombers in the port city of Chittagong and in Gazipur, 30 km (20 miles) north of Dhaka.
	1 December	A suspected suicide bomber kills two people near a court building in Gazipur.
	8 December	At least eight people are killed in a suicide bomb attack in Netrokona, 360 km (220 miles) north of Dhaka.

Source: Riaz (2008, pp. 114–15).

Appendix 2: JMB Leaflet Distributed in 2005 (English Version)

In the name of Allah the most magnificent and the most kind

On behalf of the Jamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh

A CALL FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF ISLAMIC LAWS

All praises be to Allah and all salutations and prayers be for Muhammad (Sm). I bear witness that there is no Allah but Him and Muhammed (Sm) is his apostle. In the holy Quran Allah has revealed:

No one but Allah can make laws. (Sura Yusuf – 40)

Hear ye! It is for Him to create and give orders. (Sura A'araf – 54)

To execute the laws of Allah a group of My creatures will always carry out armed struggle (jihad) [Jihad]. They will be harsh on their enemies, who will oppose them but fail to cause them any harm. They will continue to wage the war till the day of resurrection. (Sahi Muslim hadis)

Call to People

Assalamu Alaikum, dear Muslim brothers and sisters of the country,

Allah has created us as his representative on earth only so that we serve and worship Him solely. He sent to us His last messenger Muhammad (Sm) so that we may learn to avoid Tagut in our belief and action. Allah says, "I despatch apostles to all people with the responsibility to ensure devotion to Allah alone and rejection of Tagut." (Sura Nahl – 36)

If a human being worships someone other than Allah, serves or owes allegiance to him or makes Allah his partner then such a partner lord is called Tagut. A powerful Tagut is an oppressive ruler who alters Allah's laws, that is, he makes laws approving impiety.

For example, he approves of rape, interest, drinking of alcohol and obscenity; or he puts up hindrance to jihad. Similarly if a ruler forsaking Allah's laws follows laws made by him or other non-believers he is also a powerful Tagut.

In a Muslim country there can be no laws other than the laws of Allah. But it is a matter of great regret that in a land inhabited by 90 percent Muslims the laws of Allah are not enforced in Bangladesh. On top of it from the districts to the capital city in the courts of law justice is dispensed according to laws based on a man-made constitution.

This constitution has been framed by some sinful learned men. Whereas men should serve Allah and follow His laws they have instead put forward a challenge by framing a constitution of their own.

The state powers in the country are wielded by a junta inimical to Allah. Because the process under which the head of the state or other rulers are elected is totally anti-Islamic. The Quran or Hadis do not recognize any democratic or socialist system that is enacted by infidels and non-believers. These systems are in direct contravention of Allah's laws. The laws of the land are the brain-children of infidels, non-believers and Jews precisely to destroy Muslim mores and faith. It is time for the Muslims to stand up and react.

Jamatul Mujahideen discards the existing judicial system of the country and they stand for the demand for upholding Allah's laws and faith in Allah. At the same time it rejects the constitution that conflicts with

Allah's laws and calls upon all to abandon the so-called election process and run the affairs of state according to the laws of Allah and the traditions of the prophet.

JM is firmly committed to establishing Allah's Din in this land of Allah. As long as the laws of Allah are not enforced, please cease invoking the courts of Tagut laws. Instead seek solutions to your legal issues according to Allah's laws from Khatibs (sermonizers) of mosques, Muhaddeses (hadis experts) of Madrassas or experienced Alems (learned men). Neglecting the Tagut laws seek justice from Allah's laws.

Allah has revealed:

“Do they seek judgment on the basis of laws of Jahiliya (Ignorance)? Is there anybody other than Allah who can resolve issues better?” (Sura Maidah – 50).

“Shall I look for another judge other than Allah?” (Sura Aanam – 114)

“Have not you seen those who claim that they brought faith that was given to them before? They want to establish Tagut although they have been asked to defy Tagut.” (Sura Nisa – 60)

Call to Bangladesh Government

Salute to those who are willing to listen! Once you have been admonished you cannot turn back to sin and darkness. Allah sent his apostle with true faith as a messenger of good news and warning to people. Those who responded to his call, Allah has guided them well. But those who turned away, the prophet fought them.

Thereafter they followed Islam willingly or otherwise. Therefore, Bangladesh government is called upon to enforce the laws of Allah. We shall cooperate with you. We are not after power. We want the rule of Allah's laws and not of Tagut.

The workers of Jamatul Mujahideen in Bangladesh are soldiers of Allah and they have taken up arms to enforce Allah's laws as did our prophet, his companions and all fighters of Islam from time to time. Jamatul Mujahideen wants to put an end to irreligious activities and anti Islamic beliefs and customs and secure Allah's pleasure by firmly establishing Tawhid or faith in one Allah. This they believe will bring in happiness for you in both this life and afterlife.

JM has asked Bangladesh government twice before through leaflets and publicity materials to establish Islamic rule. Each time the government has arrested their workers but JM did not retaliate. This is the third call of JM for Islamic rule in Bangladesh.

This time if the government does not establish Islamic rule and instead arrest Muslims for seeking Allah's laws and suppresses ulemas (learned in religion) the JM will go into action against concerned people and authorities.

Call to the treasury and opposition benches

The democratic system under the dispensation of infidels divides the nation into various parties by creating treasury and opposition benches. They cause harm to people by hartals [strike] and blockades simply for gaining power. It is within constitutional right to hold people hostage simply to protest the misdeeds of some person or some coterie.

Those who want to strengthen institutional democracy must give up partisan politics and government as well as opposition parties must join hands to seek relief from [in] Islamic rule. Abandoning Tagut laws they must

enforce Islamic laws to get rid of irreligious activities, anti Islamic beliefs and customs and obscenities and allow people to follow Islam properly.

If you are afraid of Bush-Blair coalition and do not want to set up Islamic rule you better leave Tagut politics altogether. Insha Allah under coordinated efforts of learned religious scholars and Islamic thinkers and leaders, the people will establish Islamic rule in the country.

