

**AN INTERCULTURAL APPROACH TO MUSLIM-
HINDU INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE FOR BUILDING
COMMUNAL HARMONY IN BANGLADESH**

BY

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Islamic Thought and
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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh is a multireligious society where each religious group has maintained its culture and religion for umpteen years. However, Islam remains the most popular faith in the community, with 91.04% identifying as Muslims, 7.95% as Hindus, 0.60% as Buddhists, and 0.37% following other religions. Since the secession from Pakistan, i.e. 26th March 1971, the relationship between Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh had been cordial. But in recent years, the relationship between them has deteriorated due to the unstable socio-political environment. Consequently, sectarian violence is increasing day by day among both communities, where hostile environment within the societies had led to arson, looting, rape and killing. Therefore, this study attempts to inculcate the intercultural approach via inter-religious dialogue between the Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh. The ultimate strategy is to foster communal coexistence and religious tolerance. This research identifies and highlights shared cultural elements in-built within these two communities. These factors are recognised as the unifying factors to re-unite them. The research methodology employed in this study is based on historical narrative, sociological interpretation and interreligious studies with phenomenological interpretation through the qualitative methods of modern social research. To accomplish the objectives of the study, comprehensive library research and literature reviews were undertaken. This study found that early Islamic rulers had contributed to developing a prosperous Bengali civilisation and nationhood irrespective of culture and religion. Nevertheless, this study also highlights multifaceted challenges in sustaining communal harmony. These challenges encompass a broad spectrum of social, political, religious and economic factors. Finally, this thesis advocates that to address the differences of the two major religious groups of the population is to engage in healthy interreligious dialogues.

خلاصة البحث

بنغلاديش مجتمع متعدد الأديان حيث حافظت كل مجموعة دينية على ثقافتها ودينها لسنوات عديدة. ومع ذلك، لا يزال الإسلام هو الدين الرئيسي بين سكانها، بنسبة 91.04%، والهندوس 7.95%، والبوذية 0.60%، و0.37%. منذ الاستقلال عن باكستان، أي في 26 مارس 1971، كانت العلاقة بين المسلمين والهندوس في بنغلاديش ودية. لكن في السنوات الأخيرة تدهورت العلاقة بينهما بسبب البيئة الاجتماعية والسياسية غير المستقرة. ونتيجة لذلك، يتزايد العنف الطائفي يوماً بعد يوم بين الطائفتين، حيث أدت البيئة العدائية داخل المجتمعات إلى الحرق والنهب والاعتصاب والقتل. ولذلك، تحاول هذه الدراسة غرس النهج بين الثقافات من خلال الحوار بين الأديان بين المسلمين والهندوس في بنغلاديش. والاستراتيجية النهائية هي تعزيز التعايش الطائفي والتسامح الديني. يحدد هذا البحث ويسلط الضوء على العناصر الثقافية المشتركة المضمنة في هذين المجتمعين. ويتم التعرف على هذه العوامل كعوامل موحدة لإعادة توحيدها. تعتمد منهجية البحث المستخدمة في هذه الدراسة على السرد التاريخي والتفسير الاجتماعي والدراسات بين الأديان مع التفسير الظاهري من خلال الأساليب النوعية للبحث الاجتماعي الحديث. ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، تم إجراء بحث مكتبي شامل ومراجعة الأدبيات. وجدت هذه الدراسة أن الحكام الإسلاميين الأوائل قد ساهموا في تطوير الحضارة والأمة البنغالية المزدهرة بغض النظر عن الثقافة والدين. ومع ذلك، تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء أيضاً على التحديات المتعددة الأوجه في الحفاظ على الوئام المجتمعي. وتشمل هذه التحديات طائفة واسعة من العوامل الاجتماعية والسياسية والدينية والاقتصادية. أخيراً، تدعو هذه الأطروحة إلى أن معالجة الاختلافات بين المجموعتين الدينتين الرئيسيتين من السكان يعني الدخول في حوارات صحية بين الأديان.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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In profound reverence and heartfelt appreciation, I dedicate this doctoral thesis to my beloved and supportive parents: Sher Ali Howlader, a remarkable individual of immense wisdom and knowledge, whose departure from this earthly realm in 2016, in response to the divine call, will forever be etched in my heart.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Abstract | ii |
| Abstract in Arabic | iii |
| Approval Page..... | iv |
| Declaration | v |
| Copyright Page..... | vi |
| Dedication | vii |
| Acknowledgements | viii |
| Table of Contents | x |
| Transliteration Table | xiii |
| | |
| CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 Background of the Study | 1 |
| 1.2 Statement of the Problem..... | 3 |
| 1.3 Research Questions..... | 6 |
| 1.4 Research Objectives..... | 6 |
| 1.5 Theoretical Framework..... | 7 |
| 1.6 Literature Review | 10 |
| 1.7 Research Methodology | 22 |
| 1.8 Significance of the Study..... | 24 |
| 1.9 Scope and Limitation of Research..... | 25 |
| | |
| CHAPTER TWO: SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT AND BANGLADESH: AN UNDERSTANDING | 27 |
| 2.1 Introduction..... | 27 |
| 2.2 Formation of Bangladesh..... | 27 |
| 2.3 The Cultural Background of Bangladesh | 30 |
| 2.3.1 The Origin and Development History of Bangladeshi Culture..... | 30 |
| 2.3.2 The Uniqueness of Bangladeshi Culture..... | 32 |
| 2.4 The Contribution of Muslims to Culture in Bangladesh | 34 |
| 2.4.1 The Formation of Bengali Society | 35 |
| 2.4.2 The Development of Bengali Language and Literature..... | 35 |
| 2.4.3 The Establishment of the Bangla Calendar..... | 39 |
| 2.4.4 The Muslim Influence on Bangladeshi Cuisine | 40 |
| 2.4.5 Islamic Architectural Development | 42 |
| 2.4.6 The Development of Costume Design | 44 |
| 2.5 Nationhood and Religion of Bangladeshis | 46 |
| 2.5.1 An Overview of Bengali Nationalism..... | 47 |
| 2.5.2 Bangladeshi Nationalism | 50 |
| 2.5.3 The Crisis of National Identity Issues in Bangladesh..... | 51 |
| 2.6 Conclusion | 53 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE MUSLIMS-HINDUS RELATIONSHIP DURING THE MUSLIM RULE IN MEDIEVAL BENGAL..... | 55 |
| 3.1 Introduction..... | 55 |
| 3.2 The Historical Overview of the Muslim Regime in Bengal | 56 |
| 3.3 The Fundamental Reason for the Spread of Islam in Bengal | 64 |
| 3.4 Muslims-Hindu Relationship under Muslim Rule in Bengal | 68 |
| 3.4.1 Social Relation | 69 |
| 3.4.2 Political Relation..... | 71 |
| 3.4.3 Religious Relation..... | 73 |
| 3.4.4 Cultural Relations | 76 |
| 3.5 Conclusion | 79 |
| | |
| CHAPTER FOUR: MUALIMA AND HINDUS IN BANGLADESH: THE CHALLENGES OF MAINTAINING IN COMMUNAL HARMONY | 81 |
| 4.1 Introduction | 81 |
| 4.2 The Historical Roots of the Muslim-Hindu Conflict..... | 82 |
| 4.3 The Local Issues of Maintaining Communal Harmony | 88 |
| 4.3.1 Unstable Socio-Political Situation | 89 |
| 4.3.2 Violence in the Parliamentary Electoral Period..... | 95 |
| 4.3.3 Electoral Violence Against the Hindu Community in Bangladesh..... | 99 |
| 4.3.4 Socio-Economic Factor | 100 |
| 4.3.5 The Negative Impact of Social Media Fake Posts on Religious Harmony | 104 |
| 4.4 Regional Issues | 107 |
| 4.4.1 Regional Geopolitical Factors..... | 108 |
| 4.4.2 The Rising of Hindu Fundamentalism in India..... | 112 |
| 4.5 The Myth and Reality of Minority Persecution in Bangladesh | 115 |
| 4.6 Conclusion | 116 |
| | |
| CHAPTER FIVE: UNIVERSAL CULTURAL ASPECTS IN PROMOTING COMMUNAL HARMONY BETWEEN MUSLIMS-HINDUS IN BANGLADESH..... | 119 |
| 5.1 Introduction..... | 119 |
| 5.2 The Nature of the Culture of Bangladesh..... | 121 |
| 5.3 The Folk Cultures in Bangladesh | 121 |
| 5.4 Folk Pir Doctrine | 122 |
| 5.5 Folk Entertainment | 124 |
| 5.5.1 Folk Song | 124 |
| 5.5.1 Folk Dance | 125 |
| 5.5.3 Folk Musical Instrument | 126 |
| 5.6 Folk Arts and Crafts..... | 127 |
| 5.6.1 Jamdani (Traditional Saree)..... | 127 |
| 5.6.2 Nakshi Kantha (Kantha of Embroidery)..... | 129 |
| 5.6.3 Pottery (Traditional folk arts of Bangladesh) | 130 |
| 5.6.4 Alpana (Bengali Folk-Art Style)..... | 131 |
| 5.7 Cultural Festival..... | 132 |
| 5.7.1 The Celebration of Mother Language Day | 133 |
| 5.7.2 Pahela Baisakh (Bengali New Year)..... | 135 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 5.7.3 Navanna (New Rice Festival) | 137 |
| 5.7.4 Jabbar's Balikhela (Wrestling Competition) | 139 |
| 5.8 Marriage Ceremony | 139 |
| 5.8.1 Introductory Phase and Meet the Bride..... | 140 |
| 5.8.2 Gaye Halud (Turmeric Bath) | 140 |
| 5.8.3 Mehedi Tola (Use of Henna) | 141 |
| 5.8.4 Wedding Clothes and Ornament | 141 |
| 5.8.5 Wedding | 142 |
| 5.8.6 Post-Marriage Celebration | 142 |
| 5.9 The FairS of Bangladesh | 143 |
| 5.10 Conclusion | 145 |
| CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION | 146 |
| 6.1 Research Finding | 146 |
| 6.2 Discussion..... | 149 |
| 6.2.1 Understanding the Socio-Religious Context..... | 149 |
| 6.2.2 Historical Muslim-Hindu Relations | 150 |
| 6.2.3 Addressing Contemporary Challenges..... | 150 |
| 6.2.4 Leveraging Cultural Commonalities | 150 |
| 6.3 Recommendation | 151 |
| 6.3.1 Promoting Cultural Exchange Programs..... | 151 |
| 6.3.2 Establishing Interreligious Forums | 151 |
| 6.3.3 Incorporating Unbiased Cultural Education in Schools..... | 152 |
| 6.3.4 Interreligious Community Service Projects | 152 |
| 6.3.5 Facilitating Interreligious Dialogues on Cultural Themes | 152 |
| 6.3.6 Media and Communication Initiatives | 152 |
| 6.4 Implications for Further Research | 153 |
| 6.5 Closing Remarks..... | 153 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 154 |

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

Arabic Transliteration Scheme

(According to IIUM Thesis Manual)

Consonant

| Arabic Term | Transliteration | Arabic Term | Transliteration | Arabic term | Transliteration |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| ء | “ | ز | Z | ق | Q |
| ب | B | س | S | ك | K |
| ت | T | ش | Sh | ل | L |
| ث | Th | ص | Ş | م | M |
| ج | J | ض | Ï | ن | N |
| ح | H | ط | İ | ه | H |
| خ | kh | ظ | Z | و | W |
| د | D | ع | Ñ | ي | Y |
| ذ | dh | غ | Gh | | |
| ر | R | ف | F | | |

Vowel

| Arabic term | Transliteration | Arabic term | Transliteration |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| اَ | A | اِ | É |
| اِ | I | اُ | Ê |
| اُ | U | اَو | Ë |
| اَي | Ay | اَو | Aw |

Bengali Transliteration Scheme

(According to ALA-LC – *American Library Association and the Library of Congress* – Romanization Schemes for non-Roman Scripts, 1997 Edition)

Vowels and Diphthongs

| Bengali Term | Transliteration | Bengali Term | Transliteration |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| অ | A | ঋ | R |
| আ | Ā | এ | E |
| ই | I | ঐ | Ai |
| ঈ | Ī | ও | O |
| উ | U | ঔ | Au |
| ঊ | Ū | | |

Consonants

| Bengali Term | Transliteration | Bengali Term | Transliteration |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| ক | Ka | ন | Na |
| খ | Kha | প | Pa |
| গ | Ga | ফ | Pha |
| ঘ | Gha | ব | Ba |
| ঙ | Ng | ভ | Bha |
| চ | Ca | ম | Ma |
| ছ | Cha | য | Ya |
| জ | Ja | র | Ra |
| ঝ | Jha | ল | La |
| ঞ | Ña | হ | Ha |
| ট | Ta | শ | Śa |
| ঠ | Tha | ষ | Sha |
| ড | Da | স | Sa |
| ঢ | Dha | ড় | Ra |
| ণ | Na | ঢ় | Rha |
| ত | Ta | য় | Ya |
| থ | Tha | ৎ | Īa |
| দ | Da | ং | m̐ |
| ধ | Dha | ঁ | Ñ̐ |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Generally, inter-cultural studies or approaches examine the intersection of human variety and transformational change, which ultimately seek recognition and foster inter-cultural connections (Baldwin & McCracken, 2013, p. 6). Subsequently, inter-religious dialogue is strongly advocated to promote and establish communal co-existence (Shafiq & Abu-Nimer, 2007, p. 3). Indeed, communal co-existence is crucial in maintaining regional peace and harmony. History recorded that from the beginning of civilisation, the world had witnessed people fighting relentlessly to establish their own ideologies and fundamentals in life. However, inter-religious dialogues have been proven to nurture mutual understanding between peoples of different faiths (Swidler, 2014, p. 19). In other words, dialogues promoted respect and tolerance amongst people of different religions and beliefs. Consequently, people were able to interact positively and live peacefully despite their differences.

Meanwhile, it is deemed that people who live in different religious and multi-cultural societies are influenced by their religious doctrine. Unfortunately, because of lack of basic knowledge about their own cultures and religions, they are swayed by ignorance and unwitting passion. As a result, selfish people amongst them create communal disharmony and hostile environment in society by propagating extreme religious fundamentalism. Incidents of such antagonistic environment in society include arson, looting, rape and genocide (Brass, 2011, p. 367). All religion teaches tolerance and renounce violence against other faiths. In fact, Islam assures freedom of religion by following the guideline as spelt out in the noble Quran: "There is no compulsion in religion" (*Al-Baqarah:256*).

Moreover, Islam reiterates that human beings began with the same root i.e. Adam and Hawa and promotes the principle of justice and dignity. This is verified by the Qur'anic verse: "O humankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another" (*Al-Hujurat:13*). The Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) also stressed this when he formed the state of Medina. He

recognised Judaism during the pledge of the Medina Constitution where the Jews and Muslims lived as one nation together (Brown, 2011, p. 27). Hence, Islam had played a profound role in establishing communal harmony in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic Medina society when it was first founded.

Bangladesh is the eighth-most populated country in the world with a population of about 163 million (*Bangladesh Population 2021 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs)*). Most Bangladeshis (approximately 153 million) are Muslims and constitute the fourth-largest Muslim-majority country in the world. Hinduism is the second-largest religion with about 14 million people. In fact, Bangladesh has the third-largest Hindu population in the world. Buddhism is at 0.6 per cent, Christianity 0.37 per cent and others at 0.14 per cent (*Religions in Bangladesh | PEW-GRF*).

Bangladesh declared a Secular Nationalist Ideology in 1971 when it became an independent state from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. However, in 1988, the government had reformed the national ideology and via the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution Islam was reinstated (Hoque, 2018, p. 205). Then again, secularism came back again with the fifteenth amendment in 2010 (S. Majumder, 2016, p. 40). Hence, although Islam is the official religion, the state ensures equal rights and status for Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and people of other faiths. Actually, these multi-religious communities had lived together in Bangladesh for over a hundred years. Nevertheless, since independence in 1971, the cordial relationship between the Muslims and the Hindus had been marred by several instances of violence between these two communities. In fact, several gruesome incidences had occurred in 1992, 2001, 2013, 2014, 2016 (Minority Rights Group International, 2016), 2019 and 2020 (International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2021) involving the Muslims and the Hindus. The reasons behind these conflicts include political, socio-economic and a combination of other factors not necessarily due to the religious factor alone (M. S. Islam, 2010a, p. 33).

Even though the rich cultural heritage of Bangladesh is over a thousand years which were formed with mixed ethnography, various religion and sects, but apparently due to their sensitivities, interactions and coordination becomes the order of the day in order to bridge rampant misunderstandings. A researcher stresses that inter-cultural understanding is an effective mechanism in maintaining co-existence in a multi-

religious community like Bangladesh (Ratzmann, 2019, p. 11). Therefore, the current instabilities within the religious community of Bangladesh urgently need to promote inter-cultural understanding.

Hence, this study is timely and should meticulously examine the dynamics of Bangladesh's inter-cultural relationships and the cultivation of interaction and mutual understanding among the two main population components, i.e. Bangladesh's Muslim and Hindu communities. It is hoped that findings and recommendations derived from this study will contribute towards long-term social, political and religious stabilities of Bangladesh.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Historically, Bangladesh had enjoyed the golden age of harmonious Muslim-Hindu co-existence which, unfortunately, ended with the Partition of British India in 1947. This significant event led to a massive migration of over twelve million people to Bangladesh and Pakistan and had tragically resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives (Y. Khan, 2017, p. 9).

Following its independence from Pakistan, Bangladesh primarily fostered an amicable relationship between its Muslim and Hindu minorities. Nevertheless, this relationship has recently been marred by increasing distrust and conflicts. Following its independence from Pakistan, Bangladesh primarily fostered an amicable relationship between its Muslim and Hindu minorities. Nevertheless, this relationship has recently been marred by increasing distrust and conflicts. The destruction of the Babri Masjid in India on December 6, 1992, had a dramatic influence on the Muslim-Hindu in Bangladesh. It incited communal unrest in both India and Bangladesh and is one of the most notable instances of communal rioting after Bangladesh gained independence (Mohsin, 2011, p. 482).

Meanwhile, besides religious riots, political instability was also a negative factor for Bangladesh which is a democratic country and which since 1990 had faced challenges to attain a successful working democratic system. According to the World Justice Project's 2020 Rule of Law Index (WJP Rule of Law Index 2020) Bangladesh's global ranking had dropped to 115 out of 128 countries (Neukom, 2009). Political

conflict is a complex characteristic of Bangladesh's political culture. From 2009 to 2020, more than six thousand cases of political violence had occurred where 2221 people were killed and more than .01 million people were injured by political violence (*Annual Human Rights Report 2020*). Socially, incidences of rape were at an alarming rate where at least 9593 women and children were raped from 2009 to 2020. Sadly, among the rape victims 756 women and children were killed after the incidents (*Annual Human Rights Report 2020*). This impacted the country's religious co-existence negatively. When this type of socio-political incident happens to the minority people, the mass media and NGOs regard it as Minority Torture. More often than not the Islamic political parties were blamed.

Electoral violence is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh's national parliamentary and local government elections, which happen pre-and post-electoral periods. For most of the election, minority communities, particularly the Hindus community, were political conspiracy victimised by either getting their support or causing controversy over the election (Guhathakurta, 2013, p. 295). In 2001, post-election violence had a terrible toll on the Hindu population, forcing approximately 02 million Hindus to escape to India due to unstable conditions (Eschenbächer, 2006, p. 3). Amnesty International reports highlighted the severity of the circumstances, revealing that following the national parliamentary election in 2014, approximately 300 Hindu households and over 60 temples were destroyed (“The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia,” 2017b, p. 32).

In addition, the increasingly detrimental effects of social media on communal integration in Bangladesh have become a significant cause for concern. From 2012 to 2020, several instances of sectarian violence were caused by the spreading of rumours and incorrect information on social media platforms, particularly Facebook. As a result, more than a hundred Buddhist and Hindu temples along with approximately 3000 houses were destroyed. Tragically, one Hindu and four Muslim protesters had also lost their lives. According to the police investigation, most of the incidents happened based on fake posts on Facebook (Naher & Minar, 2018).

After the endorsement of the National Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 by the Parliament of India on December 11, 2019, a new challenge had started to emerge in Bangladesh for the Muslim and Hindu communities in maintaining religious

harmony. Hindu nationalism was championed in India after the Bhartiya Janata Party (B.J.P.) victory in 2014 (K. Siddiqui, 2016, p. 9). This had affected situations in Bangladesh where communal conflicts among the Muslims and the Hindus had persistently increased since then. In fact, whatever attacks against religious minorities in India had also triggered violence against minorities in Bangladesh.

This research, therefore, scrutinizes the Violence Factor as it directly impacts the communal relations between the Muslims and the Hindus in Bangladesh. The existence of violence, including acts like arson, looting, rape, and killings, generates an atmosphere of dread, suspicion, and hostility among the two communities. An analysis of violence within the framework of interreligious interactions offers significant insights into the intricate social, political, and economic elements that influence the relationship between Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh. Hence, understanding the root causes of violence between the Muslims and the Hindus is crucial for this research's objective.

Real-time investigations will give insight into the complex social, political, religious, and economic relationships contributing to the existing tensions. These findings will provide a base for creating practical solutions to deal with and reduce those factors, establishing the framework for promoting community coexistence and harmonious relationships.

At the same time this research explores the inter-cultural approach to encourage Muslim-Hindu inter-religious dialogues in Bangladesh. Initially, this study investigates the shared cultural components, historical instances and important inter-religious tolerance and assimilation factors ever since the Muslim rule in Medieval Bengal (Nair, 2020, p. 4). Having determined the positive factors and the common cultural practices, this research then seeks to promote inter-religious understanding and appreciation thus bridging the gap between the Muslim and Hindu communities of Bangladesh.

In essence, violence is a tool that allows researchers to understand the obstacles and challenges that impede communal peace in Bangladesh. The findings from this investigation will enhance the thesis on an intercultural approach to interfaith dialogue and highlight the pressing need and significance of implementing a comprehensive strategy. This initiative aims to tackle the underlying factors that

contribute to violence while also promoting and honouring the shared cultural history of the Muslim and Hindu communities in Bangladesh.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What is the role of Islam in shaping the socio-cultural background of Bangladesh?
2. How was the Intercultural integration of the Muslims and the Hindus during the Muslim rule in Medieval Bengal?
3. What are the root factors of violence between the Muslims and the Hindus in Bangladesh?
4. What are the common cultural elements between the Muslims and the Hindus in Bangladesh?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To explore the role of Islam in shaping the contemporary socio-cultural landscape of Bangladesh.
2. To analyse some significant works on the inter-cultural integration of the Muslims and the Hindus during the Muslim rule of Medieval Bengal.
3. To investigate the local and regional factors contributing to violence between the Muslims and the Hindus in Bangladesh.
4. To capitalize on the common cultural practices of the Muslims and the Hindus in Bangladesh.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The necessity of studying religion from an academic perspective is increasing continuously, especially since the beginning of globalisation. There are many methodological approaches to the study of religion by both Islamic and Western scholars. Muslim scholars have made a crucial effort to prepare a framework for studying religion from the early period of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.). The rising of Muslim inheritance in the studies of religion is identified through the diligent work of Muslim scholars, for instance, Abu Jafar Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari (839-923), Abu Isa al-Warraq (889 –994), Ibn Al- Nadim(320 H -385 H), Abu Muhammad Ali ibn Hazm (994-1064), Abu Bakr Muhammad al- Baqillani (940 - 1013), Abu Raihan Al-Biruni (973 - 1048), Muhammad al- Shahrastani(1086–1153 CE), Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad at-Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), Imam Ibn Taymiyah (1263 -1328), Ismail Al-Faruqi (1921 – 1986) and others. Muslim scholars have studied religion from an overall perspective of life and have not focused only on a particular aspect of life.

During the 19th century, researchers from the Western world began to appear curious in religious studies. Their efforts have resulted in developing various ideas and approaches for studying religions. Prominent scholars such as Max Weber (1864-1920) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) have made valuable contributions to the field of sociology of religion, while William James (1842-1910) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) have made noteworthy contributions to the area of psychology of religion. Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917) and James G. Frazer (1854-1941) were influential figures in the anthropology of religion. Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900) made notable contributions to studying religion and Vedantic philosophy. Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) had a significant impact on the contemporary study of religion.

Various theoretical frameworks are used to examine inter-religious dialogue, contingent upon the academic tradition and prevailing conditions. Distinguished scholars in classical comparative theology have presented their works, exhibiting different approaches to dialogue. For instance, Ibn Hazm employs the dialectical-dialogical method in his work i.e. the *Kitab al faṣl fi al-milal wa al-ahwā' wa al-niḥal* (Aasi, 2007). Al Faruqi formulates six dialogue principles stemming from his approach to comparative religious study and meta-religion (Fletcher, 2014). Additionally, Leonard Swidler (Swidler, 1983) demonstrates ten guidelines of inter-faith dialogue and

Mohammed Abu-Nimer, a specialist in conflict resolution and peace dialogue, proposes a model comprising four stages for dialogue progression (Abu-Nimer, 2003).

This research's overall content is an inter-cultural approach to Muslim-Hindu inter-faith dialogue in Bangladesh. This study combines theories from historical narratives, sociological interpretations and inter-religious studies as its main methodology. The following sections elucidate historical narratives involving theorists, firstly like Rajmohan Gandhi who wrote a book entitled "Understanding the Muslim Mind "(R. Gandhi, 2003). Gandhi represents a highly balanced and non-judgmental account of Muslims in the twentieth-century India, Pakistan and Bangladesh through the biographical portraits of eight famous Muslims and the progression of their thought processes in the context of historical events. Also, he picked diverse leaders representing various interests, beliefs and reactions to historical turbulence. He conducted an in-depth, virtually objective examination of the political, ideological and personal differences among people who had chosen to represent the interests of various communities. Overall, his works primarily present a comprehensive and historically accurate description of what transpired in pre-independence India regarding communal interaction. He demonstrated a profoundly insightful picture of inter-cultural relations in the Indian Sub-Continent.

Secondly, is a study by Asghar Ali Engineer entitled "Islamic Fundamentalism and Communalism in India" where he explains about the importance of sociological interpretation (Engineer, 1990). This study was done within a comprehensive framework focusing on religious and social-cultural changes in the Indian Sub-Continent during the Middle Age. It provides a sociological interpretation of the origin and development of the composite culture of India based on the historical and literary works on India. He studies the impact of Muslim ruling classes and the Upper-Caste Hindus that were a part of the ruling classes. He demonstrates how the culture developed by India's ruling classes was a composite culture since it was maintained by both the power elites, the Hindus and the Muslims. On the one side, Hindu traditions affected this culture, while on the other, Islamic traditions influenced it. Poetry, fine arts like dancing, painting, music and patterns of speech and clothing were all shaped by this composite culture. The Muslim and the Hindu communities celebrate many festivals together, held in the mausoleums and temples with high nobility. Muslim Sufis and Hindu Saints influenced the populace by using Hindu and Islamic idioms, significantly

impacting their minds. This confluence of the two religious traditions spawned a slew of new rituals. A comprehensive analysis of the composite culture in India during the Middle Age using the inter-cultural theories presented in Engineer's book help uncover the complexities of the interaction between the Muslims and the Hindus of Bangladesh in particular and shed light on the broader implications for understanding the interaction of cultures in multi-religious societies in general.

Thirdly, the *Kitab al-Hind* by Al-Biruni is an exclusive contribution to the study of Hinduism (Sachau, 2000). The *Kitab al-Hind* thoroughly analyses Hindu scriptures, including the *Vedas* and *Puranas*. Al-Biruni used an analytical, in-depth, scholarly and appropriate method in portraying Hinduism. Al-Biruni performed careful fieldwork in India and delved into Hindu religious practices in-depth while adhering to a strict research approach. The framework of Al-Biruni has three primary components vis-a-vis the methodological element, the socio-political and socio-economic aspects and the socio-religious factor. He examined Hindu philosophy and its Caste structure in society, ethics, laws, rituals, customs and festivals. He proposed five fundamental aspects for understanding Hindu religion and culture namely the language (Sanskrit), religious attitudes, significant religious treatises, traditions and attitudes toward other faiths. This book provides valuable and reliable information on India's Brahmanical religion for those interested in studying various religions and improving religious peace in a multi-religious community. Al-Biruni's dialogical approach, characterised by openness and impartiality, serves as a paradigm for persons desiring to participate in meaningful talks with people from various religions.

Finally, the book "Islam for Hindus" by Arvind Sharma (Sharma, 2009) is a factual introduction to Islam in general. Sharma's primary objective is to provide a basic idea of Islam to Hindus as both the Hindus and the Muslims in India have poor knowledge about the basics of each other's religions. The book explored Islam's essential beliefs and practices to allow adherents of other faiths to learn Islam's principles and grasp similar ideologies among religions. It simply illustrated the notion of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) and his life, aspects of the Quran, essential themes, the custom and history of Islam. Moreover, Islam's socio-political and legal framework delves into aspects of Islamic mysticism, investigating key characteristics such as asceticism, the wisdom of God and affection for God. Conclusively, it explored the grounds for interaction between the Hindus and the Muslims by looking into Quranic

texts that emphasised the heterogeneity of religious traditions and the universality of variation.

Similarly, this study explored historical narratives, sociological interpretation and inter-religious studies with inter-cultural and phenomenological interpretation through the qualitative methods of modern social research. Hopefully, this study would positively contribute to the inter-religious dialogue and religious concord by addressing the need to create a universal platform that facilitates inter-religious engagement and fair understanding and tolerance for each other's diversity.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on inter-cultural interactions among the Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh is still relatively unexplored ground in academia. However, despite the adequacy of the literature in this area of study, a few existing works are relevant to current research. These literature reviews have been divided into four main categories. The first part reviews the role of religion in the socio-culture of Bangladesh, and the second part analyses some significant works on interfaith relations in the Indian Sub-Continent. The third and final section examines significant works on the root causes of violence and common ground for overcoming these causes between Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh became a new sovereign state in 1971; however, it has a long history as part of the historic region of Bengal in Southeast Asia, and religion has made a meaningful contribution to the evolution of society. In the article "Interfaith Dialogue in India" by A. Suresh it was stressed that the Indian Sub-Continent is the birthplace of several religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, and various tribal belief systems (Suresh, 2000, pp. 7–17). It has also hosted many foreign-born religions, such as Judaism, Zoroastrianism (now known in India as the Parsi religion), Christianity, and Islam. Christianity came to South India just after the death and resurrection of its founder, Jesus Christ, while Islam also came to India immediately after the passing away of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w). Suresh illustrates a comprehensive interreligious dialogue between Christians and Hindus in India. He elaborated that in India, no religion or religious function could be considered in isolation, and there is rarely any public gathering or celebration that does not involve adherents of several religions.

In "Buddhism in Bengal: A Brief Survey" Niru Kumar Chakma provided a brief overview of Buddhism and its influence on Bangladesh's ancient civilization (Chakma, 2011, pp. 37–44). According to Niru, Bangladesh was once the cradle of Buddhism. Many ancient temples and many Buddha statues, relics, stone plates, and copper were uncovered in different parts of the country. A large number of archaeological ideographs were founded at Paharpur Somapuri (Jaipurhat), Ashrafpur (Dhaka), Mahasthangarh (Bogra), and Mainamati (Comilla), that date is the 6th and 10th Centuries. Furthermore, in this study, he mentioned the advent of the Pala dynasty, which governed Bengal from the middle of the eighth to the latter part of the twelfth century A.D., that the Pala regime was significant in the history of Buddhism in Bengal. The Pala period was an era of progress in religion, culture, education, literature, art, and sculpture. The Palas promoted Buddhism by establishing religious schools, constructing the great *Odantapuri Vihar*, the famous *Vikramsila Vihar*, and *Somapura Vihar* in Paharpur Rajshahi, and facilitating Buddhist philosophy taught at the religious schools, as well as patronising Buddhist intellectuals and spiritual teachers. The earliest evidence of Bengali literature, known as *Carya-padas*, was written by twenty-two Buddhist *Tantric Acharyas* named Siddhas.

In the "Cultural Heritage in Bangladesh" by Dr. Suman Barua it is revealed that Dhaka and several surrounding regions were formerly under the control of Buddhist rulers, according to early traditions. Local Buddhist monarchs known as Chandra ruled from Bikrampur in the Dhaka area throughout the 10th and 11th centuries (S. Barua, 2018, pp. 3–12). The discovery of copper plates in Idirpur and Kedarpur in this area, and Rampal, the former capital of Bikrampur in Dhaka, led to their existence. The Chandra rulers established various *Bihars* over the regions intended to teach things like crafts, astronomy, arts, geography, herbal medicine, agriculture, ceramics, and so on, in addition to monastic education. Thousands of monks and students lived in these *Bihars* to learn various skills, expertise, and scriptural studies.

"The Hindu Tradition: Readings in Oriental Thought", authored by Ainslie T. Embree and William Theodore de Bary, Provides a comprehensive discussion of the Hindu viewpoint on life (S. Barua, 2018, pp. 3–12). This book is a study of the underlying essence of the Hindu tradition—the thoughts and actions that have influenced culture in India over the last three thousand years. They explain the numerous influences of Indian tradition were the songs of the poet-saints of the great

heritage in everyday people's language, which were the most essential of all effects working towards a unity that tied together all levels of cultural and religious experience. The advent of Muslim occurred in the ninth century, and Arab soldiers established themselves along the lower Indus River; now it is Pakistan. At the end of the tenth century, North India came under Muslim rule by the victory of Muhammad Ghori, and in the sixteenth century, Muslims captured Delhi and established the Mughals empire; most regions of India were under their rule. They claim that the impact of the Islamic rule on India was enormous. The presence of at least one hundred and thirty million Muslims in the region is the most obvious proof of this. The most crucial matter is that the Muslim dominance had not eradicated either Hindu religion or culture. Instead, a unique example of Hindu-Muslim interculturalism set in Muslim India.

"The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760" by Richard M. Eaton describes an in-depth examination of the arrival of Hinduism and Islam in Bengal after the decline of the Buddhist civilisation (R. M. Eaton, 1993, pp. 3–134). According to Eaton, Bengal's historical reality was unique in its massive acceptance of Islam and its frontier disposition. Each of Bengal's frontiers thus moved on its own; the first Sanskrit and agrarian frontiers developed through the Buddhist and Brahman regimes; the second political boundary demarcated the areas where the Turks and their successors, the Bengal sultans and rulers of the Mughal Empire. The third Islamic border separates Muslim and non-Muslim populations. This last barrier, a permeable phenomenon with emotional and territorial overtones, was critical in 1947. Eaton traces the lengthy historical contact between Islamic and Indic cultures via archaeological data, monuments, oral histories, literature, and Mughal administration records to the rise of the Brahmins in the wake of the decline of Buddhist civilisation in Bengal and the trend of Islamic cultural formations. Eaton depicts that Bengal's political and cultural change trend in the Sena dynasty (ca. 1097–1223) was significant. With the political development of the Sena in Bengal came the spread of Hinduism, which dominated all spheres of Bengal society, including culture. Muslim rule in Bengal began with Muhammad Bakhtiyar conquered northwestern Bengal in 1204 and ended in 1757. This book attempts to find out the answer to how Muslim rule has prevailed for so long. Eaton argues that the ability of Islam in Bengal to adapt to the land and the culture of its people while simultaneously evolving both has made it historically prosperous and a crucial social reality. The norms of religion and the reality of local

sociocultural systems eventually accommodate one another in world religion success stories, and the tale of Islam in Bengal is one of them. Although philosophers, theologians, and reformers may disagree with this statement, it appears intuitively understood by the mass public.

In the book "Religion and Politics in South Asia," edited by Ali Riaz, provides a thorough examination of how religion and politics interact in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and the Maldives (Riaz, 2010, pp. 1–18). According to Riaz's argument, religion has become an essential tool of identity and a shaper of the political landscape in South Asia, which has the world's largest Muslim and Hindu populations and a significant number of Buddhists. He emphasised how, despite having secularism as a national policy, religion, mainly Islam plays a more significant role in politics in Bangladesh. He claims that this is the consequence of religious patronage of political parties to retain public support, and Islamic political ideology spread widely in social life through the religious organisations over time. Islamist political organisations have played a key influence in the political environment during the last several decades. Since the 1980s, two main political parties, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Bangladesh Awami League, have allied with Islamists for electoral benefits.

The following section analyzes significant works on interfaith relations in the Indian Sub-Continent. Imtiaz Yusuf conducted outstanding research on Muslim–Buddhist engagement entitled "Islam and Buddhism"(Yusuf, 2013, pp. 360–372). He discussed the Muslim engagements with Asian religious communities and explicitly detailed out Muslim–Buddhist dialogue. According to him, The Qur'an and the Muslims had been engaging in discourse with all other Semitic religions theologically and historically. From ancient times has been a commercial and political relationship between the Arab world and Asia. As a result, too early after the advent of Islam, the Muslim world engaged with other Asian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism. Generally, the character of Muslim–Buddhist connections and dialogue varies theoretically, historically, and regionally and is influenced by the prevailing mode of religious ritual and the ethnic identities of their adherents. Modern dialogue between Islam and Buddhism also takes various forms. Some Buddhist converts seek to bridge the racial divisions between Buddhists and Muslims by engaging in theological dialogue, ignoring the historical and political links between the two religions. In fact,

the Buddhists and Muslims lived together for too many years in Tibet, India, and another side of Southeast Asia. Though there is a long history of Muslim–Buddhist coexistence, such interaction is either absent or limited because of the proper interpretation of the age of globalisation. Yusuf claims that the Muslims and the Buddhist community have lived together in many world regions, but very few researchers have researched the relationships between peoples of these two religions in depth.

Akhtarul Wasey discussed the history of interreligious dialogue in the Indian Sub-Continent in his article entitled "Interfaith dialogue: an Indian Perspective"(Wasey, 2010, pp. 55–61). He states that Muhammad ibn Qasim introduced dialogue between Islam and other religions in the Indian Sub-Continent. The advent of Islam in India began in 711 CE with a military expedition in Sindh commanded by Muhammad bin Qasim. He came to the city of Raorhi, situated on top of the hill, and laid siege to the city, won without a fight, and had established an idea of dialogue between Islam and other religions. He led many local conversions between state and religious adherents and ensured that no blood would be spilt and Hindu worship sites would be harmed. He developed a system of government in Sindh based on Islamic ideals, distinguished by religious tolerance and the protection of non-Muslims' human rights. The rulers of Sindh placed a great honour on religious freedom.

The Mughal Emperor Akbar (1564-1605 CE) was another great seeker of interfaith dialogue. Priyanka Upadhyaya has provided insight into this in the "Intercultural Dialogue: lineage and Practice in the Indian Sub-Continent"(Upadhyaya, 2017, pp. 198–200).He states that Akbar was the third most sophisticated and successful emperor of the Mughal Empire. He had elevated the practice of religious dialogue to a new high in Medieval India. He fostered and formalised spiritual understanding by conducting discussions with representatives of many religions to reach a common ground of harmony. However, the most noteworthy aspect of Akbar's work was converting religious discourse into a massive campaign.

Dara Shikoh (1615-1659) was another significant doyen of the inter-religious relations like the Mughal Emperor. Supriya Gandhi focused on the contribution of Dara Shikoh's inter-religious works in her book "The Emperor Who Never Was Dara Shukoh in Mughal India"(S. Gandhi, 2020, pp. 186–193). She commented that Dara Shikoh was one of the most prominent religious philosophers. His philosophical and literary works

significantly contributed to the rich spiritual treasure in the subcontinent. His book titled “Majma-ul-Bahrain” (the "meeting place of the two seas) presented similarities between Islam and Hinduism following the Sufi traditions. He took his grandfather Akbar's legacy to new heights by making religious concord a personal experience. The work of Dara was of great significance not only politically but also academically. He translated many Hindu scriptures, notable translations of the *Upanishad*, into Persian languages; it played a significant role in stirring Western academic interest in the wisdom of the subcontinent. Moreover, He attempted to find common political grounds and create spiritual harmony among the Muslim and Hindu religious communities.

A study conducted by Mahmdur Rahman in the book entitled "The Political History of Muslim Bengal: An Unfinished Battle of Faith." acknowledged the contribution of Muslim rulers on the development of other faiths (M. Rahman, 2018a, pp. 11–16). He states that the Muslim rulers had taken the various inter-religious programs under the Shahi Bangla regime (1352–1576) which include establishing cordial relations between different religious communities. Muslim Sultans patronized the translation of Hindu theological books namely the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* from Sanskrit to Bengali languages.

