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## **Bengali Ethnicity and the Emergence of Bangladesh**

A. K. Anwar\*

### **Abstract**

The emergence of Bangladesh became a part of reality in the history of South Asia due to the effects of complex interplay of myriad political, economic, and social factors. Among the several elements engaged in this process, some are dominant and well-researched, whereas others are less pronounced and underrepresented. Bengali ethnicity, i.e. the cultural distinctiveness of Bengalis as a community is an example of the latter category. This paper is an attempt to understand the functions of Bengali ethnicity induced ethnonationalism and ethnonationalist movements in the emergence of Bangladesh as a nation-state. It finds that the Bengalis of East Pakistan had exquisitely and effectively politicized their ethnicity or ethnic identity with a view to forging and consolidating Bengali ethnonationalism that ultimately, being one among the several other eloquent factors, contributed to the emergence of Bangladesh.

**Key words:** Bengalis, Bengali ethnicity, Ethnonationalism, East Pakistan, Bangladesh.

### **Introduction**

In the popular discourse on the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign nation-state, Bangladesh has exclusively been conceptualized as a political construction. Historians and experts on this particular subject have vividly illustrated and highlighted the plethora of political endeavours especially in the forms of numerous political demonstrations and movements within the ambit of the leadership of several political parties and student organizations. It has also been, from this very perspective, equated with a “national revolution”.<sup>1</sup> However, it can be argued that this popular or political discourse on the genesis of Bangladesh tends to overshadow, though much has been written about the identity-based Language Movement of 1952, the contributions of the socio-cultural elements that played extremely crucial roles in the establishment of a separate nation-state for the

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1 Talukder Maniruzzaman, *The Bangladesh Revolution and Its Aftermath*, 2nd ed., (University Press Limited 1988), p. 1.

Bengalis within the Indian subcontinent. In this regard, the cultural aspects of Bengaliness or as it is put the ‘Bengali ethnicity’ took a nationalist overtone against a backdrop of cultural hegemony of the dominant West Pakistanis. Quite relevantly, it should be kept in mind that in no way the paper argues that the political factors were entirely divorced from the cultural ones; rather it acknowledges the fact that cultural factors or a sense of a distinct ethnicity have always remained crucial in all the political struggles of the Bengalis. Mamoon and Khan have rightly asserted that “movements on language, education, economy, and autonomy developed the concept of *Bangali* nationalism” and that struggle against West Pakistan ultimately culminated in the War of Liberation in 1971.<sup>2</sup>

Culture, in the political movements for Bangladesh, was always at the forefront and had been considered “a prime mover of political development, the core of social movements, the focus of contestation, and the front line of political confrontation.”<sup>3</sup> The Bengalis’ political struggles for self-determination and autonomy against the West Pakistani power elite had always incorporated strong cultural or ethnic connotations as they championed the use of their cultural markers as a set of strategic tools for combating the oppression inflicted on them since a significant aspect of the struggle against the Pakistanis was a cultural clash between them.<sup>4</sup> The revolution of the Bengalis and their success to create a separate nation-state for them on the basis of ethnic nationalism is considered to be “a rare case of a successful ethno-secessionist movement during the Cold War Period.”<sup>5</sup> It has also been recognized as the first successful secessionist movement in the context of the Third World.<sup>6</sup>

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- 2 Muntassir Mamoon and Zarina Rahman Khan, ‘Pakistan, Bengali Nationalist Struggles’, Immanuel Ness (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present*, Vol. VI, (Wiley-Blackwell 2009), p. 2577. See also Tariq Rahman, ‘Language Problems and Politics in Pakistan’, Paul R. Brass (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of South Asian Politics: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal*, (Routledge 2010), pp. 232-246; Rafiuddin Ahmed, ‘Introduction: Towards a National Identity’, Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Religion, Identity and Politics: Essays on Bangladesh*, (International Academic Publishers Ltd. 2001), pp. 1-34.
  - 3 Salma Sobhan, ‘Perceptions of Cultural Identity’, Meghna Guhathakurata and Willem van Schendel (eds.), *The Bangladesh Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, (Duke University Press 2013), pp. 303-310.
  - 4 Jenefer Coates, “Bangladesh-The Struggle for Cultural Independence”, *Index on Censorship*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 1972, pp. 17-37, doi: 10.1080/03064227208532144.
  - 5 Urmila Phadnis and Rajat Ganguly, *Ethnicity and Nation-building in South Asia*, 2nd ed., (Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. 2001), p. 17.
  - 6 Harun-or-Rashid, ‘Bangladesh: The First Successful Secessionist Movement in the Third World’, Ralph R. Premdas, S.W.R. de A. Samarasinghe, and Alan R. Anderson (eds.), *Secessionist Movements in Comparative Perspective*, (Printer Publishers 1990), pp. 83-

The tumultuous condition of the political landscape of the pre-partition India, springing from the excitement of notorious two-nation theory, had split the people of the sub-continent into two sharply demarcated categories: Hindus and Muslims. On the basis of this religious bifurcation, the Muslims of the sub-continent chose religion as the only basis of national integration without granting any kind of recognition of the vibrant ethnic diversities prevailing within the population structure and thus culminating in what is known as religious nationalism. But soon after the great divide in the human history, a series of incidences led to the disillusionment of the Muslim majority of the Eastern wing of the awkwardly manufactured state of Pakistan with a distance of approx. 1,500 km between the two wings. The Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan adequately sensed the deliberate discrimination and injustice by their Western counterpart, who downplayed the status of Bengali ethnicity in favour of the dominant Islamic identity. Moreover, the Hinduized portrayal of Bengali culture by the West Pakistanis exacerbated the stigmatization process further, rendering Bengalis and their culture below standard, and considering it a threat to the process of national integration in its fullest sense. To the West Pakistanis, from the very outset of the journey of Pakistan as a nation-state, East Pakistan appeared to be a land of cultural aliens since they received adequate amount of ‘culture shock’<sup>7</sup> due to the distinctive cultural pattern of the Bengalis. There had been a feeling of “superiority complex” among the *ashrafs* who were mostly West Pakistanis *vis-à-vis* the so-called inferiority of Bengali Muslims in terms of descent and commitment to Islam.<sup>8</sup> The fact is also particularly evident in the reaction of Malik Feroz Khan Noon, the Punjabi Governor of East Bengal in office between 1950 and 1953 when he labelled the Bengalis of East Bengal as “half Muslims”<sup>9</sup> or what van Schendel termed “lesser Muslims”.<sup>10</sup> They have also been denounced as “Kafirs” and “Hindus” by Punjabi military officer for espousing Bengali nationalism.<sup>11</sup> As it is widely held that Islam was the only factor common among the Muslim communities of India, it is, however, interesting to note that Islam itself as a unifying factor believed to mobilize the Muslims of India

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92; Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr, *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics*, 2nd ed., (Routledge 2004); Maniruzzaman, *op. cit.*

7 Kalervo Oberg, “Cultural Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments”, *Practical Anthropology*, Vol. 7, Issue 4, 1960, pp. 177-182, doi: 10.1177/009182966000700405.

8 A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Bangladesh: Past and Present*, (A.P.H. Publishing Corporation 2004), p. 296.

9 Anthony Mascarenhas, *The Rape of Bangladesh*, (Vikas Publication 1971), p. 18.

10 Willem van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge University Press 2020).

11 Mascarenhas, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

was also devoid of a homogenizing character as Islam is regionally informed and varies according to geo-political arrangements. Thus, Uddin argues that the Bengali-informed Islam was quite different from that of the West Pakistanis and this sense of differentiation was intensified only after the partition.<sup>12</sup> She went on to further assert that the Bengalis' denial of relinquishing their separate (ethnic) identity "fed the move to independence from Pakistan" and placed "[s]ecularism instead of Islam in addition to Bengali culture [as] the basis of nationalism in Bangladesh."<sup>13</sup> In the same vein, Phadnis and Ganguly have rightly put that during the partition of 1947 the Bengali Muslims of East Bengal highlighted and favoured their Muslim identity over their ethnicity of Bengaliness with a view to joining Pakistan.<sup>14</sup> But as soon as the feasibility of such a homogenizing endeavour was disenchanted, or when there was an 'epistemological break'<sup>15</sup>, they championed their Bengali (ethnic) identity to justify their political secession from Pakistan. As it is put, there had been an 'ethnic revival'.<sup>16</sup> Madan makes his argument more pertinent to the present discussion by further asserting that East Pakistanis shifted their emphasis from a specific element of their ethnic identity (the religious element) to a different or more incorporative one (sense of Bengaliness) in course of a generation that ultimately led them to the War of Liberation.<sup>17</sup> In this regard, Varshney has rightly argued that a nation becomes a nation when it brings ethnicity and state together.<sup>18</sup> Hence, it is pertinent enough in this point to argue that the Bengalis of East Pakistan had continuously politicized their sense of ethnicity or ethnic identity to constitute a kind of nationalism of their own what they used as a political apparatus to assert their demands of sovereignty first and statehood second.

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12 Sufia M. Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity and Language in an Islamic Nation*, (UNC Press 2006).

13 *Ibid*, p. 13.

14 Phadnis and Ganguly, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

15 A.I. Mahbub Uddin Ahmed, 'The Ethno-Class Formation and Contemporary National Identity in Bangladesh', Partha Nath Mukherji, N. Jayaram, and Bhola Nath Ghosh (eds.), *Understanding Social Dynamics in South Asia: Essays in Memory of Ramkrishna Mukherjee*, (Springer 2019), pp. 213-237.

16 Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival in the Modern World*, (Cambridge University Press 1981).

17 T.N. Madan, "Two Faces of Bengali Ethnicity: Muslim Bengali or Bengali Muslim", *The Developing Economies*, Vol. 10, Issue 1, 1972, pp. 74-85, doi: 10.1111/j.1746-1049.1972.tb00268.x.

18 Ashutosh Varshney, 'Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict', Charles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, (Oxford University Press 2007), pp. 274-294.

Thus, the present paper, against the backdrop of the above discussion, contends that the East Pakistanis, i.e. the Bengalis brought about a ‘paradigm shift’<sup>19</sup> in their nationalist orientation, signifying a transformation from religious nationalism to ethnic nationalism or ethnonationalism. Though this particular perspective as to the emergence of Bangladesh is not something virtually new, this paper, from a sociological perspective, attempts to construct the emergence of Bangladesh as a transition from a politically conscious ‘ethnic group’ to a full-fledged nation-state due to the effects of Bengali ethnonationalism and ethnonationalist movements.

### **Bengali Identity**

The Bengalis are, first and foremost, of mixed racial stock as Niharranjan Ray in the *magnum opus History of the Bengali People* had argued that “...the Bengalis are a hybrid people [and] whatever their origins, the Bengalis of today have matured into a hybrid race as a result of the organic harmony of their constituents...”.<sup>20</sup> With a similar view Murshid argued that the Bengalis are a bricolage of a range of racial stocks including Adivasis, Aryans, Austric people, Dravidians, Chinese-Mongoloid, Semitic and central Asian people, and Europeans.<sup>21</sup>

From time immemorial, the region that came to be known as Bengal had been inhabited by people across the globe. Some of them were invaders, some were merchants, some were travelers or some were just strangers. The stream of migrated people had settled in the various *Janapadas* or habitats of this particular part of the world. There were intermingling and intermarriage between foreigners and natives over the centuries, and this admixture of various races created a vastly mixed race what is known as the Bengalis.<sup>22</sup> However, from a similar point of view, Sengupta traces the trail of migration *vis a vis* the fact of admixture of four racial stocks that culminated in a distinct “Bengalee ethnic identity”.<sup>23</sup> First, it was the Austric people, also known as ‘Vedic’ or ‘Kobli’, who settled in Bengal far before the Aryan invasion of this territory from the north-west around 2,000-1,500

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19 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (University of Chicago Press 1962).

20 Niharranjan Ray, *History of the Bengali People: Ancient Period*, (Orient Longman 2013), p. 15.

21 Ghulam Murshid, *Bengali Culture: Over a Thousand Years*, Translated by Sarbari Sinha, (Niyogi Books 2018).

22 Sirajul Islam, ‘Bengali Nation’, Sirajul Islam (ed.), *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, Retrieved from [https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Bengali\\_Nation](https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Bengali_Nation), (accessed on 25 September 2021).

23 Nitish Sengupta, *Land of Two Rivers: A History of Bengal from the Mahabharata to Mujib*, (Penguin Random House India Pvt. Ltd. 2011), p. 12.

BCE. It was found that the Aryans called them *kikatas*, *vratyas* or *nishadas* in their Vedic literature and these racial strains are sustained to date through such communities as *Sabara*, *Dom*, *Chandala*, *Pulinda*, *Kola*, and *Hadi*. The other three strands included the Dravidians, the Mongolian tribes, and the Aryans. There were extensive intermarriages between the south-westerly Dravidians and the Mongolians from the north-east and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Later, a small-scale migration of Aryans joined the already heterogeneous genetic stock. These are the layers that produced the Bengali race today thus, rendering the gene pool of the Bengalis a racial potpourri from the very early of their history.

### **Bengalis as an Ethnic Group in the Erstwhile United Pakistan**

An analysis of Bengali ethnicity preconditions a theoretical discussion of ethnic formation at least to the minimum level. Ethnicity is defined as “the state of being ethnic, or belonging to an ethnic group”.<sup>24</sup> It is basically a new term getting into academic discourses in 1960s and 1970s after it was coined by David Riesman in 1953.<sup>25</sup> The term was derived from Greek *ethnos* (noun)/*ethnikos* (adjective) which were used to refer to groups of people who were ‘pagans’ or ‘heathen’, ‘non-Hellenic’, ‘non-Jewish’, ‘non-Christian’, ‘second-class peoples’.<sup>26</sup> In the simplest sense of the term, an ethnic group is a group of people whose cultural system is different from the cultural pattern practiced by the dominant population in a particular nation-state.<sup>27</sup> To be more specific, Taras and Ganguly defined an ethnic group as:

a large or small group of people, in either traditional or advanced societies, who are united by a common inherited culture (including language, music, food, dress, and customs and practices), racial similarity, common religion, and belief in a common history and ancestry and who exhibit a strong psychological sentiment of belonging to the group.<sup>28</sup>

In the same line, Smith identified a total of six dimensions that help define the structure of an ethnic group what include a. a collective name; b. a common myth

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24 James G. Kellas, *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 2nd ed., (Macmillan Press Limited 1998), p. 6.

25 Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, ‘Introduction’, Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan (eds.), *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, (Harvard University Press 1975), pp. 1-28.

26 Siniša Malešević, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, (Sage Publications 2004); Mathias Bös, ‘Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups: Historical Aspects’, James D. Wright (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed., Vol. 8, (Elsevier 2015), pp. 136-141, doi: 10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.62015-9.

27 Richard T. Schaefer, *Racial and Ethnic Groups*, 15th ed., (Pearson 2019).

28 Raymond C. Taras and Rajat Ganguly, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict*, 4th ed., (Sage 2016), p. 1.

of descent; c. a shared history; d. a distinctive shared culture; e. an association with a specific territory; and f. a sense of solidarity.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Fenton defined an ethnic group as a descent or cultural group with three specific additions including a. it is sub-set within a nation-state; b. cultural differences rather than physical differences is to be considered; and c. it is considered to be ‘other’ (foreign or exotic) in relation to a putative majority.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the perceived subtle differences in the aforementioned definitions, there are some clear commonalities among them since all of them tend to reveal differences especially cultural differences.<sup>31</sup> Another noteworthy commonality in these definitions is that they have exclusively focused on the contents or constituting parts of these groups or communities. They viewed it to be a ‘fixed’ or ‘stationary’ entity. Conceptualizing these groups from such a primordial perspective has some specific limitations as it is argued that the ethnic groups are not something static and survive in absolute isolation. In order to avert such shortcomings, Barth introduced a perspective that demonstrated a shift of emphasis from ‘content’ or ‘substance’ to their ‘boundaries’ and ‘relations’ as he argued that “[t]he critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic [social] boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses.”<sup>32</sup> However, such ethnic boundaries are created and maintained in relation to the presence of and interaction with other such categories of people when a sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ become visible through recurrent inter-ethnic social encounters. Thus, an ethnic group emerges or evolves only when it engages in interaction with other groups and the greater society at large.<sup>33</sup>

The Bengalis of the then state of Pakistan (56% of total population) grossly inhabited in the eastern wing of the country, constituting one of the several notable communities especially those living in its western wing. Bengalis with their distinguished mother tongue Bengali inherited and shared a distinct or unique

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29 Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, (Blackwell Publishing 1988), pp. 22-31.

30 Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity*, 2nd ed., (Polity Press 2010), p. 22.

31 David Jack Eller, “Ethnicity, Culture, and “The Past””, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Vol. 36, Issue 4, 1997, Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0036.411>, (accessed on 23 October 2021).

32 Fredrik Barth, ‘Introduction’, Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, (Little, Brown and Company 1969), pp. 11-15.

33 Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*, (Routledge 2009); Serena Nanda and Richard L. Warms, *Cultural Anthropology*, 11th ed., (Wadsworth 2013); Barth, *op. cit.*

cultural system with a long past dating back over a thousand years in the history of the Indian sub-continent.<sup>34</sup> Historians and academics have often been argued that it was only their religion Islam that had been instrumentalized to amalgamate the diversified population with numerous ethnicities residing in different territories of both the wings of Pakistan, leaving the crucial fact of ethnic plurality and its implications entirely unacknowledged. Ethnic differences were considered to be a vital flaw in the nation-building initiatives or national integration of Pakistan. It was only after the creation of Pakistan, the Bengalis became conscious, or to be more specific cautious and concerned, as to the separateness or distinctiveness of their ethnic identity. Their ethnic boundaries were hardened or consolidated during their close interactions with the dominant West Pakistani power elite who had always been trying to impose a cultural hegemony over the former. The first blow of such a kind came in the form of ‘linguistic hegemony’ when, even after huge protest and disgust, Urdu had been forcefully attempted to be imposed on the Bengalis as well as other linguistic communities of Pakistan. The Bengalis reckoned Urdu hegemony to be a serious threat to the survival of their Bengali identity. Moreover, subsequent developments in almost every arena of national life contributed to the intensification of boundary making and maintenance process which eventually led them to express strong self-determination. No sooner had the Bengalis ascertained the paternalistic or hegemonic influence of the West Pakistanis, or to be specific Punjabis, than they consciously opted for maintaining ‘ethnic distance’<sup>35</sup> with a view to foiling the heinous efforts of Urduization or West Pakistanization of Bengali society. Thus, the process of ethnogenesis among Bengalis began at a very early stage of the creation of Pakistan as Rosman and Rubel assert that the process of ethnogenesis occurs when a group historically differentiates and transforms its identity from the larger group.<sup>36</sup> However, it is this very relational aspect of ethnicity that establishes the position of the Bengalis in the erstwhile United Pakistan as an ethnic group *per se vis-à-vis* the dominant West Pakistanis who were at the top of the political hierarchy.

However, as far as the theories of ethnicity concerned, the primordialist perspective of ethnic identity formation posits that ethnicity is something “innate”, “ascribed”,

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34 Murshid, *op. cit.*

35 Murat Bayar, “Reconsidering Primordialism: An Alternative Approach to the Study of Ethnicity”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 32, Issue 9, 2009, pp. 1639-1657, doi: 10.1080/01419870902763878.

36 Abraham Rosman and Paula Rubel, “Chapter 5 Ethnonationalism, Nationalism, Empire: Their Origins and Their Relationships to Power, Conflict and Culture Building”, *Global Bioethics*, Vol. 19, Issue 1, 2006, pp. 55-71, doi: 10.1080/11287462.2006.10800885.

“static”, or “fixed”<sup>37</sup> as Geertz argued that ethnic identity is a biologically ‘given’ or ‘natural’ phenomenon.<sup>38</sup> Primordialism also states that ethnicity is a natural or inherent phenomenon. Bengali ethnic identity has also been attempted to be conceptualized from the primordialist perspective, highlighting its antiquity in this particular territory of South Asia. Murshid noted that contemporary Bengali writers, from an implicit primordialist point of view, inspired by nationalist spirit claimed Bengali culture to be very old as much as 5,000 years.<sup>39</sup> By the same token and from an ethnosymbolic approach, the ethnic markers, i.e. language, religion, food habits, clothes, legends, customs, traditions, institutions etc. of the Bengalis are also believed to be pristine in nature.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, from a constructionist point of view, ethnicity is conceived as something always in a state of flux. This perspective is the exact opposite of primordialist school. Constructionists argue that ethnic identity is not always fixed or pre-determined rather it is constructed and reconstructed in congruence with changes in individuals’ identities.<sup>41</sup> Thus, it can safely be claimed that ethnic identity is a social construction.<sup>42</sup> In the same line, Nagel has put that “...ethnicity is best understood as a dynamic, constantly evolving property of both individual identity and group organization.”<sup>43</sup> By the same token, Bengali ethnicity had never been a fixed or unalterable phenomenon as the primordialists claim, rather, as Ahmed<sup>44</sup> argues, it was imagined<sup>45</sup>, invented<sup>46</sup>, and instrumental<sup>47</sup> that adequately demonstrate the nature of fluidity and hybridity of Bengali national identity in the

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37 Philip Q. Yang, *Ethnic Studies: Issues and Approaches*, (State University of New York Press 2000); Stephen van Evera, “Primordialism lives!”, *APSA-CP: Newsletter of the Organized Section in Comparative Politics of the American Political Science Association*, Vol. 12, Issue 1, 2001, pp. 20-22.

38 Clifford Geertz, ‘Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States’, Clifford Geertz (ed.), *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa*, (Free Press 1963), pp. 105-157.

39 Murshid, *op. cit.*

40 Smith (2009), *op. cit.*

41 Kanchan Chandra, ‘Introduction’, Kanchan Chandra (ed.), *Constructionist Theories of Ethnic Politics*, (Oxford University Press 2012), pp. 1-47; Yang, *op. cit.*

42 Phadnis and Ganguly, *op. cit.*; van Evera, *op. cit.*

43 Joane Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Re-creating Ethnic Identity and Culture”, *Social Problems*, Vol. 41, Issue 1, 1994, pp. 152-176. doi: 10.2307/3096847.

44 Ahmed (2019), *op. cit.*, pp. 213-215.

45 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (Verso 1991).

46 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge University Press 1990).

47 Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, (Sage 1991).

forms of Muslims (from 1905 to 1947), Bangali (from 1947 to 1971), and Bangladeshi (from 1971 onwards). Likewise, Kabir observed that within a period of only forty years, the Bangladeshis endured three mutually exclusive phases of nationalist transformation with significant shifts in their national identity: firstly, religious; secondly, language and regional; and thirdly, a new religio-ethnic identity.<sup>48</sup>

### **Ethnic Considerations on the Emergence of Bengali Ethnonationalism**

Modern nation-states in the world, for most of the cases, are constituted on the basis of pre-existing ethnic ties (collective name, common myth of descent, shared history, distinctive shared culture, specific territory, and sense of solidarity) and sentiments.<sup>49</sup> And these ties do not create nations themselves as Smith enthusiastically argues that “any *ethnie*... that aspires to nationhood, must become politicized and stake out claims in the competition of power and influence in the state arena.”<sup>50</sup> In an attempt to differentiate between nation and ethnic group, it is argued that when an ethnic group endeavours to transform itself into a nation-state, it becomes so only when it mobilizes itself along political and statist ideologies and one of the four politically active ethnic groups co-existing in the modern world is the ethnonationalists.<sup>51</sup> However, in order to trace the transformation from demotic *ethnie* (ethnic community) to civic nation, Smith identifies a range of consequentially related processes and movements, including the transformation from a subordinate or passive entity to a unified active, assertive, and politicized community, the movement toward well-demarcated and recognized universal homeland or territory, economic unification of the territory, conferring ethnic members legal citizenships with civil, social, and political rights and regulations, and finally putting people of the community at the centre of moral and political concern and re-socialize as new citizens in terms of national values, myths, and memories.<sup>52</sup>

Apart from the above-mentioned processes, ideologies of ethnic nationalism, in the modern era, is considered “the most decisive” factor of nation-building and, as it

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48 Muhammad Ghulam Kabir, *Changing Face of Nationalism: The Case of Bangladesh*, (South Asian Publishers 1994).

49 Anthony D. Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic*, (Blackwell Publishing 2008); Smith (1988), *op. cit.*

50 Smith (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 156.

51 Ted Robert Gurr, *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts*, (United States Institute of Peace Press 1993); Kellas, *op. cit.*; Harff and Gurr, *op. cit.*

52 Anthony D. Smith, “The Origins of Nations”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 12, Issue 3, 1989, pp. 340-67, doi: 10.1080/01419870.1989.9993639.

has also been put, one of the several advantages of this version of nationalism is that it helps build nations out of these pre-existing ethnic ties.<sup>53</sup> Ethnonationalism as Smith defines is the “genealogical ties for national belonging, vernacular culture such as languages, customs and cults, a nativist ethno-history and shared folk memories, and popular mobilization.”<sup>54</sup> In the same line, Roshwald contends:

Ethnic nationalism is a phrase used to denote the assertion of a collective identity centered around a myth of common biological descent – an extension of the kinship principle to a large population – and, as its corollary, a claim to territorial sovereignty. The term can also refer to any movement that focuses on common, objective cultural characteristics (linguistic, religious, folkloric, or any combination thereof) as the foundation of political nationhood.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike the western civic or territorial nationalism prevailing in countries like Britain, France, Spain, Holland, or Sweden, a significant portion of southern and eastern Asia along with eastern Europe, Russia, and the Middle East opted for an alternative brand of nationalism or what is termed ethnic nationalism based exclusively on cultural or ethnic ties like common ancestry, history, language, religion, custom etc.<sup>56</sup>

In the same vein, like those in most of the East Asian countries, ethnonationalist spirits held sway over the common psyche of the Bengalis of East Pakistan. Before the Partition of India in 1947, Bengali ethnic identity was “forgotten” and confined to the “back seat” during the heyday of religious nationalism. But the scenario went through a “radical change” after 1947 when the sense of Bengali ethnicity (re)appeared to mobilize Bengalis under the banner of a new patriotism kindled by their love for land and language.<sup>57</sup>

The following section deals with the elements of Bengali ethnicity that contributed to the emergence of Bengali ethnonationalism in the erstwhile East Pakistan, facilitating the scopes for the Bengalis’ self-determination as a politically assertive ethnic group with an indomitable desire for nationhood.

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53 Anthony D. Smith, “The Ethnic Sources of Nationalism”, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 35, Issue 1, 1993, pp. 48-62, doi: 10.1080/003963339308442673.

54 Smith (2009), *op. cit.*, p. 67.

55 Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1915-1923*, (Routledge 2001), p. 5.

56 Smith (1993), *op. cit.*

57 A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Bengali Nationalism and the Emergence of Bangladesh: An Introductory Outline*, (International Centre for Bengal Studies 1994); A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *India Pakistan Bangladesh: Perspectives on History, Society and Politics*, (Readers Service 2001); Kabir, *op. cit.*

*Ethnosymbolic fervour instigated by the Language Movement of 1952*

Ethnosymbolism, in the simplest sense of the term, is an approach that considers that “the cultural elements of symbol, myth, memory, value, ritual and tradition to be crucial to an analysis of ethnicity, nations and nationalisms”.<sup>58</sup> Ethnosymbolists argue that a range of ethnic ties such as collective symbols, common experience of the past, myths, memories, histories of a community or group of people mobilized under a common platform serve as a rallying point for the formation of nation and nationalism as these ethnic elements evoke a sense of commonness among the people involved. This particular group feeling contributes to the formation of solidarity among them eventually leading them to build a nation of their own. The point to be noted here is that the “subjective elements” of these ethnic ties instill within the members involved a host of “strong emotional attachments” towards their ethnic communities or nations.<sup>59</sup> That is why ethnosymbolists deem the various networks of ethnic ties to be the single most important factor for the emergence and sustenance of nations and nationalisms.<sup>60</sup>

The heroic state language movement of 1952 or *Bhasha Andolon*, a political movement based on the demand of constitutional recognition of Bangla as a *lingua franca* provided a great deal of impetus to the formation of Bengali ethnonationalism. It was the first head-on confrontation with the Pakistani power elite immediately after the Partition of 1947. It has been claimed that, from an ethnosymbolist approach, the language movement provided the adequate myths and symbols for forging the ensuing Bengali nationalism.<sup>61</sup> It has been considered to be the seed out of which grew Bengali nationalism.<sup>62</sup> After the initial task of curving an independent state exclusively for Muslims out of Indian territory on the basis of Islam, the Pakistani rulers chose Urdu, an Indo-Aryan language spoken by only a trifling minority of 3% of the then Pakistani population<sup>63</sup>, as a second option to

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58 Smith (2009), *op. cit.*, p. 25.

59 Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, 2nd ed., (Polity Press 2010), p. 62.

60 Smith (2009), *op. cit.*

61 Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration*, (Columbia University Press 1972); A.R. Mallick and Syed Anwar Husain, ‘Bengali Nationalism and the Emergence of Bangladesh’, A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed and Bazlul Mobin Chowdhury (eds.), *Bangladesh National Culture and Heritage: An Introductory Reader*, (Independent University 2004), pp. 186-204; Kabir, *op. cit.*

62 Aatur Rahman Khan, ‘The Language Movement (1948-1952) and Bengali Nationalism’, Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Bangladesh: Society, Religion and Politics*, (South Asia Studies Group 1985), pp. 1-16.

63 Van Schendel, *op. cit.*

consolidate the nation-building process. It was emphatically held that Urdu is much nearer to Islamic tradition (with right-to-left Perso-Arabic alphabet) than any other languages spoken in the country. But such a nationalizing initiative had been formidably challenged and vehemently opposed by the Bengalis of East Pakistan since, even though being the numerical majority of the nation, Bengali or what was known to be their mother-tongue had been ruled out to be constitutionally acknowledged. The primacy of Urdu as a state language had been uttered several times, in public speeches and announcements, in the initial years of Pakistan. The idea of making Urdu the *lingua franca* came out from Pakistan Educational Conference held in Karachi in November 1947. The conference also decided that Bengali would be replaced by Urdu and English in various government stationaries including money order forms, envelops, postcards, coins, and Public Service Commission Examination.<sup>64</sup> The decision was immediately challenged by the members (mostly students) of Tamaddun Majlish, a pro-Bengali language organization under the leadership of Professor Abul Kashem of Dhaka University. Subsequently, the creation of *Rashtrabhasha Sangram Parishad* in December 1947 under the convenorship of Nurul Huq Bhuiyan, consisting mostly of Bengali politicians and intellectuals, expedite the activities of language movement in the closing days of 1947 and early days of 1948. Nevertheless, serious preparation was underway to make Urdu the only state language under the supervision of the central education minister Fazlur Rahman. Later, on 23 February 1948 a Congress Member from East Bengal Dhirendranath Datta, in the Pakistan Constituent assembly, proposed the use of Bengali when the members of the assembly were asked to communicate either in Urdu or English. But the proposal was immediately ruled out by Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan and Chief Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin in strong language as well as by the house.<sup>65</sup> Students of Dhaka University called for a general *hartal* or strike on 11 March 1948 to protest the moves which was followed by police attacks and injuries of several students and leaders including A. K. Fazlul Huq as well as by the prolonging of the strike in the following four days from 12

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64 Mussarat Jabeen, Amir Ali Chandio, and Zarina Qasim, "Language Controversy: Impacts on National Politics and Secession of East Pakistan", *South Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2010, pp. 99-124, Retrieved from <http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/csas/PDF/Mussarat%20Jabeen%207.pdf>, (accessed on 2 November 2021).

65 Hasan Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan: The Rise and Realization of Bengali Muslim Nationalism*, (Oxford University Press 1994); Badruddin Umar, *Language Movement in East Bengal*, (Jatiya Grontha Prakashan 2000).

March to 15 March.<sup>66</sup> All these developments created much chaos and confusion among East Pakistanis.

Pakistan's Governor-General and father of the nation Muhammad Ali Jinnah had also proposed and argued for Urdu as the only medium of state affairs. During his only visit to East Pakistan on 19 March 1948, amid intense protest and chaos, Muhammad Ali Jinnah in his two public speeches at the civic receptions in Racecourse Ground and later at Curzon Hall of Dhaka University on 21 March and 24 March, respectively categorically reiterated his stance as to the state language as he had always been maintained that only Urdu and no other languages would be the state language of Pakistan.<sup>67</sup> He did reassure his desire just before he departed Dhaka on 28 March leaving the controversy to simmer till February 1952. And by this, first phase of language movement came to an end.

The second phase of the movement was triggered after the reassertion of notorious 'Urdu-only' policy by prime minister Khwaja Nazimuddin at Paltan Maidan on 27 January 1952, creating huge abhorrence among East Pakistanis.<sup>68</sup> An all-out protest was called by students subsequently. In the early morning of 21<sup>st</sup> February, as it was announced before, student leaders and workers began to assemble under or near the mango tree (*Amtala*) of Dhaka University and, though the leadership factions were haggling over the matter, the vast majority of the students was in favour of violating the Section 144 imposed on that particular day. Armed men of police forces had been deployed on the university campus to maintain law and order situation and prevent the protesters from unlawful assembly.<sup>69</sup> The entire proceeding came to its climax when the desperate policemen brutally opened fire on those trying to storm into the assembly hall, killing scores of demonstrators and injuring a large number of them mostly students. Among the deceased were Abdus Salam, Rafiq Uddin Ahmed, Shafiur Rahman, Abul Barkat, and Abdul Jabbar along with a nine-year-old boy Ohiullah. Rafiq Uddin Ahmed was shot on his head having his grey matter sprinkled over the street, critically injured Barkat and Jabbar were taken to the hospital immediately to be dead at the same night, Abdus Salam, a peon of the customs departments succumbed to his wound and died subsequently.<sup>70</sup>

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66 Bashir Al Helal, *Bhasha Andoloner Itihas*, 2nd ed., (Agamee Prakashani 1999).

67 Zaheer, *op. cit.*; Al Helal, *op. cit.*; Umar, *op. cit.*

68 Umar, *op. cit.*; Al Helal, *op. cit.*

69 Umar, *op. cit.*

70 Bashir Al Helal, 'Language Movement', Sirajul Islam (ed.), *Bangladedpia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, Retrieved from [https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Language\\_Movement](https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Language_Movement), (accessed on 20 October 2021); Umar, *op. cit.*

A makeshift monument was erected at the very place of the happening on 23 February 1952 to commemorate the sacrifice of the martyrs. However, a full-fledged *Shohid Minar* (Martyr Monument) was erected in 1963 designed by a Bangladeshi sculptor Hamidur Rahman which later became “the rallying symbol for Bengali nationalism”.<sup>71</sup> Ever since the day of the incidence, the 21<sup>st</sup> February or *Ekushe February* has been observed annually with immense gravity to pay homage to the sacrifice of the language martyrs. To the Bengalis, their language became the most significant marker of ethnic identity and national integration, creating “new symbols, slogans, and myths for the ensuing Bengali nationalism based on linguistic identity”.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the ethnosymbolic fervour was extended to other attributes such as territory, natural beauty as well as ethnic markers like customs, traditions, food, and lifestyle.

*Internal colonialism and ethnonationalist movements*

Internal colonialism occurs when a ruling ethnic group utilizes its power to systematically appropriate the resources of the territory inhabited by less powerful ethnic communities, limiting the scopes of development of the region and confining them to some specific roles usually of inferior type.<sup>73</sup> It may also be called ‘Intra-State Imperialism’ “in which one, cast, or region has attempted to become more prosperous and dominant at the cost of others within a nation”.<sup>74</sup> Michael Hechter, one of the prominent theorists of this approach asserts that the uneven modernization of state territories produces relatively advanced (in the core) and less advanced groups (in peripheries), crystalizing unequal distribution of resources and power between these two groups.<sup>75</sup> The dominant or superordinate group, charged with political power and influence, seeks to maximize its profit by institutionalizing the existing stratification system. Moreover, this ruling power creates a system of stratification named ‘cultural division of labour’ in which the prestigious roles are reserved for their group members and the inferior ones are assigned to those in the subordinate groups. Here, the noteworthy fact is that it contributes to the

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71 Nitish Sengupta, *Bengal Divided: The Unmaking of a Nation 1905-1971*, (Penguin Books 2012), p. 178.

72 Kabir, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

73 M. Sornarajah, “Internal Colonialism and Humanitarian Intervention”, *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1981, pp. 45-78, Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/gjicl/vol11/iss1/3>, (accessed on 25 October 2021).

74 K.P. Misra, “Intra-State Imperialism: The Case of Pakistan”, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 9, Issue 1, 1972, pp. 27-39, doi: 10.1177/002234337200900102.

75 Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966*, (University of California Press 1975), pp. 9-10.

development of distinctive ethnic identity among the members of the two groups. People are differentiated by the presence of visible signs or cultural markers.

While analyzing the interactive aspects of the economic structures of core and periphery, Hechter asserts that the development initiatives in periphery are dependent and complementary to those in the core.<sup>76</sup> Peripheral industrialization, if any, is highly specialized and designed for export purposes. Major decisions such as investment, credit, and wages are basically taken in the core, compelling the periphery to resort to economic dependence and economic backwardness. In such circumstances, the feasibility of political and nationalistic mobilization of the disadvantaged ethnic groups in the periphery to support their culture increases, claiming it to be equal or superior to that of the core which ultimately may lead to secession or even independence.

Apart from the reality of the Celts in the United Kingdom Hechter studied, his model is pertinent enough to analyze political and nationalistic mobilization among the peripheral ethnic minorities in a wide range of regions of the Third World and in South Asian context particularly. The contexts of Bengali and the Baluch nationalist movements in the former United Pakistan are highly compatible with Hechter's model<sup>77</sup> as the economic exploitation and plunder by the West Pakistanis made the majority of the Bengalis to believe that they were victims of internal colonialism.<sup>78</sup> Mitra Das in *Internal Colonialism and the Movement for Bangladesh: A Sociological Analysis* has meticulously evaluated the relevance of internal colonialism model to Bangladesh or the former United Pakistan contexts.<sup>79</sup>

At independence, East Pakistan was linguistically homogenous as the vast majority of the population was Bengali people (apart from the Muslim majority, Hindus constituted 20% of the total population)<sup>80</sup> along with the ethnic communities, Biharis, and Dalits speaking their respective mother tongues, whereas West Pakistan was shared by population from different ethnic backgrounds such as Punjabis, Sindhis, Baluchis etc. However, during the separation in 1947, the Pakistan dominion became independent with very limited amount of resources and

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76 Hechter, *op. cit.*

77 Feroz Ahmed, 'The Structural Matrix of the Struggle in Bangladesh', Kathleen Gough and Hari P. Sharma (eds.), *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*, (Monthly Review Press 1973), pp. 419-448; Phadnis and Gangly, *op. cit.*

78 Harun-or-Rashid, *op. cit.*

79 Mitra Das, 'Internal Colonialism and the Movement for Bangladesh', K. Ishwaran (ed.), *Contributions to Asian Studies*, Vol. 12, (E. J. Brill 1978), pp. 93-104.

80 Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh*, (University of California Press 1990), p. 10.

facilities in comparison to that of India, where the lion's share of the wealth and infrastructure of the sub-continent was concentrated. The case of East Pakistan in this regard was worse than West Pakistan since the eastern part of the country was almost devoid of any kind of industries and strong administrative facilities. It has basically been used as a hinterland to ensure the continuous supply of raw materials to industrial hubs first to those located in and around Kolkata during the British Raj and later to those located in West Pakistan after the partition.<sup>81</sup>

In order to ascertain the differences in the level of development and unequal distribution of wealth and resources between the two wings of Pakistan, Sobhan adopted the term 'disparity' or 'regional disparity' in the economic sector with a few indices to measure it.<sup>82</sup> He shows that the first index to measure inequality is the regional per capita income which, in 1960, stood at Rs. 305 for West Pakistan, as much as one-third higher than that of East Pakistan which was estimated to be Rs. 213. In other measurements also the disparity was clearly evident. Just at the moment of independence, East Pakistan's Gross Domestic Product well exceeded that of West Pakistan.<sup>83</sup> But the scenario began to turn in the opposite direction since then. The fact is evident in the estimates showing that in 1949-50 East Pakistan had a GPD of Rs. 13,130 million whereas the figure for West Pakistan was Rs. 11,830 million. It is interesting to note that, during the period 1968-69 these figures reversed as East Pakistan's economy was stumbling with Rs. 20,670 million and, conversely, West Pakistan was booming with Rs. 27,744 million.<sup>84</sup>

As Sobhan analyzes other indices of disparity, the scenario of development and progress in East Pakistan remained pretty bleak. In terms of investment and revenue expenditures, East Pakistan was clearly lagging behind West Pakistan, where a wide range of infrastructural and economic development activities took place. In 1955, the First Five Year Plan of Pakistan allotted a handsome budget for the development projects in West Pakistan much higher than that of East Pakistan, which ultimately culminated in low per capita income for East Pakistanis during this period. Similarly, even after firm commitments to reduce regional disparity substantially, the situation of disparity remained unchanged in the Second Five

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81 Rehman Sobhan, *From Two Economies to Two Nations: My Journey to Bangladesh*, (Daily Star Books 2015); Feroz Ahmed, "The Struggle in Bangladesh", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, 1972, pp. 2-22, doi: 10.1080/14672715.1972.10406271.

