

INTERPRETATIONS OF IDENTITY AND CONTESTED BOUNDARIES: THE BIHARIS OF BANGLADESH



Ph.D Thesis

Researcher

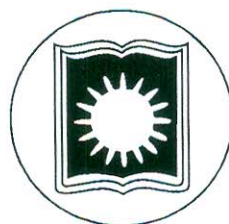
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Ph.D Thesis

By

Md. Mizanur Rahman

A Dissertation Submitted to the Institute of Bangladesh Studies, University of
Rajshahi in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

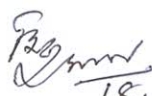
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Social Work

**Institute of Bangladesh Studies
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November 2007

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I have written this Ph.D thesis myself, it is an original work and that it has not been submitted to any other university for a degree. No part of it, in any form, has been published in any book or journal.


18.11.07

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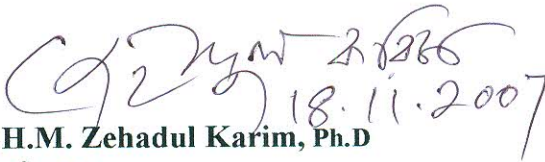
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CERTIFICATE

I do hereby certify that Md. Mizanur Rahman, my Ph.D supervisee has written this Ph.D thesis himself, it is an original work and that it has not been submitted to any other university for a degree. I recommend this thesis for final submission to the concerned authority.


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<i>khalifa</i>	Tailor
<i>Khandan</i>	Descent
<i>khati major</i>	land laborers
<i>Khaza moonsoori</i>	Music instrument player
<i>Kunjera</i>	Vegetable sellers
<i>Kuraishi</i>	Butcher
<i>Lagan</i>	A day of ritual, usually three days before marriage
<i>Lalbegi</i>	Sweeper or cleaner
<i>Mangnee</i>	The day of engagement
<i>Magadhi</i>	A local dialect in some areas of Bihar
<i>Mahajan</i>	Moneylender
<i>Maithili</i>	A local dialect in some areas of Bihar
<i>Majlish</i>	Social Gathering
<i>Marsia</i>	a form of lyric describes the Karbala battle and the heart-rending death of Imam Hossain
<i>Mashhur</i>	Famous
<i>Matam</i>	loud lamentation
<i>Mazar</i>	tomb shrines
<i>Mehfil</i>	Social gathering
<i>Milad</i>	Joint religious prayer (<i>dorud</i>) performed on specific occasion or on particular purpose
<i>Mughals</i>	One of the Ashraf castes
<i>Mulla</i>	clergy
<i>Muhajir</i>	Émigré. the word was first used when Mohammad the Prophet of Islam migrated from Mecca to Madina
<i>Muharram</i>	First month according to Arabic lunar calendar
<i>Murag</i>	Chicken

<i>Chotti Biradaris</i>	lower castes
<i>Dargah</i>	Shrine
<i>Denmohor</i>	bride price
<i>Dhunia</i>	Quilt makers
<i>Dharma</i>	Religious or religiously connected
<i>Dost</i>	Friend
<i>Duldul</i>	A legendary horse of Imam Hussain-grandson of the Prophet
<i>Eid –ul- Fitar</i>	one of the most important religious festivals for Muslims
<i>Eid-ul-Azha</i>	one of the most important religious festivals for Muslims
<i>Eid-e-Miladunnabi</i>	birth and death anniversary of the Prophet
<i>Ershad</i>	Rrecite
<i>Gazal</i>	particular form of Urdu song
<i>Goala</i>	milkmen
<i>Goalghar</i>	cowshed
<i>Haveli</i>	Brick-built big houses
<i>Hadith</i>	Preaching of the Prophet
<i>Hajam</i>	Traditional healer, mainly performs circumcision
<i>Idrisi</i>	Tailor
<i>Indara</i>	Well
<i>Jashne juloos</i>	a jovial procession on <i>Eid-e-Miladunnabi</i>
<i>jhanda</i>	flags
<i>Julahas</i>	weavers
<i>Jumma</i>	the weekly prayer in the noon that has special significance
<i>Kalal</i>	Wine seller
<i>Karbala</i>	battle field where the Prophet's grandson Imam Hussain was killed in an unfair battle
<i>Kawali</i>	a form of music of northern part of Indian subcontinent

GLOSSARY

<i>Adab</i>	Etiquette/correct procedures
<i>Agua</i> (male) / <i>Agua</i> in (female)	The matchmaker
<i>Andarmahal</i>	(private domain)
<i>Ansari/Julha/Momin</i>	Weavers /cloth businessmen
<i>Apaya</i>	ill-omened
<i>Ashraf</i>	Upper Caste Elites among Muslims
<i>Ashura</i>	10 th Muharram, mainly observed for murder of Prophet's grandson, holy day for Muslims for many other reasons too
<i>Atraf</i>	Lower Caste
<i>Awadhi</i>	A local dialect in some areas of Bihar and North India
AYGUSC	Association of Young Generation Urdu-speaking Community
<i>Azaan</i>	Call for prayer
<i>Badi Abba</i>	the grandfather/Lineage Chief
<i>Bahut khoob</i>	very good
<i>Baithak khana</i>	living room
<i>Bawarchikhana</i>	kitchen
<i>Bania</i>	Petty businessmen
<i>Benarasi</i>	A type of sari worn in festivals
<i>Beshak</i>	certainly
<i>Bhojpuri</i>	A local dialect in some areas of Bihar and some other parts in India
<i>Biradaris</i>	The professional groups that constituted hierarchy
<i>Boli</i>	Dialect

<i>Murid</i>	follower of <i>Pir</i>
<i>Musahera</i> ,	a form of Urdu poetry recitation
<i>Naatkhani</i>	admiration of the Prophet Muhammad
NGO	Non- Governmental Organizations
<i>Noth</i>	ornament of nose
<i>oju</i>	Before, prayer cleaning some parts of body with water
<i>Parcha kita</i>	The date of marriage depends on the date
<i>Pathan</i>	an ethnic group of <i>Ashraf</i>
<i>Pak panjatan</i>	five holy persons- Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatema, son-in-law Hazrat Ali, and two grandsons Imam Hasan and Imam Hussain
<i>Pir</i>	Holy man /cult
<i>Purdah</i>	Veiling
<i>Raiyyans</i>	Peasants
<i>Rabiul Awwal</i>	third month in Arabic calendar
<i>Razils</i>	Lower <i>Biradaris</i>
<i>Roza</i>	Fasting
<i>Sadka</i>	Sacrifice/return
<i>Safar</i>	Second month in Arabic calendar
<i>Shab-e-Barat</i>	A holy night observed with the belief that Allah decides fate on this night
<i>Salam</i>	salute/way of showing respect and greetings
<i>Shaer</i>	Poet
<i>Shariaat</i>	Prescription and guidelines for living of Muslims
<i>Sharif biradari</i>	prestigious upper caste
<i>Sheikh</i> ,	One of the Ashraf castes
<i>Sher</i>	Short Urdu Poems
<i>Shiaaite</i>	A sect of Muslims

<i>Shirni</i>	especially prepared food to distributed for holy purpose
SPGRC	Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee
SPYRM	Stranded Pakistanis Youth Rehabilitation Movement
<i>Sufi</i>	Devotee /holy man
<i>Sunnah</i>	behaviors of the Prophet which are guidelines for Muslims to follow
<i>Sunnat-e-khatna</i>	Circumcision
<i>Sunni</i>	the major sect in Islam
<i>Syeeds</i>	One of the Ashraf castes who are supposed to be descendants of the Prophet
<i>Tabiz</i>	amulets
<i>Tadbir</i>	Lobbying
<i>Talaq</i>	Divorce
<i>Taqdir</i>	Fate
<i>Tarabazi</i>	lightening
<i>Tazia</i>	colorful procession on the occasion of <i>ashura</i>
<i>Tickly</i>	ornament for forehead
<i>Urash</i>	Religious feast (mainly on death or birth anniversary of any holy man)
<i>Urdi</i>	The uniform of a soldier
<i>Zamindar</i>	Land owners
<i>Zilhaz</i>	Twelfth month according to Arabic lunar calendar

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the crisis of identity of the non-Bengali Muslim minority people in Bangladesh who are commonly known as 'Biharis'. During the partition of India in 1947, a number of non-Bengali Muslims migrated to then East Pakistan, which is now present-day Bangladesh. In the context of the reality that in the Independence war of Bangladesh in 1971, some Biharis sided with Pakistan, and after Liberation of Bangladesh majority of the Biharis opted for Pakistan, they are treated as 'stateless' and henceforth most of them are living in refugee camps. Still a good portion of Bengalis do not want to accept them as citizens, though many of them are coming out of the camp and gradually becoming mainstreamed. This research specifically focuses on how this community are encountered and responded to the various 'identities' attributed to them and how they themselves wish to maintain their identity. My examination of the nationalist discourses and various political, economic and social factors that surrounded or underlay these 'identities' shows that this people are not homogeneous in terms of their origin and culture nor in their perception and experiences. Rather having a little control on their life and reality, they were always pushed in a struggle of illusive identities and encounters. Based on the fieldwork carried in Bashbari of Syedpur town in Nilphamari district of Bangladesh, the thesis argues that people always create meanings to their existence that are expressed in their culture. Change of meanings or 'root metaphors' of life in particular dramatic situations is a threat to their existence when their behaviors may not be guided by norms. The thesis also explores that every group of people has own meanings of their actions and behaviors, that cannot be perceived from a particular discourse like nationalism, rather their meanings should be explored in mundane activities of their daily life and rituals.

Chapter 1

Introductory Issues

1.1 Introduction

A recent UN report points out that at the end of 1994, conflicts around the world had left nearly 27 million refugees and displaced persons (an 11 fold increase since 1970)¹. Today, one of every 200 people in the world is either a refugee or a displaced within his or her own country. This figure shows the endemic nature of various kinds of conflict in the modern nation-states and heterogeneity of different ethnic group that is woven into the homorganic fabric of their socio-economic life.

Among others, possibly the 'Biharis', the Urdu speaking migrants in Bangladesh, are the worst victims of displacement. Originally from India's Bihar and other northern states, the Urdu-speaking Muslims moved to then East Pakistan in 1947, the time of India's partition. The residence of the Biharis in present-day Bangladesh is result of the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent and the creation of India and Pakistan. Later on, they came to be known as 'Biharis', since a great portion of the immigrants came from Bihar. At that time, around one million Biharis migrated from India to East Pakistan. During the Independence war of Bangladesh in 1971, a group of the Biharis sided with the West Pakistanis and some Biharis joined armed movements to support them. Therefore, since the creation of Bangladesh, clashes between the Biharis and Bangladeshis ensued. Having their image of 'collaborators' or 'perpetrators', a number of Biharis were stripped of their properties, several thousands were jailed, and the majorities were to reside in camps in urban centers.

Denied permission to emigrate, the Biharis found themselves unwelcome in both their chosen countries -- Pakistan -- and the nation that had just formed around them -- Bangladesh. While Pakistan feared a mass influx of Biharis would be costly and could potentially stir passions in an already fragmented population, Bangladesh scorned the Biharis for having supported the enemy. Neither country offered citizenship or adequate aid. Thus the Biharis were left in limbo, where they languish to this day. On the other hand, many Bihari families who have come out of the camp are now running businesses and other jobs. Even some of them are joining as national representatives (some renowned cricket players of Bangladesh National Cricket team are Urdu-speakers). Despite the common labeling as 'Bihari', it would be a simplified idea to consider the

¹ *Development Trends in the World' Human Development Report UNDP, 1996 Chapter 1.*

Biharis a homogeneous community- rather there are divisions among the Biharis in terms of class, ethnicity, gender and more specifically concerning the issue of assimilation with mainstream Bengalis or emigration to Pakistan.

1.2 Background

The population of Bangladesh is 98% Bengali, with ethnic groups and non-Bengali Muslims -- such as the 'Biharis' the Urdu-speaking emigrants --making up the last 2%². There are around 250,000 to 300,000 Biharis in Bangladesh. When East Pakistan moved to secede and war broke out between East and West Pakistan in 1971, a group of Biharis, who considered themselves as citizens of Pakistan, sided with West Pakistan. In December 1971, however, East Pakistan became the independent state of Bangladesh, and the Biharis were left behind as the Pakistani army and civilians evacuated.

After 1971, a major portion of the Bihari community chose to move to Pakistan, as they had chosen the same once in 1947. Pakistan initially agreed to the repatriation and some 163,000 Biharis were resettled in Pakistan by 1981. So, it has been almost three decades since the Biharis were first installed in the camps throughout Bangladesh. The process is now stopped due to some political and diplomatic unrest.

Between 240,000 and 300,000³ Biharis, who are also referred to as the 'Stranded Pakistanis', are mainly urban dwellers who reside in 116⁴ camps throughout Bangladesh. They have lived in these camps since the early 1970s after the war led to the creation of Bangladesh. There is also a significant number of Biharis living outside the camps somehow getting integrated with the mainstream population. Camp-resident Biharis are denied citizenship in this country, but whoever visited the camps must admit that the life in the camps is filthy and awful.

The Biharis, or the Urdu-speakers, even if they are born in this land are considered as 'outsider' in general, as most of them have neither Bangladeshi nor Pakistani citizenship. As the consequence of this 'statelessness', they are denied basic political rights such as the right to vote and recruitment to the civil service, police, military, and political office. These political restrictions severely limit the group's economic opportunities and continue to

² *BBS Report 2005.*

³ Actual figure is missing, since different parties show different figures with particular agenda. This figure is collected from the report of Rabita Al Alam-Al Islam survey and UNHCR report 2006.

⁴ Abrar and Redclift (2005) report says that there are 116 camps, whereas the Rabita al Alam al Islam reports 66 camps.

perpetuate their poverty and under representation. On the other hand, the people who are coming out of the camp are not denied of the citizenship rights, but in their daily living they are facing inherent encounters in the dominant nationalist discourse (Ilias 2003, p. 46).

The Biharis share a common religion with the majority Muslim population. However, they speak multiple languages including Urdu and Bengali and have different social customs than the dominant Bengalis. A group of Biharis are still seeking repatriation to Pakistan but there is also a growing minority that has resigned itself to living in Bangladesh and is thus seeking Bangladeshi citizenship. Recently, a report published in *The Daily Prothom Alo* (October.24, 2007) about an order of the Election Commission of Bangladesh included a number of Bihari camp-dwellers as voters, which is also strongly opposed by a group of veteran liberation fighters. In such a situation, it has become an urgent scholarly need to know the reality of these people who have been living in this country and remaining muted for long. This cannot be explained and perceived only through external behaviors and features, rather through the exploration of their interpretations, realizations and feelings, since to some extent, every aspect of life may seem quite similar with other citizens of Bangladesh, but in the deeper heart and in the inner level of cognition, there lies the tension of identity and boundaries surrounded with those identities.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

This research attempts to explore the interpretations of identity and the maintenance of boundaries related to identity of the Biharis. The Partition of India compelled divided or migrant families, whether of Hindu or Muslim origin, to turn to different areas options selected either based on resource or land or service or location near or linked to a mega city. Questions of migration and mobility not only link up to the events of Partition but also to the quest for education, employment and the sustenance or breaking-up of marital and kinship ties. In a new scene, they had old and new relations, heritage and diffusion, assimilation and acculturation.

This research aims at exploring the reasons why and how the 'Biharis', Urdu-speaking Muslim refugees from India, were or were not assimilated into the mainstream of Bangladesh. In short, it can be argued that two divergent but related streams of nationalisms –the Pakistani from 1947 to 1971, and the Bengali / Bangladeshi from 1971 to the present, have made the Biharis the worst victims and population of great 'dilemmas'. Over the period, the people faced a severe crisis of identity and 'image' that shifted along with these events and often they had a little or no control on. Besides, these changing identities not only shaped the exterior strategy of accommodation, it certainly

caused a problem of identifying self in a cognitive level. The Biharis had to and have to cope with their changing identities and changed social structures where most of the Bihari people have no or little control. Continuously posing meanings on them by others also led them in a crisis of finding 'meanings' of their identity. This research intends to comprehend the response and perception to these changing forms of identity by the 'Bihari' people themselves.

As it was mentioned earlier that though the term 'Bihari' is commonly used to designate all the non-Bengali Muslim émigrés who themselves or their families migrated during and the aftermath of 1947, the reality of the émigrés are certainly different in terms of their place of origin, language, culture and living. However, they are in a situation where trembling boundaries and fusing in many spheres of community are present. In a broader plane, two spheres can be recognized: on the one hand, there exists a community boundary in a setting where their cultures and traditions are different from mainstream Bengali population; and on the other, boundaries are existent within the non-Bengali Urdu-speaking population where there are diversity of culture, tradition, caste and so on. Nonetheless, all these boundaries are not 'imaginative' though 'cognitive' in a greater extent, and certainly have strong influences on the life of the people who live within the edges. Widespread images like 'stranded Pakistanis', 'refugees', 'collaborators' or 'perpetrators' also pose some boundaries and trauma that directs cognition and behavior of expression. And again, it is also very important to identify that all the boundaries are not visible and rigid. The identity as 'stranded Pakistanis' are noticeable edges that pose limits on community behavior and access to resources. Such 'identity' is limited to mainly the camp-residents. The non-camp resident Urdu-speakers, on the other way, do not face certain problem of statelessness, but a popular image of 'collaborators' in Independence war often perpetuate the public mind that certainly influences actions and thoughts. For both camp-residents and non-camp residents, another popular reflection is that 'they always want to go back to Pakistan'; which is not based only on historical causes, rather the cultural association of Urdu-speakers' culture with North India and Pakistan. Even if it is taken into consideration that despite internal diversities of cultural traditions among the Urdu-speakers, some common features are pertinent there, what should be important here is to recognize that this Urdu-speakers' culture has certainly undergone tremendous changes for their sixty years' existence in this land, living with Bengalis and facing turbulent socio-political events. Therefore, at every sphere, there is a continuous process of making and unmaking of boundaries and identity- within the Urdu-speakers themselves, with Bengalis, within and outside classes and so on. These fusion and exclusion are caused and resulted by the meanings that are constantly being attributed

to life. As such, to perceive the issue of identity and boundary maintenance, a historical, anthropological and psycho-social analysis is required.

This research makes an attempt to explore the socio-historical process of boundary formation among the Biharis of Bangladesh, the symbolic actions as well as events that are thought to maintain the community boundaries, and the metaphors and images that are considered to be the people's perception regarding boundaries. As such, focus will be given on people's interpretation from symbolic (Geertz 1973, Turner 1969) perspectives. In due course, ethnographic method will be adopted to depict the colors of the symbolic expressions and to perceive the resonance of the metaphors in the greater canvas of culture and in the entire saga of social interaction. The approach is therefore, emic and reflexive. Nevertheless, causal relation of socio-cultural and historical factors is also analyzed to fill up the purpose of the research.

1.4 Objectives of the Research

In this research, major issue of query is how Bihari people perceive the meaning of 'identity' and realize their understanding of 'identity' and 'boundaries of identities'. As such, the research explores political and cultural events that shaped the life and identities; develop their worldview and give their life some particular meanings. Crisis of maintaining cultural identity and acculturation situate the Biharis at a position where there cultural boundaries are tremulous and meanings have been shifting incessantly. Through this research, attempts are made to comprehend the interpretations of their identities and the contested boundaries of their culture by the 'Biharis' themselves. It is quite possible that, after having learned how the Biharis perceive their sacrifice, suffering – is not satisfied. He will also ask them for the meaning of this rite. But if the desire for interpretation persists, they will be at ease, for the most part; and that here people act like that, that it is their custom and history; in short, that it is not their problem and they will undoubtedly be right. Major objectives of the research are to

- Know the socio-political and historical factors as well as processes that formulated and shifted the identity of the Bihari community over the period.
- Understand and analyze their interpretations regarding those socio-political and historical events and the 'fields' where such interpretations are evident and being cultivated.
- Know how they perceive their 'identity' and what the boundaries (social, political and cultural) are

- Comprehend how the boundaries of identities are maintained, especially through metaphors, rituals and symbolic interactions.

1.5 Rationale of the Research

Displaced by the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, the once urgent push for a solution to the Bihari situation has faded with time, creating the kind of chronic, troublesome situation that gets lost in the political shuffle. Often called “stranded Pakistanis,” the Biharis--Urdu-speaking, non-Bengali Muslims--have live in refugee-like circumstances in camps in Bangladesh for more than three decades. They were displaced by the creation of a new nation; no country accepts responsibility for the group. As a result, the fate of more than 240,000 Biharis has been debated, but never determined. In this research, I would like to examine the experience of ‘Biharis’ as refugees and migrants, focusing particularly on the experiences of ordinary people some of who were immigrants and some of who were born and brought up in this land. Some of them witness violence and trauma who became refugees of Partition. And for them and for the new generation, the sufferings did not end with creation of the nation-state. However, this research also focuses on contemporary interviews and individual testimony as the primary form of data source, supplemented by studies of middle-class cultural production in the public sphere that negotiated this experience of displacement, in order to understand how these new cultural geographies enable us to rethink nationalism, and understand the public developments and discourses that shape the testimonies and views of those interviewed.

1.6 Operational Definition

1.6.1 Biharis

The Biharis are not a homogeneous community. Usually, the Urdu-speaking non-Bengali Muslim people who migrated from the present part of India, as the consequence of Partition in 1947, are called ‘Biharis’. The term Biharis is often used since a large portion of the immigrants has come from present Indian state Bihar, [some also argued that the term derived from the *Bahar* –means outside, since the Biharis were the outsiders of this land they were designated as Biharis(Ilias:2003)]. Whatever the term is rooted in, the Biharis are commonly identified as originally from Bihar and migrated during Partition. The reality is different indeed, since there are people who migrated from different parts of modern India, and of course in different times. There are people who migrated not only from Bihar, but also from many parts of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and even from South India. Some non-Bengali artisans and labourers who resided nearby Kolkata also migrated at that time. As such, the term ‘Biharis’ does not mean that all the people

designated under this term are from Bihar only; rather they vary in their origin, language, culture, profession and others.