Sir Syed Ahmed was one of the proponents Hindu-Muslim unity and co-existence in British India in the nineteenth century. In an article entitled "Issues of Hindu-Muslim Relations in the Works of Syed Ahmad Khan" Yusuf Ali and Osman Bakar highlighted that Syed Ahmad was a pioneer of Hindu-Muslim harmony and later became a forerunner for interfaith dialogue in British India (M. Y. Ali & Bakar, 2020, pp. 322–332). His view of Islamic heritage as an intrinsically multicultural and multi-national stance on Muslim society reform included nationally and internationally. In modern India, Syed Ahmed Khan has played a significant role in developing communal harmony between the Hindu and Muslim communities. He mentioned his statement that "we (Hindus and Muslims) consume the same crops, drink the same rivers' water, and inhale the same air. Hindus and Muslims are Hindustan's gorgeous bride's two eyes. These flaws will detract from the bride's attractiveness (*Dulhan*).". In the same essay, he stated that all Indians, whether Muslims, Christians, or Hindus, should establish common understanding, fraternal sympathies, and contact. He believed that a nation might develop and grow if it maintained friendship, solidarity, and love without regard for religious differences. Without regard for political disagreements, a country survives

through cooperation, love, tolerance, and fraternity. He has worked all his life to establish Indian nationalism and cultural nationalism so that Hindus and Muslims can live peacefully as one nation.

Similarly, Asghar Ali Engineer was a prominent Indian Islamic scholar. He wrote prolifically about Hindu-Muslim interactions. In the book entitled "Muslims in India Since 1947: Islamic Perspectives on Interfaith Relations," Yoginder Sikand lauded that Asghar Ali Engineer is a distinguished Indian Muslim activist and writer (Sikand, 2004, pp. 14–30). In 1980, Asghar Ali formed the Institute of Islamic Studies in Mumbai to promote a better understanding of Islam, through which he built relationships with progressive Muslims in other regions of India and beyond. Asghar Ali then established the Centre for the Study of Secularism and Society in Mumbai in 1993 to investigate conflicting confrontations and promoted new interpretations between the Muslims and the Hindus. He argued that new religious conceptions were required to develop better relationships between the people of the two religions. He was involved in several inter-faith dialogue programs in India and overseas and worked extensively on Muslim-Hindu relations. He emphasized the cultural aspects to promote clearer pictures of Indian Muslims interacting with their Hindu neighbours and bringing them closer together. He strongly criticized the concept of a "solid" Islamic culture, claiming that such a thing did not exist. Instead, he argued that Islam had assumed many shapes in different world regions and had attempted to establish itself in various cultural contexts. He emphasized the local Islamic heritages such as the "Arab Islam," "Indian Islam," and "Indonesian Islam" rather than the existence of a single Islamic culture. He viewed Indian Islam as a composite culture shared by Indians of various faiths.

"Understanding the Muslim Mind" is a notable work by Raj Mohan Gandhi that discussed fairly and honestly about Indian inter-communal affairs (R. Gandhi, 2003, pp. 1–16). He provided a highly instructive and historical account of communal relations in pre-independence India. Through biographical studies of Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Muhammad Iqbal, Fazlul Haq, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Abul Kalam Azad, Zakir Hussain and Liaquat Ali Khan, he portrayed a fascinating picture of Muslims in the twentieth-century India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. He had thoroughly examined their political, ideological and interpersonal variations. He highlighted the Partition in 1947, explaining that a more thorough understanding of both the soft and the hard Hindutva-Vadis and a more in-depth analysis of Gandhi's rejection of "*qaum*" had made this study

critical for comprehending the Partition. Besides, he illustrated the inter-religious involvement in Muslim governance, noting that most Muslim regimes had Hindu executives and soldiers and that the state did not conflict with Hindu peoples. Instead, the Sufis and Bhakti poets, supported by the state, brought Hindus and Muslims closer together at the grassroots level. This study provides a profoundly insightful picture of inter-cultural relations of the Indian Sub-Continent.

As far as inter-cultural relations in Bangladesh, the country has been a multi-religious country where Muslim and Hindu communities had co-existed for many years. However, since the partition in 1947, both the major communities of the country faced numerous challenges driven by religious and international geopolitical factors. In the book "Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security (2003)" By Barry Buzan and Ole Waiver has developed a Post-Cold War Era Regional Complex Theory on regional security patterns (Buzan et al., 2003, pp. 93–124). The analysis encompasses contemporary international security systems, including the Middle East, Europe, East Asia, South Asia, and North and South America. The authors believe that the South Asian security system, which has been bipolar since India's division in 1947, is progressively transforming into an India-led unipolar hegemonic subsystem due to Pakistan's collapse in economic and governance competence. Buzan and Weaver argue that the future of the South Asian complex "depends on the nature of ties between China, India, and Pakistan." The writers regard Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Bangladesh as subsidiaries or small nations extensions of the Indian security complex. The researcher explores the history of bilateral disagreements between these smaller nations and India separately to determine if they have all accepted Indian hegemony.

Another insightful book entitled " The Indian Doctrine (1947-2007): A Contemporary Study on Indian Hegemony and Geo-Strategic Perspectives on South Asia" by M.B.I. Munshi examined India's relations with neighbours in South Asia from 1947 to 2007 (Munshi, 2012, pp. 344–357). Munshi provided a comprehensive picture of key events throughout those 60 years from the strategic, intelligence, military, economic and political perspectives. In particular, he narrated a historical and geo-strategic review of the relations between India and Bangladesh. The book sheds light on India's diplomatic and political intervention in neighbouring countries and manipulated the notorious intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (R.A.W.). India's primary goal in disrupting and intervening in the internal affairs of

bordering countries was to achieve regional dominance. Munshi's work disclosed the role of India during events in Bangladesh from 2001 to 2007, especially India's involvement in militancy in the name of Islam in the country and how it had campaigned at home and abroad to depict Bangladesh as a failed state.

In "Islam and Liberation Theology: Essays on Liberative Elements in Islam", Asghar Ali Engineer discussed ethnic or community tensions in the Third-World Nations (Engineer, 1990, pp. 207–216). He contends that there were a variety of causes for these conflicts, including political, religious and socio-economic factors. For instance, the natives and Indian conflict in Fiji, the Tamil-Sinhala war in Sri Lanka and the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India were not religiously motivated. Evidently, in India, the Hindu-Muslim conflict and antagonism was not associated with religion. However, it was incorrectly stated in religious jargon, presenting the problem as if religious. Despite gaining a separate independent state in 1947, the Hindu-Muslim problem in Bangladesh had not been significantly resolved instead worsened.

Paul Brass, in his book "The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India", offers a unique study of religious identities, politics and violence in India during the last three decades of British colonialism and Aligarh's entire post-independence history (Brass, 2011, pp. 43–132). Brass revealed how local communal violence was systematically incited and sustained by local business police and political leaders in the Aligarh communal riots. He gave the example that a communal riot is like a theatrical production, requiring scriptwriting, rehearsal and staging. In this approach, riots become essential historical tools in the competition for one society's economic, political and social dominance. The most intriguing conclusion from this book is that riots are vital and routine components of India's contemporary political culture and criticising and lamenting riots and their victims were becoming as much a core component of this political atmosphere as the riots themselves.

In "Songkhalughu Rajniti" (Minority Politics), Mehdi Hasan Palash sheds light on the persecution of non-Muslims (minorities) in Bangladesh (Palash, 2001, pp. 179–259). He claims in his research that most of the allegations of torture of minorities in Bangladesh are fake and baseless. From 1991 to 1996, the national newspaper published reports on the persecution of minorities and investigated the real reasons behind it. Analysing the data in the printed news shows that most of the incidents of communal

conflict in Bangladesh have been planned. He highlighted that the Indian intelligence agencies R.A.W. and the N.G.O.s run by them have played a significant role in creating communal conflict in Bangladesh, especially in the Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Yukko Parishad (Hindu-Buddhist-Christian United Association). Polash argued that Bangladesh might be regarded as the perfect nation of non-communalism in contemporary times.

Since ancient times, Bangladesh had been inhabited by various ethnic groups and through combining diverse elements had created a unique Bengali cultural heritage. In the book "Islamic Fundamentalism and Communalism in India" by Asghar Ali Engineer, a study was done within the comprehensive framework focusing on religious and social-cultural changes in the Indian Sub-Continent during the *Midvale* Age (Engineer, 1986, pp. 171–175). Before the British arrived in India, the ruling class's religion was Islam. In medieval times, the society was more devout, and faith was ritualistic. Religion has played a significant impact in escalating community relationships. He demonstrated how the Muslims and the Hindus developed and maintained a composite culture. Hindu traditions inspired this culture on the one hand while on the other hand Islamic traditions influenced it. This composite culture influenced poetry, fine arts like dance, painting, music and language and dress traditions. Many festivals were jointly celebrated by the Muslims and the Hindu groups which were held in great reverence in mausoleums and temples. In fact, the merging of the two religious traditions created a wide range of new universal rites.

In the book "The Emergence of Bengal Muslims", Rafiudding Ahmed discusses how Socio-cultural identity played a vital role in defining the distinctive features of Bangladeshi Muslims as a distinct community Ahmed (R. Ahmed, 2001, pp. 1–25). He argued that it is impossible to determine only the religious criteria for selecting the cultural boundaries of the Bengali Muslims. The Muslims adopted religious and local ethnic Bengali identities; representing a distinct cultural milieu. When the British captured Bengal in the eighteenth century, they mingled with the Muslim population, which was nearly exclusively rural in origin and not dissimilar to their Hindu neighbours in attire, manners, names, jobs, rituals and traditions. The way of daily living, eating habits, literature, social customs and socio-territorial were followed by both the Hindu and the Muslim communities. Soon after establishing British rule in India, the British aroused religious frenzy between the Hindu and Muslim communities

through its Policy of Divide and Rule, which resulted in the formation of two countries in 1947 based on religious identity. The Bangladeshis abandoned the sense of religious nationalism and formed a new state called Bangladesh based on regional cultural frontiers in 1971.

The book "Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue in Education," written by Ruth Vilà, Montse Freixa, and Assumpta Aneas, provides an exhaustive framework for examining inter-religious communication in socio-cultural contexts (Vilà et al., 2020, pp. 256–270). Their study develops relevance by referencing pertinent studies, policy-making and academic discussions. The article emphasises the essential tenets of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue which include attentive listening, respect for others' views, acknowledgement of spiritual encounters, prioritising ethics above rigid doctrines and a steadfast commitment to human rights and democratic ideals. Moreover, the writers recognise the complex interconnection between religion and culture, especially in anthropology, sociology and philosophy. These ideas explain the varied expressions of transcendent experiences across different cultures.

Additionally, Osman Bakar explains the boundaries of inter-religious dialogue within the Islamic framework in his book "The Qur'an on Interfaith and Inter-Civilization Dialogue: Interpreting a Divine Message for Twenty-First Century Humanity" (Bakar, 2006, pp. 4–10). The Quran stands out for its sophisticated dialogue, excellent and compassionate reasoning and justifications, free of coercion and universal respect for all people. The Qur'an even invites nonreligious people to participate in the discourse. The Qur'an offers definitive evidence that encourages individuals to engage in discussions centred on God's method of enabling them to contemplate the knowledge that the Prophets and Messengers conveyed. Bakar presents a clear Quranic position on interfaith and inter-religious dialogue in his work.

The article "Intercultural Communication, Interreligious Dialogue, and Peace" by L. Groff promotes peace and harmony in the light of the fast expansion of globalisation and the presence of great variety (Groff, 2002, pp. 701–716). The study offers an integrative approach that acknowledges cultural, ethnic, national and religious differences. Within this framework, the literature examines the crucial significance of intercultural communication and interreligious dialogue as essential means to foster comprehension, collaboration and the settlement of conflicts among people and groups.

In conclusion, the existing pieces of literature on Muslim-Hindu inter-cultural issues in Bangladesh offer a unique perspective into these communities' historical, cultural and religious connections. However, following examination, it becomes evident that there are significant limitations and gaps. Studies focusing on this particular field are relatively few and often demonstrate differences in research methodology. While Muslim rulers had contributed to inter-religious initiatives and played a major historical role in promoting peaceful cultural cohabitation in Bengal, it is essential to emphasise that these features have not gotten scholarly attention adequately. The inadequate representation of these contributions in the literature suggests that more thorough studies are necessary to clarify their role in the development of Bangladesh's cultural landscape. Hence, this research intends to fill this gap.

Moreover, the customary cultural practices that Muslims and Hindus share are not sufficiently explored in the existing literature. These mutual customs and practices are essential components of the composite culture and provide valuable insights into the integrated legacy of these communities. The lack of comprehensive research on this topic offers a prospect for future studies to explore these cultural subtleties and their importance in promoting mutual understanding.

Literature has also not meticulously analysed the inter-cultural approach to inter-religious dialogue as a tool for preserving harmonious relations within Bangladesh's diverse religious community. Considering the country's multi-religious landscape, there is a need to understand the effectiveness of inter-cultural approaches via interreligious dialogues and their usefulness in fostering coexistence. According to these identified limits and gaps, this study aspires to explore the current body of knowledge by presenting the unexplored aspects of Hindu-Muslim intercultural interactions in Bangladesh. Exhaustive research exploring Muslim rulers' historical achievements delves into common cultural practices and evaluates the inter-cultural methods of inter-religious discourse. Ultimately, this initiative aims to significantly contribute to academic knowledge and promote peace and cohabitation within the religious diversity of Bangladesh.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs the Qualitative Method to study interreligious dialogue based on the intercultural approach and the phenomenological perspectives of religious studies. It primarily relies on library research to achieve its research objectives.

The following discusses the comprehensive and enhanced overviews of the Qualitative methodology that this research focuses on.

Qualitative Research Design in Religious Studies

This study adopts a Qualitative research framework which is capable to illustrate and understand religious beliefs, experiences, practices and socio-cultural phenomena adequately (Hammersley, 2012, p. 1). This qualitative study seeks to gain in-depth insights into the complications of religious affairs. This method thoroughly examines inter-religious relationships, historical trends and current issues about communal peace and coexistence in Bangladesh.

Intercultural Approach

The research employs an intercultural methodology to comprehensively examine and analyse various cultures, relationships and communication trends between individuals or cultural groups (Elias & Mansouri, 2020, p. 492). This perspective acknowledges the variety of religious faiths, practices, and ethics between Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh and aspires to foster dialogue and compassion among these communities. The research seeks compassion and mutual dignity between these religious communities by adopting an intercultural lens.

Phenomenological Method of Religious Study

The phenomenological approach in religious studies includes understanding and narrating religious events as individuals and groups without giving judgments or preconceived beliefs (Gschwandtner, 2019, p. 3). This research employs the phenomenological methodology to examine inter-religious episodes in Bangladesh

perspective. This approach aims to illuminate the intricacies and subtleties of religious encounters by examining the religious histories of the people involved. In doing so, it seeks to foster a deeper understanding and sympathy among both the Muslim and Hindu populations.

Descriptive Method for Historical Analysis

The study undertakes the descriptive methodology to investigate the historical narrative of religion's influence on the socio-cultural structure of Bangladesh. This approach entails meticulously observing, analysing and documenting a specific community or population's traits, behaviours or phenomena free from manipulating variables (Kemp et al., 2018, p. 3). The research seeks to get a complete and unbiased knowledge of the impact of religion on communal relations in Bangladesh across time by meticulously examining and analysing historical records, literature, and other sources.

Analytical Method for Identifying Root Causes

The analytical approach examines the underlying factors contributing to violence and disputes between the Muslim and Hindu communities in Bangladesh. This systematic approach entails gathering, scrutinising and interpreting data to acquire insight into the social norms, trends and interactions (Okes, 2019, p. 4). The study analyzes the social, political, economic and religious factors that sparked tensions and social unrests. The aim of this exercise is to identify common grounds and potential solutions towards establishing communal harmony.

Sociological Interpretation of Data

The research applies the sociological interpretation method for evaluating the gathered data from a wider social perspective. This approach includes researching and comprehending social behaviours, relations and phenomena using sociological concepts, theories and principles (S. Aneshensel, 2013, p. 8). The research aims to comprehend the underlying patterns and dynamics that shape human behaviour and social structures peculiar to Bangladesh by examining the social constructs, social

circumstances and various theoretical views. This provides an in-depth knowledge of how the composite cultural elements among Bangladesh's Muslims and Hindus contributed to cultural integration and assimilation. Finally, it could be capitalized towards promoting inter-religious dialogue and harmonious coexistence in Bangladesh.

Library Research as the Primary Data Collection Method

This study utilises library research as the principal approach of data collection to accomplish its research objectives. The researcher collected relevant sources, including books, journal articles, academic theses, conference papers, seminar papers, national and international newspapers, public and private reports, magazines and online databases. These resources facilitate and enhance the data examination and interpretation process and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Ultimately, through the varied research methods and approaches conducted by this study, this thesis aims to contribute significantly towards the effective approach on how to attain communal peace and harmony and to effectively execute the inter-cultural dynamics among the Muslims and the Hindus in Bangladesh.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this research lies in its exploration of inter-religious interactions within the circumstances of Bangladesh. In 2018, Bangladesh shifted from being a middle-income country to a developing one and recently, it has become a crucial hub of geopolitics in South Asia (L. Yasmin, 2016, p. 389). Maintaining its religious coexistence and political stability is essential for sustainable development as a multi-religious society and its geopolitical importance.

While the academic arena has given notable attention to interfaith dialogue, there has not been much focus on inter-religious dialogue in the Bangladeshi context. This research addresses this knowledge gap and emphasises the interactions between the Muslims and the Hindus in Bangladesh. By examining the root causes of social conflicts and analysing the underlying dynamics, this study offers valuable insights towards promoting mutual understanding, collaboration and peace between the two communities under study.

Moreover, this study advocates inter-religious peace and cooperation in Bangladesh by emphasising everyday social rituals and cultural practices. Creating inclusive societies highlights misconceptions and encourages cultural exchange and finally contributing to conflict resolution. The study's importance extends beyond theoretical implications especially since it provides guidelines to the nation's politicians and policy makers, community leaders and to achieve the sustainable development strategies of the country.

This study identifies the gap in inter-religious dialogue literature in Bangladesh, offers practical approach towards conflict resolution and promotes peaceful communal coexistence among the Muslim-Hindu communities. It examines the root causes of discord, emphasises shared cultural heritage and encourages cultural exchange, aiming for a more inclusive society.

1.9 SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF RESEARCH

Religion has a rich legacy in the daily lives of Bangladesh's people. The primary objective of this research is to analyse the influence of the two major religions i.e. Islam and Hinduism within the context of history and culture of the Indian Sub-Continent region. Furthermore, the study also describes religious harmony and conflicts between the Muslim and Hindu communities. Finally, this study highlights the importance of inter-religious dialogue as a beneficial forum for fostering and maintaining peace and harmony within a multi-religious society like Bangladesh.

Nevertheless, it is admitted that there are certain inherent limitations of this research. The first limitation is that prior researches have failed to explore this multi-faceted and sensitive subject. So, this research faces limited literature references. While many researchers addressed the idea and development of interfaith dialogue in their study, they had not drawn much scholarly attention to inter-religious dialogues in Bangladesh. Hence, this limited availability of facts require a thorough and innovative exploration on this topic which the present research attempts to fulfil.

The second limitation concerns the lack of a neutral and reliable source of information. This difficulty stems from the prevalence of secularist and socialist viewpoints because they dominate most electronics and printing and publishing houses.

As a result, when an incident occurs among the religious community in Bangladesh, these media often tend to blame Muslims and Islamic parties without proper and fair analyses.



CHAPTER TWO

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT AND BANGLADESH: AN UNDERSTANDING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Although Bangladeshi culture has considerable similarities with other cultures of the Indian Sub-Continent, its geographical features and diverse ethnographic amalgamation have made it quite unique. Historically, the land where a new state called Bangladesh was formed in 1971 has been inhabited since ancient times where various races, religions and cultures had intermingled. Islam came to this country at the beginning of the early days of Islam, and it played a pivotal role in shaping the socio-cultural and political customs of most Bangladeshis.

Unfortunately, existing secular-oriented literature had scantily accredited the contributions made by early Muslims of Bangladesh. It is also noticed that most Bangladeshi media have propagated local secular and socialist negative narratives within the pundits which in significant cases do not portray actual situations. In fact, Bangladesh has been facing a national identity crisis for many years. Since its independence in 1971, there was a marked growth of nationalism division among the Muslims and the Hindus. The question has been circling especially in the Muslim community for a long time whether it be Bengali Nationalism or Bangladeshi Nationalism.

Therefore, this chapter examines the historical roots of the formation of Bangladesh. It also explores the notable narration of the cultural background and the contribution of Muslims to the culture of Bangladesh. Furthermore, this chapter provides a concrete socio-cultural foundation which can contribute towards peace and harmony among the multi-religious societies of Bangladesh in the long run.

2.2 FORMATION OF BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is a riverine country that is part of the largest delta in the world. It is located on the Bay of Bengal and in the lowest flow of the Ganges-Brahmaputra and Meghna

rivers (Guhathakurta & Van Schendel, 2013, p. 31). The area of Bangladesh is 147,570 square kilometers and the total land length is 2400 square kilometers. India borders 92% of Bangladesh's western side and Myanmar borders 8% to its east. The coastal boundary of the Bay of Bengal in the south of the country is 483 kilometers (R. Kabir et al., 2018, p. 2).

The rivers have had a tremendous impact on the formation of the land structure of the region and the peoples' livelihood and culture. This country's peoples, rivers and history have been tied in the same thread for thousands of years. Nevertheless, when exactly human settlement began in Bangladesh is not known precisely. However, the Greek historians of Alexander's contemporaries mentioned about a wealthy kingdom on the banks of the river Ganges called "Gangaridai." In the first century A.D., the Greek geographer Ptolemy described that Gangaridais lived in the Ganges estuary (Rashid, 2019, p. 160). The exclusive clothes made here were exported to different countries globally and the Ganges became an international river port during that time. In ancient times Bengal was a distinct part of Bangladesh and historians concur that Greek scholars referred Gangaridai to describe the Bengal delta's Dravidians. The Dravidians arrived in the Indian Sub-Continent via Baluchistan from the Tigris and Euphrates riverbanks in West Asia about 5,000 years ago and started living in the coastal areas and the banks of India's largest rivers (Avari, 2007, p. 38). Moreover, the Dravidians set up permanent settlements on the Ganges riverbanks where they built the Mohenjo-Daro and the Harappan civilizations in this region (Pruthi, 2004, p. 20).

In 1750 BC, the Aryans of the Kyrgyz region began migrating to the Sindus and Punjab areas via Iran. The formidable Aryan nomads attacked the ancient tribal Dravidian and destroyed Mohenjo-Daro, Harappan and Chanhudaro (Avari, 2007, p. 52). They killed and imprisoned many locals, occupied Dravidian states and established several Independent Aryan states from Punjab to Benares in India. Although the Aryans were powerful in northern India but the conflict between them and the Dravidians of Bengal lasted for a long time.

Over time, Bengal had witnessed many ethnic groups' migration and a radical change in its religious and socio-cultures. From the Vedic rule of Kushan, Persian, Mauryan, Gupta, Pala and Sen empires and then later on by the Muslim empire and the European colonial period, Bengal had to go through constant struggle and destruction-

construction periods (Siddiq & Habib, 2017, p. 1). However, it was during the 550 years of Muslim rule that the Muslims had established a new civilization in the region (A. A. Khan, 2011, pp. 24–25). Bengal had become an excellent example of religious co-existence and a prosperous region. Bengal became an attractive place for business people and tourists from all over the world. In the 14th century, the Moroccan Tourist Ibn Battuta visited Bengal and he commented Bengal as a 'land with abundance (Khondker, 2022, p. 424). Another Dutch merchant Van Lindolan nicknamed Bengal as 'the granary of the East' in the 16th century (N. Sengupta, 2008, p. 2). During the reign of the Pala and the Sen kings, Bengal was known as Banga which spread only partly to the east and south. Among the Muslim Sultans of Bengal, Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah made an invaluable contribution to the development of Bengal. Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah extended somewhat the Bengal boundaries which he named the Shahi Bangla(Lewis, 2011, p. 44).

On 23 June 1757, the Muslim rule in Bengal ended with the fall of Nawab Mirza Muhammad Siraj-ud-Daulah along with the British but the British East-India Company began colonizing the Indian Sub-Continent. The British ruled the region including Bengal for almost 200 years and during the long rule of the British, the British applied the "divide and rule policy." As a result, Bengal radically changed its own Muslim culture and Hindu-Muslim relations deteriorated drastically through the rise of extremist nationalism (Tharoor, 2016, p. 78). Even though Bengal was a prosperous region but it became a poverty-stricken area. In 1905, the British divided Bengal into two parts, creating two separate provinces called the West Bengal and the East Bengal or known as "Bangabhanga." However, later in 1911 the British government reunited the two Bengals because of the violent movements of Hindu fundamentalism (Chatterji, 2002, p. 1). Towards the end of the British rule i.e. in 1947, the Muslim and Hindu communities had spread extreme violence against each other which prompted the British to form two separate states; one for the Muslims and the other for the Hindus. East Bengal became associated with West Pakistan despite its long geographical distance and was called East Pakistan due to the Muslim majority. One year after the formation of Pakistan, and after Muhammad Ali Jinnah's death, the Indian conspiracy and also due to the Pakistani leaders' short-sightedness had created mistrust and discontentment among the East Pakistan's people. Eventually, the country of Bangladesh was created from Pakistan through various conspiracies of the Indian

Intelligence Agencies and the 9-month Bangladeshi freedom struggle in collaboration with the Indian Army(Sisson & Rose, 1990, p. 215).

2.3 THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is a country of ethnic diversity with about 48 minor ethnic groups living together in addition to the main population (Dhamai, 2014, p. 10). Although there are differences in linguistic and social customs between these ethnic groups, there is unity in cultural attitudes and traditions with the mainstream culture. The result of the mixing of the different ethnic groups in this country, physical structure and social rituals cannot be separated.

Climatically, Bangladesh has six distinct seasons i.e. Summer, Monsoon, Autumn, Late Autumn, Winter and Spring. Every season has its unique characteristics that have a significant impact on the society (Suchana & Shoeb-Ur-Rahman, 2020, p. 34). Climate also regulates the economy, communication, art, culture, religious and social rituals and indeed the entire way of life of the people.

Religion has a significant influence on the culture of this country. Although there is the influence of Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, Islam is observed significantly as most Bangladesh people are Muslims. Most of the festivals rooted in this country are religiously Islamic (Azad et al., 2016, p. 137). Nevertheless, all festivals have a tradition of generosity, tolerance and bringing people together from all walks of life and this cultural circle has bound the entire society.

2.3.1 The Origin and Development History of Bangladeshi Culture

The Charyapada is the earliest evidence and the reliable historical monument of Bangladesh's ancient social and cultural era (S. Dasgupta & Chaudhuri, 2021, p. 22). The Charyapada illustrated the picture of Bengali society and culture during the period of the Pala dynasty. Caryapadas was written by twenty-two Buddhist Tantric Acharyas named Siddhas between the seventh and twelfth centuries. There is no documented evidence of the people of Bengal, social life, language or culture before Caryapadas

was written and Mahamahopadhyaya Haraprasad Shastri was the one who discovered it from the library of Nepal in 1907 A.D (Beecroft, 2015, p. 232).

In the middle of the 7th century C.E., Emperor Gopal established the Pala Dynasty. Before the establishment of the Pala Dynasty, Bengal was a polity of many monarchs and small-scale kingdoms and the Pala monarchy gave Bengal an ideal shape (R. C. Majumdar, 2016). The Pala rulers governed the country for about four hundred years and all the kings were followers of Buddhism (S. S. M. Rahman, 2000, p. 54). The Pala period was an era of progress in religion, culture, education, literature, art, and sculpture. They established various Bihars all over the region. In addition to monastic education, the Bihars teach things like crafts, astronomy, arts, geography, herbal medicine, agriculture, ceramics and so on. Thousands of monks and students lived in these Bihars to learn various skills, expertise and scriptural studies (Dutt, 1988). Many ancient temples, Buddha statues, relics, stone plates and copper were uncovered in different parts of the country. Many archaeological ideographs were found at Paharpur Somapuri (Jaipurhat), Ashrafpur (Dhaka), Mahasthangarh (Bogra) and Mainamati (Comilla) which dated back to the 6th and the 10th Centuries (Bin, 2021). The Pala monarchs were courteous to individuals of various faiths. For generations, Hindus, Buddhists and indigenous peoples co-existed peacefully.

After the death of the last king of the Pala Dynasty (Ram Pal) i.e. in the first half of the twelfth century, a mighty king called Vijaya Sen took control of the whole of Bangladesh and founded the Sen Dynasty. They came from Karnataka in southern India and the Sen kings were followers of Brahmanism (R. C. Majumdar, 1971, p. 219). Many Brahmins from other regions came and settled in Bangladesh during their reign and the Sen Dynasty ruled Bengal for about a hundred years. However, the Sen kings carried out repression and cultural aggression against other religions. They introduced the Caste System in society, divided the community along Caste lines and controlled all activities of peoples' daily lives including birth, death and marriage ceremony to follow Brahmin rules. Sanskrit was adopted as the state language instead of the everyday language of the peoples because Sanskrit was the language of the Brahmins who came from Karnataka (Chattopadhyaya, 2004, p. 55).

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Aryan language and culture spread in Bengal. During that time, Ikhtiar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji had established

Muslim rule in Bengal and Muslim rulers ruled Bengal for six hundred and fifty years (M. M. Khan, 2013a, p. 18). A new culture i.e. combining Islamic and local folk cultures and civilization developed in Bengal during the Muslim rule. This culture did not only confine to the Muslim communities but also permeated into the non-Muslim Bengali communities. Hence, Bengali Muslims had built a rich historical civilized entity in the region (Rahim, 1963, p. 339). As a result, this culture became a national entity and became universal. The region's peoples lived respectfully regardless of religious identity.

In 1757, after defeating Mirza Muhammad Siraj-ud-Daulah, the last independent Nawab of Bengal, the British started a conspiracy to create cultural differences between the Muslim and the Hindu communities. Their agenda was to perpetuate their regional imperialism. Due to a hundred years of British effort finally they succeeded in the early 20th century. This sparked the creation of two cultural streams seemingly based on religion i.e. in the name of Hindu Bengali culture and Muslim Bengali culture (S. Ahmed, 2004, p. 31).

2.3.2 The Uniqueness of Bangladeshi Culture

Bangladesh is one of South Asia's most unique cultural countries that has maintained its culture from ancient times. The Bengali language is the main language spoken and written by the people of Bangladesh. Apart from the Bangladeshi people, Bengali is the primary language spoken in West Bengal, Assam, Tripura and the Andaman Islands of India (Thompson, 2012, p. 1). Though linguistically similar to these regions of India, Bangladesh has maintained a distinct identity and cultural glory throughout history. Bangladesh's geographical boundary was nearly the same during the Punda, Pala and Sen kings from the beginning of the 4th century to the end of the 11th century and was called Banga. India's West Bengal has been separated from East Bengal since ancient times. The territory on the western bank of the river Ganga or Bhagirathi was known as Anga in ancient times. Present-day West Bengal was known as Rarh during the Pala and Sen Periods and the early Muslim rule. Some parts of North and West Bengal were known as Gaur, Lakshmanavati or Lakhnauti (A. M. Ahmed, 1966, p. 155). In 1352 AD, the Muslim Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah of Bengal brought the entire Bengali-speaking region under his rule and named it Shahi Bangla for the first time. Before this,

no area outside present-day Bangladesh was known as Bangla or Banga (M. Rahman, 2018b, p. 11).

Religion is a significant component of culture in Bangladesh. Religious belief and motivation play an influential role in the development of civilization, and they create cultural diversity. Ethnographically, the people of Bangladesh were a branch of the Dravidian race. The Dravidians came to this country from the Semitic homeland Babylonian region of West Asia (Mannan, 2006, p. 23). As the ancestors of Bangladesh were Semitic monotheists, the influence of Aryan culture and religion could not spread much. On the other hand, West Bengal and North Bengal came under the rule of North Indian rulers several times, resulting in the Vedic Aryan religion and culture established among the region's peoples. The Hindus of Bangladesh, being non-Aryans have fundamental differences from the Hindus of West Bengal regarding religious deities, worship practices and rituals (Mukharji, 2017, p. 459).

Apart from differences in religious rituals, there are differences in folk culture between West Bengal and Bangladeshi Bengalis. There are many contrasts between Baul artists of Bangladesh and West Bengal in terms of lyrics, tunes and even practice and performance (Openshaw, 2002). The Bauls of West Bengal's Nadia-Murshidabad or Birbhum-Bakura regions are Vaishnava-influenced and wear ochre-yellow clothes like Vaishnavas. Normally they chant 'Hari Hari' or 'Hari Bol' at the beginning or after the song. The Bauls of Bangladesh are engaged in Sadhana, a mixture of Nath, Vaishnav and Sufi doctrines. They wear white clothes like the corpse and say 'Alek Sai', 'Allah Alek', 'Jai Guru' or 'Sai Niranjan'(Bennett, 2019).

Despite West Bengalis and Bangladeshis sharing the Bengali language base, they have developed into separate entities distinguished by their different phonetic, gastronomic, and cultural attributes. The subtle phonetic distinctions that distinguish Bangladeshi Standard Bengali from Calcutta Standard Bengali provide insight into the complexities of language development and adaptation(S. ud D. Khan, 2014, p. 82). The culinary traditions of West Bengal and Bangladesh, which are a dynamic testament to their rich cultural past, exhibit considerable differences in flavours, ingredients, and culinary practices (P. Dasgupta, 2023, p. 342). The historical significance of hospitality, highly revered throughout Hindu and Muslim cultures in Bangladesh, undergoes a

subtle alteration as it crosses the border into West Bengal. The change in the expression of hospitality reflects the wider cultural differences between the two regions.

Moreover, the geographical and ethnic boundaries that have existed for millennia emphasise the complex interaction of historical, cultural, and sociological elements that differentiate West Bengal from its eastern counterpart (Ahsan, 2002, p. 67). This long-lasting divide represents the multilayered heritage of the Bengali-speaking areas and highlights the significant influence of history and cultural development on their identities.

2.4 THE CONTRIBUTION OF MUSLIMS TO CULTURE IN BANGLADESH

Muslim rule had played a significant role in establishing a new dimension of Bengali's unique culture. But the spread of this unique cultural norm did not happen only due to the conquest of the land. Islam arrived in Bangladesh in the seventh century through Arab traders in the Chittagong region and Muslim rule began in Bengal in 1200 AD (Talib, 2002a, p. 139). Prior to the Muslims came to power, Arab traders, and Sufis, Pirs as well as Islamic preachers had spread Islam in different parts of India rapidly, which later started a social revolution under state patronage.

Before the establishment of Muslim rule, the society in this region was hierarchical under the influence of Brahminism. The state of society had become so deplorable that Brahmins were considered impure if they touched the shadow of a lower Caste. As a result, the rights of ordinary people were highly deprived, and under the influence of the Sanskrit language and Aryan culture, the native Bengali language and culture were neglected and became useless (S. D. C. Sen, 1998, p. 19). Responding to Islam's call for equality and justice, the oppressed people of this country made Islam their national spirit. Although the rulers of Bengal at that time came from outside, they accepted the country as their motherland and the Bengali language as their mother tongue. From 1200 to 1800 AD, the ruler and the system of governance changed many times during the Muslim rule in Bengal, but no ruler hindered the development of the Bengali language and culture. Instead, the genuine patronage of the Muslim royal power created a golden chapter for the Bengali language and culture (Billah, 2007, p. 48). They established a new civilisation in Bengal through its native name, language, education, literature, art and trade.

1.4.1 The Formation of Bengali Society

Bangladesh experienced numerous invasions, cultural exchanges, migrations and religious transformations. This happened in succession during the Vedic, Kushan, Persian, Mauryan, Gupta, Pala, Sen, Sultanate, Mughal and European colonial India in 1947 (Siddiq & Habib, 2017, p. 1). The Shahi Bangalah Sultanate was the first Muslim independent state during Medieval Bengal. Before Shahi Bangalah, the region was divided into many geopolitical sub-states, namely Banga, Rarh, Dakshin, Gaur, Suhma, Barendri, Samatat and Harikel (Oberst, 2015, p. 246). In the 1350s, Gaur Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah conquered Sonargaon in Banga, united this fragmented region and established the Shahi-e-Bangala Sultanate. He even took the title of Shah-e-Bangalian. He was the first to name the people of this land with the same language and ethnic characteristics as 'Bengali' and united them with the Bengali identity (A. Uddin et al., 2022, p. 43). From this time, the dwellers of all regions of Bengal identified themselves as Bengalis and to other outside countries they became known as the Bengali Nation (M. Rahman, 2018b). The Sultanate's rule lasted more than two centuries and there was no religious schism in the community under the Sultans' patronage. The word Bengali is derived from the Persian word bangalah and there was no region ever called Bengal or Bangala before (M. Rahman, 2018b, p. X). All other religious communities, including Muslims and Hindus, formed a new Bengali society and culture under the umbrella of the Muslim Sultanate.

2.4.2 The Development of Bengali Language and Literature

The Muslims contributed to the rich history of developing the Bengali language and literature. They played an incomparable role in expanding the Bengali language and literature from ancient to modern times. They help flourished the Bengali language and literature starting from the Muslim rule in 1200 AD (D. Sen, 1911, p. 10). According to Hai & Ahsan (2010) the origin and development of the Bengali language and its evolutionary characteristics is divided into three Eras, namely the Ancient Age (approximately 650 AD-1200 AD), the Middle Age (1201 AD-1800 AD) and the Modern Era (1801 AD–Present) (Hai & Ahsan, 2010, p. 3).

The Bengali language emerged through "Gaudiya apabhramsa" from "Gaudiya Prakrit" (M. Alam, 2018, p. 27). The earliest specimen of the Bengali language,

Charyapada, originated from the Varendra region. Varendra was the oldest and most historical region of Bengal. It is now part of Bangladesh's Rangpur and Rajshahi divisions and the language of this region is Varendri or Gauda (K. Islam, 1966, p. 41). The foremost author of the Charyapada, Kahupa alias Kanhpa, was a resident of Sompur Mahavihara in Paharpur at Naogaon District in Rajshahi Division. The second king of the Pala dynasty, Sri Dharmapala Deva, built this Bihara in the 9th century (S. N. Sen, 1999, p. 279). Sompur Mahavihara is one of the most notable archaeological places in Bangladesh and it was selected as a UNESCO world heritage site in 1985 (UNESCO World Heritage Centre). The practice of Bengali language and literature began during the Pala dynasty but later during the period of the Sen rulers, the Sanskrit language spread widely in this region. Sanskrit prevailed over the vernacular Bengali language in all spheres of state administration and religion. Unfortunately, in the absence of state patronage, the Bengali language made no progress and only became the spoken language of the Lower Caste people (R. D. D. Sen, 1940).

The Bengali language entered the Middle Ages with the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal by Ikhtiyar Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji in 1205 AD. Muslim rulers established Bengali language and literature under state patronage and created a new era for Bengali language and literature (S. Sen, 1992, pp. 43–36). The Bengali language and literature began to be widely practised during the reign of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah of Bengal and the Shahi Dynasty in Bengal represented the golden age for Bengali literature dynasty (Chaudhuri, 2021, p. 13). The Bengali language and literature flourished under the Muslim rulers' supervision until the mid-eighteenth century. Many works of literature such as translation, biographical literature, Mangalkavya and Vaishnava Padavali were produced during this time. Shah Muhammad Sagir (1339-1419) was the first Muslim poet of Bengal and one of the most mysterious poets of the Middle Ages. He was a high-quality patriotic poet inspired by modern thought even though he was in the Middle Ages. Muhammad Sagir composed his best poem 'Yusuf Zolekha' during the reign of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (Bose, 2014). There is no mention of the poet's birthplace in history however, three copies of his poetry book were discovered in Chittagong, and one was collected from Tripura. Thus, it is assumed that Shah Muhammad Sagir's residence was Chittagong (Bose, 2014, p. 4). Zainuddin was another famous poet of Medieval Bengal and a resident of the Chittagong region. He was the royal court poet of Gaur Sultan Yusuf

Shah (1474 - 1481) and he wrote his famous poem 'Rasul Vijay' (1474) which was inspired by Sultan Yusuf Shah himself. In his poetry, the Muslim tradition is mixed with spiritual devotion expounded into literature. Daulat Wazir Bahram Khan was another influential poet of Medieval Bengali literature and he was born in Zafarabad or Fatehabad in the Chittagong district (A. Roy, 2014, p. 73). His famous literary works are Laily-Majnun and Imam Vijay. Laily-Majnun was the first romantic love story in the Bengali language.