82 Sobhan (2015), *op. cit.*

83 Jagmohan Meher, "Dynamics of Pakistan's Disintegration: The Case of East Pakistan 1947-1971", *India Quarterly* Vol. 71, Issue 4, 2015, pp. 300-317, doi: 10.1177/0974928415600849.

84 Feroz Ahmed, *Ethnicity and Politics in Pakistan*, (Oxford University Press 1998).

Year Plan of 1966 which sanctioned Rs. 13,500 million and Rs. 9,500 million for West Pakistan and East Pakistan, respectively. Hence, with these statistics in hand, it can safely be claimed that the economic disparity of this magnitude is the direct results of internal colonialism.

In a meticulous attempt, Ahmed further observed the process of internal colonialism in East Pakistan pretty closely. To boost the pace of industrialization in Pakistan, as he argues, East Pakistan had been turned into a colony of West Pakistan that led to disparities in economic and social development of the two regions. The very few industrializations especially the jute industry of East Pakistan bloomed for the sake of West Pakistani capitalists and the industrial development of the region. The lion's share of the investment went to West Pakistan which was well-established with economic infrastructures such as the sea port of Karachi, roads and railways, financial institutions, installation of the central government, and suitable or undisturbed atmosphere for investment. The increasing industrialization was in great need of supply of capital goods and raw materials along with cheap labour what inclined the West to resort to the supplies from the East. Foreign exchange earnings produced by the jute mills in East Bengal, which amounted for 70% of the total foreign exchange earnings of Pakistan in the early years, were drained to West Pakistan for investment in the industries there. Though it provided the requisite reinforcements for industrialization, East Pakistan received a miniscule share of wealth produced by these industries as Zaheer argued that "what was earned in East Pakistan was spent... in West Pakistan."<sup>85</sup> Moreover, from a classical colonialist perspective, East Pakistan was also treated as the market for the manufactures of West Pakistan who exported huge margin of finished products to this colonized market.

The utter exploitation and plundering inflicted by internal colonialism produced much discontent and antagonism among the Bengalis from the early days of Pakistan.<sup>86</sup> But they did not resort to passivity, rather they competed and even revolted collectively as a politically conscious ethnic group to retrieve their fair-share as Nagel argues that the effects of internal colonialism upon the ethnic minorities led them to open competitions for a just share of rewards and resources.<sup>87</sup> According to resource competition theory, in multi-ethnic societies the process of ethnic identity formation and subsequently the genesis of ethnonationalism are materialized when the ethnic elites of several contending

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<sup>85</sup> Zaheer, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>86</sup> Ahmed (1998), *op. cit.*; Meher, *op. cit.*, 2015

<sup>87</sup> Nagel, *op. cit.*

groups are in constant competition with one another for the possession of scarce resources and rewards.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, by engaging into such conflicts and competitions people of ethnic groups experiencing acute deprivation and discrimination develop a strong sense of 'relative deprivation'. While exploring the process of relative deprivation, Ted Robert Gurr in *Why Men Rebel* defined the concept as "actor's perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities."<sup>89</sup> To put it simply, ethnic groups initiate political movement when they find that they receive lesser share of resources (value capabilities) than they think they deserve (value expectations). According to the frustration-aggression model, this sense of relative deprivation produces much frustration among those deprived ultimately making them aggressive to politically assert their needs and demands. The sense of relative deprivation begets the sense of nationalism among groups and communities which was clearly evident in the case of Bangladesh as Rahman argues that "Bengali nationalism was consolidated when economic dimension i.e. the relative economic deprivation of East Pakistan was added to the cultural and geographical dimensions..."<sup>90</sup>

Gurr identified and discussed four stages of the process of relative deprivation leading to ethnic political movement and revolt: first, ethnic groups need to recognize that there prevails a serious sense of deprivation in society; second, the deprivation is like that some of them enjoys relatively greater opportunities and resources than others; third, there will be such a feeling among the deprived that what is done to them is not only inequitable but also unfair; and fourth, they must believe in political movements as their lone saviour. In the same vein, in *Minorities at Risk*, while discussing the various types of ethno-political movements Gurr used the term "non-state communal group" that includes people who share language, ethnicity, region of residence, and history but they do not form a nation-state of their own.<sup>91</sup> He further subdivided these communal groups into two categories as national peoples and minority peoples. National peoples, as Gurr defined, are "regionally concentrated groups that have lost their autonomy to expansionist states but still preserve some of their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness and want to protect or reestablish some degree of politically separate existence... seek separation or autonomy from the states that rule them."<sup>92</sup> A category of these

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88 Phadnis and Ganguly, *op. cit.*

89 Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, (Routledge 2016), p. 24.

90 Khan Md. Lutfor Rahman, *Nation Building Problems in Bangladesh: A Socio-Economic-Political Perspective*, (University Press Limited 2009), p. 113.

91 Gurr (1993), *op. cit.*

92 *Ibid.*, p. 15

national peoples is called ethno-nationalist groups characterized by organized political autonomy and separatist movements.

However, while discussing the process of politicization of Bengali ethnic identity or the formation of Bengali ethnonationalism, Mallick and Husain identified six sequential stages of consciousness as to its identity which include:

1. ethnic awareness;
2. ethnic evaluation;
3. demands for equality, fairness, and justice in various spheres of national life against perceived or real discrimination and grievances;
4. demand for a separate province, region, state or a larger share of power from the dominating elites;
5. threat of secession to extract concessions made at the third and fourth stages;
6. actual secession when the political community refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the larger political community and engages in a struggle for a separate state or for its merger in a neighbouring community.<sup>93</sup>

*Cultural hegemony and the response of Bengali intelligentsia*

Cultural hegemony is the ideological and cultural domination through social institutions that enable those in power to influence values, norms, ideas, expectations, worldview, and behaviour of people of other groups.<sup>94</sup> Borrowing ideas from Karl Marx, Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of cultural hegemony to refer to a process through which ruling elites legitimize their domination by instilling their norms, values, and beliefs into the subordinate population through particular institutions and thus controlling these institutions they control the entire society. Gramsci defines hegemony as:

the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.<sup>95</sup>

To Gramsci, as it is noteworthy in this point, the concept of hegemony is inconceivable without the notion of domination.<sup>96</sup> Keeping a homogenizing project

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<sup>93</sup> Mallick and Husain, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>94</sup> Nicki Lisa Cole, 'Cultural Hegemony', *ThoughtCo.*, Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/cultural-hegemony-3026121>, (accessed 30 October 2021).

<sup>95</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Translated and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Noell Smith, (International Publishers 1971), p. 12.

<sup>96</sup> T.J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 90, No. 3, 1985, pp. 567-593, doi: 10.1086/ahr/90.3.567.

into focus, a hegemon or dominant leadership imposes cultural hegemony with a view to reducing the effects of ethnic differentiation and moves forward to establish a unitary nation-state preventing ethno-secessionist movements from dismantling national integration. Gramsci believes that ruling classes try to maintain their influence by creating an aura of moral authority as well as winning the consent of subordinate groups, but the case is not always the same as it is also observed that hegemony is often established without acquiring any consent and in the face of huge discontent of the subordinates leading the latter to revolution through strikes, factory takeovers, mass movements, and even the creation of counter hegemony.<sup>97</sup>

Against this theoretical backdrop, it can adequately be claimed that what the West Pakistanis were trying to do with the Bengalis of East Pakistan was nothing short of the domination and exploitation by a hegemon. From the very outset of the journey of Pakistan, West Pakistani power elite had been very active and attentive to dominate East Pakistanis not only economically and politically but also socially and culturally.<sup>98</sup> The cultural domination, for the first time, came as a blow to the Bengali language when it had been ruled out as an option of being one of the state languages. Moreover, during the tumultuous moments of language movement, the government's initiative to use Arabic script for writing Bengali backfired immediately and added fuel to the fire. Such a dominating attempt was vehemently opposed by the Bengalis. As the President of the East Pakistan Arabic Association, Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah had proposed Arabic as one of the state languages, but he never opined that Bengali should be written in Arabic script rather he opposed this government plan and alleged it to be an external aggression on Bengali language and culture.<sup>99</sup>

To stifle Bengali nationalism, as Coates observed, the government took several steps such as establishing Bureau of National Construction to reconstruct the thoughts of vernacular intelligentsia in line with Islamic tradition as against the Bengali linguistic one, passing laws to suppress freedom of expression, propagating government agenda by paid writers and authors through financial support provided to them by government-backed Writer's Guild, banning Rabindranath Tagore's literary works as well as broadcasting his songs by the Dhaka station of Radio Pakistan and significantly modifying the works of Kazi Nazrul Islam, producing television and radio programmes in favour of government's image, and empowering the Chancellor of the public universities to appoint, promote, and

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97 *Ibid*, p. 569.

98 Jayanta Kumar Ray, *Democracy and Nationalism on Trial: A Case of East Pakistan*, (Indian Institute of Advanced Study 1968).

99 Jabeen *et al.*, *op. cit.*

dismiss anyone according to his whim.<sup>100</sup> Cultural activities of the Bengalis had to face myriad crises due to such unfavourable government steps.<sup>101</sup> In 1961, as Khatun observed further, the matter of cultural hegemony became more evident when cultural activists of East Pakistan enthusiastically prepared themselves to observe the birth centennial of the great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore. Though it initially kept things at the implicit level, the government placed an embargo on the observance of this occasion. The secretary of a Dhaka-based organizing committee for observing the event was arrested under the veil of political ground. Moreover, the President of the same committee venerated poet Sufia Kamal had been called in and subsequently threatened by the then chief secretary over this controversy. But the courage showed by such a person like Sufia Kamal and her team was quite extraordinary as she refused to decline and proceeded to implement the project. Towards the end of this very year, due to such hegemonic attitudes of the government, Bengali writers, poets, musicians or cultural activities established an organization called *Chhayanaut* with a view to conserving Bengali culture.

The emergence of a new elite or vernacular intelligentsia within the Bengalis due to the language movement played a decisive role in fostering Bengali ethnonationalism<sup>102</sup> as Smith observed that “the emergence of new classes among which small circle of intellectuals and larger stratum of professional intelligentsia are particularly prominent and relevant.”<sup>103</sup> This intellectual class was basically secular in its orientation, possessing scientific and rational knowledge and was exclusively consisted of teachers, scientists, technicians, doctors, lawyers, and professionals from different sectors of the academic world. As the pioneers of the new era, they showed tremendous capabilities to motivate and mobilize the mass towards a particular direction. Despite the debate as to their roles and responsibilities in the nationalist movements or formation of ethnonationalism, Smith opined that the intelligentsia plays an extremely significant set of roles during the transition period from ethnic community to nationhood with particular reference to ethnonationalism. He puts:

...there is a much stronger case for the seminal role of intellectuals and artists in developing the *ideologies* of nationalism, as so many nationalist movements originated in small circles of philosophers, poets, philologists and historians, and so many of their ideas were given tangible form by writers, artists and musicians. These were the men and women who rediscovered, selected and reinterpreted existing ethnic symbols,

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100 Coates, *op. cit.*

101 Sanjida Khatun, *Shreshtho Probondho*, (Kathaprokash 2020).

102 Jahan, *op. cit.*

103 Smith (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 160.

memories, myths, values and traditions, and out of these elements forged the narratives of the nation.<sup>104</sup>

In East Pakistan, such a new social class of intelligentsia or stratum of self-conscious middle class emerged immediately after the partition as Jahan observed that the “language movement created myths, symbols and slogans that consolidated the vernacular elite.”<sup>105</sup> van Schendel while discussing the rise of the new social class noticed that it was intrinsically different from the Kolkata-based upper-caste old landowning gentry or as it was called the *bhadralok* class.<sup>106</sup> The members of this class were basically recruited from middle and lower class of society, hailing from villages and small or *mofussil* towns. However, an educated Muslim middle class was already present in Bengal at the turn of twentieth century that continued to swell further after the Partition of Bengal in 1905.<sup>107</sup> The cultural pattern created by this intellectual class was completely fresh and regional, i.e. Bengal-centered which provided ample self-confidence to the Bengalis as van Schendel notes that the self-confidence found expressions in a number of arenas such as newspapers and periodicals, cultural organizations like *Chhayanaut*, cultural and educational institutions like Bulbul Academy for Fine Arts, Bangla Academy, and College of Arts and Crafts (now the Fine Arts Institute).<sup>108</sup> Established in the 1950s, these organizations and institutions were basically established in response to the intense cultural hegemony imposed by the ruling elite of West Pakistan. Apart from the institutional efforts, individual intellectuals put crucial efforts in the process of mass awakening as “[t]he vernacular elite... could use its personal and cultural links much more effectively to mobilize the rural population for its vision of cultural renewal, political autonomy and social development.<sup>109</sup> Though a detailed description of their contributions is far beyond the scope of the paper, it is concise and justified enough to claim it this way that the intellectuals from all walks of life—teachers, writers, poets, journalists, singers and musicians, actors, cultural activists helped kindle the spirit of nationalism and patriotism among the common people of East Pakistan. However, it is worth mentioning in this point that due to such illuminating efforts the intellectuals had been targeted and massacred by the

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104 Smith (2009), *op. cit.*, p. 85.

105 Jahan, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

106 van Schendel, *op. cit.*

107 Nazrul Islam, “Middle Class in Bangladesh”, *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2017, pp. 4-15, Retrieved from <http://www.bangladeshsociology.org/BEJS14.1.pdf>, (accessed 25 July 2020); Golam Kibriya Bhuiyan, *Banglay Muslim Moddhobitto Shrenir Bikash (1885-1921)*, (Khan Brothers & Company 2013).

108 Vvan Schendel, *op. cit.*

109 *Ibid.*, p. 158.

Pakistani military establishment as Mamoon argued that the intellectuals through their activism encouraged people in social and cultural line, stimulating the spirit of Bengali nationalism.<sup>110</sup> Thus, the cultural movement initiated by the intellectuals made people aware as to their rights and claims which subsequently turned into the full-fledged political movement for liberation. In the same vein, Khan puts:

The intellectuals were the philosophers and guide in infusing in the people of East Bengal the spirit of Bangali nationalism, and they inspired the people in all the mass movements against disparity and repressive measure of the Pakistani rulers. Hence the intellectuals have all through been the targets of the rulers of Pakistan. The killing of the intellectuals was obviously the execution of a blue print of the military junta chalked out with an avowed object of eliminating the intellectuals, thereby reducing the Bangali nation into intellectual bankruptcy and depriving them of leadership.<sup>111</sup>

Intellectuals' response to the cultural hegemony imposed by the Pakistani political elite was groundbreaking. They sacrificed their lives for the cause of the nation, and the spark of the ethnonationalism they ignited lived throughout the entire period of Pakistani rule to become the flame of destruction during the Liberation War in 1971.

### **Conclusion**

Bangladesh is the end product of a series of political plans, programmes, and movements, infused with immense ethnonationalist fervour. Bengalis as an ethnic group in the erstwhile united Pakistan mobilized themselves in ethnic or cultural line to assert their distinctiveness as a different set of people which was in sharp contrast to those of West Pakistan. Beginning with the language issue, the existence and distinction of Bengali ethnicity found expressions in every aspect of national life. This sense of distinctiveness was considered the apple of discord and a serious impediment to the nation formation process. No sooner had the Pakistani elite ascertained the spontaneity and enthusiasm of Bengali ethnicity than it left no stone unturned to deploy every possible means to nip it in the bud. In retaliation, the Bengalis mobilized themselves under the banner of Bengali ethnonationalism, turning it into a rallying point for ethnonationalist movements to achieve greater autonomy initially and independence eventually. For the purpose, from a constructionist and/or instrumentalist perspective, the Bengalis continuously created and recreated their ethnicity or ethnic identity and politicized it to gain a foothold in the political arena of the country as it was wise enough from their

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110 Muntassir Mamoon, *Je Sob Hottar Bichar Hoyni*, (Somoy Prokashon 2000).

111 Muazzam Hussain Khan, "Killing of Intellectuals", Sirajul Islam (ed.), *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, Retrieved from [https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Killing\\_of\\_Intellectuals](https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Killing_of_Intellectuals), (11 November 2021).

perspective that they deemed it justified to settle things through political activism. Springing from the momentous events of the Language Movement of 1952, Bengali ethnonationalism passed through a process of maturation in the backdrops of the desire for self-determination as a separate set of population, experiences of economic exploitation or internal colonialism, sense of ethnic or cultural distinction, relinquishment of religious elements in favour of secularism etc. All these efforts ultimately enabled the subsequent political movements to propel towards the independence of Bangladesh in 1971.

## **Identity and the Language Movement in East Bengal in the 1940s and 1950s: Tension between the Religious and the Secular**

Tazeen Mahnaz Murshid\*

### **Abstract**

The paper explores the articulation of Bengali identity in East Bengal in the 1940s and 50s, particularly with reference to its secular heritage and the language movement. It accepts that Bengali identity is influenced by both religion and secular ideals. Political expediency has tilted the balance periodically reflecting the instrumentalist nature of identity formation. Language became a salient point in the ensuing controversy about the identity of Bengal Muslims. In both colonial and post-colonial times it was attributed with both religious and secular characteristics. The emergence of the language movement for the recognition of Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan demonstrates that the fundamental challenge was essentially political and proves the instrumentalist interpretation of identity formation.

**Key words:** History of Bengal and Bangladesh, intelligentsia, secularism, buddhi rmukti andolana, New Values, language movement

### **1. Introduction**

Bengali identity is both secular and deeply influenced by religion. The various markers of their identity, like language, culture, ethnicity, religion sit easily together unless manipulated by political elites to create majorities in support of their specific views. Conflict arises when opposing markers are emphasised by elites in competition. Nationalists thus formulate and reformulate concepts of state, nation and identity to gain political power, legitimacy and economic advantage.

Identity can be understood as primordial or instrumental. Geertz and Shils argue that the ties of identity are primordial or underived and unchanging. Anderson, Hobsbawm and Ranger favour an instrumentalist view: that is, identity is constructed, imagined and even invented.<sup>1</sup> Ruling elites create ruling ideas to

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the theme of primordial and instrumentalist identity see, Clifford Geertz, *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa*, New York: Free

determine the beneficiaries of state patronage through policies of inclusion and exclusion; counter elites emerge to challenge its hegemony.

The paper explores the articulation of Bengali identity in East Bengal in the 1940s and 50s, particularly after the emergence of independent Pakistan. I have argued elsewhere that the Bengal Muslim intelligentsia was not homogeneous ideologically, in terms of their social and political perceptions or the articulation of their identity. It was constantly torn by the opposing pulls of religious and secular concerns in every aspect of their lives—social, cultural and political. This tension was influenced by religious and secular movements, western ideas and values, local customs, as well as the history and tradition of Islam itself.<sup>2</sup> This chapter explores the articulation of Bengali identity, particularly with reference to its secular heritage and the language movement.<sup>3</sup> Notably, the experience of Bangladesh supports the instrumentalist view: that identity is not given or primordial, but is derived through social and political interaction.

The approach to the paper is historical. The spellings of names and places reflect the accepted norms of the period under consideration, such as Dacca, and not Dhaka. Much of the research data draws from my research on the history of Bengal Muslims over a period of time. The interpretation here draws from more recent analyses of the data based on new historical perspectives which challenge the binaries that characterised writings in the immediate post-colonial contexts. Specifically, the cleavage between the old *ashraf* aristocracy and the new upwardly mobile rural middle classes is treated in a more nuanced manner, particularly because the vagaries of fortune led members of one category to often merge into the other and partake in the same ideological struggles on the same side. The line of distinction, therefore, was not always clear cut as is often made out to be.

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Press, 1963, pp. 105-57; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991, pp. 5-7; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; Terence Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition Revisited: the Case of Colonial Africa', in Terence Ranger and Olufemi Vaughan, eds., *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa*, Houndsville: MacMillan, 1993, pp. 62-111; Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, (New Delhi: Sage, 1991), p. 15

2 Tazeen M. Murshid, *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengal Muslim Discourses, 1871-1977*, (Calcutta, 1995)

3 A paper on some aspects of the theme was published in an edited book in 2022: 'Bengali Identity, Secularism and the Language Movement' in Habibul Khondker, Olav Muurlink and Asif Ben Ali edited book, *The Emergence of Bangladesh: Interdisciplinary Perspectives I*, (Singapore: Springer; Palgrave, Macmillan, 2022)

## 2. The Changed Scenario and Relevance of the Hindu 'Other'

In post-partition East Bengal, there was no strong Hindu presence. The absence of a Hindu threat automatically relieved the pressure of communalism; organisations such as the Yuba League (Youth League) founded in 1947 and the Awami Muslim League, a political party founded in 1949, actually worked towards inter-communal harmony.<sup>4</sup> The state, on the other hand, constantly projected the alleged threat from India and the underlying fear that the two Bengals would unite. In fact, any stress on cultural similarities between East and West Bengal was interpreted by the Punjabi-dominated government as a desire for such unification<sup>5</sup> and a denial of the two-nation theory on which Pakistan was founded. The struggle to establish Bengali as one of the state languages was perceived to be a major threat to the ideology of Pakistan, for Bengali was one of the cultural links between the two parts of Bengal. The official ban on the broadcasting of Tagore songs on radio and television in 1966, was mainly to counter such sentiments of affinity. Reaction to the ban was varied: to one group of poets and writers, Tagore was 'an integral part of the cultural existence of Bengali-speaking Pakistanis'; to another, this assertion was 'not only misleading but also fundamentally opposed to the principles of Pakistan'.<sup>6</sup> The legacy of communalism was played up with suspicions cast on the Hindu community, a tiny minority: there were dark hints about their possible role as a fifth column working for the disintegration of Pakistan and merger of East and West Bengal. For example, *The Morning News*, voicing official opinion, attributed the language movement to the leadership of Hindus and a few communists, as well as to 'external provocation' conspiring to destroy the state. Hindus were often

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4 For the non-communal stance of the Yuba League, see 'Purbapakistanyuba league-daccajelasakharabedan' in Badruddin Umar (ed.), *Bhasaandolanprasanga: katipaydalit*, vol. I (Dacca, 1984, hereafter cited as *Umar Dalit*), p. 168; Anisuzzaman identified the Yuba League as the first non-communal organisation. See Anisuzzaman, 'Bangla-bhasa o bangladesh' in *Ekuserprabandha—1985* (Dacca, 1985), p. 12

5 Ghazi reflects this attitude in looking for possibilities for the political unification of the two Bengals, although he concedes that there was no emotional upsurge for such a union. But he points out that Tagore's 'Sonar bangla', an anti-partition song, became the national anthem of Bangladesh. 'Muslim Bengal: A Crisis of Identity', *West Bengal and Bangladesh Perspectives from 1972*, Barbara Thomas and Spencer Levan, eds., Occasional Paper no. 21, Michigan State University (Michigan, 1972), pp. 147-48

6 Abul Mansur Ahmad, 'Cultural Identity of East Pakistan', *Concept of Pakistan*, vol. IV, August 1967, p. 11. Abul Mansur Ahmad believed that cultural expressions of East Bengal were distinct from those of West Bengal. East Bengal had a rich heritage of *punthi* literature and music. Among the musicians were Nazrul Islam, Alauddin, Abbasuddin and Khusro. Its folk heritage included *bhatiali* and *murshidi* songs. The musical heritage of Pak-Bharat is an integral aspect of Muslim civilisation and the heritage of Arab-Persian and Turkish traditions. East Bengal shares this heritage. Abul Mansur Ahmad did not see Tagore as a representative of this tradition. See Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Bangladeser kalchar* (Culture of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 3rd edition, 1985), pp. 37-48

harassed as communists, particularly in areas of peasant disturbances; nor were Hindu urban intellectuals spared.<sup>7</sup>

In the absence of the Hindu threat of the pre-1947 period, a more secular and tolerant culture might have developed in post-partition East Bengal, were it not for a state policy which constantly played up the fear of an Indian threat, communist incursions and Hindu phobia. At the same time, Islam came to be accepted as state ideology and the bond of unity between the two wings of Pakistan. In such a situation, minority communities would have been treated as second class citizens were it not for the strong opposition from a section of the intelligentsia. At Dacca University, for example, Hindu teachers had the support of students and colleagues alike. Observing the lack of strain in inter-communal relations at Dacca University during 1947-51, a visiting British professor noted in her memoirs:

When Hindu teachers were ready to stay, neither students nor colleagues showed the slightest hostility to them. The administrator, or more probably the government sometimes did, and there were lively moments of protest when students saw or thought they saw teachers they respected being pushed out by pressure from above.<sup>8</sup>

Suhrawardy's defence of minority rights are worth mentioning here, for it is partly in this context that the religious-secular tension developed after 1947.<sup>9</sup>

Segments of the upper-class Muslims with roots in the aristocratic *ashraf*, particularly those who came from regions of India where Muslims were in a minority, had a stake in the vision of Pakistan as an Urdu speaking, unitary state where the state would determine the nature of Islam. Among them were a few stalwarts such as Liaquat Ali Khan from UP. Along with Punjabi Muslims, they dominated the Muslim League, and sought to maintain their position of influence as the defenders of Islam. Certain other segments of the Bengal Muslim aristocracy from Urdu speaking regions of Murshidabad were of a similar disposition, including Khwaja Nazimuddin, whose families had gained from their loyalty to the British Raj and sought to preserve these by aligning themselves with the new ruling ideas.

However, the dichotomies were never as clear cut. For many Muslim families with roots in the upper *ashraf* communities sided ideologically with the rising middle

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<sup>7</sup> Jyoti Sen Gupta gives detailed accounts of reprisals in areas of peasant disturbances where Hindus were particularly singled out for punishment, *History of Freedom Movement in Bangladesh, 1943-1973—Some Involvement* (Calcutta, 1974), pp. 26-36; for a discussion of the role of communists, see Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh* (Dacca, reprint 1975), p. 6; on Hindu grievances, see *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, Debates* (hereafter, *CAP Debates*) 6 March, 1949; 26 March, 1952

<sup>8</sup> A. G. Stock, *Memoirs of Dacca University, 1947-1951* (Dacca, 1973), pp. 82-83

<sup>9</sup> Speech of Suhrawardy in the Constituent Assembly, *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, Debates*, 6 March 1948, for his view on minority rights (*Hereafter cited as CAP Debates*).

classes in twentieth century Bengal. A new rising middle-class intelligentsia with roots in the former declining aristocracy of the nineteenth century, along with upwardly mobile communities from agrarian Bengal came to be a significant counterforce pushing for the rights of their constituencies. Among them were Shaheed Suhrawardy, A.K. Fazlul Huq, Maulana Bhashani, Abul Hashem, Tamizuddin Khan and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In the ensuing power struggle the religious-secular tension became significant and impinged on the domains of language, culture and identity.

The religious basis of identity acquired a special importance because religion was politicised in Pakistan. The pull towards an inclusionary, secular definition was, however, inevitable. It was a form of protest against the official world view, and was reinforced by the Bengal Muslims' natural attraction towards their eclectic local cultural roots. This was anathema to those who visualised an essentialised, pure and underived Islamic culture. In reality, this culture evolved through centuries of interaction with the systems of newly conquered territories, and so was hybrid in character. Nevertheless, the secularists were suspect in official circles as a possible threat to the integrity of Pakistan.

The Bengal Muslim was confronted with the dilemma of choosing between a religious and a secular basis of identity as popularly understood. If he accepted religion, he also accepted the right of the Muslim League to 'determine what Islam is': but if he opted for secularism, he was labelled a renegade who denied Pakistan and therefore had to be controlled. The religious-secular tension straddled political and cultural spheres and accentuated the Bengal Muslim's identity conflict.

Another important factor contributing to the religious-secular tension relates to the culturally-ambivalent self-image of the intelligentsia. While the intelligentsia naturally idealised sophisticated, upper class, *ashraf* ethics and values supposedly derived from the Islamicate worlds of Arabia and Persia, the reality was that the majority of them inhabited a very different milieu, away from the centres of urban *ashraf* culture as in Lucknow or Lahore. On the contrary, they had close links to peasant society through agricultural pursuits, or descent from peasant stock and conversion, and spoke their particular variant of a mixed Bengali, rather than chaste Urdu of the north-western regions. They shared little with the western *ashraf* except religion, some culinary delights, romantic tales from Persia. In this context, the fear that Bengali Islam was contaminated by local and un-Islamic practices took root.

The orthodoxy was harsh against those who accepted local customs. They were referred to as a 'class of fossilised imbeciles and fogies, who live in a cloud of un-

Islamic superstitions inherited from the local pagan traditions'.<sup>10</sup> The dichotomous self-image was not as devastating for the intelligentsia in the forties and fifties as it was till the twenties, when they were still talking in terms of 'choosing' their mother tongue.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the perceptions of *ashraf* ideals determined cultural and linguistic choices until groups could break from the established mould and assert that culture and identity be determined by secular criteria.

At the time of partition, the intelligentsia were still striving towards a definition of their linguistic and cultural identity. Language came to be contested because the nature and development of the Bengali language itself was manipulated by British *padris*, colonial officials and segments of the Hindu *bhadralok* who sought to create a pure Bangla as the vernacular language of learning. Essentially, it was a sanitised, Sanskritic Bengali, denuded of the Perso-Arabic words, which had over the centuries become incorporated in the colloquial Bengali of Muslims and had come to be known as Do-Bhasha. While ridicule and lack of support gradually led to the disuse of this language in *punthi* literature, the spoken variant remained distinct. The *padris* had already called it Musalmani Bangla, driving a linguistic wedge between Hindus and Muslims. Subsequently, Abul Mansur Ahmed acknowledged the distinctiveness of the linguistic heritage of East Bengal by referring to it as Pak Bangla. Although the question of the mother tongue was resolved in favour of Bengali, the fear that it was a lesser language than Urdu or Arabic persisted. So experiments were made on writing Bengali in the Arabic script.<sup>12</sup> The consequent tension was largely between a secular and religious approach to language and identity. It not only divided one group from another but generated deep conflict in the individual consciousness.

The process of resolving this tension involved defining not only their cultural identity but also national objectives in the context of the new state of Pakistan. The emphasis on religion as the guiding force behind the idea of Pakistan, the need of giving structure to a modern state, the fact that the founding fathers of Pakistan were secular politicians, and that Bengal Muslims were divided as to the nature of the state and the role of Islam, gave rise to considerable debate. In the process, sections of the intelligentsia became deeply involved, both individually and collectively, in articulating their view of their world and of the form and shape that world—Pakistan—should take.

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10 *Al-Islam*, 15 December, 1961.

11 *Bangla Nur*, 1st yr., 3rd no., Magh 1326 B.S. (1920)

12 *The Report of the East Bengal Language Committee, 1949-50* (Government of East Pakistan, Dacca, 1958), pp. 6-11, 15, 22, 26

### 3. The Intellectual Milieu of the 1940s and '50s: the idea of Pakistan and Bengali aspirations

The world-view of the intelligentsia in the immediate post-partition period reflected their acute need to define their social, cultural, linguistic and political identity in the background of articulating the idea of Pakistan, which had meant all things to all people. In the mid to late '60s, political considerations became paramount while socio-cultural ones receded to the background to re-emerge only after the creation of Bangladesh.

The forties and fifties saw a continuing reassessment of ideals and values—a trend which began at the turn of the century. It was a period of hope, full of dreams of what Pakistan was going to be. There was a sense of confidence and pride in the assertions made by the intelligentsia deriving from the assumption that it was up to them to give shape to the new country.<sup>13</sup> This mood of optimism lasted till the mid-1960s. The publication of the *Six Point Programme: Our Right to Live* of the Awami League in March 1966 brought on the ire of segments of the Punjabi-dominated ruling elite. Their determination to hold on to power at all costs effectively crushed such idealistic dreams and laid the foundations for the struggle for Bengali emancipation and the struggle for Bangladesh.

The concerns of this period were rooted in pre-partition ideologies covering a wide spectrum—orthodox, pan-Islamist, humanist and communist. Maududi and his Jama'at-i-Islami, with its mouthpiece *Al-Islam*, followed the traditionist path of Indian Muslim thought in prescribing a strongly Islamic state. The 'New Values group', deeply influenced by humanist thought, envisaged a liberal democratic society where culture belonged to the secular arena. This was one way of resolving the religious-secular tension over culture and identity. Organisations such as the Yuba League or Youth League, heavily infiltrated by communist ideas, undertook political-cultural activities with decidedly secular objectives. Other organisations such as the Tamaddun Majlis, which had deep religious orientations, nevertheless recognised a secular dimension to questions of language, identity and culture. Nor were their motives free from self-interest and considerations of political advantage, a fact which underlined the hard, secular core of avowedly religious aspirations.

The orthodox view was unwilling to allot a neutral, non-religious or secular zone to

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13 *Pakistan Student Rally—Aims, Objects and Programme: Draft Constitution, Umar Dalil*, p. 66; S. Murshid, 'Editorial', *New Values*, vol. 1 no. 1, September 1949; 'Letter to the Editor', *The Pakistan Observer* (hereafter *Pak. Obs.*), 1 March, 1951. A. G. Stock records the literary and intellectual stirrings in East Pakistan which found focus in *New Values*; see her *Memoirs of Dacca University*, p. 52

any aspect of life, be it cultural or political—for life, or the 'Process of Reality ... is one unitary flow' and it cannot tolerate duality.<sup>14</sup> There could not be a secular sector of human existence distinct from the religious. The concept of secularism was identified with ideas of profanity, disregard for the sacred, scepticism of religious truth and opposition to religious education. Some understood the term as *dunyawiyyat* or care for bodily and worldly affairs. It was asserted that 'what is criminal is what is immoral, and what is immoral is what disrupts the essential cultural values of society'.<sup>15</sup> The forces which distorted cultural values were identified as western values, industrialisation, materialism, emancipation of women and local pagan traditions.<sup>16</sup>

Orthodox rigidity was most clearly manifested in the sphere of legislation. The belief that Islam caters to every aspect of life—social, political and religious—and that it offers a complete code of conduct, induced severe criticism of the periodic reformist attempts at interpreting Koranic laws as a means of adjustment to changing times. But this was anathema since it was held that divine or Islamic law derived from two immutable sources: the *Koran* containing God's words, and the ideal conduct of Prophet Muhammad. But in fact, Islamic law, like Islamic culture, evolved through centuries of contact with the legal systems of defeated civilisations. Notwithstanding this, the authority of the *Koran* itself was invoked by the orthodox as proof positive:

It is not for the faithful, man or woman, to decide by themselves a matter that has been decided by Allah and His messenger, and whosoever commits an affront to Allah and His messenger is certainly on the wrong path. (Koran, xxiii, 36)<sup>17</sup>

Followed to the letter, this injunction allows no scope for reinterpretation. But Maududi, the founder of the Jama'at-i-Islami, affirmed that there was scope for limited human legislation subject to the supremacy of Divine law. This is the realm of *ijtihad*, which means 'maximum effort to ascertain' the correct meaning from which the law is derived.<sup>18</sup> Since the death of Prophet Muhammad, Muslims have attempted to ascertain exactly what the established *sunnah* was and whether any novel factor (*bid'a*) was entering the system through forgery. There have been differences in this ascertainment of the *sunnah*. The germs of conflict and dissent lay in this flexibility. Maududi would have liked to reserve the right of *ijtihad* for

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14 *Al-Islam*, 1 June, 1963

15 *Al-Islam*, 15 October, 1961; 1 October, 1961; 1 January, 1962

16 Marium Jameelah, 'Should Muslims Change as Conditions Change', *Al-Islam*, 15 October, 1961

17 *Al-Islam*, 1 October, 1961

18 Maududi, 'The Sunnah and Ijtihad: Some Doubts Clarified', *Al-Islam*, 15 October, 1961

the *ulama* alone. But the Muslim League government had already staked its claim immediately after partition and declared itself to be the defender of the faithful.<sup>19</sup>

Culture, identity and the ruling ideology would all be determined by that group which had the right to interpret these laws or, those who actually ruled the state. But even those who did not rule could exercise pressure to mould the state according to their concept of the ideal polity. The teachers and students of Dacca University played a significant role in this regard. They however failed to continually adopt a religious argument against the *status quo* primarily because their aims were not always political. They sympathised with the disadvantaged Hindu minority and desired a more inclusive and tolerant society, that is, a secular society. They feared the religious argument with its implications in favour of orthodoxy, puritanism, religious revivalism and intolerance of other ways of being. And indeed, as non-theologians, it would have been foolhardy for them to engage in theological debates with the *ulama*.

In 1950, the editor of *New Values*, a quarterly, commented that culture should be so conceived as to allow the uninhibited self-expression of the entire population: 'A secular attitude to cultural values, will in our context, keep culture from egocentricity and exclusion and make it absorptive of outside influences'.<sup>20</sup> Such an attitude to culture stood in sharp contrast to the orthodox Jama'at view which insisted on a rejection of all external influences.

The liberal mood in the fifties favoured attempts to find guidelines for society through open discussion of current issues. *New Values* was founded in 1949 by Sarwar Murshid, a young teacher of English at Dacca University with precisely such an aim in mind. It focussed on the cultural and literary stirrings in East Bengal, which sought to define the identity of the people and give them direction in the immediate post partition period.<sup>21</sup> The aim was to look for 'new social values' in 'our particularly groaning and travelling times' and meet the need for 'newer assumptions on which to build'.<sup>22</sup>

Although *New Values* did not represent any one point of view as it was meant to be a forum for debate and discussion, its bias was towards a rational, humanist and

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19 Speech by Liaquat AH Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan, at the first session of the Pakistan Muslim League Council held on 20 February 1949 in Khaliqina Hall, Karachi, Govt. of Pakistan Publication (English translation of Urdu speech).

20 S. Murshid, 'Editorial', *New Values*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1950), p. 50

21 *New Values*, vol. 1, no. 1 (September 1949), pp. 88-89

22 *Ibid.*, p. 89; see also A. G. Stock, *Memoirs of Dacca University, 1947-1951* for her assessment of developments in the university in general and the contribution of *New Values* in particular, p. 52

secular society. The editor and contributors were deeply influenced by men like Humayun Kabir and Kazi Abdul Wadud, who were both secular humanists and involved in the *buddhir mukti andolana* of the 1930s for the emancipation of the intellect. Incidentally, Humayun Kabir opted to remain in India after partition, but his writings continued to influence intellectual thought in East Bengal.

Humayun Kabir saw an 'affinity between the basic concepts of Islam and the principles which govern science'. He argued that 'emphasis on the unity of God and, therefore, of nature broke down the distinction between the natural and the supernatural'. This was a precondition to the emergence of natural law and science. In the field of religious experience, this emphasis 'led to the breakdown of the distinction between the secular and the religious'. In a sense, therefore, he was in agreement with the orthodox position that there is no distinction between the religious and the secular. But his rationalism was based on the belief that 'the Prophet of Islam laid down that religion must be based on reason, not authority', that the Prophet would be followed by reformers not prophets. The implication was that 'every article of faith and belief, every institution of society and polity would be subject to continual scrutiny, analysis and revision'.<sup>23</sup> Such scrutiny falls within the realm of *ijtihad* but Kabir rejected the orthodox position which allowed its use only in exceptional circumstances. He carried forward the tradition of reformist interpretation of Islam started by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and followed by Syed Amir Ali.<sup>24</sup>

Kazi Abdul Wadud, in an article in the journal, rejected the idea of the *shariat* being the basis of Pakistan on several grounds. He argued that if the *shariat* was introduced as law, a conflict would ensue in the minds of those Bengal Muslims who were attracted to the liberal democratic traditions of the West; for crimes, which would require chastisement with 'unforgettable punishments' like stoning to death or mutilation according to the *shariat* were, in his day, viewed as 'social maladjustments to be set right with the help of education and redistribution of wealth'. Further, if Muslims were forced to obey religious injunctions, the true spirit of Islam would be replaced by the mere hypocritical observance of rituals.<sup>25</sup>

Wadud thus addressed himself to the age-old debate between reformist and traditionalist Muslims.<sup>26</sup> Reformists argued that the permanent basis of Islam was

23 Humayun Kabir, 'Islam and Science', *New Values*, vol. I, no. 1 (September 1949), p. 19

24 For the views of Syed Ahmed Khan, see A. H. Albiruni, *Makers of Pakistan and Modern Muslim India* (Lahore, 1950), pp. 36-60; A. Aziz, *Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan*, p. 4

25 Kazi Abdul Wadud, 'The Foundations of State in Islam', *New Values* vol. I, no. 1 (September 1949), pp. 1-6

26 For a discussion of this issue, see Freeland Abbott, *Islam and Pakistan* (New York, 1969), p. 24

the spirit of the *Koran*, not the specific words aimed at a seventh century audience. Traditionalists stuck to the letter of the law, placing form and ritual first and maintaining that without them the spirit could not be approached. The Tablighi Jamat or the Faith Movement continued the tradition of the Wahabi and Faraizi movements. It stressed that rituals were an integral part of faith.<sup>27</sup> Wadud firmly opposed to such trends. The dream of reviving the *shariat*, he conceded, derived from the idea of Muslim self-determination. If fulfilled, it would isolate Bengal Muslims from the rest of the world, and antagonise the non-Muslim community. He found support for his contentions in the *Koran* and *Hadith* and concluded:

... those who know that Islam means submission to Allah, in other words, truth and goodness, (and hence a Muslim is ever a friend to creation?) will have no difficulty in realising that the foundations of state in Islam are common sense and the good of man.