People, who have been living in the camps since 1971, are also known as '*Stranded Pakistanis*'; because this term is a platform that unites them with a vision to migrate to Pakistan. Nevertheless, many people, who did not enter the camp and some left the camp within this long thirty five years, are not included among the stranded Pakistanis. Unlike the camp-dwellers, they are slowly integrated with the Bengali population. This research is focused on the *Biharis* according to the general usage (despite their different origins), both outside and inside the camp; though ethnographic study will be conducted among the non camp-residents.

1.6.2 Identity

Identity is a concern often refers to the issues associated with groups and commonalities. The groups and categories do not belong to a closed circumference of boundaries that is handed over from one generation to the other; rather the people and communities always remain in a changing influx of boundaries. In their living within such socio-cultural as well psychological boundaries people constantly engage themselves in defining themselves and in relation defining others. As such, it is almost impossible in a complex and open social situation, to explore the visible boundaries; rather one has to find those in the symbolic actions and in the metaphoric expressions that contain and maintain the boundaries. In the study, the Bihari people may be diversified identities in terms of class, gender, profession and origin, only the common socio-political history and linguistic affinity that made them known as (non-Bengali Urdu-speaking) will be taken into account.

1.6.3 Diaspora

The term Diaspora refers to a group of people dispersed from their original place. The term was originally applied to Jews living outside Palestine, but in recent years has been applied to African Americans and the members of other ethnic minorities. The Biharis, who are uprooted from their original land, may be referred to as Diaspora. Interestingly, their psychological belonging is not to the land where their ancestors used to live (present India), but to other land.

1.6.4 Boundary

Social groups achieve an identity by defining themselves as different from other such groups and by erecting boundaries between them (Barth: 1969). Community classifies a

person in terms of their most inclusive identity, presumptively determined by origin and background as well as a social organization maintained by inter-group boundary mechanisms, which boundary mechanism is based not on possession of a cultural inventory but on manipulation of identities and their situational character. In this research, attempts will be made to explore how Biharis perceive their cultural boundaries in their relationship with other communities, particularly with Bengalis; and what are the components and mechanisms through which they maintain such boundaries.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The study of culture is a never ending process, particularly when someone dealing with meanings and interpretations. The historical events that the community faced is a kind of trauma for many of them, particularly in present scenario of Bangladesh when nationalist discourses are dominant. Many old-aged Biharis did not open their minds having a thought in mind that what is the use of remembering that trauma once again? In this regard, as a researcher I also faced a question in my mind – should I insist on and on to bleed their forgotten wounds? The role and participation of Urdu-speakers in 1971 were carefully handled because that might have created apprehension among them.

However, actual facts and figures were missing in many aspects, because no such figure is found anywhere. Nevertheless, still I do believe that a careful and systematic study of 1971 is required to re-evaluate the extent of violence and trauma where many parties were involved. In a sheer nationalistic historiography, many facts and events are doomed with emotion and often the easiest task is to ‘blame the victims’. That is true for all minorities –linguistic, ethnic and religious.

Women’s perspectives and interpretations could have been a vital part in this research since often their voice is muted in the dominant historiography (see Das: 1995 and Butalia: 1998). Their versions can provide with a different perspective that allow us to look at events from a new angle. However, though a number of female were interviewed, but the feminine version was not emphasized with particular significance.

To understand the boundary maintenance, perspective from the other side, i.e. from the Bengalis is also important. In fact, that could reveal some other issues like how the Bengalis feel about them. Though some interviews with Bengalis, activists and scholars were taken to focus this research, the study was limited mainly to the Urdu-speakers.

Finally, being an outsider and non-native many issues may not be addressed by the researcher. Particularly this is true for Urdu, though I learned Urdu, but lacking the

complete authority I might have limitations in understanding and expressing all they said. As Geertz told, there were layers after layers in understanding a culture. So, I agree that subjective interpretations are also incorporated in this research.

1.8 Overview of the Thesis

The thesis has eight chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter Two presents some general conceptual and theoretical issues in relation to identity, nationalism, and other related issues. Chapter Three looks at the historical and socio-political contexts which the 'Biharis' of Bangladesh faced and experienced, paying particular attention to these events which shaped their life and identity. Following this, how these historical and socio-political factors characterized their identity and labeled them with different social images, were discussed in Chapter Four. Then, in Chapter Five, I discuss in detail the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the 'Bihari' population in Banshbari area of Syedpur where I did my research. In Chapter Six, I depict how 'identity' is created and transmitted among themselves through nurturing memories, creating and recreating home and perceiving 'self'. In Chapter Seven, I focus on the organizations and other activities that emerged as new voices for their rights and claims, and certainly there are wide-ranging voices. Finally, in Chapter Eight, I conclude by reiterating the main argument of the thesis, and by summarizing the analysis and ethnographic evidence in its support.

Chapter 2

Conceptual and Methodological Issues

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the main theoretical and conceptual issues that relate to the examination of the relationship between identity, interpretation and boundary in this thesis. First, I discuss key terms like nationalism, ethnicity and identity, diaspora that are central to my thesis. Following an examination of the different meanings and usage of these terms, I review how the relationships of nationalism, ethnicity and identity have been addressed in recent literature on these topics. I also look specifically at the 'interpretation of identity' and symbolic processes in the literature of anthropological studies on culture. Some broad trends noticeable in these interrelated bodies of literature may be described at the outset. Theories of two main proponents of symbolic school Clifford Geertz (1973) and Victor Turner (1969) are analyzed in particular. While Geertz mostly discussed on the awareness of meaning attribution at different layers of ethnography writing; Turner focused on human behaviors in conflict situation, which he called 'social drama'. In both discussions attribution and creation of 'meaning' is important. One of the areas in which this can be clearly seen is the large and ever-growing body of literature on nationalism and ethnicity. Given that 'identity' still holds sway over many parts of the world, viewing it from nation or ethnic group's perspectives has played a very important role in determining our understanding of the constellation of ideas, practices and relationships that the term 'identity' represents. As discussed in greater detail below, the literature on nationalism and identity has moved away from initial concerns about 'defining ethnic groups' and 'nationhood' to how nationalist ideologies are constructed and maintained in life to form a group identity. In the same way, if not to the same extent, a growing body of literature has recently begun to focus on '*diaspora*' and memory that have significant influence on identity formation in the contemporary world. As identity formation continues to be a everchanging process as Geertz (1973) told about nationalism to with onion, nationalism and identity has begun to emerge as a significant issue in this context, as discussed in greater detail below. The situation in Bangladesh, where many other voices of minority-ethnic, linguistic and religious are doomed in the prevailing 'nationalist' discourse clearly demands such an approach. More crucially, the task of depicting 'culture' as a central analytical category in exploring the relationship between different groups continues to be treated as a subsidiary issue. The fact that the historical and socio-political events are often articulated and improvised in daily interaction, indicates that despite the strength of macro-politics and boundaries, people always have their ways of meaning attribution that are central in

determining and synthesis of community boundaries. Thus it is by keeping my focus on 'identity' that I attempt to examine the linkages between the development process and the politics of religion in this thesis.

The research is concerned with identities and boundaries of Bihari people, therefore issues regarding identity, pluralism and the role of state are elaborated in this regard. *A knowledge of cultures*, describing what they are doing – which is a never-ending task (no description is exhaustive) – is but a kind of preliminary step in order to finally arrive at the essential questions: what do they think about what they are doing, what is the meaning, hidden in their collective thoughts, of what they are doing?

Admittedly, I asked the people what meaning of identity has in their life, what idea of boundary accompanies them in their interaction with Bengalis and others. I also solicited from them not only information about what they do but interpretive comments, assessments and value judgments as well. Their discourse on identity and/or difference also has its rules; it is not the same according to situations such as being with family and encountering an outsider. Not only must I understand the meaning of their phrases, I must also learn to describe their utterances⁵. Being a Bengali, all these were my limitations. What they say is part and parcel of what they do, but not everything. I can certainly be aware both of what they do and of what they say about what they do, but I do not have the action on the one hand and it's meaning on the other. So I proceeded with a methodology having all these limitations.

2.2 Conceptual Issues

2.2.1 Community, Ethnicity and Nation

Theoretically, many components may form the basis of nationalism. Such components are language, ethnicity, common culture, religion, race, common history etc. Any one or more than one of such components may contribute to the formation of nationhood of a particular community or a group of people. However, the contributing factors the mechanization of the formation process is essentially shaped by the particular period of history and other external influences as well.

The question of nationalism is a very critical one, since there are many factors and processes in the way of formation of a single nationhood. On the process of the formation of nationhood, there are many turning points as well. There lie many fragments of a

⁵ We must distinguish the phrase (*type*) or the proposal (*token*) from the wording. The wording reflects not a language but a situation, which must be described.

nationalist idea, which pervades the way to the seeds of new nationalisms later on. As such, the idea of a nation is intricately interwoven with particular period and sequence. Even the derived ideas of a single nationalism may go towards a new direction that may differ from the parental idea to a great deal. In addition, the people of the community that is supposed to belong to one nation, is not a uniform one. Therefore, the people and the individuals may perceive and respond to the very idea of their nationalism in a different mode.

Modernists, represented by sociologists such as Benedict Anderson, have pronounced the nation an essentially modern creation; with few roots in pre-modern times Smith himself is probably the leading and most prolific primordialist -- a believer in the historical longevity of nationalism and ethnicity. Even though modern "nationalism" itself (the idea of popular self rule) is only 200 years, he argues that ethnic identity has existed for thousands of years, and nationalism can only be understood as its modern articulation. Primordialists tend to see nations as being essential, basic units of social cohesion, a universal attribute of humanity Walker Connor also belongs to the primordialists. The claim to nationhood usually invokes the idea of 'a group of people' with a shared language, sometimes a shared religion and usually, but not always, a shared history to this. It holds the collective identities of same nation like ethnicity, language, religion, etc. that persist over the periods of history, or may be mythical to invoke a collective identity. In other words, nationalism, as Ernest Gellner used it, refers to "a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that the ethnic boundaries should not cut across the political ones." (Gellner 1983:1)

Like other ideologies, nationalism must simultaneously justify a particular (real or potential) power structure and satisfy acknowledged needs on the part of a population. Seen from this perspective, a successful nationalism implies the linking of an ethnic ideology with a state apparatus. The nation-state draws on an ideology proclaiming that political boundaries should be coterminous with cultural boundaries.

Ernest Gellner (1983) argues that cultural homogeneity is the basis of industrial societies for committee's cognitive and economic growth and thus ensures the homogeneity. Nationalism is the concept of a shared community (Anderson 1983:15), which has enabled post-colonial societies to invent a self-image through which they could act to liberate themselves from imperialist oppression. For deconstructionists such as Benedict Anderson, ethnicity and nationalism are essentially artificial constructs, "capricious imagined communities that float out of the new forms of media that have spread with economic modernization." Anderson's description of a nation as an "imagined political community" has been widely quoted. It is imagined, he posits, "because the members of

even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives an image of their community." It is a community, he goes on, because it is "conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 1991:6). This is a useful definition, although its modernist presumptions make it problematic. Anderson's conceptualization of the nation as an 'imagined community' is helpful in pointing to the ideological construction of national communities and therefore to their historical contingency. National identities come into existence as a consciousness of specific forms of difference. The boundaries of demarcation are often transitory and fluid, drawing on a diverse array of forms: 'a myth of common ancestry, a sense of common territoriality, a common language and body of cultural symbols and/or common phenotypic appearance, in physique or in garments...' (Anderson 1983)

Anderson's ideas are also partly influenced by Victor Turner (1969) by focusing on nationalism as a mode of political imaginary action, which has to be analyzed more like religion or kinship or like political ideologies such as Marxism or Liberalism. This emphasis on the imaginary work of nationalism opens up fascinating areas for new research on nationalist culture production, for example, how it operates in media, consumption, art and folklore. Yet there are differences between nationalism and traditionalism. Although nationalism, which is frequently a traditionalistic ideology, may glorify and recodify an ostensibly ancient tradition shared by the members of the nation, but it does not thereby necessarily re-create that tradition. Fredrik Barth (1969) argued that ethnic groups are not merely or necessarily based on the occupation exclusive territories, and different ways in which they are maintained not only by a once-and-for all recruitment but by continual expression and validation, need to be analyzed (Barth 1969:204).

According to M. Weber's account of (1922) study of the ethnic origins of nationalism and B. Anderson's (1983) conception of the linguistic 'imagined community', it becomes clear from the field research undertaken for the purposes of this study that the Bihari community of Syedpur constitutes an 'ethnic group' based on nationalist aspirations. In his study of *Economy and Society* in 1922, Weber gave a detailed account of an ethnic group which describes aptly the experiences of the first generation Bihari settlers in Syedpur. In his definition of an ethnic group, Weber argued that they are: those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or of both, or because of memories of colonization or migration. (1922, p.389)

Weber argued that a combination of shared customs, similarities of physical type and actual memories of migration can lead to 'group formation' even in a new country. The ideology of nationalism and allegiance to the 'emotionally charged... nation' has led to

another development which plays a pivotal role in contemporary international politics, that of the 'nation-state'. Guibernau and Rex's definition of the nation-state is a very interesting one for the scope of this paper: The nation-state was created as a political institution with a territorial base which utilized the doctrine of nationalism in its foundational moment to generate a common culture and a sense of belonging to its members... Once the nation-state was created... whether out of one nation or as a multicultural or imperial entity, it actively promoted the cultural homogenization of its members and even appealed to a new common ethnicity which had to be constructed in a symbolic manner. (Guibernau and Rex, 1997, pp.4-5)

Weber concludes in his discussion of 'ethnicity', the concept of the 'nation' is entwined and linked to the concept of 'political power'. Weber contests: the concept [nation] seems to refer... to a united phenomenon, to a specific kind of pathos which is linked to the idea of a powerful political community of people... the more power is emphasised, the closer appears to be the link between [the] nation and the state.(1997, p.26)

Anderson defines nationalism as an 'imagined political community... it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'(1983, pp.5-6). Nation-formation based upon the sentiments of nationalism and defined territorially has become a fundamental feature of contemporary world politics (Jackson, 2001, pp.35-49). The 'nation', argue Guibernau and Rex, is: an emotionally charged object and nationalism emerges as an ideology centred upon the sentiment of belonging to a particular community and the subsequent desire to see it flourish and develop. (Guibernau, Rex, 1997, p.4)

The definitions of nationalism cited above are very interesting as those clearly demonstrate that the Biharis have no form of allegiance to Bangladesh as a nation or a state even though they have been living here for the past 50-60 years. They are not 'culturally homogenized' with the rest of the Bangladeshi public. Thus, as Z.Bauman (1996, p.19) notes that the issue of 'identity comes to the fore when there are doubts about belonging'. Furthermore, due to feelings of alienation, racial difference, identity confusion and identity contextualization (Gardner, 2002, p.11), it has been very hard to establish this 'common culture' in synchronization with the rest of Bangladeshi society. In fact, as Smith (1986, p.41) argues, 'ethnie' becomes even more 'crystallized', more identity conscious and more self-aware when exposed to the durability and the ubiquitous presence and longevity of other ethnic communities. Thus, the living side by side with Bangladeshi people from same faith but other cultures, other history does not install a 'common culture', but 'crystallizes' further the difference between 'them' and 'us', and

tightens in the process claims to the Bengali nation built on the platform of ethnic self-awareness. As A. Kershen (1998, p.2) puts it, 'without an 'other' to identify with or differ from, self-recognition would be impossible'. Following from Smith's comment, Guibernau's and Rex's definition clearly is echoing something which is multicultural in structure but, even in this instance, the Biharis are still not part of the 'common' culture of Bangladesh (if there is such a thing). It is often argued that the Biharis have remained firmly rooted within their own camps, re-creating a 'home' within 'home'. They have distanced themselves from mainstream society, structurally, physically, and ideologically and have failed to become part of the Bangladeshi national experiment.

2.2.2 Diaspora

Diaspora discourse articulates together both roots and routes to construct what Gilroy describes as 'alternative public spheres', which give rise to forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time and space in order to live inside it with a difference. Gilroy thus clearly suggests that diaspora and irredentist identifications clearly undermine the territorial nation-state. Someone does not need to live, geographically, in a particular country to be able to call that country 'home' and have allegiances towards it. Nation and nationality cannot be observed or objectively defined. Just because certain first generation Biharis living in Syedpur may have assumed the Urdu language and also adopted certain aspects of Bangladeshi culture, it does not mean that their loyalties are towards the Pakistan even though they are living in a territory governed by the Bangladeshi nation-state. Furthermore, in criticizing Brass, P. Gilroy (1987, pp.153-160) reminds that the discourse of diaspora settlement undermines the territorial authenticity and the 'nation-building' project undertaken by the nation-state. Furthermore, as Weber (1997, p.25) reminds us, using the example of the Baltic Germans whose loyalties lie not with the German but Russian state, any sense of 'nationality' in the modern meaning of the term cannot be simply defined by a common language or a common culture. Feelings of nationalism are stirred by much deeper and more powerful emotions. Thus, the Biharis feel a greater sense of community with the 'homeland' because they feel a subjective and 'common' affinity with people from India. Therefore, loyalties to the 'nation' can transcend boundaries established by the nation-state. Claims to the nation cannot be objectively defined. Instead, using the words of Weber (1997, pp.24-25), 'the belief in common nationality is qualitative'.

This argument by Weber is carried forward by A. Smith (1986, pp.43-44) who has suggested that when a group constitutes a majority of the population then its ethnic myths and symbols will be represented in the mainstream mainly through the agents of ethnic

and national socialization such as the religious institutions, the law, the family, the education system (Gellner, 1983, pp.1-7, 19-38), the media and the business class.

In the case of the Biharis settling in Syedpur, they have been subjected to the ethnic symbols and myths of the majority Bangladeshi. They, along with other migrant settlers in Bangladesh, are an 'ethnic minority' who, according to T. Eriksen (1993, pp.1-17) are not part of the mainstream dominant group, as such, their 'ideal' is that of the ethnic homeland or the territory of belonging. Stressed in political terms, Smith suggests that ethnic unity is solidified when ethnic group is in the minority and due to the denial of access to power, the allegiance of these minority groups is not towards the structures of power in host society, but to common origins situated in a far off land. This second conclusion indicates the important interplay between nationalism and power and how claims to the nation and feelings of nationalism are a direct result of access to, predominantly political, power. Possibly, such nationalist feelings based on religion that was prevalent in the 1950s, allowed the Biharis to get access to state privileges. The complexity of the arguments of ethnicity and nationalism put forward by Weber, Smith, Anderson, Glick Schiller and Eriksen, can be demonstrated to argue that the Bihari community live within a transnational social field constructed largely through professions, letters, trading of goods, and memories and also via participation in transnational household ceremonies and rituals.

2.2.3 Identity and Ethnicity

The subject matter of this research is the different approaches to the perception of ethnic identity. It remains one of the most popular themes in the social sciences; the problem of identity being one of the most difficult challenges to which they have to respond.

Identity, in some form, is at the center of each of the contestations and is the topic of this study. These are the types of questions one may ask in order to begin an exploration of identity. What do we mean by 'identity?' Can we speak of a national identity? How may we conceptualize such an identity and how might that identity be best understood in relationship to other identities? How and when are specific identities created, activated and how and when does the meaning of each identity shift?

The term 'identity', which was introduced by Freud to explain personal psychological mechanisms, is a fundamental concept in the explanation of many social phenomena. The concept of ethnic identity is an attempt to deal with the concept of ethnicity, which has proved so elusive for social scientists to track down. The comparative approach to the problem of ethnic identity is rooted in the conviction that a combination of sociological and

psychological concepts and methods of studying ethnic identity can strengthen each other, and advance the understanding of the problem. This task can be carried out by considering the following questions: What is the role of ethnic identity in social life? What approaches exist in different disciplines and what are their advantages and drawbacks? It is not, however, my intention to present an exhaustive critical review of the literature, but rather simply to set out the basic premises uniting the different perspectives. These questions can be contextualized by following -- what is the role of 'Bihari' identity in social life? When it is consciously upheld and when is it denied? Why?

Despite the wide use of the term 'ethnic identity' in anthropological literature it is very difficult to distinguish it in this context from other related concepts, and often it is simply used as a synonym for 'ethnicity'. Indeed, identity is often taken for granted as a term which does not need to be defined, and is itself used to define ethnicity, as a set of conscious or unconscious beliefs or assumption about one's own or another's identity, as derived from membership in a particular type of group or category. Ethnic identity is treated as a conceptualization of one's membership of an ethnic group. The function and expression of ethnicity is scrutinized in a definite cultural context.

Cultural identity is in itself a fluid concept. It entails strategic use of cultural resources, texts, and messages to construct transportable identities. Critical anthropology, feminism, and cultural studies have contributed to understanding of identity as unstable and defined through various kinds of power relations: capital, class, race, language, subculture, and nation. Cultural identity entails both the sense of structural continuity and the idea of agency. However the 'fixing' performed by race and ethnicity as well as class gender, and geography is offset by the capacity to self-identify. The question of the demise of the nation looms as a determining issue in discussion of cultural identity. For historic and security reasons states have erected symbolic boundaries between cultures.