In the 15th century, the work of the Muslim poet Muhammad Sagir began with humanist romance and in the 16th century. This romanticism began to be influenced by theology. Sufism poets like Chand Kazi and Sheikh Kabir's with their "Bangla Vaishnava Padavali", Sheikh Faizullah's Satyapir and Nath literature and the renowned saint Noor Qutb Alam composed many Bengali ghazals. Syed Sultan, Shah Barid Khan, Sheikh Paran, Afzal Ali, Sheikh Chand and Haji Muhammad were poets of theology and they contributed to the creation of the field of Bengali literature in the Middle Ages (Dr. E. Haque, 1998, p. 267).

Emulating the literary prowess of the Muslim Sultans many neighboring kings got attracted by the beauty of the Bengali language and literature and employed Bengali poets in their royal courts. Amongst the Bengali poets appointed to practice poetry in the Arakan royal courts include Syed Alaol and Daulat Qazi. Syed Alaol was one of the greatest poets of Bengali literature of the Middle Ages (Forster, 2011, p. 67). He was proficient in many languages including Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit and Hindi. Padmavati, Satimayna Lorchandrani, Sapta Paykar, Saifulmuluk-Badiuzzamal, Sikandarnama, Tohfa and Ragtالnama also established a special place in Bengali literature with their poetry works (D'Hubert, 2018, p. 8). In Arakan, Daulat Qazi was another famous royal court poet of King Sri Sudharma (Thiri-thu-Dhamma, 1622-1638). He started composing the poem Satimayna and Lor Chandrani. However, he could not finish it in his lifetime. Before dying, only two-thirds of his poems were written and then poet Alaol completed the rest. Satimayna and Lor Chandrani are a romantic narrative poems about the love of a prince and a princess and he illustrated spirituality through the metaphors of poetry (D'Hubert, 2018, p. 74).

Muslim poets enjoyed an outstanding stature in Medieval Bengali literature where they depicted vividly peoples' happiness, sorrows, love and social lives. As a

result, life-oriented literature started in the Bengali literature especially about society and peoples' lifestyles. Muslim poets and writers contributed to the Bengali literature by writing translations of religion, history, biographies of various stages, spiritual dispatch, fairy tales and foreign translation books. They composed more than five thousand manuscripts including those of Kasasul Ambia, Fathusham, Alif Laila, Jang Nama, Shaheed Karbala, Laili-Majnu, Yusuf Zulekha, Amir Hamza, Chahar Darvesh, Satyapir, Gazi Kalu and Sonavan (Mustafa, 2005, p. 159). The Muslim poets of the Middle Ages also had an essential contribution in enriching the traditional folk literature of Bengal by composing numerous rhymes, riddles and folk songs. Mansoor Bayati was a Bengali lyricist, writer and singer. He is the composer of the famous Mymensingh folk song Deewana Medina (Rai Bahadur, 1923, p. 285).

British colonialism began with the end of Muslim rule in Bengal in 1757 and the beginning of the modern era of the Bengali language and literature in 1800. As a result of the British conspiracy, the Muslims of Bengal fell behind in education and culture at the initial stage. After the Sepoy Rebellion in 1857, the Muslims created new motivation and enthusiasm to protect and explore the native culture (Muhammad, 1998, p. 136). Later, Muslim poets and writers played an incomparable role in developing the Bengali language and literature. In the early period of the Bengali language and literature, the contribution of Muslims towards Bengali language and literary culture is presented frivolously, and attempts had been made even to erase the contribution of Muslim poets and writers from history. Muslim poets and writers had played an inimitable role in all areas of Bengali literature including creating novels, stories, short stories, epics, songs, dramas and essays in the modern era. Prominent figures that deserve mention include Mir Musharraf Hossain, Nawab Faizunnessa Chowdhury, Mohammad Mozammel Haque, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Abu Zafar Shamsuddin, Humayun Kabir, Mahmudul Haque, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Dad Ali Mia, Sheikh Abdur Rahim, Shah Mohammad Karim, Munsii Meherullah, Ismail Hossain Shirazi, Abdul Karim, Shah Sufi Abu Bakar Siddique, Mohammad Wazed Ali, Dr Lutfar Rahman, Yakub Ali Chowdhury, Ibrahim Khan, Golam Mostafa, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Farrukh Ahmed and Jasimuddin (Hai & Ahsan, 2010).

2.4.3 The Establishment of the Bangla Calendar

Agriculture and culture have been closely related to people's lives since ancient times. Depending on the season, harvesting crop seeds at certain times of the year, sowing of seeds, crop care and harvesting and agriculture-based festivals, everything is done synchronising with the traditional Bangla calendar (Hossen, 2017, p. 111).

The Mughal Empire made an excellent contribution to the development of administration, architecture and culture in Indian history. Bangladesh became part of the Mughal Empire in 1576 AD. The Mughal Empire was confined to the northwestern region of Bengal due to the inadequate communication system of riverine Bengal during Emperor Akbar's reign. Bengal became Subedari rule in Bengal as a suba or province under the Mughal Empire, and the appointment of governors started in Bengal (Chatterjee, 2009, p. 35).

Before the arrival of the Muslims, the people of India used the Hindu astronomical almanac (Panjika) while the Muslim rulers used the Hijri calendar for revenue collection. Using the Hijri calendar was problematic for the peasants because of the 11/12-day gap between the lunar and solar years, with 31 lunar years equaling 30 solar years. The Mughal administration collected according to the lunar year, but the peasants harvested crops following the solar year. Empire Akbar initiated reforming the calendar to introduce a scientific, practical and acceptable calculation system. He entrusted an eminent scientist and astronomer Amir Fathullah Shirazi with the task of preparing a central year calendar by integrating the solar and lunar features of the seasons of different regions of India. In 1584 AD, astronomer Amir Fathullah Shirazi formulated a new calendar known as Tarikh-e-Ilahi (A. Sen, 2021, p. 174).

Emperor Akbar's Elahi Son (Elahi Calendar) was the central calendar of all Mughal empires. He ordered the creation of a regional tax structure to facilitate the payment of taxes to the subjects, keeping in view the seasonality and agricultural production of different regions. Farmers did not harvest crops simultaneously in large parts, like in the Indian Sub-Continent. Different calendars were introduced in other areas depending on the harvest time by the Mughal demonstration. The Mughal governor of Bengal, Nawab Murshid Quli Khan introduced the regional Bengali calendar based on the principles of the Elahi Calendar. In 963, the Bengali year began from the beginning of the Muharram month of 963 Hijri, but the Sanskrit month names

were used from earlier editions. Since the month of Muharram of 963 Hijri was compatible with the Bengali month of Baishakh, instead of the month of Chaitra, the month of Baishakh was made the first month of the Bengali year. Pahela Baisakh (Bengali New Year) is the first day of the Bengali calendar. This day is the traditional New Year's Day for all Bengali people (Samayeen & Imon, 2016a, p. 162). It is celebrated with special festivals like the New Year of Bangladesh and West Bengal of India. Emperor Akbar devised other regional calendars known as the Amlī Son, Vilayeti Son and Surasani Son of Orissa. Remarkably, Akbar established a flawless and scientific solar calendar which became ideal and accepted by all, irrespective of Caste and religion (Sircar, 2017, p. 310).

2.4.4 The Muslim Influence on Bangladeshi Cuisine

Agriculture has been the primary source of livelihood for the people of Bangladesh since ancient times. Bangladesh is the largest delta, Padma-Meghna-Jamuna, with numerous rivers and canals, including the Brahmaputra, the freshwater fish of these rivers and canals are a crucial component of the daily food of the people of Bangladesh (B. Sharma et al., 2016, p. 133). The region's geographical climate has abundant rainfall producing a large amount of rice in the country. For this reason, fish and rice have become the leading food habits of the people of this region. The people of Bangladesh have gained recognition as "Machhe bhate Bangali," which translates to "fish and rice make a Bengali" (Thilsted, 2013, p. 270).

In ancient times, there was no independent state called Bangladesh. Different parts of Bangladesh were divided into Pundra, Banga, Barendra, Gaur, Samatat, Chandradwip and Harikel townships (S. K. Datta, 2002, p. 3). Although there is no complete list of the food list of these divided towns, an idea of the food routines can be found in the descriptions of Charyapadas and various religious texts of Hinduism. In the Prakritpaingal text, there is a description of serving hot rice, ghee, Maurala fish and Patshak (Jute leaf) on banana leaves in the 14th century and the oldest Bengali text Charyapada contains many descriptions of rice and Shak (green leaf) (Biswajit Panda, 2015, p. 3). The terracotta plaques discovered in Sompur Vihar and Mainamati Vihar built during the Pala period in Bangladesh, depict fish cutting and carrying fish in

baskets (N. Roy, 2013, p. 446). There are extensive descriptions of paddy fields in the ancient inscriptions of the Sen period.

Although there are descriptions of fish in archaeological artefacts and literature, Hindus and Buddhists had different restrictions on eating fish. In Buddhism, killing animals is a great sin, so the followers of the Bhadra religion did not eat eggs, fish and meat. They were vegetarians (C. T. Sen, 2004, p. 10). Hindu Brahmins could not eat all types of fish due to religious restrictions and widows were prohibited from eating all kinds of fish and meat (C. Banerji, 2006). According to the Hindu sacred scriptures, the Medieval Hindu community adopted a strict policy regarding spices where onions and garlic were forbidden in Hindu cooking (U. Ray, 2015, p. 64). All types of food made from milk were the food of the gods, so they considered all food processed from milk banned. The arrival of the Muslims in the Middle Ages brought about a revolutionary change in the cuisine and eating habits of the Bengal region and Bengali food culture took on a new form overcoming religious restrictions and social barriers (C. T. Sen et al., 2023, p. 403). The Mughal influence on Bengali cuisine changed the cooking style and introduced Bengalis to many delicacies. Especially after the establishment of the Mughal Empire and making Dhaka the capital of Suba Bengal, foreign Nawabs, Sultans and Amirs brought various cuisines and ingredients to Bengal.

For breakfast, foods include roasted khichuri, Parata, chapati, rumali roti, luchi, naan roti, shahi phirni, bakarkhani, semai, baked bread, dates, butter sauces, nuts and cream. A typical lunch is an array of Biryani Kachchi Biryani, Polao, Kebab, Korma, Kalia, Rezala, Kofta and various fish curries with onion and garlic (Antani & Mahapatra, 2022, p. 4). For dessert, Pies, Faluda, Morabba, Dudh Chana, Borhani, Lachcha Semai and a variety of sweets are common delicacies (Chakrabarti, 2017, pp. 311–312). Drinks include Sherbat, Lachcha, Matha, Labang, Coffee and Syrup. Nasta (snacks) is a Bangladeshi midafternoon/early evening tradition where common tit-bits include Nimki, Samosa, Singara, Halim and Moghlai. The Muslims imparted important influence in changing the way of cooking in Bengal. They introduced some new spices in Bengal cooking including almonds, butter, cheese, cardamom, cinnamon, garlic and onion which were not used in Bengal before (Uhl, 2000, p. 252). At that time, Brahmins of other parts of India considered the presence of fish meat and onion-garlic in the food destroy their religion but the Brahmins of Bangladesh ate fish, meat and spicy foods.

Above all, Muslim influence on Bengali Cuisine rose above religious restrictions and changed everyone's diet.

2.4.5 Islamic Architectural Development

Besides changing the religious and political context of Bengal, Muslim rule played a fundamental role in architectural development and urbanization (S. Ahmed, 2016, p. 1). Under the patronage of the Muslim rulers, numerous structures were built including palaces, forts, shrines, monuments, mosques, temples, ditches, and roads. During the Sultanate and the Mughal periods, Architecture using modern construction style flourished and urbanization expanded. Islamic architecture developed harmoniously combining the local Hindu-Buddhist architectural styles since the beginning of the Islamic regime (P. Hasan, 2007, pp. 4–5).

In the Middle Ages, most people lived in couple-roof and four-square-roof houses made of thatch and bamboo. Few of the wealthy people lived in houses made of bamboo and wood (Nishant & Das, 2023a, p. 4067). The Sultanate rule in Bengal lasted throughout the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. There were numerous precedents of architectural styles from the Sultanate period. During the Sultanate period, brick was widely used in architectural styles because there was sufficient supply of brick-making clay in the country and the Muslim and local architects favoured traditional brick architectural designs. The specialty of the Muslim construction style during the Sultanate period is the use of building materials, minarets, mihrabs and arches, keeping them compatible with the country's climate (Sanyal, 1970, p. 417).

Bagerhat city is a historical city of the ancient Sultanate period located in the Bagerhat district in the southwest region of Bangladesh. Ulugh Khan Jahan (1433–1459) founded this city in the 15th century and was an administrator of the Sultanate (Shahid, 2010, p. 59). The city was named Fatehabad and was built with a combination of Islamic and local architecture and most of the designs were entirely different and unique. The city had 360 mosques, numerous government buildings, cemeteries, bridges, roads and potable water reservoirs. Among the structures built at that time, the sixty-domed mosque is one of the traditional structures representing the golden age of Muslim Bengal. The mosque is made of small bricks; its length is 160 feet; width is 108 feet and height are 22 feet. Although it is known as the Sixty-domed Mosque, it has 77

domes on the roof and four smaller domes on the mosque's four corner minarets or towers (Dani, 1961, pp. 144–146). The mosque's facade has a large arch in the centre and five smaller arches on either side and the mosque has a total of 26 doors including a door next to the main mihrab on the west side of the mosque. Remarkably, the city was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983 (UNESCO World Heritage, 1983).

Another noteworthy district Chapainawabganj district was a part of Gaur, the capital of ancient Bengal and it has rich historical monuments and archaeological resources. In Shibganj Upazila of Chapainawabganj district, there are various historical structures and sites built by Muslim Sultans during the Sultanate period. The Chhota Sona Mosque, Khania Dighi Mosque, Darasbari Madrasa and Mosque and the Tahakhana Complex are the main historical buildings of the Upazila(Sultana, 2022, pp. 1–3). These architectures were built mainly with endemic and Delhi royal architecture. There were also other buildings that were built during the country's Sultanate period including Shankar Pasha Shahi Mosque in Sylhet, Patrail Mosque in Faridpur and Bagha Mosque in Rajshahi (P. Hasan, 1989, pp. 58–74).

After the end of the Sultanate rule in Bengal, i.e. in the first half of the sixteenth century, there was a significant change in the architectural design of Bengal. At the same time, the Mughal Empire also played an essential role in the urbanization of Bengal. The rulers of the Mughal Empire in Bengal built the country's architecture following the designs of Delhi and Agra's architecture(Asher, 1992a, p. 1). The architecture of the Mughal period brings distinctive features of mosque arches and domes with various types of craftsmanship that are easily distinguishable from those of the Sultanate period. During the Sultanate period, terracotta was used to cover the walls but during the Mughal period instead of terracotta lime-surki plaster was introduced. They built a modern city at Sonargaon in Narayanganj and modern market facilities at Chawkbazar on the banks of the Buriganga river in Dhaka and built high walls and sixteen gates for security in Chawkbazar market (Iftikhar-ul-Awwal & Alamgir, 2003, pp. 7–9). Besides, Lalbagh Fort, Baro Katra and Chota Katra Forts, Hosseini Dalan, Paribibir Shrine, Lalbagh Shahi Mosque, the Seven Dome Mosque in Dhaka, Sonakanda Fort in Narayanganj, Indrapur Fort in Munshiganj and Tahkhana Complex, Shah Naimatullah Wali Mosque and Tomb in Shibganj Upazila of Chapainawabganj District are some outstanding architectural masterpieces (Asher, 1984, pp. 37–136).

Indeed, Muslim architecture had enriched the architectural history of Bengal. These architectural feats were representative of an eclectic architectural style, and all these architectures exhibit royal features and used native materials. This multi-dimensionality of architectural styles has placed Muslim architecture in Bengal an exemplary art of architecture.

2.4.6 The Development of Costume Design

Bengali clothes have also changed at different times and over time the influence of religion, politics, economics and aesthetics have been added to the choice of clothing. Although there is no written information about the clothing worn by men and women in ancient times, an idea of their clothing can be obtained from the sculptures, terracotta plaques and manuscripts found in ancient and Medieval times (Akram, 2016). At that time, there was not much difference in the clothing of men and women. Moreover, there was no variety of clothing like the people of this era. Most of their clothing was minimal clothing necessary for modesty and protection from the harshness of various weather conditions including winter and summer. Both men and women wore traditional clothes; men wore Dhoti and women wore Saree. Ordinary men wore very short Dhoti while some elite men wore Dhoti below the knee. Women used to wear sarees that hung up to the ankles but then women did not wear blouses or petticoats with sarees.

Along with the political and social changes brought about by the arrival of Muslims in Bengal, there were significant changes in clothing under the influence of Muslim traditions. Stitched clothes were not worn before Muslims came to Bengal; wearing stitched clothes was considered impure and men and women wore unstitched sarees and Dhoti (N. Roy, 2013, p. 558). The Muslims introduced various tailoring designs and a new profession called 'Dorji' (Tailor) emerged in the society (Mustafa, 2021). Sultans, Mughals and Khans wore sherwanis narrowed at the waist, long at the bottom and a white turban on the head. The white cotton turban is 40 feet in length and 6 feet in width (Rahim, 1963, p. 292).

In the late 16th century, Muslim men wore pyjamas, caps, long kurtas or Punjabis and loose clothing. Muslim women wore kameez and salwar, Ghaghra and silk or cotton clothes. Girls from wealthy families were adorned with necklaces, pearls, diamond earrings, bala rings and gold rings studded with precious stones (Shoeb, 2018).

They also wore another ornament called kinkini on the waist and nupur or paizar on the feet. In the Middle Ages, Muslim rulers did not change the clothes that the rulers brought with them. Initially, the people of this region did not wear these clothes but in the fourteenth-fifteenth century, people of this region slowly started wearing these clothes; first in the king's court, then among the elite and later among the rich and poor. Henceforth, for both the Hindu and Muslim communities the practice of wearing these clothes began. A widely used men's garment in Bengal is the lungi. Lungi is synonymous with 'Tahmat' or 'Tahman' both words being Persian in origin. There was no custom of wearing a lungi in ancient Bengali society. The early Arabs who came to India later used the Tahmat or lungi. The practice of wearing the lungi and imitating the Arabs gradually spread among the elite and the ordinary people (Sobanglay, 2020).

Bangladeshi women wore sarees at various festivals, but the prevalence of sarees decreased significantly with the advent of Islam. In the Middle Ages, among the elite Muslims, many women wore the salwar kameez but Bengali Muslim women did not. Later, Muslim women and Bengali Hindu women also started wearing salwar-kameez. Nowadays, Bangladesh women mostly wear salwar-kameez (Hussein, 2018, p. 105).

Dhakai muslin cloth made in the Sonargaon region during the Mughal period gained great popularity among the Europeans including the Indian Sub-Continent (Khatun, 2015, p. 190). This muslin was used to make royal clothes in the Indian Sub-Continent and the western world. Different types of muslin were known by other names such as Malbus Khas, Sarkar-i-Ala, Jhuna, Ab-i-Rawan, Khassa, Shabnam, Nayan Sukh, Badan Khas, Sar-bandh, Doria and Jamdani depending on the difference in fineness, weaving style and design (G. K. Ghosh, 2011, p. 36). Among them, the Jamdani saree is still trendy among Bangladeshi women as the successor of the muslin cloth.

Even after the decline of Bengal's Muslims, both Hindus and Muslims of the country continued to wear the elite clothes of the Mughals. Rammohan Roy, Dwarkanath Tagore, Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Swami Vivekananda and all the elites of that time still wore turbans on their heads in imitation of the Muslim nobility. In British India, Bengali Zamindars Rammohan Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore showed pictures of them wearing such clothes. Bangladesh's Zamindars, Serestadars and

lawyers used to wear Jama, Nima, Kaba and Korta too (kholakagojbd, 13 December, 2019).

2.5 NATIONHOOD AND RELIGION OF BANGLADESHIS

The complex correlation between religion, nationality, politics, and security has remained intricately intertwined throughout the history of Bangladesh, with significant changes taking place since the colonial era. It is important to recall that under Islamic rule in the Middle Ages, nationalism was not an issue of concern in Bangladesh (Soper & Fetzer, 2018, p. 187). Throughout this period, Bangladesh witnessed a state of religious tolerance and achieved significant economic advancement. Many later-emerging communal conflicts are traced back to the colonial period, notably after Nawab Sirajuddaula's fall in 1757.

The British colonial administration deliberately fostered tensions between India's Muslim and Hindu populations to establish and strengthen British control over the region (Bandyopādhyāya, 2004, p. 263). The advent of religious nationalism was notably apparent in Calcutta, where economic, political, and cultural forces founded on religious nationalism gradually emerged. The surge of religious nationalism ultimately resulted in the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, leading to the establishment of two distinct countries, India and Pakistan, relying on the two-nation theory (A. A. Hossain, 2015, p. 376). Later, Bangladesh was separated from Pakistan in 1971. After the partition, increased racial hatred between the Muslims and the Hindus in both India and Bangladesh arose, and Bangladesh suffered a national identity crisis since its independence from Pakistan. The people of Bangladesh were torn between either being Bengalis or Bangladeshis (S. M. Uddin, 2006, p. 118).

The intricate interaction of religion, nationalism, and politics has significantly shaped aspects of Bangladesh's history. They had influenced and shaped its identity, security issues, and political situation. Understanding this historical perspective is therefore crucial in recognizing the dynamics of contemporary Bangladesh's Nationality and Official Religion. Based on majority rule, Bangladesh declares that its official religion is Islam. However, based on history and present day cultural and religious mix, other religions are tolerated and allowed to practice.

2.5.1 An Overview of Bengali Nationalism

Nationalism means a “uniform” that unites people under one roof. A nation can introduce itself globally as independent and distinct by holding this “uniform”. Nationalism strongly identifies a political entity as a group of people defined in national terms such as a nation. It is the trust that a country has the authority to statehood (A. D. Smith, 2010, p. 9). Bengali Nationalism is the political manifestation of the ethno-national consciousness of Bengalis residing in Bengal's ethno-linguistic regions. Bengali Nationalism refers to the unified identity of the human community living in Bangladesh and West Bengal of India as well as people living in Tripura, Assam, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands who also speak Bengali (Van Schendel, 2023, p. 106). The first Bengali Nationalism movement arose in 1905 which revolved around issues on the partition of Bengal.

After the end of the Muslim rule in this region especially after the Battle of Palashi, the Muslim population became increasingly impoverished and insignificant due to the conspiratorial activities of the British East India Company. On the eve of the establishment of the British Raj in the second half of the 18th century, misery was inflicted upon the Muslim population when the ordinary middle class and the British administration brought about a series of administrative, economic, cultural and political changes that unfairly gave rise to a new Hindu landowning class and professional aristocracy. The British administration's introduction of the new laws and the unbridled competition and corruption built up enormous wealth for the Hindu professionals (babu and gentry) while the Zamindar-Mahajan classes made Bengali Muslims and peasant-weavers even more impoverished and destitute.

In 1793, Lord Cornwallis introduced land revenue or taxation legislation in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa which he called the Perpetual Settlement (Bhardwaj, 2011, pp. 9–10). As a result of the law's introduction, the Zamindars became the absolute owners of landed property in the colonial state. Apart from being proprietors of land, they acquired Zamindari at a fixed rate in perpetuity. Although there were few Muslim Zamindars, most of the Zamindars were Hindus. Most Muslim Zamindars could not collect high revenue at the end of the year. The rural peasants and landowners could not pay more rent or revenue at the end of the year, so they were forced to pay by taking loans from the Zamindars at high-interest rates. As a result, Muslim Zamindars lost their

Zamindari after the expiry of the specified date according to the sunset law while a new unitary Hindu Zamindari class emerged.

Nevertheless, the peasants could never recover the total debts which took into account the exorbitant profit and principal. As a result, the Zamindars took possession of all their property. In the end, the Zamindars and usury moneylenders together crippled the Muslims and the rural peasants. This led to heightened anger and discontent within the peasant societies and a series of peasant revolts took place in the 19th century (Rajat & Ray, 1975).

The partition of Bengal in 1905 is a crucial chapter in Bangladesh's history of nationhood and religion. Murshid Quli Khan was appointed as the Dewan of Bengal during the reign of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1700. At that time, Dhaka was the capital of Bengal, but in 1704 Murshid Quli Khan moved the capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad in West Bengal (Richards, 1981, p. 287). During British rule, Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Assam and some other regions were formed into the Bengal Presidency and the capital moved from Murshidabad to Calcutta or Kolkata. Calcutta became the capital of British rule in the province of Bengal and the whole of India. Industry, commerce, offices, courts, factories, schools, colleges and universities were concentrated in Calcutta. Most of the people of East Bengal were Muslims but the Muslims of the region were less privileged than the Hindus. As a result, the Muslims of East Bengal were left behind in all aspects of life. In 1835, the Persian language was replaced by English as the official language of the British Government of India (A. I. M. U. Ahmed, 2019, p. 218). Persian was the official language of the Mughal administration. Because schools and colleges were centred in Calcutta and English was the lingua franca the Muslims of East Bengal lagged in English education. As a result, the Hindus were the most privileged and secured government jobs. Industrial factories were built in Calcutta with raw materials from East Bengal. Even though Jute production was mainly in East Bengal but there were no jute mills there. Most of the jute mills were built on the banks of the Hooghly River in West Bengal. Although Chittagong has had a seaport since ancient times, no work was done to develop it during the British period. Instead, the government and the business class completely neglected the Chittagong port, thinking that the profit of the capital's port, Calcutta, would decrease(Qasmi, 2023).

The Bengal Presidency consisted of Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Assam and other regions. The first census of India was held in 1872. According to that census, the population of the Bengal Presidency was “*six crores seventy lakhs*” (Mannan, 2006, p. 221). The British could not smoothly rule the entire Bengal Presidency with this huge population. On 16 October 1905, the new East Bengal and Assam Province were formed with 15 districts of Assam and East Bengal by the British Viceroy Lord Curzon in India and Dhaka was made the capital of the new province (Cronin, 1977). The newly formed area had a population of about 31 million, most of whom were Muslims. However, the British government's development was still centred on India's capital, Calcutta.

In contrast, the people of East Bengal were neglected and deliberately left out from mainstream developments. Since most people in this region were Muslims, Muslims got fewer privileges than the Hindus. Therefore, the move to separate Bengal was bred so that the people of the East Bengals, especially the Muslims, would get the needed facilities. The disenfranchised majority of the Muslims in East Bengal saw the partition movement of Bengal as the first dawn of their destiny. On the contrary, the Calcutta-based Caste-Hindu landlords, businesspeople, politicians, intellectuals and journalists who supported the auxiliary power of the British gauged this movement as a severe blow to their socio-political foundations built up over 150 years (Mannan, 2006).

The main driving force behind the anti-partition movement was the revival of Hinduism and Bengali Nationalism. The Hindus dubbed the partition of Bengal as the “*Bongo matar ongo sed*” (Loss of limb of Bengali mother) and their Hindu leaders like Surendranath Banerjee, Bipin Chandrapal, Arvind Ghosh and Ashwinikumar Dutt launched a militant protest movement to countermand it. But, within a brief period, the momentum of this movement increased and Bengali Nationalism known as the Swadeshi movement arose forcefully (S. Sarkar et al., 1973). The struggle against the partition of Bengal turned violent at one point when the Hindu extremists appeared. Two armed Hindu organizations were formed i.e. in Kolkata called the ‘Yugantar’ and in Dhaka the ‘Anushilan’. They started using bombs as weapons in the armed movement against the partition of Bengal in India. The Maharashtra leader Tilak's “Goraksha Andolan” (The cow protection movement) listed the Shivaji-initiated “Ganapati” festival in their program and adopted the anti-Muslim anthem “Vande Mataram” as the national anthem of the campaign (Bharati, 2019, pp. 19–24). Many nationalist writings were published during this period and in 1906 Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poignant

song *Amar Sonar Bangla* for the abolitionists, which became the national anthem of Bangladesh much later, in 1972 (Capwell, 2017, p. 436). But, Emperor George V announced the partition of Bengal revoked at the Delhi Durbar due to strong Hindutva protests in 1911 on 12 December (Wynbrandt, 2009, p. 139). Nevertheless, after the partition of Bengal in 1911, religious nationalist sentiments arose among the Hindu and Muslim communities. A spirit of Muslim Nationalism appeared in place of the Bengali nationalist spirit among the Muslims of East Bengal.

2.5.2 Bangladeshi Nationalism

Bangladeshi Nationalism is a political philosophy that glorifies and promotes Bangladeshi citizens as a distinct cultural and political country. It is based on the spiritual bonds of Bangladeshis living within the borders of Bangladesh. After the defeat of Nawab Sirajuddaula by British conspiracy in 1757, Bengal lost its independence and Dhaka lost its glory. But, in 1905 on 16 October, Dhaka regained its glory by being the East Bengal and Assam province's capital through partitioning the Bengal presidency. Still, the Hindus formed a widespread protest movement against the partition of Bengal. The campaign against the partition of Bengal resulted in a Muslim Nationalist spirit emerging among the Muslims of Bengal. The All-India Muslim League was formed in Dhaka in December 1906 (N. S. Malik, 2012, p. 173). In the 1930s, the poet-philosopher and modern Islamic scholar Allama Muhammad Iqbal proposed the idea of a separate, independent Muslim state in the Sub-Continent, an idea that soon became popular among Indian and Muslim League leadership (Şahbaz, 2020, p. 222).

In contrast to Bengali Nationalism, 89% of the population of East Bengal, Bengali Muslims, participated in the establishment of Pakistan. Consequently, in 1947, India-Pakistan was formed as two separate countries based on religious nationality. British Viceroy Lord Hardings was forced to abolish the partition of Bengal in 1911 due to Hindu solid agitation. The abolition of the Bengal partition created a religious, nationalistic spirit among both the Hindu and Muslim communities, leading to the creation of two independent countries i.e. India and Pakistan, at midnight on 15 August 1947. This ended British rule and incorporated the Muslim-majority East Bengal into Pakistan and the Hindu-majority West Bengal into India (K. S. Hasan, 2017, p. 14).

However, the geographical distance, the cultural contrast and the disparity between the rulers of West Pakistan led to the emergence of a geographical nationalism combining Muslim nationalism and Bengali nationalism among the people of East Pakistan. As a result, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan was broken in 1971 and a new state called Bangladesh was born based on geographical nationality (Zaheer, 1994). In 1971, a newly independent Bangladesh introduced secular Bengali Nationalism to replace the majority Muslim population's Islamic Nationalism and Bengali Nationalism, which was entirely against the ethnic and Islamic consciousness of the people of Bangladesh. The constitution collectively enshrined nationalism, secularism, democracy and socialism as the governance principles (K. S. Hasan, 2017, p. 14). Awami League added secularism to the constitution and banned all forms of Islamic politics in independent Bangladesh. In the name of Bengali Nationalism, the Awami League government tried to erase the symbols of Muslim history in the culture and politics of Bangladesh (M. R. Uddin & Nesa, 2020, p. 10).

Ziaur Rahman became the President of Bangladesh on 21 April 1977. He introduced "Bangladeshi Nationalism" to maintain the uniqueness of Bangladesh. He amended the constitution to remove the principle of secularism, replacing it with "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah" (Wohab, 2021, p. 21). The ideology of Bangladeshi Nationalism makes a clear distinction between the similar linguistic people in the Indian state of West Bengal and Bangladesh (Shehabuddin, 2016, p. 18).

1.5.3 The Crisis of National Identity Issues in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is an independent sovereign country with its language and unique cultural heritage and it has ninety-five thousand square miles and glorious history of the liberation war (S. Ahmed, 2004). After fifty years of independence, despite having all the features of single nationalism, the entire nation is still "divided" in as far as the question of nationality and the debate of Bengali Nationalism versus Bangladeshi Nationalism. Unfortunately, the current political divide over the question of national identity had profoundly undermined the beliefs, culture and communal harmony of the Muslim and Hindu communities that have been developed over centuries (A. A. Hossain, 2015, p. 368). India and Pakistan were founded based on Hindu-Muslim Religious Nationalism in 1947. Subsequently, the nationality of people of all races,

tribes and languages of India were endorsed as Indians. Likewise, in Pakistan the national identity of all religions and language-speaking Castes and tribes were sanctioned as Pakistani.

In 1971 the state of Bangladesh was born in east Pakistan and the Bengali Nationalism entered a new trend of secular Bengali Nationalism. In fact, all the pre-independence movements had revolved around the Bengali Nationalism. There was no element of secular nationalism in any movement instead the movement was conducted keeping in mind the long-standing Bengali tradition of the region. The historical region of Bengal is famous for its rich heritage of cultural and linguistic unity. Under the patronage of the Shah-i-Bangla Sultanate of Bengal the emergence of Bengali identity as a nation based on Hindu-Muslim partnership and cooperation in the region and the development of the Bengali language ran parallel. In continuation, Bengali culture was perfected in the Mughal Empire and the rule of the Nawabs of Bengal in the eighteenth century was a notable example of Hindu-Muslim unity.

The current national identity narrative in Bangladesh highlights the secularist tradition of "Bengali identity" whereas 'Bangladeshi' emphasizes Islam as the core element of identity. Bengali Nationalism had no conflict with Islamic ideology (M. N. Islam & Islam, 2020, p. 152). The expression of Bengali Nationalism in Pakistan was first reflected in the manifesto of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League in 1949. This declaration and the subsequent 42-point manifesto of the East Pakistan Awami League and the 21-point manifesto of the United Front elections of 1954, both drafted by Abul Mansur Ahmad, did not reflect any conflict between Islamic ideology and Bengali (M. N. Islam & Islam, 2020, p. 153).

In 1947, the Muslim majority of East Pakistan joined Pakistan based on religious majority. However, in the language movement of 1952 and the independence movement of 1971, local nationalism prevailed over religious Majoritarianism (Oldenburg, 1985, p. 711). Based on linguistic nationalism and regional nationalism grounds, all the Hindus and Muslims of Bangladesh participated in the movement. Through the Armed Liberation War of 1971 against Pakistan an entirely new nation and a new state of Bangladesh was formed.

National identity cannot be developed based on language alone. Nationality comprises various elements including religion and linguistic structure, Caste tribe,

culture, history of independence, tradition and specific geographical location. In contrast, Arabic-speaking people live in a wide area from the Arabian Sea to the Atlantic Ocean and from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. The language of the countries is Arabic but each Arab country has a separate national identity (Suleiman, 2019, p. 2). However, there is no chance for an absolute and complete national identity of the people of Bangladesh through Bengali Nationalism. Apart from the Bengali population, there are 45 tribes and minor ethnic groups in Bangladesh (Guhathakurta, 2022, p. 221). If the nationality of Bangladesh is Bengali, then the tribal citizens will be left out of the Bangladeshi ethnicity. Outside of Bangladesh, many Bengalis live in various states of India including West Bengal. The Bengalis of West Bengal are of Indian nationality though they share many similarities in language and manners with the Bangladeshi people. Their national identity is Indians.

In addition, Bengali, Chakma, Garo-Marma, Khasia and other ethnic groups are known by their ethnic identity within Bangladesh. Nevertheless, as a nation-state, all the citizens of Bangladesh will be identified as Bangladeshis. This characteristic will mark the clear difference between the people of Bangladesh and other ethnic groups worldwide. Hence, the ongoing debate regarding the national identity of Bangladesh highlights the nation's complexities and challenges in forging a collective identity that accommodates its rich diversity and historical context.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Bangladesh is a multi-heritage country with hundreds of years of geographical, political and religious history. There are many different blood combinations in the lineage of the people of this country. The Dravidian blood is mixed with the stream of Australoid, Mongolian and Aryan blood. As a result, it is impossible to identify anyone discretely considering their physical traits and appearance. Despite the genetic differences, the people of this country have an ordinary consciousness and wrong attitude. For many years, religion has played an essential role in creating this everyday cognition and in ancient times, the people of this country followed Buddhism and Jainism. However, with the decline of the Buddhist culture in the region due to the Aryans and Brahmins' persecution, peoples' religious beliefs changed.

With the oppression of religious, social and economic aspects of life by the Brahmins, the whole society plunged into darkness. Due to Islam's arrival in this country through Arab traders and missionaries, the people were then liberated from the Brahmins' oppression that had been going on for centuries. The rulers of Islam soon created a prosperous civilization and new nationhood in the region and contributed to the development of Shahi Bangla kingdoms, language and literature, Calendar, Cuisine, costume design and architecture. Unfortunately, later the fall of the Muslim Empire and the establishment of British colonies spawned religious divisions and mistrusts within the nation. Consequently, this led to the birth of the two new states in 1947 which was based on religious nationality.

Bangladesh state was created in 1971 due to Pakistan's political leaders' short-sightedness and personal interests. The Awami League, the first government of Bangladesh, adopted the Secular Bengali Nationalism as its fundamental principle against most peoples' political concerns. But, the Awami League rule ended abruptly with the brutal assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by a group of army officers on 15 August 1975. Major-General Ziaur Rahman introduced a new model of nationhood, which came to be known as the Bangladeshi Nationalism in 1977. Nationalism is the only patriotic element of forming a distinct nation. This nationalism must be the same. The country and the nation cannot move forward with the existence of dual nationalism. Every country in the world has its own nationality. Nationality comprises of various elements including language, culture, history of independence, tradition and specific geographical location. Indeed, there is no substitute for Bangladeshi Nationalism that could highlight the uniqueness of this Nation-State.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE MUSLIMS-HINDUS RELATIONSHIP DURING THE MUSLIM RULE IN MEDIEVAL BENGAL

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Muslims and the Hindus had been living side by side for centuries in Bangladesh. Before the establishment of the Muslim rule in Bengal, the arrival of Muslims and the establishment of Muslim society took place in three phases. Muslims came from Arabia, Turkey, Iran-Turan, and Afghanistan to Bengal and the Indian Sub-Continent. They had regarded this country as their everlasting home (A. Barua, 2022, p. 182). Meanwhile, before the establishment of the Muslim rule, the Brahmin community dominated all aspects of life of all the people of Bengal. This included the Hindus and Buddhists under the Sen rule. The Brahmin community had created various restrictions on the practice of religion whereby the religious Caste System created by them had divided the society (Bandyopadhyay, 2004, p. 18). Consequently, the unpopular dominance of the Brahmins and the discriminate Caste System of Hinduism had enticed the Hindu society into Islam. The teachings of equality and brotherhood of Islam was another push factor that led many Hindus to convert to Islam.

Historically, during the 554 years of Muslim rule in Bengal, the Hindus and the Muslims lived side by side and the two communities not only became united but maintained their religious activity and developed cultural and social relations (M. S. N. Rahman, 2001, p. 83). In other words, Bengal had a tradition of religious tolerance and inter-religious harmony throughout Muslim rule. Every person was considered an equal citizen of the society regardless of their religious or ethnic identity. Muslim rulers did not prevent non-Muslims from proselytizing but instead they contributed significantly to developing other peoples' religious literature. Muslim Sultans and Mughals in the Medieval Period adopted liberal and tolerant policies towards non-Muslims in Bengal whereby they were treated equally. More remarkably, the Muslim Sufis too had played an essential role in reducing hatred and establishing peace among the people of Bengal, irrespective of Caste and religion. Even though the Muslim regime was a golden age of religious harmony and co-existence in Bengal but there was an unpopular notion that

the spread of Islam in Bangladesh was through the help of the “sword”. By using their State power, the Muslims were said to forcibly converted the local people into Islam. This skewed view is more prevalent among the Nationalist Non-Muslim Historians where most historical literature and academic textbooks argued that the history of Muslim regimes was the central theme of contemporary conflict of changing the State power rather than social and cultural development, communal harmony and economic prosperity. To rebut this unfair state of conception, hence this chapter focuses on the historical background of the Muslim regime in Bengal and highlights the fundamental reason for the spread of Islam in Bengal. Furthermore, this chapter illustrates genuine understanding of the Muslim-Hindu relationship under the Muslim rule of Bengal. It clearly portrays a vivid picture of the harmonious history of the Muslim and Hindu communities in Medieval Bengal politically, socially, culturally and architecturally.

