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Origin and Socio-cultural Formation of Bihari Identity: A Study on Bihari Community in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Bihari community has been living in Bangladesh since 1947, after being forced to migrate from various regions of India. Owing to religious differences, the Bihari community was expelled by communal riot from their homeland. Subsequently, they moved to their ideological home propagated by two-nation theory. Bangladesh joined Pakistan as federal state after partition which made Muslims of India, including the Biharis, think that Bangladesh is also their ideological home. Having a distinct language and culture, the Bihari community could not be able to assimilate in the society of Bangladesh. They had to remain stranded and stuck in between two cultures outside of their home. However, they were given citizenship by the Government of Bangladesh, but still the debate of them being 'others' still on. This study aims to trace out the origin of the Bihari community in Bangladesh and to find out the current socio-cultural condition. To reveal their socio-cultural condition, this study uses a qualitative method. Primary data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews in two Bihari settlements (camps). This study suggests that Bihari identity has been very problematic and still debatable. Even after 70 years, many Biharis have retained their distinct socio-cultural practices, while other chose assimilation. Nevertheless, their deplorable condition has been intensified by abject poverty, social exclusion and lack of entitlements to services affect their socio-cultural condition.

Key Words: Biharis, Identity, Citizenship, Assimilation.

Introduction

Urdu speaking Bihari community has a very peculiar status in Bangladesh. Their identity does not fit the condition as an ethnic minority, refugee, diaspora, etc. categories. They were labeled as "stranded Pakistanis" considering they are the people of Pakistan (ideological home of Muslims after partition) who were left behind by their country. The reluctance of Pakistan in

taking the refugees made them stay in the land of Bangladesh with an uncertain future. Due to their economic and political crisis, Pakistan was not willing to bring those people to their land. They became the victim of two divergent streams of nationalism (Hashmi, 1998), reinforced by the war of independence in 1971.

In 1947, the British government decided to consign the independence of the Indian subcontinent, under the Indian independence act. Religion was the determining factor in separating two nations, two-nation theory promulgated this distinction, cemented nationalist sentiments in both India and Pakistan. For this reason, the religious line of separation from Hindus was applauded by Muslims of East and West Pakistan. But religion couldn't hold this tie for a long time. Nevertheless, the two nations' theory was criticized by some intellectuals. Some scholars argued that the two nations' theory was wrong and absurd, and it was proved with the advent of Bangladesh in 1971. However, separating religion from the domain of politics is not an easy task for a nation since many countries historically failed to do so. Religion provides the social glue which attaches people and offers continuity (Turner, 2006). The partition witnessed a colossal riot among various religious groups, mainly between Hindu and Muslims, which evacuated 10-12 million people from their lands (Talbot & Singh, 2009; Cited in Nair, 2010). A massive refugee crisis emerged as a consequence. Today's Bihari people were the victim of this partition who migrated from some provinces of India. Afraid of being killed by the militant Indian Hindu nationalist groups, Biharis made their way to the East and West Pakistan. In both parts, they were welcomed and acclaimed as Muhajir.

The proponents of the two-nation theory prioritized religion but ignored other crucial matters like language. Mohammad Ali Jinnah used religion as the way of unifying Pakistan, later he wanted to make Urdu as Lingua Franca of Pakistan, as an attempt to strengthen the unity. He proposed his statement with aligning Urdu with Islamic culture and tradition (Ahsan, 2020). Yet, many Bengali politicians, students, and intellectuals opposed his idea. This marks the starting point language problem of Pakistan which leads to the language movement in 1952 and later war of independence in 1971. Politics of religion was replaced by the politics of language and nationalism. Bengali national identity is heavily affiliated with the language movement, first expressed through *Rastrabhasa Sangram Parishad* (Language Action Committee) in December 1947 (Jabeen et. al, 2010). Instead of religious sentiments, language became the major concern of Bengalis during the post-partition period. Besides, discriminatory behavior in terms of economy and politics proliferated the hatred of Bengalis towards the political elites of Pakistan (Sen, 1975).

Biharis spoke Urdu and supported Pakistani elites from the beginning. Owing to a distinct cultural identity, Biharis could never accept Bengali neighborhood thus allied with West Pakistani elites living in East Pakistan. They saw Bengali as inferior to them since they speak Bengali and their culture has many similarities with Hindus. Though Bengalis welcomed Biharis as Muslim brothers, soon they start hating them several reasons. Since Biharis were allies of West Pakistani elites, they strongly supported them in every respect. A growing discontent prevailed between Bengalis and Biharis subsequently. Bengalis realized that they are distinct from Pakistanis therefore they started protesting on several issues like language movement in 1952, the election in 1954, and the 6 points movement in 1966. Biharis were strongly backed by West Pakistani elites since their arrival (Hashmi, 1998) which mad them oppose Bengalis' claim for in the independent nation. Afterward, Biharis became the enemy in the eyes of Bengali people, and hatred towards them was growing. During the war of liberation in 1971, this hatred rose to its peak when Biharis fought side by side with the Pakistani army. After 9 months of the war, the Pakistani army surrendered on 16 December 1971. The post-war period was hard times for Biharis since they faced the agony of Bengali militants who attacked them and burned their houses out of an overwhelming nationalist spirit. Biharis became vulnerable and 'other' in newly established Bangladesh.

Though Biharis were given citizenship by Presidential Order 149 in 1972 (Haider, 2018), still the promise of citizenship has not been fulfilled. Biharis were alleged of supporting West Pakistan (Present Pakistan) during the war of independence, which made them the enemy of Bangladeshi people. Since they were favored and aided by the elites of West Pakistan, Biharis opposed Bengalis' claim for independence. For this reason, Biharis still holding a separate cultural identity and bear a neglected tag of being "war criminals". Their condition is in Bangladesh mostly miserable. Their settlements were spatially segregated. Their culture and language intensified this segregation even more (Redclift, 2010).