Similarly, the problem of group legitimacy is connected with a sense of collective identity and with the fact of an existing political entity in the form of state. Among the ethnic groups we can trace the growth of an idea, and then a political program, which holds that a state is an attribute and guarantee of preserving group entity. That is, the state, including its territory, institutions of power, and resources, must have an ethno-national character and be an element of a certain cultural system. The state must have an official language, that of the dominant referent group, which provides a moral basis for exclusive control of resources and power by one group. Arguments in favor of this position are usually taken from history and especially those historical periods that are more favorable to the territorial borders and the status of the group. The struggle for making its own state may be a goal per se, as a confirmation of status and the very fact of existence for the group, and also as a guarantee

against both real and hypothetical challenges from alien environments. Through this state, the ethnic group tries to establish certain symbols of collective legitimacy and protection. Most often, such symbols are territory and language. The territory is considered not only as a source of subsistence, especially under contemporary conditions, where the market economy effectively fails to recognize ethnic and political boundaries.

Anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen(1992 and 1999) offers a typology of overarching identities that includes – ethnic, class, gender, age, religious, local, political, linguistic, kinship, supra-ethnic national identities. By over-arching identity, Eriksen means “identities which, may, in certain situations, overrule all other identities and appear as imperative in the sense that they induce action.” .Eriksen(1999) calls for the study of identity at the subjective level of experience, from within the community, which actively imagine itself, and at the level of individual agency based on local life-worlds. The understanding of identity, viewed in this manner, becomes an empirical question.

There are controversies regarding whether identity is a necessary prerequisite for social life. Individual identity –embodied in selfhood is not meaningful in isolation from the social world of other people. Individuals are unique and diverse, selfhood has commonality since this is an entire social and cultural construction: in the process of primary and subsequent socialization, and in ongoing process of social interaction within which individuals again and again define themselves and others throughout their lives. Identities are established in selfhood, gender, kinship and ethnicities that are considered as primary identity. It is important in particular to understand why and how people respond to a communal identity; even it is retrogressive to their own interests. All individuals possess multiple identities and different ones come into play at different times. If an Urdu-speaker holds an identity of ‘Bengali’, even though in performing rituals or joining the Mushaeras he may whole-heartedly belong to his Urdu-speaking identity. Multiple identities by individuals have to be seen in relation to biographical histories and social contexts. The expressions of identity are negotiated in the space each individual finds between choice and the limitations determined by location (in time and space), history, society and politics. Identities are therefore, not primordial but are constantly being constructed and created as a result of individual, social and economic forces

2.2.4 Interpretation and Boundary

In society, human beings are engaged in creating and modifying meanings to life and existence. This is a continuous process, which has certain social connotations. In such way, culture is system of meanings that can be studied in terms of extrication of such

meanings. Metaphors are the expressions of one thought, experience or phenomenon in place of another that it resembles to suggest an analogy, the bringing together domains in often-unexpected ways. Turner (1969) suggests that 'social fields' are the space where the contestations of root metaphors take place. The symbolic school emphasizes on interpretation of symbols and decoding of rituals to realize the meanings. According to Clifford Geertz (1973), social science, above all, deals with the interpretations - interpretations about their culture by the people who belong to that culture; interpretations by the researcher about people's interpretations. So, there are interpretations of interpretations. In this particular research, focus will be given on Bihari people's interpretations concerning their identity that has multi vocal resonance. Their identity as 'Biharis' can be considered as root metaphor, which contain multi vocal meanings and influence their life. Such root metaphors have been continually contested by other metaphors.

In the chapter which serves as a manifesto and which opens his work on *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz proceeds with the fusion of two themes borrowed from very different traditions. The first is that of a hermeneutical status of the humanities. The second is that of a contrast between the 'thin' description or the purely factual nature of an action and its 'thick' description or that enriched by contextual elements (he borrows this distinction from Gilbert Ryle). Geertz, in this chapter, sets out to defend two theses simultaneously and to support one by the other: the ethnographer undertakes thick description (Geertz, 1973: 9–10) and never leaves the sphere of interpretation, because what he finds in his field is formed by interpretation; that which he brings with him to the field are models or diagrams for the interpretation (Geertz, 1973: 28). Being indebted to Gilbert Ryle Geertz elaborated his discussion. According to Geertz, Ryle's brief analysis allows locating the object of ethnography: there are 'meaningful structures' which claim that winks, signals, antics or exercises are products, perceived as such and interpreted. He writes more precisely: 'a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures' (Geertz, 1973: 7). According to him, the interest of the analysis proposed by Ryle is to show how inferences and implications pile up, a factor which will be able to change a simple gesture into a complicated signal. Studying a culture is to study the 'codes' or the 'structures' by virtue of which the events of everyday life are loaded with more or less wide-ranging meanings.

Citing an example of three boys and winking, the principle of this grammar is described as that certain verbs are verbs of doing in that they signify an autonomous action (or an activity), whereas others can only describe what the actor does. An example illustrates this difference of category. An officer cannot order a soldier to obey (without saying more): in order to give a command to a soldier, he must show him the thing to be done,

for example, to lower his arms. It is impossible to do something which would be to obey and *only* to obey. Obedience is not an action that can be ordered independently. Similarly, one cannot see patriotism and loyalty but can observe certain actions. And again the actions of all Biharis as well as of all Bengalis were not the same in a dramatic situation like 1971. The meaning and motive that had driven one individual may not be the same though their actions may remain same. Similarly, the loyalty and obligation for country that was supposed to be absent among 'Biharis' is not an action to observe, rather 'loyalty' is also meaning attributed to another 'phenomenon called 'nation'.

There has not yet been a reference to interpretation in the hermeneutical sense of the term, that is to say, interpretation of a reading that is based on the radical decision of the reader. But more precisely, Geertz goes beyond Ryle's introduction of the thick description. Geertz therefore provides an extract from his own field notebook in Morocco in order to have us understand the pertinence of this idea of a piling up, one upon the other, of 'structures of meaning'.

It is then that the idea of an order, following the model of the introduction of adverbs in a simple sentence, can be of use. Not that an anthropological description must necessarily adopt purely and simply a logico-grammatical model. It remains that the problem arises for the investigator to not confine himself to a multiplication of 'points of view' and of 'aspects', but to find an articulation, an order, in this plurality. I therefore, agree that we need to explore and analyze the orders of varied positions on nation, nationhood and state.

And for doing so, I moved to describe the reality of the community. Geertz was correct in denouncing the following bias: one should, in order to pile up meanings upon one another, first allow oneself an impeccably positive description.

Bazin (2003) focuses on the relation between act and meaning in Geertz' work and demonstrates, using a combination of philosophical and ethnographic arguments, that the separation of act and meaning is an artificial misconstrual of ethnographic reality. What we humans do would thus fall into two spheres, one external, and the other internal: our behavior on the one hand, the meaning we assign to it on the other. Behavior belongs to the domain of the observable, that of facts (physical as well as social), and these facts make up the whole of that which can be described. On the other hand, the meaning of this behavior – the ideas, the representations, the values that are inwardly connected to it (the 'symbolic') – would exist only in the mind (the hypothesis of a 'collective mentality', however strange it may be, is inherent in all usage of the notion of culture). In order to have access to it, one must pass through the mediation of signs (for example, words, sentences, gestures, speeches, writings), that which presumes an interpretation.

This quality – comprehensibility – serves as the foundation of the research. It marks the boundary of the human being's domain, as not everything that is human is comprehensible. For example, if one does two things at once only one-half of behavior can be found to be understandable. When I depict what human beings are doing, at a given point I inevitably come up against a limitation beyond which it becomes impossible for description to be accurate. Once this threshold has been crossed, I am constrained to cease describing and to begin interpreting. This threshold marks the entry into the 'cultural'. Description ceases to be pertinent as soon as there are at least two cultures, that of the observer and that of the one being observed, just as comprehension ceases the moment the interlocutors speak two different languages: a translation is necessary.

Likewise, says Max Weber, if I see a man who is shouldering a rifle and taking aim, I know right away what he is doing⁶. (If you do not know, I could give you a description of what he is doing). On the other hand, knowing why he is raising his rifle and taking aim – is he at war, is he taking revenge for an affront or is he participating in a firing squad? – would be a matter of 'comprehension by interpretation' of the meaning of his act⁷. Raising one's rifle, cocking it, aiming, and firing are technical acts which, because they have certain effects on physical reality (they kill), are of the same order as physical reality, whereas avenging oneself, executing a condemned person or waging war are activities implying that one recognizes certain values (honor, justice, love of country. . .). Weberian knowledge aspires to an understanding of meaning because it is fundamentally a knowledge of 'culture', that is to say of diverse ways in which, in reference to values, human beings give meaning to their world.

2.2.5 Symbolizing and Process

Describing an action, however, is to describe an entire world of which this action realizes but one of the possibilities: it is not obvious that they are capable of doing it even though they can help me whenever necessary by pointing out to me on each occasion whether or not such a way of acting is appropriate to the situation. Metaphorically, one will say that they often act 'out of instinct' (out of the 'sense of the game', Bourdieu would say), but without necessarily being able to draw a painting of the overall picture of the 'identity', or

⁶ This is what Weber calls 'actual comprehension' (*das aktuelle Verstehen*), which he contrasts with 'explanatory comprehension' (*das erklärendes Verstehen*) which proceeds from an interpretation: sociology is a science which has 'to understand by interpretation (*deutend verstehen*)' (see Weber, 1971: 4, 7–8).

⁷ 'We understand . . . the act of taking aim with a rifle not only in actuality but also in its motivation . . . if we know that the person is engaging in this act whether it be to execute someone by command, to fight enemies (rational form) or out of vengeance (actual and consequently irrational form in this meaning)' (Weber, 1971: 8).

lack of being able to explain the significant regularities of our behavior by means of an objective determinism, a respondent might say: 'After all, although they are perhaps like us and *they themselves know* what they are doing, unlike these beings, the researchers are the only ones capable of understanding what they are doing.' Admittedly, they would not necessarily be capable, for all that, of telling exactly what they are doing, of giving an accurate description of their behavior, but they would know that they are doing something. In fact, they are not observing human behaviors of which it would be necessary, in addition, to look for the meaning. *They are witnesses to actions.*

To look at actions, Turner(1982), in his postmodern theatre concepts, moves off to explore the indeterminacy, *liminality*, and fragmentation aspects allows us to explore how patterns emerged in the seeming chaos of successive situations. Such chaotic situations was termed by him as 'social drama' Social drama, says Turner, is defined as aharmonic or disharmonic social process, arising in conflict situations (1969: 37; 1985: 180). Social drama is defined by Turner (1985: 196), as "an eruption from the level surface of ongoing social life, with its interactions, transactions, reciprocities, and its customs making for regular, orderly sequences of behavior." Turner's social drama theory has four phases of public action:

1. *Breach* of norm-governed social relations that have liminal characteristics, a liminal between more or less stable social processes;
2. *Crisis*, during which there is a tendency for the breach to widen and in public forums, representatives of order are dared to grapple with it;
3. *Redressive action*, ranging from personal advice and informal mediation or arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery, and to resolve certain kinds of crisis or legitimate other modes of resolution, to the performance of public ritual.
4. *Reintegration* of the disturbed social group, or of the social recognition and legitimation of *irreparable schism* between the contesting parties.

There is a sequence of processual acts and scenes across the four phases of social drama, with dynamic shifts in scripts, characterizations, rhetoric, and symbolism. The processes were more dynamic, rapid, and forceful during the crisis, and now there is a lull in the action. There are six key concepts which we can use to explore the dialectic of spectacle and carnival, as well as reactionary counter-carnival theatrics.

Conflict – Conflict situations make us aware of the beaches in the societal fabric. "Conflict seems to bring fundamental aspects of society, normally overlaid by the customs and habits of daily intercourse, into frightening prominence" (Turner, 1974). People are divided, taking sides, using theatre to dramatize their differences. In the weeks

leading up to the war, and during the war, a cleavage occurs between antagonistic groups. At the same time in crisis, there is the flash of imaginative fire, an inspirational force to be harnessed. The conflict escalates locally, as a reflection of those Biharis who sided to Pakistan. Some crises spread, and more and more people turn out for vigils, marches, parades, rallies, and teach-ins. For Turner, public crisis has a liminal quality, betwixt and between, more or less stable phases of the social process. Antagonists dare and taunt each other, to deal with liminal forces.

Performance Processes – A society is defined by Turner (1982) as a set of interactive processes that are punctuated by situations of conflict, with intervals between them. Turner's theatrical approach, being processual and dynamic, is appropriate to explore the rise and fall of social movements. Turner explores the contingent, ad hoc, and emergent character of the phases of social drama (breach, crisis, redress, & reintegration), focusing on how conflicts run their course. The situations interact over time. "One set of interactions influence the premises for the next"(Turner, 1985: 48).

As the antagonist to disputation play out the conflict phases of social drama, there is resistance to acts of suppression and repression (Turner, 1985: 44). Controversial issues are kept in abeyance in ritual situations, but can surface again in public situations; some political situations threaten to turn violent, both in their protest and in their repression. Solidarity of a nation at war, for example, has a chilling effect on political rivalry, so as not to threaten the safety of troops deployed in battle theatres. The unresolved conflicts and rivalries carry over into subsequent ritual situations in ways that affect behavioral patterns.

The performance events interact such that situations develop spontaneously out of quarrels with domestic and foreign policy which "rapidly acquire formalized or structural character" (Turner, 1985: 45)

Liminality – Key to Turner is the "betwixt and between" features that have liminal qualities (Turner, 1985: 113). Liminality is defined by Turner (1974: 52), as being "between successive participations in social milieu." There is a grander "liminal transition" in the peace movement, and seemingly no way to stop the growth of fascism that embeds Bangladesh governance. There is liminality in the transition from the conceptual system of nationalism that may become suppressive for other minorities (Turner, 1974: 51). There is also liminal decay, a reluctant reincorporation into the charade and façade of polite society, into more stable social processes.

Each situation in the Liberation War affects the premises of the next one. There is an emergent pattern to the inter-situational events. The successive events have liminal spaces between them. Liminal space is Turner's concept of what is betwixt and between situated events. In the liminality between situations, a leader is without a situation to rally around

Indeterminacy – Indeterminacy is always present in the background of any ritualized performance, ready to intrude. Spectacles, even with expert choreography, scripting, and stage handling, fail to contain the embedded chaos.

Fragmentation - Fragmentation is definable as a persistent dialectical "opposition of processes" with many "levels of processes" (Turner, 1985: 185). Postmodern theory spotlights moments when fragmentation takes center stage, revealing how social reality invades spectacle during moments of conflict. For Turner "the truly 'spontaneous' unit of human social performance is not role-playing sequence in an institutionalized or 'corporate group' context; it is the *social drama* which results precisely from the suspension of normative role-playing, and in its passionate activity abolishes the usual distinction between flow and reflection, since in the social drama it becomes a matter of urgency to become reflexive about the cause and motive of action damaging to the social fabric" (Turner, 1982: 196).

There are moments in institutionalized spectacle, where the social drama of conflict emerges, and political agents engage in reflection. In such moments the fragmentarity of the social fabric becomes temporarily visible, "as factors giving meaning to deeds that may seem at first sight meaningless" (Turner, 1982:196). These are moments of reflection when we can see an irreparable schism between war and peace factions.

The situation of Biharis are likely to be in perfect 'betwixt' and 'between' condition where often they had to become fragmented with their nation and neighbors they earlier used to live with, and gain with their new neighbors in their immigrant country . Every time, they only had the option to 'refuse', because whether they would be accepted or refused by other groups did not depend on them, Often their *root metaphors* were in conflict or supposedly in conflict with other discourses which always directed their situation in never-ending 'conflict' . And since, their identity was never determined by their 'agency', their liminal positions were frequent. In this research, I examined the complexities of their actions and behaviors in such complex and conflict situations that were the route to examine the meaning they attribute on their 'identity'.

2.3 Methodology

In order to know what the 'Biharis' are doing, it is not only important to interpret the *meaning* of what they are doing, beginning with their actions or their words. And one can observe and make a note of that, just as they can point it out to me if need be. 'They have an idea of what they are doing' simply means that they can, if necessary, explain what they are doing to a stranger like me. For example, they explain to me that their use of Urdu is a protest, grief and emotion. This being done, they do not provide me with a description of their state of mind but rather of what they are doing. If one does not know what a person is in the process of doing, one is all the more tempted to decide that the meaning of what he is doing is what he 'means' by doing it (the representation corresponding to his act), that if one asks him what he is doing, he is capable of answering in most instances, and is sure that his answer is correct.

It would be altogether imaginable for somebody to find his way around in a city perfectly well, that is to say for him to choose, with complete confidence, the shortest route leading from one point to another and yet be totally incapable of drawing a map of it. The moment he tried it, he would only produce a *completely inaccurate picture*. Paradoxically, it may therefore be that, in the end, I know better than them about what they are actually doing, all the while being barely capable of acting as they do, even clumsily and with numerous mistakes. Insofar as I manage to describe what they are doing by continuing to study them, it is precisely because I am not in their position. They themselves have no need of a description or a map in order to get their bearings. Therefore, an ethnographic method was adopted to describe the culture.

2.4 Place and People

Biharis are living in many places of the country, both inside and outside the camps. Two major concentrations of the Bihari people are in Dhaka and Syedpur. Major attention will be given on the people who are living outside the camps, those who are integrating into the mainstream Bengali population. Therefore; Syedpur was selected for field- work. A significant number of Biharis are living in clusters in different areas of Syedpur town along with the Bengali people.

To understand closely the diversities and complexities of identity formation and boundary maintenance and to know how the mainstream population interacts with these processes, a locality will be selected in Syedpur. The type of respondents would cut across the class, age, profession and gender. In fact, there are not only the people who came from Bihar; rather there are people from other parts of India who are different in culture and language,

but often designated as Biharis. Such ethnic diversity would also be taken into consideration in the selection of the respondents.

2.4.1 Selecting the Area

I did my fieldwork in Bashbari area of Syedpur town, in Nilphamari district. Before selecting Bashbari as my research site, I located areas where Biharis are living in cluster and also having close interaction with Bengalis. In fact, Syedpur has long been known as an area mostly inhabited by non-Bengalis. In Syedpur, there are several camps where a number of Biharis, commonly known as 'stranded Pakistanis' reside, and simultaneously a sizeable number of Bihari families also reside in other places of Syedpur town. Since Syedpur was a railway junction, non-Bengalines started to come and settle here for job and business purposes for long. In fact, before Partition the Syedpur town was mostly populated by non-Bengalis.

Though Syedpur is my in-law's town, and my relatives were also eager to assist me, searching a suitable research site, arranging access to my research area and introducing me to the prospective respondents, particularly to female members. But from the beginning, for several reasons, I consciously decided not to be introduced to the Bihari people through any sort of network of Bengalis. To me, one of the most important of these reasons was that I did not want to be identified as a representative of Bengali. Since most of my potential informants in the area had a traumatic memory and difficult relations with Bengalis, I felt that if I were to be introduced through a Bengali, there was a chance that I would be identified as a representative of the dominant ideology rather than as an independent researcher, something that would have most certainly affected the fieldwork process, creating difficulties or biases in my interaction with the women as well as in collecting data objectively. I agree with Gardener (1995:18) that one cannot deny the unequal power relationship between the researcher and the researched, even when the former is self-conscious about this relationship. I therefore decided to keep myself away from Bengali influential people in getting access to my study area. But at the same time, as a Bengali, I also knew that it would be tremendously difficult for a Bengali man coming alone to stay and do research in a Bihari-dominated area where he had neither any relative nor any sort of contact. The main focus of my research was to find out how 'Bihari' identity is created and shifted over period, and how the Biharis respond to maintain to this identity making process and how they maintain the boundaries of identity. Thus keeping all these issues in my mind, I tried to explore my informal networks in finding my research site and building contacts with the study population. While I was visiting different places to find a potential area, I joined some of the *mushaira Mehfil* (a gathering where Urdu poetries are recited, such gatherings are very

common in Syedpur). These *Mushaeras* are observed in a congenial and informal atmosphere and since I had a strong fascination for Urdu poetry it was easy for me to participate and started to talk with the participants there. Among the poets there were Ahraful Huq Babu, Ahmed Pervez Badal, renowned poet Fahmi, who are also otherwise involved in different organizations. They received me warm-heartedly and that gave me the initial access and gradually I became a familiar face at Bashbari area. Biharis have a strange way of interacting even with a new-comer by reciting lyrics of famous poems (*sher*) and if the other person responds the next by another one or even if someone recites and other one admires that creates a bond between the two people which is sometimes very joking. Thus I got connected with other people and they further informed me that they had good connections to people of both camps and outside the camps who could help me in setting up my research project in the Bashbari area. Even sometimes they treated me as *jamai* (son-in law) since my in-law's house was in Syedpur, and used to joke with me. In fact, such introduction eased my access to women, later some ladies also assisted me in my research and became my host family in the area. Thus finally I decided to work in Bashbari and visited the area in the end of October 2004.

2.4.2 'Situating' myself as a researcher

The Primary methodological dilemma faced by anyone engaged in ethnographic fieldwork is the issue of intersubjectivity, the relationship between the researcher and the community being studied, the political-cultural worlds to which each belongs, and the ultimate purposes of the research project. At the beginning, relationships with the residents of the area was relatively easy, as they are not for most ethnographers, but gradually it was becoming difficult, especially when I started to ask questions on delicate issues like 1971 and tensions with Bengalis. Most people were curious about what I was going to do. When I wanted to ask questions on Partition and 1971, often they had a common answer: 'what is the use of discussing all these now? Can you remove my pains?' or often the person asked used to show another person saying: 'he can tell you something on that'. Upon my visits in the area, many assumed that I was either associated with an NGO, someone who had come from Dhaka to evaluate or observe activities of the organization I worked for, or I was going to introduce a new development organization in the area. Since I am a college teacher, later on they started to think that 'Professor *Shahib* will write a book on us'. Again, to some people, I was always a suspicious character. Over the months of my fieldwork, after I had spent a considerable amount of time with people of Bahbari area, I felt comfortable that they did not tend to view as an NGO official, and that they accepted that my work was related to my higher studies. I developed good rapport with the camp-residents and non-camp-residents including

women, especially with my key respondents, who accepted me as their '*bhai*' (*brother*). Nonetheless, there developed in me a deep disquiet—something that stayed with me for a long time and to which I do not have any satisfactory answer even today—around the fundamental purpose of my research and its relationship to the immediate concerns of these people that I was interacting with. Interestingly they never asked “Can you help us?”, a very common question faced by researchers in rural areas of Bangladesh, rather they were happy in general, because after so long there is someone who wants to know their pains and trauma. In fact, for them, this inquisition was a kind of recognition to their pain.