Creation is the family of Allah—the dearest to Allah of His creation is he who is the kindest to His creation (*Hadith*).

\*He does not truly believe in Allah, he does not truly believe in Allah, he does not truly believe in Allah ... whose neighbour is not safe from his injuries (*Hadith*)<sup>28</sup>

This emphasis on the good of man and the assertion that what is not true, i.e. beneficent, is not Islamic, approximates the ideals of radical humanism as propounded by M.N. Roy who preached that 'man must be the measure of everything', and that 'individual freedom is the only measure of progress'.<sup>29</sup>

*The Sahitya Patrika* was published several years later in 1957 from the Bengali department of Dacca University.<sup>30</sup> It represented the growing cultural consciousness of Bengali Muslims and as such was secular in outlook. Its aim was to contribute to the understanding of Bengali literature. It projected no vision of an ideal society. The contributors were concerned with culture as literature and education. Some felt compelled to address themselves to educational problems. Muhammad Abdul Hai, the founder-editor, emphasised the need to preserve universities as neutral places of learning, an oblique reference to political interference in the functioning of universities.<sup>31</sup>

Since partition, the intelligentsia had taken a stand on issues of national importance. But these issues usually had a political import. It responded to the cultural

27 Interview with Mushfique Ahmed, a member of the movement and a teacher at Rajshahi University (Dacca, March 1985).

28 K. A. Wadud, 'The Foundation of State in Islam', p. 6

29 M. N. Roy, 'Economic Determinism and Freedom', *New Values* vol. I, nos. 3-4 (November-December 1949), pp. 13-14

30 For a history of the *Sahitya Patrika*, see Muhammad Muniruzzaman, 'Sahitya patrika panchis bachhar', *Sahitya Patrika. Panchis bachhar purti samkhya*, 25th yr., no. 2, *Barsha* 1389 B.S. (1982), pp. 173-208

31 Muhammad Muniruzzaman, *Dacca biswabidyalayer bangla bibhager itihās, 1921-81* (Dacca, 1982), p. 112

subjugation of East Bengal and to problems of economic and political disparity between the two wings of Pakistan, often in a militant fashion. For example, a faction of the Student League led by Abdur Rab, who, even before the military operation in March 1971, burnt the Pakistani flag and hoisted that of independent Bangladesh.<sup>32</sup> But they never seriously addressed themselves to social issues such as the hypocritical observance of rituals or aimed at social transformation — for example to free society from superstition, establish equal rights for women, fight religious and moral prejudices, or analyse the nature of current social problems. Some of these issues have become matters of intellectual concern only since the eighties.<sup>33</sup>

Intellectual preoccupation among prose writers in the years after 1947 focused on an 'anxiety to assess themselves and their environment in the light of their post-independence experience'. One central question was the rightful place of Islam in society. In the ensuing deliberations, the religious ideal was constantly measured against the secular ones of freedom, democracy and humanism. Their heart-searching is summed up in an article in *New Values*:

Should Pakistan try to be an embodiment of the popularly understood Islamic concept of life? Will the pursuit of such an ideal not mean Pakistan's isolation from the progressive trends of modern thought? Is there really a basic opposition between Islam and modern thought? Is no reconciliation possible? What can an Islamic ideal mean in the context of poetry or politics? Can a poet improve upon the quality of his output or of his craftsmanship by adhering to the Islamic concept of life? Can democracy whose value no one questions, connote in the context of Islam a form of government other than the type known as democratic all over the free world? Is it true that Islam in its attitude to fundamental, social and economic problems is allied to systems of thought which the free world considers illiberal or totalitarian?<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. Identity Conflict

At times the intelligentsia experienced an identity conflict that was accentuated by a range of factors—cultural, religious and political. Most of these related to the duality in their self-perception, the discrepancy between the ideal and practice, the coming to terms with their social origins, not to mention the trauma of twice forging new states out of old territories, each involving the need to redefine the nation, nationhood and national identities.

At the turn of the century, there was hardly any conflict in the Indian Muslim self-perception over being Indian and Muslim. Maulana Muhammad Ali (1878-1930),

32 Hasanuzzaman, *Antarjatakik prekshapate bangladesher chhatra andolan* (Dacca, 1984), p. 26

33 The All Pakistan Women's Association was active in securing the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961. The journals *Bichitra* in the 1980s and *Edesh Ekal* in the 1990s and the TV programme called 'Ain o Adalat' were defenders of women's rights.

34 Syed Sajjad Hussain, 'Contemporary Non-Fictional Prose Writing in East Bengal', *New Values* vol. 7, no. 1 (January 1955), p. 22

one of the leaders of the Khilafat movement, commented that, 'where God commands, I am nothing but a Muslim', but where India was concerned, 'I am nothing but an Indian'.<sup>35</sup>

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the politically-conscious Bengal Muslims tended to be members of the Congress. A. K. Fazlul Huq's early speeches fiercely asserted his Indian identity, but after proposing the Lahore Resolution of 1940, he invariably declared himself to be a Muslim first. Yet many Muslims could not accept the partition of Bengal although they had campaigned for the partition of India. Abul Mansur Ahmed went to East Pakistan only in 1951. Suhrawardy maintained dual residence until it became an obstacle to his remaining in Pakistani politics.

What was true of the politicised Muslims in Bengal was not equally true either of the community at large or even of all members of the tiny intelligentsia. The tradition of distinguishing between a Bengali and a Muslim provided grounds for some of the identity challenges which confronted Bengali Muslims later on.<sup>36</sup> In the early part of the century, they identified themselves and were defined by others as Muslims, not Bengalis; soccer games were played between 'Bengali' and 'Muslim' teams, though the Muslim teams were as Bengali as their rivals.<sup>37</sup> Hindus, Muslims and the British shared this approach that was divisive and exclusionary, like the distinction that used to be made between the Polak and the Jew in pre-war Poland.<sup>38</sup> For Muslims, language came to play a key role in the effort of the intelligentsia to resolve the ensuing conflict in self-perception both before and after independence—but along very different lines in the two phases.

Till the mid-sixties, there was no conflict in East Bengal as to whether one was a Bengali or a Pakistani.<sup>39</sup> However, the movement leading to the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 induced the intelligentsia to define their identity once again. 'Bengali' acquired a secular connotation emphasising the cultural dimension of identity. 'Pakistani' implied a continuing belief in the two-nation theory and an emphasis on religion as an overall guiding principle. But in fact, the distinction was not as clear-cut as this. Abul Mansur Ahmed saw the emergence of Bangladesh as

35 R. Symonds, *Making of Pakistan* (London, 1966), pp. 42-43

36 For an analysis of the consequent culture conflict, see B. Umar, *Sanskritir sankat* (Dacca, 1967), pp. 2-3

37 Comment by Professor Zillur Rahman, see Ali Anwar (ed.), *Dharma nirapekshata* (Dacca, 1973)

38 British officials generally had Hindus in mind when they referred to Bengalis, and Muslims were called 'Mahommedans'; see *Shan Documents*, vol. I, pp. 81, 114

39 Howard, Schuman, 'A Note on the Rapid Rise of Mass Bengali Nationalism', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 78, no. 2 (September 1972)

the 'restoration of the Lahore Resolution', which had envisaged a confederal state structure. His basic faith in the two-nation theory had remained intact.<sup>40</sup>

A new dimension was introduced into the culture conflict after the assassination in 1975 of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Awami League and President of independent Bangladesh. Nationality, which was until then defined in terms of Bengali ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identity since independence in 1971, was now sought to be redefined on the basis of political considerations. The new definition required a distinction to be made between East and West Bengal, an issue which was not very important in 1947 although there was some sentiment in favour of Pak-Bangla as distinct from the Sanskritic Bengali of West Bengal. In 1978, under President Zia-ur-Rahman's military regime, Bangladesh citizens came to be known as 'Bangladeshi', rather than as 'Bangalee' which was how they were described in the constitution of 1972. Bangladeshis, Zia implied, were different from the Bengalis of India and so were their culture and language: the language had to be moulded 'in our own way'.<sup>41</sup> His speech to this effect reminds one of Jinnah's famous statement distinguishing the cultures and religions of Hindus and Muslims as two different social orders. Zia thus asserted the precedence of political identity over the cultural. In ideological terms, this was something of a rejection of Mujib's secular stance. Although the preference for 'Bangladeshi' over 'Bangalee' had no strong religious connotation, it was accompanied by a constitutional change in 1977—the dropping of one of the fundamental principles of state, 'secularism', from the constitution of 1972. Though Zia's political party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, asserted through its manifesto that Bangladeshis had freed themselves from 'the evils of communalism' because of the 'great teachings of Islam', Zia's actions have invited speculation to the contrary.<sup>42</sup> It may be argued that by emphasising the distinct and separate identity of Bengali Muslims *vis-à-vis* the Bengali Hindus he has in fact created grounds for the exclusion of Hindus from effective political participation. To this extent, he acknowledged once again the concept of two-nations on which Pakistan was founded and which was rejected by a large segment of the population through the 1971 war of liberation. The basic complexities of defining culture and identity which existed during Pakistani rule persisted in Bangladesh. Notably, other minority communities such as the Chakma and Marma find the term Bangladeshi to be more inclusive than the nomenclature of Bangalee.

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40 Abul Mansur Ahmad, *End of a Betrayal and Restoration of Lahore Resolution* (Dacca, 1978); *Bangladesher Kalchar* (Dacca, 1985)

41 Zia's speech in 1978, cited by Abul Fazl Huq, 'The Problem of National Identity in Bangladesh', *The Journal of Social Studies*, no. 24, April 1984, p. 58

42 On Zia's party manifesto, see *Ibid.*, p. 60; G. Hossain, *General Ziaur Rahman and the BNP: Political Transformation of a Military Regime* (Dacca: UPL, 1988), Appendix IV, p. 119

### 5. Language and the Politics of Identity

The rise of the language movement in East Bengal was the result of identity politics and a nascent power struggle between East and West Pakistan. The language issue is significant in that it pinpoints the contradictions in the self-perception of the intelligentsia. The stands taken were sometimes determined by political considerations and often reflected the religious and secular dimensions of identity. The tension was at times manifest as a very painful ambivalence.

After partition, there was little or no significant revolutionary politics in East Bengal, at least in the classical sense, to bring about radical socio-economic change. No communist movement could develop owing to repressive measures by the Pakistan government. There were, however, movements which sought to bring about limited socio-political change as well as challenge the *status quo* and the structure of political leadership. Of these, the most important in the formative phase of the new nationalism which led to the emergence of Bangladesh was the language movement, which began in the immediate post-independence period in 1947. It merged into the movement for autonomy of East Pakistan which began in 1966. Both these movements—spearheaded by students and supported by teachers, intellectuals, lawyers and politicians—show that perceptions regarding Bengali identity, language and culture, on the one hand, and Islamic society on the other, were changing, particularly among some sections of the middle classes. A non-religious approach to culture and politics emerged, an approach influenced by eclecticism and supportive of a secular stance in these matters.

The concern here is with reactions to official policies on language rather than the policies themselves or the policy makers. In the nineteenth century, British extractive policies aimed to concentrate all sources of wealth in its own hands, which had led to the decline of a significant section of the Persianate aristocratic class. Over time, however, the survivors rose to join the ranks of the newly emergent middle classes along with rich peasants and other rural folk such as weavers and craftsmen, who benefitted from trade and British education and employment opportunities. From among them a new intelligentsia emerged and assertively began to enter the East Bengal socio-political scene since the 1920s and 30s. They had little connection with the older *upper-ashraf*, due to social distance and differences in socio-economic status. The leadership and activist cadres of the language and autonomy movements came largely from this new intelligentsia.<sup>43</sup>

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43 On the rise of an assertive Bengal Muslim intelligentsia that began to play an important role in the politics and culture of Bengal see, Tazeen M. Murshhid, *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengal Muslim Discourses, 1871-1977*, op. cit.

At the moment of partition in 1947 Bengal Muslim politics was dominated by a non-Bengali-speaking *ashraf*. Although Bengalis formed the majority in the first Constituent Assembly, real power was exercised by Muslims from outside Bengal, such as Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan along with the Punjabis, who believed in a strong centre.<sup>44</sup> The bureaucracy and military, which influenced decision-making, had only 30 per cent and 5 per cent Bengali representation respectively.<sup>45</sup> *Ashraf* ideology was dominant and legitimised by the massive Muslim vote in favour of Pakistan. It perceived society and politics as exclusive, attributed high status to ethnic origin and *ashraf* descent, accepted prejudices against popular Islam in Bengal as inferior, and believed in the two-nation theory as the essential basis of Pakistan.

Before partition, only a few Bengali Muslims expressed doubts about this ideology. Abul Hashim, who campaigned against the partition of Bengal, expressed his fear in the *Millat* of 2 May 1947, that Urdu would become the national language of independent Pakistan. In 1946, while secretary to the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, he had already submitted a manifesto to the Provincial Council asserting that Bengali was 'our mother tongue' and that this should be the medium of instruction in East Bengal after partition.<sup>46</sup> His fear was well founded. Linguistic difficulty was a major obstacle to education among Bengal Muslims of colonial India: most of them were forced to receive public instruction in languages other than those of their choice, or what they considered to be their mother tongue.<sup>47</sup> The Sanskritic Bangla taught in schools was difficult for those who conversed in Mussalmani Bangla. Three years before the creation of Pakistan, the East Pakistan Renaissance Society had announced that Bengali would be East Pakistan's language.<sup>48</sup> The question of the mother tongue was by no means settled for Bengali Muslims even in the forties, though many young scholars had begun to cultivate Bengali. On 31 March 1940, Abdur Rahman Siddiqui, who had been invited to chair an 'Iqbal Day' meeting, was forced to leave because he had given his speech in Bengali, not Urdu, and this had caused a terrible uproar among the students and young people present.<sup>49</sup> The duality in the Bengal Muslim psyche was only

44 K. Callard, *Pakistan: A Political Study* (London, 1957), pp. 38-39; K. Ahmed, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal and Birth of Bangladesh*, 4th ed. (Dacca, 1975), p. 97

45 Raunaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration* (Dacca, 1973), p. 25

46 See B. Umar, *Purba banglar bhasa andolan o tatkalin rajniti* (Language Movement and Contemporary Politics in East Bengal), vol. I, revised ed. (Dacca, 1979), pp. 18-19.

47 *Report of the Committee on Muhammadan Education.*, 1914, pp. ii-iii (Hereafter cited as *R.C.M. Ed.*; Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar dekha*, p. 250

48 Ahmed Rafiq, 'Bhasaandolan o jatiyatarjatrath', *Samakal*, 1st no. 1384 B.S. (1977)

49 Muslim League resolution of 1910. See Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (New York, 1967), p. 365-66; R. Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906*, pp. 130-31

exacerbated by the Muslim League's assertion that Urdu was an Islamic language and that after religion it was the chief bond of unity among the Muslims of India.

In this historical context, it was natural to expect that in a Pakistan free of Hindu domination and British masters, Islamic values would dominate; Urdu and Arabic, made redundant in colonial India, would thrive; and Urdu, the Islamic counterpart of Hindi in India, would be the national language. Because of the belief that Pakistan was created in order to provide a homeland for Muslims, the acceptance of Islam as its ideology seemed natural. This was the orthodox Jama'at-i-Islami view. Other politicians were trapped by their own rhetoric. They failed to provide a counter narrative of liberal secular values and the need to reclaim the Muslim heritage lost in Persian chronicles because of the onslaught of colonialism. Instead they claimed that Islam was in danger. However, in the post-partition period, the popularity of this slogan began to fade. Support increased for the Bengali language, first among the middle classes, and then among the working classes, in defiance of government proclamations in favour of Urdu as an 'Islamic' language suitable for Pakistan.

The paradox was that Urdu, and not Bengali, was considered an Islamic language, in an area where the majority of Muslims spoke Bengali. In 1961, 98 per cent of the population of East Pakistan spoke Bengali; 18 per cent was literate in Bengali, 4 per cent in English and only 1 per cent in Urdu.<sup>50</sup> In 1951, there were 168 Bengali newspapers and journals in East Bengal, as against only five in Urdu, demonstrating that even among the literati, knowledge of Urdu was limited.<sup>51</sup> The conditions for conflict lay in this dichotomy. The introduction of Urdu as the only national language of Pakistan would mean that it would become the official language and medium of instruction thus replacing Bengali in schools. This would place Bengalis at a disadvantage in the competition for education and employment. Such apprehensions had already surfaced in September 1947, but few dared to speak up: they feared reprisals from officials and *kuttis*.<sup>52</sup>

In formulating its state language policy, the government overlooked the changing influence of indigenous traditions on the population. For some among the middle classes, their syncretic culture and language caused no conflict: they no longer felt like aliens on their own soil; they could accept Sanskritic Bengali without any feeling of uncertainty. This was probably due to an altered perception of religion

50 R. D. Campbell, *Pakistan: An Emerging Democracy* (London, 1963), p. 226

51 Statement of Khwaja Shahabuddin, *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates*, 5 April 1951

52 'Memoir of AbulKasem', *Ekuser sankalan, 1980: Smriticharan* (A collection of memoirs), (Dacca, 1980), p. 2. (hereafter *Smriticharan*).

which allowed a separate space to language and culture that could be secular or neutral *vis-à-vis* religion. Arab descent was no longer universally recognised as a necessary precondition for being a good Muslim. Such perceptions were also possible because the emerging middle classes had very little connection with the former *ashraf* culture, and therefore did not share in its values. Some of them emerged as interest groups which challenged the dominant *ashraf* ideology.

The reaction against the official state policy on language was an assertion of pride in local culture, a demand that culture be viewed in secular terms. The language movement was an act of two-fold self-assertion—cultural and political—in an essentially political power struggle. It implied no self-conscious denial of Islam.

#### 6. 'Rashtrabhashabangla chai': Growth and Impact of the Language Movement

The movement to obtain official status for Bengali in East Pakistan began with the birth of organisations like Tamaddun Majlis.<sup>53</sup> Ostensibly founded as a cultural bod, the implicit aims of the Majlis were political. On 15 September 1947, it brought out a book called *Pakistaner rashtra bhasa: bangla na urdu* (The National Language of Pakistan: Bengali or Urdu). In the introduction, Professor Abul Kasem demanded that Bengali be given the status of a national language.<sup>54</sup> But not more than five persons bought copies of the book. Most of the students approached felt this to be a dangerous and impractical cause: Pakistan had just come into being, nationalist sentiments were high, and they did not want to antagonise the masses. The common urban folk adhered strongly to the idea of this nation as being bound by religious and cultural affinities. The Majlis activities were a threat to that perception. Deeply incensed, they beat up its members forcing many to leave Dacca city.<sup>55</sup>

53 Considerable work has been done on the language movement and the social, political and economic contexts in which it emerged. Of particular note are the collections published annually by the Bangla Academy. See the annual volumes of *Ekusher prabandha*, 1986-1994 (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1986-1994); *Ekusher sharakgrantha*, 1987-1994 (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1987-1994). Also see Bashir al-Hilal, *Bhassha andolaner itihās* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985); M.M. Akash, 'Bhasha andolan: tadanin tan sanmaj of rajniti' *Edeshekal* vol. II, no. 8, 1988, pp. 51-56 and vol. III, no. 1, 1989, pp. 51-56

54 The Tamaddun Majlis was founded by Professor Abul Kasem, Syed Nazrul Islam (a student of Salimullah Muslim Hall, who later became a politician and member of the Awami League Cabinet in the early 1970s), and Shamsul Alam (a government official) on 1 September, 1947. 'Memoirs of A. Kasem', *Smriticharan*, pp. 1-2. The book was written by Quazi Mutahar Hussain and Abul Mansur Ahmad. See 'Memoirs of Gaziul Huq', *Smriticharan*, p. 99

55 'Memoirs of Abul Kasem', op. cit., pp. 2-3, 6-7, 10

The Majlis tried to mobilise support widely among students living in the Dacca University's halls of residence, literary personages, and government officials. It organised meetings; and sought help from political organisations, like the Awami Muslim League, the Congress, the Communist Party and the Student Federation. It approached those persons who had overtly opposed the partition of Bengal. Among them were the politicians, Abul Hashim and Abul Mansur Ahmad; the founder-members of Tamaddun Majlis; students like Munier Chowdhury, who were sons of wealthy government officers but were politically left-oriented; liberal intellectuals, such as Abdur Razzak, with a strong belief in the democratic system; and members of political parties like the Awami Muslim League.<sup>56</sup>

Initially, adherents of this group were limited to a handful of intellectuals and students, especially from Dacca University. It soon gained support from civil servants who as quickly dropped out of it due to government pressure.<sup>57</sup> The support of early enthusiasts, like government officials and university teachers, was based on pragmatic considerations. They were concerned because villagers and poor people found filling Urdu registration forms difficult. It was also believed that learning Bengali would be easier for the majority and thus prevent national wastage. Bengali politicians, whether Muslim Leaguers or Communists, supported the cause secretly in order to avoid giving it a political tinge and be dubbed traitors. In 1947, most Bengal Muslim members of the Assembly belonged to the Muslim League party; they could not openly support the struggle. Their involvement became more direct later on: for example, explicit support was expressed at a public meeting held in Barisal Town Hall in April 1951, chaired by the district Muslim League president, Sadruddin Ahmad.<sup>58</sup> In 1952, some members, like Abul Kalam Shamsuddin and Ali Ahmed Khan resigned from their Assembly seats in protest against the shooting of university students on 21 February.<sup>59</sup>

The Communist Party led by Muzaffar Ahmed initially refused to be directly involved in the movement. 'We are not interested', he declared when approached by the Majlis.<sup>60</sup> The reasons were twofold: he was not sure of the depth of commitment and seriousness of the organisers; and he did not wish to invite government reprisal on the budding language movement as a communist-inspired one. However, sympathetic members were not debarred from associating with it. It

<sup>56</sup> *CAP Debates*, 27 March 1951; 12 April 1951. *Pak. Obs.*, 1, 8 March, 1951

<sup>57</sup> 'Memoirs of Abul Kasem', op. cit., p. 10

<sup>58</sup> *Pakistan Observer*, 6 April, 1951 (Hereafter cited as *Pak. Obs.*)

<sup>59</sup> 'Memoirs of Hassan Hafizur Rahman', *Smriticharan*, p. 48. Conversations with Khan Sarwar Murshid about his late father, Ali Ahmed Khan, M.L.A

<sup>60</sup> 'Memoirs of A. S. M. Nurul Huq Bhuiya', *Smriticharan*, p. 44

was only as late as 1952, when the movement had acquired a certain momentum, that the Communist Party took a more active stand; it circulated a secret pamphlet among members, called *Bhasa andolaner paryalochana* (An Analysis of the Language Movement).<sup>61</sup>

Communist support was explicit since 1951, when the Cominform published in its mouthpiece a political note, entitled, *"For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy*, praising the Awami Muslim League for its commendable struggle against feudalism and colonialism.<sup>62</sup> The East Pakistan Communist Party (EPCP) saw this as a signal to work through the Awami Muslim League and other popular front organisations. At that time, the EPCP's membership had dropped to a few hundred from about 10,000 in 1947 as a result of official containment policies backed by the United States.<sup>63</sup> Government reprisal had forced most of its Hindu members, who formed the majority, to flee to West Bengal. In an interview with Ali Ashraf, a one-time activist, Talukder Maniruzzaman asserts that the East Pakistan Youth League founded in 1951 was actually organised by the communists as a front organisation.<sup>64</sup>

Communist infiltration, however, implied a secular influence on the organisers of the movement and subsequently on its supporters. According to Talukder Maniruzzaman, an atmosphere for 'secular nationalist appeals' was created by the leftists who exploited 'the delicate and sensitive issues of language, autonomy and economic distress'.<sup>65</sup> These developments provided the government with an excuse to crack down indiscriminately on students, intellectuals, university teachers and Hindu politicians. Maulana Akram Khan, of Pirali Brahmin descent, described them referred as 'the group of people opposed to Urdu language in East Pakistan' who were the 'enemies of Islam'.<sup>66</sup>

Amongst other groups which worked to achieve national status for Bengali was the East Pakistan Democratic Youth League (*Purba Pakistan Ganatantrik Yuba League*). It was founded on 6 September 1947 as a non-communal and anti-

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61 In a statement on 24 February 1952, the Pakistan Communist Party announced: "Those giving leadership to the movement today, represent different groups and opinions. The workers of the Communist Party have also joined this historical movement like many others." See *Umar Dalil*, pp. 322-33, 341-49

62 K. G. Mustafa, 'Awami League Manifesto; Hopes and Realities', *Holiday* (Dacca Weekly), 14 June, 1970

63 Marcus F. Franda, 'Communism and Regional Politics in East Pakistan', *Asian Survey* 10, no. 8 (August 1970), pp. 588-606

64 Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh* (Dacca, 1975, reprint), p. 6

65 *Ibid.*, p. 3

66 *Pak. Obs.*, 17 April and 7 May, 1951

imperialist student and youth organisation with the help of politically-committed radical intellectuals like Shahidullah Kaiser, Muhammad Toaha (Communist), Shamsul Huq (Muslim Leaguer, who later became a member of the Awami Muslim League), Aatur Rahman (of Rajshahi), Aziz Ahmed, Shamsuddin Ahmed, Tasadduk Hussain and Hazera Mahmud. On 2 February 1948, the Youth League decided, at a meeting in Rajshahi, to demand state language status for Bengali. Previously, its manifesto only said that the language of the majority had to be given priority.<sup>67</sup> This organisation could not last long in the face of the government's drive against communism. In 1951 it regrouped itself as the East Pakistan Youth League. This was a leftist youth organisation which believed that Pakistan was created by an imperialist conspiracy. It attracted young people like Muhammad Sultan, who were non-communal in orientation and considered the Muslim League to be communal.<sup>68</sup>

The Pakistan Students' Rally was organised probably in 1948 with a more self-conscious objective—to provide students with 'a vision of ideal society which they should try to realise in their own lifetime' and thus prepare themselves to be 'full-fledged citizens of a sovereign state'.<sup>69</sup> The Rally asserted that the 'country's future' belonged to them. It upheld the ideal of freedom. In its draft constitution, the Rally stated that its ideal was:

freedom in its political, economic and social context. By freedom we mean all-round freedom, i.e. freedom of the mind as well as the body; freedom for men as well as women; freedom for individuals as well as for society. This freedom implies not only emancipation from political bondage but also equal distribution of wealth, abolition of caste barriers and social inequities, elimination of communalism and religious intolerance.<sup>70</sup>

The Rally noted that existing student organisations were attached to political parties pledged to ideologies such as communism, socialism and communal nationalism, and that certain organisations were 'fostering premature social revolution'. It felt the necessity for an independent non-communal students' organisation. The 'Pakistan nationalism' it advocated, was opposed to 'communal nationalism' and had a 'socialistic content for the economic and social liberation of the masses'.<sup>71</sup>

In its programme it included the following: removal of obnoxious customs; promotion of communal harmony; free compulsory primary education; religious education in denominational schools for religious communities desirous of it;

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<sup>67</sup> 'Memoirs of GaziulHuq', *Smriticharan*, pp. 98-100

<sup>68</sup> 'Memoirs of Muhammad Sultan', *Smriticharan*, p. 76

<sup>69</sup> Pakistan Students Rally, Draft Constitution, *Umar Dalil*, p. 67

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72-74

coeducation after the secondary stage; prohibition of early marriage. It also addressed itself to the *lingua franca* of the country. It was of the opinion that both Urdu and Bengali should be state languages and that Bengali should be treated as the provincial language with immediate effect.

By 1951 student activism became somewhat assertive. Dacca University students organised themselves into The Dacca University State Language Committee of Action. In April, the Committee submitted a memorandum to the Pakistan Constituent Assembly:

We, the students of Dacca University, who initiated the language movement in East Bengal three years ago, who are now more determined than ever to secure for Bengali the status of state language of Pakistan, will take this opportunity, while you are all assembled at Karachi, to press once more, our legitimate claim.<sup>72</sup>

The memorandum considered the claim of Urdu to be an Islamic language as 'absurd':

We refuse to believe that any language under heaven can be Islamic or Christian or Heathen.<sup>73</sup>

They argued that Bengali had a greater claim to be called Islamic because more people spoke it. They rejected the idea that Urdu could be a unifying factor between the provinces of Pakistan, because 'it is equally foreign to all parts of Pakistan'. They echoed the feelings of a section of Dacca University teachers by suggesting that the implementation of Urdu as the only state language would create a privileged class, nourish disaffection, and jeopardise the country's material and intellectual development. They were bold enough to suggest that if Pakistan was to have one state language it had to be Bengali, and if more, then Bengali had to be one of them.

Although intellectuals did not organise themselves into associations for the purpose, they took an active interest in the state language issue. On 23 February 1951, a deputation consisting of 'Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, Principal Ebrahim Khan, and Dr Quazi Mutahar Hussain waited upon the Prime Minister, Mr Nurul Amin

... with an application widely signed by MLAs, MCAs, professors, officials, writers, lawyers, publishers and students requesting him to immediately introduce Bengali as the official language of the province'.<sup>74</sup>

Among the reasons cited were the following: it was the mother tongue of most Bengalis; the majority of Pakistanis spoke Bengali; the Provincial Legislature had already passed a resolution moved by the then Prime Minister, Khwaja

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<sup>72</sup> *Pak. Obs.*, April 5, 1951

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>74</sup> *Pak. Obs.*, 24 February, 1951

Nazimuddin, on 8 April 1948, accepting the claims of official status for Bengali; the implementation of the Language Committee recommendations would modify the Bengali script and so, there could be no valid objection to the acceptance of Bengali as a state language.

Intellectuals at this time saw themselves as builders of society. Some teachers of Dacca University including Abdur Razzak, Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury, Enayat Karim and Khan Sarwar Murshid, jointly wrote a letter to the editor of the daily *Pakistan Observer* on 1 March 1951 as citizens of a democratic state who had the right to disobey 'the pernicious injunctions—Legislative or Executive—of the Government'. They found the 'attempt to make the National Language of Pakistan distinct from the medium of instruction of any part of Pakistan' to be 'a pernicious act' and 'dangerous to the existence of a state'.<sup>75</sup>

#### *Opposition to the Language Movement*

The language movement faced opposition and violence from several sources. The government insisted on viewing it as communist-inspired and godless in orientation. Its mouthpiece, the daily *Morning News*, wrote that only a handful of Hindus were behind the 'trouble'.<sup>76</sup> Local opposition came largely from the *kuttis* who originated in Bihar, the recent *muhajireen* or refugees who had fled from India, as well as other common people who sensed a threat to the idea of Pakistan and the bonds of Islam. On 12 December 1947, just six days after a Karachi conference proposed Urdu to be the sole national language of Pakistan, a group of people pretending to be students went to the Plassey Barracks student quarters and the Engineering College hostel to attack the students. This immediately prompted student mobilisation. Presided over by Professor Abul Kasem, their meeting culminated in a protest march towards the houses of ministers Syed Afzal, Nurul Amin and Khwaja Nazimuddin. Members of the movement believed that subsequent attacks on them, had the backing of the government and the Muslim League.<sup>77</sup>

Towards the end of December 1947, the *Rashtrabhasa Sangram Parishad* (the State Language Committee of Action), consisted of members from the Democratic

75 The signatories were from the Departments of Political Science, Economics and English of Dacca University. See 'Letters to the Editor', *Pakistan Observer*, 1 March 1951

76 21 February 1952, was the fateful day when students laid down their lives for their mother tongue. The *Morning News* reported that only Hindus closed down their shops to observe the strike that day; *Umar Dalil*, pp. 322-23. Among the active students were Munier Choudhury, who later became a writer and university teacher; Abdur Rahman, who became a Supreme Court judge, etc.

77 'Memoirs of Gaziul Huq', *Smriticharan*, pp. 100-101, 103

Youth League, the Muslim Student League, Tamaddun Majlis etc. The aim was to keep up the movement and spread it. By January 1948, most of the arts and science students of Dacca University were won over despite the fear of reprisals.<sup>78</sup> But one section of the Student League headed by Shah Azizur Rahman—who later became Prime Minister of independent Bangladesh under the Zia regime—was not.<sup>79</sup> In fact, a counter-movement in support of Urdu began at the same time. It was led by a student leader called Shamsul Huda, and attracted a large section of the Dacca student community. The late forties were marked by a series of confrontations between the supporters of Bengali and those of Urdu; among the latter were the government, the *kuttis*, and segments of the upper class, Urdu-speaking *ashraf*.

By early 1948, saboteurs had penetrated the movement aiming to provoke state retaliation. For example, on 11 March 1948, while the movement supporters were picketing peacefully at the Secretariat, a minister was forcibly made to sign a letter of resignation. Minister Abdul Hamid's garden was destroyed. The beard of another minister was pulled. Innocent policemen were badly beaten up. Such insults infuriated the general public who chased away the students. When students regrouped and marched toward the Secretariat the next day, they were stopped by policemen who tear gassed and lathi-charged them. Until 1948, it was impossible to hold meetings in favour of Bengali in Rajshahi, Chittagong and Sandwip, - all migrant areas where newly arrived refugees from India were wary of threats to their newly found sense of security that Pakistan had offered them. In the background of displacement and trauma they were given to strong religiosity, conservatism and fear of threats to the status quo. In other regions like Noakhali and Jessore, however, such meetings could be held.<sup>80</sup>

#### *Official Position*

In March 1948 the *Samgram Parishad* placed a seven-point demand before Nazimuddin which was conceded after much disagreement. The first two points demanded that Bengali be made a state and provincial language; the next two, asked for the unconditional release of those arrested during the language movement, and the withdrawal of restrictions imposed upon West Bengal newspapers such as *Ittehad*, *Amrita Bazar*, *Anand Bazar*, *Jugantar*, etc. The fifth point was a demand against victimisation of government officers involved in the movement; the next, that a press note be issued stating that the movement was not

78 'Memoirs of Abul Kasem', *Smriticharan*, p. 11

79 'Memoirs of Gaziul Huq', *Smriticharan*, pp. 101-103

80 'Memoirs of Abul Kasem', *Smriticharan*, pp. 11-12

being conducted by the enemies of Pakistan. Lastly, an open apology was demanded from Nazimuddin for the methods of suppression employed by the government.<sup>81</sup> Nazimuddin implemented most of these points except the one on national language. Jinnah explained later that Nazimuddin had been intimidated: it was not for Nazimuddin but the Constituent Assembly to take such a decision for the Governor had no authority to do so.<sup>82</sup>

During his only visit to Dacca, Jinnah reiterated the central government position that Urdu alone would be the national language of Pakistan, first at the Racecourse Maidan on 21 March 1948, and again on 24 March, at the Curzon Hall convocation ceremony. On both occasions some in the audience, including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who rose to be the Prime Minister of independent Bangladesh, shouted 'no! no!'<sup>83</sup> Jinnah later spoke to various student representatives and members of the *Samgram Parishad*—Syed Nazrul Islam, Professor Abul Kasem, Naimuddin Ahmed, Toaha, Tajuddin Ahmed and Oli Ahad. Jinnah's personality was such that many students began to have second thoughts about the movement. Between 1948 and 1952, the language issue lay fairly dormant. Occasional meetings were held and *Rashtrabhasa Dibas* (State Language Day) was observed annually on 11 March.

Official circles often revived the bogey of India and cries of Islam and Pakistan in danger to corner the opposition. On 15 April 1951, in his presidential address to the Urdu Conference Maulana Akram Khan said:

The group of people opposed to Urdu language in East Pakistan took their inspiration and support from quarters who were opposed and antagonistic to everything which was Islamic.<sup>84</sup>

To him the 'peculiar significance' of Urdu was that it had 'a role to play' as 'a binding force' to keep 'the various component parts of Pakistan together'.<sup>85</sup> His branding of Bengalis as 'enemies of Islam' introduced an irrational heat into the debate and resulted in a flood of critical letters to the editor of *The Pakistan Observer*. Such sentiment was generally shared by the non-Bengali upper ashraf.<sup>86</sup> But such tactics, had little to do with religion and much with politics.

The attitude of the centre was to dismiss any valid claims of East Bengal, whether of a political, cultural or economic nature, as the 'evil of provincialism'.<sup>87</sup> The

81 Ibid., pp. 13-14

82 K. Ahmed, op. cit., p. 101

83 Ibid., Also see Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*, Dhaka, 2012

84 *Pak. Obs.*, 17 April, 1951

85 Editorials, *Pak. Obs.*, 17 April, 7 May, 1951

86 See S. Ikramullah, *From Purdah to Parliament* (London, 1963); *Pak. Obs.*, 17 April, 1951

87 *Pak. Obs.*, 28 April, 1950

official aim was 'to eradicate' this evil by pursuing a policy of one nation and one culture. Although Bengali was eventually recognised as the official language of East Pakistan, there were attempts to introduce the Arabic script for Bengali. Then, it would share the same script with Urdu, but the natural flow and progress of the language would be obstructed. Middle-class professionals and intellectuals feared that this would 'check the progress of education in East Bengal'.<sup>88</sup> Thus far the language movement achieved some political, but little cultural, success.<sup>89</sup>

The methods employed to fight provincialism aroused popular hostility. Some of the measures which galvanised literate opinion against the government were the following: the proposals made by the *Basic Principles Committee Report* in 1950 aimed at establishing a strong centre and recognising Urdu as the only state language; the ruthless drive against communism, in the name of which innocent Hindus were victimised, Hindu peasants harassed, government officials punished, press freedom curtailed, and students arrested; and finally, the communal riots of 10 February 1950 believed by some to be partly instigated by hired *goondas* (toughs), the *muhajereen*, local *kuttis* and also the government. The government's declared aim was 'to take effective steps to combat all subversive activities prejudicial to the security and integrity of Pakistan'.<sup>90</sup> Hindu members of the Assembly complained about oppression on their co-religionists, of 'panic' and fear in Hindu minds and their consequent exodus, which could be checked by 'more tactful handling of the situation'.<sup>91</sup> The riot of 10 February targeted Hindus. Mahmud Ali was arrested in Sylhet because he formed a peace committee to protect Hindus.<sup>92</sup>

Although the demand for national status for the Bengali language at this time was limited, and its adherents few, the state over-reacted in its clamp-down on it. Consequently, the Muslim League government suffered a loss of confidence and became aggressive. Liaquat Ali Khan, called Suhrawardy and his associates 'dogs let loose by the enemies of Pakistan', when Suhrawardy, disappointed with the Muslim League, broke away in 1950 to found what he hoped would be a national party, the Awami Muslim League.<sup>93</sup>

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88 See 'Letters to the Editor', *ibid.*, 3 June, 1950

89 Umar, *Sanskritir samkat* (Dacca, 1967), p. 82

90 See *CAP Debates*, 26 March, 1952, p. 484

91 *CAP. Debates*, 6 March, 1949, pp. 270-71

92 See 'Memoirs of GaziulHuq', *Smriticharan*, pp. 128-30, for this and other such events.

93 *Pak. Obs.*, 14 September, 1950. On the formation of the Awami Muslim League see issue of 31 August, 1950

*The Press*

The sympathies of the press were divided on the language issue. The line of division was determined by the pattern of its ownership. Government mouthpieces like *The Morning News* and *Dawn* were hostile. So was *Azad*, a Bengali daily, founded in 1949 by Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan. *Sangbad*, another Bengali daily sympathetic to Nurul Amin's government, sought to popularise the Muslim League view among the masses. Apparently its loyalties swung to the opposite side, for it 'was exploited by anti-League forces and lost its prestige'.<sup>94</sup> The press at the time was not free, contrary to government claims.<sup>95</sup> The *Pakistani Observer*, founded in 1949 by Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, was banned in 1952 by Nurul Amin's ministry for supporting the Bengali cause. The ban was however removed in 1954 by the United Front ministry which was formed after it won the elections that year. *Ittefaq* started as an Awami League weekly under the editorship of Tafazzal Hussain; therefore, it was branded as communist-inspired or as acting for Indian interests. According to the commentator, *Ittefaq* 'felt the pulse of the people and began clamouring for their rights'.<sup>96</sup> It was, therefore, critical of the government. After the dismissal in 1954 of the United Front ministry, shortly after it came into being, *Ittefaq* was banned.