In this paper, the researchers focused on tracing the history of the origin of Bihari identity in Bangladesh and socio-cultural life and practices of Bihari community in the present day. This paper will briefly discuss the chronological history of Biharis (migration, settlement, assimilation, and repatriation). Afterward, it will discuss the cultural life and practices of Biharis and factors that shape them.

Methodology

Data from Bihari camps were collected as a part of a significant research project. Semi-structured interviews were conducted among 20 Biharis between October and November of 2019. An Interpretative qualitative approach was adopted to get a broader view of the living experience of the Bihari community. This approach looks for meaning people assign to their actions and perception of people about particular social phenomena (Sarantakos, 2005). Besides, the qualitative analysis takes a rigorous understanding of the socio-historical context (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Data were collected from two Bihari settlements (known as Bihari camps) in Dhaka city. One is Mohammdpur Geneva camp, located in Mohammadpur Thana, Dhaka South. Another settlement is known as Kalshi Bihari camp, located in Mirpur, Dhaka South. Participants in this study were recruited by adopting the stratified random sampling method. A total of 20 respondents participated in this study. Among them, ten respondents were youth group, aged between 20 to 30 years. Another group of respondents was older than 30. All of the respondents were male; no female respondents participated. The researcher went to the camp office to ask for permission. With the help of the camp office, all of the respondents were recruited for interviews. The researcher asked for permission to record all of the interviews, but not all of the respondents were agreed. So researchers had to take notes as much as possible. Finishing the interviews, the researcher transcribed all the recorded files after listening to them very carefully several times. After transcribing, all of the interviews and notes were re-written in MS word files. Researchers then analyze those data thematically employing coding. Collected data were split into some particular codes, then all of the codes were used for thematic analysis.

For this study, secondary data have also been used. Secondary data were collected from academic journals, newspapers, video documentaries, etc. medium. All secondary data were collected online from the Google search and various academic journals and books. The researcher was careful while selecting any content, mainly its reliability. Researchers put importance on honesty and transparency to make this study more rigorous. All of the respondents were briefed about the purposes of the study before conducting the interviews. The participation of the respondents was voluntary. No one was forced or offered anything in exchange. The researcher never hides identity, instead of explained all ins and outs to respondents.

History of the settlement of the Bihari community in Bangladesh

The Indian subcontinent was divided based on two nation's theory which fostered the distinction between Hindus and Muslims. This results in the migration of approximately one million Biharis to East Pakistan since 1947. The majority of them came from the Bihar state of India to save themselves from the communal riot that broke out after the partition. Stimulated by extreme nationalist sense, Hindu mutineers killed many Muslims caused their existence in those areas very vulnerable and destitute (Muquim, 2017: 17). In the beginning, the influx of the Biharis was not envied by the Bengali people as an expression of Muslim communal feelings.

Many wells off Hindu families migrated to India after partition, left behind their properties in Bangladesh. Their lands were seized by Bengali Muslims and freedom fighters including the newly settled Biharis. During that time, the emigrants from India was not considered as foreign or minority. Communal harmony was prevailing in the country. Above all, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman welcomed Biharis in East Pakistan (Chatterjee, 1973: 82). The Bihari community was primarily employed in railway sectors. They were skilled, so found jobs as the businessman, civil servants, mill workers, clerks, doctors, and railway workers (Minority Rights Group, 2018). Biharis used to consider them superior over the Bengalis because of the similarity between them and West Pakistanis, which sometimes transformed into ethnic conflict (Hashmi, 1998). The co-existence, however, failed to create communal harmony because of the development of Bengali traditions and culture. The first protest against Pakistan came in by early 1948 by Bengalis when Mohammad Ali Jinnah announced that that "Urdu would only be the state language of Pakistan, and anyone opposing this would be an enemy of Pakistan" in Dhaka (Wolpert, 1984: 359). This protest resulted in the eminent language movement in 1952. Because of their natural relationship with West Pakistan, Biharis supported united Pakistan. They supported quasi-military command in 1960, eventually supported united Pakistan in the general election of 1970. Their open support for West Pakistan made them unwanted, hated, and despicable in East Pakistan, which finally demanded freedom from West Pakistan. However, the dissatisfaction and conflict continued between Bengalis and Biharis, where Biharis were strongly backed by the West Pakistani elites. Bengali political elites condemned the idea that Urdu speakers got opportunities and privileges in a Bengali majority territory. As conflict raised to its peak, the Muslim League of West Pakistan used people's feelings for religion and language (Muquim, 2017: 30). Biharis strongly supported Pakistani military forces, even some of them joined Al Badr, Al Shams, etc. militant groups. As a result of openly

supporting the West Pakistani military during the war of independence, Bihari people became vulnerable to confront the abhorrence of Bengali people after the surrender of the Pakistani military. Bengali people were bursting out of a high spirit of nationalism, killed almost 1, 00,000 Urdu speakers during the postwar period as reported by the Sunday Times of London (cited in Hashmi, 1998). Bihari people found themselves, as expected, in a very hostile condition. The majority of them were employed in skilled jobs, as Hashmi (1998) said, they were expelled from their workforces. Their houses, properties, and other wealth were taken over by Bengali people by proclaiming that as "property of enemy" (Muquim, 2017: 26). They were hoping for repatriation to West Pakistan, but Pakistan's loss in the war and impoverished economic conditions made them not being cooperative in this respect. Biharis asked the Indian army for asylum since they feared the Bengali militant, but they were rejected (Sen, 2000).