Call to bureaucrats and judicial officers of the government

If the government does not establish Islamic rule please desist from administering Tagut laws and justice. By cooperating with establishing the laws of Allah glorify your life with Allah's pleasure. Members of all law enforcing agencies – Army, BDR, Police, RAB – should be up and doing in protecting Allah's laws rather than Tagut laws.

Do not obey Tagut laws but follow Allah's laws. Do not fight Allah's soldiers for Tagut laws. Give up serving Tagut laws and turn into Allah's soldiers. Those who will not leave Tagut service, Insha Allah action will be taken against them under Allah's laws.

Allah says, "The believers carry on armed jihad for Allah's glory while the infidels fight for Tagut. You are bound to fight against the followers of Satan. Verily Satan's circle is very weak." (Sura Nisa – 76)

Call to Muslim world

In the world of today George W Bush is the greatest terrorist. He is carrying out terrorist attack on Muslims and trying to take away their faith by imposing infidel's constitution on Muslim land.

He wants to establish the infidel system of democracy all over the world and in the name of the new world order seeks to bring the world under his zone of influence. It is like the wish of new Feruun. But Allah's soldiers will not allow this wish to be fulfilled, nor will they allow the success of the infidel concept of democracy.

Democracy is a Tagut invention and the most important weapon for establishing Tagut rule. Those who seek to establish Tagut rule are terrorists and militants. But Allah says, "Ye believers, pick up your arms and spread out in separate or joint formations." (Sura Nisa – 71)

We call upon the world Muslims to compel all your governments to enforce Islamic rule. In all Muslim countries establish Islamic rule through armed jihad and banish Tagut rule. Leave the United Nations of the infidels. Set up a Muslim United Nations and strengthen the followers of Islam all over.

Warning to the infidels and non-believers

All rulers including Bush Blair administrations are hereby warned to give up their occupation of Muslim countries. Do not try any further to patronize Muslim countries. Muslims all over the world have woken up.

Please stop persecuting the Muslims or else you will not be safe anywhere in the world. The anti-Islamic NGOs are also being warned to stop their action programmes directed against the Muslims or else Insha Allah they will be completely uprooted.

Source: <http://www.bhbcuc-usa.org/jmb.htm>

Appendix 3A: List of Interviewees: Personal Communication (2011)

1. Dr Akmal Hussain, Professor of International Relations, University of Dhaka, 13 January 2011.
2. Dr Imtiaz Hossain, Professor of International Relations, University of Dhaka, 15 January 2011.
3. Dr Salahuddin Ahmed, Professor of History, University of Dhaka, 29 January 2011.
4. Dr Sirajul Islam, Professor of History, University of Dhaka, and President of Asiatic Society, Bangladesh, 30 January 2011.
5. Dr Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, Professor of English, University of Dhaka, 30 January 2011.
6. Dr Asif Nazrul, Professor of Law, University of Dhaka, 22 January 2011.
7. Dr Anisuzzaman, Professor Emeritus, Bengali and Culture, University of Dhaka, 12 February 2011.
8. Dr Biswajit Gosh, Professor, Bengali and Culture, University of Dhaka, 2 March 2011.
9. M Abdus Sabur, Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Dhaka, 14 January 2011.
10. Dr Shaheen Afroz, Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Dhaka and women leader, 30 March 2011.
11. Lt. Colonel Nazrul Islam, Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Dhaka.
12. Lt. Colonel X (preferred anonymous), former Commanding Officer, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Bangladesh, 23 January 2011.
13. Police Superintendent Y (preferred anonymous), Police Superintendent (SP), Bangladesh Police, Dhaka, 7 February 2011.
14. Major General B (preferred anonymous), former chief of counter terrorism unit, Bangladesh Army, 4 March 2011.
15. Jamal Khan, Associate Professor, Geography and Environment Studies, University of Dhaka, 24 March 2011.
16. Sharif Mustafa, Muslim clergy, Tablig Jamaat, Bangladesh, 24 January 2011.
17. Lt. General Muniruzzaman, President, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPS), Dhaka, 28 January 2011.

18. Shafkat Munir, Director, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPS), Dhaka, 28 January 2011.
19. Dr Burhanuddin Khan Jahangir, Political Science, University of Dhaka, and Director of the Institute of Social Studies, 29 January 2011.
20. Suranjit Gupta, Member of Parliament and Advisor to the ruling Awami League, 24 March 2011.
21. Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury, former State Minister for Foreign Affairs and currently Vice Chairman of the main opposition, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), 12 March 2011.
22. Ruhul Amin Howladar, Member of Parliament, and General Secretary of Jatiya Party, coalition partner of the Bangladesh Government, 26 March 2011.
23. Shah Abdul Hannan, Advisor to the Jamaat-i-Islam, Bangladesh, 17 January 2011.
24. Dr Abdur Rab Khan, Associate Professor of Political Science, North South University, Dhaka, 27 January 2011.
25. Air Commodore (Retired) Ashfaq Elahi Chowdhury, Registrar, BRAC University, Dhaka, 28 February 2011.
26. Humayun Kabir, Research Director, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), Dhaka, 17 March 2011.
27. Brigadier (Retired) Shahed Anam Khan, security analyst and Strategic Editor, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 11 March 2011.
28. Lt. General Aminul Karim, security analyst and Professor, North South University, Dhaka, 8 March 2011.
29. Sarah Jasmine, women's and NGO activist, Dhaka, 4 February 2011.
30. Nurul Huda, former Inspector General of Police, 20 January 2011.
31. Mr Z, former Sub-Inspector of Police, local area police unit, Rajshahi, 27 February 2011.
32. Monowara Hakim, Researcher and women's leader, Dhaka, 24 February 2011.
33. Yakub Husain, Principal, Government Alia Madrassah, Dhaka, 12 March 2011.
34. Muklesur Rahman, Member of Sharia Board, Dhaka, 13 March 2011.
35. Tanjim Uddin Khan, Associate Professor of International Relations, University of Dhaka (currently a PhD student in Australia), 20 December 2012.