Owing to restrictions on the East Bengal press, locals had to rely on Calcutta newspapers. But restrictions were also imposed on the import of these. *Ittehad*, a Calcutta paper founded by Suhrawardy, was sympathetic to the Bengali cause.<sup>97</sup> But the West Pakistan press was less friendly. Following the acceptance of Mohammad Ali's language formula recognising Bengali as a national language, nine newspapers went on a protest strike on 7 May 1954.<sup>98</sup>

*21 February 1952 and its Aftermath*

The event which shook the foundations of the Muslim League government and had long term repercussions on the ideology and politics of East Bengal was the shooting of university students on 21 February 1952. This day is popularly known as marking the beginning of the language movement. On 26 January, Khwaja

94 Majid Nizami, *The Press in Pakistan*, Problems of Pakistan series II (Dept. of Political Science, University of Punjab, 1958), p. 25

95 *Report of the Press Commission*, 1959 (Govt. of Pakistan Press, Karachi, 1959); *Twenty Years of Pakistan: 1947-67* (Govt. of Pakistan Press, Karachi, 1967). See section on the press, pp. 239-51—a passage reads: 'there is no censorship of the press ...'. For press control, also see *CAP Debates*, 10 March 1949, pp. 606-607

96 Majid Nizami, op. cit., p. 25

97 Ibid., p. 26. Also see 'Memoirs of Abul Kasem', op. cit., pp. 13-14

98 *New York Times Index*, 1954, p. 815

Nazimuddin declared at Paltan Maidan that Urdu alone would be the state language of Pakistan after having agreed in March 1948 to give national status to Bengali.<sup>99</sup> The vernacular intelligentsia, already agitated by the *Basic Principles Committee Report*, became more restless.<sup>100</sup> The result was a student strike on 30 January. A procession was taken out despite opposition from the student wing of the Muslim League, the East Pakistan Muslim Student League. The *Rashtra Bhasa Samgram Parishad* called for a strike throughout Dacca on 4 February in which about 10,000 people participated, including approximately 2,000 women.<sup>101</sup> The *Parishad* called for a province-wide strike on 21 February. But one day before the event, the government banned the assembly of more than four persons under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. This deterred the *Parishad*, but a radical section within it was determined to challenge the law. Among them was the leftist Oli Ahad, secretary of the Youth League, and Ibrahim, a member of the Islamic Brotherhood.<sup>102</sup> The religious-secular divide on the language issue was no longer clear-cut.

The events of the next few days occurred swiftly in a mounting tempo of violence, excitement, and mobilisation in favour of the language movement. On 21 February students defied Section 144 and came out of the Dacca University campus in groups of ten to offer *satyagraha* on the advice of the Communist Party after it failed to persuade them not to break the law. At first, the police arrested large numbers and took them away in trucks and buses until there were no more vehicles left.<sup>103</sup> They then lathi-charged and tear-gassed them. Some students retaliated by brick batting. Finally, the police opened fire. Among those dead were four students and a rickshaw-puller. On 22 February the students erected a memorial (*shahidminar*) for the martyrs; they went on a protest march wearing black badges and carrying the bloodied clothes of the *shahids* (martyrs). More shooting and arrests followed. On 24 February, the *shahidminar* was destroyed by the police. There was more marching and more shooting.<sup>104</sup>

These events caused an open split in Muslim League ranks. Bengali members walked out of the Assembly; one resigned. By March, the movement lost its tempo

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99 K. Ahmed, op. cit., p. 110

100 *Pak. Obs.* See issues of October-November, 1950

101 It was an act of defiance against Section 144, which prohibits the gathering of more than three people in one group in public places. See 'Memoirs of Gaziul Haq', op. cit., pp. 135, 137

102 A group of about 11 students came to this decision on the night of 20 February See 'Memoirs' of Habibur Rahman and Muhammad Sultan in *Smriticharan*, pp. 57, 79. For the views of the Islamic Brotherhood see their Bulletin no. 1, *Islam bhasasamasya o amra* (Islam, the Problem of Language and Us), 16 April, 1952, *Umar Dalil*, pp. 292-99

103 'Memoirs of Muhammad Sultan', op. cit., pp. 81-82.

104 'Memoirs of Gaziul Haq', op. cit., pp. 149-82

as the organisers were forced to disperse. But it left a long memory; it created a stronger sense of Bengali ethnic consciousness than ever before, a consciousness once again of us and them, a consciousness which became more secular with each successive clash with the government. It culminated in the rejection of the Muslim League ideology that manipulated religion to serve its political pursuits. This rejection was also reflected in the United Front victory over the Muslim League in the 1954 East Bengal elections. The 21-point election manifesto of the United Front incorporated the decision to make Bengali one of the state languages of Pakistan.<sup>105</sup> Here the secular consciousness opposed the communal. Although Islam was the declared state ideology, what was actually practised by the state could be described as 'religious communalism'.<sup>106</sup>

During 1952-55, various cultural institutions such as the *Sanskriti Samsad* kept alive the spirit of the language movement. The *Samsad* was based in Dacca University. It did not publish bulletins but organised plays to raise people's consciousness.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, every year, students persisted in observing 21 February as a day of mourning and protest even after the Bengali language was given national status in the 1956 constitution. The day came to acquire a ritual and symbolic significance. In later years, it came to represent freedom from oppression.<sup>108</sup> It even became celebratory in nature to commemorate the bravery of our young heroes.

## 7. Conclusion

The language controversy gradually polarised interests in East Bengal. Initially, the small vernacular intelligentsia giving leadership to the movement was isolated and unable to mobilise much support. The cleavage was along horizontal as well as vertical lines. The vernacular intelligentsia had as much to fear from the ire of the masses as from the national political elite. But the lines of alignment did not long remain so clear-cut. The debate over the introduction of the Arabic script as the

105 See *One Year of Popular Government in East Pakistan* (Govt. of East Pakistan Publications, Dacca, 6 September 1957), p. 15

106 *CAP Debates*, 6 March, 1948, p. 262; see B. Umar, *Pakistan and Bangladesh* (Dacca, 1974), p. 119, for a discussion of the term religious communalism.

107 Some of the members were Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury, Abu Zafar Obaidullah, Abid Hussain, Amir Ali, Sakhawat Hussain and Obaidul Huq Sarkar. Hassan Hafizur Rahman, the president of the *Samsad*, had contacts with Pragati Lekhak Sangh (Progressive Writers' Guild), the cultural front of the Communist Party, some of whose members were Munier Chowdhury, Mustafa Nurul Islam, Alauddin-al-Azad, Al-Mufti Sharfuddin and Borhanuddin Khan Jahangir. 'Memoirs of Hassan Hafizur Rahman', *Smriticharan*, op. cit., p. 51

108 *Pakistan Observer*, 21 February 1955. 'Shaheed Day Today'.

medium of Bengali is an example. Again, with the strengthening of the language movement, it attracted rickshaw-pullers and members of radical organisations like the Islamic Brotherhood. Its rising popularity is striking because in 1947 it was understood by all Muslims that Urdu would be the only national language. However, this attitude changed because of the reaction of the vernacular intelligentsia to official policies and the violent methods adopted by the administration to implement their policy. For some intellectuals, like Abul Hashim their syncretic culture and language generated no conflict in identity. This was probably due to an altered perception of religion which allowed a secular or neutral space to language and culture.

The reaction against the state language policy was an assertion of pride in local culture and origins. Although initially a cultural movement confined to a small segment of the middle class, the language issue rapidly acquired political significance as it mobilised wider segments of the population including members of the working class. It focused on the self-assertion of a region in a political power struggle. But it did not deny Islam.

During the language movement, the organisers made no appeal of a religious nature. Members of the Tamaddun Majlis, the Youth League, and their communist supporters were careful not to let the movement become overtly political, at least in its initial stages. But inevitably it did become political. Those involved in it did form an effective pressure group.

Although the appeal of the language movement was secular in nature, student activists did operate within a religious framework. Homage was paid to martyrs through special prayers, fasts, and by wearing white and black for mourning. The ideal of martyrdom invoked in this context was the greatest glory a Muslim could achieve in a *jihad*. At the same time, the influence of indigenous traditions could be seen: floral offerings at the *shahidminar* and singing of dirges at times resembled devotional offerings common among Hindus.

The secular reaction to the politicisation of religion by the national political elite indicated a 'new ideology' which rejected received prejudices regarding the inferiority of Bengali Islam, language and culture. It demanded a new set of ideological criteria in terms of secularism, equality and parity. The achievement of national status for Bengali was a political, not cultural, success. The cultural conflict certainly persisted till 1971. It has not come to an end even in independent Bangladesh.

In the post-independence period, the lines of alignment changed once again. The secular basis of identity which was gaining ground through the rejection of the two-

nation theory that Hindus and Muslims constituted separate nations, and which was symbolised in the emergence of independent Bangladesh came to be questioned in the mid-seventies. The death in 1975 of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the man behind the secular thrust in Bengali politics, brought to the fore new rulers struggling to forge new ideologies in the hope of creating new loyalties and identities. The sacrifice, in 1977, of the secular ideal, one of the four fundamental principles of state, was an essential aspect of the new 'ruling ideas' which opened up once again the delicate but controversial questions of language, identity and culture. Fifty years after its emergence, debates and discussions continue to rage about the secular and anti-secular politics of Bangladesh. Religion is still seen by many as the primary instrument of political mobilisation and secularism as the source of culture conflict. A consensus is yet to be achieved. The experience of Bangladesh clearly supports the instrumentalist view that identity is not given or primordial, but can be derived through social and political interaction.

## The US Policy towards the Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988

Md. Abul Kalam Azad\*

### Abstract

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) occupies an important place in the history of the modern Middle East. On September 22, 1980, Saddam Hussein, Iraq's former President, started the war by invading the Iranian province of Khuzistan with the intention of winning the conflict quickly. However, his calculation proved wrong when the United States (hereinafter US) got involved in the war in the name of the 'tilt' policy. As part of a larger US agenda, the Reagan administration supported Saddam Hussein in one of the bloodiest, most expensive and brutal wars of the twentieth century he fought against Iran when he used chemical weapons against Iranian troops and thus revolutionary Iran was contained. Therefore, although Saddam Hussein opportunistically invaded Iran hoping to take the advantage of Iran's political and military disarray, his invasion of Iran ultimately resulted in the eight-year-long bloody and devastating confrontation. Historically, Iraq initiated the war; however, Iranians blamed the US for it. Then, the relevant questions here are: what is the real history of the Iran-Iraq War? What was US policy in the Iran-Iraq War? How far was the US responsible for influencing Iraq to wage war against Iran? How far was the US responsible for determining the courses of the war, and terminating the war? How did the war affect Iran-US relations? What is the legacy of US policy in the war? The present article sheds light upon these critical and important issues and tries to find answers to these questions from a historical point of view.

**Key Words:** Imam Khomeini, Saddam Hussein, Tilt policy, Operation Eagle Claw, USS Vincennes, Great Satan

### Introduction

The Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988 is one of the history-shaping events in the Middle East. In Iran, the war is known as the Holy Defense (*Defa'-e Moqaddas*) and the 'Imposed War' (*Jang-e Tahmili*), based on the argument and belief that the US, humiliated by the 1979-1981 hostage affair at the hands of the Iranians, encouraged Iraq's Saddam Hussein (1979-2003) to wage war against the Iranians. In Iraq, on the other hand, the conflict was referred to as Saddam's Qadisiyyah, in reference to the Battle of al-Qadisiyyah that took place in the seventh century with an Arab

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victory over the Persians.<sup>1</sup> Given these views of Iran and Iraq regarding the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988, the war is still considered as one of the determining factors both in the Iran-Iraq and the Iran-US relations. Generally, it is related in history that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein opportunistically invaded Iran's Khuzistan province on September 22, 1980, hoping to take the advantage of Iran's political and military disarray. His invasion of Iran ultimately resulted in the eight-year-long bloody confrontation; however, Iranians blamed the US for the devastating conflict.<sup>2</sup> Then, what is the real history of the Iran-Iraq War? Former US President Abraham Lincoln (1861-1865) once stated: "History is not history unless it is the truth".<sup>3</sup> In line with this truism, the present article is a humble attempt to remove existing untruths, lies and myths told about the overall US policy towards the Iran-Iraq War. The analysis of the causes of the Iran-Iraq War is beyond the scope of this article; however, it presents a vivid picture of the nitty-gritty of the US policy towards the Iran-Iraq War. For that, the article first critically looks at the US maneuverings that contributed a lot to the beginning of the war and then makes a thorough investigation into the US policy towards the war and finally sheds light on the legacy of this US policy. Let us first deal with how far the US was responsible for the starting of the Iran-Iraq War.

#### **How Far the US was Responsible for the Inception of the Iran-Iraq War**

There is no denying the fact that the Iran-Iraq War was a modern conflict between two modern Muslim states for thoroughly modern reasons of national interest and regional hegemony in which ancient animosities, traditional Arab-Persian ethnic and cultural (Semitic Arabs and Aryan Persians), ideological (Iran's Islamic and Iraq's secular Baathist) differences, the religious discrepancies between Sunni and Shi'i regimes, personal rivalries<sup>4</sup> and competition for power and prestige in the

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1. Originally, the Iran-Iraq War is referred to as the Gulf War until 1991. After the 1991 Gulf War, the Iran-Iraq War is referred to as the First Gulf War, while the 1991 Gulf War has become known as the Second Gulf War and the 2003 Iraq war has become known as the Third Gulf War or simply the Iraq war. See: Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick (ed.), *Iran, Iraq and the Legacies of War*, Palgrave Macmillan, USA, 2004, p. 4; Mehran Kamrava, Manochehr Dorraj, *Iran Today: An Encyclopedia of Life in the Islamic Republic*, vol. 1 and 2, Greenwood Press, London, 2008, pp. 250-254.
  2. David Farber, *Taken Hostage: the Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam*, Princeton University Press, USA, 2005, p. 178.
  3. "Quotes About History", *History News Network*, <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/1328> (Accessed on November 23, 2015)
  4. Imam Ayatullah Khomeini had lived for thirteen years since 1965 in exile at Najaf, Iraq. In 1978 he was expelled by Saddam Hussein at Shah's request. To some, Khomeini could not forget his expulsion and thus he could not forgive Saddam Hussein.

Persian Gulf region<sup>5</sup> between Imam Ayatullah Khomeini (1979-1989) and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, and finally border disputes including the dispute over the 127-mile-long Shatt al-Arab waterway<sup>6</sup>, played their due parts. Historians do agree on one important point that although these causes of the war had indeed existed between the two states for a long time, specifically for half a century since the independence of Iraq in 1932 however; there was nothing to resort to war. Another related but more significant fact is that taking the advantage of Iran-Iraq military engagement, Israel, an important and trusted US ally in the region, completely destroyed Iraq's nuclear power plant at Osirak on June 7, 1981, by a secretly-conducted surprise aerial attack code-named Operation Opera. Furthermore, both Saddam Hussein and Ayatullah Khomeini were in power in their respective countries when the catastrophic war ended in 1988, at the cost of incalculable human loss and material (and environmental) devastation to the belligerents. These all give rise to a number of related and important questions including, why was this bloody and costly armed conflict? Who did give Iraq's Saddam Hussein a push for the start of the war? Who was the winner of the conflict given the fact that the "Iran-Iraq War was truly a war without winners"? What did cause the prolongation of the war? As we go to explore these questions, we encounter other vital questions: did the US really play any role to encourage Iraq's Saddam Hussein to go to war with Iran? If it is so, then why, how, and to what extent did the US promote the Iraqi leader to go to war with Iran? Is revolutionary Iran's contention that the Iranians were subjected to a US-imposed war justified<sup>7</sup>

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5. Saddam Hussein was seeking to have Iraq replaces Iran as the preponderant power in the Persian Gulf after the fall of the US-backed Shah while Khomeini was determined to retain Iran's dominating role in the region.
  6. The Shatt al-Arab waterway, a navigable stream formed by the confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers just above the Iraqi port of Basra and flowing southwards into the headwaters of the Persian Gulf runs along the Iran-Iraq border by the *thalweg* line principle. Iran and Iraq have important ports on the Shatt al-Arab. For Iraq, the river is the only outlet to the Persian Gulf. Iraq has tried to claim the entire Shatt al-Arab river and both banks, while Iran has wanted half of it. During the Iran-US tensed relations over the Hostage Crisis, this Shatt al-Arab dispute became the trigger that set off the eight-year Iran-Iraq War.
  7. About a week later following the Iraqi invasion, Khomeini urged his compatriots to "cut off the hands of America, which has emerged from Saddam's sleeve." While Majlis Speaker Hashemi Rafsanjani stated: "We see this war as an American war." Both quoted in Ray Takeyh, Ray Takeyh, *Guardian of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009, p. 89. See also: Christin Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: From Khomeini to Khatami*, Routledge Curzon, New York, 2003, p. 70.

despite that the US refuted the claims? Answers to all these questions are to be found from complex political, economic, domestic, regional and international perspectives and within the periphery of Iran's relations with the US during the months following the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Following the collapse of the US "twin pillar" strategy upon the success of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, a new dimension was added to the US viewing of Iraq. Under the changed circumstances, Iraq was seen as a potential ally in maintaining regional stability.<sup>8</sup> In this context, when Iranians took 52 Americans as hostages to punish the US for its past misdeeds in Iran and support for the former Shah, Washington's faith in Saddam Hussein as a pillar of stability became a central fact of US policy. This faith led the US to encourage Saddam Hussein in his belligerency and aggression against Iran.<sup>9</sup> Iran's former President Abu al-Hasan Bani Sadr (1980-1981) in his book entitled *My Turn to Speak: Iran, the Revolution and Secret Deals with the U.S.*, (1991) claimed that Iraq's Saddam Hussein got the "green light" to attack Iran from the US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski when the two met in Jordan in July 1980.<sup>10</sup> Although President Jimmy Carter and his National Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski later denied that the US had encouraged Saddam Hussein to conduct war against Iran, Iranians continued to blame the US for the conflict.<sup>11</sup> Because reports are also available that Saddam Hussein consulted the US Gulf allies, specifically Saudi Arabia before he went to

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8. Barry Rubin, 'United States-Iraq Relations: A Spring Thaw?', in Tim Niblock (ed.), *Iraq: The Contemporary State*, Croom Helm, London, 1982, pp. 114-117.
  9. Preface in Adam Tarock, *The Superpowers' Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, Nova Science Publishers, Inc., New York, 1998, pp. xi-xiii. For more about the US role in the starting of the Iran-Iraq War see: M.S. El Azhary (ed.), *The Iran-Iraq War: An Historical, Economic and Political Analysis*, Croom Helm, London, 1984; Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict*, Routledge, USA, 1991; Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick (ed.), *Iran, Iraq and the Legacies of War*, Palgrave Macmillan, USA, 2004; Bryan R. Gibson, *Covert Relationship: American Foreign Policy, Intelligence, and the Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988*, Praeger, USA, 2010, p. 25; Sasan Fayazmanesh, *The United States and Iran: Sanctions, Wars, and the Policy of Containment*, Routledge, USA, 2008
  10. Referring to the Paris-based *Le Monde* of October 8, 1980, Dilip Hiro has mentioned Iran's President Bani Sadr had learnt of Saddam Hussein's secret plans two months before the war began. Iran's President told Eric Rouleau of *Le Monde* that a secret meeting had taken place in France among the Iranian counter-revolutionaries, the Iraqi representatives, Americans, and Israeli military experts. Dilip Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985, p. 168.
  11. President Jimmy Carter and his National Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski later disavowed the Iranian allegation that the US had encouraged Saddam Hussein to wage a war against Iran. Kaveh Farrokh, *Iran at War: 1500-1988*, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, New York, 2011, p. 348.

war with Iran. An investigative journalist by the name of Robert Parry wrote that the then US Secretary of State Alexander Haig in a 1981 memo noted that “it was also interesting to confirm that President Carter gave the Iraqi President a green light to launch war against Iran through [then Prince, later King of Saudi Arabia] Fahd”.<sup>12</sup> This was a very significant gesture, in view of the anti-Iranian posture of the Saudi leadership because of Imam Ayatullah Khomeini’s attack on the Saudi monarchy and on Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia and especially the closeness of Saudi-US relations.

Earlier on July 17, 1980, the *New York Times* published a provocative advertisement implicating Saddam Hussein that asked whether Iraq would “repeat her former glories and the name of Saddam Hussein link up with that of Hammurabi, Ashurbanipal, al-Mansur, and Harun al-Rashid?”<sup>13</sup> Without a doubt, the glory-seeking Saddam Hussein and an aspirant for the Arab leadership (after Nasser’s death and following the expulsion of Egypt from the Arab League due to the former’s conclusion of the Camp David Accords with ‘militant’ Israel in 1978), who loved to identify himself with Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia (who conquered Jerusalem in 586 BC), and Saladin (who regained Jerusalem in 1187 by defeating the Crusaders), was certainly influenced by these encouragement and propaganda. Therefore, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the Carter administration gave Saddam Hussein the green light to invade Iran and assisted him after the invasion.<sup>14</sup> As we go through the historical facts, we find a good number of major reasons that demonstrate how and why the US encouraged Iraq to go to war with Iran.<sup>15</sup>

**Firstly**, the US never wanted to see a strong Iran under Imam Khomeini, who since 1979 frequently and disparagingly called the US—the “Great Satan”, its strong ally

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12. Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade*, Indiana University Press, USA, 1990, p. 39. Iraq’s Saddam Hussein made an unannounced visit to King Khalid (1975-1982) of Saudi Arabia at Taif on August 5, 1980. Saddam went there to consult with the King about his invasion plans. Bryan R. Gibson has claimed that Saudi King Khalid gave his personal blessing to the invasion and promised him Saudi backing.
  13. Phebe Mar, *The Modern History of Iraq*, Westview Press, USA, 1985, p. 229; *New York Times*, July 17, 1980.
  14. Sasan Fayazmanesh, *The United States and Iran: ..., op., cit.*, pp. 2, 27.
  15. For more about the issue see: Md. Abul Kalam Azad, *Iran-US (United States) Relations Since 1945*, Ph.D. Thesis, pp. 172-182; Nihat Ali Ozcan and Ozgur Ozdamar, ‘Iran’s Nuclear Program and the Future of U.S.-Iranian Relations’, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, Spring 2009, p. 121; Md. Abul Kalam Azad, ‘Current Perspectives of Tehran’s Nuclear Programme: Iranian Necessity versus US Hostility’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (Hum.)*, Vol. 63(1), 2018, p. 25.

in the Middle East Israel—the “Little Satan” and the White House—the “Black House.”<sup>16</sup> Iran was under the US-backed Shah since 1953 but the shockwave of the Islamic Revolution forced the US-backed Shah to leave Iran and the country passed to Imam Khomeini who also derogatorily portrayed President Carter as the personification of the “Great Satan.”<sup>17</sup> Khomeini’s Iran added another affliction to the US by holding 52 Americans as hostage on November 4, 1979. Factually, the hostage-taking episode which humbled the US as well as its President Jimmy Carter in the eyes of the world in an unpredictable but humiliating fashion placed Iran and the US squarely in confrontation: it created an American image of Iran as a fanatic nation committed to undermining fundamental US interests. For that reason, ever since this incident, Americans have come to hate Iran even more than they loath Russia.<sup>18</sup> What is more important, since the inception of the Hostage Crisis, the US began to view Islamic Iran as a terrorist state and its Supreme Leader Imam Khomeini as a “cancer” which to be removed before spread.<sup>19</sup> The US government also viewed Khomeini’s revolutionary regime as contrary to US interests and a formidable threat to the stability of the whole region. In this context, the US government and the Americans also began to term (and they still do so) revolutionary Iran their enemy number one in the region and drastic steps were justified to hasten Khomeini’s departure from power with the concrete view that the Ayatullah “must go”.<sup>20</sup>

It was in this context, the US National Security Council (NSC), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Pentagon placed top priority on the removal of Khomeini through military intervention. They even favoured the secret plan to arm the US agents and Iranian Arabs of Khuzistan and anti-Khomeinists who strongly opposed the new Islamic regime in Iran. However, on January 9, 1980, the Director of the CIA Stanfield Turner posited three potential ways to positively affect the outcome of the Hostage Crisis. First, the US might invade Iran; second, the US might use the already explosive situation of the ethnic dissidence of Iran to solve the hostage issue; and third, the US might adopt a waiting game since Iran’s arch-

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16. Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, Random House, New York, USA, 2004, p. 215.

17. Khomeini described Carter as one of the three satanic figures confronting Iran, the other two being the Shah who was by now dead, and Saddam Hussein.

18. *New York Magazine*, December 8, 1986, Vol. 19, No, 48, p. 46. See also: Nikki R. Keddie and Rudolph P. Matthee (ed.), *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, USA, 2002, p. 367.

19. *New York Magazine*, December 10, 1979, Vol. 12, No, 48, p. 55.

20. *Ibid* , p. 55.

enemy Iraq was likely to invade Iran's oil-rich province Khuzistan by taking advantage of the internal chaos in Iran; however, only timing seemed to be in doubt. In that case, the US could exploit all these possibilities through "actions and propaganda".<sup>21</sup> Around this time, the Carter administration even seriously and desperately considered an invasion of Iran to seize its oil fields in the fall of 1980 to bolster his prospects for re-election. However, it was the concern for the American hostages that compelled President Carter to drop the plan and opted for the waiting game.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, war of words was exchanging between the leaders of Iraq and Iran while border disputes between the two countries took a new proportion. The Carter administration which became impatient over the prolongation of the Hostage Crisis saw an opportunity in deteriorating Iran-Iraq relations. The Carter administration concluded that any Iraqi military invasion would benefit the US in two distinct ways. First, an Iraqi invasion would lead to the overthrow of the Iranian Islamic government and the restoration of the old order with or without the deposed Shah and thus to block the spread of the Iranian version of political or radical Islam to the rest of the Middle East. Second, the war would increase pressure upon Iran to resolve the seemingly never-ending Hostage Crisis. Mindful of these calculations, the US ultimately resolved to encourage Iraq in its war with Iran. Francis A. Boyle has argued that there were several indications from the public record that the Carter Administration tacitly condoned, if not actively encouraged, the Iraqi invasion of Iran in September of 1980 because of the administration's shortsighted belief that the pressures of belligerency might expedite the release of the US diplomatic hostages held by Tehran since November of 1979. Boyle concluded that because of the Hostage Crisis, the US decidedly moved to punish, isolate, and weaken the Khomeini regime.<sup>23</sup>

**Secondly**, commitment to rolling back the Iranian Islamic Revolution and replacing it with a friendly regime was an integral aspect of the US perspective on Iran since 1979.<sup>24</sup> The US was in fact bent on containing or defeating Iran and thereby proving the bankruptcy of an Islamic Revolution to Muslims of other countries<sup>25</sup> and thus preventing the export of revolution in the areas strategically important to

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21. Bryan R. Gibson, "Covert Relationship: ...", Thesis, *op., cit.*, p. 23.

22. Francis A. Boyle, 'International Crisis and Neutrality: United States Foreign Policy toward the Iran-Iraq War', *Mercer Review*, Vol. 43, 1991-1992, p. 537; *New York Magazine*, December 10, 1979, *op., cit.*, p. 55.

23. Francis A. Boyle, *op., cit.*, pp. 536-537.

24. Cheryl A. Rubenberg, 'US Policy toward Nicaragua and Iran and the Iran-Contra Affair: Reflections on Continuity of American Foreign Policy', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 4, October 1988, p. 1477.

25. Shireen T. Hunter, *op., cit.*, pp. 59-60.

Washington. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini sought to export Iran's brand of revolution throughout the Persian Gulf and broader Middle East and this amounted to the undermining of US influences in the region.<sup>26</sup> Khomeini's call for 'export of revolution' was directed to the countries of the region namely Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Khomeini labeled the governments of these countries as US-backed 'satanic' regimes whose Islam he viewed as "American Islam". Without a question, this Iranian position vis-à-vis the US allies in the region invited strong reactions from Washington.<sup>27</sup> In fact, Khomeini's attempts to export the revolution in the oil-rich Arab countries not only alarmed Iraq and the Gulf states but also posed the most challenging and grave threats to US interests in the Middle East.<sup>28</sup> In this way, the Iranian threat became a common threat to Iraq, the US and its allies in the Gulf and the US found in Iraq its supporter in containing the Islamic Republic of Iran in the form of 'enemy's enemy is my friend'. To the policy-makers in Washington, Saddam Hussein appeared as the only alternative who could stop the spread of 'Islamic fundamentalism' emanating from Tehran, for Iraq was the eastern gate of the Arab states, and thus could save the downfall of the US allies in the region. Therefore, it was natural for the US government to induce Saddam Hussein to go to war with Iran as it saw militarily capable Iraq (Iran's arch-rival for centuries) as the military shield and the Gulf states' money, and the American intelligence data to beat back the Iranian Islamist challenge.<sup>29</sup>

**Thirdly**, the US tempted Iraq to go to war with Iran with a view to freeing its Middle East vital ally Israel from the wrath of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Baathist Iraq. Under the Shah, Tehran had enjoyed special relationships with Washington also because of Iran-Israeli close and friendly relations. Iran was transformed from an ally to an enemy of Israel after Khomeini-led 1979 Islamic

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26. In an address to the Muslim world once Khomeini said: "We will export our revolution throughout the world ... until the calls "there is no god but God (Allah) and Muhammad (pbuh) is the messenger of God" are echoed all over the world.' Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War: 1980-1988*, Osprey Publishing, UK, 2002, p. 12; Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: ..., op., cit.*, p. 183.
27. Fawaz A. Gerges, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?*, Cambridge University Press, USA, First Published 1999, p. 44.
28. Iran's initial goal was Iraq and due to the 65 and 70 percent Shi'a populations living in Iraq and Bahrain respectively, Tehran believed Bahrain was "100% ripe for an Islamic revolution." US ally Saudi Arabia also became concerned because, at the time, 500,000 Shi'a were concentrated in Hasa, a strategically important oil-rich province, while Shi'a are also present in UAE in small but considerable numbers. Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: ..., op., cit.*, p. 198.
29. Michael C. Hudson, 'To Play the Hegemon: Fifty Years of US Policy toward the Middle East', *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 3, Summer 1996, p. 333.

Revolution. Imam Khomeini not only denounced Israel as an illegitimate state but also labeled it as the “Little Satan” who has been acting as the agent of the “Great Satan” —the US in the region. Khomeini also positioned Israel as an enemy of Islam and as a “cancer” that would destroy Islam and Muslims if not removed from the region. Finally, he urged that “Every Muslim has a duty to prepare himself for battle against Israel”.<sup>30</sup> He named the last Friday of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan as Quds<sup>31</sup> or Jerusalem Day and urged Muslims worldwide to demonstrate on that day against Israel and in support of the Palestinians. Khomeini even denounced Egypt’s President Anwar el-Sadat’s newly established ties with Israel and accused Cairo of betraying the Palestinians.<sup>32</sup> Earlier, when PLO leader Yasser Arafat visited Tehran after the Revolution on February 18, 1979, for talks with Khomeini he was accorded treatment befitting a head of state or government. In a bold gesture on the day of Arafat’s arrival, Khomeini announced the expulsion of all Israelis from Iran and recall of all Iranian diplomats from Israel. Then, on February 18, 1979, Khomeini’s Iran severed diplomatic relations with Israel, including oil sales and air links.<sup>33</sup> On February 19, 1979, the erstwhile Israeli Embassy in Tehran had been handed over to the PLO for its use. It was against this background, the interests of Israel and that of the US in the Middle East became intermingled and identical,<sup>34</sup> and the US-Israeli allies now began to demonize the Islamic Revolutionary government of Iran by highlighting it as an example of Arab instability.

Meanwhile, Iraq confirmed its anti-Israel stance by participating in all Arab wars against Israel. Later on, Iraq emerged as the leading Arab military power with a strong anti-Israeli sentiment following the demise of Egypt’s military power at the hands of Israel in 1967 while the Soviet Union, the US cold-war rival helped build Iraq’s military strength as opposed to the US unchecked military support to Iran under the Shah. Iraq’s strong anti-Israeli position became clearer when in February

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30. Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: The Writings and Declaration of Imam Khomeini*, (trans. Hamid Algar), Berkeley, Calif: Mizan Press, 1981, pp. 276.
  31. Quds is the Arabic name for Jerusalem. Revolutionary Iran also has a special unit of Revolutionary Guard Corps by the name of Quds originally taken from the word “Al-Quds” and often used to refer to Jerusalem which has only been incurring US-Israeli anger.
  32. Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: the Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States*, Yale University Press, USA, 2007, pp. 83-93; Ray Takeyh, *Guardian of the Revolution: ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
  33. Mohammad Ayoob (ed.), *The Middle East in World Politics*, Croom Helm, Great Britain, 1981, p.132; Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
  34. Cheryl A. Rubenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 1474; Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic*, Routledge, London, 1995, pp. 129, 204; Mohammad Ayoob (ed.), *The Middle East in World Politics, op. cit.*, p.132.

1980, Saddam Hussein announced an Arab National Charter, a document that committed Iraq “waging an all-out war against Israel and to call upon all other Arab States to join in that war.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, by the early 1980 both Iran and Iraq appeared as a grave threats to Israel, however, revolutionary Iran and its anti-Israeli position appeared more dangerous to both Israel and the US. In this context, the US successfully toyed with the idea of destroying both Muslim military powers through a war in a bid to relieve Israel of the wrath of these two Muslim states.

**Fourthly**, the US encouraged and later supported Iraq in its war with Iran also for economic (oil) reason which was perhaps the most compelling reason. From the time the US-backed Shah fell in 1979, the principal regional interests of the US were: to ensure the flow of oil at reasonable prices; to maintain the stability of its Arab allies, and to contain anti-US states including the Soviet Union and revolutionary Iran. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, intense anti-American sentiment grew in the Middle East and elsewhere which was reflected in a variety of political reactions. These included the uprising in Saudi Arabia<sup>36</sup>, Pakistan and Libya, where anti-American rioting inspired by the Iranian Islamic Revolution burned down the US embassy to the ground while an attack on the US Embassy in Islamabad left two Americans dead. These developments seriously alarmed the US who now anticipated that Khomeini’s Iran might use the “oil weapon” as a means for punishing or offending consuming nations, particularly the US and its ally Israel whom Khomeini saw as a Zionist-imperialist conspiracy to maintain imperial hegemony in the region. Although by that time the Gulf states disapproved Khomeini’s call to withhold oil from exporting to the US, the US apprehended that only a reduction, let alone a suspension, of Middle Eastern oil production, would have catastrophic consequences for the economy of the US and its allies Japan and Western European nations. Therefore, to get rid of such an Iranian threat the US devised the plan of encouraging Saddam Hussein to invade Iran so that foreign military invasion would check the Iranian influence over the Gulf states where US economic interests were immense. And once the war started, the US saw it reasonable to support Iraq against Iran in the war anticipating that Iran might dominate the Persian Gulf, the site of the world’s largest oil reserves, if won.<sup>37</sup>

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35. Phebe Marr, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

36. The seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca (in November 1979), in Saudi Arabia, another strong US ally in the region appeared as a crucial threat to the US.

37. Steve A. Yetiv, *America and the Persian Gulf: The Third Party Dimension in World Politics*, Praeger, London, 1995, p. 155; *New York Magazine*, December 10, 1979, p. 56.

**Fifthly**, the thinking of arms sales to the Gulf states in general, and to the belligerents in particular, was one of the US policy objectives behind its encouragement of Iraq to wage a war with Iran. History documents that although the US and the Soviet Union made every effort to continue to supply weapons to both Iran and Iraq during the war, they did little to promote an end to the conflict.<sup>38</sup>

**Sixthly**, being alarmed at the post-revolutionary anti-American and anti-Israeli revolutionary government in Tehran, Washington urgently felt the necessity to destroy the military capability of the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>39</sup> Steve A. Yetiv has put: "In the absence of war, Iran could have attempted non-military and less provocative fashion behind the tacit threat of its feared military hand. The war, however, forced Iran to play this hand, to deplete its military arsenal, and, in the process, to isolate itself further from the Arab Gulf states and the international community."<sup>40</sup> This was what the US wanted; however, the US intention in this regard, was not by direct military engagement with Iran but through the temptation of Iraq to engage in a military conflict with Iran which it did efficaciously.

**Seventhly**, the US also devised the war plan against Iran and encouraged Saddam Hussein to execute it to remove Khomeini from power. Since the conclusion of the Camp David Accords in 1978, the US ally Egypt under Anwar el-Sadat had been isolated by all its fellow Arab nations. In this context, on May 1, 1979, Khomeini severed Iran's diplomatic relations with Egypt condemning Sadat's regime and calling for his ouster which alarmed the US a lot.<sup>41</sup> This stance of Khomeini in effect made him and his Iran an enduring enemy of the US. It is an established fact that since the conclusion of the Camp David Accords, one of the US policies has been not to tolerate anyone who is opposed to the Accords or one who opposes US Arab allies for their support to the Accords or to Israel. Therefore, when Khomeini called for Sadat's ouster for 'making concession with Israel', the US immediately moved to impose a war on his country with a view to removing him from power.

**Eighthly**, the US game plan in encouraging Saddam Hussein to start a war against Iran was also to make a pretext for itself to consolidate its own position in the Persian Gulf. The Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan on December 27, 1979 posed a serious threat to the oil-rich Persian Gulf region. In a bid to defend

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38. John H. Sigler, 'The Iran-Iraq Conflict: The Tragedy of Limited Conventional War', *International Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 2, South-west Asia, Spring, 1986, pp. 448-452.

39. Iran's military capability was in actuality, enviable compared to other Muslim states of the region since it was based on the most advanced American weaponry of the time bestowed upon it by the US-backed Shah.

40. Steve A. Yetiv, *America and the Persian Gulf*, op., cit., p. 134.

41. *New York Magazine*, December 10, 1979, p. 58.

the Persian Gulf against Soviet encroachment, the Carter Doctrine was declared.<sup>42</sup> Then the US announced that it was creating a Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) for the Gulf region, which became operational on March 1, 1980. The US encouragement of Iraq came in this context in the belief that the war might provide an excuse for the US to move into the Persian Gulf militarily.

**Finally**, the Carter administration had moved to impose a war on Iran to get rid of what President Carter termed ‘real grief in our country’ (i.e., the agonizing Hostage Crisis of 1979-1981) in his memoirs entitled *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*.<sup>43</sup> In his memoirs, Carter lamented that he would never forget the 444-day-long Hostage Crisis and blamed the episode for destroying his chances of winning a second term in office for tens of millions of Americans, the 1979-1981 Hostage Crisis marked the total failure of his administration. Interestingly enough, initially, after the taking of the US embassy in Tehran by the Iranians, President Carter himself adopted a policy of encouraging the media to highlight the irrationality of this action and thus to demonize the Khomeini-led Islamic Republic of Iran in the eyes of the world and Americans. As part of this policy, from the first day of the Hostage Crisis the images of blindfolded Americans, and Iranian crowds chanting “Death to America” were displayed daily on television screens across the US, while different media in the US headlined the Hostage Crisis almost daily. The ABC television channel, for example, regularly updated the American people on the Hostage Crisis in Tehran and emotive interviews with the hostages’ families on the issue. Of the programmes shown on different television channels in the US, ABC’s late-night “America Held Hostage” programme which later became *Nightline* began endlessly detailing the latest developments in the crisis. This *Nightline* programme eventually became a nightmare for the Americans who at one point began to press their government to bring back their fellow countrymen from Iran. “While on CBS Walter Cronkite, a man implicitly trusted by most Americans,” states David Patrick Houghton in his *US Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis*, “kept up the continual pressure on Carter by signing off his newscast each night with the number of days the hostages had been held in captivity.”<sup>44</sup>

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42. On January 23, 1980, President Carter announced: “Any attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”

43. Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, The University of Arkansas paperback edition, Printed in Canada, 1995, p. 441.