I did not live in the area as most researchers would in traditional ethnographic situations. Instead, I lived in my in-laws house which was not far away, a ten-minute's walking distance from Bashbari and made daily visits to conduct my fieldwork. I could also stay in Bashbari, but most of the families outside the camps had fewer rooms in their house, which inadequate even to accommodate all the family members. Since they are very hospitable and treated me as an in-law they could also try to arrange for me. This would certainly embarrass me. There was another practical problem. I needed to write my detailed field notes at the end of each day, but frequent power outage (load shedding) for several hours in the evenings made it quite difficult for me to do this in an uninterrupted manner. Inside the camp, the poor people that I interacted with only had one or two rooms for the whole family. Considering all this, in the end I decided to change my place of residence and began living in with my in-laws. On certain occasions like *Muharram*, *Mushaera mehfils* and weddings I stayed whole night and at those I lived with key respondents' family.

This research is a qualitative one. Since the major objective of the research is to comprehend the interpretations by Biharis concerning their identity, the entire details of their culture must be depicted to understand how shared meanings are created and contested. Therefore, the major approach of this research is '*ethnographic*' and the strategy (rather than method) will be, borrowing the term from Geertz (1973), '*sympathetic participation*', than mere '*participant observation*'. The current debates regarding ethnography brought out new light that ethnographers should not focus only on the external social phenomena, rather on the inner voice and cognitive mechanism of the people who belong to that culture. In that way, subjective interpretation and reflexive ethnography are widely pronounced methods, that will also be applied in this research to reflect that inner voices and feelings of the people. Therefore, qualitative methods will be used in this regard. The approach of the research is diachronic and historical also. Family histories of Partition, therefore, make a strong statement about social transformation.

They reiterate that families are open to change, transforming themselves and thereby changing social reality. Times of transition are trying as such changes; brought about suddenly, create havoc and an upheaval that continues to haunt one into another century.

2.5 Data Collection

2.5.1 Phases of Data Collection

Phase 1: Ethnographic data collection - participant observation in various community events (i.e. neighborhood meetings and festivals) with the help of key informants, social networks, life histories and so on.

Phase2: Survey design and test using the knowledge gained from Phase 1, I have designed and conducted pilot test on household survey to be administered in the third phase.

Phase3: Survey data collection.

Phase 4: Group discussions and in-depth interviews with activists, scholars and concerned officials.

2.5.2 Sources of Data

Both the primary and secondary sources will be used for this research, but primary source will be the key source. Primary data will be collected through participant observation within the community, in-depth interviews based on checklists, informal discussion, key informants and case studies.

2.5.2.1 Secondary Sources

- ❑ Government and Official documents
- ❑ Literature by the Biharis
- ❑ Manifesto, leaflets and other publications by different (political and social) organizations working for the Biharis.

2.5.3 Methods of observation and data collection

From my residence in the city, I began to visit to Bashbari area six days a week, spending the whole period of daytime in the area. I would begin my daily journey to Bashbari around nine o'clock in the morning and would stay there till night. The area becomes full of grandeur in the evening. I continued to have my lunch at hotels and sometimes I used to come back home for lunch and go back again. In many occasions I had to take lunch at

my key respondent's house and in some respondent's houses. The Bihari people were so hospitable that it could have become hurtful if I refused. Several times, I tried to pay for my food on a monthly basis, but they never gave me the chance. They always treated me as a member of their family. Since I felt uncomfortable to keep on having food with them without paying, I tried to compensate by socially accepted forms such as by occasionally bringing with me food items and other gifts. For the most part during my fieldwork, I employed two research assistants—one of them was Mrs Ayesha (Chanda), a lady working as an NGO worker and Ashraful Huq Babu who is a journalist and a *Shaer* (poet) of the area. Both of them accompanied me for interviews. Normally the young people speak in Bangla in different accent, but that is quite understandable. Although I understand the Urdu spoken by the old people, I wanted to be certain that I did not misunderstand anything said and checked my notes with them to ensure that I had recorded all the information correctly. The older respondents also spoke in a mixed language of Bangla and Urdu. For research among the people in Bashbari, I used the standard techniques of ethnography: participant observation, group discussion and interviews. I recorded day-to-day observations in detail in a fieldwork diary. The strategy of participant observation allowed me to observe day-to-day living and interaction within different social arenas—within households, in restaurants, in work places and markets, in gatherings, in *mushairas* and *Tazia*. Besides everyday interactions, I conducted unstructured and semi-structured interviews. Data from these interviews were noted in the diary along with the data from the daily observations. Occasionally, with the permission of those being interviewed, I taped the interviews (mostly group discussions and songs) and subsequently transcribed them. But I used camera in certain occasions. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I conducted a household survey on the socio-economic status of the residents of the area. As the area is quite big and densely populated, it took almost three months to complete the survey. The purpose of this was mainly twofold—to collect basic information about the households, including their names, age, religion, marital status, education, household composition, landholding, occupation, migration, involvement, and also whether they have memory of Partition and Liberation War of 1971, and also to build good rapport with them. After I became familiar with the community, I started to talk, individually as well as in groups. My regular visits and staying long hours in them created an atmosphere for me to have intimate conversations with the respondents including women and to verify what they verbally stated and their life realities. The survey was conducted on a household basis whereas there was no fixed place for in-depth interviews. Women were conducted at their houses or yards, whereas males were interviewed in restaurants, in different offices where they normally gather to have a chat with others and of course in workplaces. But I, only in few instances, held a private interview as is the Western research textbook ideal (White 1992:8). Often we

discussed several issues in groups where other people were also present to spend their 'leisure' together in the afternoon. In the household, particularly when women were interviewed, other household members gathered there to see what was happening, sometimes they also supplied clue to continue discussion. I also regularly participated in the *Mushaera Mehfil*s, markets and restaurants to observe the interactions among Biharis themselves and between Bengalis and Biharis. My direct participation in those gatherings also gave me an opportunity to document how people perceive and interact in different settings of their life. I conducted around one hundred interviews of varying lengths with people of different age and classes. Although the segment of 'Biharis' I chose to focus on in my study fell into a broad category of 'non-Bengalis', I was quite conscious of the fact that it was not homogeneous. Clearly, the category of 'non-Bengalis' contained numerous social distinctions within itself, including factors such as place of origin, language, customs, class, religion, age, marital status, educational achievement, and the status enjoying for having residence within and outside the camp. The people's experiences during the Partition and 1971 also varied. Considering these factors, I attempted to select a diverse group of respondents both from and outside the camp for my interviews. Even there were many other people who came from Syedpur but now residing in Dhaka. In the course of my fieldwork, I also collected some case studies. Most of the interviews were conducted in the form of conversations, though a checklist was there but I always tried to make sure that all key issues of my research were ultimately covered in the course of our conversations. I spent several hours for each interview to get the information I needed. Sometimes I talked to the respondents several times, especially when some aspects of the conversations were very interesting and fascinating, or if I simply needed further clarification of things discussed. Interviews with Mr. Ahmed Ilias⁸, Ashraful Huq Babu⁹, and Dr. Zahurul Huq¹⁰ would fall in this category. I began the interviews by asking questions very loosely. I asked questions such as: When did the respondent or his/her family come here and why? What was their experience in India and what was after coming here?¹¹ In case of having memories of Partition, I asked them to describe as elaborately as possible. How did they maintain their life? What are the spheres of interactions with Bengalis? How do they treat each other? I tried to ask these questions by phrasing them differently on different occasions, depending on the level of interest and understanding of the respondents. With each answer, I attempted to probe more deeply and lead the respondent in telling me about the things that were most

⁸ Executive Director, Al-Falah, an NGO working for Biharis.

⁹ Urdu-speaking Journalist, Poet.

¹⁰ Local doctor in Bashbari area.

¹¹ Detailed checklists are attached in Appendix.

important to their identity formation .my respondents. In addition, to understand the broader dynamics and diverse issues related to my research topic, I also interviewed people of other social groups in Syedpur and Dhaka. For example, I interviewed Executive Director of Al-falah, President of AYGUSC, SPGRC and other organizations. And, to get to know about the perceptions prominent writers like Shawkat Ali who are also known for their Pro-Liberation stand were also interviewed. In these cases, I conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews as well as group discussions. I also tried to talk to the local leaders, NGO workers and other influential people of the area whenever I got the opportunity. My 'teacher identity' played a significant role in my fieldwork and data collection process. Having an exposure to Urdu poetry and history of the Biharis, I had some advantage in interacting with the 'Biharis' in Bashbari. Despite the hesitation that seemed to be there among many 'Biharis' initially in talking about the Patition, traumas of 1971, or in talking about discrimination they face, either because they could not trust me or because of their fear of reprisal by the powerful, I was very fortunate that in course of my fieldwork I could develop good rapport with most of the respondents. My relationships with them turned out in such way that we were able to overcome the initial barriers and hesitation. I really enjoyed my work with the 'Biharis' of Syedpur, whom I gained and learnt much from. As a Bengali man, I had to remember the 'appropriate' gender norms of the society. I was not able to establish equally easygoing relationship/interaction with all women, especially those who observe *purdah*. It is not that they did not like me, but they do not talk with any other man except their family members. With such women, I had to be content with my female research assistant Chanda conducting the interviews on my behalf and taking notes for me. Occasionally, I did get the opportunity to listen to such interviews from a slight distance, e.g. from outside a house!

For having a clear understanding of the associations and emerging new voices a number of group discussions and interviews were conducted in Dhaka, because such organizations and movements are centrally organized from Dhaka.

Chapter 3

Biharis of Bangladesh: History, Politics and Society

3.1 Introduction

A minority's sense of identity is shaped by its understanding of its own history. Its self-image is influenced, no less, by the image the majority groups have of the minority-an image shaped in turn, by their understanding of history. Major focus of this chapter is history of Biharis, with particular emphasis on Bangladesh episode. This chapter investigates the way Bihari communities experience antagonisms in historical events in relation to development of many trends of nationalism.

3.2 Background of the Muslim Community of Bihar

Bihar, the ancient land of Buddha has a long and possibly the most colourful heritage of Indian history. It is the land where the first republics emerged in 500 BC. Such fertile is the soil that has given birth to innumerable intellectuals which spread the light of knowledge and wisdom not only in the subcontinent but in the whole world.

The history of the Bihar is very ancient. In fact, it extends to the very dawn of human civilization. Earliest myths and legends of Hinduism the Sanatana (Eternal) Dharma - are associated with Bihar. It is no accident, therefore, that the original author of the Hindu epic - The Ramayana - Maharishi Valmiki - lived in Ancient Bihar.

It was here that Prince Gautam attained enlightenment, became the Buddha- at the present Bodh Gaya- a town in central Bihar; and the great religion of Buddhism was born. It is here also that Lord Mahavira, the founder of another great religion, Jainism, was born and attained nirvana (death). It is here that the tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh was born and attained the sainthood of Sikhism, that is became a Guru. .

The ancient kingdoms of Magadh and of Licchavis, around about 7-8th century B.C., produced rulers who devised a system of administration that truly is progenitor of the modern art of statecraft, and of the linkage of statecraft with economics. Kautilya, the author of Arthashastra, the first treatise of the modern science of Economics, lived here. Indeed, he brought about amicable co-existence between the Greeks and the Mauryan Empire. Megasthenes, an emissary of Alexander's General, Seleucus Nicator, lived in Pataliputra (ancient name of Patna, the Mauryan capital) around 302 B.C. He left behind a chronicle of life in and around Patliputra. This is the first recorded account by a foreign traveler in India.

Another Mauryan king, Ashoka, (also known as Priyadarshi or Priyadassi), around 270 B.C., was the first to formulate firm tenets for the governance of a people. He had these tenets, the so called Edicts of Ashoka, inscribed on stone pillars which were planted across his kingdom. The pillars were crowned with the statue of one or more lions sitting on top of a pedestal which was inscribed with symbols of wheels. As the lion denoted strength, the wheel denoted the eternal (endless) nature of truth (dharma), hence the name Dharma (or Dhamma) Chakra. This figure of lions, atop a pedestal, with inscription of a wheel, was adopted as the Official Seal of the independent Republic of India (1947). Ashoka's empire extended from what is now the North West Frontier Province (in Pakistan) in the west, to the eastern boundaries of present India in the north, and certainly, up to the Vindhyan Range in the south. Ashok was responsible also for the widespread proselytization of people into Buddhism.

At Nalanda, the world's first seat of higher learning, a university, was established during the Gupta period. It continued as a seat of learning till the Middle Ages, when the Muslim invaders burned it down. This glorious history of Bihar lasted till around the middle of the 7th or 8th century A.D. - the Gupta Period - when, with the conquest of almost all of northern India by Muslim invaders from the middle-east, the Gupta empire went down..

In medieval times, Bihar lost its prestige as the political and cultural center of India. The Mughal period was a period of unremarkable provincial administration from Delhi. The only remarkable person of these times in Bihar was Sher Shah, or Sher Khan Sur, an Afghan. Through his conquest, Sher Shah became the ruler of a territory that, again, extended all the way to the Punjab. He was noted as a ferocious warrior but also a noble administrator - in the tradition of Ashoka and the Gupta kings. Several acts of land reform are attributed to him. Consequently, conversions seem to have started later than in Bihar and had a different character (Cf. Ghosh 1998: 229). Though a few religious souls, army personnel and merchants must have travelled through its jungles and hills much before, it is only with the accession of Akbar to the throne of Delhi in 1556 that Muslim influence penetrated Jharkhand, also known to the Mughals as Kokrah. Nevertheless, even 'the enormous power of the Moughals was strictly limited in the hilly tracts of Chotanagpur where their orders could not always be easily enforced' (Kumar 1969: 42-44); yet, in 1585, Akbar sent a force to Chotanagpur and reduced the Raja of Chotanagpur to the position of a tributary. Kokrah was included in the *Subah* of Bihar and in 1632 Chotanagpur was given as a Jagir to the Governor of Patna (Ibid.).

Some claim that ninety percent of the Muslims in present-day Jharkhand State, 'are in fact tribals and are descendants of the ancestors who were aborigines and converted to Islam'. A good number of informants could recount their family history and mentioned that their

ancestors had come from Bihar from places such as Gaya, Aurangabad and Arrah and had arrived as traders, mostly in cloth. Later on, people narrated, many had bought land and became cultivators (too). Some also knew that their ancestors had been working for the (Hindu) *Rajas* in the area or had worked as zamindars with a good number of (ethnic) laborers working for them. Some had been employed in local armies. A few even argued their ancestors had come from outside Bihar mostly from Uttar Pradesh and present day West Bengal or Bangladesh. Many agreed that it was quite likely that intermarriages had taken place between "locals" and "migrants" and most inhabitants seem really to have been an intermingled lot of "Hindu", "*adivasi*", and "Muslim" descent. Unlike Christian converts however, most of these Muslims have changed their names, and it is therefore difficult to determine their adivasi or Hindu background.

During most of British India, Bihar was a part of the Presidency of Bengal, and was governed from Calcutta. As such, this was a territory very much dominated by the people of Bengal. All leading educational and medical centers were in Bengal. When separated from the Bengal Presidency in 1912, Bihar and Orissa comprised a single province. Later, under the Government of India Act of 1935, the Division of Orissa became a separate province; and the Province of Bihar came into being as an administrative unit of British India. At Independence in 1947, the State of Bihar, with the same geographic boundary, formed a part of the Republic of India, until 1956. At that time, an area in the south-east, predominantly the district of Purulia, was separated and incorporated into West Bengal as part of the Linguistic Reorganization of Indian States.

Resurgence in the history of Bihar came during the struggle for India's independence. It was from Bihar that Mahatma Gandhi launched his civil-disobedience movement, which ultimately led to India's independence.

3.3 Nationalism and Identity in the Subcontinent

In discussing the nationalism, partition and history of sub-continent the queries that may come : Why did a people, with a long –standing history of shared living, respond to symbols of discord and disunity at a particular historical juncture? Why was the innocence of the mind, “banished after so many days of living together? Why did the structure of human mind change overnight? How could that land become somebody else’s forever? “Just one line drawn on the map and home becomes a foreign country!” (Hasan:2002.p.10) Why this partition and exchange of population? Why did a society with its splendidly plural heritage become the site of one of the most cataclysmic events in twentieth century history?

Despite the breakthrough scholarships on nation and nationalism initiated by Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), these questions need to be analyzed afresh with the aid of historical and sociological insights. Scholarship, although stimulated by preoccupations stemming from the present, is never sufficient in itself to modify the conceptualization of a problem or an event. For this and other reasons, it is necessary to challenge commonly held assumptions of Islam and Muslims, delineate the multiple ideological strands amongst them, and trace the *evolution* of a Muslim political personality not in doctrinaire terms, but in context of colonial policies and the exertions of powerful Hindutva and Islamist forces.

Islam, for one, can no longer be treated as a static point of reference. Contemporary scholarship has drawn attention to changing interpretations over time and to powerful pluralist visions that shaped the Muslim (not *Islamic*) communities in India and elsewhere. Indeed, as historians and anthropologists have noted, the Islamic tradition has produced a repertoire of concepts that have been employed to validate and explain a wide variety of political, social and intellectual movements (Imtiaz ; 1981, pp18-19). No longer can one assume, despite the rhetoric of the theologians and the publicist, the existence of a single inalienable Muslim identity in India.

Identities in South Asian history and politics have seldom been unified: in colonial India they were increasingly fragmented and fractured. Indeed, they were not singular but multiple, and thus difficult to capture a single axis. Constructed across different, intersecting and antagonistic sites, discourses and practices, they are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of making and unmaking.¹² Thus Nita Kumar focuses on the existential experiences of Hindu and Muslim masses based on their culture of everyday life to argue that 'identity in Banaras has not been communal in the past nor is it progressively becoming so. It is rather on occupation, social class and a city's tradition.

Such insights are important to recount the trauma of those caught up in politics of hate and violence, the anguish of the silent majority which was invisible in national or provincial arenas of formal and institutional politics.¹³ Moving further away from the meta narratives of nationalism and communalism, their research endeavoured to give voice to the 'feelings and interests' of 'ordinary folks'. The aim of the research was to emphasize the different meanings and perceptions of partition, a theme that to the best of

¹² Hasan (1998) see the Introduction 1-26.

¹³ Butalia (1998), and Verma (2004) are such sensitive pieces of work.

my knowledge have not been explored before and to underline the view in which religion is just one rather than the sole source of identity.

Locating India's partition in this debate is a daunting task. In addition to the die-hards who regard the 'event' as imminent and inevitable, one has to contend with writers who have lazily settled for two-nation theory, articulated not just by Muslim League but also by sections of Hindu right. It is common to connect the two-nation theory with Aligarh reformer, Syed Ahmed Khan, and not his contemporary Dayanada Saraswati, the high priest of Arya Samaj. Beginning with the Arya Samaj movement and culminating in the writings of Veer Savarkar and Guru Golwalkar, the relentless search for a 'Hindu nation' and a 'Hindu identity' provided the underpinnings of the two-nation theory. Long before Jinnah appeared on the scene, Lala Har Dayal stated in 1925: 'I declare that the future of the Hindu race, of Hindustan and of the Punjab rest on four pillars (1) Hindu Sangathan, (2) Hindu Raj (3) Shuddhi of Muslims and (4) Conquest and Shuddhi of Afghanistan and the frontiers'. For him, Muslims and Christians are removed from the confines of Hinduism, for their religions are alien and they love Persian, Arab and European institutions (Brown : 1975, p.233). On the other hand Government's role in stoking the fires of communalism is underscored, the 'divide and rule' is readily invoked, rhetorically, to explain 'Muslim separatism' rather than the overt manifestations of Hindu communalism. Adding a fresh dimension to the debate, Sumit Sarkar points out that constructions of Indian nationalism, Hindu unity and Hindutva were partly related though in different ways, to efforts to respond to counter 'pressures from below' in the form of lower caste aspirations. (Sarkar, 1997: p.12)

But the more fundamental difficulty lies elsewhere – in the overall direction and orientation of research on the Muslim communities that is still mired in traditional frameworks. Though some new voices are being heard, most academic discussions involve a range of intellectual supposition that rest on the belief that Muslims are an exclusive category, with a shared worldview, a common outlook and a structure of consciousness in accord with the fundamental tenets of Islam. This approach underlines the analytic primacy of culture and ideology, assigns a privileged place to Islam, and portrays the image of community acting in unison. In other words, the emphasis is not on the stratified and differentiated character of the Muslim communities but on a monolithic conception of Islamic ideology and practice or a teleology dictating the actions of the Muslims; or a general acquiescence in the actions of a few. The mere fact of people being Muslims in some general sense is usually conflated with their adherence to beliefs and practices that are strictly described as 'Islamists' or 'separatist'. (more elaborated by Hasan :1997). Increasingly this view is being challenged by regional and local studies.

Tazeen Murshid's book *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengal Muslim Discourses 1871-1977* and the collection of essays in Mushirul Hasan (ed.) *Islam, Communities and the Nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond* are some examples of these studies.