Primarily, the Government of Bangladesh offered citizenship, but their decision was polarized. Article 2 of the Bangladesh Citizenship (Temporary Provisions) Order (President Order 149 of 1972) provides them with citizenship like Bengali people. Some of them accepted citizenship and assimilated into Bangladeshi society (Haider, 2018: 32). The rest of them rejected the citizenship and preferred repatriation to Pakistan. This marked the beginning point of their identity crisis. Citizenship status owes allegiance to a particular country. In the case of Biharis, those who opted to move to Pakistan by rejecting citizenship of Bangladesh were disqualified for attaining citizenship. Subsequently, they became the camp dwellers.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation of Bangladesh, requested UNHCR to be involved in the process of repatriation. They enlisted the names of those who wish to repatriate with the help of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Society (ICRC) (Haider, 2018: 33). According to Noor (2005), ICRC enlisted some of the 540,000 Biharis desired repatriations in the post-war period. Besides, ICRC established some of 66 camps all over Bangladesh for temporary settlement and protection (RMRRU, 2007).

In August 1973, an agreement was signed among the government of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh named as New Delhi Agreement (Sen, 1999). The agreement was signed to solve the problems of stateless people. One of the significant consequences of this agreement was Pakistan decided to take 1, 70,000 Bihari people. ICRC supported them in the process (Samad, 2015). Considering domestic resistance and political instability, the Bhutto government was unenthusiastic to repatriate Bihari people. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman raised the 'Bihari' issue in the Third World Committee of the United Nations General Assembly in December 1974. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman also brought up the issue in Commonwealth Leader's conference in Jamaica in May 1975 (Mantoo, 2013: 125-126). Diplomatic attempts continued after the

regime of Sheikh Mujib. The military government of General Ziaur Rahman resumed his incomplete task by taking diplomatic initiatives. Pakistan's Foreign Secretary visited Dhaka in 1977 and agreed to take 25,000 Bihari people, but in "hardship cases" with the help of intentional agencies. In reality, only 4,790 people were repatriated. Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh visited Pakistan in 1978. He insisted the government officials resume the repatriation process. Nevertheless, Pakistan reduced the number of people from 25,000 to 16,000.

As UNHCR was directly involved in the repatriation process, they helped another 2800 people to repatriate in September 1979. (Haider, 2003: 126). A total of 9,872 Biharis were repatriated in 1979 (Sen, 2000:56). After 1979, the repatriation process continues as Lord David Ennals, a former member of the British Parliament, met presidents of both Bangladesh and Pakistan. This results in another 7000, making their way to Pakistan (Mantoo, 2013: 126). Another 750 families and 4800 people went to Pakistan in 1982. From 1977 to 1982, the repatriation process continued until a public announcement by Pakistani President Zia-Ul-Haw, who stated that Pakistan would not continue this repatriation procedure if they are not provided with funds by donors (Mantoo, 2013: 126). In the meantime, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan visited Dhaka and stated that Pakistan was thinking about taking 50,000 more Biharis, owing to New Delhi Agreement signed in 1973. In 1984, another 6000 Biharis were repatriated with the help of Lord Ennals trust. They were settled in Lahore subsequently.

President of Pakistan Zia-Ul-Haq stated, during his visit to Dhaka in 1985, that "Pakistan already fulfilled its legal obligation under the agreement signed in 1973 and further repatriation would only depend on the availability of huge resources required" (Haider, 2003). Later, in December 1985, Rabita Ai-Alam Al-Islami (Humanitarian organization based in Mecca) signed an agreement with Pakistan regarding repatriation. Still, the Pakistani government did not pay attention owing to the resolution of their internal conflict (Sen, 2000: 58). However, this agreement facilitated the establishment of Rabita Trust Deed with appointing President of Pakistan as its chairman. This trust provided the fund to recommence the repatriation process, which stopped due to the funding issue.

Nevertheless, this whole arrangement to take back 250,000 stranded Bihari people was paused with the death of its chairman Zia-Ul-Haq in 1988. At that time, Pakistani had to deal with some internal issues, including the rise of some militant groups and economic crisis. Furthermore, some Sindhi political and social organizations directly opposed the repatriation process (such as Sindhi nationalist party, Awami National Party, Sindh Student Federation, etc.) which created heavy pressure on Bhutto government (Mantoo, 2013: 127). For this reason,

Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan called the Bihari issue "a very complex problem" and delicately avoided talking about this during her visit to Dhaka in 1989 (Muquim, 2017: 25). Upon Bhutto Pakistan's reluctance due to their economic and political issues, the whole repatriation process decayed much. Only 325 Biharis were repatriated to Pakistan in January 1993 (Sen, 2000: 61). Nawaz Sharif, who became Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1990, reconstituted the Rabita Trust to support the repatriation process and prepared Punjab province to accommodate the Bihari community (Muquim, 2017: 25).

After Nawaz Sharif, Benazir Bhutto again came to power in 1993. Though they uphold the promise of repatriation initially, the whole program suffered from various barriers. The repatriation program stopped in 1993, after 28 years, left the majority behind. Over the years, a total of 178,069 Biharis could be repatriated (See Figure: 1).

Estimated Figures of Repatriation, 1972-1999

Year	Number of Biharis Repatriated
1973-74	163,072
1979	9,872
1982	4,800
10 January 1993	325
Total	178,069

Figure 1: Estimated repatriation of Biharis to Pakistan

Source: The News, 8 September 1992; The Guardian, 11 January 1993; MRG, op.cit., 30; Proceeding Report, International Conference, op.cit., Annexure IV Was Originally taken from Sen (1999: 542).