3.2 THE HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE MUSLIM REGIME IN BENGAL

The Islamic State that started with the Prophet Muhammad's migration to Madinah was followed by the expansion of the Islamic empire from West Africa to East Persia in the next hundred years. The Muslims first tried to conquer India during the reign of the second Caliphate Hazrat Omar (r.a), but due to various difficulties the campaign was not successful. However, after this i.e. during the era of the fourth Caliph Hazrat Ali (r.a), the region bordering Iran and Pakistan and Mekran came under Muslim rule (Avari, 2012, p. 20). Furthermore, during the supremacy of the Umayyad Caliph Walid I, the Indus region became the extension part of the Islamic Empire when Muslim rule spread across the Indian Sub-Continent in three stages. The first phase started in 712 AD, when Muhammad bin Qasim, the son-in-law and nephew of Hajjaj bin Yusuf, the ruler of the eastern provinces of Caliph Walid, conquered Sindh and Multan. Muhammad bin Qasim's conquest of the Indus was one of the landmark events that had a lasting impact on the later period (Sunderlal, 2018, p. 43). The cultural importance of the Sindh conquest was immense especially in the sphere of knowledge and communication between Arab and Indian scholars. Due to the sudden death of Muhammad bin Qasim and the change in the foreign policy of the Arab Caliphs, the Arabs were busier with military affairs in the African continent than in India, so they could not pay much attention to India.

Moreover, due to the strong position of the Rajputs on one side of Sindh and the desert on the other side, it was not possible to extend the borders of the Muslim kingdom to other parts of India except Sindh. The second phase was the period of the Indian expedition of Ghazni King Sabuktgin (977-97) and his son Sultan Mahmud (997-1030). In 977, Nasiruddin Sabuktgin (977-91) ascended the throne from Ghazni and founded the Turkic Dynasty. Sabuktgin conducted several expeditions to India to expand the kingdom's boundaries, consolidated the border areas and included the region between Hamdan and Peshawar in the Ghazni state (Jha, 2018, p. 110). After the death of King Sabuktgin in 997, Sultan Mahmud became the ruler of Ghazni. Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi was the most important ruler of the Ghaznavid Empire, whose empire covered most of present-day Afghanistan, eastern Iran and Pakistan (Holt et al., 1977, p. 3). Sultan Mahmud raided different parts of India 17 times. He conquered the northwestern part of the Indian Sub-Continent (present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan) but did not establish a permanent empire in India.

In the third phase, the Muslim state of India was founded under the leadership of the Turkish warrior Sultan Shihabuddin Muhammad Gheri (1186-1206). Sultan Shihabuddin Gheri's real name is Muizuddin Muhammad and he was born in 1149 AD in Ghur, Afghanistan. His father, Bahauddin was the ruler of Ghur and after his father's death, his brother Ghiyasuddin became the ruler in 1173 AD. Shihabuddin Gheri and his elder brother Ghiyasuddin ruled from 1173 to 1202 and after Ghiyasuddin died in 1202, Gheri ruled as an independent ruler until 1206. After the defeat of Prithviraj in the Battle of Tarain in 1192 AD and King Jaichand of Kanauj in the Battle of Chandwar in 1194 AD, Muhammad Gheri established his authority in Delhi and Ajmer (Auer, 2012, p. 1). He appointed Qutb-ud-din Aibak as the Ruler and as his representative in Delhi and he founded a Muslim state in India with Delhi as its capital (Chaurasia, 2022, p. 4).

Bengal was under King Laxman Sen when Muslim rule was established in Delhi, India. The oldest civilization of Bengal was developed around 1500 BC during the reign of Ashoka where the Pundra township of North Bengal was part of the Mauryan Empire. After the death of Ashoka, no competent King reigned the Mauryan Dynasty. As a result, the Mauryan Empire kept getting smaller and smaller (C. T. Sen, 2022). Contemporary emerging Dynasties occupied various parts of the Mauryan Empire and the Gupta Dynasty arose. Between 320 and 550 AD, almost all of Bengal

was under the Gupta Empire during the Gupta period. Nevertheless, at the end of Gupta's rule, there was extreme chaos in Bengal (Pal, 2008, p. 79). After Two independent Kingdoms were formed in Bengal; one was the State of Gaur in North-West Bengal and the other was the State of Bengo in Southeast Bengal. At that time, Gopal ascended the throne of Bengal, ending nearly a hundred years of political anarchy and he started the rule of the Pala Dynasty. The Pala Dynasty ruled Bengal for almost four hundred years. The Pala Dynasty was a glorious chapter in the history of ancient Bengal (A. N. Chowdhury, 1965, p. 273). After the fall of the Pala Dynasty, Hemanta Sen founded the Hindu Sena Kingdom in 1070 and the Sen Dynasty began to rule. The Sens were Hindu Brahmins who came to Bengal from Karnataka of South India in search for greener pastures (R. C. Majumder, 1943, p. 210).

The Muslim regime began with the conquest of Bengal by Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji who defeated Raja Lakshmana Sen in 1204 AD. Bakhtiyar Khalji was born in the Khalji clan of Garamshir in northern Afghanistan and the Khalji tribe settled in Afghanistan from Turkestan (M. M. Khan, 2013b, p. 14). Bakhtiyar Khalji came to India in 1193 AD during the reign of Qutbuddin Aibek in Delhi and took service under Malik Hizbaruddin, a commander in Badaun in northern India. After a short time, he left Badaun for Ajodha and was granted the Jagir of two Parganas, Bhagwat and Viuli, situated in the south-east corner of the present Mirzapur district by Husamuddin, the ruler of Ayodhya. In 1201, the Bakhtiyars started invading the neighbouring kingdoms and brought the entire Bihar region under their control and in 1203 AD, Bakhtiyar captured the Radha and Barendra regions of Bengal. Later in 1204, Bakhtiyar defeated Raja Lakshmana Sen and conquered Nadia. After the conquest of Nadia, he brought Lakhnauti or Gaur under his rule. He divided the entire region into three central administrative parts and appointed three governors for the convenience of governance. Husamuddin Aiwad Khalji was appointed as the administrator of the western region comprising the Mirzapur district of Ayodhya, parts of South Bihar (Magadha) and North Bihar (Mithila). Muhammad Shiran Khalji was appointed as the administrator of the south-western region centered on Birbhum's Lakhnoor. Ali Mardan Khalji was appointed as the administrator of the north-eastern area consisting of Rajmahal (now part of Bihar), Maldah, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Bogra, Kiadangsh of Jessore and Nadia (M. M. Khan, 2013b, p. 17).

The conquest of Bengal by Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji resulted in the first political establishment of Muslim rule of Bengal. From this time, many Muslims from the western part of India, Afghanistan, Iran, Arabia and Turkey started coming to Bengal. After the conquest of Bengal, Muhammad Bakhtiyar enforced internal law and order but adopted a hospitality policy towards non-Muslims. Bakhtiar Khalji founded the Khalji Dynasty which was the first Dynasty to lay the foundations of Muslim rule in Bengal, lasting from 1204 to 1227.

In 1227, Ghiyasuddin Iwaz Khalji, the last ruler of the Khalji Dynasty of Bengal, was defeated by Nasiruddin Mahmud, son of Sultan Iltutmish of Delhi. Nasiruddin Mahmud established the rule of Delhi in Bengal and he ruled Bengal until 1229 1229 (A. K. Sarkar, 2013, p. 36). Bengal was continuously a province of the Delhi Sultanate from 1227 to 1287. Ten of the 15 rulers who ruled this region then were Turkish Mamluk who enslaved people and for this reason, this period is called the ruling period of Mamluk Sultans. In 1281, Mughisuddin Tughral Khan, the greatest ruler of the Mamluk Dynasty of Bengal was defeated and killed by Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban of Delhi (S. J. Sarkar, 2017). Balban appointed his son Bughra Khan as the governor of Bengal, marking the beginning of Balban's rule in Bengal (F. F. Ahmed, 2016, p. 101). When Bugra Khan's father, Ghiyasuddin Balban, died in 1287, Bugra Khan denied the authority of Delhi and declared himself an independent Sultan. The 'Independent Sultanate Era' began in Bengal. The Balban Sultans ruled Bengal from 1281 - 1324 and during this time, the arrival of Muslim scholars and Sufi saints increased significantly in Bengal. As a result, Islam spread to a massive level and Hindu-Muslim cordial relations reached an outstanding stage.

After the death of Delhi Sultan Alauddin Khalji in 1316 AD, the Khalji Dynasty ended in Delhi in just four years and the Tughlaqs Dynasty came to power in the Delhi Sultanate. The founder of this Dynasty, Gazi Malik Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq was the ruler of Punjab. After killing Qutbuddin Mubarak, the last Sultan of the Khalji Dynasty, an Emir named Khusrau Malik seized power but within a few days, he became unpopular. Other Emirs united to eliminate Khusrau Malik's tyranny and Gazi Malik led the movement. Khusrau Malik was defeated and was killed in the battle by the Ghazi Malik Ghiyasuddin. Later Ghazi Malik Ghiyasuddin ascended the throne in Delhi, bearing the title of Tughlaq (V. A. Smith, 1920, p. 248). In 1324 AD Ghiyasuddin Tughluq conquered Bengal and divided Bengal into three provinces namely Lucknow, Satgaon and

Sonargaon. Separate governors were appointed to each region and Tughluq governors ruled Bengal from 1324-1339. Bahram Khan, the ruler of Sonargaon under the Tughluq Sultan of Delhi died in 1338 AD. After his death, armoury supervisor Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah took over the ruling power in Sonargaon and declared himself an independent Sultan (M. M. H. Khan et al., 2022, p. 3). Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah died in 1349 AD and his son Ikhtiyaruddin Ghazi Shah ruled the Kingdom of Sonargaon (spread over the eastern and south-eastern parts of Bangladesh) for three years. At that time, Alauddin Ali Shah was the ruler of Lakhnauti and Izzuddin Yahya ruled Satgaon under the Tughluq Sultan of Delhi (Grewal, 2005, p. 225).

Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah overthrew the Tughlaq rulers of Delhi in Bengal and established the independent Sultanate of Bengal. In 1338 Ilyas started the Shahi dynasty which ruled for about 152 years in Bengal. Ilyas Shah was born in Sizzistan in eastern Persia and in his early life served under Firuz, the Malik of Delhi. Later, Ilyas Shah came to Bengal and served under Izzuddin Yahya, the Tughlaq Ruler of Satgaon and was promoted to Malik on his merits (Sayed Mahmudul Hasan, 2013). Ilyas Shah became the ruler of Satgaon after the death of Izzuddin Yahya in 1338 AD. In 1342 AD, he defeated Alauddin Ali Shah, the ruler of Lakhnauti, ascended the throne of Lakhnauti and assumed the title of Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah. In 1352 AD Ilyas Shah defeated Ikhtiyaruddin Ghazi Shah after attacking Sonargaon and became the ruler of the entire Bengal (Sayed Mahmudul Hasan, 2013). Before this, no ruler could be the Sultan of Bengal autonomously but from the time of Ilyas Shah, this region became famous as Bangala and one Sultan ruled.

In 1410 AD, a Hindu royalist named Ganesh killed Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah and after the Sultan's death, his son Hamzah Shah ascended the throne. Nothing is known precisely about the birth and lineage of King Ganesha. Ganesha was one of the nobles who became influential in the Ilyas Shahi court of Firuzabad (Pandua) towards the end of the reign of Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (Wolseley Haig, 1928, p. 266). Two years later, in 1412 AD, Ganesha killed Hamzah Shah and through the killing ended the Ilyas Shahi Dynasty that ruled Bengal. Hamzah Shah's loyal slave Shihabuddin stood up against King Ganesha's plot and he was able to destroy the conspiracy of King Ganesha. He became the ruler of Bengal bearing the title of Shihabuddin Bayezid Shah and ruled Bengal for three years from 1412 to 1415 AD. In 1415, King Ganesha killed Bayezid Shah and came to power. Therefore, the accession

of King Ganesha ended two hundred years of Muslim rule and ushered in Hindu rule in Bengal. Ganesha began to persecute the Muslims as soon as he was in power and killed many innocent Muslims. Shaykh Noor Qutbul Alam wrote a letter to the ruler of Jaunpur, Ibrahim Sharqi, about Ganesha's atrocities. Noor Qutubul Alam was Bengal's best scholar and religious figure during the Sultanate period. His father was one of the greatest Sufis of Bengal, Shaykh Alaul Haque (r.a.), and Ghiyas Uddin Azam Shah, the third Sultan of the Ilyas Shahi dynasty, was a friend of Nur Qutubul Alam (Reza, 2019, p. 183).

Ganesha abdicated the Kingship when Sultan Ibrahim Sharqi came forward to invade Bengal. His son Judu was installed into power after accepting Islam from Noor Qutubul Alam and Judu changed his name to Jalal Uddin. With Jalaluddin in power, Ibrahim Sharqi withdrew his campaign without invading Bengal and after leaving Ibrahim Saraki, King Ganesha once again returned to power (Damle & Damle, 2023, p. 171). The larger Bengal population was non-Muslim but enjoyed the benefits of Muslim rule and lived happily because the Muslim Sultans never oppressed them. The ordinary Hindus were not ready to participate in the anarchy that the radical Hindu King Ganesha and his loyal followers tried to create. After Ganesha died in 1418 AD, Jalaluddin returned to power and abided Islam with full devotion. Sultan Jalaluddin was one of the prominent Sultans of the Bengal Sultanate and was in control from 1418 to 1433 1433 (Hussain, 2002, p. 277). He played an extraordinary role in spreading Islam in Bengal and in raising the political prestige of Bengal. None of the rulers before him propagated Islam as a State initiative. He gave Islam the status of royal religion and rebuilt the mosques and Islamic architecture destroyed by King Ganesha. He built numerous mosques, shrines and khanqahs hence provided special royal patronage to Sufi dervishes.

Jalaluddin died in 1434 and his son Shamsuddin Ahmad Shah ascended the throne at age fourteen. After four years of power, his son's two manipulative servants, Sadi Khan and Nasir Khan conspired and killed him. Nasir Khan came to power but later they both got into a dispute and were ousted. As Ahmad Shah had no son, the leaders of Gaur elected Mahmud, Ilyas Shah's descendants as the Sultan of Bengal Sultanate. Mahmud took the title of Nasiruddin Abul Muzaffar Mahmud Shah and sat in power of Gaur in 1439 (Salim, 1902, p. 119). This reign is known as the Ilyas Shahi

II's reign where the Khulna and Bagerhat regions came under Muslim control during this rule.

During the reign of Ilyas Shahi II the Abyssinians started coming to Bengal. The Abyssinian soldier Barbak Shah and Yusuf Shah were appointed to important posts. A large number of Abyssinians joined the army and Abyssinian soldiers became dominant in the capital. In 1487 AD Ilyas II killed Mahmud Shah, the last Sultan of the Shahi Dynasty. The commander of Abyssinian troops took over and assumed the title of Sultan Barbak Shah and sat on the Musnad of Gaur. Four Abyssinian Sultans ruled Bengal for six years (N. N. Vohra & Dixit, 1998, p. 72). After the last Abyssinian Sultan, Shamsuddin Muzaffar Shah Sidi Badr was killed in 1494 and Alauddin Hussain Shah became the Sultan of Bengal. The rule of the Hussain Shahi Dynasty began. Hussain Shah ruled for 25 years and peace prevailed during his reign (Mondal, 1970, p. 236). Liberal attitude toward Hindu subjects was a notable feature of his power. Hussain Shahi died in 1519 AD and after his death, his son Nasrat Shah ruled till 1532 AD. After the death of Nasrat Shah, his son Firoz Shah assumed the title of 'Alauddin Abul Muzaffar Firoz Shah' and sat on the Musnad of Gaur as the Sultan of Bengal. In 1533 Ghiyasuddin Mahmud Shah assassinated his nephew Sultan Alauddin Firuz, ascended the throne in 1533 AD and ruled for five years. He was the last Sultan of the Hussain Shahi Dynasty of Bengal (GANGULI, 2023, p. 27).

In 1538 AD, Shershah Sur invaded Bengal, defeated Sultan Ghiyasuddin Mahmud Shah and occupied Bengal. Hence the end of the Hussain Shahi Dynasty in Bengal. Simultaneously, the rule of the Afghans began in Bengal. Sher Shah was a Pashtun native of Afghanistan. He started his career as a general army officer in Delhi, later rose to the rank of general in the army of the Mughal emperor Babur and was later appointed as the ruler of Bihar. In 1538 AD, Sher Shah Suri conquered Bengal, established the Suri Empire and declared himself the new Emperor (Ganeri, 2014, p. 51). Afghani rule continued in Bengal from 1538 until the Mughals defeated Dawood Khan Karrani in 1576. In 1576, the Battle of Rajmahal took place in which Dawood Khan was defeated and killed. The death of Dawood Khan Karrani marked the end of Afghan rule in Bengal and the beginning of the Mughal power (Ansari, 2019, p. 66). The Mughal Empire was divided into several provinces. After the defeat of Sultan Dawood Khan Karrani of Bengal at Rajmahal in 1576, Emperor Akbar declared Bengal as one of the twelve Subahs. Subah was the name of the province of the Mughal Empire

and it bordered Bihar, Odisha and Myanmar (K. A. S. Murshid, 2022, p. 172). The governors of Subah were called Subadar and Hossain Quli was the first Subadar. He was employed by the Mughal Emperor till 1578 (A. Karim, 1962, p. 12).

In 1576, Emperor Akbar annexed Bengal to the Mughal Empire but he was able to establish full authority over only a small part of Bengal. The rest of Bengal were ruled independently by the Afghan chieftains, the Pathans and the Hindu Zamindars. The last 29 years of Akbar's reign and the first seven years of Jahangir's reign - a long period of 36 years, were a time of skirmishes between the Mughal generals and the independence-loving Pathans and Hindu chieftains. Historically, these Pathan and Hindu landlords were known as 'Baro Bhuiyan' and majority were Muslims (SINGH, 2021, p. 363).

Mughal rule in Bengal ruled the region in two phases i.e. Subadari and Nawabi. Emperor Akbar conducted several expeditions to establish his rule in the Bengal region but was unsuccessful due to feudal revolts. After he acceded the throne, Emperor Jahangir also sent troops on several expeditions to the province of Bengal but all the campaigns failed. In 1608 Emperor Jahangir sent Islam Khan to conquer Bengal. Subadar Islam Khan completed the conquest of Bengal and established Mughal power in Bengal by crushing the independence efforts of the Bhuiyan and Afghan chieftains (Gommans, 2002, p. 172). At the end of 1611, Musa Khan, the chief of the Baro Bhuiyans, surrendered to Islam Khan with all the Baro Bhuiyans and after the suppression of the Baro Bhuiyans, Mughal rule was established in the whole of Bengal.

After the death of Islam Khan in 1613, several people served as Subadars of Bengal until 1717. Among them, Subadar Shaista Khan was a famous provincial ruler. He ruled Bengal for 22 years in two phases i.e firstly from 1664 to 1678 and secondly from 1680 to 1688 (Guido van Meersbergen, 2018, p. 60). During his reign, Dhaka prospered greatly and the best period of Mughal rule was reflected by this province. After the death of Emperor Aurangzeb in the 18th century, power struggles and political strife shook the foundations of the Mughal Empire. After his death, there were significant changes in the political scene of many regions including Bengal. As part of that change, an independent 'Nawabi' rule was established in Subah Bengal. From 1717 to 1757, the Nawabs ruled the region as the head of sovereign Bengal. Murshid Quli Khan (1717-1727) was the first Nawab of Bengal (McLane, 2002, p. 27). Murshid Quli

Khan was just, learned and philanthropic and had a reputation as a liberal Nawab. Apart from constructing mosques, he paid for temples for the Hindus of Bengal and the Judiciary was neutral on religion and Caste (Heartfield, 2022). Siraj-ud-Daulah, the last independent Nawab of Bengal, was defeated by the British in the Palashi desert due to the treachery of Mir Zafar. His defeat and death at the Battle of Palashi marked the beginning of 190 years of British rule in India.

From the conquest of Bengal by Muhammad Bakhtiar Khilji in 1204 AD to the fall of the Muslim rule through the defeat of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah in the Palashi desert in 1757 AD, a total of one hundred and one rulers had ruled Bengal for five hundred and fifty-four years. During this period, Bengal's social, political and economic aspects had undergone massive changes toward modernity and development. When the Muslims arrived in this country as conquerors, they loved it with all their hearts, accepted it as their permanent home and did not mind living alongside with the non-Muslim residents of this country. As rulers, they did not impose injustice to the ruled and the people accepted their rule.

3.3 THE FUNDAMENTAL REASON FOR THE SPREAD OF ISLAM IN BENGAL

After Islam arrived in the holy city of Mecca, Islam spread worldwide and Islam came to Bangladesh. Islam's message of humanity and equality opened a new outlook for the region's people where the oppressed people found liberation and peace propagated by Islam. Islam spread across Bangladesh in three stages; the first phase started in the 8th century. At this time, Arab Muslim traders crossed the Bay of Bengal through western and southern India. They came to the coastal areas of Chittagong and Noakhali in Bangladesh for commercial purposes. The port of Chittagong was already a commercial colony for the Arabs long before the advent of Islam. Within the country, the Arabs used to trade by boat and they used to buy sandalwood, ivory, spices and cloth. They traded north-east-west through the Red Sea, Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean (M. Prasad, 2011, p. 29). The Arab traders almost entirely inhabited the port city of Chittagong and many also lived permanently in other big cities of the country. Arab historians and geographers also mentioned various places in Bengal. Al-Idrisi's account states that Arab merchants and tourists from Baghdad and Basra used to travel to and from the

region near the Meghna estuary (R. Mukherjee, 2022, p. 101). In his description, the geographer Ibn Khurdadbih mentioned the Chandpur River port in Bangladesh (RAHAMAN, 1995, p. 427). Islam emerged in the Arabian city of Mecca in the early seventh century. As soon as Islam appeared in the Arab nations, all the Arabs doing business abroad were naturally attracted to this new religion of their own country. Thus, before the end of the seventh century, the trading Arabs in Bengal converted local population to Islam especially in the port of Chittagong.

India and China had had trade relations with Arab merchants since ancient times and the Arab traders used the sea route in the Bay of Bengal through the Malabar coast to go to China. On long voyages, it was challenging to navigate continuously so they repaired their ships and bought food from the Chittagong port in Bangladesh (M. T. Islam, 2010, pp. 91–106). This trade journey continued even after the advent of Islam and along with business, they were working to spread Islam among the people of the region.

In the fifth year of the Prophethood, a group of his companions exhausted by the persecution of infidels migrated from Mecca to Abyssinia. Two years later, a “*sahabah*” of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas started the journey from Abyssinia to China in two ships with some of his companions. After nine years of long travel, they reached China in 626 AD (Benite, 2004, p. 84). Historians believe that Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas's caravans had to use the coast of Malabar and the Bay of Bengal to get to China. In India, the ancient Tamil texts mentioned that a group of Arabs came to Malabar by ship and the King of Malabar i.e. Cherumal Perumal was influenced by the Arab Caravan and converted to Islam (Prange, 2018, p. 2).

In fact, he was converted to Islam by Saad ibn Abi Waqqas and the people of the coastal areas of Bangladesh were also attracted to convert to Islam. Saad ibn Abi Waqqas lived in Canton's port area (Guangzhou) in China and built the Canton (Huaisheng) Mosque on the sea beach. After his death, he was buried next to the mosque (Liu et al., 2021, p. 756). Meanwhile, the Arakan of Myanmar which was situated on the Bay of Bengal's shores in Bangladesh's south part was ruled by King Ma-Ba Tung from 750 to 810 AD. During his reign, several Arab Muslim ships were wrecked and caught by the storm on the Arakan coast. The survivors of the vessel took refuge on the island of Ranbyi. Later, the King of Arakan was satisfied with the behaviours of the

Muslims and allowed them to reside there permanently (Yegar, 2002, p. 23). They established a Muslim settlement which can still be found even till today in the Chittagong region of Bangladesh.

The second phase (from the 11th to 13th century) saw the arrival of the Sufi saints who spread Islam in Bengal. The presence of Sufi saints laid the foundation in establishing the Muslim society. It paved the way in establishing the Muslim rule in Bengal in the early thirteenth century. The role of the *Pirs* and *Moballighs* (preachers) who came to Bangladesh was one of the factors for the widespread propagation and development of Islam. In the eleventh A.D., a group of *Moballighs* (preachers) came to preach Islam to the people of Bengal. Among prominent leaders who welcomed the teachings were Shah Sultan Balkhi in Hariram of Dhaka District, Shah Muhammad Sultan Rumi in Madanpur of Netrokona District, Baba Adam Shahid in Bikrompur of Dhaka District, Jalaluddin Tabridhi, Shah Makhdum Rupush in Rajshahi district, Bayezid Bustamy in Chittagong and Khan Jahan Ali in Khulna-Jessore (Nazir Ahmad, 2013, pp. 24–26). The *Moballighs* (preachers) did not only preach religion but also played a major role in Bangladesh's socio-economic development. They helped to build roads, dug pondswells and eradicate social prejudices in the region. Hence, through religious spirituality and social development activities, they established themselves among the people of Bengal.

The third phase began with the setting up of a Muslim government in Bengal in the 13th century. In 1204 AD, Ikhtiyar Uddin Mohammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khilji led an expedition in Bengal, defeated King Lakshman Sen, an oppressive ruler of Gaur and established the first Muslim rule in Bengal (M. N. Haque, 2001, p. 230). Through the conquest of Bengal by Bakhtiyar Khilji in 1204 AD, Muslim rulers, soldiers and officials began to arrive. To facilitate the administration, they indulged in various programs for the welfare of the local people which created a vast opportunity to spread Islam in this country. In the early stages, the independent Sultans of Bengal and later the Mughal rulers, being Muslims, practiced Islam in real life. They provided equal rights and security to people of all religions which led to peoples' interest in Islam. When Muslim rule was established in Bengal, *Moballighs* (preachers) arrived massively in this country. They spread Islam directly and indirectly by establishing mosques, shrines, and *madrassahs* (J. Malik, 2008, p. 147).

Scholars differ on when actually Bangladesh became a Muslim-majority region notable Orientalist intellectuals, alongside Hindu scholars and historians, include Henry Elliot (1853), William Hunter (1881), James Wise (1883), William Muir (1891), Murray Titus (1930), Will Durant (1935), Suniti Kumar Chatterji (1963) and R. C. Majumdar (1973), declared theories that Islam was a forced conversion regime through the “sword” in Bengal (M. N. Islam, 2023, p. 17). However, it must be stressed that the Muslim rulers of Bengal did not forcibly convert people of other religions to Islam simply because Islam forbids compulsion for conversion. People had voluntarily converted to Islam because of the provision of equality and justice guaranteed in Islam. Before the advent of Islam, the people of this region were oppressed by the Brahmins and the lower Castes had no social and religious rights due to the class division of society. Women were the most victimized in society. They had no social status. After the husband's death, the wife was also cremated instantaneously (Upadhyaya, 1990, p. 45). Islam established equal social groups and values for all people. The people of the region left paganism and embraced Islam for being fascinated by Muslims' behaviours and the beauty of Islam, not the “sword” (Ikram, 1964). About 600 years before the conquest of Bengal by Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad Bin Khilji, Islam was introduced to Bangladesh by the Prophet’s Companions. The companions started the propagation of Islam in Bangladesh and later Bangladesh became a Muslim Majority Country through the growth of its lineage. In 1987, the remains of an ancient mosque were discovered in Ara village of Majedar in the Panchagram union of Lalmonirhat District. The mosque is 21 feet long and 10 feet wide and has octagonal pillars at the four corners of the mosque (S. D. Roy, 2013). There is a 4 feet wide space for queues inside the mosque. An inscription inside the mosque reads *Kalimah Tayyibah* and dated 69 Hijri, suggesting that the mosque was built around 69 Hijri or 690 AD (M. N. Islam et al., 2020, p. 298). Besides that coins of the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Harun-ar Rashid have also been unearthed in a Paharpur Buddhist Vihara in Rajshahi and Mainamati in Comilla, dating from the 8th to 13th centuries (Oberst, 2015, p. 249).

Overall, the historical records and archaeological findings in this discourse challenge the notion that the emergence of Islam in Bengal was motivated mainly by military conquest and forceful conversion. Instead, they emphasise a complex and varied process characterised by deliberate societal changes, the establishment of Islam by the Prophet's Companions, and the significant impact of Sufi traditions. The

discovery of the old mosque in Ara village and the identification of Abbasid coinage inside the Buddhist Viharas provide more evidence for a cultural transformation driven by Islamic values. Indeed, this narrative shed light on the peaceful adoption of Islam in Bengal, highlighting the fact that the peoples' conversion of this region was not driven by the "sword" but by the inherent allure of Islamic principles, equality and social justice.

3.4 MUSLIMS-HINDU RELATIONSHIP UNDER MUSLIM RULE IN BENGAL

During the long Muslim rule in Bengal, the Muslim-Hindu communities enjoyed harmony in the social, political, religious and cultural infrastructures. Although there was a possibility of conflict due to the differences between the two communities regarding religion and social behaviours, they had lived side by side for a long time. Due to peaceful co-existence, a cordial relationship developed between the two communities. Even though there occurred rivalry among the upper classes in the society over the change in the state governance structure, the life of the ordinary people was not disrupted. The Muslims' manners, lifestyle and culture influenced the local population. Hindus who mastered the Persian language of the time were appointed to high positions in the royal houses of the Muslim rulers (Annemarie, 2003, p. 290) Hindu Zamindars, chiefs and others cooperated with the Muslims leaders to run the State affairs smoothly. Likewise, the Muslims were also appointed and performed essential duties under the Hindu Zamindars and Traders. The Hindus, while maintaining good relations with their Muslim neighbours and working under them did not give up their Hinduism.

On the other hand, the Muslim rulers did not interfere in the religious and social life of their Hindu subjects. Remarkably, a significant aspect of the social life of the Bengali people during the Muslim rule was the spread of a sense of understanding and cooperation between the Muslims and the Hindus. As a result, it brought peace and prosperity to Bengal and developed political, religious, and cultural assimilations between these two communities.

3.4.1 Social Relation

In the thirteenth century, the Muslims conquered Bengal and established the Muslim rule. Bengal remained under Muslim power until the mid-eighteenth century. A significant aspect of the social life of the Bengali people during the Muslim sovereignty was the spread of a sense of understanding and cooperation between the Muslims and the Hindus. As a result of living side by side for a long time, a love relationship developed between the two religions. There was no communal conflict due to the Muslim influence across the society and culture and the Muslim rulers allowed full freedom to all Hindus and Buddhists. This was practiced despite the norms of society of that time whereby only the Brahmins and Kashatriya Hindus were advanced in Education and finance while those of the lower Caste were backward and were deprived of privileges enjoyed by them.

Hinduism divides people into four castes namely the Brahmins (priestly people), the Kashatriyas (known as Rajanyas, who were also rulers, administrators and warriors), the Vaishyas (artisans, traders, merchants, and farmers) and the Shudras (the labour class). In Hindu society, these four classes are called 'Varnasrama'; the highest Caste being the Brahmins (Jacobs, 2010, p. 58). This Caste System created in ancient Bengal significantly impacted its education system. The doors of Education were not open to the general public and Education was only for the Brahmin priests and the privileged. Naturally, the Shudras who belong to the lowest Caste and women of all Castes did not have access to the education arena. As a result of this practice, the education system did not acquire a universal character for a long time. In the sixteenth century, under Muslim rulers, the Brahmin customs changed and people of all Castes had access to Education (M. T. Islam, 2017, p. 10). The Shudras of the lowest Caste had no right to recite the Vedas or listen to the Vedas Vedas (Ponnaian, 1998, p. 126). In the Muslim period, even if opportunities were not created for everyone to read Veda, all the children of the four Castes of the Hindu society got the right to Hatekhori (Bangla Alphabet) in the fifth year of age. Muslim rulers used to donate tax-free land to spread education to Muslim educational institutions and Hindu educational institutions (M. T. Islam, 2017, p. 22). During the Sultanate period, there were three levels of Education in Bengal namely Primary, Secondary and Higher Education. *Maktabs* and *Pathshalas* were for the primary level and secondary and higher-level schools were called '*Madrasahs*.' Muslim children were formally initiated into primary Education at the age of four

through the *Maktab* and Hindu boys and girls were given primary Education in the *Pathshalas* (Telwani, 2019, p. 691).

During the Sultanate period, traditional style *Bangla Pathshalas* was established under the Sultans' patronage and *Pathshalas*'s full development took place in the seventeenth century. *Pathshalas* were found in the courtyards of noblemen's houses or under the shade of trees in the homes of *gurus* (teachers). In many places, *Pathshalas* and *Maktabas* were conducted in the same place. The *Munshi* (Muslim teacher) conducted classes in the morning while the *Guru* (Hindu teacher) taught students in the afternoon (Rahim, 1963, pp. 203–204). Secondary and Higher-level schools were called '*Madrasahs*.' *Madrasahs*' education in the Middle Ages was religiously centric but various subjects were taught besides religion. The medium of instruction in *Madrasahs* was mainly Persian and some *Madrasahs* had a system of learning 'Sanskrit.' In Bengal during the Mughal era, Hindu students also had the opportunity to get an education in *Madrasahs* (Momen & Hossain, 2022, p. 1). Hindu students used to study in *Madrasahs* and learned the Persian language to get high positions in the government. After the fall of Nawab Sirajuddaula, many Hindu students continued to study in *Madrasahs* during British India. Rammohan Roy, a prominent Hindu figure in the British era of Bengal, was educated at the *Madrasah* and Harichand Tagore, the founder of the Matua sect, also studied at the *Madrasah* (Wadhwa, 2021, p. 24).

In Muslim rule, the social structure was formed based on the social values of all the citizens of the society. The backward community of Kayasthas was integrated into the mainstream society and created a position of social status with the cooperation of the Muslim rulers. The Kayasthas mostly handled the revenue service of the Muslim rulers and the Kayasthas became influential and prosperous as they rose through the ranks (H. Bellenoit, 2014, p. 883). They acquired Zamindari by paying fixed revenue through treaties with Muslim rulers and by purchasing from old and decaying Zamindars. By changing social status, the Kayasthas assumed the titles of Chowdhury, Majumdar, Adhikari and Niyogi (Bhaduri, 2001, pp. 68–69). At the time of Murshid Quli Khan, out of fifteen big Zamindars and twenty-one small Zamindars of Bengal, only two or four were Muslims; all the rest belonged to the Hindu community and most of them were the Kayasthas (R. Ray, 1975).

The Muslims were well-known for maritime and commercial activities and had reliable knowledge regarding various sea routes and trading ports of different countries. In Medieval Bengal, the Muslims had commercial relations with Hindu merchants and were impressed by the Hindu merchants' ship management skills. The Hindu merchants employed Muslims as sailors and utilized Muslim experience and knowledge in foreign trade (Mahajan, 2007, p. 379). By doing business together, the Hindus and the Muslims got to know each other well and built good social relations.

The Hindus used to invite Muslims to their social festivals and participated in their rejoice festivals. Likewise, the Muslims also invited the Hindus to their social celebrations. Higher-class Hindus participated in events such as celebrating Muslim birthdays and marriages (N. Sengupta, 2011). According to poet Vijaygupta's account, nine hundred Muslim Gawals (singers) attended the wedding of Laxminder, son of Chand Saudagar, a prominent figure in the history of Medieval Bengali Hindu literature (S. Hasan, 2012, p. 44).

3.4.2 Political Relation

As a result of the establishment of Muslim governance with the principles of equality and brotherhood as opposed to the absolute dominance of the Brahmins and the Caste System of Hinduism, a new type of political structure was formed in Bengal. All people from different Castes played their role in the administration of the State together with the Muslim rulers by adorning various positions, including the revenue department, army, court, and royal poet. The Muslim rulers did not impose Islamic rule on the Hindu population regarding the judicial system where during the Sultanate or Mughal period, Brahmin scholars help solved the cases of Hindus according to Hindu law (Merriman, 2009).

During the Sen rule, the Hindu community was subjected to various exploitation and torture by the Brahmins. Brahmins and the Upper-Caste Hindus performed essential state duties while Lower-Caste Hindus had no role or status in society. But after the establishment of the Muslim rule, the monopoly of the Brahmins in the Hindu society was primarily destroyed by instituting the Muslim culture. The Kayasthas had become influential and prosperous in the community as they advanced in Education and held official positions (H. J. Bellenoit, 2017, p. 12). Another notable feature of the Hindu

society was the emergence of revenue farmers and Zamindars from among the Kayasthas during the Muslim rule in Bengal. Maladhar Bose and his son Lakshminath Bose of the Kayastha family of Kulingram in Burdwan served in high state positions during the reign of Ilyas Shahi. Maladhar Bose was conferred the title of Gunaraj Khan in appreciation by the Muslim rulers (Bandhopadhyay, 1959, p. 628). Many more Kayastha families were noted to have prospered during the reign of Sultan Hussain Shah. Gopinath Bose held the highest position in the revenue department (*Wazier* or finance minister), Gaur Mallik an army general Keshav Khan, the superintendent of the royal palace and Raj-physician (royal-physician) Mukund (R. M. Eaton, 2019). Three Kayastha brothers namely Ramabhadra, Ramanath and Banikanta Roy, held high posts in the revenue department. Under the Muslim state, the Kayasthas became hereditary Zamindars in acquiring revenue cultivation through ancestral service and contracts with the government. Besides Kayasthas, many Brahmins and others also enjoyed patronage from the Muslim rulers. Sultan Ilyas Shah included many Hindu chiefs, generals and soldiers in his forces in the struggle for independence against the Delhi Sultanate (A. Y. Ali, 2015, p. 13). A Hindu General named Shahdeo led a large army in a war against Firuz Shah Tughluq. Ilyas Shah conferred the titles 'Bangabhushan' and 'Rajjayi' on two of his servants, Duryodhana and Chakrapani, for their outstanding contributions (Rahim, 1963, p. 329).

Between the Afghan rule in Bengal and the rise of Mughal power, various parts of the country came under the control of many military chiefs and Hindu Zamindars. They sometimes ruled their respective territories as independent or semi-independent rulers. During this time, the Hindu Zamindars did not stay away from the Muslims but included them in their work. Anant Manikya, a Hindu Zamindar of Bhalwa State i.e. present Noakhali region, appointed Mirza Yusuf Barlas as his Minister. Chand Rai, the Zamindar of Bikrampur, appointed Sulaiman Lohani as the Commander of his army and Khwaja Kamal was employed as one of his Generals in the military of Jessore Zamindar Pratapaditya (Rahim, 1963, p. 333).

In 1538 AD, Hindu-Muslim relations in Bengal were raised to an exceptionally high level, resulting in a regional alliance between the two communities, regardless of religious identity which was known as the age of the Baro Bhuiyan. The twelve Bhuiyans were not descended from any royal family but were Zamindars, landowners and patriots (Kamal, 2013, p. 17). They resisted the Mughal invasion for three years

with indomitable courage and bravery. During the Mughal invasion, the Mughal forces were repeatedly defeated by the combined Muslim-Hindu forces led by the Baro Bhuiyan (C. Ullah, 2021, p. 79). The Brahmin Hindus held responsible positions in the State offices during the Sultanate of Bengal. During Alauddin Hussain Shah's reign, two Brahmin brothers, Sanatan and Roop held important positions. Elder brother Sanatan served as Sarkar-i-Mulk (Minister of State) and the younger brother Roop Dabir-i-Khas as Secretary (A. P. Sen, 2019, p. 79). During Sher Shah's time, Hinduism received due recognition and there was no discrimination between the Hindu and the Muslim subjects. Non-Muslims were recruited to various high posts according to their merit. Sher Shah appointed a Hindu soldier, Brahmajit Gaur, as the Commander-in-Chief. During the Nawabi period, they introduced the practice of large-scale recruitment of Bengali Hindus into State service (K. Roy, 2004, p. 69). A few high-ranking officials in the revenue department were Muslims while the rest were Hindus.

During this period, almost all large Zamindars were Hindus and 75% of Talukdars and small Zamindars were also Hindus (A. Karim, 2004, p. 118). During the reign of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan, Hindus were employed in all branches of the Secretariat. The Chief Land Records Preservation Officers were Krishna Narayan and Darpa Narayan. During Nawab Sujauddin, Alam Chand was the Dewan (Chief Revenue Officer) and a member of the Advisory Council. Ummid Rai, Durlavram, Jankiram, Gokul Chand and Veeru Dutta held high posts in the State in the period of Nawab Alivardi Khan and his successor Siraj-ud-Daula (A. Karim, 2004, pp. 118–119).

3.4.3 Religious Relation

Since ancient times, Bangladesh's religion had not only controlled the religious customs and practices but also influenced the overall lifestyle of the people. Religion played an essential role in building the social structure of the people in the Middle Ages. Due to faith, various customs and traditions had been prevalent in this country especially regarding food products. Religious rituals were closely related to the agricultural activities of the country. Different spiritual ways are practiced in this country, along with planting or harvesting crops. Muslim rulers followed a policy of non-interference in Hindu religious affairs and Hindus enjoyed complete freedom in spiritual practice, Education and preaching. With the help of religion, reconciliation and unity between

Muslim-Hindu communities became possible. During the Muslim period, the Muslim rulers had considerable respect and devotion to the Muslim Sufi saints and the religious *gurus* of the Hindu religion. Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah regularly paid allowances to Hindu monks like Muslim *ulamas* and Sufis out of the State treasury.