44. David Patrick Houghton, *US Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis, op., cit.*, p. 2.

Thus the Carter administration was soon caught short by the American public's immediate emotional reaction to the hostage-taking although the media publicity was feeding their angry preoccupation with the Iranian hostage-takers. To the Americans, the hostage issue quickly became a reflection of America's powerlessness as the Carter administration proved incapable of releasing its official representatives from their harsh ordeal. One scholar has emphatically stated: "However, as the hostage drama dragged on without any prospect of a negotiated resolution, the American public grew increasingly impatient with Carter and his diplomacy-based foreign policy toward Iran."<sup>45</sup> In this way, Carter himself became the victim of his own policy when night after night until the 444<sup>th</sup> night every American counted the days of America's humiliation. Carter who was due to face a Presidential Election in November 1980 felt intense pressure from the mass media and from television in particular. In this context, he severed US diplomatic relations with Iran on April 7, 1980, and gave the permission of a rescue plan of the hostages code-named "Operation Eagle Claw" which was tried on the night of April 24-25, 1980. The rescue mission ended in a complete failure which only added pressure on the President. With regard to the hostage issue President Carter also faced mounting pressure to do something in the Congress.<sup>46</sup> His National Security Adviser Brzezinski advised him to take some major steps not only to punish Iran but also "to unseat Khomeini." "I want to punish them as soon as our people have been released; really hit them. They must know they can't fool around with us."<sup>47</sup> In fact, it was in this background that the US moved to lure Saddam Hussein for an Iranian invasion providing false hope of a quick victory through CIA. Perhaps anticipating such an American conspiracy, Khomeini on September 12, 1980, only ten days prior to the Iraqi invasion of Iran, said that the Great Satan (the US) was resorting to another *stratagem* after the failure of both the economic boycott and the military attack of April 25, 1980 (code-named Operation Eagle Claw to rescue American hostages held in Iran). Mentioning Iraq's Saddam Hussein as the "humble servant of America" and portraying Iraq as an American puppet serving the US and Israeli interests, Khomeini concluded: "Iran has tried to sever all its relations with this Great Satan and it is for this reason that it now finds wars imposed upon it. America has urged Iraq to spill the blood of our young men, and it

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45. Rose McDermott Rose McDermott, *Risk-taking in International Politics: Prospect Theory in American Foreign Policy*, The University of Michigan Press, 1998, p. 48.

46. David Patrick Houghton, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

47. Quoted in Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, Farrar Straus & Giroux, USA, pp. 482-484. See also, Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Fateful Encounter with Iran*, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd. London, 1985, p. 206.

has compelled the countries that are subject to its influence to boycott us economically in the hope of defeating us.”<sup>48</sup>

### **The CIA Pushed Saddam Hussein to the War**

As the bilateral relations between Iran and Iraq reached to a crisis point, the two countries severed their diplomatic relations. This followed the exchanges of war of words between Khomeini and Saddam Hussein. Khomeini depicted Iraq as the “US agent in the region” and pithily described Saddam Hussein as the wretched servant of the US and appealed to Iraqis to overthrow the ‘non-Muslim’ Baathist regime. In response, Saddam Hussein viewed him as a “turbaned Shah” and ‘a Persian magician’. The opportune moment was now at US hand. Focusing on Iran as the real source of danger, it quickly manipulated the hostile relations between Iran and Iraq by supplying intelligence to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein through the CIA that Iran was militarily in a weak position due to Khomeini’s purging of the army and the cancelation of \$10 billion arms deals with the US.<sup>49</sup> William Engdahl in his famous book entitled *A Century of War: Anglo-American Oil Politics and the New World Order* has precisely observed that “Washington had secretly encouraged Saddam Hussein to invade Iran in 1980, falsely feeding him intelligence data indicating early success.”<sup>50</sup> History records that after being emboldened by the CIA’s provocative reports of Iran’s military weakness and expecting a quick and decisive victory over his unstable neighbour due to Iran’s post-revolutionary chaos, regional and international isolation,<sup>51</sup> Iraq’s Saddam Hussein who had a connection with the CIA since 1963, struck Iran on September 22, 1980.<sup>52</sup>

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48. Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution, op., cit.*, pp. 301-305.

49. See Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War: ..., op., cit.*, pp. 19- 44; Nikola B. Schahgaldian (with the assistance of Gina Barkhordarian), “The Iranian Military Under the Islamic Republic”, Prepared for the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Published by The RAND Corporation, March 1987, pp. 19-20; Stephen C. Pelletiere, *The Iran-Iraq War: Chaos in Vacuum*, Praeger Publishers, New York, USA, 1992, pp. 14-35.

50. Frederick William Engdahl, *A Century of War: Anglo-American Oil Politics and the New World Order*, Pluto Press, London, 2004, p. 213.

51. Regionally Iran lacked friends due to the Islamic Republic of Iran’s revolutionary rhetoric, especially, Khomeini’s call for the export of revolution to neighbouring countries. Internationally, Iran-Soviet relations were at odds due to Iran’s condemnation of the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, scraping off the 1921 Russo-Persian treaty, as well as Khomeini’s strong anti-Soviet stance on the atheist system of communism. While relations between Iran and the US reached an all-time low on November 4, 1979, when Iranian students took the possession of US Embassy in Tehran and held 52 Americans as hostages.

52. Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy*, Metropolitan Books, New York, 2006, p. 144; Dilip Hiro, *Iran under the Ayatollahs*,

### The US Policy towards the Iran-Iraq War

Once the war began, Iraqi forces occupied a vast tract of Iranian territory. Sitting on the sideline and in anticipation of the Iranian willingness to settle the hostage issue, the US now moved to adopt a calculated policy for preserving its interests in the Persian Gulf region. Consequently, every single policy and action of the US government affected the course of the Iran-Iraq War tremendously. Interestingly, to befool the international community and as part of its calculated policy, the US officially declared neutrality in the conflict once the war began. Without condemning Iraq for the aggressive attack on Iran, President Carter on September 24, 1980, publicly “pledged” not to intervene in the Iran-Iraq War by declaring: “Our own position is one of strict neutrality and we’re doing all we can through the United Nations and other means to bring a peaceful conclusion to this combat.”<sup>53</sup> Francis A. Boyle has called this US official policy toward the Iran-Iraq War the ‘so-called neutrality’. To Boyle, the US policy of neutrality toward the Iran-Iraq War, first adopted by the Carter administration and supposedly continued by his successor President Ronald Reagan, only misrepresented fact if not the law. The fact is that the US consistently ‘tilted’ in favour of Iraq throughout the war despite its public proclamation of neutrality.<sup>54</sup> Why was such a US double standard policy? An observer has put: “The hostage crisis led indirectly to the next reason for hostility between the United States and Iran. This was the conduct of the United States during the Iran-Iraq War, from 1980 to 1988.”<sup>55</sup> Another reputed scholar of the Middle East Stephen Kinzer has said that the hostage episode which poisoned the Iran-US relations soon changed the course of US political history and then led the US to support Iraq in its long and horrific war with Iran.<sup>56</sup>

The matter of fact is that with the inception of the Iran-Iraq War the US had pursued a two-track policy: short-term and long-term. The US short-term policy was to get American hostages back and if possible to overthrow the revolutionary government in Tehran. The long-term policy of the US was to secure US-Israeli

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*op., cit.*, p. 169; Gholam Hossein Razi, ‘An Alternative Paradigm to State Rationality in Foreign Policy: The Iran-Iraq War’, *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 4, December, 1988, pp. 713; Edgar O’ballance, ‘The Iraqi-Iranian War: The First Round’, *Parameters*, Journal of the US Army War College, Vol. XI, No. 1, March, 1981, p. 56.

53. *The New York Times*, September 24, 1980; Sasan Fayazmanesh, *The United States and Iran: ..., op., cit.*, p. 24.

54. Francis A. Boyle, ‘International Crisis and Neutrality: ...’, *op., cit.*, pp. 536-537.

55. William O. Beeman, *The “Great Satan” vs. Mad Mullahs: How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, USA, 2005, p. 131.

56. Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New Jersey, USA, 2008, p. 179.

political and economic interests in the Persian Gulf by destroying the military might of both Muslim regional powers since both Iran and Iraq were enemies of Israel. To achieve its short- term and long-term goals the US adopted a ‘tilt’ policy which was executed in two ways: stated or overt ‘tilt’ toward Iraq and unstated or covert ‘tilt’ toward Iran.<sup>57</sup> Throughout the war years the US followed this ‘tilt’ policy in a calculated fashion in the hope that such policy would contain each other by prolonging the war and thus the balance of power in the region would be maintained. Hence, this ‘tilt’ policy involved various approaches of the US over the courses of the war.

**a. US Covert Communications with Iran: First Phase (1980-1981)**

Once the Iran-Iraq War began with the Iraqi invasion of Iran, the US followed a two-track stratagem in an attempt to achieve its short-term goal of releasing American hostages from captivity. In the first place, the US government successfully induced the United Nations Security Council (hereinafter UNSC) to adopt Resolution 479 on September 28, 1980 which called upon Iran and Iraq to immediately cease any further uses of force and settle the dispute through negotiations, however, it did neither condemn nor even criticize the Iraqi aggression. Although Iraqi troops were still in a position of an occupying force holding about 30,000 square kilometers of Iranian territory, the US supported the UNSC’s move and made it clear that it was against “any dismemberment of Iran”. Why was such a US position, is now a question to be answered? Dilip Hiro, a noted scholar on Iran’s foreign policy, has observed that the US statement in the UNSC was meant to smooth the way for the release of the American hostages in Iran held since 1979.<sup>58</sup> In the second place, the US government hoped to establish covert arms supply relations with Iran in the wake of the Iraqi invasion. As Iran was cornered by Iraqi aggression, the State Department viewed that Iran’s ability to conduct successful large-scale offensive operations “for at least the rest of the year” was seriously weakened and Iran’s defeat at the hands of the Iraqi forces was just a matter of time. This exactly created the type of opportunity the US had been hoping for in order to establish a sort of covert arms-supply relationship with Iran for

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57. The US ‘tilting’ toward Iraq was such that US assistance for Iraq would be enough that Iraq would not be defeated by Iran while the US *tilting* toward Iran was to prevent absolute Iraqi victory over Iran. The official “tilt” towards Iraq was defined in a State Department Information Memorandum in October 1983, concluding that the “policy of strict neutrality has already been modified, except for arms sales, since Iran’s forces crossed into Iraq in the summer of 1982,” adding that the “steps we have taken toward the conflict since then have progressively favoured Iraq.” See: Mehran Kamrava, Manochehr Dorraj, *Iran Today: ..., op., cit.*, p. 257.

58. Dilip Hiro, *Iran under the Ayatollahs, op., cit.*, p. 168.

releasing American hostages. However, when Iran did not come to seek arms from the US despite initial pressure from the Iraqi military, the US considered the possibility of selling some military spare parts and munitions through Israeli agents to Iran. The Carter administration viewed that an offer of badly needed military spare parts to Iran in exchange for the release of hostages might prove tempting. Therefore, President Carter decided in principle to deliver an estimated \$240 million in military equipment. On October 28, 1980, he promised that if the hostages were released the US would airlift the arms and spare parts that Iran had already paid for.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, initially, President Carter tried two options with high hope but to his utter shock and dismay, nothing had happened as he desired: Iran neither accepted the UNSC call to end the use of force nor it sought arms from the US at this stage of the war. Therefore, there was no end to the Hostage Crisis on the scene although Iran received some US arms through an Israeli connection.<sup>60</sup> Later on, Iran settled the hostage issue with the US through the Algiers Agreement on January 20, 1981, only when it felt necessary and when Carter's humiliation was complete after his defeat in the 1980 US Presidential election. Since mid-1981, the US had to expect the unexpected: it alarmingly noticed Iran's battlefield breakthrough against Iraq. Iran's battlefield victories hardened the US position on Iran. In actuality, once the Hostage Crisis was resolved, the US cast its baleful gaze on Iran to take revenge for humiliating its superpower image by holding 52 Americans for 444 days. The new Hollywood actor-turned US President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) pursued even a harder course of foreign policy towards Iran. He sought to contain and isolate Iran which would actually become the official policy of the US ever since. As part of this US policy toward Iran, Washington "actively backed Iran's regional nemesis, Saddam Hussein, throughout the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War."<sup>61</sup> At the same time, the US also worked for the prolongation of the war by denying victory to either of the belligerents. To that end, President Reagan followed Carter's policy of developing covert communication with Iran and secretly allowed Israel to sell American-made arms, spare parts and ammunition to Iran, even after the settlement of the Hostage Crisis. That is why, even after Saddam Hussein's announcement on

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59. *Ibid.*, p. 322.

60. Reportedly, the US also provided the Iranian military with arms via Israel in the hope that it would overthrow a civilian government at a time when the country was under a foreign military attack. *New York Magazine*, November 10, 1980, p. 26; Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: ...., op., cit.*, p. 40; Sasan Fayazmanesh, *The United States and Iran: ..., op., cit.*, p. 2.

61. Ilan Berman, *Tehran Rising: Iran's Challenge to the United States*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., USA, 2007, pp. xviii-xix.

September 28, 1980 that his country was willing to cease hostilities and negotiate a settlement (which clearly indicates a limited strategy in the war<sup>62</sup>), the US continued to supply arms to Iran. Reportedly, with Washington's approval, Israel sold over \$500 million worth of arms to Iran in the 1980-1983 period, while the CIA mentioned the amount was approximately \$300 million.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, to convince the Iranian leadership that the US-Israeli nexus was working for Iran Israeli fighter jets in a surprise attack destroyed completely the Iraqi nuclear power plant at Osirak on June 7, 1981 through Operation Opera (also known as the Operation Babylon). Israel destroyed Iraq's nuclear power plant with US tacit consent also because Saddam's Iraq was bitterly critical to Israel.<sup>64</sup>

**b. The US 'Tilt' toward Iraq and the Formation of an Anti-Iranian Alliance with Iraq, 1982-1984**

At the beginning of the war, Iraq won victories, however; from June 1981 Iran successfully started repelling Iraqi forces and liberated most of the lost territory and turned the tide of the battle in its favour. Since late November 1981, Iran followed up its offensive codenamed *Tariq al-Quds* meaning Road to Jerusalem<sup>65</sup> and ultimately Iran's goal became "War, War until Victory." This new development petrified the US and its Israeli and Arab allies. Meanwhile, the CIA reported in Washington that Iraq's defeat was a matter of time. Being nervously alarmed at this turn of the war, the US government publicly announced that it had informed its Gulf allies (who were supporting Iraq's Saddam Hussein) that Iraqi defeat at the hands of Iranians would be "contrary to United States interests". Finally, the US abandoned its policy of so-called neutrality and non-involvement in the war in favour of a declared "tilt" toward Iraq which led to the formation of an anti-Iranian

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62. Efraim Karsh (ed.), *The Iran-Iraq War: Impact and Implications*, St. Martin's Press, Inc., USA, 1989, p. 259.

63. *The New York Times*, December 8, 1991; Farhang Jahanpour, 'The Roots of the Hostage Crisis', *The World Today*, Vol. 48, No. 2, February 1992, pp. 33-34.

64. J. C. Hurewitz, 'The Middle East: A Year of Turmoil', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 59, No. 3, 1980, p. 560.

65. As a result, by May 1983, Iran pushed Iraq out and advanced into enemy territory with the slogans "War, War Until Victory" and "The Road to Jerusalem Goes Through Baghdad." The Iranian leaders aimed to liberate the Shi holy shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala, and install an Islamic regime in Baghdad, as a stepping-stone to freeing Jerusalem from the militant Zionist Israeli control. See Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2008, p. 171; Nikki R. Keddie and Rudolph P. Matthee (ed.), *Iran and the Surrounding World: ..., op., cit.*, p. 360; Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: ..., op., cit.*, p. xxii; Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: ..., op., cit.*, pp. 193-194.

alliance with Iraq.<sup>66</sup> In this regard, US policy was: “Look, the enemy of my enemy is my friend; we’re going to have to support the Iraqis in order to stop the Iranians.”<sup>67</sup> The US “tilt” policy toward Iraq and the formation of an anti-Iranian alliance with Iraq are demonstrated in the following six ways.

**(i) Delisting Iraq from the So-called List of Terrorism-Sponsored States**

Baghdad severed its diplomatic relations with Washington because of US support for the militant state of Israel in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. On the other hand, given Iraq’s anti-Israeli stance Iraq was listed in the US State Department’s so-called list of terrorism-sponsored states since its inception on December 29, 1979 as one of the states, which has been sponsoring terrorism. However, Iranian victories in the war since November 1981 forced the US to change its policy toward Iraq and Washington quickly moved to form an anti-Iranian alliance with Iraq for supporting the country militarily to prevent its defeat. As the first step of such US policy in February 1982, the US State Department delisted Iraq from the government’s so-called list of states ‘supporting international terrorism’.

**(ii) Providing War Materials and Intelligence to Iraq**

The removal of Iraq from the US list of terrorism-sponsored states paved the way for the US to provide arms and ammunitions, dual-use equipment and high technology for both civil and military purposes, agricultural credits, and other logistic support to Iraq. Now following an important CIA officer’s visit to Baghdad in the summer of 1982, the Reagan administration authorized the sale of 60 helicopters to Iraq for ‘agricultural use’ which Iraq was believed to be used for war purposes. Washington even began issuing Baghdad high-tech export licenses which opened the door for Iraq to buy sophisticated equipment including its Weapons of Mass Destruction (hereinafter WMD) programmes and since then the US and its allies started selling Iraq virtually anything the latter wanted.<sup>68</sup> In this way, the policy of the Reagan administration provided the means for Iraqi development of WMD, nuclear weapons, biotoxins, Chemical Weapons (herein after CW), and so on.<sup>69</sup> A direct secret intelligence link between Baghdad and Washington was also

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66. Michael Stemer, ‘The Iran-Iraq War’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Fall, 1984, p. 129.

67. Bryan R. Gibson, *Covert Relationship:..., op., cit.*, p. 89; James G. Blight et al., *Becoming Enemies: U.S.-Iran Relations and the Iran-Iraq War, 1979-1988*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., USA, 2012, pp. 77, 270; James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*, Yale University Press, London, 1988, pp. 304-306.

68. Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: ..., op., cit.*, pp. 207-208.

69. David Barsamian et. al., *Targeting Iran*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, USA, 2007, p. 33.

set up. Resultantly, since March 1982, the US was able to deliver critical intelligence to the Iraqis. US satellite photographs of Iranian targets were readily transmitted to Baghdad through AWACS surveillance planes based in north-western Saudi Arabia since September 30, 1980, listening-post based in south-eastern Turkey and later on P-3 reconnaissance aircraft taking off from Kuwait. The passing of high-value military intelligence collected by US satellites and spy planes regarding Iranian military deployments soon proved to be the most useful to Iraq's conduct of the war: it increased Iraqi military strength, enhanced Iraqi morale, and helped Iraq fix key flaws in the defensive capabilities.

**(iii) Imposing a World-Wide Arms Embargo on Iran: The “Operation Staunch”**

Despite the fact that the US was providing Iraq with crucial intelligence and war material, however, the Iranian battlefield victories in 1982 convinced the US that Iran would be able to crush Iraq. In the spring of 1982, assessing the whole situation of the war the CIA concluded that “Iraq has essentially lost the war with Iran” and expressed concern about the implications on the US of an Iraqi defeat.<sup>70</sup> The fear in Washington was that Iran would win the war which had other components: this would be the first stage of Iranian implementation of exporting revolution, the Iranians would capture Iraq, then follow up this unprecedented victory by igniting the majority Shi'i population of Iraq to take up arms against US interests all over the Middle East, march to Jerusalem and move to close the Straits of Hormuz, the single most important passageway for getting Middle Eastern oil to the West. What made the US most worrisome was that after having secured its position in the war, Iran sent 1,000 Revolutionary Guards to South Lebanon in 1982, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, to train Shi'i groups (later emerged as Hizbullah) to make sure that the massacre of Sabra-Shatila in 1982 (conducted on unarmed Muslims by the Maronite Christians with the help of the Israeli forces) would not be repeated. Following a bombing at the US barracks in Beirut on October 23, 1983, that left 241 killed, the US accused that armed and aided by Iran Islamist groups in Lebanon was causing havoc for US and Israel. Meanwhile, in response to the ‘tanker war’, the extension of the Iran-Iraq War to sea, Iran threatened to close the Straits of Hormuz in October 1983. The US took the Iranian threat very seriously and viewed the Iranian threat of closing the Straits of Hormuz as just like cutting the US economic lifeline. In view of such an Iranian threat, President Reagan signed the National Security Decision Directive (hereinafter NSDD) 114 on November 26, 1983, which later became the basis for

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70. Bryan R. Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

the official US policy toward the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>71</sup> While to prevent an outright Iranian victory in the war and thus to prevent a *Pax Irani*, on January 19, 1984, Washington designated Iran as a “state-sponsor of terrorism,” and strongly advocated for shutting down Iran’s access to arms by imposing a worldwide arms embargo called “Operation Staunch” on Iran.<sup>72</sup> The Operation Staunch successfully prevented major weapons systems from reaching Iran from US allies.

#### **(iv) The Re-establishment of US-Iraq Diplomatic Relations**

Washington also stepped up its efforts to re-establish diplomatic ties with Baghdad, a development that Baghdad itself yearned for in order to put pressure on Washington’s allies to forbid the sale of arms to Tehran. Washington eventually restored diplomatic relations with Baghdad on November 26, 1984, after a 17-year break, which also opened a window of opportunity for the US to supply critical war and non-war materials and intelligence to Iraq. Since December 1984, merely a month after the US and Iraq re-established their diplomatic relationship, the newly opened US Embassy in Baghdad began supplying the Iraqi armed forces with much-needed and vital military intelligence.<sup>73</sup>

#### **(v) Economic Assistance to Iraq**

US ‘tilting’ policy to Iraq was also extended to the economic level that boosted Iraq to renew its attacks on Iran. This US policy in this connection included the overwhelming increase of Baghdad-Washington trade in 1983-1984 (\$ 1 billion, three times the size of Baghdad-Moscow commerce), the US assistance in important commodity credit for agricultural products, support for Iraqi efforts to secure vital loans to bridge debt shortfall (for example, \$400 million in 1983, \$513 million in 1984 and \$652 million in 1987).<sup>74</sup>

#### **(vi) Diplomatic Support for Iraq at the UN and Indifference to the Iraqi Use of Chemical Weapons on Iranians**

The US tilt toward Iraq was also extended to the diplomatic level. The first instance of this US policy demonstrated in the US support for a UN-sponsored

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71. Bryan R. Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 110; Dilip Hiro, *Iran under the Ayatollahs, op. cit.*, p. 233.

72. ‘State Sponsors of Terrorism’, U.S. Department of State, available at: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/list/c14151.htm>; Bruce W. Jentleson & Thomas G. Paterson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of U.S. Foreign Relations*, Vol. 2, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, p. 419; Mansour Farhang ‘The Iran-Iraq War, The Feud, The tragedy, The spoils’, *World Policy Journal*, Fall, 1985, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 671.

73. Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War: ..., op. cit.*, p.44; Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: ..., op. cit.*, p.159.

74. WM.J. Olson, ‘The Gulf War: Peace in Our Times?’, *Parameter*, Winter, 1986, Vol. XVI, No. 4, pp. 52-53; Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: ..., op. cit.*, p.159-161.

condemnation of Iran for the latter's attacks on Gulf shipping while remaining virtually silent over a similar Iraqi attacks.<sup>75</sup> It was around this time Washington purposefully shut its eyes to the Iraqi use of Chemical Weapons on the Iranians and thus allowed Saddam Hussein to commit the most heinous crime in the history of human civilization. Iraq, fearful of a perceived defeat at the hand of Iran and emboldened by US continuous support, used CW—as a desperate measure and as a weapon of last resort to force Iran to end the war—against Iranians and killed thousands of unprotected Iranians and thus inflicted horrifying damage on them for which Iran saw in Saddam Hussein an American Devil. Was there any rationale behind such Iranian viewing of Saddam Hussein? The answer is yes. An American analyst named Barbara Slavin has mentioned that as part of Washington's tilt policy it provided Baghdad with intelligence and weapons, including the components for the biological and chemical arms.<sup>76</sup> The US also remained unmoved despite the fact that Iraq was using CW (including mustard gas, cyanide, the nerve agent Tabun, soman, and sarin, as well as other choking agents like phosgene) “almost daily” and Iran had complained about horrifying chemical attacks by Iraq at the UNSC on numerous occasions since August 18, 1983.<sup>77</sup> The US tilt toward Iraq made Washington all the more reluctant to condemn Iraq's use of CW even though US intelligence confirmed Iran's accusations of Iraqi chemical attacks against Iran's soldiers and Kurdish insurgents. The US (and its Western allies) who adopted the “seeing and hearing no evil” policy turned a complete blind eye to the Iraqi use of CW on Iranians.<sup>78</sup> This actually gave a signal to Iraq that it could continue, and even escalate, the use of CW in the war to prevent an Iranian victory.

### c. US Covert Communication with Iran: The Second Phase (1985-1986)

The US policy in the Iran-Iraq War since 1982 was quite detrimental to Iranian interests and Tehran had to behave with utmost caution for two reasons: not to escalate Iran-US confrontation (given the restoration of Iraq-US full diplomatic relations in November 1984 and the US role at the UN) and to keep open the future

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75. WM.J. Olson, ‘The Gulf War: ...’, *op., cit.*, pp. 52-53; Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: ...*, *op., cit.*, p.159-161.

76. Barbara Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S. and the Twisted Path to Confrontation*, St. Martin's Griffin, New York, 2009, p. 18.

77. Md. Abul Kalam Azad, ‘The Future of Tortured Iran-US Relations: Accommodation or Confrontation?’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (Hum.)*, Vol. 65, No. 1, 2020, p. 59. William O. Beeman, *The “Great Satan” VS. The “Mad Mullahs”*: ..., *op., cit.*, p. 131; Bryan R. Gibson, *Covert Relationship: ...*, *op., cit.*, p. 117.

78. Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: ...*, *op., cit.*, p. 113; Adam Tarock, *The Superpowers' involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, *op., cit.*, p. xii.

door of Iran-US rapprochement. Some moderate and influential pragmatic elements within the Iranian leadership such as the Majlis speaker Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (later Iran's President) indicated that Iran-US hostility should not last until "Doomsday" (*Rouz-e Qiamat*) and that Iran would be prepared for reconciliation.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, despite the fact that the anti-Iranian view was dominant within the US policy-making establishment since 1979, some at the NSC were aware of Iran's strategic importance to the US and they tried to prevent Iran's complete isolation least Iran turned to the Soviet Union. Therefore, they encouraged US allies Japan and West Germany to maintain ties with Iran. This conciliatory position of Iran and apparently responsive mood of the US soon paved the way for the second phase of US covert communication with Iran which began with a set of complicated Israeli-instigated and US-initiated Iran-Israel-US secret arms dealings from August 1985 to November 1986 that later became known as the Iran-Contra Affairs or Iran-Contra Scandal. Nathan Thrall argues, Washington's such covert arms dealings with Tehran resulted in the development of "clandestine and indirect Iranian-American relations."<sup>80</sup> During this time Iran received from the US five separate covert shipments that included 2008 Tube-Launched Optical-Tracking Wire-Guided (hereinafter TOW) missiles, 235 Homing-All-the-Way-Killer (hereinafter HAWK) anti-aircraft missiles, HAWK parts, and other spare parts. The US government received from Iran about \$64 million.<sup>81</sup> The US secret arms

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79. Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: ..., op., cit.*, p. 42.
80. Nathan Thrall, 'How the Reagan administration taught Iran the wrong lessons', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 2, June 2007, pp. 16-18; Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: ..., op., cit.*, p. 115; Robert Owen Freedman, *The Middle East from the Iran-Contra Affair to the Intifada*, Syracuse University Press, New York, 1991, p. 173.
81. On August 6, 1985, President Reagan authorized a covert programme to provide weapons, funneled through Washington's Middle East ally—Israel—to US enemy state Iran. In the first order, he authorized a shipment of 4,500 US-made anti-tank TOW missiles to Israel to be sold to Iran. The first sale included 100 TOW missiles while on September 15 the second sales of 408 missiles reached Iran from Israel. The initial shipment involved \$1 million most of which (\$850,000) was diverted to the Contras—rebels of Nicaragua and thus the Iran-Contra connection began. Following the success of the first order, on January 17, 1986, another Presidential Order was issued authorizing direct US arms sales to Iran. In accordance with the order, Washington sold an additional 1000 TOWs to Tehran in February 1986. After meeting in Frankfurt on February 24-27, 1986, between Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North and his Iranian contacts another five hundred TOW missiles were delivered to Iran on February 27. Theodore Draper, *A Very Thin Line: the Iran-Contra Affairs*, Hill and Wang Publishers, New York, USA, 1991, p. 199; See also: Johnathan Marshall, Peter Dale Scott, Ges Jane Hunter, *Irangate: The Israel Connection*, South End Press, 1987; Roger East (ed.),

dealings with Iran came to an abrupt halt on November 4, 1986 following the disclosure of the affairs by a Lebanese weekly magazine named *al-Shira'a*. The key question here is: what were the US objectives of such covert communication with Iran while Washington's arms embargo 'Operation Staunch' against Iran was still in place? As a matter of fact, the US had two sets of objectives or motives for the covert arms supply to Iran at this stage of the war: stated and real. With regard to the stated objectives, the US government had several interpretations.

*Firstly*, it is widely publicized that to secure the release of the American and other Western citizens who were held hostages by pro-Iranian Sh'ia Hizbullah in Lebanon, the US moved secretly to supply arms to Iran. *Secondly*, it is also stated that Iran's geostrategic significance (because of its oil reserves and strategic location) played an important part in the so-called secret arms dealings between Iran and the US.<sup>82</sup> *Thirdly*, the US government adopted a policy to establish contact with moderate elements within and outside the government of Iran and then provided arms, equipment and related material "in order to enhance the credibility of these elements in their effort to achieve a more pro-U.S. government in Iran by demonstrating their ability to obtain requisite resources to defend their country against Iraq and intervention by the Soviet Union."<sup>83</sup> *Fourthly*, the Reagan administration also believed that the US secret engagements with Iran would be a potential strategic opening to Tehran, with the aim of either overthrowing Khomeini or replacing him by some other means.<sup>84</sup> *Finally*, since April 1980, there were no diplomatic ties between Tehran and Washington, therefore, through covert communication with Iran, the US wanted to have intelligence reports about Iran and thus to check Soviet challenge or influence in the region and to prevent Iranian export of revolution to other Gulf States and thus to save its Gulf allies.<sup>85</sup>

The US real motives with regard to Washington-Tehran covert communication from August 1985 to November 1986, however, were diametrically opposite to that of the stated motives. History provides ample evidence that when the US entered

*Keesing's Contemporary Archives—Record of World Events*, July-1986, vol. 32, Longman Group Limited, London, p. 34515.

82. James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 307-313.
83. *New York Magazine*, December 8, 1986, Vol. 19, No. 48, p. 48; Gary Sick, 'Iran's Quest for Superpower Status', *Foreign Affairs*, Spring, 1987, Vol. 65, No. 4, pp. 710-711; Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 221.
84. Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 114; George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 878.
85. Christin Marschall, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86; James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 309-313; Robert Owen Freedman, *op. cit.*, p.79.

the secret arms dealings with Iran, the humiliating memories of the Hostage Crisis of 1979-1981 were still fresh in the American minds and Washington's official arms embargo on Iran—the 'Operation Staunch' (adopted in early 1984)—was still in place. The only thing that Iran did by this time was: it spontaneously offered mediation in the release of US hostages in Lebanon in 1985. Certainly, this was not enough for the US to engage with Iran secretly or to improve Tehran-Washington relations risking its own image at home and abroad (in particular, among US Arab and Gulf allies). Besides, all the arms dealings took place violating the US official policy of denying weapons to nations aiding terrorists (in January 1984, the US singled out Iran as a terrorism-sponsor state). What is more, while the US was supplying arms to Iran, simultaneously it was supporting Iraq by all means at its disposal.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, the whole episode gives rise to serious suspicions among the scholars, historians, and political scientists regarding the US stated motives as just mentioned. James A. Bill has related that the Hostage Crisis of 1979-1981 left a legacy of distrust, misunderstanding and hatred and during the testimony of NSC officials at the July 1987 Select Committee Hearings on the Iran-Contra affair it became clear that it was the lingering embarrassment of the painful 1979-1981 hostage issue that helped promote the Iran-Contra secret arms deal.<sup>87</sup> James A. Bill has also documented quoting Rober McFarlane that at one point when Reagan was queried about the dangers of selling arms to what many in the US considered a terrorist state, he reportedly responded that "I will be glad to take all the heat for that."<sup>88</sup>

Given this fact, there is no mistaking that the US adopted a long-term hidden political agenda since the start of the Iran-Iraq War. This hidden political agenda or real motive of the US (as well as Israel) was the continuation of the Iran-Iraq War and thus destroying the military might of two Muslim powers in the region, and preventing the victory of either side in the war. True the US also developed a covert arms supply relationship with Iran as part of "Washington's terrorist war against Nicaragua",<sup>89</sup> however, 'throughout the entire episode and during the investigations afterward, President Reagan consistently denied both that he knew that arms sales

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86. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, June 1987, Vol. 43, No. 5, p. 42; Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: ..., op., cit.*, pp. 213-217; Cameron R. Hume, *The United Nations, Iran and Iraq: ..., op., cit.*, p. 85.

87. James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: ..., op., cit.*, p. 302.

88. *Ibid*, p. 413.

89. Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: ..., op., cit.*, p. 5. *New York Magazine*, December 8, 1986, Vol. 19, No. 48, p. 44; Robert Parry and Peter Kornbluh, 'Iran-Contra's Untold Story', *Foreign Policy*, No. 72, Autumn, 1988, p. 5; Cheryl A. Rubenberg, *op., cit.*, pp. 1474-1501.

profits were being transferred to the Contras and that the arms sales were tied solely to the freeing of American hostages held in Lebanon.<sup>90</sup> Amiya Rao wrote in the *Economic and Political Weekly* in September 1987 that before the Congressional Committee, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North disclosed that every time he met with the Iranian representatives in Frankfurt for arms sales to Iran, he lied to them. He assured them that the US supported Iran in the war and like Iran; it wanted to see Saddam Hussein of Iraq overthrown. He even went to tell the Iranian representatives that the US would defend Iran against any attack by the Soviet Union.<sup>91</sup> True, taking the advantage of TOW anti-tank missiles secretly supplied by the US, Iran not only baffled Iraqi attacks but also succeeded in capturing Iraq's Fao peninsula on February 11, 1986. This only increased US opportunity to continue its clandestine arms supply to Iran and overt support for Iraq to prevent the Iranians from winning the war. Given the fact, Sasan Fayazmanesh has concluded that once put in a historical context, the Iran-Contra "affair was the logical outcome of the dual containment policy pursued for a long time by the US and Israel."<sup>92</sup>

The US real motive was also best reflected in the remarks of the former US Secretary of State and the incumbent Secretary of State Haig's political mentor Henry Kissinger made in February 1984. Known as the consummate *Realpolitik* practitioner Henry Kissinger stated, "...it was the interest of the United States for the war to go on indefinitely as it weakened two states who had strongly opposed the United States influence in the area".<sup>93</sup> The *New York Times* on May 22, 1984, reported that with regard to the US goal and policy in the war Henry Kissinger's contention was that "the ultimate American interests" is that "both should lose."<sup>94</sup> The time of the US secret arms engagement with Iran also demonstrates the fact that the US wanted the war to continue. In 1984 the balance of military power moved in Iraq's favour of course, due to the US overt tilt policy toward Iraq. However, it was not in the interest of the US that Iraq wins the war outright. Therefore, the US reversed its stance whenever it considered appropriate and sold weapons secretly to Iran while it continued to help Iraq openly. This actually

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90. James M. McCormick, *American Foreign Policy and Process*, Wadsworth, USA, Fifth Edition, 2010, p. 141.

91. Amiya Rao, "All the President's Men", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 22, No. 38, September 19, 1987, p. 1504.

92. Sasan Fayazmanesh, *The United States and Iran: ...*, *op. cit.*, p.59.

93. John H. Sigler, 'The Iran-Iraq Conflict: ...', *op. cit.*, p. 452; Cited from Robert C. Johansen and Michael G. Renner, *Los Angeles Times*, February 16, 1986.

94. *New York Times*, May 22, 1984; Mansour Farhang 'The Iran-Iraq War, The Feud, The tragedy, The spoils', *op. cit.*, p. 671.

indicates that the US benefitted from the continuation of the war, which weakened both countries.<sup>95</sup> This truism is demonstrated in Trita Parsi's opinion. Trita Parsi has pointed out that the logic behind Washington's secret arms dealings with Tehran was simple and clear: so long as Iran and Iraq fought each other, neither one could fight Israel. On December 8, 1991, the *New York Times* disclosed a similar fact.<sup>96</sup>

**d. The Direct US Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War, 1987-1988**

The secret arms dealings between Tehran and Washington served the latter's hidden purpose by prolonging the Iran-Iraq War for nearly one and a half years from July 1985 to November 1986. The leak-out of these dealings on November 4, 1986, quickly gave birth to the confrontational phase of Iran-US relations during the 1987-1988 period, when the US, fearful of Iraqi and US Gulf allies' infuriated reactions, decidedly tilted toward Iraq. As a result, the year 1987 witnessed a direct military confrontation between Iran and the US.<sup>97</sup> In March 1987, the US moved to reflag eleven Kuwaiti tankers and escort them to the Gulf in response to a Kuwaiti appeal. In the same year, the US deployed additional air and naval forces in the Persian Gulf in order to facilitate navigation there.<sup>98</sup> This actually gave the US an additional facility to confront Iran militarily.

The first direct confrontation between Iran and the US occurred on September 22, 1987, when a US Army Special Forces helicopter opened fire on an Iranian vessel on the pretext that it was laying mines fifty miles north of Bahrain. As time proceeded, more military engagements between Iran and the US followed.<sup>99</sup> The

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95. Joseph J. St. Marie and Shadad Naghshpour, *Revolutionary Iran and the United States: Low-intensity Conflict in the Persian Gulf*, Ashgagte Publishing Company, USA, 2011, p. 147; Simon Chapman (ed.), *The Middle East and North Africa*, Regional Surveys of the world, Europa publications, London, 2001, p. 573.

96. Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 112; *The New York Times*, December 8, 1991.

97. Christin Marschall, *op. cit.*, p. 183; Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

98. Efraim Karsh (ed.), *The Iran-Iraq War: ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

99. From October 8 to 22 of 1987, the US sank three Iranian patrol boats in the Persian Gulf and Iran fired missiles at unprotected US-owned tankers. On October 16, 1987, a tanker named *Sea Isle City* was struck at anchor in Kuwaiti waters by an Iranian silkworm missile. The US Navy attacked the Iranian Rostam oil platform in retaliation. Iran retaliated not only by attacking US ships or the Navy but also by firing Silkworm missiles from Faw at Kuwait's oil loading terminal at Mina al-Ahmadi. This sudden escalation of the conflict saw US troops for the first time kill Iranian sailors and brought Iran and the US one step closer to a major military confrontation. For more about Iran-US military confrontation see, Eric Hooglund, 'Reagan's Iran: Factions behind US Policy in the Gulf', *Middle East Report*, No. 151, March-April, 1988, p. 29; Robert Owen Freedman, *The Middle East from the Iran-Contra Affair to the Intifada*, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-173; Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War: ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

most significant naval battles occurred in early April 1988, when the US Navy destroyed a substantial proportion of the Iranian Navy. On April 14, 1988, the *USS B. Roberts* frigate struck a mine in the Persian Gulf which was believed to be dropped by Iran to stop oil tanker traffic as part of its war effort with Iraq. Four days later, another US guided-missile frigate, the Oliver Hazard Perry-class *Samuel P. Roberts*, hit an Iranian-laid mine in the Persian Gulf, which almost sank the ship. No lives were lost, but the ship underwent almost \$90 million in repairs and the incident prompted immediate US retaliation against Iranian assets via “Operation Praying Mantis” on April 18, 1988. Reportedly, this was the largest US naval operation in retaliation since the Second World War. Iran lost about a quarter of its larger naval ships in a one-day engagement with the US Navy, including one frigate sunk and another badly damaged.<sup>100</sup> Iran also lost a significant portion of its naval force: six vessels including two (out of three) frigates while about 49 American personnel and an unknown number of Iranian were killed during the Iran-US military confrontations.

#### e. The US Terminated the War

Despite Iranian heavy losses in the Iran-Iraq War due to the US direct military engagement with Iran in the Persian Gulf region, the country still showed no sign to end the war. However, since late 1987 the US genuinely wanted the war to end and became very impatient at the Iranian resilience for the continuation of the war. For that, it escalated military engagement with Iran in the Persian Gulf region as just mentioned. The pertinent question is why did the US want the war to be ended right at that time? In fact, around this time, the world attention quickly shifted back to the basics of Middle East politics as the Palestinians began direct and violent confrontation in the name of the first *Intifada* or Mass Uprising (1987-1991) in the Gaza Strip and West Bank in December 1987 with the US sole vital ally in the Middle East—Israel. The uprising against Israel by the Palestinians soon grabbed international attention and the event increased US tension considerably for the Arab world which was preoccupied with the protracted Iran-Iraq War might focus sharply on the Palestinian issue now. The US also feared that Iran, which succeeded in creating an anti-Israel Islamist armed group named Hizbullah in Lebanon even during the war in 1983 (which not only played the leading role in attacking Israeli Defense Force positions but also forced Israel to withdraw from all but a small enclave of an Arab territory without a single security guarantee for the volatile border or vulnerable northern Galilee)<sup>101</sup> might open a new war front in

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100. Joseph J. St. Marie and Shadad Naghshpour, *Revolutionary Iran and the United States: ..., op., cit.*, pp. 147-148.