36. Dr Alauddin Ahmed (Bangladeshi origin), Associate Professor, University of Queensland, Australia,
16 December 2012.
37. Ramendra Majumder, cultural activist, Dhaka, 17 February 2011.
38. Faizul Latif Chowdhury, senior civil servant (Joint Secretary) to the Government of Bangladesh.

Appendix 3B: Consent Form

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Name: **Dr Peter Searle**

Title: **Senior Lecturer**

Co-Investigator's/Researcher's Name: **Moinul Khan**

Title: **PhD Candidate and Tutor**

Information and Consent Form

Name of Project: **Islamic Extremism: Why It Failed To Take Root**

You are invited to participate in a PhD study of the above area.

The purpose of the study is:

Since 1970, Islamic extremism has become more apparent in a number of South and South East Asian states. Bangladesh, being the 3rd largest Muslim country, presents a puzzle in this regard as it has successfully resisted Islamic militancy and reinforced a state based on democratic and secular principles. Despite a wave of extremism in the name of Islam in some Muslim countries particularly in Asia, Bangladesh is heading in a different, if not opposite, direction. Why is that? Is there any uniqueness or strengths in the Bangladeshi context? The research will investigate to find out these answers.

The study is being conducted by Dr Peter Searle, Senior Lecturer, Centre for Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism (PICT), Macquarie University, contact telephone: +61-2-98501431, e-mail: peter.searle@mq.edu.au; and Moinul Khan, PhD Candidate and Tutor, Centre for Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism (PICT), Macquarie University, contact telephone: +61-2-98501435.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to express your role, opinion and experiences with semi-structured interview questions. The duration of the interview will be about 2–5 hours. An audio device will be used to record the interview. The university will pay you TK. 5000 (equivalent to A\$50) as a remuneration to take part in the session.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results without consent. The chief investigators and the investigators only will have access to the data. A summary of the results of the data can be made available to you on request by e-mail or any other means.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

I, _____ (*participant's name*)
have read and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name: _____

(Block letters)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Co-Investigator's Name: **Moinul Khan**

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

(INVESTIGATOR'S/PARTICIPANT'S COPY)

Appendix 3C: Interview Questions

1. What were the contexts, background, and specific factors behind the Islamic militancy in Bangladesh in the late 1990s to 2005?
2. To what extent were local factors involved in a political tilt to Islam?
3. To what extent/how significant were foreign/external factors, i.e. returnees from Afghanistan war, bearing a foreign ideology and tactics?
4. Overall would you agree that foreign influences/tactics were determinative?
5. Do these influences still pose a threat to Bangladesh society and how significant are they? Why?
6. What were in your view the key reasons as to why the extremist Jihadist's outlook failed to take root in Bangladesh?
7. How would you consider the influences of culture, nationalism and contemporary political history in the identity of Bangladesh?
8. How do you consider the recent developments with regard to the constitutional changes and women empowerment in the light of resilience to radicalization of Islam and Islamic identity?
9. Is there any other issue that you want to bring out on the issue of Islamic militancy and its defeat in Bangladesh?

Appendix 3D: Categories of Interviewees

Categories	No. of people
1. Major political parties:	
Awami League (government)	1
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (main opposition)	1
Jatiya Party (coalition with government)	1
Jamaat-e-Islami (opposition)	1
2. Ex-service men (security force):	2
3. Academics:	2
4. Constitutional lawyers:	2
5. Cultural activists:	2
6. Journalists:	2
7. Researchers (BIISS and BIPSS):	2
8. Historians:	2
9. Religious clerics:	2
10. Informed public:	2
11. Women leaders:	2
12. Police officers:	2
13. Army officer:	2
14. Others:	4

Appendix 4: Religio-political Developments in Muslim Societies: 1926–1967

Year	Event
1933	Voluntary deveiling led by Huda Shharawi in Cairo
1924	Egyptian women receive free secular education
1924	Islamic schools banned; clergy subordinated to Dept of Religious Affairs in Turkey
1925	Veil banned in Turkish universities and government institutions, fez banned outright
1928	New law codes replace the Sharia law in Iran
1928	Al-Banna founds Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Egypt; calls for Islamic state and Sharia
1934	Teaching Training Act provides for secular education system in Iran
1936	University of Tehran established with European-educated faculty
1936	Reza Shah bans veil and passion plays in Iran
1936	New Iranian law makes it impossible for Ulama to sit in courts of law
1937	Legal separation of religion and state introduced to Turkish Constitution
1940s	'Islamic Economics' founded in India by Mawdudi and others
1941	Mawdudi forms Jama'at-i-Islami in British India, calling for Islamic state and Sharia
1942	MB established in Jordan
1949	First MB branch in Sudan
1949	State-controlled Divinity Faculty established in Ankara University
1950	Sayyid Qutb returns from the United States scandalized, joins MB
1961	Nasser adds secular subjects and women's faculty to Al-Azhar University
1967/75	Initial family protection laws in Iran regulate divorce and polygamy
1967	Arab failure in Six-Day War

Source: cited in Carvalho (2009, p. 7).

Appendix 5: Religio-political Developments in Muslim Societies since 1967

Year	Event
1969	Chinese–Malay riots lead to policies favoring Malay Muslims
1973	Anwar Sadat initiates ‘holy war’ against Israel
1973	Arab oil boycott; greater financial support for Islamic organizations, especially from Saudi Arabia
1975	First Islamic bank offering a range of commercial services opens in Dubai
1978	Somali wing of MB, Al-Islah, formed
1978	Zia-ul-Haq ushers in Islamic legal system in Pakistan
1979	Islamic tithe (zakat) made an obligation in Pakistan, collected by government
1979	Islamic republic in Iran, Ulama control law; Shah’s women’s rights reforms repealed
1979	Seizure of the Grand Mosque at Mecca by Sunni militants
Late 1970s	Mujahideen formed to fight Soviet army in Afghanistan
1981	Anwar Sadat assassinated by religious extremists
1983	Harsh form of Sharia implemented in the Sudan
Mid 1980s	Major Islamic banks established in Turkey, gain tax breaks and regulatory concessions
1975	Formation of Hezbollah in Lebanon
1987	Higher education council in Turkey forbids veiling in class
1989	Al Nahda wins 14 percent of vote in Tunisia; subsequently banned and repressed
1989	MB in Jordan, Islamic Action Front, become largest group in parliament
1990	Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria sweeps municipal elections
1991	FIS win first round of parliament elections, canceled by Algerian military, FIS banned
1992	Egypt’s interior minister: all laws based on Sharia, would never allow secular state
1994	First Islamic television station begins broadcasting in Turkey
1995	Leader of MB in Algeria receives over 25 percent of popular vote in presidential