A misplaced emphasis on what Anthony D. Smith call *ethno* history –the tendency to extol the heroic deeds of the past national leaders and to provide a legitimizing historical perspective as the basis of the national project –is yet another problem that plagues historical studies. Hence the use of Saladin as a metaphor in the writings of some Pakistani scholars is a cultural construct to compare him with Mohammad Ali Jinnah. The oddity of the comparison is apparent in the comment: “Both Saladin and Jinnah took on the most renowned opponents of their age, almost mythical in stature .Saladin fought against Richard the Lionheart and Jinnah challenged Mountbatten, Gandhi and Nehru.”(Ahmed:1997) Akbar S Ahmed comments: “when a leader who commands respect in the Muslim community appears, and can focus on a cause, Muslims are capable of moving mountains.’ Yet this is how partition studies are dignified as an academic specialty, not because they contain demonstrably special features, but because they allow the historian to identify with his heroes and his ‘event’.

Two ‘conflicting forms of urban solidarity’ in eighteenth and nineteenth century north India served as the foundation for the growing nationalism and religious communalism, which so dramatically affected the events in the twentieth century. Sumit Sarkar noted, more explicitly, that ‘the decisions and actions of (the) leaders cannot really be understood without the counterpoint provided by pressures from below’(Sarker:1985, p.116) This is corroborated by the pattern of communal violence between 1905 and 1947;a transition from a phase of rioting which was relatively unorganized,less related to institutional politics and exhibiting a higher degree of organization and overt communalism(Das :1991,p.207). Sarkar has delineated, moreover, the by which Hindu-Muslim divisions in Bengal evolved into a movement in the 1920s.As a result, the masses ‘outstrip(ped) their leaders’, while the ‘specific features and collective mentalities ‘ of the ‘subaltern groups’ involved became sharply defined in contradistinction to the ‘domain of the elite politicians’. Popular notions began to define community not as a shared culture but as religious identity (Sarker: 1991, p.207). Much the same process can be discerned among the Sikhs in Punjab, the *Jats* in rural south-east Punjab in the 1920s and 1930s, and the Urdu –speaking elites of UP and Bihar.

The localities often mirrored the regional and all-India setting, hence the argument that the political pressures leading to the partition of Punjab and Bengal originated outside the province. Yet the complex and intricate process of formation of community-based solidarities, and how these spread their tentacles upwards, can be delineated in the arena of public performance and of 'collective activities in public spaces' (Freitag:1990). So it may be that the untold story lies in the dusty lanes and by-lanes of towns and cities and not only or always in the faceless metropolitan centres; in and around the bustling vernacular newspaper offices, district courts, *thanas*, and municipalities; or in the seemingly benign *madrasas*, *pathshalas*, mosques, temples and Sufi shrines, the focal points mobilization in Sind and Punjab; (Freitag:1990) and in the highly charged and volatile precincts of *shuddhi* and Gauraksha sabhas, the Anjuman-i-Islamia's, *Tabligh* and *Tanzim* outfits. These were, undeniably, the sites where myths, memories and divisive religious symbols were invented and proragated to heighten communitarian consciousness and perpetuate the image of the other. They were also the arenas where wide-ranging issues—some having breached the citadel of inter-community harmony towards the end of nineteenth century –were passionately contested. Public discussions over cow-slaughter and music in front of mosques, conducted in columns of newspapers and in printed tracts, pamphlets, journala and books, all added fuel to controversies of one kind or another (Murshid,T :1995and Hasan:1998).

The intricate nature of such process can be traced to urban centres like Lucknow, Aligarh, Allahabad and Banaras in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as also to rough and rugged rural south-east Punjab where the Jats, having been converted to Arya Samaj, became the votaries of *shuddhi*, Hindi and cow protection(Jones.K:1994). The urban-rural divide, having been partially bridged by the pan-indian ideology of Hindu and Muslim revivalism, involved in separation from and rejection earlier symbols of joint Hindu-Muslim culture; the definition and affirmation of newer communal symbols,(Freitag:1990, p. 19) and the invention of a tradition which Christophe Jaffrelot, in the context of Hindu nationalism, describes as 'the strategy of stigmatization and emulation' (Christophe: 1997, pp. 116-120). This was new and from the Liberal left perspective an ominous development. There had after all, been common traditions and common reference points in the pre-colonial past, but they had not necessarily developed into the consolidated solidarities which Islam or Hinduism in the late nineteenth and twentieth

centuries came to signify. Nor had they acquired a new socio-political dimension (Christophar, A: 1985, p. 202). Christopher Bayly has argued quite rightly, that prior to 1860 there was perhaps no identifiable “Muslims” ‘Sikh’ or ‘Hindu’ identity that could be abstracted from a particular circumstances of individual events or a specific societies.(*Ibid.*) Accordingly, in her work on the interaction between Muslim, Hindu and Christian traditions in the south, Susan Bayly has identified borrowing of symbols and ideas, a frequently shared vocabulary, and an interweaving of motifs within a common sacred landscape (Hasan:2002, p.14).

Whatever the debate on the nature and depth of such interactions, it must be recognized that Islamization or the ‘nationalization’ of Hindu traditions was triggered by factors that not only converged, but also gained salience, at a particular historical conjuncture. It is therefore imperative to properly contextualize these trends rather than read them in the light of dubious theories on long-standing, irreconcilable Hindu-Muslim differences.

Taking a stand on any of the two major driving political forces is also common among the scholars. Seervai’s overall thesis is that while there was an element of duplicity in the conducts of all the Congress leaders, with the exception of Azad, Jinnah’s politics were largely transparent and consistent. He argues that the Congress Leaders, particularly Gandhi and Nehru, though genuinely committed to their ideologies were not sufficiently pragmatic. Instead they were often motivated by a desire to be perceived as idealists. According to Seervai, Jinnah was a sincere nationalist and believed in a secular and democratic future for India. However, he was concerned about the rights of the Muslims and realized that the Congress leaders would not provide the Muslims with equal opportunities after Independence. Therefore, Jinnah sought out ironclad guarantees and almost to the end hoped that this could be achieved through constitutional means without Partition of India, finally realizing that the Congress would not concede this, he (Jinnah) campaigned the movement of Pakistan.

Some of the themes relating to the genesis and growth of the ‘Pakistan movement’ were elaborated by contributors to a volume edited by C.H. Philips and M.D. Wainwright in 1970¹⁴. At present, ‘specialists’ and ‘non-specialists’ alike grapple with much the same issues that were once a historian’s delight but are now a nightmare. A case in point was lively debate sparked off by the release of Maulana Abul Kanlam Azad’s ‘thirty pages’ in

¹⁴ *The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives 1935-1937* (London 1970).

1989. Newspapers splashed stories on the inept handling of the 'communal' tangle by the country's premier organization, the Indian National Congress, on Jinnah's 'motives' and his use of 'Pakistan' as a bargaining counter to extract concessions from an obdurate Congress leadership. Cryptic comments were offered on the mechanization of the colonial government, specially its last representative, Earl Mountbatten, who hastened India's Partition into two sovereign nations. The badly stated conclusions in much of the literature that has appeared since the publication of the 'complete version' of *India Wins freedom* are that Partition could have been averted if the Gandhi-Nehru Leadership in the Congress had been magnanimous towards the Muslim League demands, if Mountbatten's predecessors – Linlithgow and Wavell had shown greater enterprise in devising political initiatives, and if Jinnah had been less intransigent during his dialogues with representatives of the Crown and the Congress high command. The die was cast, more so after the 1946 elections which were held under a restricted franchise but were treated as the final verdict of the people. The predictable collapse of the interim government and the fire of violence in Bengal and Bihar, which nobody tried to extinguish, offered to every party an opportunity and an excuse to hammer out the modalities of transferring power to two separate nations. Only then it will become clear that, in the ultimate analysis, it does not matter whether, in the penultimate phase of League crusade, Jinnah bargained for a separate nation or not. What mattered was his articulation of the two-nation idea and his successful mobilization in the community.

Though the adulation of Jinnah is by no means exceptional in Pakistan, historians of all hues have painstakingly profiled national parties and their leaders for decades to construct the grand narratives of India's "vivisection". This exercise cannot be decried or considered as unimportant : the Congress and the Muslim League were undeniably, key players in the decade preceding the transfer of power. Introducing a volume in 1993, it was referred by Hasan to the complexities of the years of 1937 to 1940 embodied in the three paradoxes--- the League being catapulted to prominence after years in the political wilderness, Jinnah's transformation from a secular politician to an ideologue of Muslim nationalism; and the Congress acceptance of the partition plan with seeming alacrity, thus relinquishing its vaunted principles of national unity. Pointing to the intricacies of the conjuncture, it can be analysed that the performance of the 1937-40 Congress ministries, including the interaction between class and communal tensions, in influencing the timing of emergence of the Pakistan demand. Revisiting the debates about the Congress truculence over a coalition ministry in the United Provinces (UP); examining the failure of the Muslim Mass Contact Campaign; and mapping out the political consequences of the Congress refusal to join war effort in 1939 (Hasan: 2005, p.34). It was the war, wrote

the historian Eric Hobsbawm, 'that broke India in two .In one sense it was the last great triumph of the Raj—and at the same time its last exhausted gasp (Hobsbawm: 1994).'

Concentrating only on the British –Congress-League negotiations cannot unravel the complex nature of the partition story. Similarly, individual pronouncements, party resolutions and manifestos, though a pointer to various crucial turns of event in politics and society, are not good enough .For one, they convey the impression that the sub-continental leaders occupied an unassailable place in deciding the nation's destiny on the eve of the transfer of power. 'Major players' in the high politics of the 1940s, though influential, were by no means free agents, able to pursue their own or party's agenda. Some, if not all, of their initiatives were severely curbed by those sections of their followers who were embroiled in communal campaigns and affected by changing political alignments in UP, Punjab, Bengal and Bihar. Much energy was released, in a communally polarized environment, when it looked like a Congress-League rapprochement might be a remote possibility on the political landscape, though as most contemporaries observed, such a possibility was dimmed after the failure of Gandhi-Jinnah talks in September, 1944. Local Hindu, Muslim and later Sikh leaders, infused with religious fanaticism and sensitive to escalating communal violence, sent out loud and clear signals to Congress, League and Akali Dal representatives, many of whom were obliged to dispel the impression of a 'sell out'.

Although the pressure on national leaders came from various quarters, the constraints on their capacity to act freely and independently need to be probed in the context of the direction, thrust and modus operandi of the League, their initiatives often generated, new fears and uncertainties in many regions though in significantly different ways. They also enlarged, thanks to the structures created by the Raj to accommodate Muslim areas of conflict and competition. This paved the way for religious and cultural bodies, some having been founded in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, to assume the mantle of community leadership and intervene stridently in national affairs. Although every single step in the process of devolution of authority, commencing with the Morley-Minto Reforms (1909), legitimized their operations, a good many 'reformist' movements – notably the Arya Samaj in Punjab or the *tabligh* and *tanzim* societies in Indo-Gangetic belt—developed their ideas and support base outside institutional structures, colonial policies and influences .They derived sustenance from their own complex repertoire of ideas and concepts, from their own self-image and self-representation; from their apprehension of intrusive influences responsible for contemporary decadence; and from

their overall comprehension of where they stood in a world which, they believed, was dominated by other.

It is important to know how and why this occurred; in fact, making sense of the occurrences outside the national and regional spheres requires a delineation of the local roots of Hindu and Muslim nationalisms. This is how one can establish how local interest, operating within sharply demarcated religious boundaries and using their linkages with Hindutva or Islamist movements, mounted pressure on all-India leaders to safeguard their special claims; and also how they opposed, sometimes violently, the occasional concession being offered to their adversaries as a price for reconciliation. Their profile, location and linkages may serve to explain the reasons why they occupied a vantage point in Indian politics in the mid-1940s, and their ability (mostly in doubt in earlier decades), to prepare the groundwork for partition well before the Union Jack was lowered in Delhi and Karachi (Hasan :2005 p. 8) .

This debate, often conducted in a polemical and acrimonious spirit, goes on ceaselessly as more and more information comes to light and as individual and collective memories is revived time and time again through the medium of the vast Indian television network and its screening of popular serials like *Buniyaads* and *Tamas*. These are memories of broken homes and families, the wounds inflicted by Partition generally, the 'unequalled mistrust, acerbity and frenzied warfare'¹⁵, and the 'general sense of gloom and despondency that pervaded the subcontinent'.

It is tempting, even four decades after Independence and partition, to reflect on the agony so many experienced, review part of the literature afresh, and explore themes for future research. This research is just a tentative reappraisal of an agonizing process. Many vital areas remain uncovered, not because their importance is not recognized, but because they are perceptively explored elsewhere. The colonial government's policies, so central to the evolution of 'separatist politics' is more than adequately analyzed and documented¹⁶. Similarly a number of studies have dealt with ideological and social forces which aided

¹⁵ K.A. Abbas *I Am Not An Island: An Experiment in Autobiography* (Delhi, 1987); A.K. Gupta (ed.), *Myth and Reality: The Struggle for Freedom in India 1945-7* (Delhi, 1987), especially the contributions of Alok Rai, Tapati Chakravarty and S.S. Hans.

¹⁶ Francis Robinson (1974); Bipan Chandra (1984); Gyanendra Pandey (1990), Sandria Freitag (1989).

‘separatist’ politics and reinforced communitarian identities around shared values and symbols.¹⁷

There exists certain inclination in choosing particular centres in writing history. In much of the writings until 1980s –the works of Seal (1968), Brass (1991), Robinson (1974), Chris Bayly(1985), Gyanendra Pandey(1990) and Zoya Hasan included UP (uttar Pradesh) was seen as the heartland of Hindu and Muslim revitalization movements, the chief arena where competing elites devised and followed their political trajectories within communitarian frameworks. Historians have since turned to regions outside the Indo-Gangetic belt to traverse the terrain of elite politics within formal imperial structures. Thus the works of David Page(1982), Kenneth Jones(1994), Ian Talbot (1988), David Gilmartin(1988) on Punjab and of Rafiuddin Ahmed(1988), Asim Roy(1978), Joya Chatterji(1998) and Suranjan Das(1991) on Bengal, have individually and collectively shifted focus from UP to the ‘Muslim Majority’ provinces of present Bangladesh and India. Unfortunately, despite the violent riots of Bihar, little has been written on Bihar and Muslims in Bihar except the works of Ghosh (1998).

Relevantly the cultivations of history and its events evidently got the different voices and interpretations. Mahbubur Rahman and Willem Van Schendel (2004) wrote: “the study of Partition itself has been one of the principal victims. Over the past half-century, three rival nationalisms have fashioned and refined own interpretations of Partition, and these are not compatible”.¹⁸ One of such interpretive works is *The Other Side of Silence*, by Urvashi Butalia (1998) pieced together from oral narratives and testimonies, in many cases from women, children and *dalit*¹⁹s –marginal voices never heard before –and supplemented by documents, reports, diaries, memoirs and parliamentary records, this is moving, personal chronicle of partition that places people, instead of grand politics, at the centre. She drew the untold stories of Partition. She emphasized both on personal stories and memories—how people coped with the trauma, how they rebuilt their lives, what resources, both physical and mental, they drew upon, how their experience of dislocation and trauma shaped their lives, and indeed in cities and towns and villages they settled in – find little reflection in written history.

Methodologically closer to Urvashi Butalia, Verma(2004) studies affects of violence on ten individuals who were victims, and in some instances perpetrators, of terrible acts of violence in events ranging from the Partition of 1947, to the Bangladesh war of 1971, the

¹⁷ Peter Hardy (1971); Robinson; Freitag; S.Gopal (ed.) (1991).

¹⁸ Mahbubur Rahman and Van Schendel, Willem (2004)

¹⁹ Scheduled caste community among the Hindus.

anti-Sikh riots of 1984 and the anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat in 2002 drawing heavily on oral interviews, each of these accounts describes how for all concerned –whether they are victims, aggressors or onlookers—one brief moment of madness has had repercussions which persist even half a century later. The survivors continue to struggle with their guilt and grief, desires and regrets, nostalgia and melancholy, as they get on with business of everyday life.

The question of ‘handing down’ is dealt in many stories and literature too. The disillusionment that followed was captured by a number of writers on both sides of the border. Such writings lament the loss of a world, though not only in the form of romanticized nostalgia. Partition was irrevocably etched on the minds of people as watershed, which brutally served from their own past. Indeed, many writers regard the Partition as an experience that was crucial in shaping their writings. A collection of stories and poems written by Sa’dat Hasan Manto, Krishan Chander, Amrita Rai, Bhisham Sahni, Rahi Monsoor Raza, Abdullah Hossein and many other eminent writers shed lights on controversies and different colors of Partition experience.

3.3.1 Nationalism in Bengal

The task to trace back the history of Bengali nationalism is a difficult one. Before the nineteenth century, two factors shaped the formation of the community and its ideological arena. One is the spread of Islam, and the other is the local encounter of the religious formation for traditional Hinduism and Hindu societies. During the Bangladeshi period, the process of nation building has been hindered, among other factors, by disparity between East and West Bengal. East Bengal has been poorer and densely populous. In the nineteenth century, the majority of the people of Bengal were Muslims and most of them lived in the eastern part. But the middle class, the most important element in the effort to weld the nation into a whole, was overwhelmingly Hindu. Certainly, the Bengali Muslims fell in the paradox of identifying themselves between Muslims and Bengalis. By remaining aloof from the Western-oriented education system, the Muslims alienated themselves from the many new avenues opening up for the emerging middle class. Curiously, however, it was Muslim opposition to the extension of representative government—a political stance taken out of fear of Hindu dominance—that helped to reestablish rapport with the Bangladeshi, who by 1900 welcomed any available support against mounting Hindu nationalism.

The rise of nationalism in the late nineteenth century has so many aspects to analyze. It was not the rise of Bengali-nationalism rather it had a Pan-Indian character. By the end of nineteenth century the idea of a separate Muslim nationality, with separate interests and

aspirations had begun to emerge. Along with consciousness of its distinct political interest, the educated Muslim middle class of Bengal was also eager to find its distinct cultural identity. The decision of the Partition of Bengal in 1905 again made a clear division between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Many of the Muslim leaders from East Bengal supported the government, although there were few leaders, who were the passionate upholders of secular politics. The All India Muslim League, which was supposed to see the political and economic interests of the Muslims, was led by the urban Urdu-speaking elites. Therefore, the Muslim masses of the Eastern Bengal remained aloof in the national political arena.

The fear and envy of the Indian Muslims led to the movement for Pakistan, demanding a separate homeland. Islam was the only combining factor for the two geographically and culturally isolated communities. Unlike the West Pakistan, the majority Muslim and the other communities like Hindus, Buddhists of Bengal region always used to speak in the same language and share the same culture. After the establishment of Pakistan, the non-Bengali ruling elites sought to strengthen their position. The sacrifice of the martyrs of the Language Movement brought about a new political awakening and cultural resurgence among the people of East Pakistan. And finally, the Bengalis became aware of their distinct cultural identity. The rise of Bengali nationalism by going beyond the religious and communal boundaries created a new dimension to the political and social scenario. Passion and feelings for land, language, culture and for the fellow people formed the basis of Bengali nationalism. Bengali nationalism, although being secular and appropriating many of its metaphors from the local culture, failed to integrate women in its core.

The demarcating principles of the Bengali Muslim collectivity have been reshaped several times during this century in response to diverse ideological and political forces. When Pakistan came into existence as a homeland for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, Islam was inevitably invoked as the unifying principle of national identity, capable of transcending all differences between its geographically and culturally divided populations. The quest for the defining principles of 'Bengali Muslim' nationhood is complicated, however, by the fact that while Islamic religion and Bengali culture are the very essence of the community's separate identity, its historical experience has prevented the two from being successfully molded into a coherent unity.

The Biharis as well as the Bengalis are maintaining their own expressions and these types of validation; boundary process is developed as component of identification. Biharis are not a homogenous community. Still, if in a broader sense, the Urdu-speaking non-Bengali

Muslims is considered a Biharis, this community maintains specific boundary particular cultural contents; share some common characteristics with the Bengalis because of residing in the same region

3.4 Riots and Partition

Communal riots have become a distinct feature of communalism in India. Whenever conflicting groups from two different religions, which are self –conscious communities, clash, it results in a communal riot. An event is identified as a communal riot if (a) there is violence and (b) two or more communally identified groups confront each other or members of the other group at some point during the violence. The reason for such a clash could be superficial and trivial, though underlying them are deeper considerations of political representation, control of and access to resources and power. There have been many incidents of riots recorded during the course of British rule and even before that. For example: In Ahmedabad there were riots in 1714, 1715, 1716 and 1750. But according to Bipan Chandra, in his book “*Communalism in Modern India*”, communal tension and riots began to occur only in the last quarter of the 19th century, but they did not occur in India on any significant scale till 1946-47. Before that, the maximum communal rioting took place during 1923-26. A clear relationship between communal riots and politics was established for the first time in 1946, when the Muslim League gave its direct action call on August 16, 1946 (Chandra, B.:1984).

The partition of India in 1947 caused one of the great human convulsions of history. The statistics are staggering. Twelve million people were displaced, a million died, seventy five thousand women were said to have been abducted and raped, families were divided, properties were lost, homes destroyed.

This chronology reveals that communal riots are not caused spontaneously and also that they are rarely caused by religious animosity. They arise due to conflicting political interests, which are often linked to economic interests. There is a significant change in the pattern of communal riots since the 1990s, which could be noticed in the later part of this chronology. This brings forth the shifts that have occurred in the nature of communal riots in India. Moreover, the aim is to underline that religion in most of the cases is not the reason why communal riots occur. The reason for the occurrence of communal violence has been different in the two different phases. During the time of partition, it was

the clash of political interests of the elite of two different communities which resulted in communal riots.