As 178,069 could be made their way to Pakistan with the help of various international organizations like UNHCR and ICRC, they left behind a large number of people, approximately 300,000, settled in various camps around Bangladesh. They were settled in a different part of Bangladesh (see figure 2).

Area	No. of Families	No. of Persons	Area	No. of Families	No. of Persons
Dhaka	12,918	69,767	Thakugaon	NA	NA
Narayanganj	1,452	7,289	Niphamari	NA	NA
Sayedpur	9,017	69,234	Parbotipur	271	1,632
Rangpur	2,538	15,879	Dhaka	1,207	7,763
Chittagong	2,652	17,302	(outside		
Dinajpur	1,542	9,906	camp)		
Khalishpur	2,382	12,394	Dewanganj	109	578
Jessore	985	5,539	Rajshahi	1,185	6,829
Mymensingh	435	2,583	Khulna	1,029	5,864
Faridpur	104	557	Bogra	898	5,319
Rajbari	53	287	Gaibandha	129	788
Total	**No. of families: 40,357**		**No. of Persons 238,093**		

Figure 2 Settlement of Biharis around Bangladesh

Source: Brief on "Stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh," Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. URL: www.mofa.gov.bd The Neglected Stateless Bihari Community in Bangladesh: Victims of Political and Diplomatic Onslaught.

Status of Biharis in Bangladesh

The legal status of the Bihari community is debatable. From several perspectives, Farzana (2009) showed that the status of the Bihari community does not fit any particular social category like refugees, emigrants, diaspora, etc. groups. Haider (2016) showed that Biharis do not fall under the category of a refugee by Refugee Convention Article 1 A (2), that says:

> a refugee needs to meet the following criteria: … owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (Refugee convention, 1951: cited in Haider, 2016; p-430).

Under the above definition, "the Biharis are not refugees, because they have not fled the country of their residence" (Haider, 2016). Rather, the territory of their residence has seceded from the mother country and became a separate, sovereign, and independent state. According to Farzana (2009), they are not migrants. Only a few people who migrated in East Pakistan from Uttar Pradesh (UP) who were mainly railway workers. These people were influenced by President Mohammad Ali Jinnah (Farzana, 2009: 224).

Apart from that, many authors claimed Biharis to be stateless people. Farzana (2009) responded to this question following way:

> "It is certain that the government of Pakistan never treated them as stateless people. Rather they were considered as linguistic minority people among the Bengali-speaking majority in East Pakistan. And the government of Pakistan provided them with different kinds of facilities to encourage Muslims of India to migrate to Pakistan and asked the Pakistani people to accept them cordially." (*p. 225*)

Many international organizations supported the Bihari community considering their despondent condition triggered by nationality issues. Conversely, the 1959 United Nations Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, states that every "Bihari is entitled to Bangladeshi citizenship and Bangladesh cannot deny it."[i]

Citizenship status

After independence, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman invoked a general apology for all and according to Presidential order, all of the Biharis were given citizenship. The ordinance of 1972 invoked that: Article 2 of the Bangladesh Citizenship (Temporary Provisions) Order (President Order 149 of 1972)[ii]provides:

> "Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law, on the commencement of this Order, every person shall be deemed to be a citizen of Bangladesh,
>
> I. Who or whose father or grandfather was born in the territories now comprised in Bangladesh and who was a permanent resident of such territories on the 25th day of March. 1971, and continues to be so resident; or,
>
> II. "Who was a permanent resident of the territories now comprised in Bangladesh on the 25 days of Mach, 1971, and continues to be so resident and is not otherwise disqualified for being a citizen by or under any law for the time being in force". A plain reading of these two sub-sections would confirm the entitlement of the Biharis to citizenship of Bangladesh" (Rahman, 2015).

Later, Article 2B (1) the Amendment ordinance of 1978 (Ordinance no. 7) about Bangladesh Citizenship included that "a person shall not qualify to be a citizen of Bangladesh if he owes, affirms or acknowledges, expressly or by conduct, allegiance to a foreign state". Those who listed themselves to go to Pakistan divulge their loyalty to Pakistan were disqualified from attaining Bangladesh citizenship (Haider, 2018).

These ordinances could only secure citizenship and rights of few people, mainly those who reside outside the Bihari camps (Redclift, 2010), the dilemma remains as many of the Biharis were deprived of citizenship (Sattar, 2007). The reason was simple. Some of the Biharis enlisted their names to move to Pakistan, except those who prefer to stay in Bangladesh were given citizenship immediately (Haider, 2018: 30). This deadlock continues subsequently. In 2003, a breakthrough came in after some 10 of the Biharis went to court asking their right to vote (Paulsen, 2006: 61). After the evaluation from legal experts, the High court granted their citizenship (U.S. Committee for Refugees World Refugee Survey - Bangladesh, 2004).

This event is eminent in achieving citizenship of Bangladesh along with voting rights in 2008 after many years of settlement. The supreme court of Bangladesh ruled that all members of Urdu-speaking community will be given voting rights and national identity card (Shadman & Schönbauer, 2015) after many years of statelessness. Yet, the challenge of entitlement to civil rights still prevailing. Many Biharis do not have access to basic rights and continue to live in extreme poverty.