	election
1996	Taliban take power in Afghanistan
1996	Necmettin Erbakan becomes Turkey's first Islamist Prime Minister
1997–8	Turkish military forces Erbakan to step down and bans Welfare Party
2002	Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey is first Islamist party to form government
2002	MB in Algeria win 7 percent of vote giving it 38 members in parliament
2002	MB representative in Bahrain, Al-Menbar, wins 8/40 seats, making it equal largest party
2005	MB in Egypt win 20 percent of parliament seats, despite harassment and electoral irregularities
2006	Hamas wins parliamentary elections in Palestine

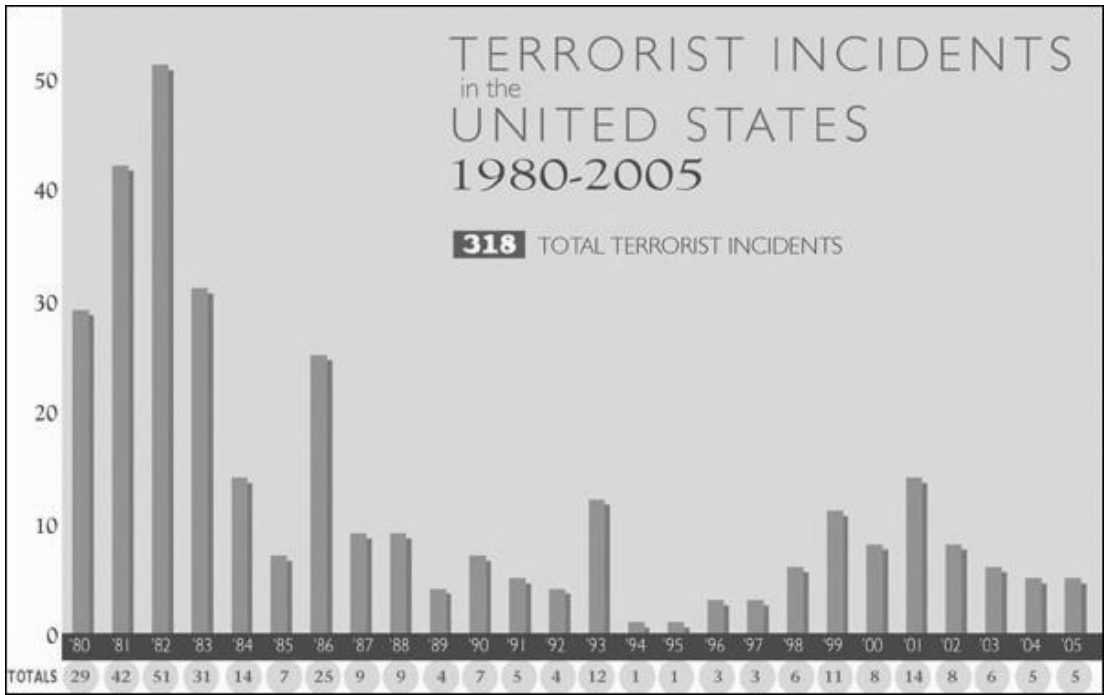
Source: cited in Carvalho (2009, p. 8).

Appendix 6: Middle Eastern/Radical Islamist-inspired Terrorist Acts on US interests in the 1980s:

Year	Incident
1979	hostages taken in Tehran, Iran
1983	truck bombing of US marine barracks in Beirut
1983	car bombs explode in front of the US and French embassies in Kuwait City
1984	bombing of the US embassy annex in Beirut
1984	hijacking of Kuwait Airlines 221; two Americans killed
1984	kidnapping of Americans by Hezbollah and other terrorist groups
1985	hijacking of TWA 847. A US navy diver is killed and 39 Americans are held hostage for 17 days
1985	hijacking of the Achille Lauro, and bombing of the Rome and Vienna airports
1986	bombing of a West German discotheque frequented by American military personnel
1986	hijacking of TWA Flight 407
1986	Pan Am jet hijacked on the ground at Karachi Airport
1986	TWA Boeing 727 exploded from bomb under a seat while flying from Rome to Athens
1988	bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland

Source: Garrison (2003, p. 50).

Appendix 7: Trend of Terrorist Incidents in the Period between 1980 and 2005



Source: FBI, 2005

Appendix 8: The View of Orientalist and Neo-Orientalist Schools of Thought on Islamism

The main concern of Said's work is to show that the Orientalist discourse was used for a "created body of theory and practice" to serve the interests of the Atlantic and European powers. (Macfie, 2002, p. 12). This is motivated, self-fulfilling and is based on power relations. Thus, the Orientalism discourse exposes the pursuit of knowledge subject to global political considerations. Donnan and Stokes (2002, p. 6) while establishing the inextricable links between knowledge and power assert that "The knowledge that results is thus imbued with the power to dominate". According to the Orientalist school, Islam is characteristic of such knowledge essentialized from the position of power by the West as "a civilizing, rationalizing and modernizing force". (Donnan and Stokes, 2002, p. 6). When this is the case, it is hardly possible for an academic or observer, who is politically or culturally positioned, to represent the "other" culture. Said (1978) raises this question: "How does one *represent* other cultures?" (Said, 1978, p. 325). The Orientalists without unfolding the true meaning and interpretations of the Orient acted to suit the "emotional needs and political aims" of the Occident by constructing the perceptions on their own terms as "imaginative" (Laisram, 2006, p. 1).