There were four days riots in Kolkata in August 1946. The Bihar riots in October November 1946 and huge blood shed generated immense feeling of Islamic brotherhood among the Muslims (Ilias: 2003). Within these circumstances and after partition a large number of Biharis migrated to East Bengal with a dream of land when they could live a better life. The promise land Pakistan became the root metaphor to those Muslims. They expected the East Pakistan government to settle them there. Pakistan government was “averse to their miserable plight” and that ‘the blood of the Bihari martyrs’ which served as the foundation stone to Pakistan had been callously forgotten (Ghosh: 1988)

The Muslims of the Indian sub-continent demanded and eventually created a country for themselves. Before the British departed, India was partitioned in to two countries. Muslim majority areas became Pakistan and the rest became the present day India. Pakistan consisted of two provinces East Pakistan and West Pakistan, more than a thousand miles apart. After the Partition, India went through a great turmoil, and a huge transfer of population took place. Millions of Muslims of India moved either to West Pakistan (and are often referred to as “*Mohajirs*”) or to East Pakistan (and are often referred to as “*Biharis*”). Although there were many languages among the émigrés from India, the majority spoke Urdu.

Tajul Islam Hashmi writes (1998), “The large scale exodus of Muslims from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal started in the wake of the massacre of thousands of them in Bihar and Calcutta in late 1946 and in 1947 and 1950 by Hindu and Sikh extremists. The Great Bihar killings of October – November 1946, preceded by the Great Calcutta killings of august 1946, alone led to the extermination... Consequently, more than a million Bihari Muslims sought refuge in East Bengal after partition. Another thirty thousand entered East Bengal from other parts of eastern India, especially eastern Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. More migrants followed them from eastern India after the communal riots of 1950 and 1964”.

Massive population exchanges occurred between the two newly-formed nations in the months immediately following Partition. Once the lines were established, about 14.5 million people crossed the borders to what they hoped was the relative safety of religious majority. Based on 1951 Census of displaced persons, 7,226,000 Muslims went to

Pakistan from India while 7,249,000 Hindus and Sikhs moved to India from Pakistan immediately after Partition²⁰.

3.5 Bihari community in East Pakistan: Migration and Reintegration

The new country Pakistan was poor in every way imaginable, resources, trained personnel and infra-structure. Most of the machinery of government was located in what was now India. Pakistan was mostly agrarian, and economically underdeveloped with almost no industry. At a time like this the founders of the country considered it necessary to direct the new émigrés to go to areas of the country where their services could be best utilized. As a consequence a large number of Biharis who worked for the Railway in India proceeded to East Pakistan and those employed with the central government in Delhi and elsewhere in India moved to Karachi. After the birth of Pakistan, Karachi was chosen as the capital, and Urdu was declared the official national language, the language identified by Muslims of the sub-continent as theirs. Initially the arrival of Biharis and the positive discrimination of the Pakistan Government in terms of refugee rehabilitation were not resented by the Bengalis. However, the euphoria of the formation of Pakistan and the positive attitude of the Bengalis towards the Biharis was short-lived. It was over as early as March 1948 when Mohammad Ali Jinnah announced in Dhaka that “Urdu and Urdu alone shall be the State language of Pakistan.” During the Language Movement, the Biharis instead of supporting the Bengalis, sided with the West Pakistani ruling elite. Further, in the 1954 provincial elections and in the 1970 general elections, they extended their support to the Muslim League, which symbolized and championed the domination of the West Pakistanis over the Bengalis. They also supported the West Pakistani ruling elite and many of them actively participated in the military actions against the Bengalis in the 1971 Bangladesh Independence War. The exclusive attitude of the Biharis and their pro-West Pakistani political activities culminated with the growth of an anti-Bihari sentiment among the Bengalis.

The Biharis, the Urdu speaking minority of East Pakistan, not only stood for a united Pakistan, they also identified with language and culture of West Pakistan. On the other hand, the Urdu speaking immigrants, once again became minority in their new home because of the language and cultural differences with the local populations and for their support to the “ideology of Pakistan” which aimed at strengthening the ‘Pakistani Nationalism.’

²⁰ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Partition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition).

However a large segment of population, the Bengalis in East Pakistan were very unhappy with this decision and they made it known. The neglect of the aspirations of the East Pakistanis continued under many governments in Pakistan. The Politicians of East Pakistan spoke to these and many other grievances of the people of East Pakistan and eventually achieved a convincing victory at the ballot box. The Government of Pakistan and West Pakistani politicians were unable to reach necessary compromises with respect to sharing of power which resulted in a civil war.

The inheritance of the Muslim Identity created a sense of confidence, safety, and superiority as far as the legacy of culture and language was concerned among the Urdu speaking community when they arrived in a Muslim dominated state after the partition of 1947. Their dreams were shattered when the Bengali demanded for equal status of their language in the affairs of state functioning along side with the language-Urdu. After partition of 1947, the two-nation theory lost its importance and significance. Muslim League leadership had adopted the theory for the sake of argument to divide India for the creation of Pakistan. When the goal was achieved, Muslim League had no such political and economic policy that could favor the people of its eastern wing. The growing interests of the non-Bengalis in the economy of East Pakistan, made the Bengalis suspicious and with the passage of time the exploitation of East Pakistan was exposed.

During the 24 years of Pakistan's rule over the Bengali nation, only a handful of secular, liberal, democrat and progressive Bihari or Urdu speaking stood for the cause of Bengali's struggle for economic, cultural, and political emancipation. These people created a division among the Biharis, when in 1952; the language movement took a violent turn.

For the majority, the choice was either support the people or side with the establishment. The Urdu speaking linguistic minority, due to its ignorance of the characteristic of the Bengali society, lack of knowledge and understanding of history and for its own superiority complex, misjudged the consequences of the language movement.

During the period of united Pakistan (1947-1971), the Urdu-speaking Biharis were not assimilated within the society of East Pakistan and remained as a distinct cultural-linguistic group. They generally associated and identified themselves with the West Pakistani society primarily based on a shared linguistic heritage and supported the West Pakistani governing elite in the process of capturing the economic and political power in East Pakistan. Consequently, the Biharis enjoyed government patronage and preferential treatment in various sectors of the East Pakistan economy.

Such exile and re-establishments are not unusual in history. During the Babylonian exile, Those who did go back did so with high expectations; Isaiah recounts the prophecies that Yahweh would lead them into a beautiful land flowing with milk and honey and that the mountains would level out to provide an easy path for their return. The prophecies also told that when the returnees arrived in Judah they would find an empty land wherein they would rebuild the cities, erect temples to Yahweh, and live in peace and plenty. It didn't work out that way. H.M. Barstad, in his *The Myth of the Empty Land* (1996), marshals archaeological and textual evidence to show that throughout the period of the Babylonian exile.

3.6 Tension of '71 and Hostility

In every human society, the range of experiences that are socially acknowledged and named is always much narrower than the range of experiences that people actually have. Despite the deep nationalistic emotions on the events of 1971, there has been little systematic effort on the violent conflicts that prevailed in the course of the nine-month long war. Popular attention has, so far, focused on the Pakistani army's action against the Bengalis. Looking back to history, it may become apparent that then East Pakistan in 1971 was simultaneously a battleground for many different kinds of violent conflict that included aggressive insurgence, mob violence, military crackdown on a civilian population, urban terrorism, guerrilla fight to full-scale war. The culture of violence fomented by the conflict of 1971 forms the context for much of Bangladesh's subsequent history. A careful, evidence-based approach to understanding the events of 1971 is fundamental if the different parties to the conflict are to be ever reconciled.

The postponement of the national assembly on March 1 followed by the call to observe "hartal" given by Sheikh Mujib led to widespread lawlessness during March, when the Pakistan government effectively lost control of much of the territory of East Pakistan. Many accounts, both Bangladeshi and Pakistani, have recorded the parallel government run on Sheikh Mujib's decrees. Apart from sporadic incidents of violence in Dhaka, there was arson, looting and attacks by Bengali mobs on non-Bengali people and property in many parts of the province, some with casualties. There can be no doubt that in many of the towns where there was a substantial Bihari population, the Bengalis turned against the 'Biharis' during the short period they were in control and some terrible massacres resulted. Among the places where this happened were Chittagong, Khulna, Jessore, Comilla, Rangpur, Phulbari, Dinajpur and Mymensingh. In areas where the non-Bengalis were in a majority, as in some of the railway towns, the 'Biharis' turned and attacked the

Bengalis. For example, in Paksey nearly all the Bengalis who had not fled were murdered. The White Paper published by the Pakistan government in August 1971 lists such incidents, of which the worst loss of life appears to have occurred in Chittagong in the first week of March. That “the government’s writ had ceased to function in most parts of the province” and that there were attacks upon non-Bengalis by Bengalis on the rampage, is acknowledged by critics of the government too²¹.

A description of the indiscriminate killing during this period has been given by an American engineer who was working on a construction project at Kaptai, near Chittagong²². Anthony Mascarenhas gave another account of the ‘Biharis’ plight. According to him:

‘Thousands of families of unfortunate Muslims, many of them refugees from Bihar who chose Pakistan at the time of the partition riots in 1947, were mercilessly wiped out. Women were raped, or had their breasts torn out with specially fashioned knives. Children did not escape the horror: the lucky ones were killed with their parents; but many thousands of others must go through what life remains for them with eyes gouged out and limbs amputated. More than 20,000 bodies of non-Bengalis have been found in the main towns, such as Chittagong, Khulna and Jessore. The real toll, I was told everywhere in East Bengal, may have been as high as 100,000, for thousands of non-Bengalis have vanished without a trace. The Government of Pakistan has let the world know about that first horror. What it has suppressed is the second and worse horror which followed when its own army took over the killing. West Pakistan officials privately calculate that altogether both sides have killed 250,000 people’²³.

A portion of ‘Biharis’ joined and collaborated with the Pakistani army also killed numerous Bengalis. The roots of the conflicts that divided people of the subcontinent have different phases – first, Hindus were separated from Muslims and then line of separation was drawn from different ethnic linguistic groups. Consequently, the concept of nationalism, as developed in the subcontinent during the last one hundred odd years has been germinating conflict. In short, Hindu-Muslim, Bengali-‘Biharis’ and Bengali-

²¹ *Sunday Times*, London, June 13, 1971.

²² Malcolm w. Browne, *New York Times*, May 9, 1971.

²³ Anthony Mascarenhas, *Sunday Times*, London, June 13, 1971 see more in his *The Rape of Bangladesh* (Delhi, 1971) and *Bangladesh: A legacy of Blood* (London, 1986). He is considered as one of the most sympathetic writers on Liberation War in 1971. See also Ziring Lawrence (1992), *Bangladesh: From Mujib to Ershad: An Interpretive Study*.

ethnic minority groups' conflicts in Bangladesh are part of much larger conflicts and identify crises in the subcontinent.

Ahmad Ilias stated, "During the whole period of political and constitutional crisis, the Urdu-speaking immigrants in East Pakistan remained to the Muslim League. The labor riot in the industrial areas brought them more close to the central government.

It must be remembered that these incidents occurred in the immediate aftermath of a most brutal civil war, and took place at a time when no government had yet been established in Dhaka, let alone been able to take action to restore law and order. The prime target of the Bengali forces were the hated 'Razakars', Al-Shams and Al-Badrs. One incident which gained immediate world wide publicity as it occurred in front of the television camera was the stabbing to death at the Sports Ground of four Razakars. This was carried out by one of the irregular guerrilla units who were not under the control or orders of the Bangladesh government in exile. It was led by Abdul Kadir Siddiqui.²⁴ There were cases of large scale massacres in Khalishpur of Khulna, Shantahar, Chittagong, Mymensingh and other areas. Nevertheless, rape and harassment of women, murders, jailing of youths were a common phenomenon after the independence²⁵.

Thousands more 'Biharis' were killed, all of their homes and businesses were confiscated, they were fired from their jobs, their bank accounts seized, their children expelled from schools and they once more had to seek refuge. International Red Cross created camps to save them from total annihilation. Most did not want to live in Bangladesh after the battering they had received. So half a million chose to leave for, what was left of their country, Pakistan.²⁶

As soon as the new government was established and in particular after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned to Dhaka early in January to assume the office of Prime Minister, all the authority of the new Government was brought to bear to stop these revenge killings and to leave the fate of collaborators to be determined by the courts after due process of law. In general this policy has been successful, though feelings against the 'Biharis' are such

²⁴ Whitaker, Ben, *The Biharis in Bangladesh*, (Minority rights Group, London :1982, P, 9) and Minority Rights Group, *The 'Biharis' in Bangladesh*, Report 11, 4th edition, January 1982, p. 7.

²⁵ Similar accounts are given by Bengali Pro-liberation writers like Muhammad Zafar Iqbal (see Weekly 2000, Eid Special issue 2007 pp 488-489)

²⁶ Sharmila Bose, 'The Truth About East Pakistan' *EPW Special Articles October 8, 2005* <http://www.epw.org.in/showArticles....3 & filetype=html>

that explosions of mob violence against them may recur. One such outburst occurred in Khulna in March 1972, when some 200 'Biharis' are believed to have been killed by a Bengali mob. International observers also pointed out that the 'nationalist local press' repeatedly fuelled the Bengalis hatred of the 'Biharis', leading to the mass looting and expropriation.²⁷ An Indian observer wrote in 1973:

Perhaps no other class of people in the world today is as ruined, economically and socially, as amitten and smashed up as the community of the former Indian refugees in Bangladesh who are known here by the general term 'Bihari',.... Today in Bangladesh, to be a Bihari is the worst crime... thousands have been discharged from ...Many persons rejoined duty on the strength of 'clearance chits' given by Awami League MPs. But they did not return, even their bodies remained untraced (Chatterji: 1973).²⁸

Against the above backdrop and, more importantly, because of their active anti-independence role (for example, their participation in the East Pakistan Civil Armed Forces, i.e. *Razakars* and *Al-Shams*, raised by the Pakistani authorities to carry out atrocities over the East Pakistanis), the 'Biharis' became subject to widespread political persecution preceding and during the Independence War, as well as in the aftermath of liberation. Following independence, the Bihari political persecution continued and their properties and houses were taken over by the Bengalis. During March-April 1971 the non-Bengali population mainly Urdu speaking were viciously attacked during which nearly 64,000 were killed and many more injured. Eventually the federal government called in the armed forces to restore law and order, and for a period of time they were successful. Due to recent disturbances the Biharis were also very afraid of the Bengali majority. Toward the end of 1971 the Bengali nationalists with over-whelming support of the local population and Pakistan's chief rival India managed to militarily beat Pakistan.

Ahmad Ilias (2003) stated, "During the whole period of political and constitutional crisis, the Urdu-speaking immigrants in East Pakistan remained to the Muslim League. The labor riot in the industrial areas brought them more close to the central government. Movement of the autonomy and independence war further extended the distance between the two communities. Anthony Mascarenhas gave another account of the Biharis plight. According to him 'More than 20,000 bodies of the Non Bengalis have been found in the main towns). Just before the crackdown of 25th March (Mascarenhas: 1986). A massive killing of Biharis happened by the Bengali just before the liberation war started and after the victory. A

²⁷ Whitaker, B *Ibid*.

²⁸ Basant Chatterjee, *Inside Bangladesh Today: An Eyewitness Account* (New Delhi, 1973), cited in the book of Ahmed Ilias 'Indian emigres in Bangladesh, 2003, p-129.

portion of Biharis joined and collaborated with the Pakistani army also killed numerous Bengalis. Nevertheless, it should not suggest that the killings were one-sided. In popular estimates, it is claimed that 3 millions of people of Bangladesh had been killed by the Pakistanis and their collaborators during the liberation war of 1971. Even if the number varies in different accounts, there is no doubt that only few events in history are comparable with the brutal massacre of Bengalis in 1971 and also within such a short period.

3.7 Post '71 and the Biharis of Bangladesh

On December 16, 1971, ninety five thousand Pakistani armed forces and other personnel surrendered in Dhaka, and were taken to India. The minority, which cooperated with the Pakistani government, was now considered traitors and was under assault by the Bengali majority for their language and political views. For the protection of this population they were given sanctuary by the International Red Cross in certain areas of the country, which later came to be known as camps. There are still around hundred camps in various parts of Bangladesh with a population of more than 250-300,000 people. In the newly liberated Bangladesh thousands of Biharis were killed on the streets, maimed, raped and looted. Their homes and businesses were confiscated. They were fired from their jobs and Bihari students were expelled from schools.

After break-up of Pakistan Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto hailing from the province of Sindh, became the President of the country and had the responsibility for negotiating release of prisoners and settlement of other outstanding issues such as transfer of population. By this time 535,000 Pakistanis had registered with the International Committee of the Red Cross in Bangladesh and had indicated their preference to move to West Pakistan. However the Pakistani Administration introduced conditions upon who or how many, shall be accepted for repatriation to Pakistan. In the end Pakistan accepted the return of only 173,000 Pakistanis. Introduction of limitations and conditions on the repatriation of this population was not only unconstitutional (according to the Constitution of Pakistan) i.e. illegal it was also an abuse of authority and an immoral act by the Pakistani head of state. Mr. Bhutto knew that the extermination of the citizens of his State was in progress in Bangladesh yet he chose to deny responsibility for protection of these citizens of the Pakistan.

These Pakistanis left in Bangladesh became the first group of stateless, because Bangladesh did not accept them as citizens either. Realizing the government of Pakistan was not going to repatriate them, Pakistanis in Bangladesh continued to repatriate themselves and their families by whatever means were available to them. Government of Pakistan issued a presidential ordinance in March 1978 stripping all Pakistanis left in Bangladesh after December 1971 of their nationality, unilaterally, retroactively,

arbitrarily and en masse. This ordinance was and is illegal and the sole purpose of the ordinance was to deprive a group of citizens, the common feature of the group being their language, of their basic right as citizens of Pakistan. There are around one hundred thousand Pakistanis who returned without the blessing of the Government of Pakistan, now living in Pakistan who are not recognized as citizens and are denied all amenities of citizenship. This is the second group of stateless. We advocate for restoration of full rights of citizenship for both these groups.

Against the above backdrop and, more importantly, because of their active anti-independence role (for example, their participation in the East Pakistan Civil Armed Forces, i.e. Razakars and Al-Shams, raised by the Pakistani authorities to carry out atrocities over the East Pakistanis), the Biharis became subject to widespread political persecution preceding and during the Independence War, as well as in the aftermath of liberation. Following independence, the Bihari political persecution continued and their properties and houses were taken over by the Bengalis. Several government promulgations [for example, the Acting President Order I of 1972, the Bangladesh Abandoned Property (Control, Management and Disposal) Order, 1972, President's Order 16 etc.] did facilitate the dispossession of Bihari properties. As a result, by the middle of 1972, a total of 1,008,680 Biharis were domiciled in various shanty camps spreading all over Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh Government announced the Presidential Order-149 in 1972 as a step towards offering the Bangladeshi citizenship to the Biharis. According to Bangladesh Government sources, 600,000 Biharis accepted the offer²⁹, while 539,669 registered with the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) opting to return to their 'country of nationality' - Pakistan. Islamabad, however, was less interested and showed a lax attitude about the repatriation of the Biharis except those who joined the East Pakistan Civil Armed Forces and surrendered with the Pakistan Army. According to a Pakistani Foreign Ministry official: "What are we supposed to do with them (the Biharis)? We have enough problems already. Besides, you must remember that they are really Indian refugees³⁰." Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the first post-1971 civilian president of Pakistan, was even unwilling to admit any sizeable number of 'Bihari refugees' to be repatriated to Pakistan.

²⁹ Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Government of Bangladesh, 1982, p. 3.

³⁰ Bangladesh State and the Refugee Phenomenon' in *Refugee Watch* online magazine http://www.safhr.org/refugee_watch.org18.htm

By late January 1974, some 90,000 people had been transported from Pakistan to Bangladesh, and over 44,000 from Bangladesh to Pakistan³¹. By mid February 1974, over 200,000 people had been repatriated under the terms of the New Delhi Agreement. The implementation of the agreement played a role in Pakistan's decision on 22 February 1974 to recognise Bangladesh. On 1 July 1974, in agreement with the governments concerned, UNHCR phased out the repatriation, which began in the previous September. By this time, some 9,000 people had been transported by sea between Bangladesh and Pakistan and some 270,000 airlifted across the subcontinent. Those airlifted included some 166,000 Bengalis returning from Pakistan to Bangladesh and some 104,000 non-Bengalis going back from Bangladesh to Pakistan. This was the largest emergency airlift of civilians ever organized³².

One of the unresolved issues at this time was the status and citizenship of Biharis who moved to East Pakistan at the time of partition in 1947. The problem still remains unresolved. Most of them spoke Urdu, which bound them to West Pakistan, but they fared relatively well in East Pakistan. During 1971, many Biharis joined the Pakistani militia or collaborated with the Pakistan Army. As a result, after the surrender of the Pakistan Army in mid-December 1971, the entire Bihari community faced the wrath of Bengali nationalism.

Although Biharis were among those accepted by Pakistan under the August 1973 repatriation accord, Pakistan was slow in giving clearances. At a meeting of the foreign ministers of the three countries in New Delhi in April 1974, a new tripartite agreement on a second phase of repatriation was reached. More than 170,000 Biharis moved to Pakistan under the terms of these agreements. However, Pakistan interpreted the categories of 'non-Bengalis' set out in the agreement restrictively and did not take back all Biharis. In addition to this earlier movement, nearly 9,900 Biharis repatriated to Pakistan between 1977 and 1979 and further, 4,800 more of them in 1982. In 1993, Pakistan accepted 53 more Bihari families but then the process stopped³³.