Muslim interest in the knowledge of Hindu scriptures naturally led enlightened Hindus to respect the religious works of Muslims. Ramayana and Mahabharata, the holy books of the Sanatan religions were written in Sanskrit. As the language of the sacred texts was cultural, its practice was restricted to Brahmins only and its approach was religiously prohibited for the ordinary Lower-Caste Hindus of Bengal. In the 14th century, during the reign of Sultan Nasrat Shah of Gaur, the two epics, 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata,' were first translated into Bengali (A. Sen, 2012, p. 60). Many Sanskrit texts, including Manasa Vijaya, Krishna Mangala and Padma Purana, were translated into Bengali under the patronage of the Sultans of the Hussain Shahi period (Md. S. N. Rahman, 2015, p. 272).

Before the Muslim rule in Bengal was established, not all Hindus had the opportunity to practice their religion. Muslim rulers helped create equal opportunities for religious practice for all. The Caste System of the Brahmins was so strict that even contact with the Lower-Caste Hindus was forbidden. The ordinary Hindus were freed from this traditional rule of the Brahmins during Hussain Shah's reign through the Sri Chaitanya's Vaishnava movement. The Brahmins strongly opposed Sri Chaitanya's reform movement and the Brahmins appealed to Sultan Hussain Shah to stop Sri Chaitanya's reform movement. The Sultan made a proper inquiry into Sri Chaitanya's activities. He realized that the Vaishnava ideas did not harm Hindus instead it aimed at improving the Hindu society. Sri Chaitanya wanted to create unity and harmony among the people thus received royal favour. Hussain Shah allotted a village called 'Ramkeli' to promote Chaitanya's reform movement and issued an order prohibiting government officials and others from interfering in Sri Chaitanya's work (Gosvāmī, 2010, p. 114).

During the Mughal rule in Bengal, the Mughal rulers played an important role in sponsoring the construction of mosques and building temples for the Hindus. Only seven temples were built in the 6th century but 74 were built in the 17th century. In the six decades (1701-1760) before the establishment of British rule in the eighteenth century, another 138 temples were built only during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb

(1658-1707) and more than 50 temples were built (Aminul Islam, 2021). Dhakeshwari temple in Dhaka, Rajaram temple in Khaliya in Faridpur, Kantnagar temple in Dinajpur, Jor Bangla temple in Pabna, Govinda temple, Shiva temple in Putiya in Rajshahi and Atchala temple in Chandina in Comilla district were among them.

Acceptance of multi-religion was a general policy during the Mughal rule in Bengal. This mutual understanding of the other's culture paved the way for developing social harmony between the two communities of Bengal and the Hindu landlords maintained friendly relations with the Muslims by building mosques. Thakur Chand, a Hindu Chaudhuri residing in the region of Fatikchari Thana Chittagong district generously donated 17.5 acres of forested land for the construction and sustenance of a village mosque, which was erected by a local qazi. This act of philanthropy and religious tolerance exemplifies a remarkable case of Hindu-Muslim cooperation during this period. Similarly, in the year 1740, in the area of Rauzan Thana, Manohar and Jagdish, two Hindu Chaudhuris portrayed a similar spirit of communal harmony by donating a large tract of 76.8 acres of land to Shikur Muhammad Pahlawan. This benevolent contribution was intended to cover the financial requirements of a mosque that Shikur Muhammad Pahlawan had constructed within a forested area. The actions of Manohar and Jagdish are testimonies to the enduring tradition of cross-community cooperation and support for religious infrastructure in the region (R. M. Eaton, 1993, p. 252).

In Bengal, the converted Muslim community continued to practice many ancient rituals even though Islam did not recognize them. As the Muslim rulers and Sufi saints of the time did not impose restrictions on prevailing social customs, a social relationship and religious harmony developed between the two communities. In the oath ceremony in the Mughal military, Muslim army officers took an oath in the name of Allah and Hindu officers took an oath in the name of Vishnu (R. Eaton, 2003, p. 79). Hindus did not have to renounce their religion to serve in court or the army under Muslim rulers.

The Sen Kings had alienated the ordinary people of Hindu society from religious practices and economically cornered them. Brahmins considered themselves impure if they touched ordinary Hindus (Shudras). Muslim Sufi saints began to arrive in Bengal before the Muslim rulers came to power in Bengal. The Sufis' ideal of humanism, a characteristic of humanity, was joined by Islam's generosity and cultural excellence, which the Sufis practically projected to the oppressed, disenfranchised, degraded people

of the society. Most of the Sufis of Bengal attracted ordinary Hindus through their humanitarian activities. The Sufis established khanqahs in remote areas of Bengal and khanqahs were based on humanity (R. Vohra, 2014, p. 37). Regardless of Caste and creed, people of all faiths used to come here and mingled freely. Due to the imposition of extra taxes during the Sen era, ordinary Hindus could not have a proper three-course meal at home. Each khanqah had a Langar Khana attached to it from where food was supplied to the poor and needy. Ordinary Hindus were given ample opportunities to fill their bellies in Sufis' Langar Khana (I. Iqbal, 2017, p. 5). Six of the thirteen inscriptions discovered in Bengal during the first hundred years of Muslim rule (1204-1304) bear the memory of the Khanqah (Siddiq & Habib, 2017, p. 6). Devkot, Mahasthan, Deotla, Dhaka, Sonargaon, Sylhet, Chittagong, Gaur, Rajmahal, Pandua, Triveni (Satgaon) and Murshidabad were famous for Khankahs (A. Karim, 1969). Muslims and non-Muslims respected khanqah and it became a centre of inspiration. A significant fact of the social union of the two communities under the influence of Sufism is that the Hindus were greatly influenced by the ideals and ideas of the Muslims in many fundamental aspects of their lives. The Hindus had great respect for Muslim saints and the Quran. Common Hindus offered various gifts to Pir's shrine to eliminate diseases and problems and Hindu merchants prayed to Allah for safety on voyages (M. A. T. Khan, 2012, p. 23).

An excellent example of harmony can be seen in the architecture of temples, mosques, and khanqahs of the Mughal period. Temple walls were covered with geometric motifs of the abstract Islamic tradition (Asher, 1992b, p. 6). The Ramnagar temple in Jessore, the Taras temple in Pabna (in present-day Bangladesh) and the Pancha Ratna Shyamray temple in Gekarna, Murshidabad district, the Pancha Ratna Shyamray temple in Bishnupur, Bankura district West Bengal in India, superimposed Muslim geometric motifs on Hindu mythological figures (Bain, 2016, p. 90).

3.4.4 Cultural Relations

Having dwelled side by side for over five hundred years, the most profound cultural relationship between the Muslims and the Hindus was formed in Bengal. The Muslim culture had profoundly influenced the beliefs of the Hindus and their social life. The Muslim culture had gradually developed since the arrival of the Muslims in seven hundred Hijri. In 1303 AD, during the Sultanate period, Sufism began to spread with

the appearance of 360 *Auliyas*, including Shah Jalal in Sylhet, an ancient town in Bengal (N. M. Majumder et al., 2018, p. 84). Through the Sufis, Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages spread among the local inhabitants. Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages were combined with the spread of mystical literature with poetry, puthi and palagan. From the beginning of its development, mysticism significantly influenced the public mind. Vaishnava Padavali was born out of the combination of Chaitanyaism and Jaganmohani ideologies and the Vaishnava Padavali was influenced by mysticism literature (M. S. Siddiqui, 2022, p. 135). In mystical literature, there is the concept of union with God in all cases. For example, man is meeting with God, or the soul is meeting with God; this attitude prevails in all this literature. The terms "purbaraga," "anuraga," "banshi," "birah" and "sammilan" of Sufism were directly adopted in Vaishnava terms resulting in harmony between Sufism and Vaischavism despite the fundamental differences in theology (Chandra, 2007). From the religious spirit, some folk Islamic cultural activities were prevalent and spread through Sufi saints in Bengal. However, there were many differences between this culture and the fundamental principles of Islam.

The liberal outlook and religious simplicity of the Muslims made their relations with the Hindus deep and close where the Muslim culture particularly attracted and influenced the Hindu society. Hindus of upper and educated classes wore Muslim dress which was considered a sign of great distinction. Noble Hindu women wore ghagras, kameez, salwars, veils and cholis and styled their hair like Muslim women (Kumar & Walia, 2016, p. 754). Many Muslim women were seen getting used to Indian-style sarees. Later, the saree became the ordinary dress of almost all Bengali women irrespective of whether they were Hindus or Muslims. Only the presence of vermilion on the sinthi and tilak or sandalwood drops on the forehead could identify them as Hindus. Clothes like lungi, fatua and dhoti Punjabi were ordinary attire in Hindu-Muslim societies. Furthermore, Hindus also used various types of perfumes typical of the Muslim communities (Prakash, 2005).

Hindu Kings and Zamindars wore royal robes like Muslim rulers. They wore a rich chapkan with gold fringe and a coat of mail. A turban was worn on the head and above the turban was a bright bird's feather (kanka). A large belt adorned with shiny gold pendants was worn around the waist and a large string hung over the garment (Reza, 2020, p. 180). Hindu Zamindars imitated Muslim rulers' dress, traditions, court ceremonies and etiquette. The King (landlord) sat on a golden throne in the middle of

the court and had a royal umbrella over his head. Hindu Sepoys stood in rows in the royal court with shields on their breasts and swords slung at their belts like Muslim Sepoys. Visitors used to make three *taslims* (three bows) towards the King. In imitation of the Muslims, they built large harems for apartments inside the palace (S. Islam, 1992). Hindu elites, community leaders and teachers used Muslim titles like *Mustafa*, *Mahalanbhash*, *Rai Sahib*, *Sarkar*, *Shikdar*, *Tarafdar*, *Kanungo* and *Majumdar*, which they considered to be of special honour to their personal and family life (Chatterjee, 2010, p. 453).

The Muslim community in Bengal exchanged culture with the Hindu society. The Muslim rulers did not wish to change some of the previous rules and customs of the Hindus but adopted a liberal policy in these matters. Worshiping idols and making or painting and preserving idols in Hindu society is an essentially religious act, whereas Islam does not support drawing or carving models. The Sultans of Bengal prioritized local culture over religious conservatism. They disregarded religious prohibitions and issued coins inscribed with the image of a horseman or the Sun on their coins. The Muslim rulers engraved *kalimahs* on one side of the coin and also painted animal portraits on the same coin. Bakhtiyar Khalji (1204-1206 AD) and Ali Mardan Khalji (1210-1212 AD) engraved designs of equestrian figures on gold coins. The coins of Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah (1435-1459 AD) and Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah (1415-1416 AD and 1418-1433 AD) showed the portrait of a lion (Goron & Goenka, 2001). A coin of Jalaluddin Fateh Shah (1481-1488 AD) showed the symbol of the Sun with seven rays (S. Hasan, 2012, pp. 38–39).

The social and cultural fusion of Muslim and Hindu communities occurred in architecture and art. Matichura Mosque in Rajnagar in the present-day Birbhum district of West Bengal in India was built in Hindu-Muslim eclectic architectural style (Nishant & Das, 2023b, pp. 466–474). The arches of this mosque were completely modeled following Hindu temples. Atiya Mosque in Delduar Upazila of Tangail District, Egar Sindur Mosque in Pakundia Upazila of Kishoreganj District, Chota Sona Mosque in Shibganj in Chapainawabganj District and Boro Sona Mosque in Maldah District of West Bengal in India bear witness to the Indo-Islamic architecture of Bengal. The Sultans of Bengal had made a glorious contribution to the development of calligraphy in Bangladesh. Swimming calligraphy of a swan, the vehicle of Saraswati, is found in Tughra script on the northern wall of Zafar Khan's mausoleum in Triveni, Hooghly

district of West Bengal, India. It was built in 1313 during the reign of Sultan Feroz Shah. It is considered to be the best form of Tughra script (S. Sen, 2017, pp. 213–234). The calligraphy at the Adina Mosque in Pandua in 1374 -76 is another landmark of Arabic calligraphy in Bengal (Alamgir, 2014, p. 263).

Before the arrival of the Muslims, the education system in Bengal was mainly confined to the Brahmins. The Muslim rulers allowed the lower-class Hindus to benefit from the power of the privileged Hindu class. As a result, the way for the intellectual development of the lower Caste Hindus was opened. Muslim rulers gave Hindu scholars and poets a place of honour in their courts and discussed Hindu scriptures with them. Earlier, during Muslim rule, the Sanskrit mystical work of Amritakanda was translated into Arabic and Persian (Parikh, 2015, p. 217). During the Muslim rule, several centres of Sanskrit learning became very prominent. The most famous centre was Navadwip. There were many Tols in Navadwip and thousands of eminent scholars, jurists and professors (Dr. A. Sarkar, 2023, p. 1). The tax-free land that the Muslim rulers used to sponsor Education was not only for Muslim educational institutions but also for Hindu educational institutions (M. T. Islam, 2017, p. 19).

Hindus used to attend religious ceremonies in Sufi Khankas and many Hindu poets identified themselves as devout devotees of the Pir and eulogize the Muslim spiritual saint. Bengali poet Vidyapati sang the praises of many Muslim Pirs, including Bara Khan Ghazi, Zafar Khan Ghazi and Ismail Khan Ghazi (M. A. T. Khan, 2012, p. 32).

3.5 CONCLUSION

Many Arab colonies were established on different coasts of the Indian Sub-Continent in ancient times. The companions of Hazrat Muhammad (s.a.w) came to Bangladesh to preach Islam about six hundred years before the conquest of Bengal by Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad Bin Khilji in 610 AD. Due to commercial contacts, Sufi saints came to preach Islam along with incoming Muslim merchants in 700 AD. In the 9th century, Muslim traders and Sufi saints spread out to various regions including the coastal areas of Bangladesh. The Sufis played a crucial role in the propagation of Islam in Bengal. Their inclusive approach towards people of other religions, polite behaviour and normal lifestyle attracted the Bengalis.

The Muslim rule from 1202-1757 AD was a shaping period in Bengal's socio-cultural and political life. The Muslim rulers of Bengal played an essential role in promoting inter-religious tolerance in the Middle Ages. Most rulers were kind and sympathetic to non-Muslims and did not force non-Muslims to convert to Islam. Islamic brotherhood, egalitarianism, equality and social justice were the main reasons in converting Buddhists and Lower-Caste Hindus to Islam and the development of the Muslim society. Islam is monotheistic and anti-paganistic but Hinduism practice paganism. In the case of rituals, direct contradictions and disputes between both religions are clear. The union of Islam was not easy with the entire opposite culture. Although the Muslims were the rulers, they did not stay away from the Hindus or keep them away. Muslim rulers had appointed them to employ various essential responsibilities in the State. Muslim rulers had appointed them to employ multiple crucial duties in the State. Besides, Muslim rulers had given generous patronage to Hindu scholars and poets and awarded them various titles. Also, the Muslims acquired the trust of the Hindu Kings (Zamindars), resulting in the Hindu Kings (Zamindars) appointing Muslims to various important posts. The Muslim culture profoundly influenced the beliefs of the Hindus and their social life. Hindus deeply respected Muslim Sufis and sought their blessings for multiple problems or good deeds.

Hindus offered shirni (one kind of sweet) and various gifts like Muslims in Sufi dargahs. Many Brahmins of that time were advised to utter the name of Allah at the beginning of their business undertaking. From the 16th to 18th centuries, Mughal architecture and art bore the hallmarks of Hindu-Muslim fusion culture. If there were no deep harmony in the social life between the Muslims and the Hindus then such a comprehensive amalgamation of Hindu-Muslim culture would not have been seen. Their interest in each other's culture paved the way for friendly relations between the two major communities of Bengal. The people of different communities were not classified by their religious identity. Sri Chaitanya, the founder of the reformist movement in Hinduism and the State patronage given to him for his propagation of Vaishnavism, is an excellent example of Muslim tolerance towards people of other faiths. This mutual understanding of the other peoples' culture paved the way in developing social harmony between the two major communities of Bengal. The Muslims and the Hindus were fully integrated into society with equal socio-economic and religious rights.

CHAPTER FOUR

MUSLIMS AND HINDUS IN BANGLADESH: THE CHALLENGES OF MAINTAINING COMMUNAL HARMONY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a multireligious society in which the culture and traditions of each religion have persisted for centuries. The relationship between Muslims and Hindus is a significant historical phenomenon in Bangladesh. The Muslim population of Bangladesh is around 153 million, positioning it as the fourth-largest country in terms of Muslim predominance. Nevertheless, Hinduism is the second-highest religious group in Bangladesh, with about 14 million adherents. Moreover, it is the third-largest Hindu population globally (Population of Bangladesh 2023 | Religion in Bangladesh, 2021). Muslims and Hindus have historically coexisted in Bengal. However, there have been confrontations and riots between the two communities.

The British colonisation officially started on the Indian subcontinent in 1757 with the defeat of Nawab Sirajuddaula in the battle of Palashi. The British's divide-and-rule policy led to a decline in Hindu-Muslim relationships (Sandhu, 2009, p. 62). Communal unrest between Muslims and Hindus escalated in the early 20th century. Subsequently, in 1947, two autonomous countries, India and Pakistan, were formed based on religious affiliation. The establishment of the two countries resulted in the permanent communal animosity between Muslim and Hindu communities, fueled by political factors (G. Pandey, 2001, p. 16). Consequently, India's two most prominent populations experienced a psychological division.

Bangladesh has a rich historical heritage of religious liberty, and harmonious cohabitation facilitated their peaceful coexistence throughout Pakistani rule. Shortly after the nation gained independence in 1971, a contingent of Hindus migrated to India, allegedly leaving due to the predominance of Muslims in the country (Shamshad, 2017, p. 11). Islam unequivocally rejects any religious discrimination and upholds the principle of equality among all individuals since Allah is the creator of humanity. Both men and females, regardless of their religious beliefs, are considered equal in the eyes of Almighty Allah. However, devoutly religious persons are regarded with more

reverence (Maudoodi, 1995, p. 20). Nonetheless, in recent years, specific issues have arisen that have led to confrontations over minority groups in Bangladesh, resulting in an unfavourable situation for these populations. Between 1992 and 2022, over a thousand instances of assaults against minority groups have been recorded, including homicides, deliberate fires targeting residences, destruction of temples, and illegal seizure of property. The persecution of religious minorities in Bangladesh is not attributable to any religious motive but rather stems from political and broader socioeconomic instability.

The nation is embroiled in a controversial debate about the subject of violence, which encompasses many forms, such as political, social, and economic violence. Politics, rather than religion, is the primary catalyst for the violence and oppression faced by religious minorities. In addition, regional geopolitics has a crucial role in determining the approach towards addressing matters such as minority rights, communal unrest, terrorism, religious persecution, radicalism, and related concerns (Sufian, 2022, p. 7). Islamist organisations are unfairly held responsible whenever a minority group is attacked. Most of the time, the public has no idea what causes these situations. Secularists and leftists' control most of Bangladesh's media outlets. The media gives in-depth coverage of things as they happen but distorts the facts when reality takes the stage.

Therefore, this chapter aims to elucidate the historical origins of the Muslim-Hindu conflict in Bangladesh and examine the regional issues and local factors that contribute to violence between Muslims and Hindus in the country. It emphasises that these problems are not solely communal but encompass broader socio-political matters in Bangladesh. Additionally, this research examines the veracity of the participation of Islamic parties in the persecution of minorities in Bangladesh, separating fact from fiction.

4.2 THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE MUSLIM-HINDU CONFLICT

The dethronement of Siraj Ud Daulah at Palashi in 1757 and the downfall of Mir Qasim at the Battle of Buxar in 1764 marked the end of a period of five hundred and fifty years of Muslim governance in Bengal (Chaurasia, 2002, p. 39). Emperor Shah Alam of Delhi granted official sanction of the Diwani, which refers to the tax collection of Bengal, to

the British authority on August 12, 1765 (Garcia, 2020, p. 81). Although Mir Zafar held the title of Nawab in a symbolic capacity, British Lord Clive had complete power over Bengal. The Muslims and Hindus experienced a significant rise in their distance from each other with the expansion of British control in the subcontinent in 1757. Muslims rebelled against the British and tried to have them evicted from the nation once they lost control (Belkacem, 2007, p. 40). Notable events include the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, the Balakot Battle under Syed Ahmad Brelvir, the Faraiji movement under Haji Shariat Ullah and Dudu Mia, and the anti-British struggle under Titumir. As a result of the conflict between the Muslim community and the British, the Hindu community garnered popularity from the British. The British used an unfair and inconsistent strategy of misrepresenting the historical narrative of Muslim governance to instigate hostility among Hindus against Muslims (Belkacem, 2007, p. 33). Despite the Muslim rulers achieving significant achievements over their six hundred years of regime, they also had some drawbacks. British historians produced a fictional past imbued with deceit. They attempted to substantiate the claim that Muslims had dismantled the Hindu faith and culture, as well as defiled the purity of Hindu women. In the book "Indian Muslims," written by WW Hunter, Muslims are portrayed as terrorists, jihadists, and robbers, whereas the Hindu community is described as a civilised and respectful culture (Hunter, 1876). Native Hindu authors, such as Bankim Chandra and Ramesh Dutta, began composing 'historical' novels by drawing inspiration from the fictionalised and inflated accounts provided by British historians (Bhagat-Kennedy, 2016, p. 7). The portrayal depicted Hindus as courageous individuals and Muslims as cowardly oppressors. Ishwar Chandra Gupta began to promote this work by writing poetry that referred to Muslims as 'Nare' and 'Jobon' (S. Ghosh, 2020).

The British officially implemented an initiative to promote hate against Muslims among Hindus. British authorities levied accusations against Hindu writers, contending that their incorporation of Arabic and Persian vocabulary into Bengali undermined the language's integrity and thereby harmed the Hindu language and culture. Christian clergy composed Bengali dictionaries in English to illustrate the presence of Arabic-Persian words found in Bengali. Mritunjay Tarkalankar and Vidyasagar eradicated Arabic and Persian words from the Bengali language to introduce "pure Bengali" (McGuire, 1983). Within a few short years, the terms 'Bengali' and 'gentleman'

came to be interpreted solely in the Hindu context. Conversely, the Muslim community emerged as a vile and untouchable neighbourhood (A. Banerji, 2021, p. 54).

Since the beginning of British rule, Muslims were systematically excluded from all areas of society, including zamindari, employment, and business, with preference given to Hindus. According to statistics of government employees in 1871, Assistant Commissioner Hindus 7, Muslims 0, Income Tax Processors Hindus 43, Muslims 6, Deputy Magistrates and Collectors Hindus 113, Muslims 30, Registration Department Hindus 25, Muslims 2, Munsef Hindus 178, Muslims 38 people (Hunter, 1876, p. 169). The British implemented the Permanent Settlement Act in 1793, which had the most disadvantageous impact on the Muslim population (S. M. S. Alam, 1991, p. 473). This act severely undermined the economic stability of the Muslim elite. The Muslim peasants were dispossessed of their land and willingly became subjugated to the landlords. Landlords' subject peasants to harsh torture and oppression to get revenue. The sunset ordinance caused many Muslim zamindars to lose their zamindari. This legislation states that the zamindari will be auctioned if they don't pay the revenue by the designated sundown on the day. Due to their inability to remit the revenue within the specified timeframe, a considerable number of Muslim zamindaris were subjected to auction and subsequently acquired by Hindu personnel employed in the revenue department of the British government; these individuals assumed the titles of zamindars.

British invasion terminated Bengal's prominent position as a distinguished centre for Islamic education. During the reign of Muslim rulers, numerous educational institutions were founded in this region, starting from Bakhtiar Khilji until Alivardi Khan. During the British occupation, Bengal had a total of eighty thousand educational institutions. Many renowned educational institutions were established in several regions of Bengal, including Dhaka, Sonargaon, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Darsbari, Rangpur, Sylhet, Murshidabad, Gaur, and Pandua. (Mannan, 2006, p. 60). Many students from the Indian subcontinent and beyond came to Bengal educational institutions for higher education. The Education Act of 1835, following the counsel of Lord Thomas Barrington Macaulay, stipulated that educational establishments that were not English schools would not be eligible for financial assistance from the government (Cutts, 1953, p. 824). The British policies and actions led to the rapid destruction of such educational institutions. In addition to the shutdown of Islamic educational institutions, government-sponsored schools and colleges were founded with the support of Christian

missionaries to promote Christianity. The British administration founded the first academic institution in Calcutta in 1817 under the patronage of Raja Rammohan Roy and David Hare. The institution was named a Hindu College, aiming to impart English education to the offspring of esteemed Hindu households (Kochhar, 2011, p. 842). The educational system implemented by the English was entirely in contrast with Muslim ideology in terms of customs and objectives. Before 1841, no colleges were founded in Bangladesh's current geographical region. In 1846, the number of Muslim students in schools and colleges in Dhaka was a mere 18 out of 263 pupils. Following the foundation of Calcutta University in 1857, the number of pupils saw a fivefold expansion within four decades, with most students belonging to the caste Hindu community. Among the 1712 graduates in 1881, the majority, of 1480 individuals, belonged to the Bengali caste Hindu community, while the remaining graduates were from Bihari, Assamese, or Oriya (Mannan, 2006, p. 62). The number of Bengali Muslims did not align with the count figure. Four hundred twenty-three individuals obtained MA degrees in the subcontinent the same year. Of the total number of students, three hundred and forty were Bengali caste Hindus, while the remaining pupils from other parts of India amounted to just eighty-three (Mannan, 2006, p. 63).

As a result of the British's rigorous, long-term planning, significant gaps in education, culture, and economics emerged between the Hindu and Muslim communities in Bengal. The Hindu community-acquired substantial authority through British assistance and assumed prominent roles throughout various areas of society. Simultaneously, the Muslims saw a gradual decline in status across every place. Consequently, a profound psychological divide emerged, fostering religious nationalist feelings among the Muslim and Hindu groups. The Partition of Bengal, which occurred on October 16, 1905, officially established religious nationalism between the Hindu and Muslim societies (Bhatt, 2020, p. 34). As a result of the partition of Bengal, the Muslim community experienced a restoration of their prestige and honour, leading to Dhaka being designated as the capital of the newly formed province of East Bengal and Assam. Multiple businesses formed around Dhaka, and Muslims gained from several advantages. However, the politicians of caste Hindus were concerned that if most of the Bengali-speaking populace in the new East Bengal and Assam Province prospered, it would damage their long-term interests. Fearing a severe loss of their interests, the caste-Hindu zamindars of East Bengal residing in Calcutta launched a

large-scale campaign against the division of Bengal (Aziz, 2002, p. 25). Communal tensions and hatred spread everywhere, and Muslim-Hindu relations got worse significantly. In schools, Hindu pupils refused to sit alongside their Muslim classmates, forcing school administrations to create separate sections for Muslim students. The partition of Bengal resulted in the emergence of Hindu extremists and their engagement in subversive actions throughout India, namely in Bengal, Punjab, and Maharashtra (Silvestri, 2009, p. 12). Muslim leaders commemorated the first anniversary of Bengal's separation on October 16, 1906. Muslim intellectuals and leaders founded the Muslim League in 1906 to oppose the Hindu anti-partition movement (Schimmel, 1980, p. 216). Public gatherings were arranged by Muslim leaders around the country, especially in Dhaka, Momenshahi, Faridpur, and Sylhet. Radical Hindus attempted in several ways to sabotage these public gatherings, and during the Comilla public assembly, Nawab Salimullah was assaulted. Through carrying out terrorist assaults, killings, and assassination attempts, extreme Hindutva fostered a climate of dread throughout the country (N. A. Kabir, 2023, p. 41). There was a plot to kill Governor General Lord Minto of Bengal. The entire country became stuck in a state of deadlock due to the aggressive agitation carried out by extremist Hindus. As a result, on December 12, 1911, the British administration was compelled to rescind the partition of Bengal (Jayapalan, 2001, p. 17). The annulment of the division of Bengal has elicited profound astonishment among Indian Muslim and Bengali Muslim leaders.

On January 31, 1912, Nawab Salimullah and a group of Muslim delegates urged the British administration to build a university to enhance the socio-economic conditions of the Muslim population in East Bengal. In response to the wishes of the Muslim majority in the area, Lord Curzon consented to the proposal to establish the university (Paul, 2022, p. 32). The British Indian state administration made an official declaration on February 2, 1912, endorsing the formation of the university. The formation of Dhaka University faced opposition from extremist Hindus. To safeguard the interests of caste Hindus, a gathering was convened on March 28, 1912, at Gara Ground in Calcutta, specifically to protest against Dhaka University. Also, the Hindus residing in East Bengal expressed their opposition to the foundation of Dhaka University. Various meetings were organised on different dates in different locations, such as Faridpur and Mymensingh on February 11, 1912, Dinajpur on March 23, Rangpur on March 24, Rajshahi on March 26, Comilla on March 28, and Medinipur to

create a negative public perception about of the university (Ahmad, 2002). Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, serving as the Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University at that time, played a significant role in vehemently opposing the foundation of Dhaka University (Paul, 2022, p. 36).

Under the leadership of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, an agreement that came to be known as the Bengal Pact was formed in 1923 to resolve the recurring conflicts that existed between Muslims and Hindus (Bhattacharya, 2014, p. 22). Chittaranjan Das advocated for a Hindu-Muslim union to attain communal harmony and liberation from British dominance. Chittaranjan Das's non-communal ideology garnered support from several figures in Bengal, irrespective of their religious affiliation. The Bengal Pact presented the possibility of eliminating the antagonism and hate between Muslims and Hindus, but it faced strong opposition from the privileged and educated Hindu elite. The first phase of the Bengal Pact was not approved at the Kononada Congress convention because of the objections of radical Hindus. The Bengal Pact was ratified at the Congress' regional convention in Sirajganj in 1924. Deshbandhu passed away in Darjeeling on June 16, 1925, and his demise had a profound impact on the harmony between Muslims and Hindus, resulting in a significant tragedy (R. N. Sen, 1989, p. 71). The Bengal Pact faced strong opposition from the Hindu community, leading to its declaration as void at the Krishnanagar Conference of the Congress on May 22, 1926 (Shamshad, 2017a). The termination of the Bengal Pact extinguished the potential for Muslim-Hindu harmony.

The British Government assigned a three-member British Cabinet mission to India on March 24, 1946, referred to as the Cabinet Mission (Menon, 2015, p. 236). The primary objective of the Cabinet Mission was to put up a plan for the creation of a unified India by fostering cooperation between the Congress and the Muslim League. The Cabinet Mission Plan failed since it lacked unanimity among the leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League. In response to the Cabinet Mission Plan's failure, the Muslim League organised a nationwide demonstration assembly on August 16, 1946, to demand the creation of Pakistan (A. Roy, 1990, p. 386). Although the assembly proceeded without incident in various other regions of the country, it incited extensive communal riots in Tripura, Kolkata, Noakhali, and Assam in Bengal. Communal turmoil expanded across different areas, including Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab, as a reaction to the Bengal incidents (Chakrabarty, 2004, p. 8). The riots, which lasted

for a week, resulted in the deaths of thousands of individuals from Muslim and Hindu communities, causing extensive damage to residential and commercial properties. The date of August 16, 1946, was a Dark day for both the Muslim and Hindu people, as it marked a significant shift in India's understanding of communal relations. Following the unsuccessful outcome of the Cabinet Mission and the violent riots in 1946, the Muslim League revised the 1940 Lahore Resolution to propose the creation of a distinctive independent Muslim country, Pakistan (Sohal, 2017, p. 9). Consequently, the Pakistan movement picked up popularity, and in 1947, Lord Mountbatten consented to the Muslim League's two-nation theory's demand for an independent Pakistan. Finally, on June 3, 1947, the proposal to split British India into two states (India and Pakistan) was announced (K. Iqbal, 2015, p. 32).

The emergence of the Two-nation theory in the subcontinent was a result of the Hindu majority's sectarian mindset towards the Muslims. The Hindu Nationalist Congress consistently obstructed demands and initiatives about the concerns of Muslims. Due to the absence of communal peace in British India, Muslims were compelled to demand a distinct state based on the two-nation doctrine. In the Indian subcontinent, Muslims and Hindus are recognised as separate nationalities, with religion being prioritised above language, race, and cultural traits. Since independence in 1971 till the present time, the volatile politics in Bangladesh has led to the utilisation of religion, religious politics, and minority populations as tools of self-interest by almost all political parties.

4.3 THE LOCAL ISSUES OF MAINTAINING COMMUNAL HARMONY

In recent years, religious communities are facing challenges in maintaining communal harmony in Bangladesh. However, no religious issue is involved in Bangladesh's challenges of religious coexistence. Followers of every religion can practice their religion freely; there is no hindrance in the practice of religion by the state or any other religious community. Communalism in the Indian subcontinent arose from the conflict of socio-economic interest in the Hindu elite society. The concept of communalism was spread in the second half of the 19th century during the British period, which acquired a full political character in the early 20th century among Muslim- Hindu communities. After independence in 1947, the Muslim-Hindu conflict subsided, and after Hindu

supremacy in East Pakistan ended, a non-communal outlook developed rapidly in place of communal politics. Although Pakistan was created based on religious nationality, in the language movement of 1952 and the liberation war of 1971, people of all religions and castes rose above religious identity and participated in the freedom struggle together. In 1971, the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan took full shape as a non-communal state. The Hindu population is 7.95 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh; however, significant numbers of Hindu community members hold in the cabinet, law, judiciary, government bureaucrats, police, RAB, military, industry, culture, and business (Bangladesh Pratidin, 2019). Apart from the ideological political parties of secularism, nationalism, and socialism in Bangladesh, there are Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, Islamic Andolon, and other Islamic political parties, but the Islamic parties are not communal. Their declared goal is to establish governance in the country based on Quran and Sunnah, and they do not say anything offensive against the Hindu community (B. Umar, 2022b). Attacks on the Hindu community are considered communal, but since 1972, looting and violent politics have been ongoing in Bangladesh for 50 years. The way the Hindu community is being attacked, such attacks have been assaulting ethnic groups, including vulnerable Muslims, Santhals, Garos, Chakmas, Marmas, and Tripuras, spreading political influence and looting land, property, and houses. Wherever the Hindu community has been attacked, the attackers appear to be local influencers associated with the ruling party or government (S. I. Chowdhury, 2022). Locally for their political interests and land grabbing and looting, they created the situation and attacked Hindu settlements, temples, and shops. Due to the direct interference of the political party in the judiciary and the police administration, most of the incidents have not been adequately investigated and prosecuted. The unstable socio-political situation, socio-economic factors, violence during elections, lack of the rule of law, and negative impact of fake social media posts on religious harmony are more significant than communalism in violence against the Hindu community in Bangladesh.

4.3.1 Unstable Socio-Political Situation

Bangladesh was born in 1971 through a bloody liberation war, and one of the aspirations of the liberation war was an independent, sovereign, and democratic Bangladesh.

However, on January 25, 1975, through the fourth amendment of the constitution of Bangladesh, the multi-party system of government was abolished, and Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (Bakshal) was formed (Q. M. J. Khan & Husain, 2022, p. 96). With this, less than five years after independence, the state embraced autocracy instead of democracy, one of the popular demands of the freedom struggle. Between 1972 and 1975, Bangladesh saw unprecedented levels of political violence; thirty-seven thousand individuals were killed for political reasons during this period (M. Ahmed, 1988, p. 39). In April 1973, at that time, the home minister presented statistics on the parliament that 2,035 clandestine assassinations of a political nature had taken place in the previous 16 months (M. S. Islam, 2010b, p. 30). Bangladesh's founding president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family died in a bloody coup on August 15, 1975, and Ziaur Rahman came to the centre of power amid various incidents and extreme chaos in Bangladesh's politics and army (S. S. Islam, 1984, p. 556). Violence became a popular culture in the political history of Bangladesh. After August 15, 1975, the political parties could not play their proper role due to the chaotic political environment, and the army was directly involved in the politics of Bangladesh. There were frequent coups and counter-coups throughout Zia's rule, and Zia was criticized for his harsh crackdown on dissent (Ahamed, 1988).

Over 3,000 soldiers and military and civilian officials were extrajudicially killed or disappeared during Ziaur Rahman's tenure (A. Kabir, 2009, p. 30). Moreover, one thousand one hundred forty-three people were hanged in various prisons nationwide for their involvement in a failed military coup on October 2, 1977 (Sayeed, 1994, p. 122). Around 62,000 Awami League and other opposition leaders and activists were arrested (Sayeed, 1994). Ziaur Rahman was killed in a military coup in Chittagong on May 30, 1981 (Paxton, 2016, p. 187). On March 24, 1982, General Ershad overthrew Justice Sattar and seized power and, banning politics in the country, imposed military rule for the second time in Bangladesh and declared himself the chief army ruler. In 1983, 1986, 1987, and 1990, there were intense protests against Hussain Muhammad Ershad, and he suppressed dissent with lethal force. In that movement, about 370 people were killed by the state forces, and many people were disabled and disappeared (khuda, 2021). In 1990, a mass movement led to General Ershad announcing his resignation on December 4, and he was forced to resign officially on December 6 (Riaz, 2016, p. 39). After the fall of the Ershad government, then Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed took over as the

interim president based on the consensus of all parties. The fifth national parliament election was held in 1991 under Shahabuddin Ahmed, and BNP formed the government under the leadership of Khaleda Zia in the 1991 Bangladesh general election. Khaleda Zia's government transitioned Bangladesh from military rule and dictatorship regime to full democracy, but supporters of political parties often abducted, tortured, and killed the other party's supporters. In 1995 alone, there were more than 5,000 political violence incidents, and 60,000 crimes were recorded, including 1,300 murders, 1,100 kidnappings, and 2,900 cases of torture (Moniruzzaman, 2009, p. 94). Besides, 25 students were killed in the same year due to a student clash, and 24 colleges and universities closed (Moniruzzaman, 2009, p. 94).

Khaleda Zia's cabinet was dissolved in 1996 amid violent protests, and a caretaker system was constitutionalized. Sheikh Hasina came to power in 1996 through elections under the caretaker government, and Awami League's rule in Bangladesh broke all records of misrule and terrorism in contemporary history. According to the report of Bangladesh Police Headquarters, from June 1996 to July 2001, 19,285 people were killed in 53,300 incidents of violence in 64 districts (Dr. M. Ullah, 2001, p. 38). On July 15, 2001, Sheikh Hasina handed over power to former Chief Justice Latifur Rahman after a five-year term. The BNP-led four-party coalition government was in power for five years after getting a two-thirds majority in the 2001 elections (Rashiduzzaman, 2002, p. 183). Much more severe political violence persisted under the coalition government led by the BNP from 2001 to 2006. The Awami League-led antigovernment campaign was the leading cause of the violence at the time. Two thousand three hundred eighty-nine persons were reported killed and 64,942 injured due to political violence in Bangladesh from 2001–2006 (Moniruzzaman, 2009, p. 86).

An extensive political crisis was created after the expiry of the BNP, as the Awami League-led coalition demanded a neutral candidate to become the chief adviser. President Yazuddin Ahmed took over as the chief adviser. Still, on January 7, President Yazuddin Ahmed announced the emergency and resigned from the post of chief adviser in the face of pressure from Army Chief General Moin U Ahmed. Former Governor of Bangladesh Central Bank, Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, was appointed chief adviser to the caretaker government. The emergency continued for two years, and a military-backed interim government ruled the country for two years (Sreeradha, 2009, p. 2). National elections were held under Fakhruddin-Mainuddin's government on December 28, 2008,

and the Awami League-led coalition won significant margin elections. Although the Awami League formed the government through periodic elections, a culture of political violence persisted through violence against political opponents, the press, and dissent. Bangladesh has been governed under Hasina's hybrid regime through disputed elections in 2014 and 2018 (Riaz, 2021, p. 212). Due to the hybrid regime, the law-and-order situation rapidly deteriorated with state-led violence against citizens, resulting in countless killings, extrajudicial killings, abductions, and rapes. From 2009 to 2020, more than 129478 political incidents occurred; over 2221 people were killed, and 127257 were injured in political violence (Odhikar, 2020). Furthermore, between 2009 and 2020, a total of 587 persons were picked up by members of law enforcement agencies. Among them, the whereabouts of 149 persons still disappeared, 81 disappeared, then found dead, and 357 surfaced alive (Odhikar, 2021).