Socio-cultural Formation of Bihari identity

The difference and problem of language between East and West Pakistan was the catalyst of Bengali national identity which later became a major portent to Bengali nationalism (Salik, 1977: 225). The place of Islam in Bengali national identity was vague and disputed because of the secular intellectuals and politicians who promoted Bengali identity as a secular construct. Some writers on the issue of Bangladeshi nationalism tend to think that it emerged as an aftermath of the failure of Muslim nationalism in the post-partition era. Then, "Bangladeshi nationalism was a product of ethno-linguistic developments based on Bengali identity propagated by Bengali intellectuals and educated elites" (Rabeya and Hossain, 2017: 76-79). The rise of Bengali identity and later development of Bengali nationalism has a long history, from religious reform movement in the countryside during colonial regime to the rise of communalization, then to the development of unique Muslim identity in Bengal, and to the rise of an educated middle class who claimed their rights (Karim, 1956; Ahmed, 1981; Hashmi, 1992;2019). However, it is hard to accommodate a detailed discussion regarding Bengali identity in this paper concerning its focus, though it is important to understand the issue of Bengali identity and Bangladeshi nationalism in this context.

However, the development of nationalism in West and East Pakistan had a different origin. According to prominent Bangladeshi sociologist Anupam Sen (1975), Pakistani Muslim

nationalism was originated by educated middle classes who were mainly from the landed aristocracy. On the contrary, Bengali nationalism was not limited to a particular class of people (though led by a petit-bourgeois). Bengali nationalism was inspired and broadened by the mistreatment of West Pakistani elites by economic and cultural means. This distinction led to a hostile relationship between West and East Pakistanis and created the base of Bengali's claim for an independent nation. Biharis felt isolated and alienated in East Pakistan. For their distinction, they felt an association with West Pakistanis, because of language and cultural similarities. West Pakistani elites in East Pakistan convinced them to support West Pakistan offered them with better opportunities and privileges. West Pakistani people often neglected Bengali Muslims as Semi-Hindu and unfaithful to Pakistan (Sen, 1999). They were misguided by the West Pakistani elites (who seized power in the East), and their conflict with local Bengali people became inevitable in the upcoming movements of East Pakistanis for liberation (Hashmi, 1998).

Initially, upon their arrival to East Pakistan during the partition, the Bihari community was valued by local Bengalis as 'Muhajirs.' This denotes religious refugees who had migrated to an Islamic land to save lives from enemies (Redclift, 2010; Hashmi, 1998). They were even considered as superior to Bengali people. The government of Pakistan recognized them as Pakistani following the Ordinance of 1952 (temporary provision), offered them job settlement. They were happy here. At first, they started to settle here through purchasing lands, building houses, and marrying Bengali women. However, their happy times end soon after the riot began in East Pakistan. They were labeled as "Stranded Pakistani" after the establishment of SPGRC. This created an externality among national essence and legal system owing to a separate cultural identity. They were stuck in between two identities inside and outside of the camp.

To outsiders (Bengalis), the camp seems like little Pakistan, with people are speaking Urdu, and Urdu songs are being played repeatedly. Some Urdu wall writings and photos of famous Pakistani figures (Fir or reputed personalities) also shown inside the camp. Some older people who still hold strong ties to their ancestors try to relate their activities to their ancestors. They usually keep their long-established cultural norms and values inside them so roughly that they have not much absorbed Bengali culture. For instance, researcher tried to talk to an aged Bihari, but he hardly can speak Bengali. Some of them voluntarily isolate themselves from interacting Bengali people, as one of the respondents (32) said:

> "We usually interact with Bengalis a lot. But (some of) our grandfathers hardly interact with any Bengali and keep them solitude in the camp. I do not know why. They insist us practice our culture more."

Whatever the reason is, the elder generation still practices their ancestors' culture. Their actions can be analyzed by the concept of the "primordial consciousness" approach, and one of the proponents of this approach regarding the Indian sub-continent was Alavi (1975). He explained the nationalist sentiments of Hindu and Muslims of the Indian sub-continent and called it is primordial consciousness which separated Hindus and Muslims. Generally, primordial consciousness refers to a feeling that is embedded in the human mind, influenced by socio-cultural affiliation. This feeling sustains over the times based on “ineffable affective significance” (Scott, 1990: 148) and it is driven by a group's distinct past thus has a historical dimension.

The elder generation of Biharis experienced their ancestors (who migrated) so meticulously that they absorbed some values in their cognizance. Adults still secured their cultural life with valuing their "original culture." The issue of ethnicity and religion might remain dormant for a long time, but arise when people were exposed to different ethnicities and religions. Recalling the event of a partition again, that division was centered on religion. Later, both India and Pakistan sought religious homogenization by wiping out 'others' from their lands. Spatial politics made people think they were united by their religious affiliation, throwing out other identity formation factors. However, the issue of race, language, ethnicity and other distinctions were latent then, and religion was dominant, as Amartya Sen argued, we have to prioritize a particular identity in a given circumstance (Sen, 2006: 19). When the religious issues resolved, the issue of ethnicity and language came to light. The claim of Bengalis for the autonomy and recognition of language can be an ideal example.

Biharis retained a distinct culture since their repatriation in 1947 and onward. They were well accepted in society because of being Muslim and speaking Urdu. Even they assume themselves superior to Bengali, offered opportunities like jobs, settlement, and services by the Government of Pakistan; they were in good condition (Hashmi, 1998). The trouble began in 1971 when two Pakistan collided, the crisis of identity emerged for the first time for Biharis as a consequence. Some of them supported Pakistan, which resulted in Bengali liberation fighters taking revenge on them (Hashmi, 1998; Farzana, 2008; Haider, 2018). After the war of liberation, newly established Bangladesh faced many problems: that was a traumatic time for Bihari people as they did not know their fate. Bangabandhu offered them citizenship, leaving the option to repatriate to Pakistan for those who do not feel them as Bangladeshi. Some of the Biharis, who considered them as Bangladeshi and preferred assimilation, were given citizenship by 1972 Ordinance. However, "problems arose for the remaining 500,000 persons, who had requested repatriation to Pakistan and called themselves Pakistanis" (GOB, 1998; cited in Haider, 2018:

30). ICRC enlisted as Pakistani them because of them rejecting Bangladesh citizenship. Considering their protection from Bengali militants at that time, ICRC created 66 camps around Bangladesh and put them into those camps. Since then, they have been living in the camp with a distinct identity failed to, or simply not willing to, assimilate with Bangladeshi culture.