³¹ Bangladesh State and the Refugee Phenomenon' in *Refugee Watch* online magazine [http:// www.safhr.org/refugee_watch.org18.htm](http://www.safhr.org/refugee_watch.org18.htm)

³² all facts and figures used in this paragraph are collected from the Bangladesh State and the Refugee Phenomenon' in *Refugee Watch* online magazine [http:// www.safhr.org/refugee_watch.org18.htm](http://www.safhr.org/refugee_watch.org18.htm)

³³ Bangladesh State and the Refugee Phenomenon' in *Refugee Watch* online magazine [http:// www.safhr.org/refugee_watch.org18.htm](http://www.safhr.org/refugee_watch.org18.htm)

In 1999, over 200,000 Biharis were still living in 116 camps of Bangladesh with poor facilities. By this time, many of them have been naturalised in the country but because their citizenship is still an unresolved issue, they continue to face innumerable problems

Bangladesh in its formative phase insisted that it would establish formal diplomatic relations with Pakistan only if that country agreed to expeditious repatriation of the non-Bengalis including Biharis from Bangladesh. This insistence forced the Pakistan Government to move back from its original stance and agreed to receive a sizeable number of Biharis in the 1973 New Delhi Agreement as well as in the Tripartite Agreement of 1974 in exchange for the return of the Bengalis from Pakistan. As the first step towards implementing these agreements, the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) registered 539,639 Biharis who intended to return to Pakistan. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) facilitated the return of 108,750 Bihari refugees by June 1974³⁴. After that date, the UNHCR had to suspend the repatriation process due to exhaustion of funds. The Bangladesh Government complained to Islamabad about the slow repatriation of the Biharis and raised the issue during the 1974 Mujib-Bhutto summit. The Pakistani side, as it was earlier, showed little interest in the matter.

The post-Mujib Government undertook new diplomatic initiatives to persuade Islamabad to resume the repatriation of the Biharis. It approached the Islamic countries to exert pressure on Pakistan as well as to provide assistance to resolve the matter. Despite initial reluctance, President Zia-ul Haq subsequently, however, desired a solution to the Bihari issue on humanitarian ground. He asserted during a visit to Dhaka in December 1985 that Pakistan was ready to accept the Bihari refugees if sufficient financial resources could be raised for their transfer and rehabilitation³⁵. In 1988, a trust agreement was signed between Pakistan and Rabita Al-Alam Al-Islami (an Islamic charity organization, hereafter Rabita) to expedite the process of Bihari resettlement in Pakistan. A repatriation and resettlement plan was drawn up which included the construction of 36,000 houses spread over 80 sites costing about \$278 million and with approximately \$30 million for community services and \$10 million for the transportation of the refugees. Despite elaborate preparations, the repatriation process could not get off the ground³⁶.

³⁴ Bangladesh State and the Refugee Phenomenon' in *Refugee Watch* online magazine http://www.safhr.org/refugee_watch.org18.htm

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Benazir Bhutto was traditionally opposed to the idea of transferring the Biharis to Pakistan and followed the party politics (Pakistan Peoples Party or PPP) and the state policy of her father (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) after she came to power in 1988. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, it is noteworthy, introduced the restrictive entry regulations for the Bihari refugees in the early 1970s. During her tenure as Prime Minister, Benazir did not grant the citizenship rights either to the refugees in Bangladesh or to the 100,000 Biharis who moved to Pakistan illegally since 1977³⁷. During a visit to Bangladesh in October 1989, Benazir asserted that the Biharis should be permanently settled in Bangladesh and Pakistan would help to raise funds from the Muslim world for their settlement. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, was generally supportive to the repatriation of the Bihari refugees from Bangladesh. He undertook meaningful initiatives for the return of the Biharis. He was ready to rehabilitate them in his home province (Punjab) and officially domiciled them issuing identity cards. Although definite steps were taken for repatriation and a symbolic return of 235 Biharis did occur on 10 January 1993, it was subsequently shelved for 'logistical and practical' problems. All subsequent Pakistani governments showed disinterest in ending the Bihari issue that. It is indeed a political question rather than an economic problem.

3.8 Conclusion

Historical accounts, even the scholarly accounts vary a great deal. The Historical accounts by Hindu and Muslim scholars, or Congress and Muslim differ not in terms of fact rather in terms of highlighting and interpreting particular events.

By all accounts after 1946, 1971 was the next watershed for the Biharis in East Pakistan stigmatized as collaborators of Pakistan Government. Biharis were identified as 'Stranded Pakistani' or "Stateless People"; Most of the Biharis had never experienced the culture and customs of the Bengalis though centuries ago Bihar had been part of Bengal. According to their belief, Bengal was a fabulous country where the wizard women live, there was a saying- that there are hundreds doors to enter Bengal but none to come out. (Ilias: 2003). Movement of the autonomy and independence war further extended the distance between the two communities. Three generations of Biharis have seen and passed their lives directly and indirectly in such socio-political phenomena. Dreamers and defenders of Pakistan (1946), Stigmatized collaborators of Pakistan (1971) and Stateless Diaspora (1972-), into these three major phases partitions Biharis' lives are deeply connected.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

For a balanced, objective and rounded view, it is necessary to explore the tension of those scholars, creative writers who contested the definition of Muslim Identity in purely religious terms and refuted the popular belief that Islamic values and symbols provide a key to understanding the Muslim world view (Mujeeb: 1967) He stated “we may well discover that they, more than anybody else, discovered elements of unity. Cohesion and integration in India's past sensed the bitter consequence of political Identity being built on religious ties and questioned the conviction (or Myth) in certain Muslim circles that the future of Islam was endangered by Hindu nationalism (Hasan: 1989) what Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had feared in 1887. He argued that under the one nation system of election was held the Hindu Members would be four times larger than the Muslim in the legislative Assembly (Ilias: 2003). The unity, fraternity of the Muslims as a religious and social community was gradually increased through Muslim Leagues political movements and demand of separate State for Muslim became evident. But there were different scenario in Indians Muslim lives.

Such political and literary descriptions make it clear that boundings are multiple, and that at no time is one boundary the sole definer of an identity. Yet at different times and for different reasons there is a “relevant boundary” that gains prominence and define the us/them divide. The us/them divide created by the institutional and bureaucratic structures introduced by the colonial government towards the end of nineteenth century eventually led to the partition of India along religious lines. It is doubtless true that economic discontent, coupled with escalating violence; riots lend weight to nations of identity and act as a catalyst to community based strategies (Hasan: 1988). The rivalry between the Hindus and the Muslims on the question of partition of India tension provoked communal violence in many parts of India. There were four days riots in Kolkata in August 1946. The Bihar riots in October-November 1946 and huge blood shed generated immense feeling of Islamic brotherhood among the Muslims (Ilias, 2003). Within these circumstances and after partition a large number of Biharis migrated to East Bengal with a dream of land when they could live a better life. The promise land Pakistan became the root metaphor to those Muslims. They expected the East Pakistan government to settle them there. Pakistan government was “averse to their miserable plight” and that ‘the blood of the Bihari martyrs’ which served as the foundation stone to Pakistan had been callously forgotten (Ghosh: 1988)

Bearing a negative attitude to Bengali culture Bihari Muslims preferred the east for their future settlement. Hence “Pakistan” was not only simulative-- business, service, employment, education, better living were also the pull factors. Ahmed Ilias pointed out that the process of economic exploitation of East Pakistan began with the migration of Hindu Bengalis and arrivals of new capitalist class from India and West Pakistan that

pushed the Bengali business community on the margin. Unlike the other refugee groups, Biharis were small businessmen and shopkeepers. Another group of Bihari refugees and optees obtained jobs in railway. Equally large was the number of Urdu speaking constables in police, mostly from Uttar Pradesh. The Pakistan government developed the province East Pakistan (Bengal) as a colonial hinterland of West Pakistan. (Chakkraborty: 1994). The role of State was quite exploitation based to the Bengalis. Urdu speaking immigrants totally ignored the undercurrent of the politics and kept them isolated from the mainstream. Language movement of 1948-52 made socio cultural differences evident. The roots of the conflicts that divided people of the subcontinent have different phases – first, Hindus were separated from Muslims and then line of separation was drawn from different ethnic linguistic groups (Hasan: 1988). Consequently, the concept of nationalism, as developed in the subcontinent during the last one hundred odd years has been germinating conflict. In short, Hindu-Muslim, Bengali-Biharis and Bengali-ethnic minority groups' conflicts in Bangladesh are part of much larger conflicts and identify crises in the subcontinent.

Chapter 4

Identities and Boundaries: Formation, Changes and Maintenance

4.1 Introduction

While a general term used for Urdu-speakers as 'Biharis', there were several other terms that embroiled this people in a crisis of identity, involving an oscillation between two poles of identity—local Bengali people and Urdu-speakers. They are often treated as '*mauras*', '*Pakistanis*' '*razkars*' etc—and each of these designations has particular connotations. Not unlikely, almost all the names are given to this 'other' people by Bengalis. In this chapter, I discuss the historical and contemporary contexts in which different labeling for Biharis were formulated paying particular attention to how the Biharis themselves responded to this identity shifting. This research is focused on the *Biharis* according to the general usage (despite their different origins), both outside and inside the camp; though ethnographic study was mostly conducted among the non camp-residents.

4.2 Nomenclature of Biharis

There is a controversy over the nomenclature of this 'community'. The term community is attributedly used since except the commonality of religion and shared history of migration in partition, they have diversity of cultures, language and so on. Their identity was never consistent after that. To address these people 'Bihari' is commonly used, originally it is a Hindi word, literary means a person belonging to the Indian State of Bihar. In Bangladesh, the Urdu speaking community did not come from the Indian State of Bihar alone. The term Biharis is often used since a large portion of the immigrants has come from present Indian state Bihar, (some also argued that the term derived from the *Bahar* —means outside, since the Biharis were the outsiders of this land they were designated as Biharis). Whatever the term is rooted in, the Biharis are commonly identified as related to Bihar and migration during Partition. The reality is different in deed, since there are people who migrated from different parts of modern India, and of course in different times. There are people who migrated not only from Bihar, but also from many parts of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, even from South India. Some non-Bengali artisan who resided nearby Kolkata also migrated at that time. As such, Biharis does not mean that all the people designated under this term are from Bihar only; rather they vary in their origin, language, culture, profession and others. Not only that they came from other parts of India as well, and were largely distinguishable by their life-style that bound

these people from their former homelands into an identifiable minority group with the commonly spoken and understood language of Urdu. Ironically, in Bangladesh all the Urdu speaking persons irrespective of their distinct origins India are called as Bihari.

Those people were called as *Mohajers* in the first stage when they migrated from India . In Pakistan they still love to use this term to identify themselves³⁸. Within a very short time after their arrival in then East Pakistan, they were also called as non-locals and non Bengalis. During the war of liberation they were called as ‘*Maura*’ (Hashmi:1998) a term which is used for *Marwari* traders from Marwar³⁹ in India. People who have been living in the camps since 1971, are also known as ‘*Stranded Pakistanis*’; because this term is a platform that unites them with a vision to migrate to Pakistan. Nevertheless, many people, who did not enter the camp and some left the camp within this long thirty years, are not included among the stranded Pakistanis. Unlike the camp-dwellers, they are slowly integrated with the Bengali population. With the passage of time all the Urdu or Hindi speaking people were called as Biharis. In 1975 after the assassination of Sheik Mujibur Rahman a new doctrine was introduced ‘Bangladeshi Nationalism’ vis-à-vis’ Bengali Nationalism. A senior minister of the then Ziaur Rahman government named the community as “Urdu speaking Bangladeshi” (Ahmed Ilias:2003).

Eminent lawyer advocate M.I. Farrooqi who himself is a Bihari urged that “the Urdu speaking community should not be called as non-locals, non-Bengalis or Biharis. The better nomenclature for them would be Indian Bengali or Indian Bangladeshi⁴⁰.”

4.3 State and the Identity

The history of the Bihari migrants goes back to the partition of India in 1947. Their displacement occurred in the wake of communal violence during and in the aftermath of the partition (for example, 30,000 Muslims were killed in the ‘Great Bihar Killing’ in October-November 1946). About a million of them migrated to the eastern wing of Pakistan (East Pakistan⁴¹. mostly from the eastern Indian states of Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Orissa, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim. The migrant Muslims not only

³⁸ For example a leading party in present-day Pakistan is named Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) which mainly looked at the interest of the migrants. Recently the name is changed and known as Mottahida Qaumi Movement (MQM).

³⁹ The Marwaris are not Muslims, predominantly Hindus and Jains, and usually they started coming to Bengal since 19th century for their business purpose.

⁴⁰ *The Bangladesh Observer*, Dhaka, 26 February 2000.

⁴¹ Minority Rights Group, *The Biharis in Bangladesh, Report 11*, 4th edition, January 1982, p. 7

from Bihar, but also from other parts of India, who migrated to both East and West, were known as *Mohajer*. Since a bulk of the migrants came from Bihar, They were known as Biharis.

Partition of India brought very frustrating aftermath to the Bihari people of Bangladesh. Over the period of anti British movement Indian Muslims struggled for the independence of India, mostly under the leadership of Congress, Khelafat Movement and Muslim League. Finally they raised the demand of the creation of Muslim state within the subcontinent. The historic Pakistan resolution declared on 23 March 1940 at the Lahore conference of All India Muslim League. The Muslim delegates from the provinces where Muslims minority were not ready to support this, it they were informed that if Pakistan was created Muslim majority provinces would be benefited and the minority provinces would become slaves. Religion based identity divided whole India into two nations; the two nation theory of Muhammad Ali Zinnah united most of the Muslims of India, for the demand of Pakistan. In the Lahore session Fazlul Haque, a Bengali Muslim league leader, then the leader of coalition government in Bengal, in course of his speech had said. "I am Muslim first and Bengali afterwards". "I too follow the same. I am Pakistani Muslim first and then anything"⁴².

Believing the doctrine of Islamic brotherhood the Muslims of minority provinces had to sacrifice a lot. Accepting the demand of the partition and the creation of Pakistan were becoming inevitable to the British rulers, particularly after the Hindu Muslim riots.

Jinnah had campaigned for Pakistan as the homeland for the Muslims of Indian subcontinent. The idea of creation of a Muslim state within India was strongly opposed by the nationalist Muslim leaders of minority provinces. Congress Muslim leaders like Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, Rafi Ahmed Qidwai, and Asif Ali were among those. Even after the foundation of Pakistan, the Red Shirt Movement leader in Frontier, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan said on 5 March 1948, it was his honest opinion that India should not be partitioned (Ilias:2003,p.41)

Maulana Azad had argued: "To the Pakistan scheme, India will be divided into two states, one with the majority of Muslims and the other of Hindus. In the Hindustan State there will remain three and a half cores of Muslims scattered in small minorities all over the land. With 17% in UP, 12% in Bihar and 9% in Madras, they will be weaker than they are

⁴² Late Nasim Khan, The President of Stranded Pakistanis Genral Repatriation Committee (SPGRC).

today in the Hindu majority provinces. They have their homelands in these regions for almost a thousand years and built up well-known centers of Muslim culture and civilization there.(Azad:1989,p.5)”

After the partition ‘47 a massive migration was held throughout the whole India . A very significant number of both Hindu Muslims community migrated to their dreamlands. Some Urdu-speaking Indian migrated to East Pakistan. They settled down in segrated areas or enclaves, mostly in Syedpur, Shantahar, Khulna, Chittagong, Mirpur and Mohammadpur in Dhaka city. Pakistani ruler Ayub Khan helped them with special dispensations like soft loans for houses and preferential recruitment for in relways, jute mills etc. The West Pakistan based rulling class used them as proxies to rule East Pakistan. The Biharis were encouraged to act as agents of the oligarchy that ruled the land from their safe land Karachi and Rawalpindi.

On the other hand India had to receive the great influx of Hindu peoples from the two parts of Pakistan. Dominique Lapier stated the vivid description about the greatest migration in the history⁴³ “It was not just the books, bank notes bureaucrats’ chairs, which had to be sorted out and divided up in those frantic summer weeks. So, too, hundred thousands of human beings, members of vast army of India’s public employees from rail road presidents and junior ministers to sweepers, errand boys, bearers and babus those infuriating, petty minded clerks, who grew like weeds through India’s administration. Each was given the choice of serving India or Pakistan. Then separated into human piles they were shunted off to one dominion or the other”.

The influx of migrants from Bihar to East Bengal was not the concerns and anxiety of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Governor General and founder of Pakistan, he referred the East Punjab cataclysm after partition of India when he visited East Bengal of the millions of Muslims who in consequence were uprooted from their homes in East Punjab, Delhi and neighboring districts (Ilias: 2003, p.55) but ignored the Bihar carnage, which compelled the Bihari Muslims to migrate. In early days of building nationhood, Pakistan’s national leaders with their Islamic nationalist view could not foresee the after effects of the complex problems while a few Muslim leaders correctly realized the situation and anticipated the forthcoming.

Through the killing of Kolkata and the great Bihar killing of 1946, they received cruel treatment in 1946 resulting in aggravation of calamity in their native provinces in India and

⁴³ Dominique Lapiere (1991), *Freedom at Midnight*.

again in 1971, they faced a lot for their supports to the west Pakistanis. They sided with the West Pakistanis for preservation of Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In 1946 they suffered because they were Muslims, trying to vivisection of India, as Hindu nationalists called it, in 1971 they were accused of being agents of West Pakistan, helping and fighting alongside Pakistani Army to maintain west Pakistan domination over and exploitation of Bangladesh. The SPGRC leader M. Nasim Khan wrote "whatever the merit of the accusation that we were acting as agents of West Pakistan, the fact remains that we wholly stood by a virtually West Pakistan Army, locked in sanguinary war with peoples of Bangladesh." He wrote in another place of the same writings "It is a tragedy that the government of Pakistan deliberately ignores this fundamental reality about our existence in Bangladesh and takes shelter behind homilies of Islam and Islamic values and virtues, and tries to evade its responsibility which it owe us in point of law and honour, no less than in the light of Islamic teaching, precepts and practices."⁴⁴.

4.3.1 Pakistan Period

The Muslims of the Indian sub-continent demanded and eventually created a country for themselves. Before the British departed, India was partitioned in to two countries. Muslim majority areas became Pakistan and the rest became the present day India. Pakistan consisted of two provinces East Pakistan and West Pakistan, more than a thousand miles apart. After the partition India went through a great turmoil, and a huge transfer of population took place. Millions of Muslims of India moved either to West Pakistan (and are often referred to as "Mohajirs") or to East Pakistan (and are often referred to as "Biharis"). Although there were many languages among the émigrés from India, the majority spoke Urdu or Hindi.

In 1947 the British government gave a choice to all of its service holders asking which country they would like to serve. In response the majority of Indian Muslim employees opted for Pakistan and the Hindus opted for India. As a consequence a large number of Biharis who worked for the Railway in India proceeded to East Pakistan and those employed with the central government in Delhi and elsewhere in India moved to Karachi.

The Biharis, the Urdu speaking minority of East Pakistan, not only stood for a united Pakistan, they also identified themselves with the language and culture of West Pakistan. The Muslim refugees, who migrated from the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to East Bengal, found the new homeland entirely different from their own birth place, they

⁴⁴ Presidential speech of Nasim Ali Khan, delivered in conference at national press club, Dhaka on 18th November 1997. Published by SPGRC, Geneva Camp, Mohammadpur, Dhaka.

were Urdu speaking, using Persian scripts while local Muslims were Bengali speaking and using Sanskrit scripts. They did not even learn Bengali language, rather showed dishonor to the local language in the name of Islam and were misguided by the speeches of the creator of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah(1878-1948). Apart from language, there were tremendous differences in cultural traditions that compelled them to keep away from the local population. Most of them had a sort of superiority complex, originated from their conception of skill, education, better Muslim. This resulted strong social relation among themselves, and isolation from the local Bengali community. (Ahmed Ilias: 2003) They settled in mostly urban areas and started to live in clusters. Thus they have tried to maintain their cultural boundaries through their rituals, religious practices. Those people were then addressed by the locals as Biharis or non-Bengalis to distinguish.

The influx of the optees with their relatives and friends and the refugees, who were forced to leave their country of origin by the communal forces, created manifold social and political complications at later stage. Pakistan failed to tackle the situation with the national leaders of India, and accepted all the refugees as her citizens without giving the constitutional protection pertaining to their citizenship rights. Government servants were exempted from obtaining the domicile certificate (Ilias: 2003). Government servants, migrated from India to Pakistan before 13 April 1951, were treated citizens of Pakistan without question of their domicile in Pakistan, no application as Pakistani citizen by such government servants was required. Before partition it was a general belief that creation of Pakistan would not affect the movement of the people. Everything will be much better and people would enjoy more facilities than the present situation of that time. But the whole situation changed in 1952 with introduction of passport and visa between India and Pakistan. It is a hardened fact that after partition in 1947 majority migrated people were left behind both in India and Pakistan. Relatives, friends near and dear one were separated from each other with blow of the new states what they dreamt of. Migrants considered it as a denial of human rights and come under the purview of human rights granted under UN declaration of 1950 and the Quranic code and Sunnah. Thus people have been confined to boundaries of their respective countries. Now nobody can move freely from one end to another as they once moved during British era even just after the partition. There are the instances where father had been left behind India; mother lives in Pakistan with one of her sons while others sons and daughters of the same parents live in Bangladesh.⁴⁵

The Urdu speaking refugees faced a tough situation in their adopted homeland, when the Bengali, the Sindhi, the Pathan and the Beluch became more for their own regional

⁴⁵ *Watan*, January 2003.

interests against the Punjabi. Punjabis were in fact dominating the country politically and economically. The Urdu speaking refugees had no cultural region of their own. They had no option but to support the “Ideology of Pakistan” which meant a strong federal government to oppose regional autonomy.

The major component of this civil army bureaucratic system was composed of the Punjabi refugees and optees. They derived their support from West Pakistan based political parties, whose members and followers were Urdu-Speaking wealthy refugees, who were officially called as *Mohajir*⁴⁶ or emigre (see first census of Pakistan conducted in 1951}).