The social decay that began in 1971 due to the lack of competent political leadership and political stability in a war-torn country continues today. Social, political, and economic factors are directly involved in the degradation of values because a lack of social discipline and a culture of impunity is one of the factors of social degradation. Consequently, Bangladesh currently gains a 'rape culture'; a 'rape culture' refers to a culture where every woman, child, or adolescent girl in society can be a victim of rape (Hayes, 2023, p. 8). Children, teenagers, students, homemakers, and older women are being raped nationwide. The rape rate in Bangladesh is 10 per lakh, and Bangladesh ranks 62nd in the world. (Rape Statistics by Country 2023, 2023) According to police statistics, there were 5400 rape cases in Bangladesh in 2019 (Rony, 2020). According to this data, the rape rate in Bangladesh is 3.80; that is, about four women and children out of every 1 lakh women and children have been victims of rape, which is the highest in the history of memory (Rony, 2020). A total of 9593 women and children were raped from 2009 to 2020. Among them, 3419 were women, 5978 were girls under 18, and 196 were female individuals whose age was unknown (Odhikar, 2021). Furthermore, 756 of the raped women died after rape, 2797 were victims of gang rape, and 90 committed suicide (Odhikar, 2021). Mehdi Hasan Palash has closely observed 'minority politics' in Bangladesh for the past three decades. Palash has observed and investigated hundreds of incidents in twenty-two districts. According to Palash, a Hindu woman, a Bagerhat PC College student and a Rampal resident, had her husband tied up and gang-raped by miscreants in front of her eyes. The victim and her husband said the rapists were all

acquaintances from the same community (Palash, 2021). Still, the media masked the religious identity of the rapists and headlined them as minority abuse.

The incidence of isolated attacks against the Hindu community in Bangladesh is mainly related to ruling parties and occurs near the police. On December 9, 2012, from 9 am to 9:30 am, Bishwajit Das was brutally killed by the Chhatra League activists in front of hundreds of people and members of law enforcement and journalists on camera, suspecting him to be an activist of Islami Chhatra Shibir in Dhaka city (Moneruzzaman, 2017). Biswajit worked as a tailor in his brother's trailer shop in Dhaka's Shankhari Bazar. On December 9, 2012, the 18-party coalition led by the BNP announced a blockade program against the government. In support of this program, antigovernment lawyers took out a procession from the old Dhaka Judge Court around 9 am. When the march approached Victoria Park, leaders and activists of Chhatra League, the government party student organization of Jagannath University, and Kabi Nazrul Government College attacked the lawyers. At that time, Biswajit Das was walking across the Jagannath University premises, and BCL activists started hitting him. He repeatedly tried to escape, but the leaders and activists of the Chhatra League kept chasing him. As he fell unconscious on the ground, the killers left, and doctors declared him dead when he was taken to the hospital. In another sensational incident in Bangladesh, advocate Palash Kumar Roy, arrested in a defamation case against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, was burnt to death in Panchagarh District Jail on April 26, 2019 (Swapan, 2019). Palash was a former legal officer at Kohinoor Chemicals, and Kohinoor Chemical authorities filed a case against Palash. Palash and his family staged a hunger strike in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office on March 25. They produced a human chain in front of Sher-e-Bangla Park to demand the withdrawal of the false case, and Palash was arrested on the charge of insulting the Prime Minister from this human chain. Advocate Palash and his family were associated with Awami League, the ruling party of Bangladesh. Palash Kumar Roy was the founders' general secretary of Hindu Chhatra Mahazot and nominated vice chairman candidate of Atwari Upazila Awami League. His mother was elected vice chairman of the Awami League party candidate of the same upazila. Before Palash died, he named three conspirators in the murder: Jahangir Alam, Joint Secretary of Home Ministry, Mohammad Rezaul Karim, Managing Director of Kohinoor Chemicals, and Ajit Kumar Pal, Additional Secretary, of Finance Ministry (Guhu, 2019).

On February 16, 2022, a thirty-five-year woman Shahnaz Parveen Jotsna was raped and strangled to death by her Hindu neighbour's medicine businessmen Jitesh Chandra Gop, Anjit Chandra Gop, and Asit Chandra Gop in Jagannathpur upazila of Sunamganj district (The Daily Jugantor, 2022). On February 16, Jotsna goes to Jitesh's pharmacy to buy medicine for her illness, and Jitesh gives Jotsna sleeping pills, which make Jotsna sleep. Then Jitesh and his two accomplices, Anjit and Asit, raped her. Jotsna was strangled to death when she tried to tell everyone about the rape; Jotsna's arms, legs, chest, and stomach were cut into six pieces with a knife.

On May 26, 2022, Tisha Akhter, a nine-year-old student in 2nd grade of Shaheed Cadet Academy, daughter of Md. Abu Bhuiyan of Bande Bhatpara village of Basail Upazila of Tangail district was gang-raped and killed by her Hindu neighbours Vijay Sarkar, Chanchal Chandra Mandal, and Govinda Mandal (A. A. Noman, 2022). On May 26, Tisha's mother left Tisha alone at home and went to work outside. As no one was at home, the rapists entered Tisha's room and raped her in turn, and Tisha lost consciousness due to the rape. The rapists tied a veil around Tisha's neck to hide the incident, hung her from the room's ceiling fan, and escaped. Later on, May 28, Tisha died while undergoing treatment in the hospital.

According to The Asia Foundation report, repression against religious minorities in Bangladesh (2007–2015) stated that from 2007 to 2015, 6 people were killed, 1,401 were injured, and 16 women were raped (The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia, 2017a). In comparison, a statistic was done by the "Odhikar," a renowned human rights organization in Bangladesh. To the report, from 2009 to 2020, 2221 people were killed, and more than .01 million people were injured by political violence. Furthermore, at least 9593 women and children were raped from 2009 to 2020. Besides, among the rape victims, 756 women and children were killed after the incidents (Odhikar, 2021). Murder, rape, torture, land grabbing, and looting crimes occur as part of political and social crimes in Bangladesh. Politically influential people continue to oppress and exploit the weak and the opposition. People of all communities, regardless of Hindu-Muslim, are affected in the country. When the people of the Hindu community are attacked, it is presented as a coordinated attack through statements, meetings, and processions without reviewing the overall situation in Bangladesh.

4.3.2 Violence in the Parliamentary Electoral Period

The Bangladesh electoral system has been plagued by violence since the country's independence in 1971. Political parties often engage in violent activities to undermine their opponents, intimidate voters, and influence election outcomes. Such violent incidents are commonplace during both the pre- and post-electoral periods in parliament and local government elections. The variances in political ideologies and the pervasiveness of illicit activities and misconduct within the ranks of politicians and bureaucrats represent significant factors contributing to electoral violence in Bangladesh. The first parliamentary election in Bangladesh was held on March 7, 1973, and the last eleventh parliamentary election was held on December 30, 2018. Although the term of each parliament is five years, out of 11 parliaments, five could not complete their time due to various reasons, including political instability.

Bangladesh's first national parliamentary election on March 7, 1973, marked a historic event in the nation's political history. The Awami League emerged victorious, securing a sweeping majority of 292 out of 300 parliamentary seats (Maniruzzaman, 1975, p. 893). However, the election was marred by extensive violence, thus undermining its democratic legitimacy. Notably, 11 members of the National Parliament were elected unopposed, indicating the unrest political environment surrounding the election. Bangladesh's independence was achieved with much hope. However, the first national parliamentary election was characterized by severe limitations on voters' freedoms, and they could not vote freely in the first elections. The main reason behind the widespread violence and electoral malpractices observed during the 1973 election was the ruling party's concerted effort to secure an absolute victory. The Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) was the main opposition party in the first Parliamentary Elections of Bangladesh. As a result, their leaders and supporters were the primary targets of the pervasive electoral violence during this period. Government data reveals the extent of this violence, with the period between January 1972 and June 1973 recording over 2,000 secret killings, 337 kidnappings, 190 rapes, and 4,907 dacoities. Shockingly, an additional 4,925 people lost their lives at the hands of miscreants during this same period, indicating the severity of the situation (Noorana, 2015, p. 128). The desperation of the problem is further highlighted by the fact that in just five months of 1973, sixty police stations were looted for arms, a clear indication of the prevailing lawlessness during this period (Jahan, 1974).

The second national parliamentary election in Bangladesh was conducted on February 18, 1979, with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) emerging victorious by securing 207 out of the 300 seats in the National Assembly (Obaidullah, 2019, p. 35). Nevertheless, the electoral process was plagued by an onslaught of violence that disrupted both the pre-election campaign and the polling day. There were widespread reports of voter intimidation, ballot-box stuffing, and voter impersonation, casting a shadow over the election's credibility. In the aftermath of the election, a spate of violence ensued, including assassination, looting, shooting, kidnapping, hostage-taking, dacoity, and murder, causing significant upheaval in the country. It is estimated that nearly 150 individuals died due to violence in the run-up to the election (Noorana, 2015). At the same time, political rallies were targeted, election offices and polling stations were vandalized, and arson was committed.

In 1986, the third national parliamentary election was held in Bangladesh, and Jatiya Party emerged victorious, winning 153 seats. However, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) boycotted the election, and instead, 13 other political parties participated and won 115 seats (Liton, 2010). Throughout both the 1979 and 1986 elections, there were various instances of violence stemming from the antigovernment movement. On the day of the election in 1986, at least 29 people were killed, and over 500 were injured (Noorana, 2015, p. 129). Additionally, polling was suspended in 173 centres, and the parliament's term was limited to 17 months.

On March 3, 1988, the fourth national parliamentary election was held. Most of the political parties, including Awami League and BNP, boycotted the election, and as a result, Jatiya Party won by getting 251 seats. A total of six political parties participated in the polls, and this parliament's term was two years and seven months (Huque & Hakim, 1993, p. 257). That election before the election, the government enforced section 144 and declared a ban on anti-election activities and propaganda. On the Election Day violence, about 5 persons were killed, and more than hundreds were injured; polls were postponed in 170 centres in bomb explosions voting centres (Mannan, 2005, p. 100).

Following the overthrow of dictator Hussain Muhammad Ershad, the fifth parliamentary election was conducted on February 27, 1991, under an interim government. Virtually all political parties, including the two principal factions, Awami

League and BNP, participated in the electoral process. BNP emerged victorious, securing 140 seats in the parliament (Baxter & Rahman, 1991, p. 687). This election marked the inauguration of a democratic system of governance in Bangladesh and was the first to be held under an interim government. Notably, instances of electoral violence were fewer than in previous elections, and the polling day transpired in a peaceful and tranquil manner, with only one casualty reported. Thirty-four polling stations were suspended due to the violence, and 39 fatalities and 1,090 injuries were recorded the day before and after the poll's day (Noorana, 2019, p. 131).

The sixth national parliamentary election occurred on February 15, 1996, amid political unrest. BNP achieved a resounding victory, securing 278 seats, but the term of this parliament lasted for only 11 days (Serajul, 2001, p. 166). Most political parties chose to boycott the election held under the party government, resulting in only three parties participating in the electoral process. Notably, on election day, the violence marred the peaceful conduct of the election, resulting in the loss of 66 lives, including four police officers, and injuries to thousands of individuals (M. S. Rahman, 2021, p. 7). As with prior elections, the human and material losses were substantial. As a result, electoral violence undermined the conditions for free and fair elections.

The seventh national parliament election was conducted on June 12, 1996; in this election, the Awami League won 146 seats (Kochanek, 1997, p. 139). It was the first National parliamentary election held under caretaker governance. The election featured eight political parties; this parliament's tenure was five years. The nature of the violence during and before the seventh parliamentary election was the same as that during the sixth parliamentary election. Most conflicts that occurred before, on Election Day, and following the polls involved AL and BNP. As a result, thousands of people were hurt, and 26 individuals perished (M. S. Rahman, 2021, p. 8).

On October 1, 2001, the eighth national parliamentary election was held. In this election, 19 political parties participated, and the BNP emerged victorious with 193 seats (Rashiduzzaman, 2002, p. 186). Pre-election violence in the elections for the Eighth National Assembly was so severe that it was impossible to hold the polls in a civilized atmosphere. The situation became critical after fights between BNP and Awami League workers. Daily occurrences included murders, assaults on electoral processions, attacks on candidates, and destroying election camps. Within 35 days of

the election schedule release, 124 fatalities and 6,000 injuries were documented (Noorana, 2019, p. 131). During the election day violence, five people were killed, and almost 500 were injured. According to Election Commission sources, polling has been suspended in 137 of the country's 29 thousand 848 voting stations. Regarding post-election violence, the eighth parliamentary elections were more violent than previous ones, with around 39 people murdered and thousands injured nationwide (M. S. Rahman, 2021, p. 9).

Consistent electoral violence jeopardizes the environment for free and fair elections. As a result, the 2006 elections were cancelled by declaring a state of emergency throughout the country (A. H. M. Kabir, 2018, p. 111). The emergency government closed the offices of all political parties in the country, and interior and outdoor political gatherings were prohibited for an extended period. After two years of rule by Chief Advisor Fakhruddin Ahmad in the unelected caretaker government, the Ninth National Assembly elections were held on December 29, 2008. The election saw the participation of ten political parties, with the Awami League winning with 230 seats (N. Ahmed, 2011, p. 145). The level of violence in the ninth parliamentary election was low compared to prior parliamentary elections in Bangladesh. On pre- and post-election days, only five people were murdered, and 331 were injured (M. S. Rahman, 2021, p. 11).

Bangladesh's 10th National Assembly elections were conducted on January 5, 2014. Most parties, including the main opposition BNP, boycotted the election, while Sheikh Hasina's Awami League ran alongside 17 other political parties. The Awami League won 154 of the 300 unopposed seats and formed the government (Riaz, 2014, p. 119). One hundred and seventeen people were killed, and 5335 were injured in violent incidents around the country in the days leading up to and following the election (M. S. Rahman, 2021, p. 13).

On December 30, 2018, the 11th National Parliament election was held, and the 2018 parliamentary elections also were marked by violence, with at least 29 people murdered and more than 13280 injured (M. S. Rahman, 2021, p. 14). The opposition parties boycotted the election, claiming it was manipulated on voting day. The Awami League was elected to the National Parliament with 259 seats (Safi et al., 2018).

Bangladesh's history of parliamentary elections has been characterized by violence, intimidation, and electoral malpractice. The prevalence of violence in parliamentary elections has led to low voter turnout, rigged election results, and loss of lives and property. It has significantly impacted the country's political landscape and social harmony among citizens. The deleterious consequences of such electoral challenges extend beyond the immediate political sphere, casting a shadow over the nation's prospects for sustained socio-economic development and fostering a need for comprehensive electoral reforms.

4.3.3 Electoral Violence Against the Hindu Community in Bangladesh

The Hindu community in Bangladesh, which comprises a minority population, has faced electoral violence during several elections. The community has been targeted by political parties, which aim to disrupt the election process and suppress the minority vote. In many cases, Hindu voters have been prevented from casting their ballots, leading to low voter turnout and rigged election results. Additionally, there have been physical attacks on Hindu voters to intimidate them into not voting. In the wake of Bangladesh's independence, numerous Hindu communities have actively participated in both national and local constituency elections. This enduring commitment to the democratic process is evidenced by the consistent engagement of Hindu minorities in the electoral landscape. Notably, historical data reveals a progressive representation: 15 minority members were elected in 1973, followed by 8 in 1979, 6 in 1986, 4 in 1988, 12 in 1991, 15 in 1996, 12 in 2001, 16 in 2008, 17 in 2014, and a notable increase to 18 members in 2018 (Muenuddin, 2022, p. 55). This sustained involvement underscores the integral role of Hindu communities in shaping the political narrative of the nation over the years. The large-scale electoral violence affected the Hindu community in the 2001 and 2014 parliamentary elections. Notably, post-electoral violence was observed to be more severe than pre and election-time violence (Parvez, 2018, p. 52). After the National parliament elections on October 1, 2001, opposition leaders and activists were tortured in various parts of the country. After the Awami League government came to power in 2009, Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB) filed a writ petition in the High Court to identify and punish those involved in the torture incident. On May 6, 2009, the High Court ordered the government to investigate the 2001 torture

allegations (Preetha, 2016). The commission was formed about nine and a half years after the incident was explored for about a year and submitted a report of 1 thousand 78 pages to the Ministry of Home Affairs. While the report mentions more than 18,000 incidents of violence, the commission investigates 3,625 incidents (R. Karim, 2021). In 2001, this episode of violence commenced 15 days before the polls on October 1 and persisted until approximately October 27. Over this period, the Hindu community was subjected to a staggering number of about 330 incidents of violence (Mohsin, 2002, p. 485). Similar violence was observed in the 2014 election when Hindu-owned homes and businesses were damaged. The Christian community in Bangladesh was also targeted. Overall, 2014 election, at least 500 individuals and 5335 were injured, including voters, party workers, election officers, and security forces, who died during the tumultuous election (Papri & Ghatack, 2018).

The primary drivers of such acts of violence on the Hindu community are purely political and not communal. After the election, the Hindu community is considered Awami League's voting block, causing them to suffer the wrath of the BNP and other parties (S. Datta, 2002, p. 317). Sometimes abused by Awami League activists because the Awami League believes local Hindus did not vote as predicted, and in some cases, terrorists use the situation for extortion and looting. The Hindu community, which bore the brunt of the aforementioned electoral violence, believes that the attacks were orchestrated by a specific group of individuals affiliated with the political party that emerged victorious in the election. While it is inaccurate to implicate the Muslim community in perpetuating such acts, the affected Hindu community's perception underscores the complex interaction of religion, politics, and violence in the country.

4.3.4 Socio-Economic Factor

During the British period in Bangladesh, there were two classes in the society, the rich and the poor or the zamindar and the subjects. The British artificially created a middle class in Calcutta by changing the economic status of some people with whom they had close relations. After the partition of Bengal in 1905, the rise of the middle class in Bangladesh started, and later on, the abolition of the division of Bengal declined somewhat. Since the creation of Pakistan, the middle class has spread rapidly. During Pakistan, the middle class was limited to lawyers, law clerks, primary and secondary

school teachers, small shopkeepers, low-level government and private jobs, and small businesses. They did not own large land or large industrial companies, and when Bangladesh became independent, there was no well-organized and robust middle class. Behind the independence of 1971, there was a qualitative change in the life of the middle class, and they became part of the power in the politics of Bangladesh. Once in ability, they began to acquire wealth through massive looting (B. Umar, 2022a, p. 11). Between 1972 and 1975, unprecedented anarchy took place in Bangladesh. The ruling political party Awami League and people related to them in various ways acquired enormous wealth quickly through massive looting, corruption, and terrorism. Under the political umbrella, vested interests oppress Bengali Muslims, Bengali minority communities, and other ethnic groups and occupy their lands. This plot has happened consistently during every government, and the land grabbing of others by illegal seizure is a big problem irrespective of town and village. Serious criminal offences such as fighting, encroachment, murder, abduction, or rape also occur due to disputes over possessing other people's land. According to the BBC Report 2022, the number of pending cases in Bangladesh is about 4 million, and a large part of these cases, about 60 per cent, are related to land disputes (Akhter, 2022).

The partition of British India in 1947 and the Indo-Pak war of 1965 led to a mass exodus of Hindus and Muslims from India and Pakistan. During this time, the properties left behind by the citizens were declared enemy property and seized by the governments of India and Pakistan. In the 1962 war between China and India, India was miserably defeated by China, and in 1962 India first passed the Enemy Property Act 1962. After the Indo-Pakistani war in 1965, Enemy Property Act 1968 was promulgated in India in 1968 (S. Umar, 2019, p. 7). According to this law, the property of citizens who left India during the war period to China or Pakistan was confiscated as enemy property. Enemy Property Act 1962 rules expired in India in 1971, but Enemy Property Act 1968 is still in force (Nag, 2022, p. 350). In 2017, the Enemy Property Act 1968 was amended, and a terrible provision was made with retrospective effect (Ayub, 2022). As a result, if someone's parents or extended family members emigrate to a country that is an enemy of India, like China or Pakistan, even if that person is an Indian citizen, the government can seize his property as Enemy Property.

1965 during the Indo-Pak War, the Government of Pakistan issued the Defense of Pakistan Ordinance 1965 and the Defense of Pakistan Rules 1965, declaring a state

of emergency and martial law. A state of emergency was in force under the Defense of Pakistan Ordinance 1965 from September 9, 1965, to February 16, 1969 (Panday, 2016, pp. 384–385). At that time, the Hindus who left Pakistan and moved to India, their abandoned property listed as 'enemy property.' According to government records, the country has 643,140 acres of enemy property (Feldman, 2017, p. 471). Most of this property is occupied by leaders of various political parties in Bangladesh. After the independence of Bangladesh in 1974, the Awami League government changed the name of Enemy Property to Vested Property. The Vested Property Act is one of the causes of persecution and an exodus of the Hindu community in Bangladesh. The dominant class often forced the landowner to migrate by fear of arms, threats, murder, rape, and intimidation. Due to the provisions of this law, influential circles have obtained fake degrees with fake documents or seized these properties by force. The highest number (37%) of ceded property grabs in the post-1947 period involved the Muslim League. Beneficiaries in later independent Bangladesh are 45% associated with BNP, 31% with Awami League, and 14% with other political parties (Barkat, 2011, p. 109).

In 2001, 'the Vested Property Return (Repeal) Act 2001' was promulgated to return these entrusted properties to the original owners or heirs. Although the act has been modified and amended several times over the years, it has not been able to play an influential role due to a lack of political will and transparency in administration. The process of transfer of vested property under this act started in 2010. In this process, about two lakh cases have been filed nationwide, and about 20,000 patients have been settled, but no single claimant has been handed over to the property (Karmkar, 2016).

Not only the Hindu community is the victim of land grabbing in Bangladesh, but the generally vulnerable people and ethnic groups are facing similar problems from the dominant people of all religions. After the country's independence, many ordinary people's lands have been illegally encroached upon by listing them as "Vested Properties," the victims continue to file court cases year after year to recover their lands. From December 16, 1971, a planned conspiracy against the non-Bengali Urdu-speaking Bihars of Bangladesh began to take effect. Urdu-speaking industrialists, elites, and ordinary citizens of West Pakistan living in Bangladesh left behind valuable abandoned properties, fearing their lives' insecurity (Haider, 2018, p. 26S). According to the government's derelict property records, the country has 6,074 acres and 10,347 derelict houses (M. Hasan, 2016). To manage these assets, the government enacted a law in

1918 called the Bangladesh Abandoned Property (Control, Management, and Disposal) Act-2018. According to this Act, any property belonging to a citizen of a state engaged in a war or military conflict with the People's Republic of Bangladesh at any time after March 25, 1971, shall be deemed to be abandoned property. The government took complete control of the abandoned property by enacting this law. After the war, the Urdu speakers trapped in Bangladesh lost their homes, and approximately 3 lakh Urdu-speaking Biharis lived in inhumane conditions in 116 camps in the country (Haider, 2016, p. 430).

More than 1.5 lakh ethnic people of about 38 ethnicities live in 16 districts of the Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions of the North part of Bangladesh (Hannan, 2009). More or less, all of these ethnic groups are victims of land terrorism. Among the various small ethnic groups, the Santals are the most affected by land problems—those who have lost three lakh acres of land in the last three generations. In Nawabganj Upazila of Dinajpur District, local influencers have tortured, killed, and displaced Santal's purpose of land grabs. Local influentials killed ten people of the Santal ethnic group at different times due to land grabbing (Habib, 2015). Fagu Saren had 108 acres of land and was a resident of Kachua Darkamari village in Nawabganj Upazila. Local influencers killed Fagu Saren and his two sons Gosai Saren and Dhudu Saren, one by one over the past three decades to take over Fagu Saren's land. In 1964 Fagu Saren was killed; in 2011, Fagu Saren's son Gosai Saren was hacked to death in the dark of night, and on August 2, 2014, another son Dhudu Saren was killed, and almost all their lands were taken over (BBC News Bangla, 2016). In another sensational incident, on August 18, 2000, in Bhimpur Santal village of Mahadevpur upazila of Naogaon district, the influential Hindu land grabber Shithesh Chandra Bhattacharya alias Gadai and local Aoimi League leader Hatim Ali attacked with the intention of eviction from the land in Santal village (S. Hossain, 2022). They vandalized, looted, and set fire to the houses of 11 families. About 30 people, including tribal women and children, were seriously injured in the attack, and Santal leader Alfred Saren was hacked to death (S. Hossain, 2022). Land grabbing in Bangladesh is a social problem; land grabbers use religion and political identity as tools. In Padua Union of Rangunia Upazila of Chittagong District, Buddhist monk Sharanankar Ther occupied more than 100 acres of land over seven-eight years, including government forest land, privately owned land of local Muslims, eviction of Hindu crematories, and encroachment of Radhakrishna Temple since 2012 in the name

of construction of Buddhist monastery (Dainikrangpur, 14 November, 2020; Prothomalo, 18 October, 2020).

Bangladesh's intricate socio-economic factors, including historical legacies, political manoeuvres, and legal frameworks, have contributed to a complex landscape of land-related issues. Efforts such as the Vested Property Return (Repeal) Act 2001 aimed at returning properties to their original owners have faced challenges due to a lack of political will and transparency. Moreover, vulnerable populations, including various minority groups, continue to face land-related issues, with instances of violence, displacement, and human rights abuses.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that combines legal reforms, political will, and social awareness to ensure justice and equitable access to land for all citizens.

4.3.5 The Negative Impact of Social Media Fake Posts on Religious Harmony

Several significant attacks on the Hindu community have occurred in Bangladesh in the past decade. Almost every year, there has been a succession of these conspiratorial attacks, and the origin and narrative of each episode are the same (M. S. Ali, 2023). The conspiratorial group posted pictures or writings insulting Islam on Facebook. They spread among the ordinary people and gathered people to attack the houses and temples of Hindus and loot them extensively. Each attack has been led by local influential and political leaders, who are mainly related to the ruling party and the government in various ways.

On November 2, 2013, there was an attack on the Hindu community in Bangram of Santhia Upazila of Pabna district due to spreading rumours about the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) on Facebook. According to the details of the incident, a Facebook ID named Rajib Saha posted offensive writings about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and an offensive cartoon of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). A page photocopy of the Facebook post was circulated in the neighbourhood, and outrage erupted. At one stage, the agitated crowd blocked the Dhaka-Pabna highway and started protesting. Then some youths attacked Ghoshpara and Sahapara of Bangram village next to the road and vandalized about 25 houses and two temples of the Hindu community (Topu,

2013). According to the investigation report, Rajib Saha was a 10th-standard student of Haji Jasim Uddin High School, Miyapur, and does not use Facebook. His father, Babul Saha, is an uneducated man who has no idea about Facebook.

In Comilla 2014, a similar incident happened on April 27; two individuals of the Hindu faith residing in Bak Sitarampur village of Homna Upazila in Comilla made derogatory remarks about the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on the social media platform Facebook. Subsequently, tensions escalated, and there were attacks on Hindu households in Sitarampur village following rumours of the insults. These attacks resulted in extensive damage, with twenty-eight homes, including two temples, being vandalized (M. S. Ali, 2020, p. 3). Additionally, the assailants looted cash and gold ornaments from the affected households. According to the police investigation report, these two people from the Hindu community had nothing to do with this post on Facebook.

On October 29, 2016, a Hindu youth named Rasraj from Harinber village of Nasirnagar upazila was handed over to the police after he complained of insulting Islam on Facebook. A Facebook profile in his name uploaded a picture of the Hindu god Shiva with the Kaaba. The next day, at least one hundred houses were vandalized, looted, and set on fire in eight Hindu neighbourhoods from two gatherings at the upazila headquarters (R. Hasan & Hridoy, 2020). Then on November 4 and November 13 again, at least six houses of Hindus were set on fire in Upazila Sadar. According to the police investigation report, the ID in the name of illiterate Rasraj is fake. The forensic report also confirmed that no status was given on Facebook from Rossraj's mobile.

On November 5, 2017, Titu Chandra Roy of Harkali Thakurpara village of Gangachra Upazila of Rangpur alleged that he posted insulting Islam on Facebook. On November 10, thousands of angry people gathered and protested in several areas, including Shaley Shah, Balapara of the upazila, based on a rumour of an insulting post on Facebook. At that time, the protesters burnt down at least 30 houses of eight Hindu families in Harkali Thakurpara village. When the police fired rubber bullets and tore gas to stop the attackers, one person named Habibur Rahman was killed, and 20 others were injured (The Daily Star, 11 November 2017).

On October 20, 2019, in Borhanuddin, Bhola, a young man named Biplab Chandra Vaidya was accused of spreading insulting words about the Holy Prophet

(PBUH) on his Facebook messenger. Biplab Chandra filed a general diary (GD) at Borhanuddin police station on October 18 that his Facebook ID had been hacked. On the morning of October 20, a rally was held at the Borhanuddin Eidgah grounds to protest against the denigration of the Prophet of Islam on social media. At one point, the police clashed with those who came to the rally, and four protestors were killed and hundreds injured in police firing (Tuhin, 2019). During this time, a Hindu temple was vandalized, a business owned by a Hindu man was attacked, and unidentified persons attacked eight houses and set two places on fire.

On March 16, 2021, Jhumon Das of Noagaon village of Shalla upazila of Sunamganj posted a status on his Facebook page mocking Mamunul Haque, the leader of Hefazate Islam. When the matter came to the attention of the locals, people became angry. The next day on March 17, they held a protest rally in the local Darain market. During this time, tens of thousands of people attacked the Hindu-dominated village of Noagaon, vandalizing 88 houses and eight family temples and carrying out extensive looting (D. Chowdhury & Shanto, 2021).

During Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of Hindus in 2021, the National Emergency Service 999 received a report early in the morning on October 13 that a Quran was placed at the feet of an idol inside the Puja Mandap at Nanuardighi in Comilla town. Instantly, the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police brought the Quran from the spot. However, around 10 am, a picture of the Ganesha idol placing the Quran near its knees went viral on social media, and within a short time, many people gathered there. At one point, the crowd stormed the puja mandap and vandalized the makeshift stage and idols (S. Roy & Singh, 2023, p. 4). Preliminary investigations by the Comilla police revealed that a young man named Iqbal brought a Quran and placed it at the feet of the mandapam statue. The next day they went live on Facebook again and excited everyone. After that, tension and violence spread across the country, and there were attacks on houses and temples of Hindus in several districts, including Rangpur, Chandpur, Sylhet, and Kishoreganj. There was a massive clash between the protesters and the police; in this clash, five people were killed, and more than 100 people were injured (The Daily Star, 2021). On October 16, three Hindu-dominated villages of Ramnathpur Union of Pirganj Upazila of Rangpur District were attacked on charges of alleged offensive comments on the Kaaba Sharif image on Facebook. During this time, Hindu houses, business establishments, and temples were

attacked, vandalized, arson, and looted; about 20 homes and shops were burnt (The Business Standard, 2021).

In recent years in Bangladesh, attacks on various individuals and groups have increased, apart from attacks on the Hindu community, due to rumours of religious blasphemy. Around 800 people died spreading rumours in Bangladesh from 2011 to 2018 in mass lynchings, some suspected of desecration of religion, kidnapping, robbers, and thieves (BBC News Bangla, 24 July, 2019). On September 29, 2012, some photos of the desecration of the Holy Quran were published on the Facebook ID of a youth named Uttam Kumar Barua in Ramu Upazila of Cox's Bazar district. As soon as this news spread, miscreants attacked 12 Buddhist monasteries and about 66 residences in the afternoon, looted, and set them on fire (Wahid & Mohammad, 2021, p. 16). On October 29, 2020, after spreading rumours of insulting Islam and the Quran, a Muslim youth named Shahidunnabi Jewel was beaten to death in Burimari of district Lalmonirhat, and his body was set on fire by an angry mob (The Daily Star, 30 October, 2020). In his personal life, Jewel was known to the locals as a simple, innocent, and religious person.

In recent years, Bangladesh has experienced a surge in attacks on various individuals and groups, not limited to those directed at the Hindu community. These incidents, often stemming from rumours of religious blasphemy, have resulted in a climate of heightened tension and intolerance. The victims of mass lynchings are accused of offences ranging from alleged desecration of religion to accusations of kidnapping, robbery, and theft. This broader pattern highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to such violence to address the root causes effectively.

4.4 REGIONAL ISSUES

Bangladesh is strategically located at an important location in South Asia. The country is surrounded on three sides by India in the north, west, and east and by the Bay of Bengal and Burma (Myanmar) in the south and southeast, respectively, and China is the nearest neighbour of Bangladesh (Hanlon et al., 2016, p. 3). Bangladesh's geographical proximity to China and regional power India, one of the powers of world politics, and the rivalry between these two countries in the region, including South Asia, have added

a new dimension to the discussion about Bangladesh. Bangladesh is termed a bridge between two potential organizations, SAARC and ASEAN (Parnini, 2010, p. 376). Besides, the Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a critical area of focus in global politics due to its strategic location, natural resources, and fast-growing economies (A. J. Majumdar, 2022, p. 65). The region, which encompasses the Indian and Pacific Oceans, is home to some of the world's most critical trade routes and natural resources. The rise of China as a global power and the emergence of Southeast Asia as an important player in international affairs has also contributed to the region's growing importance. As a result, the United States has shifted its Asia-Pacific security strategy to an Indo-Pacific strategy (Köllner et al., 2021, p. 4). In addition to the growing significance of the Indo-Pacific region, the importance of the Bay of Bengal in Bangladesh is also increasing (U. Das, 2022, p. 174). Bangladesh's strategic location and proximity to the Bay of Bengal have caught the attention of other global powers, including the United States.

From the British period to the present in Bangladesh, minority politics have played an essential role in pursuing regional geopolitical interests, and the emergence of communal politics in India has exacerbated existing communal tensions in India and Bangladesh. Moreover, following the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) victory in 2014, the propagation of Hindu nationalism as a political ideology took hold in India (Chakrabarty & Jha, 2019, p. 1). In continuation, in 2018, the publication of the citizenship list in the Indian state of Assam and the subsequent passage of the National Citizenship (Amendment) Act in December 2019 by the Indian Parliament have engendered a socio-political crisis in the region (Pathan, 2022, p. 149).

4.4.1 Regional Geopolitical Factors

Bangladesh serves as the gateway to South and Southeast Asia and has geographical proximity to China and borders with India's Seven Sisters. Besides, the India-China rivalry in South Asia has multiplied the geopolitical importance of Bangladesh. The seven states of Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal, and Nagaland in the eastern part of India are called Seven Sisters (R. Mandal, 2011, p. 13). These states are connected to the Indian mainland through a narrow route 60 km long and 21 to 40 km wide called the Chicken Neck Corridor, which is time-consuming and expensive. The Chicken Neck Corridor is also known as the Siliguri Corridor, located

in the northern part of the Indian state of West Bengal (S. K. Das, 2013, p. 1). India is establishing road, rail, and sea transit with these seven states through Bangladesh. Compared to the use and maintenance of Bangladesh's infrastructure for using Bangladesh's seaports and roads, railways, and waterways through transit, the existing tolls related to transit from India are insufficient, considering Bangladesh's economic interests (M. Islam, 2013). Still, India's economic interests are being fully served.

The Farakka Dam is the most discussed issue in Bangladesh-India relations. The Farakka Dam is located on the Ganges River in the Maldah and Murshidabad districts of the Indian state of West Bengal, 18 km from the Chapainawabganj border with Bangladesh. The construction of this dam on the river Ganga started in 1961, and the building was completed in December 1974. In 1975, the Bangladesh government allowed India to divert 310 to 450 cusecs of water from the Ganges for ten days to test a dam section. Indian water use through the Farakka Dam without any agreement till 1996 was inequitable (P. Pandey, 2016, p. 7). In December 1996, Indian Prime Minister Dev Gowda and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina signed the Ganga Water Sharing Agreement in Delhi (Singh, 2011, p. 284). Although the water-sharing issue has been mentioned in the 30-year Ganga Treaty, India is not following it correctly. Due to India's uncontrolled removal and closure of water from the dam, Bangladesh suffers from acute water shortage in the dry season and heavy floods in the monsoon season. Besides, the Teesta River is a significant reservoir for northern Bangladesh's agriculture, fisheries, and food systems. Especially the people of about 5,500 villages near the basin largely depend on this river for their livelihood. An interim agreement was signed between Bangladesh and India in 1983 (Ranjan, 2020, p. 83). That interim agreement expired in 1985 and was extended for another two years in 1987, after which no further agreement was reached. It is Bangladesh's right to get its fair share of the waters of the Teesta as an inland river as per the international legal system.

Nevertheless, India has been withdrawing exclusive water from this river for over two decades, especially during the dry season. As a result, the water flow in the Bangladesh part of the Teesta has gradually decreased, significantly disrupting the agricultural production in the 12 upazilas of the north-western region, which depend on the Teesta's water. Apart from this, among the 54 identical rivers of the two countries, 53 flow in India upstream of Bangladesh - in almost everyone, dams, gates, and spurs have been built and choked by controlling the upstream water (I. Ahmed, 2012, p. 52).

Today, the economy of Bangladesh is suffering from drought in one season and floods in the monsoon season at an increasing rate.

Bangladesh's trade imbalance with India increases yearly as the import and export gap rises. As a result, Bangladesh has become India's fourth-largest importer of goods. According to Bangladesh Central Bank estimates, Bangladesh exported 2 billion goods to India in the fiscal year 2021-22. In contrast, Bangladesh imported goods from India worth 16.19 billion dollars, and the deficit is 14.19 billion between India and Bangladesh (S. Chowdhury, 2023). Since Bangladesh gained independence, India has used border killings to keep Bangladesh under pressure. According to a report by Odhikar, a human rights organization based in Bangladesh, there were instances of violence committed by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) against Bangladeshi citizens in the border areas from 2009 to 2020. Specifically, the report indicates that 506 individuals were killed, 525 were abducted, and BSF members tortured 684 (Odhikar, 2021).

Without giving rightful rights to Bangladesh, India has been gaining all kinds of strategic and economic benefits by influencing the internal politics of Bangladesh by maintaining unequal trade with Bangladesh. In 2008, late Indian President Pranab Mukherjee brought Sheikh Hasina to power in a compromise with the 1/11-infamous unconstitutional government (P. Mukherjee, 2017, p. 92). The reconciliation with the then army chief Moin U Ahmed is very important for the politics of Bangladesh. Awami League's incredible victory in two arranged national elections in 2014 and 2018, disenfranchisement of citizens, lack of freedom of speech, and authoritarian government system, Bangladesh entered a hybrid regime (Riaz, 2019, pp. 28–29).

India has kept Bangladesh in its direct sphere of influence by unquestioningly supporting the Awami League. India's dominance over Bangladesh and its unilateral support to the Awami League have created discontent and anti-India sentiment among the Bangladeshi population. It is considered a threat to Bangladesh's communal harmony because most Hindu communities are considered pro-Indian. On March 26, 2021, a golden jubilee celebration was organized to mark 50 years of Bangladesh's independence. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was present as a guest on that occasion. Various professionals, student political organizations, and political organizations held protest programs nationwide to protest Narendra Modi's

participation in the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Bangladesh's independence. On March 26 and 27, protesters clashed with the pro-government student organization Chhatra League and the police in Baitul Mokarram in Dhaka, Hathazari in Chittagong, and Brakshanbaria. Seventeen protestors were killed, more than 500 injured, and more than 200 were arrested in the two-day protest program(Newage, 28 March, 2021).

Myanmar shares extensive borders with China, India, and Bangladesh. Ongoing civil conflict in Myanmar has resulted in the expulsion of Muslims from Arakan state, leading to an influx of Rohingya refugees seeking refuge in Bangladesh. Approximately 1.2 million Rohingya refugees reside in Cox's Bazar district in Bangladesh (A. A. Ullah & Chattoraj, 2022, p. 190). The unprecedented number of refugees has placed a significant strain on resources and created an unstable political climate in the region, posing a considerable challenge to Bangladesh's economic and state security. In the meantime, China is constructing an economic zone in Myanmar's Rakhine state that includes a deep-sea port (T. M. Haque & Nower, 2020, p. 43).

Additionally, China has established a pipeline network from the Kyaukpyu port on the Bay of Bengal coast in Rakhine state to Kunming (Phanjoubam, 2015, p. 24). The pipeline is intended to transport oil and gas from the Middle East through the Bay of Bengal. In contrast, India is accepted the Kaladan Multimodal Transit-Transport Project in Rakhine. The Kaladan project aims to create a seamless transportation network linking eastern India with Southeast Asia through the Bay of Bengal, creating a viable alternative to the Strait of Malacca for cargo shipments (Yhome, 2019, p. 184). Despite maintaining friendly relations with Bangladesh, China and India have supported Myanmar's actions in expelling Muslims from Rakhine, which has faced widespread condemnation from the international community. Myanmar's government has been accused of violating international law and human rights norms, drawing criticism from human rights organizations and other concerned parties.