However, Said's thesis provoked a debate on the question of acquiring knowledge and the construction of perceptions free from subjective considerations. Among those prominent who are critical of Said's thesis are Bernard Lewis, James Clifford, Albert Hourani, Peter Gran, Fred Halliday, David Kopf, Aijaz Ahmad Emmanuel Sivan, Ernest J. Wilson III, John Mackenzie, Joel Berry, Irfan Habib, Robert Irwin and Daniel Varisco. According to the critique, Said's thesis is not devoid of generalization on the assumptions and interplay of the Orient vs Occident. For example, Laisram (2006, p. 2) gives an account of four travel writers of the 19th century, namely James Morier, Alexander Kinglake, Richard Burton and Gertrude Bell, who projected the indigenous cultures of the Islamic Orient without the influence of prejudices of the Oriental discourse. He thus questions the generalization of the Western perceptions as "oversimplification and an Occidentalization of Western cultures". Rahul Sapra (2011) in his book *The Limits of Orientalism: Seventeenth-Century Representations of India* details the portrayal of the natives by the English not as "Others" but as partners in trade and allies in wars. Bernard Lewis in his article, 'The Question of Orientalism' (1982), echoes this criticism and brands Said's thesis as an "arbitrary rearrangement of the historical background", a "capricious choice of countries, persons and writings" and an "unpolemical ignorance" of historical fact. (cited in Macfie, 2002, p. 11). MacKenzie in his *Edward Said and the Historians* (1994) gives an account of historical events that do not

confirm Said's contention of Orientalist depiction of the East as "Others". He asserts that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain was contesting with France and later with Imperial Russia, Germany and the Soviet Union. So the "Others" had connotations in British scholarship different from the Orientalist discourse. (MacKenzie, 1994, pp. 15–16). John M. Berry (2006) also reveals the similar contest between the British and the Dutch and the Portuguese over trade in 17th century India, and the British bonding with the Mughals in opposition to the Portuguese belittles both the idea of a homogenous 'West' and 'East'. (p. 3). Irwin (2006) points out that Said did not take into account the "Other" representation in the case of other empires including the Persian, the Umayyads, Abbasids, Fatimids and the Ottomans who escaped his notice. Habib (2005) points out that the concept of Orientalism is replete with accounts which are "far too general" and "far too restricted", and the limits of his definition are so set and the actual selection so executed that his conclusions are thereby simply predetermined. (cited in Berry, 2006, p. 4).

Despite criticism of Said's proposition on Orientalism, his thesis remains influential in the intellectual arena particularly in the study of the Islamic world. Some authors suggest that concept of Orientalism is still valid and has been overtaken by the neo-orientalism of what Alam (2006, xiii) calls "repackaging of the old Orientalism", assuming a cultural character in the debate on Islam vs the West. This assumption reinforces the earlier preoccupations prevalent in the West regarding Islam as inherent conflict with the West. The prominent neo-orientalists are led by Bernard Lewis and include Elie Kedourie, Davide Pryce-Jones, Raphael Patai, Bat Ye'or, Daniel Pipes, Martine Kramer, Robert Kaplan and Samuel P. Huntington. (Khan, 2006; Alam, 2006). Their main contention centers on a "friend/foe dichotomy" between the West and Islam.

Appendix 9: The Closed Views of Islam

The closed views on Islam not only are reflected in the media but also are represented in the statements of high-level policy makers, media and academics. This often leads to prejudice which results in violence, discrimination and exclusion of the Muslims. In that process, hostility towards Islam and its followers has become a natural course. (The Runnymede Trust, 1997). Such closed views find resonance in the writing of other academics. Garrison (2005, p. 49) observes that Islamist extremism is the outcome of two main premises: “1. that the West has insulted, killed and looted Muslims because they are Muslim, and 2. Allah requires that such infidels be killed.” Marsot (1992, pp. 157–58) argues that Islam does not allow the separation of religion from politics as opposed to the concept of Christianity and modernity. He claims that Islam assumed political character from the very beginning over the question of governing religiosity and other earthly living including politics. However, due to varied contexts of history, geography and culture, the connection between religion and politics may have waned over time. But in the Muslim countries, Islam in political nature works in the background and may appear to “reassert itself” when there is an opening in response to an issue affecting it. (Marsot, 1992, p. 158). As Dalacoura (2003, pp. 39–68) explains, the main reason for this close link between Islam and politics is that the Prophet, Muhammad, himself assumed the combined role of political and religious leadership for the Arabs in his lifetime and this dual role was also evident in his descendants during the subsequent Muslim *Caliphates* and empires. Feder (2001) projects Islam as inherently militant. From its early period, Islam advanced through “sword” and “wild horsemen” from the Arabian Peninsula to the neighbouring countries. They conquered new lands and gained converts to Islam by force and that militant zeal flowed from its early period till today. However, the tide of such advancement was in check from the 17th century to the 1970s until the phenomenon of Islamist resurgence came to the political arena mainly due to Arab oil power, surplus population, growing Muslim immigrants and the rising Islamists. The new tide has been spearheaded by the new Islamist terrorists, guerrillas, theocrats and tyrants. (cited in Khan, 2006, p. 72). Khan (2006, p. 72) points out some of the popular assertions to highlight the antagonistic relationship between Islam and the Western norms. He quotes from writers like Hanson (2002), Danner (2001) and Gerech (2002) saying that Islamic culture is necessarily “backward and corrupt”, the Muslim people are not happy with the Western power and prestige and hence they are jealous of their “success and superiority” which owe much to their ideology of “free market, free