101. Efraim Karsh (ed.), *The Iran-Iraq War: ..., op., cit.*, p. 113.

Palestine. Hence, fearful of an escalation of the Iran-Iraq War in Palestinian land, the US felt an urgency to end the war since one of US policies in the Middle East is to protect Israel.<sup>102</sup> This US urgency brought Washington and Baghdad together to coordinate their military operation against Tehran.

Meanwhile, the US issued explicit warnings to Israel to desist from supporting Iran in any way and warned the Zionist state not to get involved in the conflict (as it secretly got involved in 1981 when it demolished Iraq's nuclear facilities at Osirak) to avoid the Muslim reactions at this stage of the war. Israel followed the US war strategy.<sup>103</sup> While these were happening in late 1987, the Iran-US military conflict took a new turn in early 1988 as mentioned above. Now, a month after the US Operation Praying Mantis which factually crippled the Iranian Navy, one of the US Navy's most technologically-advanced cruisers, the *USS Vincennes* entered Iranian waters from international waters and then on July 3, 1988 shot down an Iranian civilian airliner Iran Air Flight 655, a commercial flight boarding 290 passengers, which was flying over Iranian airspace. The US shooting killed all passengers including 66 children. The downing of the passenger plane caused international consternation and greatly embarrassed the Ronald Reagan administration. However, the US said and persisted in saying that this was an accident which sounds factually less convincing.<sup>104</sup> In fact, the US intentionally and purposefully shot down the Iranian airliner to force Iran to accept UNSC Resolution 598 which was passed by the UNSC on July 20, 1987. Iran soon realized its position vis-à-vis the Iran-Iraq War. After the July 3 incident, it had become clear to the Iranians and to their leaders that Iran was engaged in a direct war with the US, a war that Iran could not possibly win. Imam Khomeini realized that Iran could not prevail so long as the 'Great Satan' was working against the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this context, on July 18, 1988, Iran accepted UNSC Resolution 598 and agreed to a cease-fire which eventually brought an end to the eight-year-long war with Iraq. The US claimed Iran's acceptance of the ceasefire resolution as a success which had stemmed from its determination to stay in the course of the war and follow 'a firm and consistent policy' in the war.<sup>105</sup> Hence, there is no dispute that the US downing of Iran Air Flight 655 contributed to the end of the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>106</sup>

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102. Michael C. Hudson, 'To Play the Hegemon: ...', *op., cit.*, p. 329; Harvey P. Hall, *op., cit.*, pp. 5-15.

103. Efraim Karsh (ed.), *The Iran-Iraq War: Impact and Implications*, St. Martin's Press, Inc., USA, 1989, pp. 160-161.

104. Reese Erlich, *The Iran Agenda: The Real Story of U.S. Policy and the Middle East Crisis*, PoliPointPress, USA, 2007, p. 68.

105. Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: ...*, *op., cit.*, p. 251.

106. George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: ...*, *op., cit.*, p. 880.

### The Legacy of the US Policy

There is no doubt that the US policy towards the Iran-Iraq War has left a long-lasting legacy. The devastating war which lasted for long eight years as nightmares for both the Iranians and the Iraqis had been bloody and expensive and it left no winners but only losers. It cost 367,000 humans (262,000 Iranians and 105,000 Iraqis) and \$1,188 billion (Iran's war cost was \$627 billion and Iraq's \$561 billion).<sup>107</sup> Gholam Hossein Razi (1928-2013), former Professor Emeritus of the Department of Political Science at the University of Houston, stated in an article (published in December 1988) that it was anticipated that it would take Iran and Iraq until the year 2008 to return to where they were in 1980, if every man, woman, and child saves \$50,000 per annum to be devoted solely to rectifying the damage of the war.<sup>108</sup> This statement clearly shows the scale and intensity of the devastation of the war wherein neither Iran nor Iraq gained anything tangible from the eight years of warfare: they only suffered immense and large losses: humans, materials and environmental. Given this reality, the peoples of these two neighbouring countries began to nurse bitter memories of the war in the years that followed while their respective governments (as well as other Arab states and Israel) locked in an arms race of worrisome proportions speculating a future conflict between them. A scholar has expressly stated: "Neither Iran nor Iraq will be able to sweep their mutual animosity under the carpet after such bitter confrontation. Rather, one can expect both to retain a healthy skepticism of each other's intents and, for this reason, maintain significant military force on, or near, the front line. Both sides will have to assume that at some point in the future they may have to fight again."<sup>109</sup> Thus, by the end of the war, the US succeeded not only in estranging the Arab-Persian dispute and the Sunni-Shia conflict but also in diverting the military target of Iran and Iraq from Israel (or US interests in the region) to themselves. By the same token, by encouraging Iraq, the strong anti-Israeli leading Arab state, to engage militarily with Iran, the US virtually eliminated the possibility of another major Arab-Israeli war in the near future.

Historically, Iranians from the first day considered the Iraqi-initiated war as an American-imposed war on their country and they still blame the US for the eight-year blood bath which is not distant from the fact. The defeats and military debacles that Iran suffered in the Persian Gulf strengthened this Iranian perception.

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107. Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: ..., op., cit.*, pp. 250-251.

108. Gholam Hossein Razi, 'An Alternative Paradigm to State Rationality in Foreign Policy: Iran-Iraq War', *op., cit.*, pp. 700-701.

109. Geoffrey Kemp, 'The Arms Race after the Iran-Iraq War', in: *The Iran-Iraq War: Impact and Implications*, Efraim Karsh (ed.), St. Martin's Press, Inc., USA, 1989, p. 271.

Their leaders firmly believed that Iraqi attack had been instigated by the US as a way of weakening Islamic revolutionary Iran.<sup>110</sup> Thus the war experiences left Iran more anti-American than ever. Iranians saw beforehand how Washington delayed in adopting a resolution but did not criticize Iraq for initiating the attack on Iran once the war began. Then they closely noticed how the growing US-Iraq relations and their efforts acted against Tehran's interests during the war. The worst Iranian experience in the war was how emboldened by US support in the UNSC, Iraq employed CW numerous times during the war against the Iranian troops and civilians, most of whom perished instantly and others became crippled for life. The US first helped Iraq in the latter's use of CW more effectively by providing it with satellite imagery positions of Iranian troop and then turned a blind eye to Iraqi use of CW against Iranian troops. The US desired that the war should end in a stalemate—or even with an Iraqi victory, but under no circumstance an Iranian victory. Arguably, this is how the war ended. For this, the US time and again chose to close its eyes to the Iraqi use of CW on Iranians.<sup>111</sup> This “seeing-and-hearing-no-evil” attitude of the US to Saddam Hussein's misdeeds left a devastating legacy on the Iranian world view and this along with US hypocrisy only doubled the trouble: it increased anti-Americanism in Iran firmly grounded on anti-Iranian US policy in the 1980s. The net result of the US policy was also to make an Iranian victory increasingly untenable and after the shot down of Iran Air Flight 655 on July 3, 1988, there came a point when Iran seriously considered it prudent to cease the war. Iran, in this way, was deprived of victory by the US who first assisted Iraq with intelligence and weapons, then imposed worldwide arms embargo on Iran and finally got involved militarily with Iran. Resultantly, Iran and the US became arch enemies in the context of the Iran-Iraq War.

The US double-standard policy of supporting Iraq overtly and developing relations with Iran covertly to provide war materials during the war years also left an enduring negative impressions on the minds of the Iraqis or the Arabs in general and on the mind of Saddam Hussein in particular. Saddam's angry reaction to such contradictory US policy (which came to light on November 4, 1986 as stated above) was evident when an Iraqi aircraft hit the USS Stark with a missile on May 17, 1987 and killed 37 and wounded 21 American crews. Saddam Hussein also cemented his understanding of the US and started viewing ‘the Americans’ as the

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110. John W. Garver, *China and Iran: Ancient Partners in a Post-imperial World*, University of Washington Press, 2006, p. 69.

111. Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick (ed.), *Iran, Iraq and the Legacies of War, op., cit.*, p. 159.

‘conspiring bastards’.<sup>112</sup> Many in the Middle East even some US allies still hold the same view with regard to the US and its present policy in the region. Another important legacy of the US policy towards the Iran-Iraq War was that the US (and its Gulf allies) succeeded in ending the special relationship between Iraq and the Soviet Union.<sup>113</sup> It was due to the US policy the war ended with a face-saving victory for Saddam Hussein who declared a three-day holiday on August 9, 1988, to celebrate the ‘great victory’ in Iraq where his popularity soared. He was now seen by his countrymen as the national savior who had preserved the honour and territorial integrity of their homeland. Bolstered by a huge standing army after the war and a confident populace at home, Saddam Hussein turned his attention to such pan-Arab issues as the Palestinian-Israeli problem, projecting himself as someone on a par with the leaders of the more populous and strategic Egypt and the much larger and more affluent Saudi Arabia.<sup>114</sup> Such position of Saddam Hussein would soon increase US tension in the region.

### Conclusions

Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 as Washington’s vital ally, US foreign policy goals were based on the “holy trinity” of its interests in the Middle East: oil, Israel, and anti-communism and Washington successfully secured them prior to the end of the Cold War in 1991 through the projection of military power, diplomacy, aid, culture, education, espionage and subversion.<sup>115</sup> The US policy towards the Iran-Iraq War should be studied in light of these US policy considerations. Although after having been encouraged by the US, Saddam Hussein initiated the war, he did it with the purpose of a limited war. Therefore, since 1981 he was seen to propose a ceasefire on several occasions.<sup>116</sup> But the US had other things in mind and pursued a policy to supply arms to Iran covertly, while assisted Iraq actively and openly. This US policy prolonged the war which in turn resulted in the containment and destruction of the military might of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saddam’s Iraq. This benefited the US in two ways: Israel became secured and the flow of oil remained undisturbed. While taking the advantage of the war, the US cemented its position in the Persian Gulf which in fact served another US

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112. Hal Brands and David Palkki, “‘Conspiring Bastards’: Saddam Hussein’s Strategic View of the United States”, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 36, No. 3, June 2012, p. 626.

113. Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

114. *Ibid.*, pp. 248-249, 265-266.

115. Michael C. Hudson, ‘To Play the Hegemon: ...’, *op. cit.*, p. 329; Harvey P. Hall, *op. cit.*, pp.5-15.

116. Efraim Karsh (ed.), *The Iran-Iraq War: ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 259, 262.

objective: it prevented the Soviet expansion in the region. Given, the US and its ally Israel were major beneficiaries of the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>117</sup>

However, some pro-American and pro-Israeli historians and Middle East experts tried to argue that the decision to invade Iran was Saddam's, and the US was dragged into the war.<sup>118</sup> Of them, Kenneth M. Pollack asserted that the US involvement in encouraging and supporting Iraq in the war was "180 degrees from reality."<sup>119</sup> But consciously or unconsciously Pollack himself has made conflicting and ambiguous statements in his book entitled *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*. In the book, Pollack has mentioned that when the war began most American remained angry and frustrated at Tehran. Given, when Iran turned the tide of the war Washington provided Iraq with intelligence, military hardware and agricultural credits support by delisting Iraq from the countries that sponsor international terrorism. At one point the US tried to limit the support it provided Iraq.<sup>120</sup> He has gone on to state that "As part of the "tilt", the United States turned a blind eye to Iraq's various misdeeds" including the use of CW against Iranian troops and Iraq's Kurds.<sup>121</sup> Pollack's final assessment is that the US under the Reagan administration gradually increased its "involvement in the war to the point where, in the end, Washington's role became an important factor in Iran's defeat."<sup>122</sup> Therefore, Pollack's own statements clearly show that the US adopted a calculated policy before and during the Iran-Iraq War to contain revolutionary Iran. However, containing Iran does not mean that the US would welcome an Iraqi victory. Rather the US (and its ally Israel) viewed the victory of both warring parties as contrary to their interests. An Iranian victory would lead to the fall of Iraq, and the country would resume its old place as a regional powerhouse, and at the very least encourage anti-Western and anti-Israeli movements across the Middle East. Iran would also be able to link up with Syria through conquered Iraq, a country with a Shia majority which would be threatening to the US Arab allies in the region. Moreover, Western oil interests and tanker traffic would be sitting astride a strengthened Iran, a country which the US hated most since the hostage episode. Conversely, an outright Iraqi victory would also be harmful to US-Israeli

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117. *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 107.

118. Phebe Marr, *op. cit.*, p. 292. Historians like Barry Rubin, Brian Urquhart, Gary Sick, Kenneth M. Pollack and many more support this proposition.

119. Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: ..., op. cit.*, pp. 233-234.

120. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

121. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

interests in the region as Saddam Hussein could lay claim to the leadership of the Arab world and he was actually longing for that after Egypt's expulsion from the Arab League in 1978 (for Egypt's conclusion of the Camp David Accords). This would ultimately create a dangerous unified Arabian front against Israel and challenge US petro-economic interests in the Persian Gulf.<sup>123</sup>

Under these considerations, the US had everything to do with the Iran-Iraq War. The US overt policy of supporting Iraq and covert policy of supplying arms to Iran had been directed towards that end once the Iran-Iraq War began. Therefore, in line with giving encouragement to Saddam Hussein to wage a war against Iran, the US adopted a calculated policy to influence and manipulate the courses of the war until the end. This study finds that following the Palestinian uprising against Israel, the US government desperately and impatiently pressed for the ending of the war by directly involving in the war and by supporting actively Iraq but "without victor or vanquished".<sup>124</sup> The shooting down of Iran Air flight 655 over the Persian Gulf came in this background.<sup>125</sup> It is pertinent to state that prior to the incident, no one had a clear view of whether or how the Iran-Iraq War would end. The July 3, 1988 event brought Iran to the bargaining table and it soon agreed to cease the war by accepting the 598 resolution. This makes it easier to draw the conclusion that the US encouraged Saddam Hussein, Iran's enemy, to launch the eight-year bloody and devastating war, then set the conflict's trajectory and ultimately put an end to it at its discretion. Therefore, although it was Iraq, not Iran that began the war, the onset of the war and its prolongation for eight bloody years and its termination were of the making of the US policy.

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123. Kaveh Farrokh, *op. cit.*, p. 391.

124. Shireen T. Hunter, 'Post-Khomeini Iran', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 68, no. 5, Winter 1989, p. 146.

125. George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: ... op. cit.*, p. 880; Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (ed.), *The Foreign Policies of the Middle East States*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., USA, 2002, p. 299.

## The Image of *Vimala Devi*: A Classical Instance of Bengalis' Religious Evolution

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### Abstract

*Vimala Devi*, a quirky idol, is established in the Yamuna temple of *Jogir Ghopa* and worshipped by a marginal group of people (*Natha* yogis) in North Bengal (Bangladesh). It is merely an image of a tantric deity, but a *stupa* changed its identity by the tantric Buddhists who converted to a new syncretic faith, *Nathism*. The idol gives testimony about the evolution of Bengalis' religious life through ages, and consequently, styles itself a material instance of the cultural history of Bengal. The article attempts to analyze the significance of the image in history by using vernacular sources and by the elements collected personally from the field.

**Key words:** *Vimala Devi*, *JogirGhopa*, tantric Buddhists, *Natha* yogis, religious evolution, Charyapada writing, Ramavati.

### 1. Introduction

*Vimala Devi* is a unique example of the religious evolution of ancient Bengal. It witnesses Bengalis transformation, especially the conversion of the Buddhist community into the *Natha* cult. It also provides information about the tantric influence on Bengali life. Nevertheless, the idol fails to attract the proper attention of the researchers. As a result, there has not been adequate research on the subject.<sup>1</sup>In addition, there are no conservation and security arrangements maintained for the idol. The article aims to draw the attention of the concerned and determine the position of *Vimala Devi* in the cultural history of Bengal. It tries to explain the importance of *Vimala Devi* in the history of religious evolution in

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1 Notwithstanding a glorious role in the Bengali civilization, the Nathas are unable to draw the scholars' attention and accordingly failed to acquire the due position in the history of Bengal. Recently, scholars have tended to discuss the community that brings the issue to light. Some try to see the subject as an archaeological issue, while others limit what the community exercises. Their discussion confines the subject within nathas rites-rituals, worshipping method, and the esoteric yoga practices. Thus, most parts of the Nathas' culture and their glorious activities in the past remain unexplored.

Bengal. However, before turning to the main issue, it gives a brief sketch of the *Vimala Thana* at which the idol sits and the Natha community who worship it.

## 2. *Vimalathana* and the idol

The Vimala idol is seated in the Yamuna Temple at *Jogir Ghopa*<sup>2</sup> (yogis' cave), a religious and cultural center of the *Nathas*. The site belongs to PatnitalaUpazila under the Naogaon district of the Rajshahi division in Bangladesh. The Ghopa compound is a high-rise square on the west bank of *Gukshi Bill*, a dried stream of the great river Atrai. The *mouza* (village) of this site is Chalkbhavani<sup>3</sup> under the Amair Union Parisad.<sup>4</sup> It is about 13 km (8 miles) northwest of the historic *Sompura Vihara* (Paharpur)<sup>5</sup> and southwest of the Badal pillar inscription<sup>6</sup> of Mukundapur (Mangalbari).<sup>7</sup> It is about 110 and 35 km (northeast and northwest) respectively from Rajshahi (Rampur-Boalia) and Naogaon.<sup>8</sup> From any of these cities, one can come here (in the *Jogir Ghopa*) by the convenient road which is throughout metaled.

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2 Gofa is a Hindi word that means the cave. On the other hand, Ghopa is a Bengali dialect that means a dark place without light and air ventilation. Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah (ed.), *Bangladesher Anchalik Bhashar Abhidhan*, (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1973), p. 257; Md. Rezaul Karim gives a detailed description of the Jogir Ghopa. See, Md. Rezaul Karim, "Natha Sanskriti-Kendra Jogir Ghopar Aitihasik Gurutta", Asif Jamal Laskar and Dipankar Biswas (ed.), *Sanjog Sanslesh Samannay: Abahamaner Dakshin Asia*, (Kolkata: Book Space, 2019), pp. 463-484.

3 Apart from Jogir Ghopa, there are two more holy places of the Nathas in North Bengal. These are Gorkui in Dinajpur (Thakurgaon) and Jogir Bhaban in Bogra districts.

4 Alexander Cunningham mentions the site on the banks of the Yamuna River. The small (Yamuna) river flows along the eastern side of *Gukshi Beel*. At that time, perhaps the *Gukshi Beel* was called the flow of the Yamuna. However, this is the dried stream of the great river Atrai. See, Alexander Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India: Report of the Tour in Bihar and Bengal in 1879-80 from Patna to Sunargaon*, Vol. XV (hereafter *ASI*), (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1882), pp. 120-121.

5 *Sompura Vihara*, a famous monument of the Pala era, is situated here.

6 There is a Garuda pillar at Mangalbari under Dhamoirhat Upazila of Naogaon district. Name of the *mauza* is Mukundapur. The stone (black basalt) pillar, engraved with 29 lines of Sanskrit inscription, is commonly known as the Badal pillar inscription. It plays a significant role in writing the history of ancient Bengal, especially in the reconstruction of the history of the Pala Kings. In 1781, William Wilkins, the then resident of Badal factory, 'discovered' it in the marshy woods. For details, please see, Md. Rezaul Karim, "Mangal badir Badal Stambhalipi", *Institute of Bangladesh Studies Journal* (hereafter *JIBS*), Issue 24, March 2017.

7 *Ibid.*

8 It was, formerly, a sub-divisional head-quarter of Rajshahi district, but now a separate district town.

The *Jogir Ghopa* or *Jogir Gopha* (yogi's cave) is a narrow room (6 feet/1.81 meter width) at the south-eastern border on *the Vimala* compound considerably below the land level.<sup>9</sup> There is relatively high and flat ground surrounded by the walls. A two-stored building consists of three rooms, stands on the north side of this area that provides accommodation to the Yogis. A small newly-built temple located on the southwest side of this ground bearing no idol. There are two east-facing temples stands on the northern side of the yogis' residence. The northern one of them is a recent-built structure erected on the ancient ruins having no idol to worship. However, the southern of the temples is a very old structure. Francis Buchanan Hamilton<sup>10</sup> and Alexander Cunningham<sup>11</sup> mention it (the temple) in their writings and indicate it as the Yamuna temple.

The temple (Yamuna temple) is a square-shaped structure built with brick and lime and ornamented by using flower-carved terracotta plaques. Inside and outside of the

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9 Abul Kalam Mohammad Zakariya, the foremost archaeologist, says that initially, Jogir Ghopa was built a parallel to the ground level. However, later on, it went down the ground due to natural calamity. The half-sink room (the Ghopa) is the part of a brick structure equally low from the ground. Its western portion is slightly higher and parallel to the ground level. The roof and floor of the building remain flat and intact that disproves the disaster theory of the archaeologist (Zakaria). In 1897, a devastating earthquake attacked and collapsed many structures, but the Jogir Ghopa remained unchanged. Cunningham found it in the same condition during his inspection in 1879. Therefore, we can conclude that it was built in the same manner to meet the purpose what the builder wanted. See, Abul Kalam Mohammad Zakariya, *Bangladesher Pratna Sampad*, (Dhaka: Divya Prokash, 2011), 3rd Imp., 1st Pub. 1984, p. 283.

10 Francis Buchanan (1762-1829 AD) was employed as a doctor in the East India Company in 1794. He was later honored as a personal physician to Wellesley, the Governor-General (1798-1805). He was also a botanist. In 1817, he took over the charge of the Calcutta Botanical Garden as its superintendent. Gradually, he became a trustworthy civilian of the East India Company, and accordingly, after 1806, he took the responsibility of conducting statistical surveys of the Bengal Presidency. Though Buchanan failed to complete survey work in his long service time of seven years, he visited various districts of Bengal, especially Dinajpur and Rangpur. At that time, he came to the Jogir Ghopa. The narrative of his visit was published in 1833. See, Abu Imam, "Varendra Bhumir Pratna Charchar Itihas", Muha. Momtazur Rahman *et al.* (ed.), *Varendra Anchaler Itihas* (hereafter *VAI*), (Rajshahi: Office of the Divisional Commissioner, 1998), p. 509.

11 Alexander Cunningham was in charge of the Archaeological Survey of India and the first man who conducted the archaeological survey of Bengal in 1871-72 A.D. He came to Bengal for the second time in 1879-80, that was his last visit to the province. At that time (1879 AD), he visited the JogirGhopa and published his travel report in the *Archaeological Survey of India*. It contains a detailed description of the site (Jogir Ghopa). See, *ASI*, p. 121; Abu Imam, *Alexander Cunningham and the Beginnings of Indian Archaeology*, (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1966), p. 175.

structure are 49 and 225 square feet respectively (inside 7 feet and outside side 15 feet in length). Its wall is four feet in width. There is an altar on the western wall (inside) estimating one foot nine inches wide and two feet high from the floor. There is a dome (one foot nine inches in the scale) in the middle of the altar that contains an idol wrapped with a *saree* (cloth). According to the worshippers,<sup>12</sup> this is *Vimala Devi*. *Nathas* worship the deity regularly with flowers, leaves, milk, and banana. To honor the Devi, an annual festival (fair) is observed here in the month of *Chaitra* (in April), and the people from far and wide participate thereof. At the time of the fair, the worshippers change the old wearing of the image with a new one.

*Vimala Devi* is a semi-quadrilateral pillar made of sandstone. The four corner sides of its body are not the right angles but half-rounded circles that give the idol such a shape. The height and perimeter of the body are three feet and four inches, and three feet and six inches, respectively. The body meets a narrow rounded neck of the idol, estimated six inches in height and two feet two inches in the round, follows a grooved wheel, the head-crown on the top. The number of the groove is twenty. There is a seven inches' cone on the middle of the grooved wheel, gradually narrows to an end. Its upper portion is fragmented.

The head of the image is bifurcated from the body breaking into the neck. "The thieves break *Devi's* head in a night and take it away, but give it back in another night by falling into the anger of the goddess"- the worshippers claim. Such storytelling indicates *Vimala's* immense influence on *the Natha* community. Indeed, they believe in the power and dignity of their deity. However, the fact was probably different. The thieves stole it for its precious element, the valuable stone. The stone was not as money-yielding as they thought before but an ordinary one. Accordingly, the thieves became reluctant to it, changed their decision, and gave the head back. If they were frightened by the goddess, the *nathas* would identify and punish them for their hated project. But, expectedly, such an incident did not happen.

The body of the idol bears the images of Gautama Buddha. A little above the basement, four pictures of the Buddhists' Lord depict the four sides of the quadrilateral body. Buddha sits in the *mihrab*-shaped frames with a meditation mode. These frames are equal in size and estimated at 12 inches in length and five

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12 Earlier, *Sutra Nath* was the caretaker of the *Jogir Ghopa* and the preist of the *Vimala Devi*. After his death, currently, *Sekai Nath Mahanta* is in charge.

inches in width. They are equally high with width, up to five inches, and then narrow gradually to meet a junction of the top midpoints.

### 3. The worshippers

The *Vimala* worshippers follow *Nathism*, a faith, based on yoga introduced by Patanjali.<sup>13</sup> According to the mythological dictionary, yoga is the union of the universal spirit with an individual one.<sup>14</sup> Man can achieve the quality of this union through the exercise of meditation. Yoga is one of the six-philosophies of the Hindus, tends to realize the truth by concentrating mind with absolute attention, and connects directly with the supreme spirit. Ramai Pandit, an ancient writer observes, yoga is generally various esotery processes of attaining *Samadhi* by awakening the *Parama Shakti* (the supreme power) of the body through practicing many rituals and *mantras* based upon the physique.<sup>15</sup> This religious-philosophical system has been prevalent in India since ancient times, even in the pre-Aryan era. The interpretation of the *Bratyastrotya* of AtharvaVeda indicates that yoga was closely related to *Bratyadharmā*.<sup>16</sup> It (yoga) was also exercised in Bengal and practiced by the yogi communities like the *Natha*.<sup>17</sup>

13 Nerves play a substantial role in this method. The actions of nerves and the technique to control them are prominent features of the Yoga philosophy. According to it, there are three controlling nerves in the human body called *Īṅgalā*, *Piṅgalā*, and *Suṣumnā*. *Īṅgalā* and *Piṅgalā* represent the sun and moon and are the flows of Ganga and Yamuna. On the other hand, *Suṣumnā* flows between God and Satan. These three nerves meet together at a point that the Yogis consider the holy confluence of the three rivers. Other significant nerves are *Gandhari*, *Kuhu*, *Hastijihva*, *Amalbhūsa*, *Shāṅkhūnī* etc. The Yogis perform yoga and other esoteric practices to get systematically rid of them. See, Syed Sultan, "Gyan-Pradeep", manuscript kept at Dhaka University, Fol. No. 9B; cited in, Momtazur Rahman Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal*, (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1965), pp. 205-208.

14 Sudhir Chandra Sarkar (ed.), *Pauranik Abhidhan*, (Kolkata: M.C. Sarkar and Sons Pvt. Ltd., 1380 B. S.), 3rd ed., 1st Pub. 1365 B. S., p. 587.

15 Bhakty Madhav Chattopadhyay (ed.), *Ramai Pandit Birachita Shunnyapurana*, (Kolkata: Pharma KLM Pvt. Ltd., 1977), p. 55; Body is the all in all in this faith and accordingly, men can achieve success to enhance the quality of their body through practicing yoga. Chandika (Durga), the female deity and wife of the Shiva says to her mother Menka, "উর্কে স্বর্গ মধ্যে মর্ত্য পাতাল অধেতে। স্বর্গে বসে পঞ্চতীর্থ বারানসী ভাতে।। ... উর্ক-যন্ত্রে বনপথে আছয়ে কৈলাশ। নাসিকা সংযোগে পুরী দ্বারিকা প্রকাশ।।... যোনী কীটমতপ্রায় অগ্নি আছে চক্ষে। যথা অগ্নি তথা জল দেখিবা প্রত্যক্ষে।। "Panchatirtha", *Nigama Saptaka*, Shree Prafullacharan Chakravarti, *Nathdharma O Sahitaya*, (Jalpaiguri: Prafullacharan Chakravarti, 1955), pp. 43-44.

16 The literal meaning of the word *Bratya* is fallen or uncultured. Niharranjan Ray observes that the Vedic Aryans looked down upon the Alpino-Dinaric races in eastern India who did not follow Veda. Accordingly, they called them *Bratty*, the uncultured. The people of this country and their faiths in the Pre-Aryan era are called *Bratayas*. See, Niharranjan

When does yoga culture launch in Bengali society? It is a question difficult to answer. However, we can assert that *Nathism* was in progress during the *Pala-Chandra* regime.<sup>18</sup> Propagation of the religion started from the end of the *Pala* rule and flourished by the 14th century A.D.<sup>19</sup> How *Nathism* spread over the Bengali society is yet to be known. However, it is clear that the Buddhist and Hindu tantric converted into the faith and nourished it.

Mahayana Buddhism spread widely in Bengal by the backing of the rulers, and in the *pala* era, the religion became a common faith of the country.<sup>20</sup> From the very beginning, the religion (Mahayana Buddhism) was influenced by traditional beliefs and the existing faiths, Ajivikaism and Jainism,<sup>21</sup> and eventually became a syncretic faith in practice. In the eighth and ninth centuries A.D., the tantric meditation system influenced the followers of this faith. Esoteric *Sadhana*, ethics, and worship became popular among the Buddhists that eventually split them into *Mantrayana*,

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Ray, *Bangaleer Itihas, Adiparva*, (Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 1407 B.S.), 3rd ed., 1st Pub. 1356 B.S., p. 52.

- 17 Abul Kalam Mohammad Zakariya (ed.), *Kavi Shukur Mahmud Birachita Gupichandrer Sannyas*, (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1974), p. eighty two.
- 18 AKM Zakariya, the foremost archaeologist, considers Nathism a faith derived from Buddhism. According to him, the evolution of Buddhism in Bengal led to form a new religion, Nathism, introduced by Meennatha. On the other hand, Kalyani Mallick claims the faith as a branch of Hinduism. See, Abul Kalam Mohammad Zakariya (ed.), *Gupichandre rSannyas, op.cit.*, p. eighty-three; Kalyani Mallick, *Nathsampradaer Itihas, Darshan O Sadhan Pranali*, (Kolkata: University of Calcutta, 1950), p. 17.
- 19 Niharranjan Ray, *op.cit.*, p. 530.
- 20 The Mahasthangarh inscription mentions *Chhabbagia Bhikshus* (six sectioned monks) that gives testimony of the existence of Buddhism in Bengal two hundred years ago. The spread of the religion began in the country in the fourth century A.D., when Ashoka, the great Buddhist emperor, occupied Bengal. However, during the reign of Shashanka, a Brahminist ruler, the faith was subsided to a great extent. Subsequently, the religion spread adequately by the patronage of the Pala kings, the Buddhists. See, Abul Kalam Mohammad Zakariya (ed.), *Gupichandrer Sannyas, op.cit.*, p. 81.
- 21 Makkhali Gosala established Ajivikaism in the sixth century B.C. The *Bhagavati Sutra*, contemporary evidence testifies that Gosala considered himself the twenty-fourth *Tirthankara* of the *Avasarpini* (current) age. However, the religion was an ancient faith before Gosala. Contemporary sources mention several names of its propagators (i.e., Nanda Vaccha and Kisa Sankicca). Nevertheless, Gosala was eminent among them, and he was the man by whom the faith took a firm footed position in India. On the other hand, Mahavira is the proponent of Jainism and was his (Gosalas) contemporary and friend. For a detailed discussion on the influence of these religions in Bengal please see, A. L. Basham. *History and Doctrines of the Ajivikas: A Vanished Indian Religion*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Private Ltd., 2002). 2<sup>nd</sup> reprint, 1<sup>st</sup> Pub. 1951, pp. 27-50; Niharranjan Ray, *op.cit.*, pp. 493-494 and 501-505.

*Vajrayana*, *Kalachakrayana*, and other communities (sects).<sup>22</sup> The *Sahajayani* or *Sahajiya*, one of the branches of the *Vajrayana* community, is strongly attracted to the esoteric practices and denied the fundamental beliefs of Buddhism. Even though they rejected the existence of worldly and post-world Buddha, abandoned the modesty and deity of the *Vajrayana*,<sup>23</sup> and became assertive to the *kaya sadhana* and *hathayoga*.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, a resemblance with *Nathism* was created that led *Sahajiyas* to put trust in *Nathism*. They converted into the faith, joined the *natha* community, and eventually merged therein.

Brahminical Hinduism, on the other hand, had several branches. The followers, consequently, split themselves into Shaivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism, etc.<sup>25</sup> Likewise the tantric Buddhists, a similar change was taking place in the religious life of the Hindu communities. They started a culture of esoteric *Sadhana* with the Gemini and became ardent to the *hatha* yoga. They also adopted the new faith and merged in the *Natha* community.

The *Nathas* believe in *Mukti (nirvana)*, what a *man* could achieve through exercising yoga.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, they practice yoga and are called for this by the

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22 Niharranjan Ray, *op.cit.*, pp. 525-529.

23 The *Sahajiyas* believe in Sahajism that directs the easy way to learn the Truth. The philosophy, contrary to existentialism, denies the existence of any deity or even the universe.

24 For details of the *hatha* yoga, please see, Sahajanandachintamonisayataramayagindra, *Hathayogaprodipika* (ed. Shree Maheshchandra Paul), (Kolkata: Nirapeksha Dharmasancharani Sabha, 1810 *Shak*); Surendramohan Bhattacharya (tr.), *Hathayoga-Sadhan Ba Hatha-Dipika*, (Kolkata: Paul Brothers and Co., n.d.) 4th ed.

25 The Hindus in Varendra divided themselves into three groups, i.e., Vedic, Puranic, and Tantric. The followers of the Vedas (four Vedas) were called Vedic. The Hindus who followed the mythological sculptures, the eighteen Puranas, were the Puranic. The communities, believing various explanations of the religious doctrines, were identified as tantric. It is mentionable that the Varendra, at this time, was dominated by the tantric Hindus. The Hindus, again, were divided according to their deity into three communities, i.e., the Shaivyas, the Shaktas, and the Vaisnavides. The Shaivas worshipped Shiva, the suppressor of the naughty image of the *Bhagawan* (God), while Vaisnavides worshipped its Vishnu image of love and affection. Shaktas, on the other hand, provided prayer to the female deities, bearing fertility and strength. Generally, the Shaiva worshipped Shiva or Shiva Lingam. The Shaktas prayed to the mother goddesses, i.e., Kali, Durga, Manasha, etc., and the Vaisnavides worshipped Vishnu and considering Krishna, the Hero of Mahabharata, as an incarnation of the Vishnu. They usually did not involve in idolatry. AKM Yaqub Ali, *Aspects of Society and Culture of the Varendra, 1200-1576 A. D.*, (Rajshahi: M Sajjadur Rahim, 1998), pp. 188-194; Momtazur Rahman Tarafdar, *op.cit.*, pp. 319-320; AKM Yaqub Ali, "Varendra Anchaler Dharmacharcha: Ekti Aitihasik Parjalachana", *VAI*, pp. 188-189.

26 In an *Agama (Haramala)* text, Shiva states to his wife, Durga about how immortality could be achieved. "শিবে বলে স্নান দেবী কহি যত যোগ। ব্রহ্মজ্ঞান ভাবিলে না থাকে মৃত্যুরোগ।। সমানে পালিবা

yogis. They are tantric and belong to Shaivism, whose sole deity is the Shiva, Suppressor of the nauty. The prime objective of the *nathas* is to make themselves immortal like their Lord (Shiva).<sup>27</sup> It is possible to get rid of the body if it is nourished in a specific yoga-tantric system to unite with the Shiva, they believe. Like Shiva, they hold coils, made of stone, *Belwar*, or *Gandhara* peaks, with holes, in their ears, and for this, they are also called *Kanfata* yogis.<sup>28</sup> They are *Darshani* yogis since some call the coil- *Darshan*.<sup>29</sup> The *nathas* receive the *darshan* during their initiation and believe it as the Shiva's ornament. They adorn with *Sali* of the *Wourna* thread, the loop around the neck that bears *nada* (a black object of two or three fingers in length), and wear with the saffron clothes.<sup>30</sup> They have long and messy hairs on their heads and use ash to polish their body, and they sketch *Tri-Pundra* on the foreheads by using *Vibhuti*.<sup>31</sup> The yogis are indifferent in worldly affairs. Usually, they do not get married, travel freely, stay in the various temples and worship Shiva as their deity.

According to the yogis' belief, Shiva himself preached *Nathism*, and *Matsendranatha* reproached it when the faith is about to disappear in the world. Gorakhanatha, another great saint and the disciple of Matsyendra, re-established it.<sup>32</sup> He was supposed to be derived from Shiva's wheezing hair, while the master created from the fish. *Agama Samhita*, ancient literature mentions that the eleventh *Rudra* and his wife emerged from the God, and Adinatha (Shiva), Menanatha (*Matsendranatha*), Gorakkhanatha, and others were born in their clan. As the descendants of Adinath (Shiva), they are not *dases* (slaves) but *Nathas*.<sup>33</sup>

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সব করিয়া যতন। ভ্রম না হইবা ইহাকে দৃঢ় কর মন।।” On the other hand, in a *Nigama (Nigama Saptaka)*, the Devi describes the detailed of the yoga practice to her mother, and dictates, “জানুতে রাখিয়া হস্ত চাপি ব্রহ্মপুর। তজ্জনি অঙ্গুলি প্রমাণ ক্ষীণ হইব কর।। তাহা না হইয়া যদি বৃদ্ধ হয় হাত। বৎসরের মধ্যে মৃত্যু কহিলাম তুমাত।। “Abataranika”, *Haramala*; “Kalantar Bichar”, *Nigama Saptaka*, Shree Prafullacharan Chakravarti, *op.cit.*, pp. 4, 50.

27 *Nigama* texts also indicate the method of achieving immortality. Yogashankarer Kalanta Bichar states, “অনলে পুড়িলে আগম মনে কাটে মলা। অমর হইবে কন্দ না ছুটিবে কলা।। চারি চন্দ্র ভেদ যদি বোড়মনে করে। না রহিবে রোগপীড়া মৃত্যু পলায় ডরে।।” “Yogshankarer Kalanta Bichar”, Shree Prafullacharan Chakravarti, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

28 The word *Kanfata* derives from Hindi origin. The word *Kan* means ear, and the *Fata* indicates the hole. Therefore, *Kanfata* mentions the men who hole their ears. See, Akshay Kumar Datta, *Bharatbarshia Upasak Sampradai*, (Kolkata: Sanskrit Press Depository, 1888), p. 138.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

32 Kalyani Mallik, *Nathpontho*, (Kolkata: Viswabharati Granthalai, 1357 B.S.), p. 4.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Although Shiva Himself propagates Nathism, the faith (*Nathism*) does not draw the proper attention of the people and to spread adequately in India, at least, in comparison with other religions. The number of *nathas* in the country is very few. According to the Census 1901, the number of *Natha* yogis in the sub-continent (India) is only 45,463.<sup>34</sup> The census report does not provide the state-wise distribution of the *nathas* in India and their location in Bengal. The subsequent surveys are also almost silent on this issue. On the other hand, Bangladesh censuses include them in the Hindu castes. Therefore, it is difficult to comment on how many *nathas* reside in Bengal and in which areas they inhabit. However, we can assert, many *nathas* live in the Chittagong division of Bangladesh. Elsewhere, especially in North Bengal, they are a marginal community. However, a few *natha* reside in the district of Naogaon, particularly in the adjoining areas of the *Jogi rGhopa*.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4. Antiquity of *Vimala Thana*

Vimala compound is a place of antiquity. The ruins of the ancient buildings can be seen here under the new-built structures.<sup>36</sup> According to Francis Buchanan Hamilton, the residence of Devapala,<sup>37</sup> a famous Pala ruler of ancient Bengal, was situated here. The Vimala Temple (Yamuna temple)<sup>38</sup> was erected on the brick mound, predominantly ruins of the structure (King's house).<sup>39</sup> The great orientalist (Buchanan Hamilton) conveys the information collected from the yogis. He did not, probably, verify it in any other way since he said nothing more about it.

Sandhakara Nandin,<sup>40</sup> an ancient writer, mentions Varendra as the *Janaka-Bhu* (fatherland) of the Pala kings.<sup>41</sup> Recently, some researchers try to indicate

34 Kalyani Mallik, *Nathsampradaer Itihas*, *op.cit.*, p. 6; *Nathpantha*, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

35 At present, only fourteen *Natha* families live in the adjoining areas of the *Ghopa*.

36 Abul Kalam Mohammad Zakariya, *Bangladesher Pratinasampad*, *op.cit.*, p. 283.

37 He was the grandson of Gopala, the founder of the Pala dynasty, and the son of the famous Pala Emperor Dharmapala. He ruled the country in the first half of the ninth century (approximately 821-861 A.D.).