This camp life was a curse for the Bihari community since they were yearning for going to their ideological homeland with an uncertain faith. Since both Bangladesh and Pakistan were devastated by nine months of the war, it is not easy for them to settle this refugee issue while they were busy rebuilding their states. This gave rise to a period of uncertainty for Bihari people, which can be called a period of an identity crisis, drawing from the theory of psychologist Erik Erikson. According to Erikson, a person's identity has three interrelated dimensions. First of the subjective dimension implies an ego identity which Erikson called "a sense of temporal-spatial continuity and its concomitants" (Erikson, 1970). Second is the personal dimension or behavioral character that distinguishes people from another. The third and final one is the social dimension implies a person's role in a community. These three dimensions come together with information about one's identity. However, when it fails to do so, an identity crisis is evident. This identity crisis characterized by "a subjective sense identity confusion, behavioral and character logical disarray and lack of commitment to the recognized role in a community." (Erikson, 1970). From this theory, it is apparent that identity results from people becoming jumbled in identifying themselves from personal, behavioral, and social levels. In the case of Bihari people, Farzana (2008) argued that the identity crisis of Biharis emerged because of them being Bangladeshi and Pakistanis simultaneously, along with confusing their identity between refugees or minorities. Therefore, this identity crisis resulted in the deprivation of fundamental rights, abject poverty, and social exclusion.

Among the respondents from Mohammadpur and Kalshi camp, none of them identified them as Pakistani, not even anyone ever wanted to move to Pakistan. To Zilani Sardar (64), president of Bangladesh Bihari Rehabilitation Assembly (BBRA), who was born and became an adult before 1971, clearly stated his view of Bihari culture, politics, and social life. To him, Bengali and Biharis are not much different in the sense that they, too, are Muslim. Firstly, he stated that:

> "I was involved in political movements before 1971. When West Pakistan rejected the result of the 1970s election, we marched in support of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and stand against the brutish ruler of West Pakistan. Some of us became a supporter of Rajakars as we know because of the influence of powerful people who manipulated them."

Zilani Sarder opens up about the distinction between Bengali and Bihari culture, he said:

> "Yes, we are different in origin, but not different from Bengali entirely. I have many Bengali friends here whom I often meet; I see nothing is different between us. You can say, we retained some particular practices, but those are few, and because of living here for more than 50 years, we are assimilated with Bangladeshi culture."

He has not even mentioned that the differences between Biharis and Bengalis bear can be a distinction between them. Like speaking Urdu, it is like another Bengali dialect, like the Noakhali[iii] dialect of Bengali.

However, Redclift (2010: 6) commented on the cultural identity of Bihari people: "having brought them together in East Bengal religion has also become a dividing force. Both communities are Muslim, predominantly Sunni, but certain religious festivals are practiced differently in line with each's cultural heritage. Religion is both a marker of sameness and difference." From Redclift's writing, it is apparent that Bengali and Bihari have differences even though they share a common religion. This indicates why their full assimilation in Bengali societies never happened (Hashmi, 1998).

A person from the Geneva camp called himself 'Bihari'; he speaks Urdu and born to a Bihari family. As he speaks:

> "I would say I am Bihari; then, I am Mussalman (Muslim). Not every member of our community here feels in the same way. Those who have money live outside the camp, and identity never matters to them. We poor people in the camp have few choices to make and few opportunities to avail."

Some recent writers on Bihari people stated the cultural and social differences between Bengali and Bihari people. Farzana (2008: 4) asserted that "they are ethnically different as they speak in a different language. Internally they maintain Bihari cultural values in social life. Due to these characteristics, they maintain a different ethnic identity despite practicing the religion of the Bengali majority."

From data gathered through interviewing 20 people, researchers argue that the Bihari community lives in between two cultures. They may retain a particular cultural value with their family and the Bihari neighbors, but it is not exposed when they come to contact with Bengali people. More specifically, most of them are Bihari at home and Bengali when they are outside. However, the cultural identity of Bihari people depends on their social affiliation, social status, and economic condition. Those who are economically well off and could manage a prestigious job mostly would say they are Bangladeshi, and they are assimilated with the Bangladeshi culture, hardly retains any sign of Bihari identity, from food habit to group affiliation.

Though some Biharis strongly tied to distinct socio-cultural practices that resulted in their externality in the society of Bangladesh, it is noted in many studies that, the new generation of Biharis are reluctant to maintain this tie. So, a strong commitment to distinct cultural practices is no longer a significant barrier to assimilation rather economic factor has taken this place. It is evident that the economic condition of camp dwellers is preventing them from being assimilated to Bangladeshi society and better economic condition leads to assimilation. Economic vulnerabilities offer social exclusion which made many Biharis attach to their primordial cultural identity. Some of the wealthy Bihari businessmen from old Dhaka[iv] hardly expose their Bihari identity in public. Unlike poor camp dwellers of Mohammadpur or Mirpur, well off Bihari like old Dhaka businessman have better acceptance from Bengali neighborhood. Moreover, the destitute condition of Biharis much affects their perception of identity. Nahar (2000: 180) narrated the camp life of Biharis:

> "Most of the Biharis, including those living outside the camps, pass their days in agony and anger. There is abject poverty, disease, and deprivation. There is no facility for health care, sanitation, or education. The dingy houses inside the camps are breeding ground for disease. The young ones remain uneducated and unemployed and are tempted to take to crimes easily. A sizable number of older adults have turned to beg and some to rickshaw pulling. Young girls have been forced to take prostitution for the living; the old and newborn babies are dying for lack of medical care. The anti-social elements from the Bengali community have found the camps as haven whenever they are pursued by the members of the law enforcement agencies. The wretched Biharis are now abandoned by all."