The Bangladesh government has faced criticism from various quarters, including international human rights organizations, for alleged human rights violations, depriving the people of their right to vote, and restrictions on free speech and press freedom.(Pattanaik, 2019) However, despite the conflict, China and India have monopolized the government to stay in power for almost 15 years (Sajen, 2023). Due to the geopolitical position of Bangladesh, it can lead to dire consequences of communal

harmony in Bangladesh. Moreover, in the context of regional and international politics, particular and motivated politics work to prove the people of Bangladesh as 'communal.'

4.4.2 The Rising of Hindu Fundamentalism in India

The emergence of Hindu fundamentalism in Indian politics can be traced back to the "Rath Yatra" program initiated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a radical Hindu nationalist party, in 1990. The Rath Yatra commenced on September 25, 1990, from the city of Somnath in Gujarat, and it was supposed to traverse through various parts of India, covering a total distance of 10,000 miles to reach Ayodhya, a holy city in the state of Uttar Pradesh (Chhibber & Verma, 2018, p. 223). The primary objective of this Rath Yatra was to garner support for the BJP's political agenda among the Hindu majority population of India. The program was organized by Lal Krishna Advani, a prominent leader of the BJP, who intended to lay the foundation stone of the Ram Mandir upon reaching Ayodhya. The Rath Yatra's main goal was to mobilize public opinion to construct Ram Mandir, a temple believed to have been built at the site where Lord Ramchandra was born. However, the Babri Masjid, a mosque built by the Mughal Emperor Babur in the 16th century, stood on the same site, creating religious tensions. Advani, accompanied by several BJP members, including Narendra Modi, embarked on this journey to promote the demand for the construction of the Ram Mandir. Due to Advani's growing influence and communal tensions, when Advani reached Samastipur in Bihar, the Chief Minister of Bihar arrested him, and the Rath was suspended (Udayakumar, 2005, p. 109). The campaign created a highly polarized environment in Indian politics. The Rath Yatra program is regarded as a seminal event that paved the way for the BJP's political ascendancy in India. In 1992, the radical Hindu Karsevaks demolished the Babri Masjid, triggering widespread religious violence and communal tension across India.

The situation escalated into Hindu-Muslim riots, resulting in the loss of around 2,000 lives (Oliver & Harding, 2003). Consequently, the BJP became the first significant opposition party, and in 1996, BJP formed India's first government. In 2014, the BJP re-formed the government of India, and before winning the 2014 elections, one of their key election promises was to amend the Citizenship Act of 1955 (Gupta, 2019). The Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), 2016, was introduced in the Indian Parliament

by the BJP government in 2016 as an amendment to the Citizenship Act of 1955 but was sent to a parliamentary committee for reconsideration due to opposition. Later, on December 9, 2019, the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) 2019 was recognized as part of the constitution as an amendment to the Citizenship Act 1955 (A. Roy, 2022, p. 3). The bill's main objective is to grant citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and other non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, who have fled to India due to religious persecution in their home country. The primary political tool of the Hindutva BJP is to use anti-Muslim Hindu nationalists to incite communal tension among most Hindus. Since the BJP came to power, communal propaganda began in politically backward states for the BJP, and intense communal tension was created in Assam. As a result, the BJP won the 2016 elections in Assam, which Congress had ruled for a long time. After the BJP formed the government in Assam, the BJP government took up the project of preparing the NRC (National Registrar of Citizens) list in 2018. Although three crores of twenty-nine lakh people applied for inclusion in the citizenship list, about one and a half million citizens were kept out of the initial list. In the face of widespread public protests, the final draft of the NRC has retained the citizenship of 28.9 million people and revoked the citizenship of another 40 million (Gani, 2018). In addition, millions of Bengali Muslims have been put on the list of dubious voters and termed as D-voters (Doubtful voters) by maintaining an arbitrary process of identification of citizenship (A. K. Das, 2017, p. 146). The publication of the citizenship list has created a socio-political disaster for Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam. Seventy per cent of Bengalis were excluded from the final draft list of NRC, and most of these Bengalis are Muslims (M. K. Nath, 2021, p. 2). The Citizenship Act 2019 has included the provision of citizenship to Hindus residing in India from Bangladesh, resulting in which Bengali Hindus in Assam can obtain citizenship through this act. However, the new NRC in Assam has created a big crisis for the Bengali Muslims there, as millions of Bengali Muslims have been branded as foreigners or immigrants from Bangladesh. Although Muslims are a minority in Assam, at least 9 of the thirty-three administrative districts are in the majority, constituting about one-third of Assam's population. Preparing the NRC list has been undertaken as a part of a strange and terrible activity of depriving the Bengali-speaking Muslims of their citizenship and sending them to Bangladesh.

The National Registrar of Citizens (NRC) 2018 and the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) 2019 pose a significant threat to socio-political and communal harmony in the region. The ordinary Muslims and Hindus of the region have suffered dramatically due to communal politics at various times in the past. The Cabinet Mission of 1946 proposed a three-tiered structure for the British to transfer power to Indians. The All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress accepted the Cabinet Mission plan in principle. Nevertheless, disagreements over the proposal to form an interim government led to more extensive communal riots by Muslims and Hindus in Calcutta on August 16, 1946. Over 4,000 civilians died, and 1,00,000 residents were homeless in Calcutta within 72 hours of the riots that erupted due to communal tensions (A. Roy, 2018, p. 159). The violence was not limited to Kolkata, but Noakhali, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab also erupted in riots.

On December 6, 1992, approximately 1.5 million supporters of the radical Hindutva movement, led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and Shiv Sena Party, and including prominent figures such as LK Advani, Murali Manohar Joshi, and Vinay Katia, demolished the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India (Murphy, 2023, p. 351). This action triggered widespread communal violence between Hindus and Muslims across India. On the following day, December 7, violent protests erupted throughout Bangladesh in response to the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Hindu homes, businesses, and temples were set on fire, vandalized, and looted in at least 21 country districts, including Dhaka. To curb the situation, the government-imposed Section 144 in some parts of Dhaka and some districts, including Bhola, Tangail, and Jamalpur. During the protests, clashes erupted between the police and protesters, leading to the death of 10 individuals (Akhter, 2019). The demolition of the Babri Masjid and the ensuing communal violence in India and Bangladesh underscore the region's deep-rooted religious and political tensions. To maintain its political success, the BJP sought to promote and disseminate this ideology, resulting in India's deeply divisive and polarizing communal situation. It was a strategic move implemented by the ruling party, the BJP, and its parent organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Consequently, sectarian tensions have persisted in India and Bangladesh in recent years.

4.5 THE MYTH AND REALITY OF MINORITY PERSECUTION IN BANGLADESH

Attacks on the Hindu community in Bangladesh are always blamed on Islamist political parties, and religion-based politics are seen as challenging to maintain communal harmony in Bangladesh. The challenges of maintaining communal balance in Bangladesh are not due to religious issues, and people of all religions are free to practice their faith. Communalism arose in the Indian subcontinent due to conflicts of socio-political interests, but after independence, a non-communal outlook developed rapidly in Bangladesh (M. N. Islam & Islam, 2018, p. 8). Although there are political parties based on Islamic ideology, they are not communal and do not promote offensive behaviour toward the Hindu community (B. Umar, 2022b). The frequent occurrence of attacks against minority groups in Bangladesh is frequently depicted as radical or sectarian, with no connection to communalism. However, a common practice in Bangladeshi society is to communalize instances of land grabbing, looting, and criminal trials. Religious figures are notably absent from leading such attacks, with no clear evidence of their involvement (Hassan, 2023, p. 1). Instead, these acts of violence can be attributed to more extensive processes of exploitation and social and political domination.

Over the last 14 years, leaders and activists of the Awami League in Bangladesh have been accused of attacking and torturing people belonging to the Hindu religion, as well as other religious minorities and small ethnic groups. Many of these Awami League workers have also been accused of looting and taking over land, houses, temples, crematoriums, and burial grounds belonging to members of minority groups. Despite coming to power with the promise of "ensuring the security and rights of religious and ethnic minorities," the Awami League has instead subjected these groups to increased levels of violence. Minority members have been tortured and violent, including beatings, molestation, burning, hacking, and even death.

On September 29, 2012, a tragic incident occurred in Ramu Upazila of Cox's Bazar, destroying 12 ancient Buddhist monasteries through a midnight attack and arson. Seven Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples in Ukhia and Teknaf were also set ablaze the following day. These acts of violence were attributed to allegations of religious insult via social media. A published photograph in the newspaper shows a

procession that began on September 29 at ten o'clock in the evening, led by Ancharul Haque Bhutto, the President of Ramu Upazila Awami Matsyajivi League, along with numerous leaders and activists of Chhatra League and Jubo League (Palash, 2012). On December 9, 2012, Bishwajit Das was brutally killed by Chhatra League activists in front of hundreds of people, law enforcement members, and journalists on camera in Dhaka city (M. Ahmed, 2014). In another incident, on October 29, 2016, three accused of attacking and vandalizing Hindu houses and temples in Nasirnag Upazila of Brahmanbaria district were nominated by Awami League for the chairman in the Union Parishad elections (Hrday, 2021). Advocate Palash Kumar Roy, arrested in a defamation case against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, was burnt to death in Panchagarh District Jail on April 26, 2019 (Swapan, 2019). On March 17, 2021, an attack was carried out on a Hindu village in Shalla Upazila of Sunamganj, led by Shahidul Islam, the ward president of the ruling party youth organization Jubo League and a member of the Union Parishad (D. Chowdhury & Shanto, 2021). On October 13, 2021, various puja mandaps and houses of Hindus in Comilla were attacked. After the attack, the president of the district puja celebration committee, freedom fighter Tapan Bakshirki, alleged the involvement of Awami League leaders and workers (Hasnat, 2021). The minority community organization "Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council" has accused the ministers, MPs, leaders, and workers of the ruling party and the administration of grabbing the property of the minority community (Daily Janakantha, 9 January, 2016). Since independence in 1971, every attack on minority communities has been politicized and blamed on Islamist groups. It has led to the concealment of the real culprits, and none of the incidents have been adequately investigated and prosecuted. It is crucial to address these issues and uphold the rights and security of religious and ethnic minorities in the country.

4.6 CONCLUSION

Bangladesh is a multireligious country where Muslims and Hindus have a long history of coexistence, but there have been conflicts between them. The country's Muslim population is significant, but Hinduism is also a substantial religious community in Bangladesh. Communal instability between Muslims and Hindus increased in the 20th century, and communal hatred arose between the two communities due to the political

impact of the formation of India and Pakistan in 1947. Despite a historical legacy of religious freedom and coexistence, violence against minority communities in Bangladesh has been documented, including killings, arson attacks, temple vandalism, and land grabbing. The violence issue in the country is contentious, and instead of religion, politics is the primary cause of violence and persecution of religious minorities. As a result of the general anarchy and deteriorating law and order situation in the country, people of all communities have been tortured. Hindus constitute a fraction of Bangladesh's population, as much as nine per cent. The ordinary people are being tortured by the ruling party terrorists in the country, and Hindus also suffer as a part of the people. The involvement of Islamic parties in minority persecution in Bangladesh is a myth, and the actual cause of those incidents is frequently concealed or unknown to the public. In general, the people of Bangladesh are oppressed, disappeared, murdered, and the promotion of torture against Hindus is given priority.

Regional geopolitics is also significant in how minority community riots, terrorism, religious persecution, extremism, and other issues are handled. The current ruling party in the Awami League has used communal politics to deal with its legitimacy crisis in politics, prolong its power, and increase the vote share. Both India and China, enemies of each other, continue to support the government of Bangladesh, despite being in power through disputed elections, ignoring important issues such as human rights violations. India tends to label any attack on the people of the Hindu community as a coordinated attack without judging what is happening to fulfil its political objectives. India's discernible endeavour to exert influence over the internal politics of Bangladesh is evident. For nearly a decade, India has assisted the Awami League in maintaining an authoritarian regime in Bangladesh. The Persecution of Minority Hindus in Bangladesh Incidents facilitates the BJP in strengthening its vote bank and promoting separatism among the Hindus in Bangladesh. Communal issues play a momentous role in keeping Bangladesh within India's sphere of influence, allowing India to exert direct pressure on the Bangladeshi government. Overall, the persecution of religious minorities in Bangladesh is not due to religious reasons but is a part of political and overall social instability. The torture and killings currently going on against ordinary people and the persecution of Hindus are not separate from the deterioration of the overall situation in Bangladesh. The lack of the rule of law, violence during elections, and the negative

impact of fake social media posts are significant factors contributing to the violence against the Hindu community.



CHAPTER FIVE

UNIVERSAL CULTURAL ASPECTS IN PROMOTING COMMUNAL HARMONY BETWEEN MUSLIMS-HINDUS IN BANGLADESH

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Promoting communal harmony is paramount in a diverse country like Bangladesh, where Muslims, Hindus, and other significant religious communities. Cultural aspects foster understanding, respect, and connection between these religious groups. Culture is one of the essential parts of social life, which is not an outward show; It is the creative historical form and an integral part of human life in a society (Lenzerini, 2011, p. 102). A nation's history, language, sovereignty, thought, art, literature, and everything creative belong to a culture. Every country's history, tradition, and culture form the link between the nation's past, practice, and present. Culture directly reflects every land and nation's uniqueness and essential features in their way of life (Dieckhoff, 2017, p. 3). The nationalism of a country is developed through this reflection, and respect and pride for its history are created. Every society has its own culture, and each culture has its characteristics. The culture of Bangladesh also has specific features that differentiate it from other cultures. These characteristics include language, thought, intellect, knowledge, ideas, values, and behaviour. Over the ages, Bangladesh has been enriched and influenced by various cultural elements from the outside world. With the arrival of multiple nations, the culture of this country has been amalgamated with different cultural aspects, especially Aryans, Sens, Turks, Afghans, Mughals, and finally, the British-occupied Bengal (Abmed, 2008, p. 2). Foreign rule, colonial rule, and assimilation of various cultural elements have transformed our culture into a mixed culture.

Bangladesh is the habitation of people of various races, religions, and colours, including Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists-Christians. Most people in Bangladesh follow the religion of Islam, and Hinduism is the second largest religious community; the country also has Buddhist and Christian populations. The population of various ethnic minority groups, such as Chakma, Marma, Hajong, Manipuri, Garo, and Rakhine, live here and have their own religious beliefs (HAQUE et al., 2018, p. 149).

Mainly, religious faith and motivation play an influential role in developing a culture in Bangladesh because religion is the source of inspiration in life for all Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians (Horaira & Devi, 2021, p. 7). The cultural lifestyle here harmonised with Bengal's natural and social life. In this country, everyone lives together and performs social and religious rituals. With each other, they share joy, and others attend each other's festivals and events. There is a liberal tolerance and a tendency to accept all classes of people together in all the festivals, even if they are based on religion. Bangladesh encompasses thousands of years of combined civilisation and culture, encompassing people from various religions and castes. It has traces of Hindu, Buddhist and tribal societies and significantly contributes to Islam as the majority religion. During the over six hundred years of Muslim rule, the Muslim rulers did not suppress the culture of this country; instead, they adopted this country as their homeland and built a new culture in the light of Islam based on a thousand years of culture of this country (A. M. Ahmed, 1966, p. 22). Islam always accepts different opinions; when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) established the Islamic state in Madinah at the beginning of Islam, he adopted local customs and practices that were not directly anti-Islamic (Abdullah & Fathil, 2021, p. 165). According to Ibn Taymiyyah, If the local customs of any country are not directly anti-Islamic, they will remain if they are not clearly prohibited (Noorhayati & Fata, 2017, p. 218).

Furthermore, Sufism, a mystical tradition within Islam, has played a significant role in promoting interreligious harmony in Bangladesh. Sufi saints and their teachings emphasise universal love, compassion, and inclusivity, bridging the gap between Islam and Hinduism (Halim, 2018, p. 175). However, contemporary conflicts and communal violence have left scars that impede communal harmony. Besides, Sociopolitical factors, sectarian interests, electoral strategies, and discriminatory policies create barriers to interreligious cooperation. Thus, this chapter explores the universal cultural elements, which include folk cultures, arts and crafts, literature and entertainment, social customs, marriage ceremonies, and festivals that contribute to promoting communal harmony between Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh and by recognising and appreciating cultural diversity, individuals can develop empathy, tolerance, and mutual respect.

5.2 THE NATURE OF THE CULTURE OF BANGLADESH

The Indian subcontinent is well recognised for its status as one of the most ancient human civilizations in the world, and Bangladesh is one of the countries that presents a culturally rich legacy (Avari, 2007, p. 2). The culture of Bangladesh encompasses the intricate connection of the beliefs, traditions, literature, music, dance, cuisine, attire, and festivities observed by the people of Bangladesh. The core basis of Bangladeshi culture is derived from Bengali culture, which has evolved over thousands of years in this region. It has acquired a unique identity as Bengali culture via the growth of the Bengali language and cultural practices throughout the Sultanate era. Before the Sultanate era, there was no culture known as 'Bangala' that surpassed others in significance (Muhith, 1992, p. 12). Therefore, it is not accurate to refer to the historical regional culture of the area as Bengali culture from an epistemological standpoint. During the Sultanate's time, the Bengali language reached its full development, and as a result, this extensive area came to be recognised as Bengal.

Throughout history, numerous beliefs, and cultural elements from various regions of the world have enhanced and shaped the culture of Bangladesh. The cultural lifestyle of Bengal evolved in interaction with the natural environment and the social fabric. The influence of that culture extended beyond Muslims and into the non-Muslim population. Consequently, it achieved universal prominence, establishing Bangladesh as a unified cultural hub (G. Murshid, 2018, p. 7). However, distinct customs and traditions are present in different parts of the country, resulting in the diversification of mainstream culture. Despite some slight variations, the whole nation is united in an artistic sphere. Apart from the theological schism, the inhabitants of this region cannot be segregated into ethnically heterogeneous clans. There has been an excellent cultural blending of the various peoples of this country, as a result of which not much difference is observed in terms of physical structure, rituals, family management, and relations.

5.3 THE FOLK CULTURES IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh's folk culture is deeply intertwined with the religious and social beliefs, traditions, festivities, ways of life, creativity, and entertainment of its rural people (Shamsuddin, 1988). Despite the profound changes brought about by modern civilization, the folk culture of Bangladesh has not only survived but also retained its

inherent dynamism. The people of Bangladesh preserve their cultural integrity through deep affection for their heritage. Villages in Bangladesh serve as the place of origin of the country's cultural heritage, fostering the transmission of traditional customs from one generation to the next (Dr. A. Siddiqui, 2001). The simplicity and tightly knit social structure of village life facilitates the preservation and continuation of traditional activities, arts, and beliefs. The impact of rural society is not confined just to the villages; it also extends to the cities, which inherit and preserve the cultural heritage of their rural counterparts. As a mainly agrarian country, agricultural practices have been firmly ingrained in the fabric of society. Agricultural traditions have become an essential and widespread component of culture, alongside religious identity.

Moreover, Bangladesh has an enormous variety of festivals, each with a unique character and profound importance. The festivals, which exhibit variations stemming from varied religious motivations, nevertheless foster the consolidation and cohesion of the nation's folk culture (Halder, 1965, p. 210). These festivals serve as powerful representations of collective celebration, uniting individuals from all backgrounds to engage in exuberant activities characterised by lively music, dancing, and colourful exhibitions. They provide an inclusive experience and function as a reservoir of national pride and identity.

5.4 FOLK PIR DOCTRINE

Sufism has played a significant role in fostering a pluralistic society in Bangladesh. It provided an avenue for the oppressed to break free from societal constraints and establish principles of equality and justice. With their uncomplicated and simplistic way of life, Sufis profoundly influenced society during the spread of Islam, leading to the widespread acceptance of the religion among the people of Bengal (Chaudhury, 2016, p. 280). This acceptance shattered the barriers of caste division and fostered camaraderie and harmony between the Muslim and Hindu communities.

From the 11th century to the 17th century, Islam experienced its most significant propagation in Bangladesh. Sufi saints arrived from various regions, including Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Khorasan, Central Asia, and North India, to propagate Sufism in the region (N. R. Khan & Talukdar, 2021, p. 12). Notable Sufi saints who dedicated themselves to spreading Islam during the 11th-12th century include Shah Sultan Rumi,

Baba Adam Shaheed, Shah Sultan Balkhi, Shah Niamatullah Butshekan, Shah Makhdoom Ruposh, Sheikh Fariduddin Shakkarganj, and Makhdoom Shah Daula Shaheed (Al Masud et al., 2017, p. 108). Their exceptional knowledge, eloquence, and love for humanity attracted ordinary people, contributing to the popularity of Sufism in Bangladesh. When Bakhtiyar Khalji conquered Bangladesh in 1204-5 AD, many pir-dervishes and the ruling class arrived in the country and focused on spreading Islam. Prominent figures from this period include Sheikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi, Shah Jalal, Sheikh Alaul Haque, Khan Jahan Ali, Sharfuddin Abu Tawama, and Shah Fariduddin (Kalam, 2021, p. 43). It is possible to observe two phases of pir arrival in Bangladesh: the first phase predates the Muslim conquest of Bengal, while the second phase spans from the conquest of Bengal to the eighteenth century.

The liberal ideals and egalitarianism of Islam attracted oppressed Buddhists and lower-caste Hindus in the region, leading to their conversion to Islam and the formation of a larger folk society. Although the Pirs played a significant role in these conversions, they could not reach a large number of new Muslims with the actual teachings of Islam. As a result, the new Muslims could not entirely abandon their established way of life, incorporating certain long-held religious practices (Chaudhury, 2016, p. 276). The Hindu belief in the avatars of God and the notion of humans as miniature counterparts of God influenced the practices of the Buddhists. Consequently, among the converted Muslims, the worship of Pirs (Pir Puja) became prevalent, reflecting the influence of both Hinduism and Buddhism (Haq, 1975, p. 223).

During the Middle Ages, the pir doctrine became an integrated cultural aspect among Bengali people, irrespective of their religious backgrounds. Pir and Guruism in Hinduism share similar spiritual characteristics. Some Pirs attained the status of ideal figures during their lifetimes and transformed into revered "Deva-Gurus" after their deaths. These Pirs gained regional or national prominence. Fictional Pir characters, such as Badar Pir, Madarpir, Gazipir, Khwaj Khizir, Hawa Bibi, Trinathpir, Satyapir, Manikpir, Sonapir, Banbibibi, Jangalipar, Nanaipir, Thunkapir, Cowapir, Norapar, and Ghorapir, have become notable symbols of faith and icons of divine power in Bengali society (M. S. N. Rahman, 2018, p. 59). Practices such as offering shirni (sweet rice dish) in the name of Pir-Ghazi during illness at home, seeking blessings and good luck in agriculture from Manik-Pir, or invoking the Pir-Badar before embarking on trade

journeys are standard among both Hindu and Muslim communities (A. Roy, 2014, p. 212,218).

Worship rituals have evolved, incorporating Islamic elements while maintaining the inspired practices from Hindu and Buddhist traditions. During this transformation, Buddhist Chaitya worships with incense and sandalwood, and Muslim Pir-dargah worships with rose, incense, and ruparti, have been given an Islamic veneer (Haq, 1975, p. 325). A literary tradition has also emerged, resembling the Mangalkavya literature of Hinduism, which focuses on the life stories of folk heroes. Performances based on these stories, such as the "Mother Pir's Song," "Manik Pir's Song," "Gazi Pir's Song," and "Ekdil Pir's Song," have become popular theatrical styles, transcending religious identities, and finding popularity in rural towns throughout Bangladesh (Kabi, 2010, p. 16).

5.5 FOLK ENTERTAINMENT

Folk entertainment in Bangladesh celebrates the country's cultural diversity, showcasing various traditional performances that have captivated audiences for generations. The rich folk entertainment in Bangladesh sheds light on the various forms of artistic expression that serve as a source of joy, amusement, and cultural identification for the local communities. These performances encompass traditional art forms, including music, dance, and musical instrument presentations.

5.5.1 Folk Song

Folk song is Bangladesh's most popular and rich branch of folk culture. It is a distinct genre within Bangladeshi music, embodying the essence of Bangladesh's musical heritage. The expansive green meadows, vast wetlands, forests, and ever-changing landscapes of rural Bengal have given the nation a unique artistic inclination. Folk songs crafted by the people of rural Bangladesh resonate with the rural populace's life experiences, emotions, festivals, rivers, boats, and enchanting thoughts and beliefs (Sturman, 2019, p. 325). The folk music of Bangladesh resonates with a deep poetic tradition, where the emphasis lies predominantly on mastering verbal melodic skills rather than instrumental accompaniment. These include the soulful Baul songs, musical

Bhavaiya compositions, rhythmic Bhatiali melodies, lively Gambhira tunes, captivating Kabigan performances, beautiful Zarigan renditions, soul-stirring Sarigan chants, beautiful Ghatu songs, evocative Yatra songs, vibrant Jhumur compositions, and spirited Jager melodies, among others (R. Chowdhury, 2022, p. 536). Folk music in Bangladesh exhibits distinct regional characteristics due to the country's geographical diversity. Although Bangladesh is riverine, there are differences in the nature of rivers in different regions; the forms of Padma, Meghna, Surma, and Dhaleswari differ from those of Madhumati, Ichamati, Bhairavaand, and others. The connection of the people with the rivers is not the same everywhere in Bangladesh; because of this, the way the region's lifestyle is developed and the folk music of the area is also created and set in the same way. For example, the Bhaviya of North Bengal, Bhatiali of the eastern region, and Baul-Marfati of the southwestern part, besides the music of Santal, Shabar, Lodha, Hajong, Morong, Chakma, tribes are also characteristic (Chakrobarty, 2011). Despite these regional features, the entire Bengali nation is united by an integral unity in terms of folklore.

5.5.1 Folk Dance

The most significant portion of Bangladesh's folk culture has developed by harbouring Muslim and Hindu communities' life force and social values. Folk dances have been prevalent in Hindu society in the region since ancient times. Since the introduction of Muslim rule in the area, a new form of folk dance has evolved into a fusion of Muslim-Hindu communities. According to the basic principles of Islam, all dances and festivities that create frenzy within people are prohibited, and Islam forbids ideal living through moderation. After the establishment of Muslim society in Bengal, Muslims were easily influenced by Hindu customs and manners due to their coexistence with Hindus (Dr. W. Ahmed, 1965, p. 22). As a result, the Muslim community enjoyed the country's traditional dances and festivals and enriched them with new ideas and cultural materials. Folk dances of Bangladesh have evolved from a combination of ancient reforms, religious influences, and social and cultural values. There are several types of folk dances in Bangladesh: Jari dance, Baul dance, Fakir dance, Ghetu dance, Sari dance, Chokra dance, Khemta dance, Dhak dance, Dhali dance, and Raibenshe dance (Suchana, 2021, pp. 108–132). These dances are divided into religious, social, and

festive. A mixture of Hindu and Islamic traditions is in the Baul dance, and the prominent patrons of the Ghatu dance are Muslims, but its foundation is entirely based on Hindu tradition (S. J. Ahmed, 2000, p. 285). Zari dance was the most famous and widely practised in the Muslim community of Bengal, which was held on the occasion of Muharram based on the sad story of Karbala (Dunham, 1997, p. 30). This ritual directly results from Hindu worship and has no precepts in Islamic theology.

5.5.3 Folk Musical Instrument

Since ancient times, folk music instruments have played a significant role in religious and social events in Bangladesh. Instruments such as Dhak, Dhol, khol, dugdugi, khanjar, dof, ektara, bena, dotara, sarinda, khamak, kansi, Juri, Kartal, Tubri, Sankh, Shinga, Bhempu, Chatri khartal, Chatti, kansi, Juri, Kartal, khartal, banshi, and patbani have become an integral part of the daily life cycle in rural areas of Bangladesh, representing its rich folk culture (R. Karim, 2020, pp. 69–70). These instruments are known for their simplicity and are often crafted using native materials. Evidence of the usage of musical instruments in Bangladesh can be found in historical artefacts such as Paharpur-Mainamati stone slabs and terracotta paintings dating back to the 8th century AD (B. N. Prasad, 2021, p. 556). These depictions showcase kansar, cymbal, Dhak, veena, mridanga, and flute instruments. The earliest form of Bengali literature, Charyapada, written between the 9th and 11th centuries, describes songs, dances, and music, representing an early form of Bengali music. During the Middle Ages (13th-18th century AD), various Mangalkavyas (auspicious poems) and Chaitanya biographies mentioned 66 musical instruments classified into four categories (Dr. W. Ahmed, 1965, p. 128). The contributions of Muslims to Indian music during this period were unparalleled. Muslims introduced hymns to various aspects of life and enriched music by creating new themes and diverse forms. When the Mughal rule was established in Bangladesh in the 16th century, there was increased contact with northern India, leading to the reintroduction of Bengali music infused with Muslim lyricism. Muslims brought Dhol (drums) to the region; the famous saint Amir Khusrau invented instruments like the Dhol Sitar, Rabab, and Tabla (S. R. Sharma, 1999). (Karomat, 2012, p. 102). The Persian word for 'Dahan' eventually transformed into the Bengali term 'Dhol.' Dhol is widely used in folk music and dance by both Hindus and Muslims. They are played in

Hindu temples, weddings, Muharram processions, stick games, and wrestling matches. The rich tradition of folk music instruments in Bangladesh, dating back centuries, showcases their deep cultural and religious significance in rural and urban communities, serving as a vital component of musical expression in various social and ceremonial events.

5.6 FOLK ARTS AND CRAFTS

Folk arts and crafts encompass the skilful creation of handmade items by ordinary individuals residing in rural areas, utilising locally sourced materials and essential tools. In Bangladesh, the practice of folk art has endured throughout history, serving as a distinctive component of cultural identity that transcends religious affiliations (P. Ahmed, 2009, p. 14). Bangladesh's folk arts and crafts are shedding light on the diverse range of everyday items skilled artisans produce. These creations, which include woven Sarees, Naskhi Kantha textiles, jute and bamboo products, wooden furniture, clay toys, wall paintings, terracotta plaques, and Alpana designs, exemplify the profound sense of aesthetic beauty and artistic consciousness among the common populace.

5.6.1 Jamdani (Traditional Saree)

The establishment of various dynasties in Bengal, the emergence of multiple religions, the Muslim conquest of Bengal, British rule, the partition of Bengal, the transition from East Bengal to East Pakistan, and finally, the formation of independent Bangladesh has all played significant roles in shaping the culture and lifestyle of the region. Despite these historical transformations, the Saree has retained its esteemed status and traditional significance as the attire for Bengali women (Zahin & Nion, 2023, p. 579). Religious beliefs, political changes, and the influence of international dress cultures have not displaced the Saree from its prominent position. Throughout the ages, women in Bangladesh have found comfort in wearing Sarees, and even in the present era, they continue to choose Sarees for various occasions, including weddings, corporate parties, birthdays, picnics, religious festivals such as Eid and Puja, as well as cultural celebrations like Pahela Baishakh and Pahela Phalgun (Mahamud, 2016, p. 393). Sarees

remain a popular choice for Bengali women in both formal and informal settings, including at home.

Numerous types and variations of Sarees exist in Bangladesh, with notable examples including Jamdani, Silk, Tant, and Manipuri. Each saree in the country carries its unique history and tradition, often tied to specific regions. Among these, Dhakai Jamdani holds a significant place as the foremost traditional saree. Jamdani is integral to Bangladesh's rich folk culture and historical traditions. Crafted from silk, yarn, and lace, with the masterful touch of skilled artisans, the Jamdani saree traces its lineage back to the illustrious muslin fabric of the bygone era. Its intricate weaving technique and distinctive motifs set the Jamdani saree apart, making it particularly beloved (S. Yasmin et al., 2022, p. 24). The hallmark of Jamdani Sarees is their geometric designs, which often feature depictions of flowers, herbs, and Kalka patterns. Various designs are prevalent in Jamdani Sarees, including Panna Hajar, Tercha, Pansi, Mayurpankhi, Batpata, Karla, Jal, Butidar, Jalpar, Dubli, Duria, Bolihar, Katihar, Kalkapar, and more (P. P. Chowdhury & Khan, 2022, p. 102). The Jamdani weaving technique gained popularity due to its ability to create intricate designs and maintain the continuity of oriental weaving, with the motifs easily reflected in the fabric.

The history of Jamdani predates the history of Dhaka itself. When Subedar Islam Khan moved the capital from Rajmahal to Dhaka in 1610, the history of Dhaka began, but the tradition of Jamdani weaving predates this event (Haque Khondker, 2009, p. 132). Sonargaon, Dhamrai, and Bajitpur were the region's historical centres for Jamdani and Muslin cloth. The actual advancement of Jamdani Sarees occurred during the Mughal period, where Persian and Mughal cultural influences blended (Panneerselvam et al., 2022, p. 1047). Following the fame of Dhaka Muslin, Dhaka's traditional Jamdani Sarees gained widespread recognition. The global acclaim and acceptance of Jamdani Sarees are well-established. Exclusively crafted from local raw materials found in Dhaka and created through the artistic sensibilities and ideas of Dhaka's weavers, Jamdani is a unique textile. The renowned traveller Ibn Battuta praised the textile industry of Sonargaon in his travelogue from the 1400s, explicitly mentioning muslin and Jamdani (I. Iqbal, 2014, p. 19). In 2013, the distinctive method of Dhakai Jamdani weaving was recognised as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, and in 2016, Jamdani became Bangladesh's first Global Indicator product (Zahur, 2017, p. 441). Despite the existence of diverse religions and communities in Bangladesh, the saree

remains a unifying element that transcends these differences, revealing a common aspect of the Bangladeshi people.

5.6.2 Nakshi Kantha (Kantha of Embroidery)

Nakshi Kantha, a centuries-old artistic tradition of Bangladesh, represents its people's exceptional skills, craftsmanship, and social heritage, holding profound historical and cultural significance. As a distinctive form of Kantha, Nakshi Kantha is a significant component of Bangladesh's folk art. Throughout the ages, the allure of Nakshi Kantha has remained undiminished, and its demand has escalated in response to the changing times. Contemporary designs have been incorporated, introducing a fresh appeal to this traditional art form. The intricate embroidery of Nakshi Kantha brings forth a plethora of motifs, including mangoes, fish, palm trees, birds, palanquins, ploughs, boats, elephants, flowers, leaves, horses, moon, stars, depictions of royal life, enchanting mythical beings, and symbolic representations of rural existence (Zaman, 1995, p. 69). Through meticulous execution using needle and thread, these motifs vividly portray different facets of rural life, including the dynamics between men and women and other aspects. Primarily recognised as the handiwork of rural women, Nakshi Kantha weaves together socio-economic activities and artistic expression.

Muslim and Hindu women residing in rural areas express their religious and cultural heritage through the intricate art of Kantha. Muslim women create various types of Kanthas, including Jainamaz (a prayer rug), Gilaf (an envelope-shaped Kantha used to cover the Quran), and Dastarkhan (used for placing food items and dining plates on the floor). Their focus lies in the skilful incorporation of geometric and floral motifs and symbols like the minarets, Arabic alphabet, crescent, star, domes, and verses from the holy Quran. On the other hand, Hindu women contribute to the Nakshi Kantha's diverse tapestry by depicting elements central to Hindu festivals, such as the lotus flower, the Jhulanjatra (Swing festival of Krishna and Radha), and the Rathajatra (Procession of Chariots) (Mahbub & Al Noor, 2022, pp. 673–674). These embroidered artworks are a remarkable expression of their respective religious and cultural traditions, adding depth and vibrancy to the rich heritage of the art form.

Although Nakshi Kantha is produced across Bangladesh, its commercial production predominantly occurs in regions such as Rajshahi, Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna,

Dinajpur, Kushtia, Faridpur, Jessore, Dhaka, Chittagong, Mymensingh, Comilla, Chandpur, and Sylhet. It is worth noting that the designs may exhibit regional variations, reflecting the unique characteristics of each area (M. T. Islam, 2022, p. 5). Furthermore, Nakshi Kantha has found metaphorical resonance within various branches of literature, stories, novels, and poems. For instance, the renowned poet Jasim Uddin composed a poetry book titled 'Naksi Kanthar Math.' Moreover, poet Chandravati mentions the art of Nakshi Kantha embroidery and other qualities of Sita in her Ramayana poem (Thakur & Roy, 2016, p. 357). Remarkably, Nakshi Kantha transcends the boundaries of caste and religion, finding utility and significance in both rural villages and urban areas. It serves as an integral element of hospitality, prominently featured during welcoming ceremonies for new sons-in-law and their families, where Nakshi Kantha, Nakshi pillows, and Nakshi Dastarkhanas (embroidered tablecloths) are employed to extend warm reception and graciousness.

5.6.3 Pottery (Traditional folk arts of Bangladesh)

Pottery, one of the traditional folk arts of Bangladesh, encompasses all artistic creations made from clay. Pottery holds unparalleled significance in Bangladesh's rich history, culture, and traditions, spanning thousands of years. During the Pala period, the potters contributed significantly to the pottery industry in Bengal. The archaeological remains found at Paharpur, Mainamati, Mahasthangarh, and Uari-Bateshwar bear witness to the historical importance of Pottery in these ancient settlements (Sharmin & Ahmed, 2019, p. 184). The artisans associated with this craft are known as Kumaras. While this profession has been passed down through generations, it is no longer limited to the Hindu community; Muslims and individuals from other religious backgrounds also engage in Pottery. Potters skillfully create various items, ranging from pots, pans, and clay banks to showpieces, jewellery, pitchers, flower tubs, vases, lids, and pie moulds (Ihtesham, 2004, p. 415). In the past, people exclusively used earthenware as glass, ceramic, melamine, and aluminium were not prevalent. Although the demand for and usage of clay utensils have decreased with the advent of modern materials, the charm of the Shokher Hari (hobby pots) persists in Folk and social festivals. Hobby pots, widely used in celebrations such as turmeric rituals in marriage ceremonies, circumcision, weddings, birthdays, Annaprasan, Navanna, 1st Baisakh, and 1st Falgun,

hold a special place (Farina, 2018). Besides everyday items, beautiful terracotta slabs or clay tiles have been developed. Terracotta involves firing patterned clay slabs similar to bricks. Notable buildings in Bangladesh, such as Kusumba Mosque, Bagha Mosque, Six Dome Mosque, Satgambuj Mosque, Khan Jahan Ali Mosque, Tara Mosque, Binat Bibir Mosque, Khan Mohammad Mridhar Mosque, Eleven Sindur Sadi Mosque, Kantjiu Temple, Seventeen Gems Temple, and Dhakeshwari Temple, are adorned with traditional terracotta plaque paintings. The terracotta displayed in these ancient represents a universal form of folk craftsmanship.

5.6.4 Alpana (Bengali Folk-Art Style)

Alpana, derived from the Sanskrit term 'alimpada,' meaning 'to coat,' is a highly regarded genre of folk culture in Bangladesh (Chisty, 2021). This art form involves applying pitali or chalk work and paintings on house walls, doors, floors, courtyards, and streets during diverse festivals. The practice of Alpana dates back thousands of years, with evidence of its existence found on numerous ancient terracotta. These depictions exhibit a wide range of designs, incorporating elements such as foliage, vibrant colours, geometric patterns, and abstract artistic expressions. From ancient times, Hindu women in Bangladesh have engaged in the tradition of painting Alpana on floors, walls, door frames, kula (a traditional water container), and dala (a low wooden stool) to enhance the aesthetic appeal of their homes, particularly during various pujas (religious rituals). While Alpanas created for specific Hindu religious events feature deity motifs, those designed for social occasions predominantly consist of floral, vine, leaf, and geometric patterns (A. Sengupta, 2012, p. 76).

Over time, Alpana has transcended religious boundaries and has been embraced by individuals from different faiths and socio-political contexts. Alpana emerged within the universal context of Bangladesh and is practised in households belonging to Muslim and Hindu communities (Alom, 2015). The advent of Muslim rule in the area played a significant role in the widespread adoption of Alpana in Muslim society, owing to the absence of animal imagery in this art form. Furthermore, Alpana bears historical relevance to the political history of the country. During the language movement of 1952, students from the Dhaka Art College, established by the renowned artist Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin, took to the streets with colours in hand, using their art to protest (Selim,

2019, p. 122). Collaborating with various student organisations, they expressed their dissent by painting walls and creating posters. Alpana finds extensive usage in festivities such as Payala Baisakh, Basant Baran, New Year celebrations, wedding ceremonies, and religious and national events. The tradition of presenting Kula or Chale Alpana (decorated plates or trays) during marriages is observed in both Hindu and Muslim societies. These plates or trays, adorned with Alpana patterns, are sent with gifts, often containing various pithas (traditional sweets) in clay pots. An annual highlight of Alpana is its prominent display during the celebration of Mother Language Day on February 21st. On this occasion, Alpana is meticulously painted on the open square of Shaheed Minar (Martyr's Monument) and the surrounding roads and streets throughout the country (Sharmin, 2021, p. 15). In recent years, Alpana has extended its reach, with large-scale drawings covering an impressive area of 40,000 to 60,000 square feet in district cities such as Dhaka, Chittagong, Bogra, Sylhet, and Khulna during the 1st Baishakh ceremony (bdnews24,9 April 2019). In both rural and urban social and cultural events, decorative Alpana plays a prominent role in constructing gates, utilising Kula, Chalun (a type of decorative cane), wooden pots, and various other elements. Irrespective of religious distinctions, the common underlying purpose behind these practices is creating beauty and uniting people in appreciation of artistic expression.