society, [and] military might". Such popular perceptions of Islam have been shaped mainly by memories of historical events of religious animosity between Christianity and Islam, particularly over the crusades and "a series of myths and legends" which became part of popular beliefs in the West. These beliefs were largely a result of "misunderstanding and distortion of Islam" and different from what the Muslims actually held. (Macfie, 2002, p. 43). The historical encounters took place over the Muslim march towards Europe and the Christian halt to it by crusaders, the Napoleonic wars and the European colonisation of the Muslim lands. Laisram (2006, pp. 2–7) argues that although the Islamic conquest was halted through historical encounters, the memories are still vivid in the Western psyche which largely determines their perceptions of Islam as a whole. Waddy (1976) gives a succinct picture of this historical animosity: "... Muslims broke out into the world aggressively, and challenged the Christian world on its own ground, both militarily and theologically; and brought large portions of Europe under their domain. The 'carte de visite' was returned by the Crusaders, and in the name of Christianity – of the Cross – all sorts of horrors were committed. Then the Muslims, led by the Ottoman Turks, returned the 'carte de visite' once more, knocking at the gates of Vienna and conquering the Balkans. There was another encounter in the Nineteenth Century, when Egypt was occupied in the Napoleonic wars, followed by Algeria. Gradually great areas of Muslim land were brought under western control, from Morocco to Indonesia. All this of course involved a great deal of organised fighting in defence of the community". (Waddy, 1976, pp. 95–96). Such a memory often appears to flare up and refresh the historical links through different incidents or troubles. Armstrong (2006) highlights this issue in her article published in *The Guardian* on 18 September 2006. She asserts that many people in the Western world share the prejudices "unconsciously" against Islam and the Muslim without understanding different dynamics and currents within it. One of the common prejudices is that they believe that "Islam and the Qur'an are addicted to violence". The 9/11 terror act came to reinforce "this deep-rooted Western perception" that Islam breeds violence and terrorism. The terrorists were considered as "typical Muslims instead of the deviants they really were". (Armstrong, 2006, p. 1). The Runnymede Trust (1997, p. 5) in its report on Islamophobia also brings out this issue. The report points out: "Whether there is a continuous line from the Crusades of medieval times through the Ottoman Empire and European colonialism to the Islamophobia of the 1990s, with each main event having an element of 'here we are again', is a question on which historians disagree. At first sight, certainly, there appears to be continuity. It is present in the

perceptions of both Muslims and non-Muslims. An alternative view is that human beings make selective use of the past in order to understand and to justify aspects of the present, and that the past is continually being redefined, even reinvented. According to this view both Muslims and non-Muslims choose to 'remember' the past (more accurately, choose stories from the past) to illustrate feelings, fears and animosities in the present. Either way, the task of combating Islamophobia involves a repudiation of the power which stories about the past in general and about the Crusades in particular, do certainly have."

Appendix 10: Divisions within Islam and the Responses to the West on the Question of Revival

The withdrawal of the Soviet forces in 1989 has been seen by many Islamists as a victory of Jihad, which adds a moral boost and strength to their militant political ideology. (CATR White Paper, 2008, pp. 5–8). This group presents a threat to Western security in terms of their ability to inflict terrorist acts on Western interests. However, they constitute a “small minority” (Barton, 2005, p. 118; Wolny, 2009, p. 14) and are faced with strong resistance from within many Muslim countries and the outside world. Baxter and Akbarzadeh (2005, p. 31) point out such radical Islamists groups believe in the division of the world between *dar al-Islam* (the land of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (the land of enemy). This view involves the relationship between Islam and the West as inimical and an apparent confrontation between them – similar to the thesis proposed by the neo-Orientalist school of thought. One also needs to further categorize the non-Islamists who regard Islam as not more than a personal faith. Some are regarded as conservative while others as non-conformist in outlook and practice. The conservative Muslims often remain stuck to the fundamentals of the religion and practise the basic pillars and values in their individual life. Sometimes they are projected as fundamentalist, a term which is contested by some authors. The *Tablig Jamaat* is an example of this group. This group’s emphasis is to give importance to personal conviction to the basic pillars and values of Islam in private life and shows no interest in politics. Greg Barton (2005, p. 118) points out that the term fundamentalism is not appropriately applied to such religious conservatism and argues that it is not “inherently bad or problematic”. Khan (2007, p. 78) also distinguishes religious conservatism from those who subscribe to a political ideology of Islam. Within the non-Islamist category, there are also Muslims who are non-conformist and who do not practice their religion in their personal and social life. (Wolny 2009, pp. 5–6). They are often branded as atheist Muslims. However, there are some who remain in between these two categories of non-Islamists. They are ambivalent and adopt a moderate approach between religious conviction and non-conformity.

It is in this divergence of groups within Islam that different authors draw their categorization based on different interpretations with regard to its political context. Husain (2001, p. 139) while explaining the Muslim responses to the European colonial intrusion, categorizes the Islamist resurgence into three main groups. These are acculturationist, normative and neo-normative. According to acculturationist thought, Islam is not in conflict with the Western liberal ideals and they need to be accommodated in redefining the Islamic system to interpret reality. They are also divided into two divisions: secular and nationalist. The

secular form of Islam propagates the separation of religion from the state and politics and emphasizes the Western model of political system. The nationalist form, on the other hand, combines the traditional societies with Western ideals. Secularists seek to infuse Western liberal thoughts into the traditions and redefine their own with Islamic precedents. The normative are those who oppose and reject the Western ideals as “alien and ungodly” (Husain, 2001, p. 140) and advocate strict adherence to what they call authentic Islam. The neo-normativists are an “offshoot of the struggle between the acculturationists and normativists” (Husain, 2001, p. 140). They seek to modernize Islam but refuse to undermine religion in politics, giving importance to Islamic identity. They adopt Islamic norms to interpret and judge the reality and seek to regulate society and the state with this norm.