38 The forewritten temple containing the idol of Vimala Devi was probably known as the Yamuna Temple.

39 Buchanan writes, "The temple stands upon a large space of ground, that is covered and raised above the level of the adjacent country by bricks, and which contains several tanks. The Yogis say, that these are the remains of the house of Devpal, a prince who lived five or six hundred years ago", Doctor Francis Buchanan (Hamilton), *Geographical, Statistical, and Historical Description of the District or Zila of Dinajpur, in the Province, or Soubah, of Bengal*, (Calcutta: The Baptist Mission Press, 1833), p. 55; Montgomery Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India*, Vol. 2 (London: William Allen and Co., 1838), p. 668-69.

40 Sandhyakara Nandin is the author of the oldest book that deals with Bengal history, especially, history of the Pala ruler. His father, Prajapati Nandin, was the

Amair, a neighboring village of Jogir Ghopa, as Ramavati, one of the capitals of the Pala dynasty.<sup>42</sup> Apart from this, there are many historical monuments within a few miles of Jogir Ghopa. Sompura Vihara (Paharpur), Jagaddala Mahavihara, the Badal pillar inscription, and Dibor Dighipilar are notable among the pala monuments. In addition, there is a royal residence in Jogir Ghopa. Therefore, considering Amair a capital is not an imagination. Probably, the pala rulers established capital here (Amair) and devoted themselves to pray in the Jogir Ghopa, a nearby holy place. However, Abul Kalam Mohammad Zakariya, a leading archaeologist, disagrees with this view. The house of a mighty king like Devapala will be, expectedly, in a big city. But, in the Jogir Ghopa or its surroundings, no existence of such an urban locality is discovered yet- he argues. There are ancient brick piles and mounds in the Jogir Ghopa compound and its surroundings, especially in Amair. An adequate excavation could discover a new urban civilization. Nevertheless, before having findings from the site and conducting an extensive study, we should not conclude.

In the 1870s, Jogir Ghopa was called *Raja Devpala Ka Chhatri*.<sup>43</sup> Chhatri is the structure built on the holy ashes of an important person. According to Cunningham, a foremost archaeologist, the Yamuna Temple of Jogir Ghopa (Vimala Temple) was erected on Devapala's ashes. He asserts, the king died, and his dead body was cremated here through a burial ceremony.<sup>44</sup> It is needless to say that the place was of immense importance. Otherwise, the influential ruler would not be interested in this place. Accordingly, he might not die in Jogir Ghopa, and the site would not experience any burial ceremony, and consequently, construction of a *Chhatri*.

Recently a scholar has claimed that Devpala used to be engaged alone in meditation in the Jogir Ghopa.<sup>45</sup> However, he does not exhibit any reliable evidence in favor of his statement. It is not unusual that the king was inspired to meditate and to worship his deity in this remote place. He might be a follower of

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'Sandhivigrahika' (minister of peace and war) of the Pala king, Rampala. See, R.C. Majumdar, *et al.*, (ed.), *The Ramacaritam of Sandhyakaranandin*, (Rajshahi: The Varendra Research Museum, 1939), p. vii.

41 "His (Rāmpāla's) beautiful father-land (Varendrī), decorated with houses as well as lines of furrows, was occupied by his enemy named Divya (Divokka), an (officer) sharing royal fortune, who rose to a high position, (but) who took to fraudulent practice as a vow.", R.C. Majumdar *et al.*, (ed.), *op.cit.*, V. 38B, p. 30.

42 Montgomery Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India* (London: William Allen and Co., 1838), p. 669.

43 *ASI*, p. 121.

44 *Ibid.*

45 Samar Paul, *Varendra Bhumir Itihas*, (Dhaka: Shobha Prakash, 2016), p. 96.

the well-known tantric ideology, and so that, engaged in meditation in this holy place. Devpala ruled Bengal (approximately) from 821 to 861 A.D.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, it is easy to assume that the Buddhist structures of *Vimala Thana* date back to the late eighth and the early ninth centuries A.D.

### 5. Legend of the *Devi*

According to a legend in the Natha community, a *Siddha Purusa* (Natha guru) introduced the worship of Vimala Devi, a local *Rajkanya* (princess). The saint presented her two consecrated sons- Laba and Kusha. He created them from *tusha* (rice husk) and *Chaul* (rice), respectively. Notwithstanding the benedictions of the *Siddha*, Vimala falls into a complicated situation. Society contemplated and looked her down upon the blessed sons having no paternal identity. The *Siddha* came to know the matter through his divine power and tried to restore the prestige of the princess. He, consequently, established an idol at the Jogir Ghopa and began to worship it. At that time, the saint announced that as long as the earth exists, the Devi will be getting worship with flowers, leaves, milk, and banana. Since then, the Nathas have been worshipping the Devi as one of the images of their deity.

It is difficult to say how the legend begins. Ramayana, the epic of ancient India, narrates a similar story, in where Sita also had two sons of the same names.<sup>47</sup> The story of religious literature was widely prevalent in traditional Hindu society. The legend also affected Nathas. They took the idea from there and tended to propagate a legendary tell in favor of their deity.

*Rajkanya Vimala* was to be a historical character either. Contemporary writers consider Amair, a village nearby Jogir Ghopa, as the Ramavati, one of the capitals of the Pala kings. In this region, the zamindar families were also called royal families.<sup>48</sup> Vimala Devi might be a member of the royal (zamindar) family who entrusted in tantrism, and *hatha* yoga came to the close companion of the

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46 Devpala was enthroned in 821 and died in 861 A.D. (approximately). Muhammad Abdur Rahim *et. al.*, *Bangladesher Itihas*, (Dhaka: Nawroz Kitabistan, 1998), 7th ed., 1st Pub. 1977, p. 56.

47 Chandra Mauli Mani, *Memorable Characters from the Ramayana and the Mahabharat*, (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2009), pp. 77-78.

48 In Bengal, several zamindars were called rajas, and in the locality, their subjects considered them royal personage. However, all of them were not coronated the title of the Raja by the authority. For a detailed description, please see Loke Nath Ghose. *The Modern History of the Indian Chiefs, Rajas, Zamindars, & co.: The Native Aristocracy and Gentry*. (Calcutta: J.N. Ghose and Co., 1881).

Nathaguru and subjected to his sexual aspiration. Consequently, she gave birth to two sons. The news of misdeeds spread quickly and became a much talked about topic. The issue affected the dignity of her family and threatened the influence of the guru on his followers. Under these circumstances, he invented a novel technique to get rid of the sinful act, introduced worshipping Vimala in the Jogir Ghopa, and propagated a story in favor of his novel project. His intention, probably, was to create a socio-psychological basis of the issue. The story circulated widely among the disciples and followers of the guru and eventually became a legend. The malicious guru became free from the fear of diminishing influence over his followers. At the same time, the princess (Vimala Devi) got rid of the social humiliation by taking an unexpected seat of the *Natha's* deity.

The immoral sexual practice of the Natha gurus was nothing new but a common phenomenon. Several pieces of evidence witness natha gurus' moral degradation. Even though, *Natha* literature itself gives testimony of this unethical practice of the saints.<sup>49</sup> In the natha literature, there are many tells of romantic stories of the gurus' unrestrained sexual life. Meena Natha, the pioneer of Nathism, forgot meditation practices and engaged in sexuality with sixteen hundred women surrounding him in *Kodli Shahar* (*Kodli* city). Krishnacharya (Kanupa), another natha saint, lost his life due to the love affair. Gavur Siddha (Chowrangee Natha) lost his limbs for having sex with his stepmother. The illicit relationship of Hariipa with Mayanamati is a well-known story of Natha literature. The literature claims that all instances happened for the curse of Durga, a female deity.<sup>50</sup> However, it is a strategy to emancipate natha saints from the blames. There was a widespread practice of unrestrained sexuality among Buddhist priests just before the disappearance of the faith (Buddhism) in Bengal. Initially, Natha gurus were not free from this sinful act. The women pursuing in the *kaya sadhana* were prevalent among the tantric since the very early times. During the Sena rule, the introduction of the *Devadasi*<sup>51</sup> system opened the way for uncontrolled sexuality in the name of

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49 Goraksha Natha, the foremost disciple of Meena Natha, tends to escape his *Guru* from Kodli-Shahar, states, “মোহা ভোলে পড়িয়াছে মীন মোহাসয়। কিরূপে আনিব তারে বড় লাগে ভয়।। ভোলেত গড়িল গুরু আপনা পাসরি। ভালে সে না পাইল মোরে সোলসত নারী।।” (Guru Meen falls into a great mistake. I am afraid, how can I bring him (from there)? Guru builds up his world on the fault. He does not get me for the sake of fate, but sixteen hundred women.), Seikh Faizulla, *Goraksha-Vijaya*, (ed. Munsif Abdul Karim Sahitya-Visharad), (Kolkata: Bangio Sahitya-Parisad Mandir, 1324 B.S.), p. 76.

50 Abul Kalam Mohammad Zakariya (ed.), *Gupichandrer Sanniyas*, *op.cit.*, p. 88

51 The girls reside in the temple and entertain the priests.

religious functioning. Natha yogis followed the path and indulged in sexual luxury. It is easy to assume that the son giving saint (Siddhapurusha) was an unknown Natha guru, indulging in irrational sexuality. On the other hand, Vimala Devi was a victim of his sexual lust. She becomes, eventually, a 'fortunate' and 'blessed' character in the history of Nathism.

As a human character, the existence of Vimala Devi should not be in the very ancient time. In the late 19th century, the Nathas worshipped the idol as a Brahma lingam. We do not find any other image of Vimala Devi. Even the oldest details do not provide such information. Thus, we can conclude that Vimala Devi is not an ancient character, as early as in the Pala era, but probably, daughter of a local zamindar known as the king (Raja) in his locality. Accordingly, the people considered Vimala Devi a princess (Rajkanya).

#### **6. Transformation of the *Devi***

In the early 19th century, Francis Buchanan Hamilton, an eminent civilian and orientalist, inspected Vimala *Thana* (Jogir Ghopa). He narrated a detailed account that mentioned the archaeological site as one of the Pala monuments. The Yamuna temple<sup>52</sup> of the Ghopa compound, a structure erected on the ruins of *Devpala's* house<sup>53</sup>- he asserted. Buchanan heard the information from the yogis and did not verify it in any other way. In addition, he does not mention whether there was an image of a deity inside the temple. On the other hand, Alexander Cunningham, the foremost archaeologist, observed that a four-faced Brahma Lingam was seated in the temple.<sup>54</sup> Currently, a quirky idol of Vimala Devi is established and worshipped in the Yamuna temple, which is presumably that very Brahma Lingam having four faces in its body. Scholars believe that the idol was primarily a Buddhist

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52 Perhaps the forewritten temple containing the idol of Vimala Devi was known as the Yamuna Temple.

53 Buchanan writes, "The temple in fact stands upon a large space of ground that is covered and raised above the level of the adjacent country by bricks, and which contains several tanks. The Yogis say, that these are the remains of the house of Devpal, a prince who lived five or six hundred years ago", Doctor Francis Buchanan (Hamilton), *op.cit.*, p. 55.

54 Cunningham mentions in his report, at that time, a Shiva Lingam was seated at the Ghopa. There was a tulsi plant on one side of its entrance, while a Trishul on the other side. In front of the Ghopa, there was a residential building to provide accommodation for the yogis. On the right-hand side, there were two temples. One of them had a common Shiva Lingam, while the other had a four-faced lingam, called the Brahma Linga. Outside the Ghopa, there was a Vishnu image (3 ft 7 inches in height), and next to it, there was a female image with a child lying on the bed. Cunningham imagines these two idols as the child Krishna and His mother. See, *ASI*, p. 121.

*stupa*,<sup>55</sup> transformed its identity from time to time and finally established itself as the Vimala Devi.<sup>56</sup>

When did the idol change its name? It is convenient to think that Vimala Devi transformed and changed her identity after the emergence of *Nathism*. Perhaps, it did not happen even at the very beginning of its preaching campaign. Initially, the idol was a Buddhist *stupa*. The Buddhists, who converted into Nathism, included it to the Natha deities immediately after their conversion. Matsyaendranatha,<sup>57</sup> a great

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- 55 Buddhists build stupas to preserve *Dhatus* (the remains of Gautam Buddha and his disciples) or Buddha and his disciples' memories. These two types of stupas are known as relic stupas and memorial stupas, respectively. Buddhists also built stupas in various significant institutions to fulfill desires that are called votive stupas. There are no signs of the first two categories (stupas) in Bangladesh. However, many of the last categories have been discovered, even though, in a single archaeological site. There are 132 votive stupas of different shapes (round, square, rectangular) in the Satyapir Vita in Paharpur. See, Abul Kalam Mohammad Zakariya, *BangladesherPratnatatya, op.cit.*, pp. 26 & 275.
- 56 Mokhlesur Rahman, a contemporary researcher, writes, "Stone fragments of a *caitya* pinnacle, placed one above the other, and completely covered with a saree are worshipped as the image of Vimala Devi. On each of the four faces at the base of this improvised structure, a Buddha image is visible." On the other hand, S K Sarwasaty, the foremost scholar, comments, "The only stone specimen of votive *stupa*, so far known in Bengal, is now enshrined at Jogi-gopha, and looks at first sight quite unlike a *stupa*. A close examination, however, reveals that it was probably an ultimate transformation of a hemispherical structure due to an excessive tendency towards elevation and elongation. Along with the multiplication of the different elements there was also a corresponding elevation of each component part, and here, even without the basement that is lost, we find that the drum and the dome each represents a high cylinder, their total height being more than three times the diameter at the bottom. The drum, as usual, is ornamented with four figures in niches, while the plain dome is surmounted by the *harmika*, not square but circular and ribbed on edge, just like the *amalaka-sila* of a temple. This is a peculiarity which is noticed here for the first time in case of *stupa* monument.", Mukhlesur Rahman, "The Archaeological Heritage of Rajshahi (Pre-muslim Period)", S.A. Akanda (ed.), *The District of Rajshahi: Its Past and Present*, (Rajshahi: Institute of Bangladesh Studies, 1983), p. 13; Ramesh Chandra Majumdar (ed.), *History of Bengal*, Vol. I, (Dhaka: Dhaka University, 1963), 2nd ed., 1st Published 1943, pp. 484-485.
- 57 According to the prevailing view, Matsendra Natha is the originator of Nathism. He is known as Meena Nath, Matsyendra Nath, Machsindra Nath, Meena Pada, Matsya Pada, Machsendra Pada, Mochatdar, Machlandi etc. Sometimes he is also called Adinath. According to the Hindu scriptures, Adinatha is another name of Shiva. There are three types of information about the birthplace of Matsyendra Natha. First, in the *Kauljgan Nirnai*, an ancient book indicates Matsyendra Natha as *Chandradeepvinirgata*. In ancient times Bakharganj district and its surrounding areas were called Chandradeep. Matsyendra Natha was born in this region. Secondly, the *Nityagnikatilaka*, a Buddhist book of the late 14th century, mentions the birthplace of Matsyendra in *Varanabangidesha*. Most of the scholars indicate the place in Bangladesh. Thirdly, according to Lama Taranath, the Tibetan historian, Matsyendra Natha was a resident of the Kamrupa in a fishermen clan. Lama Taranath's account, in comparison with the

preacher, introduced and propagated the faith, while Gorakshanatha,<sup>58</sup> another famous saint, established it. Both the preachers were contemporary, and the former was the master, while the latter was his disciple. Dinesh Chandra Sen, a notable scholar, mentions that the preachers (Matsyaendra Natha and Goraksha Natha) existed in the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. According to him, Goraksha Natha propagated the religion in the late tenth century or the beginning of the eleventh century.<sup>59</sup> Before him, Nathism, even though, was not a well-known faith. Therefore, we can conclude that the Buddhists converted into Nathism in the eleventh century A.D., at best in its beginning.

The journey of Buddhism in India began with the advent of Gautam Buddha in the sixth century B.C.<sup>60</sup> The religion expanded extensively in the next two to three centuries, and gradually, the atheist philosophy became an all India faith. However, it did not influence equally all parts of the sub-continent. It had an immense

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former two sources, is lately (in the seventeenth century A.D.) composed and less related to Nathism and the natha community. Therefore, it is logical to consider that Matsyendra was an inhabitant of Bangladesh. See, Abul Kalam Mohammad Zakariya, *Gupichandrer Sannyas, op.cit.*, p. 57.

58 Goraksha Natha is the most notable disciple of MatsyendraNatha. At first, he was a Vajrayana Buddhist. Matsyendra converted him into Nathism. Subsequently, he became a prominent preacher and establisher of the religion. Nevertheless, the natha literature does not mention the birthplace of Goraksha Natha. The Nathas consider him as the son of Shiva. Perhaps, natha sources are silent about his birth and birth place for this reason. There are many Sanskrit and Hindi verses composed by Goraksha Natha. Indeed, Goraksha Natha is the pioneer of Hindi prose. However, we could not discover any of his Bengali writings yet. Therefore, we cannot assert that Goraksha Nath was a Bengali. A proverb suggests that he belonged to the Punjab region. According to Dinesh Chandra Sen, an eminent scholar, he was born at Jalandhara in Punjab. However, evidence proves that he stayed and propagated his doctrine in Bengal. Maynamati, the wife of a Bengali King (Gopi Chandra), was his disciple. Hariipa (Jalandhara Natha) was also his disciple. Jogir Ghopa, Jogir Bhaban, Gorkui, etc., are the places that exhibit the memory of Goraksha Natha. The natha believe that there is a tomb of Goraksha Natha at Gorkui in Dinajpur. See, Shree Kalyani Mullik, *Nath Sampradaer Itihas, op.cit.*, pp. 43-44; DineshchandraSen, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

59 *Ibid.*

60 The life of Gaumat Buddha is the most ancient event of the Indian history that can be determined almost accurately. Buddha died, at the age of 80, about 486 years before Christ. However, there are a prevailing view in the Sinhali Buddhists that he died in 543 BC is no much different. Therefore, it is convenient to assume that Buddhism was first propagated in India in the sixth century BC, and within two to three following centuries it became a dominating faith in the whole of India. Jainism and anti-Vedic six-philosophies were also established during this period that led the history to the end of the Vedic era. Rameshchandra Majumdar, *Hindu Sabhyata O Sanskritir Kramabikash*, (Kolkata: KolikataVisyavidyaloy, 1977), p. 24.

influence over the eastern part of the country.<sup>61</sup> According to a Buddhist legend, Gautam Buddha came to Bengal at the invitation of Sumagadha, the daughter of Aunathapindaka, and propagated Buddhism in Pundravardhana.<sup>62</sup> Other Buddhist sources also claim that Buddha visited and lived in Bengal for quite some time. According to Samyutta Nikaya,<sup>63</sup> Buddha lived for few days at Setaka in the Sumha (West Bengal).<sup>64</sup> Therefore, we can assume that Buddhism spread in Bengal during the lifetime of the Gautama Buddha. However, like India, Buddhism did not influence all parts of the country (Bengal). Sumha and Varendra (North and Northwest Bengal) were more affected by the religion, whereas the rest of the country (especially South-East Bengal) remained less influenced. Huen Tsang, the renowned Chinese traveler, came to Bengal and visited Pundravardhana, Vanga, Samatata, and Karnasuvarna after a century of the advent of Buddha. He stayed three months in Pundravardhana and while spent only seven days visiting the other three places.<sup>65</sup> There was an immense influence of Buddhism in the Pundravardhana that led the traveler (Huen Tsang) to stay there for a long time.

In the pala era, Buddhism spread widely in the country under the patronage of the Pala kings. At this time, many new doctrines infiltrated the religion (Buddhism). As a result, the followers of the faith divide into several yanas (communities), i.e., the Vajrayana, Kalachakrayana, Mantrayana, etc. These communities, again, spitted themselves into different branches through which the Sahajayani or Sahajiya community emerged in the last days of Buddhism in Bengal.<sup>66</sup> The division was

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61 Miss Puspa Niyogi, "Aspects of Buddhism in Ancient Bengal", unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Calcutta, 1977, p. 2.

62 *Ibid.*

63 The Samyutta Nikaya is the third division of Sutta Pitaka containing 2,889 suttas in five vaggas (sections). Each of them is divided into samyuttas what they contain. The samyuttas are named according to contend. For instance, Kosala Samyutta (in the SagathaVagga) contains suttas concerning King Pasenadi of Kosala and Vedana Samyutta (in the SalayatanaVagga) deals with suttas regarding the feeling (vedana). Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000) is an excellent translation of the Samyutta Nikaya. See, Bhikkhu Thanissaro. "Samyutta Nikaya." *Epitome of the Pali Canon*, (2012): 120. p. 1.

64 See, BenoychandraSen, *Some Historical Aspects of the Inscriptions of Bengal*, (Kolkata: Calcutta University, 1942), p. 37ff; Rajendralal Mitra, *Nepalese Buddhist Literature*, (Calcutta: 1882), reprint, p. 237; cited in Miss Puspa Niyogi, *op.cit.*, pp. 2-3.

65 *Ibid.*

66 Haraprasad Shastri indicates, in the Nineteenth Century A. D., Luepada propagated the *Sahaja-Dharma* (the easy religion) in the Buddhist folk. See, Shree Haraprasad Shastri (ed.), *Hajar Bachharer Puran Bangala Bhashay Bauddhagan O Doha (Charyacharyabinishchay, Sarojbajrer Dohakosh, Kahnapader Dohakosh O Dakarnob,*

happened for the tantrism that influenced the Buddhists and led them to be confident in various esoteric practices and yogas.<sup>67</sup> The resemblance between the Buddhists with the Nathas and led them to convert to Nathism. They gradually disappeared into the new community by losing their identity.

However, one of the main reasons for the abolition of Buddhism in Bengal is the intolerant religious policy proceeded by the *Sena* rulers. The *Sena* kings adopted an emphatic policy towards the subjects that led the Buddhists to flee from the country or leave the existing faith by converting themselves into Brahmanism or other religions acceptable to them.<sup>68</sup> Unlike Brahmanism, Nathism had many rituals similar to what they used to practice. Thus the faith was a better alternative for the tantric Buddhists to adopt it, and consequently, they converted to Nathism. The impact followed the next phase of history. Most of the people in Bengal were followers of Nathism during the reign of LakshmanaSena, the last ruler of the Hindu era.<sup>69</sup> The converts transformed their temples and deities in favor of their new faith. Accordingly, they shifted their former worshipping place into a Natha Sadhana Kendra (center for practicing Nathism) and the stupa, to which they have the utmost respect, into a Shiva Lingam. The converts absorbed the idol with proper dignity in the new ground of Nathism instead of neglecting and rejecting it. They transformed it again into the Vimala Devi with the evolution of the faith and the situations required.

Reutilization of images of the left behind faith by the convert was not unique in the history of Bengal. Such instances were observed in many parts of the country. We can mention, for example, Zafar Khan's mosque<sup>70</sup> at Triveni, a prominent Hindu

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(Kolkata: Bangio Shahitya Parishad, 1323 B. S.), p. 16; Rameshchandra Majumdar, *Hindu Sabhyata O Sanskritir Kramavikash*, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

67 Luepada states in the Charyacharyabinishchay, “কাসা তরুণৰ পঞ্চবি ডাল। চঞ্চল চীত্ৰ পইঠো কাল।। দিই কৰিঅ মহাসূহ পৰিমাণ। লুই ভণই গুৰু পুচ্ছঅ জাণ।।” (body is a tree, it has five branches. Time is entered with an unstable mind; Lue says, weigh the amount of happiness, what is this? Ask the *Guru*. So what, whatever the *Samadhi* are? Through practicing these *samadhis* you must die by happiness or by the sorrow. Bring to the base of the zero party by the bonding of rhythm and the maturity of the ‘Karan’. Lue says, according to the discussion of the *Pandit*, I have observed that my deity is seated on the Dhaman and Chaman, Ali and Kali, respectively.”), Shree HaraprasadShastri (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 14-15.

68 AbulKalam Mohammad Zakariya, *GupichandrerSnniyas*, *op.cit.*, p. eighty six.

69 *Ibid.*, p. eighty seven.

70 “Zafar Khan’s mosque, on which the inscription is carved is built out of the materials of old ruined Hindu temples, as several mutilated figures of Hindu deities are found in the fragments of stone utilised in the mosque.”, Shamsuddin Ahmed (tr. and ed.), *Inscription of Bengal*, Vol. IV (Rajshahi: Varendra Research Museum, 1960), p. 19.

Cultural Center. The Muslim soldier constructed here a Mosque in 1290 by using materials from the ruins of a Hindu temple.<sup>71</sup> He engraved an inscription on a fragmented Hindu idol (the will for establishing a school) and sat it on the body of the mosque minaret. It titles Zafar Khan as a destroyer of the kafirs (the stubborn disbelievers). However, it is easy to identify the issue as the conqueror's fanatic zeal on the faith of the conquered community.<sup>72</sup> But expectedly, a question raises to the claim. If the Khan abolished Hindu images with disgrace and dishonor for his fanatic ideology, why did he reuse them in a holy structure like a mosque? The lack of construction materials, especially the unavailability of stones in Bengal, led him to use these materials again. The new religion did not stand in the way, but coordinating cultural harmony adopted them. At Mahisantosh<sup>73</sup> the newly converted Muslims built a mosque using idols of Hindu-Buddhists deities due to the constraint of construction materials.<sup>74</sup> The new converts of Nathism used the stupa (made of stone) of the erstwhile temple to build a new worshipping yard by converting it into a Shiva Lingam. The Buddhists, indeed, deviated slightly from the old faith (tantric Buddhism) and converted to a similar one. Expectedly they shift the stupa to their new faith. Over time, they changed it again to the Vimala Devi, assumably, after the seventies of the nineteenth century. They, since, worshipped it as a Shiva Lingam in the 1870s, during the inspection of Cunningham.

71 Richard M. Eaton, *Islamer Abbhudo O Bangladesh, 1204-1760* (tr. Hasan Sharif), (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation, 2008), pp. 61-62.

72 The plate contains sixteen lines inscriptions. Nine to twelve lines state-

9. ... تبتدى ظفر خان هز بر العنابس

10. بفلد بلاد الهند فى كل ركضة- و تشييد بناء الخير بعد الدوار س

11. و قلع علوج الكفر بالسيف والقنا- و بذل كنوز المال في كل باس

12. و احنا بقا ع الشرع من بعد ميته- بتلخيص برهان العلوم الفراسيس

(9. ... ..Zafar Khan, the lion of lions, has appeared. 10. By conquering the towns of India in every expedition, and by restoring the decayed charitable institutions. 11. And he has destroyed the obdurate among infidels with his sword and spear, and lavished the treasures of his wealth in (helping) the miserable. 12. And he has revived the institutions of the faith, after its destruction by selecting arguments based on intuitive knowledge. Shamsuddin Ahmed (tr. and ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 20.

73 Mahisantosh is an archaeological site of Naogaon under Dhamoirhat upazila. It is about 12 Km from JogirGhopa.

74 Mesidah, a town's ruin of the west side of the Mahisoantosh, was visited by Buchanan and he found many Hindu elements used in building the structures of the town. For details please see, Doctor Frances Buchanan Hamilton, *op.cit.*, p. 54; Md. Rezaul Karim, "Pratnanagor Mahisantosh: Udbhab, Bikash O Parinati", *JIBS*, Vol. 22, pp. 48-49.

### 7. Significance of the *Devi*

There are many instances regarding religious syncretism in medieval Bengal that provide information about the assimilation of Hinduism and Islam. *Vimala Devi*, on the other hand, indicates how the religion of the ancient Bengali society syncretized. In Bengal, Buddhism went through a long formative way. The Bengali came into the faith with some of their existing beliefs and practices. In addition, the folk beliefs and other religions, especially Ajivikism, Jainism, Hinduism, and Nathism, affected it. The faith, accordingly, adopted some non-Buddhist elements and made it similar to what existed in the natha community that eventually led the Buddhists to convert into Nathism. The Buddhists got new ideas from others that led them to a radical change but never threw their old deity off. They adopted it into their new religious concept and set it in their worshipping yard. They changed its name from time to time according to the situations required. Consequently, a Buddhist image took a permanent seat in the nathas ground and became a lively instance of Bengalis' religious evolution.

The trend, introduced by the nathas, followed subsequently and contributed to forming a new syncretic religion. The Nathas themselves were affected by the influence of other religions, especially by Vaisnavism and Shaivism. In the last decade of the fifteenth century, after the commencement of Vaisnavism, they were attracted to the new faith. They, accordingly, set the image of a four-armed Vinshnu, and child Shree Krishna and his mother on the *Vimala* ground.<sup>75</sup> However, the subsequent event led them to another way. They put their trust in Shaktism and leave vaisnavide deities, and instead, bring Kali, a Shakta image, to the praying yard. *Vimala Thana* experiences assimilation of the religious practices and witnesses a faith becoming syncretic through ages. It also bears many sources that help to interpret Bengalis' Religious life.

*Vimala Devi* (the idol) evidences Jogir Ghopa's antiquity and determines how old the archaeological site is? It witnesses the oldness of its own with the *Thana* at where it takes its seat. The idol, bearing Buddha images on the body, exhibits the identity of a *stupa* that relates it with the Buddhist age. It simultaneously dates the site back to the pala era by linking it with Devpala, a mighty king of ancient Bengal.

The evidence (*Vimala Devi*) indicates the connection of its worshippers with Buddhism and their (the tantric Buddhists) conversion into Nathism. The tantric

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<sup>75</sup> *ASI*, p. 121; Names of the villages nearby Jogir Ghopa, i.e., *Gokul*, *Brajabana*, *Kulbana*, *Vanshibati*, etc., also indicate the connection of Vaishnavism with this area.

Buddhist gurus (Siddhyacharyas) played a vital role in composing *Charyapada*, the earliest instance of Bengali literature. There were eighty-four such Siddhacharyas in the tantric Buddhist. Twenty-eight among them are the gurus of both communities, the Buddhists and the Nathas.<sup>76</sup> Evidence shows the conversion of tantric Siddhacharya also. Gorakshanatha, the establisher of Nathism, belonged to the Vajrayana, shifted his trust to the new faith. The site, assumably, experienced charyapada writing since some of the composers converted into Nathism. Consequently, the idol helps to determine a merely discussed place where the charyapadas were composed.

Notwithstanding the great success of the archaeological discoveries following the find out ancient cities and towns, Ramavati, the capital of the Pala Empire is remaining unexplored. However, historians try to identify different places as the ruins of the city. Some of the scholars tend to locate Ramavati in the surroundings of Gaur, an ancient city and capital of Bengal, while the others find it in another place, in between Ganga and Karatoa rivers.<sup>77</sup> However, after the determination and excavation of the ruins of Jagaddal Mahavihara, it becomes clear that Ramavati was nearby of the site in Bangladesh. Accordingly, a third idea comes to the light that Amair, a village of some eight km distant from the Vihara and nearby the Jogir Ghopa, was the pala capital. The Devi strengthens the idea by connecting Jogir Ghopa with the Pala kings.

## 8. Conclusion

In Bengal, the religions went through a long run of assimilation and eventually became syncretic faiths by exchanging ideas, rites-rituals, and deities from each other. Vimala Devi, a Buddhist' *stupa*, experiences this assimilation through ages.

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76 Several natha *Siddhas* wrote Charyapada. Some of the lines of Meenanatha are as follow:  
 “কহন্তি গুরু পরমার্থের বাট/ কৰ্ম কুরঙ্গ সমাধিক পাঠ/ কমল বিকসিল কহিহ গ জমরা/কমল মধু পিবিবি ধোকে ন  
 ভমরা।। Haraprasad Shastri, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

77 Most of the writers state that the city was in between two great rivers Ganga and Karatoa. They, without a consensus, mention no single place to be the ruins of the capital. Please see for details, Khan-BahadurAbid Ali Khan, *Gaur O PanduarSmriti*, (Tr. & ed. Chowdhury Shamsur Rahman). (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985), p. 1; Shahanara Hussain, *History of Ancient Bengal*, (Rajshahi: Institute of Bangladesh Studies, 2011), pp. 61-63; Kazi Mohamamd Miser, *Rajshahir Itihas* (Dhaka: Gatidhara, 1965), p. 160-168; Hem Chandra Roy, *The Dynastic History in Varendri* (Kolkata: University of Calcutta, 1931), pp. 344-345; Abdul Momin Chowdhury, *Dynastic History of Bengal*, (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1967), pp. 121-122; Md. Rezaul Karim, “Pratnanagar Mahisantosh”, *op.cit.*, p. 39; Chittaranjan Mishra, “Ramcharit Kavye Barnita Ramavati Itihas O Aisharya”, *Bangladesh Asiatic Society Potrika*, Vol. 28, 2010, pp. 1-11.

It transforms from time to time with changing identity. Once a stupa shifts its identity to a Shiva Lingam and then to the Vimala Devi, and accordingly, becomes a witness to the evolution of the Bengalis' faith. The idol, in addition, indicates the antiquity of Jogir Ghopa by connecting it back to the ancient period, the Pala era, and by mentioning the site as one of the Charyapada writing centers, demonstrates its worthiness in the history of Bengal. It also helps to conclude the ongoing debate on determining the ruins of Ramavati, one of the capitals of ancient Bengal.

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4. Md. Akramul Haque, Lecturer (Bengali), Dhamoirhat Women's College, Dhamirhat, Naogaon.

**Appendix**

Pictures of the Vimala Devi and it's *Thana*.



Figure 1. Jogir Ghopa, Figure 2. Yamuna Temple, Figure 3. Vimala Devi

## **Power and Emotion in Family: Analysis of Online Entrepreneurship in Dhaka City from Gender Perspective**

Umme Busra Fateha Sultana \*

### **Abstract**

Feminists have cut through a longstanding romantic assumption about family being a site of altruism and love; arguing that there exists instead conflict of interests, intra-household bargains and power dynamics.<sup>1</sup> Does power always take a coercive form in such bargains? What roles emotions might play? Taking a feminist point of view from Pedwell and Whitehead<sup>2</sup> in this paper<sup>3</sup> I perceive family as a site of interlocking relationships which are not always dominated by social relationships of power, but also how its members respond towards embodied experience of emotions. There are gendered emotional repertoires that perpetuate unequal divisions of labor in the families, albeit there is also “care of the self”,<sup>4</sup> allowing women to craft different forms of personhood. Drawing from 20 in-depth interviews with stay-at-home mothers, who run online entrepreneurship, this paper highlights the ambivalent contexts of power and emotions in everyday life. Worn-out by the quadruple burdens of managing home and online business simultaneously, many of them receive husband’s assistance in household chores. Thus, everyday struggle in maintaining gender orders is mediated through mutual emotions which are makeshift; yet, none resist the patriarchal arrangements of gendered emotional repertoires.

**Key words:** Family, online-entrepreneurship, patriarchy, power, emotion, care of the self.

### **Introduction**

Bangladesh is one of the South Asian countries with clearest instance of “classical patriarchy” in its extended households.<sup>5</sup> Even so, rapid commercialisation of

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1 H. Hartmann, “The Family as the Locus of Gender, Class and Political Struggle”, *Signs*, Vol. 6(3), 1981, pp. 366-394.

2 C. Pedwell and A. Whitehead, “Affecting feminism: Questions of feeling in feminist theory”, *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 13(2), 2012, pp. 115-129.

3 The in-depth qualitative research that this paper is based on received a highly competitive research grant, Faculty of Social Sciences Research Grant (FSSRG) from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Dhaka. The author is highly indebted to the awarding body.

4 M. Foucault, *The care of the self: the history of sexuality*, Vol. 3, New York: Random Books, 1986, translated by R. Hurley, pp. 37-81.

5 D. Kandiyoti, “Bargaining with patriarchy”, *Gender & Society*, Vol. 2 (3), 1988, pp. 274-290.

agriculture sector and a growth in urban industrial employment opportunities led to an urban migration of many rural households resulting in a rise of nuclear families.<sup>6</sup> In this situation, although the material basis of classical patriarchy is eroding<sup>7</sup>, there is a new form of patriarchal domination, which Sariog˘ lu<sup>8</sup> rightfully conceptualises as “familial patriarchy”. In these nuclear families, familial patriarchy maintains a strong gender division of labour where household tasks and childcare responsibilities are women’s prime duties. As a result, many women either end up staying at home or engage in online entrepreneurship due to the latter’s flexible nature of working hour. Likewise mentioned in Matchar, albeit in the context of the global West, ‘the young mom who, after her too short maternity leave, decides to try to make extra money selling her knitting on *Etsy* rather than go back to work’.<sup>9</sup>

Bangladesh has made it to the World Economic Forum’s news for its remarkable economic achievement – shifting from once Henry Kissinger’s “bottomless basket” to ‘one of Asia’s most remarkable and unexpected success stories’.<sup>10</sup> Since 2006, Bangladesh’s annual GDP growth has exceeded Pakistan’s by roughly 2.5 per cent per year, and is likely to surpass India’s. Bangladesh has reduced its infant mortality rate from 92 per 1000 live births in 1990 to 46 in 2017. In terms of education, the country has achieved nearly hundred percent enrollments in primary schools. While there is no single cause for such an economic boom, skilled use of “manpower”, creating skilled workers, rapid digitalisation of rural as well as urban sphere, women’s gigantic inclusion in the formal and informal economy, social changes for example, women’s empowerment and spread of education are some of the causes which have accelerated the economic transformation.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the

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6 S. Feldman, “Historicising garment manufacturing in Bangladesh: Gender, generation, and new regulatory regimes”, *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, Vol. 11 (1), 2009, pp. 268-288. L. Hoek, *Cut-pieces: Obscenity and the Cinema in Bangladesh* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Amsterdam: Amsterdam, 2008.

7 V.M. Moghadam, “Patriarchy in transition: women and the changing family in the Middle East”, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol. 35 (1), 2004, pp. 137-162.

8 E. Sariog˘ lu, ‘Gendering the organization of home-based work in Turkey: Classical versus familial patriarchy’, *Gender, Work and Organization*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012, pp. 1-19.

9 S. Luckman, ‘Micro-enterprise as Work-Life ‘Magical Solution’’, in L. Adkins et al. (eds.), *The Post-Fordist Sexual Contract*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 91-108.

10 K. Basu, (2018). *This is what you need to know about Bangladesh’s remarkable economic rise*, 2018, retrieved on 4 April, 2021 from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/why-is-bangladesh-booming>.

11 N. Kabeer, ‘Snakes, ladders and traps: changing lives and livelihoods in rural Bangladesh (1994-2001)’ *CPRC Working Paper 50*, IDS, 2004. B. Sen, ‘Growth, Poverty and Human Development’, R. Jahan (ed.) *Bangladesh: Promise and Performance*, Dhaka, Bangladesh: The University Press Limited, 2015.

question is – to what extent the benefit of such economic development reaches to women, they being one of the key agents of such economic boom? In Bangladesh almost 50% of the total population are women. Hence, at the advent of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is a need to identify areas where women need special consideration to reduce gender gaps.

With regard to reducing gender gap, women's access to online entrepreneurship is such an area that needs close attention. Although historically, women remain significantly underrepresented across all studies of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and careers, however, social media – a subject of new media technologies is increasingly becoming popular among women of all ages in Bangladesh. It has proved to be an effective platform for entrepreneurial ventures among urban women in Bangladesh. Contrary to the traditional business sector in Bangladesh, which is still considered a masculine arena, the online domain presents quite an opposite scenario – where women are emerging as fashion designers, sellers, bakers, product manufacturers, event managers, makeup artists and freelance photographers and taking part in other innovative and challenging professions.<sup>12</sup> Social media is helping them to connect with prospective consumers, gain popularity and stay updated with changing tastes and demands of the online consumers.

Having said so, women's online entrepreneurship is not an easy task in Bangladesh. The traditions and cultural context of Bangladesh is very conservative about women engaging in business or publicity activity; not everyone accepts women as online entrepreneurs. Access to business opportunities for men and women are not equal, rather women's entrance to entrepreneurship is further curbed by socio-cultural constraints, religion, as well as the never-ending household responsibilities.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, stereotypical beliefs such as 'women cannot do business' or 'women are technologically challenged' create barrier against women's wishes to get involved in entrepreneurship.<sup>14</sup> Albeit, women's participation rate in economy is actually on the rise.<sup>15</sup> Social media is acting as a potential platform for women to emerge as independent, solvent and successful

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<sup>12</sup> U.B.F. Sultana and T. Ahmad, "Women's Empowerment through Social Media Entrepreneurship: A Critical Analysis of Online Female Entrepreneurship in Dhaka City", *Empowerment: A Journal of Women for Women*, Vol. 26, 2019, pp. 01-16.