This condition might alter their perception, beliefs, and understanding of them or induced poverty and inequality made them think they are poorly neglected. Bhattacharjee (2015) explored the level of social exclusion among the Bihari community, showed that Biharis are excluded economically, socially, spatially, and culturally. Their sufferings know no bound. Nobody cares about poor people, as one of the respondents (54) said, a resident of Kalshi camp:

> "The condition of the camp is very inhuman. Most of the people living here are living below the poverty line. Most of the people here are illiterate. In this condition, it doesn't matter which identity we prefer."

Researchers eluded to ask whether any of the respondents still want to go to Pakistan. While talking to a respondent, that question arises. He replied: "If the chance to move to Pakistan were created, many of the Biharis would move not because they feel like Pakistanis, rather because they are fed up with their condition living in a 19 feet width narrow room for years." That says, economic vulnerability is the key driver of Bihari identity lately. Since many of them chose to assimilate, mainly poorer segment of population still protecting a cultural

boundary. An educated and economically well off Bihari from Mohammadpur camp responded to what he thinks about his identity:

> "I am Bengali because I was born here. Excluding language, I have no difference from a Bengali man. I might speak Urdu at home all the time but hardly in public. I traveled abroad as a Bengali. My ancestors might feel like Pakistani long ago, but now most of us are happy here." (44)

However, Biharis have absorbed many elements of Bengali culture and almost everyone can speak Bengali. Biharis' distinct socio-cultural practices seem to be a barrier towards assimilation but it was apparent in literature and interviews that Biharis are no longer strongly attached to their distinctive practices. The major concern of camp dwellers is extreme poverty and economic vulnerabilities. Economic vulnerabilities are the major obstacles for Urdu speaking Biharis to be integrated into mainstream society and culture. Many of them are mobilizing for their rights including education, job, and other necessities.

SPGRC and Hope of Pakistan

Nasim Khan, a Bihari, established "The Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC)" in 1988. An organization for their wellbeing and to express their rightful claim. Subsequently, it became an extremist grouping as Nasim Khan 'urging' his followers to immolate themselves unless a repatriation schedule was issued. They were extremists in nature and influence Biharis to claim for repatriation to Pakistan. Some people joined them, but their long yearning for 'home' never sees the light. However, SPGRC re-enkindled their hope to Pakistan. Nevertheless, for the long delay over repatriation, some of them become frustrated with Nasim Khan. The Rise of SPGRC and their revolt for repatriation labeled the Biharis as 'stranded' people who are waiting for their move to Pakistan.

Nasim Khan and SPGRC helped revive their dormant aspiration for home, which resulted in separating Biharis into two groups: one who joined Nasim Khan and agreed to create pressure for repatriation and another group were happy with their condition in Bangladesh. Biharis were divided into this regard, and internal conflict arose. Since then, Biharis are divided into different groups and sub-groups, as one of the respondents (44) from Muhammadpur camp said: "Among us, some people are to be blamed for our destitute condition. One is Nasim Khan. Besides, there are other people too who tried to create differences among us, influenced by external elites. We accepted our condition, but for some people conflicts still, prevail inside and the outside the camp."

Religious Practices

Among the Biharis, it is reported that 100% of them are Muslims. Except few, all of them are Sunni Muslims. Though it is a matter of debate, Biharis seem to practice the Sunni version of Islam as they are influenced by Bengali culture too. Redclift (2010: 7) said:

> "Urdu speaking Biharis in the region have always been regarded as a particularly religious community and the campsites of religious conservatism and 'anti-Shia' sentiment. A lack of education in the camps causes many of those more 'Bengalised' Urdu-speakers who have moved outside to accuse them of practicing religion in the 'wrong' way, blurring the boundaries between 'religion' and 'culture.' The festival of Moharram is an interesting site in which to examine these complex dynamics."

The practice of the Moharram festival is somewhat a Shia phenomenon. Some branch of Sunnis also celebrates the month of Moharram; however, debate arises whether Biharis celebrate Moharram in the same way as Shia Muslims do. Researchers asked one of the respondents (50) about this Shia Sunni debate. He replied:

> "We are not Shiite (Shia Muslim), yet we celebrate Moharram. They are maybe only 1% of Shia in our camp who live in isolation. Our Sunni Islam insists us to celebrate the month of Moharram. For example, we keep "manat" in the name of Hasan and Hossain during Moharram. Is this sign of Shia?"

Biharis often listen to Urdu songs and gazals. Anyone passes by the Bihari camp can hear they are listening to Urdu songs and gazals. Since they speak Urdu, which is close to the Hindi language, they often watch Hindi movies and TV serials and mostly hear Hindi songs. Apart from that, they used to watch Bengali programs too. Camp dwellers (28) in Mohammadpur stated:

> "We used to hear Urdu gazals often as our parents like this very much. Not that we always hear Urdu songs, we hear Bengali and Hindi songs too. We did not have the TV for a long time. Now we have TV and satellite connection that facilitates us to watch anything we want. We see lots of programs on TV. Sometimes we watch Hindi channels, sometimes Urdu channel and most often Bengali channels."