Similarly Ahmed (2007, pp. 56–71) argues that in the intellectual history of Islam, there has always existed diverse trends of thought with regard to the political connections to Islam, leaving an important impact on the common mindset of the Muslim community. According to Ahmed, such trends are classified into five groups: 1. Orthodox fundamentalist: They are the most radical form of Islamist groups who believe in the strict and narrow dictates of the Qur’an and *Sunnah*. They are opposed to the unity of mankind and hold that the world is divided into two factions; one is the believer of God and the other non-believer as infidel. They are so fanatic in their religious dictates that they are ready to go to any extent including waging Jihad and militancy for the cause of their faith and to establish true ‘Islamic order’. It is common to come across the phenomenon of such orthodoxy in history when there is a sense of decline of Muslim power and a challenge from external forces. 2. Spiritual humanist (Sufism): This is a mystical current within Islam held by Sufis who believe in spiritual humanism. Love and devotion are the central theme of such mysticism to unite with God. Ahmed (2007, p. 59) sums up the main teachings of Sufism: (a) the unity of Godhead (*wahadat-al-wajud*); (b) the futility of external forms or rituals of worship; (c) the necessity of self-purification and absolute devotion to God for attaining salvation. They are in favor of non-orthodox and tolerant beliefs and accommodate much of the liberal and plural traditions. 3. Conservative reformist: This group is willing to modernize Islam, but is not ready to accept Western liberal ideals. 4. Modern reformist: Reformists seek to reinterpret Islam from the perspective of modernity. They do not see any conflict with the West in their liberal ideals and hence they are willing to adopt the Western values to face the challenge of modern times. They are also in favor of scientific knowledge and rationality. 5. Secular rationalist: This group supports a secularist approach

in their way of life. They are interested in distancing the religion from the state and politics. Plurality and rationality are key elements of this school. Post Kamal Turkey is an ideal example of this model.

Fred Hutchison (2004, pp. 1–5) argues that the Muslims of the world can be divided into four categories evident in both branches of Islam – the Sunnis and the Shiites. These are folk Islam, secular, moderate and militant. The first category seems at odds from other authors while the other three – secular, moderate and militant – are similar or identical from the divisions pointed out before. According to Hutchison, folk Islam represents “Sufi spiritual mystics, superstition, the occult, and good and evil geni [genie]”. (Hutchison, 2004, p. 1). In his interpretation, folk Islam is equated to the “larger part of the iceberg which is underwater and visible Islam as the smaller part of the iceberg which is showing above the water”. (Hutchison, 2004, p. 1). However, he is not sure of its linkage to the crisis of Islam. Joshua Massey (1999, p. 198) lists nine categories of adherents to Islam including ultra-orthodox and folk Islam. These ultra orthodox and folk Islams are particularly important in the context of Islamist politics. The folk Muslims, branded as low Islam, infuse the local tradition, beliefs, culture, animistic rituals, superstitions etc into Islam while the orthodox Islam, often equated with official or high Islam, is opposed to folk traditions and wants to discard what they call non-Islamic traditions by way of reform.

Hadway (2010) brings out this contradiction between folk and orthodox traditions in his PhD thesis in a study of the *Beja* tribe in the Sudan. According to Hadway, folk Islam is the blend of local tradition with Islam while the official Islam stands for a puritanical form of Islam. Most of the Muslims today belong to folk Islam. Parshall (2006, p. 2) estimates that the number of folk Muslims would be about 75 percent of the total world Muslims. The significance of this distinction is that folk Islam is a deviated form of Islam from the eye of theological or official Islam and hence it does not have a necessary leaning towards political Islam. On the other hand, theological Islam emphasizes the literal interpretation of Islam, often seeking a return to the doctrine and practices of the early founders of Islam relating to politics. Within this brand of high Islam, political Islam has grown in some Muslim groups and within this brand radicalism and militancy may also exist. However, not all belonging to this school are necessarily radical and militant. Marshall et al. (2002) estimate that the number of such radicals would be between two and fifteen percent of all the Muslims while Esposito and Magahed (2007) figure out this number at seven percent. (cited in Hadway, 2010, p. 72).

Appendix 11: Bengalized Islam: Opening Ballads of ‘Nizam Docoit’

First of all I bow down to the Supreme Deity (Prabhu), and secondly to (same Omnipotent Being conceived as) the Creator (Sirjan); and thirdly to the benign Incarnation of Light. The Koran [Qur’an] and other scriptural texts I regard as revelation – the sacred utterances of the Lord (Prabhu) himself.

When the Lord was engrossed in deep meditation, the Luminous figure of Mohomet [Mohammed] flashed before His mind’s eye, and as He gazed and gazed upon the vision, He began to feel a certain softening of the heart. So out [of] love, He created the prophet Mahomet [Mohammed] and sent him down to the earth as the very flower of the Rokibul (the solar race). He next created the entire universe. Had there been no incarnation of Mahomet [Mohammed], there would not have been established the seat of God (arskors, from Ar’arsh, “throne of God”) in all the three worlds.

All reverence to Abdulla and Amina; salutations at the feet of her, who bore in the womb Mahomet [Mohammed] (deliverer) of the earth. All honour to the city of Mecca in the west and to the Mohomedan saints; and further west, I do reverence to the city of Medina – the burial place of our Rosul (Prophet). Bibi Fatemah, daughter of Rosul, honoured of all, was called “mother’ by all excepting Ali.

In the north I offer my tribute of respects to the Himalayas, beneath whose snowy heights lies the entire universe. I bow down to the rising sun in the east, and also to the shrine of Vrindavan, together with Lord Krishna, the Eternal Lover of sweet Radha. I next do reverence to the milky rivers and the ocean, dashing against the two shores, with sandy shoals in the middle. In all the four directions, I tender my respectful compliments to all the four sects of the Massalmans. I pay homage to Mother Earth (Basumata) below and the heavens above.

I bow down to Mother Isamati in the village of Raunya and also to the mosque of the great Pir at Nawapara. I next make my salam to the hill of Kavalyamura to the right and the mosque of Hrimai to the left. The great upholders of truth are passed through these tracts. The river Sankha is also sacred ... Tendering my regards to all the sacred sports, I proceed onwards and arrive at Sita Ghat (Sitakund), where I offer my tribute of worshipful regards to that ideal of womanly virtue – Sita Devi – and also to her lord Raghunatha (Rama).