<sup>13</sup> M. Nasima and N. Alam, "Women micro-entrepreneurs in Bangladesh: Socio-economic aspects and factors affecting their development", *Journal of Business and Technology (Dhaka)*, Vol. 9 (1), 2014, pp. 53-70.

<sup>14</sup> U.B.F. Sultana and T. Ahmad, *Op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> S.M.A. Rahman, "Leveraging ICTs for empowering women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh: A review of recent developments and way forward", *European Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 5 (3), 2016, pp. 1-15.

entrepreneurs. The number of woman entrepreneurs is increasing every year taking on the challenge to work in a male-dominated, competitive and complex economic and business environment.<sup>16</sup> Situating within these contrasting contexts, this research intends to explore the reasons behind women's intention to start online business, what the challenges are in online entrepreneurship, and finally, how the entrepreneurs traverse various patriarchal institutional norms and constraints and adopt nuanced styles and strategies to keep their entrepreneurship running and make their voices heard.

### **Women, Entrepreneurship and Patriarchy: A Critical Reflection on the Existing Literature**

In this introductory section, I provide a critical feminist review of existing literatures on Women and Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, Social Media and Entrepreneurial Opportunity for Women, Women, Micro Credit & Empowerment and ICTs for Empowering Women Entrepreneurs etc. I further focus on the few available feminist researches conducted globally, which explore connections among entrepreneurship, work-life balance, power and intra-household gender relations. Thus, I particularly point to the knowledge gap in the entrepreneurial literature, and this paper contributes by addressing this gap.

#### **Women and Entrepreneurship**

The review of literatures suggests that there is a dearth of scholarly literature to explore women's online entrepreneurship from a critical feminist point of view. The existing writings on women's entrepreneurship suffer from use of gendered instruments that posits women as secondary to men, and women's businesses are less significant compared to that of men. Such limitation in entrepreneurship literature is a global phenomenon. For instance, Jones<sup>17</sup> mentions that the concept of entrepreneurship in the UK context is largely written and dominated by white, western males, that consider women to be weak and incapable of managing businesses. In the US context, popular discourses of entrepreneurship are masculine, and researches on entrepreneurship are devoted to male entrepreneurs to a great degree.<sup>18</sup> Kikooma<sup>19</sup> in the context of Uganda suggests that although there

<sup>16</sup> Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI), *Building women in business: A situation analysis of women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh*, BWCCI, 2008, pp. 1-50.

<sup>17</sup> C. Jones, 'Accounting for student/educator diversity: resurrecting coaction theory', *Handbook of Research in Entrepreneurship Education*, Part 3, 2010, pp. 71-85.

<sup>18</sup> R. Gill and S. Ganesh, "Empowerment, Constraint, and the Entrepreneurial Self: A Study of White Women Entrepreneurs", *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, Vol. 35(3), 2007, pp. 268-293.

<sup>19</sup> J. Kikooma, 'Gender and Entrepreneurship in Uganda: Women Maneuvering Economic Space', in T. Burger-Helmchen (ed.) *Entrepreneurship - Gender, Geographies and Social Context*, IntechOpen, 2012, pp. 15-30.

are studies focusing on female entrepreneurship however, the emphasis is given on how female entrepreneurs can adopt essentially masculine strategies to be successful business owners; as if '*the entrepreneurial self is masculine*'.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, based on a discursive analysis of 81 leading articles on entrepreneurship research Ahl<sup>21</sup> concludes that writings on women's entrepreneurship do not take into account the distinctive historical, structural and cultural factors that influence women's entrepreneurship, and highly lacks a feminist perspective. Consequently, Ahl<sup>22</sup> suggests new research direction that would include a feminist analysis of entrepreneur literature; which, instead of reproducing women's subordination, would capture nuances of women's online entrepreneurship. Reinforcement to such claim is Gill and Ganesh's statement, '[the] silhouette of the entrepreneur, however, has been decidedly masculine, and researchers have traced the contours of such gendering'. For instance, available in the work of Bird and Brush<sup>23</sup>, most early studies of entrepreneurship were based on popular discourses of entrepreneurship which were essentially masculine, and included only male experience.

Literatures discussing women's entrepreneurship in Bangladesh mostly highlight challenges and prospects, but from a business perspective.<sup>24</sup> The analysis of entrepreneurship in these literatures lacks a theoretical grounding; especially, a lack of feminist analysis is obvious here. Bhuiyan and Abdullah<sup>25</sup> conduct desk research

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<sup>20</sup> Gill and Ganesh, *Op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> H. Ahl, "Why research on women entrepreneurs needs new directions", *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, Vol. 30 (5), 2006, pp. 595-621.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Gill and Ganesh, *Op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> T. Afroze, N. Alam, E. Akhter and N.S. Jui, "Women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh — challenges and determining factors", *Journal of Business and Technology* (Dhaka), Vol. 9 (2), 2014, pp. 27-38. I. Ahammed and S.M.U. Huq, "Women entrepreneurship development in Bangladesh — Challenges and prospects", *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, Vol. 2 (7), 2013, pp. 41-48. L.B. Jahan, "What are the issues & challenges faced by women entrepreneur in Bangladesh when entering entrepreneurship?", *European Journal of Business and Management*, Vol. 9 (29), 2017, pp. 53-63. Nasima and Alam, *Op. cit.* M. Nesa, *Economic empowerment of women through entrepreneurship: A study on women SME entrepreneurs in Bangladesh*. Deutschland: Dictus Publishing, 2015. L. Parvin, J. Jinrong and M.W. Rahman, "Women entrepreneurship in Bangladesh. What are the challenges ahead?", *African Journal of Business Management*, Vol. 6 (11), 2012, pp. 3862-3871. M. Rahmatullah and F. Zaman, "Female entrepreneurship in Bangladesh: Constraints, motivation and success", *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*, Vol.11 (2), 2014, pp. 65-77.

<sup>25</sup> M.B. Bhuiyan and R. Abdullah, "Women empowerment through entrepreneurship development: Bangladesh perspective", *DIU Journal of Business and Economics*, Vol. 2 (2), 2007, pp.134-154.

to address women's empowerment, which is more of a general perspective – identifying what is required to ensure women entrepreneurs' empowerment, countrywide. Mayoux<sup>26</sup> does a notable gender analysis of empowerment in the context of entrepreneurship through small loans/ micro credit. In fact, there is an impressive amount of studies conducted on micro credit and women's empowerment in Bangladesh. Even so, none of these studies investigate the relationship between women's entrepreneurship and structural barriers such as patriarchy, and what connotations power may bear here. Women's online entrepreneurship in Bangladesh is relatively a new area. In fact, realisation about ICTs as a potential sector for development did not emerge until early 1990s.<sup>27</sup> Although, Hossain and Rahman<sup>28</sup> offer a quantitative analysis of 108 women's responses on how social media can be a useful opportunity of entrepreneurship for women. Whereas, Rahman addresses social media and women's entrepreneur opportunity from a general point of view, does not address what influence entrepreneurship can have on woman as an individual, or on her family as well as social life. Hence, the critical perspectives that Ahl<sup>29</sup> suggested to bring into entrepreneur literature, more than a decade ago, are yet to be addressed in Bangladesh.

#### **Work and Family Responsibilities – from a Gender Lens**

The challenges of parenting and how to attain work – life balance have occupied a central place in the very few of the entrepreneurial literature that addresses challenges of women's entrepreneurship; on due reflection some of which I include next.

*Maternity management in large, small and medium (SME) entrepreneurship:* Literature on maternity management in SME entrepreneurship has been mostly generated in the developed world.<sup>30</sup> These studies inform that our organisations are masculine, and a highly competitive environment exists in these SME organisations where ideal workers are expected to work full-time and be constantly visible at the

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<sup>26</sup> L. Mayoux, "Participatory learning for women's empowerment in micro finance programs: Negotiating complexity, conflict and change", *IDS bulletin*, Vol. 29 (4), 1998, pp.39-50.

<sup>27</sup> S.M.A Rahman, *Op.cit.*

<sup>28</sup> M. Hossain, and M.F. Rahman, "Social media and the creation of entrepreneurial opportunity for women", *Management*, Vol. 8(4), 2018, pp. 99-108.

<sup>29</sup> H. Ahl, *Op.cit.*

<sup>30</sup> B. Stumbitz, S. Lewis and J. Rouse, "Maternity Management in SMEs: A Trans disciplinary Review and Research Agenda", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, vol. 00, 2017, pp. 1-23.

workplace. Pregnancy and infant care are considered as disruptive to work environment by many organisations. The idea of an “ideal” employee conflicts with parenting and family management. As if an ideal employee is devoid of a family life. In the wider literature research reveals that in large organisations pregnant workers are often deprived from promotion and are told that ‘motherhood reduces career motivation’.<sup>31</sup> There is a dearth of literature on pregnancy in SMEs, which further points to the knowledge gap. Nevertheless, SME literature do focus on the short length of maternity leave (Large and Greenberg),<sup>32</sup> inadequacy of breastfeeding corners and how mothers are left to feel sidelined in the workplace after they return from maternity leave.

***Motherhood and sexual division of work at home:*** Reddock and Bobb-Smith’s study<sup>33</sup> in the context of Trinidad and Tobago found that motherhood and division of work responsibilities at home is gendered. Motherhood is thought to be completely women’s responsibility. Surprising however, still in this era, home is supposedly considered the fundamental place for a woman, and work outside home is perceived a way to supplement husband’s income. Quite similar evidence is found in Turner and Norwood<sup>34</sup> who argue that women occupy almost half of the workforce in the US yet are still considered to be children’s primary caregiver. The study further emphasises on the fact that the world of work has historically been developed around men’s bodies and masculine values, which inevitably separates out workspace from domestic domain. Such values also establish a dichotomous discourse: a good mother cannot be a good worker.

***Can self-employment be a way to work-life balance?***

As mentioned earlier, this paper addresses a largely under-researched area by exploring the interlocking experience of family and women’s entrepreneurship from a gender perspective. Whilst the mainstream entrepreneurial literature is yet to accept man’s role at home,<sup>35</sup> recently some attentions have been paid to investigate

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> J.J. Ladge and D.N. Greenberg, “Becoming a working mother: managing identity and efficacy uncertainties during resocialization”, *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 54, 2015, pp. 977-998.

<sup>33</sup> R. Reddock and Y. Bobb-Smith, “Reconciling work and family: Issues and policies in Trinidad and Tobago”, *Conditions of Work and Employment*, Series No. 18, Geneva: ILO, 2008, pp.1-98.

<sup>34</sup> P.K. Turner and K. Norwood, “Unbounded Motherhood: Embodying a Good Working Mother Identity”, *Management Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 27(3), 2013, pp. 396-424.

<sup>35</sup> S.D. Simone and V. Priola, ‘What’s ‘woman’s work’? Work-family interface among women entrepreneurs in Italy’, in Broadbridge A. M. and Fielden S. L. (eds.),

how best a balance can be achieved between women's professional work and home responsibilities, especially in the context of Italy and Ireland. In Italy, self-employment has been identified as an alternative to attain work-life balance. However, '[...] taking care of the house is still conceived as "women's work" by both men and women' (Simone and Priola).<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, in absence of formal/institutional child care system in most of the cases, family commitment and children are generally considered a stumbling block against women's career. In Ireland, husbands are found to be non-supportive in household work, and to some extents are even obstructive to wife's career (Drew and Humbert).<sup>37</sup> In such a context women try to initiate own business. However, the question of whether to achieve work-life balance through self-employment still remains ambivalent, as women may actually end up working longer hours to manage the quadruple burdens of family, child care and self-entrepreneurship.

Therefore, while all these are very valuable knowledge and this is where I situate this paper, also informs me that I am contributing to such a field that does not exist yet in Bangladesh. Because my intention is not to provide a broad or generalised perspective on entrepreneurship; rather, to explore the critical avenues of stay-at-home motherhood and online entrepreneurship, which would further contribute to reveal whether technologies facilitate caring or further commodification in a neoliberal capitalist context of urban Bangladesh.

#### **Methods for Data Generation and Ethical Considerations**

This is a qualitative research with particular emphasis on feminist approach of data generation. Although studies I discuss next, imply that there is an abundance of research on entrepreneurship, but a gender perspective in these studies is largely missing. This research therefore conducted twenty in-depth interviews with online women entrepreneurs, to explore how women navigate various patriarchal norms and institutional barriers that are not ready yet to accept women in business or rigid to apprehend women's relationship with technologies.

Entrepreneurs were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, keeping in mind to include married women with diverse categories. For instance, some

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*Handbook of Gendered Careers in Management: Getting In, Getting On, Getting Out*, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2015, pp. 390-408.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> E. Drew and A.L. Humbert, 'Who's minding the kids? Work and family issues among owners of small business enterprises in Ireland, in C.L. Cooper and R.J. Burke (eds.), *Human Resource Management in Small Business: Achieving Peak Performance*, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2011, pp. 236-258.

respondents were chosen from nuclear families, some from combined/extended families, some newly married, again some with nursing child/ toddlers and some with relatively older children to see what impact motherhood leaves on online business. With regard to online business, entrepreneurs who operate business through social media were chosen for this study. Among social media, Facebook was considered a good starting place due to its unquestioned popularity among people of all ages in Bangladesh. According to Khan and Taher<sup>38</sup>, with growing internet connectivity, availability of cheaper smartphones, and a rapid rise in social networking, the popularity of using social media, especially, Facebook as an entrepreneurship tool has extended beyond imagination. Despite the growing concerns and debates against Facebook, it still has the highest percentage of users.<sup>39</sup> I also kept a close eye on Instagram and Twitter in search for respondents. Choosing women with business web pages with a good number of followers was one of the criteria in selecting the desired entrepreneurs; presumably this indicates the success of an online business. I also took into consideration to choose various kinds of entrepreneurship to examine whether different kinds of businesses open up different challenges or opportunities for women entrepreneurs. These various businesses included clothing business, baking, home decoration, party arranging, fashion designing, as well as pages that sell cosmetics, baby foods, toys and baked products for children with special needs. Considering the limited resources, the interviews were all based in Dhaka. The interviews took place between the months of December 2019-April 2020. The respondents were from different parts of Dhaka city. However, the last two interviews were conducted over telephone due to the lockdown for Covid-19. Nevertheless, managing time to be interviewed remained a big challenge for the respondents; since, time management has always been a problem for them – juggling between home responsibilities and business. “Work from home” of family members as a consequence of Covid-19, brought additional work pressure for these women. In one of the last two interviews, I had to conduct it in three parts in three separate time slots, as there were interruptions from her children and family members. The interviews were open ended, conducted following an interview guideline.

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<sup>38</sup> M.R. Khan and F. Taher, “ICT opens up new prospects for Bangladesh”, *The Daily Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/drivers-economy/ict-opens-new-prospects-bangladesh-1364893> on 2017, February 23.

<sup>39</sup> According to a recent data by Stat counter Global Stats, social media user statistics in Bangladesh (between May 2018 to May 2019) as follows: Facebook 94.45per cent, Twitter 1.22per cent, Pinterest 1.23per cent, Google+ 0.07per cent, YouTube 2.56% and instagram 0.2%. Available at <http://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/bangladesh/> 2018 Accessed 3 June 2019.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Maintaining research ethics is key to any research. Wengraf's argument<sup>40</sup> ponders upon some critical ethical issues that one need to take into consideration in any feminist research:

The interviews that you do or that you study are not a social, a historical events. You do not leave behind your anxieties, your hopes, your blind spots, your prejudices, your class, race or gender, your location in global social structure, your age and historical positions, your emotions, your past and your sense of possible futures when you set up an interview, and nor does your interviewee when he or she agrees to an interview and you both come nervously into the same room. Nor do you do so when you sit down to analyse the material you have produced.

Therefore, power relations between the researcher and the researched, researcher's emotion and the inevitability of losing research objectivity<sup>41</sup> are some of the potential risks that any social research on human beings can encounter. Keeping in mind these issues, the interviewees were clearly explained about the purpose of the study. The interviews and recording of the proceedings were performed in full consent of the entrepreneurs, and a consent paper was signed by individual entrepreneur prior to data collection. The respondents have had the opportunities to withhold from the interview at any point until the final drafting of the report. The interpretation of data for analysis and publication have been done with close consultation with the respondents. Finally, although I initially planned to use pseudonym of the respondents, nonetheless, the proud entrepreneurs requested me to let their voices heard by using their original names; hence, it seemed a frivolous action not to put up with their request.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Inspired by feminist methodology,<sup>42</sup> I always enquire social phenomenon not through what is already there, but, what the "realities" at the ground are. Feminists

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<sup>40</sup> T. Wengraf, *Qualitative Research Interviewing*, London: Sage Publications, 2001.

<sup>41</sup> J. Clifford, 'Introduction: partial truths', in J. Clifford and G. Marcus (ed.) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 1986, pp. 1-26. D. Deacon and M. Pickering, P. Golding and G. Murdock, *Researching Communications: A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Analysis*, 2nd Edition, London: Hodder Education, 2007. E. Hsu, 'Participant Experience: Learning to be an Acupuncturist, and Not Becoming One', in G. De Neve and M. Unnithan-Kumar (ed.), *Critical Journeys: The Making of Anthropologists*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. S. Kvale, 'Dominance through Interviews and Dialogues', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 12 (3), 2006, pp. 480-500. R.M. Lee, *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics*, London: Sage Publications, 1993. R.L. Miller, 'Analysing Life Histories', in *Researching Life Stories and Family Histories*, London: Sage Publications, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> See for instance, S. Gorelick, 'Contradictions of Feminist Methodology', in H. Gottfried (ed.), *Feminism and Social Change: Bridging Theory and Practice*, Urbana and Chicago:

insist that there needs to be theories that better reflect the perspectives of women. For instance, Du Bois<sup>43</sup> puts emphasis on addressing women's lives and experience 'in their own terms, to create theory grounded in the actual experience and language of women [...]'. The theoretical framework of this research thus, relies on a grounded theory approach.

Based on the data generated from women entrepreneurs, I particularly consider focusing on how emotion and wellbeing get prioritised in conjugal relationship, despite the continuous presence of power and patriarchy. Thus, I focus on literatures that deal with "emotional geographies". I further borrow a concept from cultural studies – "making do" by de Certeau<sup>44</sup>, and its relevance to this research would be obvious in the discussion I initiate next. Literatures on emotional geographies bring forth some pertinent questions: does power always take a coercive form in bargains in conjugal life? What roles emotions might play? Taking a feminist point of view from Pedwell and Whitehead<sup>45</sup> in this paper I view family as a site of interlocking relationships which are not always dominated by social relationships of power, but also how its members respond towards embodied experience of emotions. There are gendered emotional repertoires that perpetuate unequal divisions of labor in the families, albeit there is also "care of the self"<sup>46</sup> allowing women to craft different forms of personhood. Drawing from 20 in-depth interviews with mostly stay at home mothers, who run online entrepreneurship; this paper highlights the ambivalent contexts of power and emotions in everyday life.

In doing so, I find de Certeau's<sup>47</sup> "making do" a particularly relevant concept to understand the symbolic actions and everyday strategies women employ to survive, negotiate, and recast the boundaries between work for home and home-based labor/ entrepreneurship. Although, critics like leading cultural geographer Carol Ekinsmyth terms such actions as "mumpreneurialism", i.e., 'embracing, rather than contesting, the role of "mother" [...]'<sup>48</sup>, Highmore<sup>49</sup> defies and argues, '[...]' the

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University of Illinois Press, 1996, pp. 23-45. M. Hammersley, *The Politics of Social Research*, London: Sage Publications, 1995. S. Harding, *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*. USA: Indiana University Press, 1987.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* M. Hammersley.

<sup>44</sup> M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984.

<sup>45</sup> C. Pedwell and A. Whitehead, *Op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> M. Foucault, *Op. cit.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* M. de Certeau.

<sup>48</sup> S. Luckman, *Op. cit.*

<sup>49</sup> B. Highmore, 'Michel de Certeau's poetics of everyday life', in *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 145-154.

everyday is hidden and evasive'. He further elaborates that de Certeau's "making do" evidences an "unquestioned faith" on the potentials that everyday can offer; everyday needs to be rediscovered. de Certeau focuses on everyday practices and argues that people are active agents, and what matters most is how creatively they act or respond to a particular situation. 'Resistance here is both a preservative and a creation of something new: rather than presenting the inverse of power, it offers a different and pluralised account of powers.'<sup>50</sup> Hence, the expression of resistance can vary based on people's multiple identities, i.e., sex, social class, religiosity, age patterns, sexual orientation etc. Consequently, Luckman (2016:100)<sup>51</sup> opines in the context of the global West, '[...] it should therefore come as no surprise at all that women who are in a position to do so continue to embrace [...] "making do" position of home-based micro enterprise to "resolve" competing work-life responsibilities'.

This is where I depart to understand how the twenty women entrepreneurs move to and fro along the extensive journey of family, motherhood and entrepreneurship, how both experiences intertwine, and what the nuances of creations are in negotiating everyday patriarchy.

### Respondents and Their Entrepreneurial Life

This discussion starts with a brief overview of each of the respondents. Table-1 and Table-2 respectively, presents some key information on respondents' personal and entrepreneurial life which is important to understand their entrepreneurial behavior.

**Table 1:** Profile of Entrepreneurs

Serial No.	Entrepreneur's Name	Age	Educational Background	Length of Conjugal Life	No. & Age of Children	Husband's Profession	Name of Online Business Page
1	Afsana Mimi	25	Honours (Final Year)	5 years	1 (1.5 years old)	Business	<i>Mimi's Gallery</i>
2	Farhana Fahmida Ila	36	Master's in Accounting (Eden College)	8 years	1 (5 years old)	Marketing Job	<i>Dresses, Jewelry, Home decor</i>
3	Shahida Akter	32	Master's in Botany	9 years	1(6 years old)	Textile engineer	<i>Cake Fairy</i>
4	Umme Humaira Afroz	33	Master's in Professional course (incomplete)	6 years	1 (2.5 years old)	Banker	<i>Sweet Crush</i>

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> S. Luckman *Op. cit.*

5	Mashrufa Akter	35	Architecture	13 years	2 (10 years & 3.5 years old)	Business	<i>Dazzling Dresses by Mashrufa</i>
6	Rifat Firoz	25	B.S.S. in Economics(UIU)	5 years	1 (1.5 years old)	Private job	<i>Sparkling Beauty by Rifa</i>
7	Maliha Zaman	24	Master's in Economics (DU)	1 year	–	Private job	<i>The Purple Box</i>
8	Tarin Akter	28	Honours (incomplete)	10 years	1 (6 years old)	Private job	<i>Cake Art by Tarin</i>
9	Jannatul Ferdous	24	BSS & MSS in IHE (DU)	7 years	1 (2.5 years old)	Private job	<i>Nokshibazar</i>
10	Umme Salma Usha	34	Master's in Economics	12 years	2 (9 years & 5 years old)	Private job	<i>Nuha's Wardrobe</i>
11	Israt Shoma	37	Honours & Master's in Management (Eden College)	12 years	3 (11 years, 9.5 years & 6 years old)	IDLC, Private job	<i>Shoma's Home-made Food</i>
12	Jannatul Firdous	27	Master's in Islamic Studies (Eden College)	3 years	–	Freelancing Web developer	<i>Shoi</i>
13	Sanjida Khushbu	30	BSc Engineering	4 years	1 (3 years old)	Works in a Buying House	<i>Fairy – Hub of Baby Books/ Toys</i>
14	Meherun Nesa	33	Marketing Honours (Dhaka City College)	12 years	2 (9 years; 7 years)	Works in Singapore	<i>GFCFSF Bakery (Gluten free, caffeine free, sugar free)</i>
15	Monica Chowdhury	35	MBA (South Asian University)	7 years	3 (Twin of 4.5 years & 3 years old)	Merchandiser, Private job	<i>Tiny Toony</i>
16	Monika Mondol	35	Master's in English, MBA	5 years	1 (4 years old)	Private job	<i>Lyric Handicrafts</i>
17	Riffat Mitu	38	Master's (Chittagong University)	10 years	1 (5 years old)	Partner in <i>Cakes by Rifat</i>	<i>Cakes by Rifat</i>
18	Razia Putul	33	BBA, MBA (South East University)	7 years	1 (3.5 years old)	Engineer, Bangla link	<i>Yarrow</i>
19	Sarah Rahman	24	Aeronautical Engineering	4 years	1 (3 years old)	Merchandise	<i>Shama's Caravan</i>
20	Israt Jahan Tatia	40	Master's in Library Science (DU)	14 years	2 (10 & 3.5 years old)	Environmental Consultant	<i>Tatiar Tant</i>

### Staying Home – a Choice or Obligation?

Among the 20 women entrepreneurs, 2 did not have any plans for conceiving any sooner, when the interview took place. When the rest of the 18 women were asked how a decision was made with regard to staying at home, much surprisingly it was

found that despite the differences in the type of the families (there were 13 nuclear and 5 extended families with members from husband's side), opinion regarding shouldering the responsibility of children was similar. There was a covert understanding that it is the mother who has to stay at home for the babies, or has to arrange alternative care arrangements if she wants to go back to her job after maternity leave. Two third of the mothers had their own jobs when they got pregnant; but had to become stay at home mothers, because they had no other options. For instance, Razia Putul joined back her private job finishing maternity leave. She had a very good job and was soon to be promoted to the managerial post. However, fate had another plan for her; in her words:

I tried a lot; but there was no one to look after my two years old son properly. I struggled a lot to keep my seven years old job. Yet then we realised my son was having a speech delay. So, what else? I had to end it for my son. I sacrificed a month's salary and the promotion.

**Table 2:** Entrepreneurial Ventures

The entrepreneurial ventures can be classified as following:

<b>Types of Entrepreneurships</b>	<b>Number of Entrepreneurs</b>
Bakery	4
Home-made food	1
Clothing	8
Jewelry	2
Handicrafts	1
Make-up Artist	1
Baby items	3

Thus, likewise mentioned in Large and Greenberg (2015)<sup>52</sup> in absence of motherhood benefits in the workplace or a support system at home, respondents like Putul, Sarah and Monika had to get rid of their precious jobs. Influenced by motherly emotion and a sense of responsibility towards her three years old daughter, Sarah says "I brought her into this world. She is my responsibility. I can't leave her just like that". Among the 18 mothers, Sanjida Khushbuis the only one who continued her fulltime government job after completing maternity leave. Sanjida in addition to a fulltime job operates an online business page of baby books

<sup>52</sup> J.J. Ladge and D. N. Greenberg, *Op. cit.*

and toys, which has a big number of followers. She has to carry out the burden of almost 2 jobs, to meet up with the costs of expensive medicines and special food requirement for her three years old daughter, who is suffering from autism. Sanjida had to place her daughter in an expensive day care for special children to manage her both jobs.

#### **“Care of the Self” and Starting of Entrepreneurship**

Before marriage, most of the entrepreneurs were involved either in paid jobs or in small self-businesses (2 women). When, the women were asked about the reason behind the start of online entrepreneurship, the response that was most common (15 among 20 entrepreneurs mentioned) – a sense of self-esteem, an attempt to proof self-worth. Besides, 3 specifically informed about to help with family expenses and the rest 2 entrepreneurs said, ‘it is a productive time spent’. However, as argued in Luckman (2016)<sup>53</sup> albeit in the context of the global West, all of the entrepreneurs agreed that it is because of the “flexible” work hour nature of online business that they could start their own entrepreneurship; although the progress of work is not always satisfactory.

The conscious development of self-esteem and the idea of transforming it into “cultivating creativity” is interchangeable with Foucault’s notion of “cultivation of the self”<sup>54</sup> where one is allowed to ‘attend to oneself, care for oneself’. Winslade<sup>55</sup> citing from Foucault mentions ‘individuals can have a say in the governing of their own lives, even in the face of the effects of power relations on their identity construction’. The respondents think that it is very important that a woman has her own earning. ‘Not having any job is like someone has cut the ground from under your feet’ (Entrepreneur Monica Mondol). “Care of the self” can also be an aspiration to do better; ‘it suggests a career as an aesthetic project, more like producing a work of art’.<sup>56</sup> All from the twenty women entrepreneurs feel that online business has made them confident both personally and professionally. Entrepreneur Humaira mentioned she was in dire depression after leaving her job to stay home for her baby. “*Sweet Crush*” – her cake business helped her to slowly overcome from depression. Echoing her, Mashrufa added:

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<sup>53</sup> S. Luckman, *Op. cit.*

<sup>54</sup> M. Foucault, *Op. cit.*

<sup>55</sup> J. Winslade, “Constructing a career narrative through the care of the self”, in K. Maree, (ed.) *Shaping the story: a guide to facilitating narrative career counseling*, Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik, 2007, pp. 48-58.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

You know, an independent woman cannot sit at home “doing nothing”. A creative mind cannot sit idle. I had to start my page *Dazzling Dresses* and it bestowed me with a sense of freedom. My mind was not chained anymore!

Being able to start an online business, run it successfully and spend for the family has improved their status among relatives, in-laws and in the larger society. Many mentioned about the joy of being able to create something (ornaments, decorative pieces, cooked food, baked products, designed clothes etc.) from the scratch. In certain cases, entrepreneurs also become good friends with clients. Such networks are useful for mental wellbeing and sometimes also help in healing from sufferings. In Sarah’s words:

My clients are often young mothers like me. Some became very good friends with me. They ring me, share personal stories, motherhood struggles, or anything. I feel like we are connected. We understand each other.

#### **Motherhood, “Making do” with Crafting and the Thresholds**

Having said that, Foucault<sup>57</sup> informs the care of the self is not free of challenges. It involves taking particular risks in formation and implementation of decisions.

For instance, managing money for the initial investment was a big challenge for many of the entrepreneurs. Some of the entrepreneurs had to ask for money from their parents or husbands to invest initially; nevertheless, all of them returned the money once their business started making profits. Entrepreneur Putul knew that she would have to resign from her job to take care of her son at home. Accordingly, she saved a handsome amount of money from her salary to initiate her own online entrepreneurship. Likewise, some of the entrepreneurs invested their savings earned from previous jobs or private tuitions, into initiating entrepreneurship. But nonetheless, not that everyone can have things in such a planned manner. Monika Mondol for example, was struggling and at last started her handicraft business with 5000 BDT, received from her only paternal aunt. On the contrary, Monika Chowdhury had no other options other than selling her only gold jewelries received as wedding gift.

There are other obstacles, namely, cyber bullying that includes getting messages in social media with sexual images, or slang words and being body shamed during live telecast of their products. Entrepreneurs opine that the success of online entrepreneurship depends a large extent on live showcase and marketing of the products concurrently. Fear of cyber bullying restrict their live presence, and many of them become bound to recruit staff to only show the products during live time,

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<sup>57</sup> M. Foucault, *The hermeneutics of the subject: lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005, Edited by F. Gros; translated by G. Burchell.

which incurs an extra cost on their business. The severity of virtual sexual harassment and its impact on online business is also noted in a recent study by Sultana and Ahmad (2019)<sup>58</sup>, where the entrepreneurs mention that in order to keep their pages free from bullies and indecent comments they need to stay online or keep an eye on their pages for almost 24 hours.

Besides, wider social insecurity and negative perception towards women also negatively impact women's business; some of the entrepreneurs were called "*meyemanush*" and treated badly when they went alone to purchase raw materials. Furthermore, online business is not taken seriously; a few of the entrepreneurs are still perceived as "doing nothing". Therefore, sexual division of labour continues at a full range. Among the five extended families, only in one, in-laws are found to help in business if needed. But none of the families are ready to take responsibility of the children so that mothers can continue their outside job. Persisting patriarchal values view women's work as less compared to men's work. In many instances, husband and in law's permission was key to initiate and continue online entrepreneurship. At least 2 (Mimi and Fahmida) out of 20 women have specifically mentioned that their husbands do not want them to continue the business; they think spending time for business means giving less time in family matters. These women run their entrepreneurship when their husbands are not around. Some of the entrepreneurs mentioned getting pejorative comments from neighbors and in-laws; like 'online business is a favorite pastime'; '*Eto porashuna kore ekhon naru beche!*' ('What is the point of earning so many degrees now that she sells *naru!*'). Nonetheless, entrepreneurs like Jannatul have developed their own strategy to fight back such situations, 'Society or in-laws never stop complaining. So just pay a deaf ear, and move fast with your life'.

Now the question is – what keeps these women entrepreneurs encouraged despite such hurdles, and what strategies do they employ in "balancing" between work for home and work for entrepreneurship? Entrepreneur Farhana's words provide an example to this,

I do not blame, but I do not have any spare time for myself anymore. I have stopped going out for entertainment purpose, and have a reduced sleeping time. I chat with my online customers, respond to their queries, take pictures of my products and upload while actually I am cooking. I am doing both simultaneously.

Or evident in Fairy Hub's owner Sanjida's beautiful reminiscing:

I still remember, how I started this entrepreneurship. I was on maternity leave from my job. I was thinking about doing something new, something that I like to do and that would also earn me some extra money – may be starting a business. Then one day,

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<sup>58</sup> U.B.F. Sultana and T. Ahmad, *Op. cit.*

while I was breast feeding, and just like that I thought a name for my business page *Fairy Hub- for Baby Books and Toys* and opened it.

Sanjida runs her own business page, in addition to shouldering her family responsibilities and a full-time job. Mother of a special child, she cannot meet the huge expenses of autism specific treatment, medicines and diets from the salary received from regular jobs.

Therefore, what I find in common among all the entrepreneurs is well explained in de Certeau's (1984)<sup>59</sup> "making do" – an "unquestioned faith" on the potentials of everyday, the joy from creating something new, is the "magical vigor" that keeps these women's determinism high. Also explicit in entrepreneur Shoma's statement, 'People have emotion for food, and I have, for cooking'. She further adds,

This entrepreneurship venture has actually helped me to have more control over my personal life. I have two fulltime cooks to help me in cooking for my food business. They cook for my family too, and my children do not wait for their mother to come and serve food on their plates. All of my three children are self-reliant. Both of my sons have rather learned some cooking and my 11 years old eldest son often makes and serves me tea. My husband does not make tea but has no complaint that I do not cook for him. What to do? I do not have time. But I have managed people who cook for them. And I think that's enough.

Or in Monika Mondol's words, 'It has given me a new identity and a reason to live. I can dream again'. Shahida from *Cake Fairy* echoes Monika as the accolades she receives from family:

Before, I was never taken seriously. They thought I know nothing. But now, I bake. I get orders. I have my own page. I give baking lessons. Now, everyone praises me. As if I have a new identity. And everyone is happy about my new persona. Believing in oneself is necessary.

As a result, having a compromised sleeping time and keeping zero time for entertainment, doing business and nursing at the same time, asking for family member's help or asking for husband's help are some of the strategies women employ. Most of the entrepreneurs do a major portion of their business work when their children are at sleep. This means having spent the entire night for entrepreneurial work in most of the cases, and then a couple of hours' sleeps before they start working again – for family. So actually, none of them mentioned about having a balance. What they all have in common is a hope and a dream to move forward. To achieve, they need to go through quadruple burden in managing home and business simultaneously. Being asked, a few of the husbands assist on a temporary basis in product packaging, responding online messages, communicating with delivery service, moderating online page (in a couple of cases), accompanying

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<sup>59</sup> M. de Certeau, *Op. cit.*

in purchasing product and in a few cases managing chores and looking after their children. Albeit, home and child rearing are thought of as women's key responsibilities; husbands can help only in special circumstances.

### **Emotions, Power and Patriarchy – Concluding Reflections**

This paper is based on my original research conducted through in-depth interviews among twenty married female online entrepreneurs in Dhaka city of Bangladesh. The empirical findings obtained from the research points to the necessity of applying a poststructuralist view of “power”<sup>60</sup> – we need to be thinking beyond binary power; rationality and emotionality should not be perceived as dichotomous. Although, feminist research is typically centered on critiquing the patriarchal arrangement of sexual division of labor, where home management is totally a woman's responsibility, these twenty interviews on online entrepreneurship offer some significant insights and suggest that realities of gender relations are not that clear cut. For instance, there persists bounded rational belief<sup>61</sup> in the society that considers child rearing is women's sole responsibility; there is also a covert understanding that in absence of a nanny or day care facilities, a mother has to be the chief care provider for her baby and stay at home. There are also a few entrepreneur mothers who have been told strictly that nobody will take care of their children, except themselves. But again affected (Anderson)<sup>62</sup> by emotion, there are also mothers among the entrepreneurs who themselves consider that motherhood comes first than anything. So, they never searched for any secondary options to keep their children with a nanny or relatives while they can do outside job. Two of the entrepreneur mothers have children with special needs; in absence of a supportive state system, motherhood becomes even more challenging for them.

Despite these various patriarchal institutional norms and constraints that women in this research traverse, through the affective dimensions of selfhood<sup>63</sup> they seek for

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<sup>60</sup> A. M. Jaggar and P.S. Rothenberg, *Feminist frameworks: alternative theoretical accounts of the relations between women and men*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1993. D. Mumby and L. Putnam, “The Politics of Emotion: A Feminist Reading of Bounded Rationality”, *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 17(3), 1992, pp. 465-486.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* D. Mumby and L. Putnam.

<sup>62</sup> B. Anderson, “Becoming and Being Hopeful: Towards a Theory of Affect”, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 24, 2006, pp. 733-752.

<sup>63</sup> S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. S. Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. M. Foucault, *The hermeneutics of the subject: lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005, Edited by F. Gros; translated by G. Burchell. C. Hemmings, “Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn,

creative possibilities. They adopt nuanced styles and strategies to keep their entrepreneurship running and make their voices heard. The very idea of women as victims of patriarchy, women as submissive and weak in performing entrepreneur roles, as claimed by many traditional literatures on entrepreneurship, are being challenged by these women entrepreneurs. Besides, worn-out by the quadruple burdens of managing home and online business simultaneously, many of them receive husband's "assistance" in household chores. It may sound surprising albeit, 15 out of 20 entrepreneurs inform that since they have to give time to their online businesses, their husbands have started taking part in child rearing activities to certain extent; they too share household responsibilities and voluntarily help in many matters of their business activities. The empirical evidence does not infer that online entrepreneurship leads towards abundance of happiness and love in the homes; rather, suggests that there is more to resistance. Although some of these entrepreneurs started online business after quitting their high-profile jobs, or even, outside job was not a choice for many of them due to the overwhelming responsibilities of motherhood, nonetheless, they place emotion and creativeness over resistance. The narratives offer multiple forms of emotions; emotion between the married partners, emotion between parents and their children, emotion of selfhood and also emotion towards creating something. This paper thus does not deny the existence of patriarchy and domination in the family, but there is also emotion and care that enable women to take their decisions for themselves and move forward. Instead of considering women a helpless victim of patriarchy, the narratives highlight the ambivalent contexts of power and patriarchy and further confer, creative possibilities can arise through emotion and affect, and one needs to explore how this interplay.

To conclude, I would like to quote from Drew and Humbert<sup>64</sup> who rightfully claim:

While societal expectations suggest that women can now progress their careers in the professions, employment and business on similar terms to men, this fails to acknowledge the inequitable division of labor in the domestic sphere for many women entrepreneurs once they become mothers [...].

It is not to deduce that entrepreneurship is an option to earn alongside motherhood; nor to affirm that women's entrepreneurship has emerged due to a crisis of motherhood. Since there are gigantic or small businesses that women initiated from

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*Cultural Studies*, Vol. 19(5), 2005, pp. 548-567. H. Moore, *Still Life: Hopes, Desires and Satisfactions*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.

<sup>64</sup> E. Drew and A.L. Humbert, 'Who's minding the kids? Work and family issues among owners of small business enterprises in Ireland', in C.L. Cooper and R.J. Burke (eds.), *Human Resource Management in Small Business: Achieving Peak Performance*, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2011, pp. 236-258.

pure business philosophy. But also, it should not be denied that a lot deal of women's entrepreneurship has emerged as crafting allows a work life "balance". The Covid-19 pandemic has further pushed to open up new online businesses to a greater extent than ever before, in addition to creating digital/online arrangements for offline businesses. We also cannot overlook the fact that home based online entrepreneurship by mothers leave them with augmented burdens; where husband's involvement and managing of everyday gender orders are mediated through mutual emotions, which are makeshift; yet, none resist the patriarchal arrangements of gendered emotional repertoires. Since, family and online entrepreneurship are inextricably interlinked, these gendered dimensions of entrepreneurship need to be included in the entrepreneurial literature, and a holistic perspective – embedding family and parenting needs to be in place to create a supportive environment for online entrepreneurship. Proper steps should also be taken to render cyber bullying, online-sexual harassment and degrading comments targeted to sexually objectify women. Last but not the least, technology with regard to entrepreneurship has opened up new opportunities for women. However, using it to only limit women's outside activities within home may rather prove disempowering for women. This leaves us with further questions: whose purpose is actually being served by the online entrepreneurship? Women, or is it patriarchy that benefits in the end?