Condition of Education

Most of the people of Mohammadpur Geneva camp and Kalshi camp are uneducated. Access to education is very limited. In the Geneva camp, the most significant settlement of the "Biharis in Bangladesh has 25,000 residents: it is estimated that only 5 percent have formal education." (Minority Rights Group, 2018; Das, 2011). Das (2011) further reported that they had no access to public education until the year 2000. In educational institutions, Bihari children face much

discrimination in many cases either by their classmates or by teachers for their identity and language. It has been found from different studies that approximately 1% of the Camp children go to school. This is why the majority of them are illiterate (Bhattacharjee, 2015). There is only a school in the camp free for the camp dwellers, earlier operated by CARE Bangladesh, named NLJ Primary School. It was established in 1974 ("NLJ Primary School - OBAT Helpers," 2019).

The condition of the Kalshi camp is even worst. There was a school in the camp called "Non-local free school" for the Bihari child, which provided free education for years. Later, that school was dispossessed by the political elites during the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) regime (2001-2006). Free education for the children was stopped due to not having any alternative for that. One of the respondents from Kalshi camp (50) said:

> "They snatched out the free education which endangers the future of our children. Snatching out means plunging a community into the darkness. That darkness never ejected."

Besides, there was a school beside the camp office, which used to provide free primary education for a long time, closed recently. At present, there is no school inside the camp. Schools outside the camp cost so much that poor Biharis could hardly afford it. Some of them may afford, but their children face discrimination from Bengali students and teachers. Sometimes, in the face of harassment and mocking, Biharis hide their identity and provide a fake address to the school authority. For instance, one of the respondents said during the study of Raffetary and Gilmer (2010), "People teased me and said, 'You are a Bihari, and you are a loser'." That person was refused to enter school because of not being Bengali, then he faked his identity and enrolled in school. One of the respondents from Kalshi camp (30) said:

> "We had a free school in Kalshi camp a few days back. Now it is closed. Our children could study here for free as we cannot afford to send them to private school or kindergarten. The public school sometimes does not permit our children to study there because of our identity. That is why most of the camp dwellers are educated. Only those who live outside the camp or can at least afford can send children to school. Otherwise, the situation goes in another way."

Lack of education leads to various socio-economic problems. From the camp, only a limited number of people can manage a full-time job due to others not having the necessary skills and credentials. The rate of unemployment is very high among the camp dwellers. The absence of a proper job leads them to pursue minimal works like rickshaw pulling, informal small business, construction works, and day labor, stated by a respondent from Kalshi camp (50).

Conclusion

Historically, the partition of India and Pakistan created trouble for some provinces with different ethnic groups and languages. Uniting these provinces was a challenge for both India and Pakistan. A communal riot broke out soon after the partition, which changed the fate of many groups of people who were forcefully migrated to another land. The Bihari community was one of the victims of this partition who still carries the wound of being driven out of their homeland. However, Biharis considered East Pakistan (Bangladesh) their new home (ideological home of Muslims) as they were welcomed for being Muslim. This religious line of unity did not sustain for long. Many political and economic issues intervened and altered the communal harmony between Bengalis and Biharis. War of independence in 1971 was a turning point for West Pakistan as its longstanding conflict with East Pakistan was finally driving toward an end, through war. Biharis were loyal to West Pakistani elites who supported them by providing housing, jobs, respected positions, etc. means. Their loyalty toward the West and United Pakistan made them the enemy of Bangladesh. Biharis were alleged to be supporting Pakistani armies during the war. The ending of war sees the outrage of Bengali militants who burned the settlements and killed many Biharis in Bangladesh. Experiencing this horrific event, some of the Biharis opted to move to Pakistan, fear of being killed or exploited. ICRC helped Biharis to move to several settlements (known as Bihari camps). They were hoping for repatriation, but Pakistan's reluctance about taking them back made their fate even more dreadful. They had to remain inside this temporary camp for almost 50 years by now.

Even after many years of the liberation war, their fate has not much changed. Except for a few, most of the Biharis became the victim of nationalism, remained destitute and indigent. As Khan and Samaddar (2007) said, Bihari camps are the center of insecurity, violence, crime, and harassment that make Biharis' life miserable. To an average Bengali person, the Bihari community still seems to be strangers. Some socio-cultural factors, apparently triggered by speaking of a distinct language, prevented them from being assimilated into the society of Bangladesh for a long time. They often are neglected for their inferior status, being a resident of the camp. This contributes to worsening their condition even more. Though they were given citizenship and voting rights, it is still a dream for them to be entitled to citizenship rights.

There are several ways to mitigate this problem of identity and otherness. Haider (2016: 437) contends that though it is a challenging task for Biharis to be integrated, it is not impossible. Muquim (2017) provided the example of the Saidpur Bihari community who mostly integrated into the society of Bangladesh. Their condition is better than many other camps in Bangladesh.

The dream of Pakistan, Biharis' yearning for ideological home, no longer an aspiration. From fieldwork experience, the researchers have not noticed anyone wishing to repatriate to Pakistan. So it's high time the government of Bangladesh took necessary steps for the rehabilitation of Bihari community. Future research can be conducted on the state response towards Urdu speaking Biharis since 2008.

Limitations

This paper is a part of a student research project. Therefore, researchers got limited time to finish the study. The size of the sample was small in numbers which may not present the real picture of reality.

Competing Interest

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Notes

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[iii] Noakhali is one of the 64 districts of Bangladesh.

[iv] Old Dhaka refers to the historic old city of Dhaka which was established in 1608. It is located on the banks of Buriganga river. Old Dhaka has many historical places, buildings, monuments and others.