Appendix 12: Religious Parties in the House of Representatives, 1999–2009

Islamist Parties	1999		2004		2009	
	Vote in %	Seats	Vote in %	Seats	Vote in %	Seats
PAN	7.12	34	6.44	53	6.01	43
PBB	1.94	13	2.62	11	1.8	0
PKB	12.61	51	10.57	52	4.94	27
PKS	1.36	7	7.34	45	7.8	57
PPP	10.7	58	8.15	58	5.3	39
Total	33.73	163	35.12	219	25.85	166

Source: The General Election Commission (KPU), cited in Hamayotsu (2011, p. 137)

Appendix 13: Internal Colonialism

Average Annual Budget

Total Revenue	Rs. 6000		West	East
Expenditure on Defense	Total	60%	50%	10%
Civil Expenditure	Total	40%	25%	15%

Foreign Trade and Exchange Earnings

During 10 year period 1950–1960	West Pakistan		East Pakistan	
	Export	Import	Export	Import
	£82 m	£2315	£1151 m	£1000
	41%	70%	59%	30%

Government Employment

Category	West Pakistan	East Pakistan
Central Civil Service	84%	16%
Foreign Service	85%	15%
Foreign Head of Missions (numbers)	60	9
Army	95%	5%
Army: Officers of General Rank (numbers)	16	1
Navy Technical	81%	19%
Navy non-Technical	91%	9%
Air Force Pilots (numbers)	89%	11%
Armed Forces (numbers)	500,000	20,000

Pakistan Airlines (numbers)	7000	280
PIA Directors (numbers)	9	1
PIA Area Managers (numbers)	5	None
Railway Board Directors (numbers)	7	1

Education

Area	West Pakistan		East Pakistan	
	1947–48	1968–69	1947–48	1968–69
Primary schools	8413	39,418 (450 percent increase)	29,663	28,308 (4.57 percent decrease)
Secondary schools	2598	4472 (176 percent increase)	3481	3964 (13.88 percent increase)
College – various types	40	271 (675 percent increase)	50	162 (320 percent increase)
Medical/Engineering/ Agriculture colleges	4	17 (425 percent increase)	3	9 (300 percent increase)
Universities	2 (654 scholars)	6 (18,708 scholars) (30 times higher)	1 (1620 scholars)	4 (8831 scholars) (5 times higher)

Other Areas of the Economy

Area	West Pakistan	East Pakistan
Population	55 million	75 million

Total number of doctors	12,400	7600
Total number of hospital beds	26,000	600
Rural health centers	325	88
Urban community development centers	81	52
Employment of civil labor force	59% (rural): 41 (urban)	86% (rural): 14 (urban)
Per capita income in Pakistan rupees	355 (1960); 492 (1970)	269 (1960); 308 (1970)
GDP per capita	312 (1959–60); 391 (1964–65)	242 (1959–60); 297 (1964–65)
Price of wheat and rice in Pakistan rupees per mound (82 lbs)	18 (rice); 10 (wheat)	50 (rice); 35 (wheat)
Calorie intake in rural areas in 1960–65 per head per day	1625	1556
Power production	83%	17%
Development expenditure	77%	23%
Inter zonal trade in Pakistan rupees	5292 million (from West to East)	3174 million (from East to West)
Defense budget	80 percent	20 percent

Source: Singh et al. (1971, vol. 1, pp. 15–22).

Appendix 14: Distribution of the National Assembly Seats

Provinces	General	Women
East Pakistan	162	7
The Punjab	82	3
Sind	27	1
Baluchistan	4	1
North West Frontier Province	18	1
Centrally Administered Tribal Area	7	-
Total	300	13

Source: Ahmed (1991, p. 185).

Election Results

Party	Elected Seats
Awami League (East Pakistan)	167
Democratic Party (West Pakistan)	1
Independent (East Pakistan)	1
Pakistan People's Party (West Pakistan)	85
Council Muslim League (West Pakistan)	7
Convention Muslim League (West Pakistan)	2
Quaid-i-Azam Muslim League (West Pakistan)	9
National Awami League (Wali Khan, West Pakistan)	8
Jmat-i-Islam (West Pakistan)	4
Jamiat-Ulema-i-Pakistan (Hazarvi, West Pakistan)	7
Jamat-i-Ulem-i-Pakistan and Nizam-i-Islamic Party (Thanvi group, West Pakistan)	7
Independents (West Pakistan)	15

Source: Ahmed (1991, p. 187).

Appendix 15: Electoral Performance of Jamaat-i-Islami and Islamists in Bangladesh Politics

Year	Electoral votes	No. of seats	Comments
1970	10% votes cast (about 1,400,000)	X	Jl secured the votes despite anti-Pakistani sentiment being at its peak, but did not win any parliamentary seats.
1973	X	X	Jl was banned.
1979	8%	20	Islamic Democratic League alliance with Islamists including Jamaat-e-Islamic
1981	1.79%	-	Presidential election held; the Islamists formed alliance under the banner of Khilafat Andolon with Hafizi Huzur as the President candidate.
1986	4.6%	10	Major opposition, BNP, boycotted the elections.
1991	12%	18	
1996	8.6%	3	
2001	4.26%	18	Formed alliance with BNP
2008	4.6%	2	Formed alliance with BNP

Source: Election Commission Bangladesh; Ahamed (1983, p. 1116); Maniruzzaman (1986. p. 66).

Ethics Approval

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Ethics Secretariat** <ethics.secretariat@mq.edu.au>

Date: Wed, Dec 15, 2010 at 8:44 AM

Subject: Ethics application reference-5201001450- Final approval

To: Dr Peter Searle <peter.searle@mq.edu.au>

Cc: Mr Moinul Khan <moinul.khan@mq.edu.au>

Dear Dr Searle

Re: "Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it failed to take root" (Ethics Ref: 5201001450)

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Human Research Ethics Committee and you may now commence your research.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr Peter Searle- Chief Investigator/Supervisor

Mr Moinul Khan- Co-Investigator

NB. STUDENTS: IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP A COPY OF THIS APPROVAL EMAIL TO SUBMIT WITH YOUR THESIS.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports. Your first progress report is due on 15 December 2011.

If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew

approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/>

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of Final Approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have Final Approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Secretariat at the address below.

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of final ethics approval.

Yours sincerely
Dr Karolyn White
Director of Research Ethics
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

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