5.7 CULTURAL FESTIVAL

The traditional festivals of Bangladesh encompass a rich tapestry of cultural expressions steeped in historical significance and reflecting the country's deep-rooted agricultural heritage. These festivals have evolved over centuries, intertwining with the social, religious, and economic dimensions of Bangladeshi society. As a predominantly rural nation, Bangladesh has nurtured diverse customs and celebrations intricately tied to the rhythms of nature, harvest cycles, and community solidarity. The cultural practices and the transformation of the traditional festivals of Bangladesh shed light on their historical underpinnings, socio-cultural significance, and enduring relevance in contemporary times.

5.7.1 The Celebration of Mother Language Day

The celebration of Mother Language Day in Bangladesh holds immense significance within the socio-cultural fabric of the nation. This occasion, observed annually on February 21st, serves as a poignant reminder of the historic Language Movement of 1952, a critical chapter in Bangladesh's struggle for linguistic rights and cultural identity. With its roots deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of the Bangladeshi people, this commemoration underscores the enduring vitality and profound influence of mother languages. Since ancient times, Bangladesh has been a destination for various ethnic groups, including Aryans, Dravidians, Austrians, Mongols, Afghans, Pathans, Marathi, Persians, Mughal Sultanate, Portuguese, Dutch, and English, who arrived for purposes such as trade, preaching, and ruling. Despite encounters with different ethnicities, the language and culture of the country have remained largely intact while also experiencing enrichment. During the period of Bengal's independent Sultanate from 1342 to 1537, the region was referred to as 'Bangla,' a name that resonated in the amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups, including Hindu-Muslims, and the flourishing of the Bengali language and literature (Banu, 1992, p. 26). Over time, despite changes in state power, political dynamics, and religious differences, the linguistic unity of Bangladesh has remained unbroken. Although the creation of a nation-state in 1947, based on the two-nation theory, aimed to establish a religious identity as a defining factor, language transcended these boundaries in East Pakistan, unifying its people, ultimately leading to the historic 1952 language movement. Following the partition of India, approximately 44 million Bengali-speaking individuals from East Bengal became citizens of the newly formed East Pakistan, which had a population of 69 million (Mazid, 2012).

In 1947, the National Education Conference held in Karachi, Pakistan, advocated Urdu as the sole state language, recommending its exclusive use in media and schools (Matin, & Rafiq, 2017, p. 35). This proposal was met with strong opposition, and students across various schools and colleges, including Dhaka University, Dhaka Medical College, and Jagannath College, boycotted classes and organised protests throughout the country. The demand for Bengali as the national language was formally presented to the first Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, during his visit to East Pakistan in November 1948. The subsequent developments further fueled the language movement. On January 27th, 1952, then

Prime Minister Khawaja Nazimuddin delivered a public speech at Paltan Maidan in Dhaka, where he announced Urdu as the national language of Pakistan (Matin, & Rafiq, 2017, p. 17). This proclamation ignited significant protests, leading to the formation of the "Sarbadliya Rashtra Bhasha Sangram Parishad" on January 31st, 1952, under the leadership of Kazi Ghelam Mahbub. The movement planned to observe "Flag Day" on February 11th and 13th, followed by a demonstration on February 21st, when students would present their demand for Bengali as the national language at the Provincial Parishad Building. However, East Pakistan Chief Minister Nurul Amin's government-imposed Section 144 in Dhaka, prohibiting public gatherings (S. M. S. Alam, 1991, p. 479). When students defied this order and attempted to hold a rally, the police opened fire, resulting in the martyrdom of Barkat, Rafiq, Jabbar, Shafiur Rahman, and Abdus Salam (Abedin, 2016). This tragic incident triggered widespread protests and intensified the agitation in East Pakistan. Consequently, on May 7th, 1954, Bengali was granted the status of a state language. When the first constitution of Pakistan was drafted in 1956, it acknowledged Bengali and Urdu as the state languages (Nur et al., 2020, p. 21). February 21st, 1952, holds immense historical significance as it marks the establishment of the Bengali language through a mass movement under the slogan "I want the national language Bangla." Since 1953, International Mother Language Day has been celebrated annually on this date to honour the sacrifice made by those who exhibited immense love for the Bengali language, even at the cost of their lives. Throughout February, language festivals are organised in educational institutions, from districts and upazilas to remote villages. These events include discussions, cultural activities, and prayers for the souls of the language movement martyrs, ensuring the memory of their sacrifices endures. On this occasion, the Bangla Academy organises a month-long book fair known as the Ekushe Book Fair. Since the inception of independent Bangladesh, this fair has become a traditional event (F. Alam, 2014, p. 20). Taking place throughout February, it occupies the Burdwan House premises of Bangla Academy. The fair encompasses around five hundred publishing houses, featuring dedicated sections for children's literature and stalls representing government and private institutions (K. M. R. Alam, 2023). In addition to these festivities, there are separate sections dedicated to honouring the language martyrs, such as Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Jabbar, as well as renowned literary figures like Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, and Abdul Karim. The fair hosts discussions on diverse topics, poetry recitals, and cultural programs daily during the evenings. The Government of Bangladesh officially proposed

the recognition of February 21st as 'International Mother Language Day' to UNESCO. In 1999, UNESCO acknowledged Bengali as an International Mother Language Day, and in 2010, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the resolution, designating February 21st as International Mother Language Day to be celebrated annually (M. M. Rahman, 2020, p. 289).

The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 was a direct outcome of the nation's transformation, spurred by the spirit of the language movement of 1952. This crucial event reshaped the region's destiny, and Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation, embodying the collective aspirations of its people. The Bengali language has played a crucial role in fostering a unified identity among the diverse ethnic and religious groups residing in Bangladesh. It has transcended ethnic and religious boundaries, uniting individuals under a shared Bangladeshi identity. This linguistic cohesion has been instrumental in forging a common national identity that encompasses all the citizens of Bangladesh, regardless of their diverse backgrounds. The observance of International Mother Language Day in Bangladesh is a powerful testament to the nation's unwavering commitment to preserving and promoting linguistic pluralism. This commitment reflects Bangladesh's dedication to safeguarding the linguistic rights of its people but also contributes to the broader global discourse on language rights and the enrichment of society's cultural fabric. By celebrating and cherishing linguistic diversity, Bangladesh continues to endorse the values of inclusivity and cultural preservation, paving the way for a more harmonious and enriched society.

5.7.2 Pahela Baisakh (Bengali New Year)

Historically, Bangladesh has predominantly relied on agriculture, resulting in various customs and festivals deeply rooted in agrarian-based social life. Pahela Boishakh, initially originating as an agricultural celebration, has evolved into a universally observed festival. The inception of Pahela Baisakh can be traced back to the reign of Emperor Akbar, a Muslim Mughal ruler (Minhus & Huie, 2021, p. 4). Bengal, encompassing a vast territory, held significant economic importance for the Mughals, with revenue collection being facilitated through the Zamindars, who acted as intermediaries. However, Bengal was prone to natural disasters such as floods, storms, and droughts, often resulting in crop failures.

Consequently, the collection of revenue by the zamindars faced difficulties due to farmers' inability to meet payment deadlines. Recognising the prevailing circumstances in Bengal, the Mughal administration devised a plan to schedule tax payments when crops were typically harvested, allowing subjects to pay taxes promptly. Under the guidance of Emperor Akbar, the esteemed astronomer and thinker of that time, Amir Fatehullah Siraji, created a new Bengali calendar based on the solar and Arabic Hijri years (Samayeen & Imon, 2016b, p. 161). Thus, the modern Bengali calendar, known as "Bangabda" or the Bengali year, came into existence as part of the reforms in revenue collection. As per the newly introduced regulations, farmers in Bengal would pay revenue to zamindars, talukdars, and other landlords until the final day of the fourth month. The following day, which marked the first day of the month of Baisakh, landlords would adopt a genial demeanour and organise various events. Subedar Islam Chishti of Bengal would distribute sweets among the subjects and celebrate the Baisakhi festival in front of his residence (Akter, 2023). Emperor Akbar introduced the new solar system for convenience in tax collection, drawing inspiration from Iran's solar system. The Mughal emperors held a particular fascination for Iranian civilisation. Thus, the tradition of Pahela Baisakh, celebrated in Bangladesh, can be traced back to Iran. Iranians commemorate a unique festival called Nowruz on the first day of their solar year (Nowshin, 2017). Initially centred around economic linkages, Pahela Baisakh gradually became a universal festival. This New Year festival bears close associations with rural life in Bengal, making it particularly significant for the rural populace. Typically, on Narvarsh day, people clean their homes and prepare traditional dishes, including sweets, cakes, and pies. Relatives, friends, and neighbours gather in households to partake in the festivities. Pahela Boishakh is the focal point for widespread folk fairs nationwide. These fairs showcase local agricultural produce, handicrafts, traditional artefacts, rural cottage industries, children's toys, women's ornaments, and Pottery. Various delectable conventional food items such as Chira, Muri, Khai, Batasa, and a diverse array of sweets are served at these fairs. Cultural programs like Nagordola, Circus, and Yatra Pala are organised to entertain visitors. Pahela Boishakh holds a prominent place in Bengali literature, with renowned poets and writers, including Kazi Nazrul Islam, Rabindranath Tagore, Farrukh Ahmad, Palli Kavi Jasimuddin, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Kabi Al Mahmud, and Jibanananda Das, producing numerous poems, lyrical compositions, rhymes, essays, and studies dedicated to the festival in Bengali literature (Saha, 2023).

Over time, Pahela Boishakh has assumed new forms, reflecting ongoing social and political changes. Rituals such as the Ramana procession and the Dhaka Mangal Shobhayatra, along with the consumption of panta bhat (fermented rice) and Hilsa fish and the donning of red and white saris, have been promoted as traditional aspects of Pahela Baishakh. However, these elements have emerged due to social and political divisions and corporate influences, bearing little connection to the ancient traditions of Pahela Baishakh. In 1965, as a protest against the government of Pakistan, the organisation Chhaynat initiated the singing of Rabindra Sangeet (songs composed by Rabindranath Tagore) at the Ramana Batmool based on the Bengali New Year (Samayeen & Imon, 2016b, p. 162). Subsequently, the Chhaynat organisation began organising annual celebrations by singing Rabindra Sangeet at Ramana Botmule. After the country gained independence in 1989, the Mangalshovayatra became popular on the first day of Baisakh. Students from the Fine Arts Institute of Dhaka University organised the Mangalshovayatra to protest against autocracy, ultimately leading to its widespread acceptance (Samayeen & Imon, 2016b, p. 163). Nowadays, it is customary for women to wear white Sarees with red borders and for men to wear pyjama panjabi with matching-coloured inserts. However, Pahela Baishakh or the Varshavaran ceremony initially did not exhibit any specific colour preferences. While dressing well was emphasised, no particular colours were mentioned (Akter, 2023). The consumption of panta bhat (fermented rice) and Hilsa fish on Pahela Boishakh was not part of Bengali culture in its early days; this concept emerged in the 21st century as a corporate construct. Bangladesh strives to preserve the traditions of an exemplary society founded on strong moral values. Bangladesh has not socially acknowledged these phenomena despite nude dance, drinking practices, polygamous marriages, and extramarital affairs within the community. By disregarding the majority population's religious consciousness and fundamental beliefs, the emerging cultural trends represent a form of cultural hegemony.

5.7.3 Navanna (New Rice Festival)

Navanna (New Rice Festival), a traditional grain festival celebrated in Bangladesh, holds great significance as a symbol of agricultural civilisation within the country. According to the Bengali calendar, Navanna occurs on the first day of the second month

of the Hemant season, corresponding to Agrahayana, the eighth month (A. Nath, 2021). Rooted in the agricultural society of Bangladesh, Navanna represents one of the cherished rituals and festivals observed at various stages of crop production. The festival of Navanna emerges from the deep-rooted connection that the people of Bangladesh have with their agricultural land. As the month of Kartik begins, the paddy in the fields gradually ripens. This paddy is meticulously processed and stored during Agrahayana to ensure a steady supply for consumption in the subsequent months.

Consequently, a sense of scarcity is alleviated when farmers finally gather the paddy after a patient wait of 4-5 months. To celebrate the arrival of this new harvest, farming households joyously commemorate it with a festival, during which a variety of Payes and delicacies are prepared (I. Ahmed & Jahan, 2013, p. 166). Navanna festival has been observed in the homes of Bangladesh since ancient times, during the month of Agrahayan. The festival encompasses a range of ceremonies held throughout the country. Hindu farmers organise pujas, with thirteen pujas held during the twelve months, including one dedicated explicitly to Navanna. In some regions, Muslims traditionally offer prayers at home and distribute Shinni in mosques.

Moreover, in certain areas, relatives, including sons-in-law and daughters, are invited to the father's house to partake in the festivities. An intriguing aspect of the Navanna festival is the folk fair, a grand fair held during the festival. The fair offers various items, such as cakes, sweets, Sandesh, manda-mithai, toys, dolls, and essential daily items made from earthenware, bamboo, and cane (Dr. S. Mandal, 2022). The fair features puppet dances, circus performances, and bioscope shows to entertain the children. Additionally, diverse regions organise cultural concerts featuring traditional songs, including Jari, Sari, Murshidi, Lalan, Pala, and Bicher songs (Dr. S. Mandal, 2022). Over time, the folk festival of Nabanna has transcended its rural origins and has gained recognition as a national festival of the country. Since 1998, the official celebration of the Navanna festival has been observed at the state level in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh (The Daily Ittefaq, 2022). The National Navanna Festival Celebrations Council orchestrates the annual Navanna Festival on the Pahela Agrahayana date.

Moreover, the Faculty of Fine Arts at Dhaka University organises a three-day Nabanna Festival, including various vibrant events and an array of patty arrangements.

Navanna transcends caste, religion, and social divisions, as the entire country comes together to celebrate this festival. It serves as a unifying force, fostering a sense of unity, brotherhood, and kinship among the Bangladeshi nation while forging stronger social bonds among its people.

5.7.4 Jabbar's Balikhela (Wrestling Competition)

Jabbar's Balikhela wrestling competition is a popular and traditional event in Bangladesh. The competition occurs annually on the 12th of Baisakh at Laldighi Maidan in Chittagong. It is an entirely non-communal ceremony, disregarding caste and religion, and attracts participants and spectators from all walks of life, including Muslims and Hindus (Tasnim & Alam, 2022, p. 59). In 1909, Abdul Jabbar Saudagar, a businessman from Chittagong, introduced the Balikhela competition to foster anti-British sentiment among Bengali youth and nurture Bengali culture (P. Barua, 2023). Since its inception, the competition has been held every year, spanning three days, and has drawn wrestlers nationwide. In addition to participants from British and Pakistani colonies, renowned wrestlers from the Arakan region of Burma also partake in this sport (Tasnim & Alam, 2022, p. 64). Thousands of visitors from various parts of Bangladesh gather to witness this grand spectacle. The Baisakhi fair, encompassing an area of approximately three kilometres around Laldighi Maidan and centred around the wrestling event, accompanies Jabbar's Balikhela (The Business Standard, 2023). This fair is the largest of its kind in the Greater Chittagong area. It provides a platform for selling various household products unique to the region while hosting diverse folk culture programs. Over time, Jabbar Balikhela and the Baisakhi Fair have emerged as cherished symbols of Bangladesh's rich tradition and culture, evoking a sense of national pride.

5.8 MARRIAGE CEREMONY

Bangladesh's Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, and anthropological communities uphold their respective religious traditions. Marriage holds significant significance in the lives of individuals within each religious community, with followers adhering to the fundamental principles of their respective faiths in conducting marriage ceremonies. It

is noteworthy that while marriage rituals observed within Bangladesh's Muslim and Hindu societies share resemblances, most of these practices have evolved into social customs rather than being strictly rooted in religious doctrines.

5.8.1 Introductory Phase and Meet the Bride

Marriage proposals in Bangladesh involve an intermediary known as a Ghatak or sometimes relatives, who serve as the initial point of contact between the prospective bride and groom (A. U. Ahmed, 1986, p. 53). If both parties express mutual interest, the future groom will visit the bride's residence. This tradition has ancient roots in the country, where it has been customary to bring betel nuts when visiting someone's house. In the context of the bridegroom's first visit, he typically carries betel nuts and sugar beets as offerings. Providing and consuming sugar betas during the ceremony of seeing the bride is known as 'Panchini' or 'Panchini's invitation' (Sabur, 2014, p. 600). During the meeting, important matters such as the date and time of the marriage, dowry, and other arrangements are discussed and agreed upon either orally or through written documentation in the presence of both parties. On this occasion, the groom's party witnesses the bride's face for the first time and presents her with money or an original ornament, often a ring. Additionally, the Panchini sugar betas and betel nuts are distributed among all those present as a gesture of goodwill. In Hindu society, the term 'Ashirvad' is commonly used to refer to this ceremony, while 'Bainama' is the term more frequently employed within Muslim society.

5.8.2 Gaye Halud (Turmeric Bath)

In both Muslim and Hindu societies in Bangladesh, the "Gaye Halud" ceremony holds great significance across all strata of society, regardless of wealth, social status, education level, or rural-urban divide. Gaye Halud is a pre-wedding ceremony that occurs separately from the leading wedding event (Deb & Khondkar, 2011, p. 160). Although it traditionally involved the application of turmeric paste on the bride or groom, over time, the tradition has evolved into a more elaborate affair. A vital element of the Gaye Halud ceremony is using raw turmeric, which holds symbolic value. The groom or bride sends various gifts to the event organised by the other party. Typically,

the organising party attends the ceremony, and the guests from the other side may also be present, bringing gifts. During the ceremony, the bride or groom is seated on a rug, and individuals of all ages apply a yellow paste made from turmeric on their cheeks or hands (Capo, 2013a, p. 17). This act carries cultural and auspicious significance.

5.8.3 Mehedi Tola (Use of Henna)

Applying henna on the hands and feet, known as "henna tola," is a customary practice during wedding celebrations in Bangladesh. The ceremony involving the paste and application of mehedi (henna) is akin to the turmeric ceremony (khan, 2014). Typically, henna is prepared by grinding natural henna leaves, creating a paste that is subsequently used for decoration. The henna leaves are combined with crushed stalks of kheer, terracotta, and kachur to enhance the henna mixture's texture and adherence. The bride and groom apply mehndi, but the bride's adornment with mehndi tends to be more elaborate and intricate than the groom's.

5.8.4 Wedding Clothes and Ornament

On the wedding day, the groom's attire in Bangladesh typically consists of a Punjabi-pajama ensemble and a sherwani, a long coat-like garment (Shoukat & Islam, 2016, p. 144). He adorns his head with a cap, over which a turban is elegantly wrapped. The groom completes his attire with socks and shoes for his feet, carrying a handkerchief in his pocket or hand. Traditionally, brides in Bangladesh have worn red Sarees for weddings, although maroon, jam, dark blue, purple, or pink shades have also gained popularity (Shoukat & Islam, 2016, p. 144). These Sarees come in fabrics such as Banarasi, Katan, Tissue, or Muslin and may feature lacework, heavy sequins, embroidery, pearls, or Kundan work. Additionally, a wide array of gold ornaments is worn during weddings, including Tikali (headpiece), tiara, bala (bangles), earrings, knuckle rings, Nalock (nose ring), neck chains, statement necklaces, rings, payal (anklets), nupur (toe rings), and more. (The Daily Star, 2016) As for men's accessories, finger-ring, bracelets, and necklaces are commonly observed as part of their wedding attire.

5.8.5 Wedding

During the wedding ceremony, the groom arrives at the bride's house with a procession comprising family members, close relatives, friends, and neighbours. Separate seating arrangements are made for the bride and groom, with the groom taking his designated seat. In Muslim marriages, the Qazi, in the presence of relatives from both the bride and groom's families, seeks the couple's consent. Once their consent is obtained, the main formalities of the marriage are completed (Capo, 2013, p. 19). During this time, a marriage sermon is recited, and prayers are offered to Allah for the well-being and happiness of the newlyweds. In Hindu weddings, the priest recites marriage chants, holds the sacred fire in his left hand, and circumambulates it seven times to signify the completion of the main ceremony (Capo, 2013, p. 19).

A feast is served to the bride and groom's guests after the wedding ceremony. The menu typically includes dishes such as Polao (a fragrant rice dish), regular rice, roasted chicken, korma, kebab, rezala, biryani, and fish (S. Noman, 2019). Sweet delicacies such as curds, pies, jordas, and a variety of regional pithas are also offered to the groom's guests (S. Noman, 2019). It is important to note that, due to religious reasons, Hindus do not serve beef to their guests. While there may be slight variations in the food served based on regional preferences, the overall food selection does not significantly differ between Hindu and Muslim weddings. After the wedding feast, the groom accompanies the bride, seated together. Other rituals are performed, followed by the farewell phase. The bride is handed over to the groom by her family, signifying the formal union. Emotional farewells often occur, with relatives, including parents, expressing their emotions through tears. It is worth noting that, apart from specific religious practices, there are no fundamental differences between the Muslim and Hindu communities in the context of weddings.

5.8.6 Post-Marriage Celebration

Following the marriage ceremony, a post-marriage celebration known as Baubhat is organised at the groom's house in all societies, including those of Hindu and Muslim communities. This festive event is joyful and centres around sharing food and drinks. The specific meal arrangements are contingent upon the financial capacity of the families involved. Typically, Baubhat takes place either on the day after the wedding or

occasionally three days later. Relatives from the bride's side are invited to participate in the celebration (Monger, 2013, p. 43). In Hindu society, the Baubhat event is a significant ritual whereby the bride is escorted to the kitchen. By engaging in the act of touching the food, she symbolically signifies her acceptance into the groom's family. This ritual serves as a meaningful gesture, solidifying the bride's integration into her new marital household. It is important to note that Hindu and Muslim wedding ceremonies are attended by members of both communities, fostering an atmosphere of inclusivity and shared participation (Mohinuddin, 2022). Different meal preparations sometimes cater to Hindu and Muslim guests' dietary requirements and preferences. However, in most cases, the meals are arranged and shared collectively, emphasising unity and togetherness. This communal sharing of meals reflects the harmonious nature of these celebrations, transcending religious boundaries and promoting a sense of camaraderie among all involved.

5.9 THE FAIRS OF BANGLADESH

The fair serves as a manifestation of Bangladesh's cultural, traditional, and festive aspects. In a village-based society, fairs serve as a celebration and entertainment for the local populace. Elaborate and vibrant arrangements characterise these events. Over time, fairs have evolved and expanded beyond the confines of villages, extending their influence into urban areas. One of the primary functions of fairs is to bring together individuals from diverse ethnic groups, religious communities, poets, artists, tribes, holy men, and ascetics. This convergence highlights the non-communal attitude deeply ingrained in the traditional values of Bangladesh. Fairs serve as a nexus between the rural populace and their cultural heritage, encompassing elements from various religions. Fairs in Bangladesh have originated from different perspectives, giving rise to various types of fairs. Agricultural festivals, such as Baisakhi Mela, Navanna, and Paushparvan fairs, celebrate the agricultural cycle (M. Hossain, 2014). Seasonal fairs mark specific seasons and occasions, including Vasant Utsav, Kartikvrat Mela, Ras Mela, and Chaitrasankranti Mela. Religious festivals such as Durga Puja Mela, Buddhist Mela, Janmashtami Mela, Maharam Mela, Shiv Mela, Mangalchandi Mela, Rath Mela, Mansar Mela, Rajpunyahaar Mela, and Ganga Abirbhava Utsav provide

platforms for religious observances (M. Hossain, 2014). National events such as the 21's Book Fair and Vijay Mela are also celebrated through fairs.

Furthermore, there are trade fairs, folk craft fairs, agricultural fairs, textile fairs, fish fairs, and tree fairs, which serve as venues for the exhibition of commercial goods. Notable fairs in Bangladesh include the Dolpurnima fair held at Lalan Sai Akhara in Kushtia, the Harithakur fair in Gopalganj, the Shah Sultan fair in Mahasthangarh, Bogra, the Maizbhandar fair in Chittagong, the Enayetpuri fair in Sirajganj, the Baul Shah Abdul Karim fair in Sylhet, the Hasan fair in Sunamganj, the Rabindra fair in Shilaidah, the Nazrul fair in Darirampur, the Madhu fair in Sagardani, the Jasim Mela in Faridpur, and the Bijumela organised by tribal communities. Sonargaon, a historically significant town renowned for its folk arts and traditions in Bengal, holds a month-long folk craft fair and festival each year (Kakon, 2022, p. 171). This event aims to revive and showcase rural Bengal's vanishing culture and traditions while introducing them to the younger generation. In addition to these prominent fairs, Bangladesh hosts over 10,000 smaller fairs yearly, each commemorating various occasions (Tarfdar, 2015).

The fairs hold a special allure through their vast array of consumer goods, household items, and diverse entertainment events. Women and girls are particularly drawn to the fair, where they have the opportunity to purchase items such as alta (a red dye), snow, powder, glass bangles, nose studs, earrings, hair ribbons, khoppa (hairpin), clips, and various body adornments (S. Sarkar, 2016). Additionally, fairs offer a chance to indulge in delectable treats like jilapi (a sweet pretzel-like pastry), Gaja (deep-fried dough), cloves, rasgulla (a syrupy dessert), karma (fried pastry), tilua-batasa (sesame-flavored sugar cookies), okhra (a sweet), Binni paddy khai (puffed rice sweets), and curd-chira (curd with flattened rice) (S. Sarkar, 2016). Moreover, fairs serve as marketplaces for a wide range of products, including cloth, Manohar (decorative items), plastic goods, puja (worship) items, religious posters, pictures, bamboo crafts, and utensils made of copper, bronze, and brass (Tarfdar, 2015). Special attention is given to Gersthal items, which encompass essential tools such as da (a type of knife), scissors, axes, hunting (a small sickle), cooking utensils, fans, dhakis (drums), sieves, chips (winnowing trays), Jalchouki (water pots), and pindis (earthen pots). The fair brings the vibrant essence of village life to the forefront, where visitors can witness captivating performances such as Yatra palar asar (traditional theatre), Gambhira kirtan (devotional

songs), Jari-sari (musical recitation), Ramayana (epic narrative), circus acts, puppet dances, nagardola (swings), bull fights, cock fights, stick games, and hadudu games, all of which captivate and entertain attendees (M. Hossain, 2014).

5.10 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, promoting communal harmony between Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh relies on recognising and appreciating universal cultural aspects. The diverse cultural landscape of the country, influenced by various historical and religious factors, shapes the identity of its people. Cultural elements such as folk traditions, arts and crafts, literature, social customs, marriage ceremonies, and festivals play a vital role in fostering understanding, respect, and connection between religious communities. The rich history of Bangladesh, encompassing influences from different cultures and religions, contributes to the unique and diverse fabric of its society. Islam, as the majority religion, coexists with Hinduism and other religious beliefs, creating an environment where individuals can share joy, participate in each other's festivals, and demonstrate a liberal tolerance towards different religious groups. Sufism, emphasising universal love, compassion, and inclusivity, has acted as a bridge between Islam and Hinduism, promoting interreligious harmony in Bangladesh. Sufi saints' teachings have helped nurture a spirit of acceptance and understanding among different religious communities. However, contemporary challenges such as conflicts, communal violence, sociopolitical factors, sectarian interests, electoral strategies, and discriminatory policies pose barriers to communal harmony. Addressing these issues and working towards eliminating them is crucial to create a more inclusive and harmonious society. By recognising and celebrating cultural diversity, individuals in Bangladesh can develop empathy, tolerance, and mutual respect. This can foster an environment where communal harmony can thrive, allowing Muslims and Hindus to coexist peacefully and build a stronger and more united nation.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 RESEARCH FINDING

This Chapter highlights the findings of each Chapter that could be capitalised to address the Socio-Cultural issues faced by Bangladesh. This study explored the inter-cultural approach to Muslim-Hindu inter-religious dialogue towards building communal harmony in Bangladesh via the fulfilment of the research objectives. The four main objectives of this research include: (i) to understand the socio-religious context of Bangladesh, (ii) to examine the historical overview of the Muslim-Hindu relationship during the Muslim rule of Medieval Bengal, (iii) to analyse the challenges faced in maintaining communal harmony between the Muslims and the Hindus in present-day Bangladesh and finally (iv) to explore the common cultural aspects that could promote communal harmony between the two communities.

Chapter Two focuses on the socio-religious background of Bangladesh and its importance in comprehending its uniqueness. Bangladesh is a country with a rich cultural inheritance, including a diversified ancestry that includes Dravidian, Australoid, Mongolian, and Aryan genetic influences. Although there are genetic variations, the individuals in Bangladesh possess a shared communal awareness, although marked by certain wrong and extreme attitudes. However, religion has had a significant impact on forming the typical mindset of the people. Initially, Buddhism and Jainism were subscribed to, but the emergence of Islam by Arab merchants and missionaries gave freedom from long-standing Brahmin domination and transformed people's way of life. In fact, Muslim rulers contributed significantly towards developing the state into a prosperous civilisation besides fostering a new sense of Nationhood. It turned out that historical events such as the founding of the British colonies and the fall of the Muslim Empire caused religious divisions and mistrust amongst the two major groups of people, i.e. the Muslims and the Hindus. The British-led partition of India in 1947 resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh as a distinct State founded on religious identity. In the following years, various nationalist ideologies materialised, namely Secular Bengali Nationalism and Bangladeshi Nationalism. These two ideologies were to play a crucial role in defining the Nation-State's identity.

Overall, this chapter's outstanding finding is that its peoples' have diverse heritage, religion and identity. However, Islam and Muslims are the dominant feature. The Muslim rulers significantly contributed to establishing a flourishing civilisation and promoting new nationhood. This is evident through the formation of the Shahi Bangla kingdoms and the development of the language, literature, calendar systems, cuisine, costume design, and architecture. Understanding insight into these processes, precisely the significance of Bangladeshi Nationalism is essential for promoting unity and advancement within the country.

Chapter Three presents a historical overview of the Muslim-Hindu interaction during the Muslim rule in Medieval Bengal. It also reveals that there had been a significant level of inter-religious tolerance and potential towards integration of the two major religious groups. The influx of Arabs, the impact of Sufi saints, and the propagation of Islam via commercial networks contributed to the embracement of Islam among the majority of the Bengali population. The Muslim rulers of Bengal showed generosity and tolerance towards non-Muslims, notably Hindus, without forcibly enforcing conversions. The values of Islamic brotherhood, equality, and social justice were significant in the conversion of Buddhists and Hindus from Lower Castes to Islam, thereby influencing the formation of a diverse Muslim community. Despite the religious contrasts and incompatible rituals between Islam and Hinduism, Muslim rulers frequently interacted with the Hindu society. Hindus had crucial roles in the governance of the state, while Muslim rulers provided support and patronage to Hindu intellectuals and poets. The Mughal architecture and art demonstrate the peaceful blending of Hindu and Muslim cultures, which improved cordial relationships between the two groups. The impact of Muslim culture on the beliefs and social customs of Hindus was apparent, as they had a genuine respect for Muslim Sufis and eagerly sought their blessings. These mutual understandings and cultures should be able to pave the way towards long-lasting social integration amongst the Muslims and Hindus who had enjoyed socio-economic and religious rights from the beginning.

Chapter Four discloses that despite the long history of co-existence, there had occurred increased sporadic instability and conflicts between the Muslims and the Hindus in Bangladesh. Furthermore, the political influence of the formation of India and Pakistan in 1947 played a crucial role in nurturing communal hostility between the two communities. However, it is crucial to observe that political factors, not religious

motivations, were the primary drove of persecution and violence towards religious minorities in Bangladesh.

This study observes that violence towards minority communities, which includes arson attacks on houses, temple vandalism, land grabbing and killings, has been recorded in Bangladesh. But the ruling party's discriminate involvement and the worsening law and order situation in the country had resulted in the torture and persecution of followers from all religious communities, particularly the Hindus. Hence, the oppression of the Hindus could be regarded as part of the overall socio-political instability in Bangladesh rather than being a separate issue. Nowadays, regional geopolitics significantly handles communal issues, violence, religious persecution, and radicalism in Bangladesh. The Awami League has utilised communal political tactics to mitigate its legitimacy crisis and preserve its power during the last fifteen years. Simultaneously, despite the violation of human rights, India and China persist in backing tackling national and international challenges to the Bangladesh Awami League. Specifically, India has pursued its geopolitical interest by categorising any assault on the Hindu population as a communal attack. India's involvement in Bangladesh's internal politics via supporting the Awami League has strengthened its hegemony and promoted communal sentiment among the Hindus in Bangladesh. It has allowed it possible for India to maintain influence over Bangladesh and apply direct pressure on the government of Bangladesh.

Overall, the findings suggest that to keep communal peace in Bangladesh, it is necessary to tackle the political and social instability prevalent in the nation. The lack of a rule of law, electoral violence, and the detrimental effects of false social media content are major factors that significantly contribute to the violence against the Hindu population. It is imperative to address these problems and cultivate an environment of religious freedom, tolerance, and reverence for all groups to achieve long-term communal peace in Bangladesh.

Chapter Five investigates the universal cultural elements for fostering communal peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh. The country's unique cultural milieu, formed by historical and religious impact, plays a significant role in shaping its nation's identity. Cultural components, such as social rituals, folk traditions, literature, arts and crafts, marriage ceremonies, and festivals,

promote comprehension, respect and assimilation among religious groups. The prosperous history of Bangladesh, influenced by diverse cultures and religions, provides a domain where individuals can exchange happiness, participate in each other's celebrations, and express tolerance towards different religious communities. Sufism bridges Islam and Hinduism, encouraging interreligious cooperation by highlighting universal affection, empathy, and inclusion. The teachings of Sufi saints have fostered tolerance and understanding among various religious communities.

Finally, this chapter promotes the notion that enriching communal harmony in Bangladesh requires acknowledging and capitalising on cultural diversity, common traditions and way of life. Through adopting cultural components and cultivating empathy, tolerance, and mutual respect, people may actively contribute to the harmonious coexistence of Muslims and Hindus, thus strengthening and integrating the country.

6.2 DISCUSSION

This study has highlighted inter-religious dialogue between Muslims and Hindus in fostering communal harmony in Bangladesh. Each chapter presents findings illustrating how such dialogue can be a powerful platform for building a cohesive and peaceful society. By examining the socio-religious context, historical interactions, contemporary challenges, and cultural commonalities, it can see the significant potential of inter-religious dialogue in addressing socio-cultural issues in Bangladesh.

6.2.1 Understanding the Socio-Religious Context

Chapter Two underscores Bangladesh's rich cultural and religious heritage, a shared legacy that is pivotal for fostering a sense of unity and belonging. Despite the diverse genetic and religious backgrounds, the people of Bangladesh share a communal awareness shaped significantly by Islam and the historical contributions of Muslim rulers. Interreligious dialogue can leverage this shared heritage to promote mutual understanding and respect, fostering a sense of inclusivity. Acknowledging the dominant influence of Islam while appreciating the contributions of other religious

traditions, such dialogue can create a platform for inclusive discussions that reinforce national unity, strengthening collective bond.

6.2.2 Historical Muslim-Hindu Relations

Chapter Three provides a historical overview of Muslim-Hindu interactions during the Muslim rule in Medieval Bengal, highlighting periods of significant inter-religious tolerance and cultural integration. The historical generosity and tolerance shown by Muslim rulers towards Hindus, as well as the influence of Sufi saints, underscore the potential for interreligious dialogue to bridge contemporary gaps between the two communities. This historical precedent serves as a model for current efforts, demonstrating that peaceful coexistence and mutual respect are achievable through dialogue.

6.2.3 Addressing Contemporary Challenges

Chapter Four discusses the challenges faced in maintaining communal harmony in present-day Bangladesh, emphasising that political factors, rather than religious motivations, often drive conflicts. Interreligious dialogue can be pivotal in addressing these issues by providing a platform for political and community leaders to engage in constructive discussions. By focusing on shared goals such as improving law and order, countering misinformation, and fostering social stability, dialogue can help mitigate tensions and reduce violence against minority communities. This approach can transform political and social instability into opportunities for cooperation and mutual support.

6.2.4 Leveraging Cultural Commonalities

Chapter Five explores the common cultural aspects that promote communal harmony between Muslims and Hindus. The shared cultural elements, such as festivals, literature, arts, and social rituals, provide a strong foundation for interreligious dialogue. The influence of Sufism, which emphasises universal love, empathy, and inclusion, further

bridges the gap between Muslims and Hindus. Interreligious dialogue can enhance mutual respect and strengthen communal bonds by celebrating these cultural commonalities, creating a more integrated and harmonious society.

6.3 RECOMMENDATION

This thesis argues that Interreligious dialogue is crucial in promoting communal harmony between Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh. By acknowledging and embracing common cultural elements, these communities should engage in meaningful dialogues that promote understanding, respect, mutual appreciation, and brotherly love.

The following recommendations are proposed to enhance interreligious dialogue considering similar cultural elements. The Ministry of Religious Affairs Bangladesh, the Ministry of Education, relevant government and non-government organisations, and other pertinent authorities should implement these recommendations. They include:

6.3.1 Promoting Cultural Exchange Programs

Organising cultural exchange programmes that highlight the common heritage of Muslims and Hindus. These events may enhance a more profound comprehension of their mutual cultural aspects. These programmes include many forms of artistic expression, such as Jamdani, Nakshi Kantha, Pottery and Alpana exhibits, folk music performances, storytelling sessions, and traditional culinary events. They facilitate meaningful interactions and foster mutual appreciation of cultural traditions among the people of both communities.

6.3.2 Establishing Interreligious Forums

Creating dedicated platforms or forums that bring together religious leaders, scholars, and community members from both Muslim and Hindu backgrounds can encourage open and constructive dialogue. These forums can serve as spaces for discussing shared

cultural values, traditions, and beliefs, highlighting the commonalities that unite the communities and promoting a sense of harmony and cooperation.

6.3.3 Incorporating Unbiased Cultural Education in Schools

Developing unbiased cultural education by highlighting the common cultural elements of Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh has the potential to cultivate reciprocal comprehension among young pupils. Integrating lessons on folklore, literature, traditional arts and crafts, and actual events that connect religious customs might facilitate dismantling preconceptions and foster a feeling of collective heritage.

6.3.4 Interreligious Community Service Projects

Collaborative community service initiatives that unite individuals from diverse religious backgrounds may enhance connections and develop a collective commitment to responsibility. Muslims and Hindus may collaborate in endeavours such as relief assistance in natural disasters, volunteering service during each other's religious festivals, and social awareness campaign programs fostering comprehension and collaboration that transcend religious divisions.

6.3.5 Facilitating Interreligious Dialogues on Cultural Themes

Organising interreligious dialogues focused on cultural themes, such as literature, music, or traditional practices, may foster substantive discussions and promote the exchange of experiences. These conversations provide a secure environment for people to articulate their viewpoints, inquire, and acquire knowledge from one another, developing connections of comprehension and admiration.

6.3.6 Media and Communication Initiatives

Utilising various media platforms such as television, radio, and social media for presenting narratives of community peace, shared cultural traditions, and successful

interreligious partnerships can benefit public opinion. Emphasising positive instances and stories may effectively combat divisive narratives and foster a more inclusive and harmonious social milieu.

6.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study also paves the way for future research on intercultural approaches to interreligious dialogue in different contexts. Comparative research may be undertaken to understand better how comparable techniques might be implemented in other places with varying religious dynamics. Besides, longitudinal studies could track the development and efficacy of interreligious dialogue programmes in fostering communal peace over time. Exploring the influence of technology and social media in promoting intercultural dialogue might be a fascinating future research topic.

6.5 CLOSING REMARKS

An intercultural approach to Muslim-Hindu inter-religious dialogue holds tremendous opportunity for building communal harmony in Bangladesh. Recognition of the socio-religious context, historical dynamics, challenges, and shared cultural components can pave the way for a more inclusive and harmonious society. This study objectively depicts the challenges and prospects of interactions between Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh. It is intended for researchers, theology students, NGOs, politicians, religious leaders, and anyone who wants to foster dialogue, understanding, and reverence. Ultimately, successfully implementing the recommended strategies will contribute to a harmonious and cohesive society where all peoples can live happy and peaceful lives on this earth.

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