In Pakistan, the Mohajers claimed that they had sacrificed for Pakistan in the name of Islam, so they had a right in this country. The Bihari Mohajer took the same stand to support the ideology of Pakistan ignoring the political aspirations of local population. Their unconditional support to strong federal government isolated them from the popular national movements in then East Pakistan. They became the friends of the rulers and non-friendly to the masses. Gradually majority of the community turned into veteran supporters of the rulers. The rulers used them only to perpetuate their political and economic domination over the country. These events and incidents generated distrust and suspicion among the local population, this mistrust between two communities rapidly increased.

After the birth of Pakistan, Karachi was chosen as the capital, and Urdu was declared the official national language. A large segment of population, the Bengalis in East Pakistan were very unhappy with this decision. Ignoring the aspirations of the Bengalis continued under many governments in Pakistan. The Pakistan government developed the province (East Pakistan) as a hinterland of West Pakistan. At the time of partition, there were no significant differences in economic conditions of both parts of Pakistan. Within a couple of years, West Pakistan developed her economy duly modernizing the instruments of production, both in agriculture and industry. East Pakistan remained backward as she was before. The industrialists from West Pakistan were given free hand to exploit Bangladesh (Chakraborty, S.:1992, pp16-17). In this context the Bihari people expected a new social and economic order in their expected country, where they would not be a religious or cultural minority and their faith and culture would not be under threat. (Ilias: 2003). They only thought about their economical interests disregarding the social and economic

⁴⁶ Mohajer is an Arabic word for emigre. It was first used when Mohammad the prophet of Islam migrated from Mecca to Madina.

aspirations of the forty-two million Bengali Muslims and sufferings and agony of the Bengali Hindus (Hasan, Z: 1994, p. 14).

Though the Urdu was the mother tongue of a very small section of Pakistanis, the architects of new Muslim state successfully managed different linguistic groups of West Pakistan and the Biharis of East Pakistan using the particular historic events and political social phenomena for demanding Urdu as 'state' language. Stigmatizing the Bengali language as a language of Hindus, establish the demand of 'Urdu' led to inevitable 'language movement'.

The Bengali politicians spoke to these and many other grievances of the people of East Pakistan and eventually achieved a convincing victory at the ballot box. The Government of Pakistan and West Pakistani politicians paid no respect to sharing of power which resulted in a liberation war of Bangladesh.

During the period of united Pakistan (1947-1971), the Urdu-speaking Biharis were not assimilated within the society of East Pakistan and remained as a distinct cultural-linguistic group. They generally associated and identified themselves with the West Pakistani society primarily based on a shared linguistic heritage and supported the West Pakistani governing elite in the process of capturing the economic and political power in East Pakistan. The Biharis, consequently enjoyed government patronage and preferential treatment in various sectors of the East Pakistan economy.

Initially the arrival of Biharis and the positive discrimination of the Pakistan Government in terms of refugee rehabilitation were not resented by the Bengalis. However, the euphoria of the formation of Pakistan and the positive attitude of the Bengalis towards the Biharis was short-lived. It was over as early as March 1948 when Mohammad Ali Jinnah announced in Dhaka that "Urdu and Urdu alone shall be the State language of Pakistan." During the Language Movement, the Biharis instead of supporting the Bengalis sided with the West Pakistani ruling elite. Further, in the 1954 provincial elections and in the 1970 general elections, they extended their support to the Muslim League, which symbolized and championed the domination of the West Pakistanis over the Bengalis. They also supported the West Pakistani ruling elite and many of them actively participated in the military actions against the Bengalis in the 1971 Bangladesh Independence War. The exclusive attitude of the Biharis and their pro-West Pakistan political activities culminated with the growth of an anti Bihari sentiment among the Bengalis.

It was at the instigation of the rulers that the Biharis refused to assimilate. They stood against the language of the land they had settled in, preferring instead to continue with the language Urdu, which had already become the language of rulers. The situation in Kosovo is very similar, Serb minority is no more than 10% of the total population, the Serbs as proud members of the ruling ethnic group never bothered to learn Albanian. The Biharis in East Pakistan likewise disdained the language of the natives. They were brainwashed into becoming the cat's paw for Pakistan ruling oligarchy. Inevitably, and tragically the whole community were blamed. What is worse The Biharis discarded unceremoniously when they were no longer useful to Islamabad. A quarter million of the hapless Biharis have been rotting in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

These represent the nationalist outlook of a Bengali and their interpretations of history. On the other hand, whatever the ethnic or linguistic origin of the original wave of refugees who migrated to Pakistan, a very large segment of this population was born in East Pakistan after 1947.

4.3.2 Bangladesh Period

4.3.2.1 '71-75 Marginalization, Trauma and Vulnerability

The minority Biharis, which cooperated with the Pakistani government, and a number of them formed militia like Razakar, Albadar (there were Bengali also in these groups) to fight out the pro liberation forces, but the whole community were considered traitors and were under assault by the Bengali majority for their language and political views after the independence. For the protection of this population they were given sanctuary by the International Red Cross in certain areas of the country, which later came to be known as camps. There are still 66 camps in various parts of Bangladesh with a population of more than 250-300,000 people. In the newly liberated Bangladesh thousands of Biharis were killed on the streets, maimed, raped and looted. Their homes and businesses were confiscated. They were fired from their jobs and Bihari students were expelled from schools. With the Urdu language banned country wide, only in some local schools could they still learn Urdu.

Renowned novelist Sawkat Ali stated in an interview with the researcher 'It has been totally beyond recognition that there were a good number of Biharis who were engaged with progressive socio political activities of then East Pakistan. A mentionable number of Biharis were active members of left politics. I knew Ali Ahmed a journalist, who was a freedom fighter also; during the war time Bengali people killed his parents. After the victory he asked me "Was it the return of his fighting for the Bengali people?" Afterwards he left the country, and settled in England. In the arena of Bengali nationalism this incident does not get any sort of consideration, because there are rationales of first attackers, degree of casualties, number of deaths and so on in the discourse of war and nationalism. Being a

Bihari he does not secure his identity with respect and recognition in the history of Bengali nationalism.

I lost my father in 71. We, I mean my whole family left Dhaka after the crackdown but my father decided to stay at Dhaka. A Bihari neighbor provoked the Pakistani army to kill my father but there was another truth that a man, who buried the dead body with some household objects, was also a Bihari. With the help of him we found our father's skeleton beneath the trashes. We recognized that was my father's, noticing the ring my father wore in his finger.

After independence of Bangladesh the flood gates of oppression opened wider, many thousands more Biharis were killed, all of their homes and businesses were confiscated, they were fired from their jobs, their bank accounts seized, their children expelled from schools and they once more had to seek refuge. International Red Cross created camps to save them from total annihilation. Most did not want to live in Bangladesh after the battering they had received. So half a million chose to leave for, what was left of their chosen country Pakistan

Against the above backdrop and, more importantly, because of their active anti-independence role (for example, their participation in the East Pakistan Civil Armed Forces, i.e. Razakars and Al-Shams, raised by the Pakistani authorities to carry out atrocities over the East Pakistanis), the Biharis became subject to widespread political persecution preceding and during the Independence War, as well as in the aftermath of liberation.

During March 1971 the non-Bengali population mainly Urdu speaking were viciously attacked during which nearly 64,000 were killed and many more injured. East Pakistan had declared herself the independent state of "Bangladesh" in March 1971. After the victory of 16th December in 1971, following independence, the Bihari political persecution continued and their properties and houses were taken over by the Bengalis. Several government promulgations [for example, the Acting President Order I of 1972, the Bangladesh Abandoned Property (Control, Management and Disposal) Order, 1972, President's Order 16 etc.] did facilitate the dispossession of Bihari properties. As a result, by the middle of 1972, a total of 1,008,680 Biharis were domiciled in various shanty camps spreading all over Bangladesh.

Mohammad Rustam Ansari is 58. His father was a railway worker, he was from Kachrapara, Bihar, in 1947 he opted for Pakistan. Mohammad Rustam Ansari stated that his father used to say "All Biharis came here to live with Muslims in a separate land from India ". Rustam said " I was born here, in Bashbari Syedpur . I studied here in an Urdu-medium school. Bengalis used to go to Bengali - medium school. I think that is a conspiracy of West Pakistan. They deliberately tried to keep differences between Bengali Bihari. We had Bengali teachers in our school. We live then in a congenial situation. Two communities have cultural

distinction but that was not the hindrance at all. In my boyhood, my two good friends Babul and Idris were Bengalis. In 1971, I helped Babul. My Bengali friends helped me after the Independence of Bangladesh. Before liberation I was publicity secretary of Syedpur unit of East Pakistan Students Union (Menon) wing/ group". Now he is a member of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). He is very conscious about politics and political history of emergence of Pakistan and Bangladesh. He stated that it was only for Mr. Surawardi, who started the riots in Kolkata through the vigorous observation of direct action day in 1946.

He was asked who the beneficiaries were, in reply he told, in India it was Hindus in Bangladesh it was Bengali Muslims and in Pakistan it was certainly the Punjabis. It is the Punjabis who nurtured the differences between Urdu speaking community and the Bengalis through the whole time of undivided Pakistan. In reply of the question of the losers of disastrous 26 years (1946-71) he stated, in India - the Muslims, in Bangladesh - the Hindus and we Bihari people and in Pakistan - who are Mohajirs. Now he is a shoe seller. He is not quite solvent but he thinks that he is living much better than the early period of Bangladesh. He said that only the politicians were the responsible particularly the West Pakistanis for the war of 1971.

He remembers the days of communal harmony in Syedpur. Especially he recalls a Puja of Hindu community observed within the period of 1960-62. Muslim people of Syedpur bought lalshalu (red cloth) and wrapped the different roads of the city. Hindus participated in Muslims festivals also.

He thinks that the language movement was a just movement. The message of that movement reminds him the right of the recognition of his mother tongue by the state and the Bengali community. He wants to identify himself and to be recognized by others as Urdu speaking Bangladeshi not the Biharis or the collaborators or the stateless or with the other common humiliating identities.

He remembers the massacre of 71. Bihari killed the Bengalis Bengali killed the Biharis. In Syedpur, the city was occupied by the Biharis during the independence war. Renowned Awami league leaders were killed after the March crackdown by the Pakistany army and some collaborators from the Bihari community. Near about 300 hundreds of Marwaris (business community migrated from India) were killed by the Biharis in a train. They were sent by the Bihari people in the name of crossing the Pakistan border. It was not believable that we lived with harmony just a few days ago.

During the war time many Biharis took shelter in Syedpur from the adjacent areas like Dinajpur, Thakurgoan, Parbotipur and different places of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) they were attacked and a huge number of them were killed by the Bengali people. "My sister lived in Khulna in that time. They lost their soap factory, land, house, finally they went back to India. He saw the miseries of Biharis. After 16th December of 1971, we people were comprehensively recognized as the collaborators of Pakistani Army. That was not the full truth. I am an example and I can name hundreds who were not the collaborators. We lost our jobs, land, assets and what not. There were hostile Bengalis but there were sympathized Bengalis also. Then I thought to go to Pakistan but the second thought was in my mind that what had happened to us that could be happened there also. With the course of time those days were gone, now we are fighting for survival. Now I am doing shoe business, active member of Bangladesh Nationalist Party(BNP). I am a voter .My relatives are in India and Pakistan but

I do not want to go there. I want to be identified as Urdu speaking Bangladeshi. I want to be entitled with every right of a Bangladeshi citizen. I want my future generation will be identified as Urdu speaking Bangladeshi. We do not want war, and no more bloodshed."

After break-up of Pakistan Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto hailing from the province of Sindh, became the President of the country and had the responsibility for negotiating release of prisoners and settlement of other outstanding issues such as transfer of population. By this time 535,000 Pakistanis had registered with the International Committee of the Red Cross in Bangladesh and had indicated their preference to move to West Pakistan. However the Pakistani Administration introduced conditions upon who or how many, shall be accepted for repatriation to Pakistan. In the end Pakistan accepted the return of only 173,000 Pakistanis. Introduction of limitations and conditions on the repatriation of this population was not only unconstitutional (according to the constitution of Pakistan) i.e. Illegal it was also an abuse of authority and an immoral act by the Pakistani head of state. Mr. Bhutto knew that the extermination of the citizens of his State was in progress in Bangladesh yet he chose to deny responsibility for protection of these citizens of the Pakistan. These Pakistanis left in Bangladesh became the first group of stateless, because Bangladesh did not accept them as citizens either. Realizing the government of Pakistan was not going to repatriate them, Pakistanis in Bangladesh continued to repatriate themselves and their families by whatever means were available to them. Government of Pakistan issued a presidential ordinance in March 1978 stripping all Pakistanis left in Bangladesh after December 1971 of their nationality, unilaterally, retroactively, arbitrarily and en masse. This ordinance was and is illegal and the sole purpose of the ordinance was to deprive a group of citizens, the common feature of the group being their language, of their basic right as citizens of Pakistan. There are around one hundred thousand Pakistanis who returned without the blessing of the Government of Pakistan, now living in Pakistan who are not recognized as citizens and are denied all amenities of citizenship. This is the second group of stateless.

The Bangladesh Government announced the Presidential Order-149 in 1972 as a step towards offering the Bangladeshi citizenship to the Biharis. According to Bangladesh Government sources, 600,000 Biharis accepted the offer⁴⁷; while 539,669 registered with the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) opting to return to their 'country of nationality' - Pakistan. Islamabad, however, was less interested and showed a lax attitude about the repatriation of the Biharis except those who joined the East Pakistan Civil Armed Forces and surrendered with the Pakistan Army. According to a Pakistani Foreign

⁴⁷ Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh (Dhaka: Government of Bangladesh, 1982), p. 3.

Ministry official, “What are we supposed to do with them (the Biharis)? We have enough problems already. Besides, you must remember that they are really Indian refugees.” Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the first post-1971 civilian president of Pakistan, was even unwilling to admit any sizeable number of ‘Bihari refugees to repatriated to Pakistan.

Bangladesh in its formative phase insisted that it would establish formal diplomatic relations with Pakistan only if that country agreed to expeditious repatriation of the non-Bengalis including Biharis from Bangladesh. This insistence forced the Pakistan Government to move back from its original stance and agreed to receive a sizeable number of Biharis in the 1973 New Delhi Agreement as well as in the Tripartite Agreement of 1974 in exchange for the return of the Bengalis from Pakistan. As the first step towards implementing these agreements, the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) registered 539,639 Biharis who intended to return to Pakistan. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) facilitated the return of 108,750 Bihari refugees by June 1974. After that date, the UNHCR had to suspend the repatriation process due to exhaustion of funds. The Bangladesh Government complained to Islamabad about the slow repatriation of the Biharis and raised the issue during the 1974 Mujib-Bhutto summit. The Pakistani side, as it was earlier, showed earlier little interest in the matter.

4.3.2.2 ‘75-90(Bargaining, Challenges and Negotiation)

The post-Mujib Government undertook new diplomatic initiatives to persuade Islamabad to resume the repatriation of the Biharis. It approached the Islamic countries to exert pressure on Pakistan as well as to provide assistance to resolve the matter. Despite initial reluctance, President Zia-ul Haq subsequently, however, desired a solution to the Bihari issue on humanitarian ground. He asserted during a visit to Dhaka in December 1985 that Pakistan was ready to accept the Bihari refugees if sufficient financial resources could be raised for their transfer and rehabilitation. In 1988, a trust agreement was signed between Pakistan and Rabita Al-Alam Al-Islami (an Islamic charity organization, hereafter Rabita) to expedite the process of Bihari resettlement in Pakistan. A repatriation and resettlement plan was drawn up which included the construction of 36,000 houses spread over 80 sites costing about \$278 million and with approximately \$30 million for community services and \$10 million for the transportation of the refugees. Despite elaborate preparations, the repatriation process could not get off the ground.

In 1978 General Ziaur Rahman ordered the army to come and evict all Biharis who were still in their homes and move us in to the camps. The army pushed a thousand families from their homes to the camps. But a few sued in the courts and were able to return to their houses.

Benazir Bhutto was traditionally opposed to the idea of transferring the Biharis to Pakistan and followed the party politics (Pakistan Peoples Party or PPP) and the state policy of her father (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) after she came to power in 1988. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, it is noteworthy, introduced the restrictive entry regulations for the Bihari refugees in the early 1970s. During her tenure as Prime Minister, Benazir did not grant the citizenship rights either to the refugees in Bangladesh or to the 100,000 Biharis who moved to Pakistan illegally since 1977. During a visit to Bangladesh in October 1989, Benazir asserted that the Biharis should be permanently settled in Bangladesh and Pakistan would help to raise funds from the Muslim world for their settlement. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, was generally supportive to the repatriation of the Bihari refugees from Bangladesh. He undertook meaningful initiatives for the return of the Biharis. He was ready to rehabilitate them in his home province (Punjab) and officially domiciled those issuing identity cards. Although definite steps were taken for repatriation and a symbolic return of 235 Biharis did occur on 10 January 1993, it was subsequently shelved for 'logistical and practical' problems⁴⁸. All subsequent Pakistani governments showed disinterest in ending the Bihari issue that⁴⁹. It is indeed a political question rather than an economic problem.

4.3.2.3 '90 to Present Situation (Emerging New Faces)

Successive governments of Bangladesh, along with the vast majority of Bangladesh have consistently denied the existence of any discrimination on the basis of ethnic, religious or linguistic identity and in respect of these Identities, minority people or groups living in the country with their fundamental rights. The case of the Biharis in Bangladesh is different the other minority groups since the state and average Bangladeshi do not accept them as members of a minority of citizen status according to the country's constitution and peoples perception. Bangladeshi intellectuals, politicians, businessmen and others argue that they were the collaborators of the Pakistani Army, they are nothing short of war criminals and are stranded Pakistanis, who should be sent back to Pakistan. (Hashmi: 1998). The Biharis were depicted as privileged and collaborators, thus deserving lifelong sentences, not only for the adults but for every generation that followed. Only 275 of the 19000 children in camps go to school. Only six of the 116 camps have a school.

Biharis residing in the camps are one of the most poverty stricken people in Bangladesh. Their poverty is deep-rooted, infinitive and multi-faceted. Birth rate is very high and their

⁴⁸ Bangladesh State and the Refugee Phenomenon' in *Refugee Watch* online magazine http://www.safhr.org/refugee_watch.org18.htm

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

children are malnourished. The Biharis are the most distressed and deprived community in Bangladesh. Lack of opportunities in education is one of the key-factors preventing them from coming out of poverty. The prerequisites for eradication of their poverty is to change the Bengalese' traditionally fixed attitude towards them. The camp dwellers commonly have no voting rights. But, there are alleged instances of casting fake votes on their parts. There are instances when a newly elected government excludes the common Bihari voters from a new list probably just because their votes have every possibility to be cast for the opposition side. The Biharis at Ispahani Camp #3 in Rangpur, for example, had been exercising their right to vote till 1991. But suddenly the new voter list that year did not include them. Again, a Bihari government employee at Mirpur, Dhaka, had been exercising his voting right since independence of Bangladesh. But after the termination of his job in government service in 1996, his voting right was cancelled. Md. Hasan, A Bihari youth, thus exclaimed during an intercommunity dialogue on the future of the Bihari Youth in Bangladesh in 2000. He alleged that receiving local commissioner's certificate has been a major problem. Such certificates are needed for getting job and a host of other reasons. He referred the case of 12-13 year old child could not be admitted in an orphanage due to lack of such a document. "Urdu speaking children are not admitted in the government schools if they use their camp addresses. Therefore, it has become a common trend for the Biharis not to disclose their identity. These school goers have been found to persuade their parents not to visit their schools in fear of their identity being disclosed. Discrimination continues even after their admission. They are ignored in the class by the teachers and students.

There are an inconsistent opinion about their refugee status. The United Nations High Commission for Refugee does not accept the term refugee to address the community, though UN agencies were involved in their previous repatriation. According to the Geneva convention of 1951 the term refugee shall apply to any person who : "owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group of political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his or her former habitual residence as a result of such event, is unable or owing to such fear, is willing to return it"⁵⁰. Under this definition Biharis do not qualify as refugees as they have not come from Pakistan to Bangladesh for fear of such persecution. They have become refugees in a country where they have been residing for the last fifty years.

⁵⁰ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, commonly known as Geneva Covention 1959.

However, at present a number of associations and organization of Biharis now came in the limelight and their agenda are different.(the organizations are discussed in chapter 7), They consistently demand that following International Law Commission's conclusions, both the Governments of Bangladesh and Pakistan should provide a fresh option to the Biharis about repatriation to Pakistan and integration in Bangladesh. Those who would opt for Pakistan should be repatriated and those who would express to be integrated in Bangladesh should be provided with Bangladeshi nationality and all forms of supports in line. The problem of Biharis should not be considered from the view point of politics, rather a humanitarian and human rights prespective is needed. Though they could create attention of the civil society, still there is a long way.

4.4 Conclusion

In the words of Kabir:

*Steeped in inertia, enmeshed in poverty,
they are waiting because
waiting is the only thing that they can do.*

What are the consequences of Statelessness for an individual? The short-term consequences of statelessness are similar to being an illegal alien. Except that illegal aliens can return to the country of their citizenship but the stateless can't.

Three generations of Biharis have seen and passed their lives directly and indirectly in such socio-political phenomena. 'Dreamers and defenders of Pakistan (1946)', Stigmatized collaborators of Pakistan (1971) and Stateless Diaspora (1972-), into these three major phases partitions Biharis' lives are deeply connected.

The consequences often start with a lack of recognition of the education, training, skills or professional achievements. From there it degenerates in to unemployment or massive underemployment, lack of economic opportunities and exploitation (by state, employers and private citizens), absence of any political rights, inability and unwillingness of the stateless to seek justice, general poverty follows with unavailability of medical care and education for the stateless and their off-spring, lack of security of person and protection of property from other citizens and the state. Inabilities to travel or the ability to improve one's condition in life are just some of the consequences of statelessness. These have been proven in numerous academic studies. Statelessness is depriving these individuals from uplifting themselves and their countries.

Majority of Biharis in Bangladesh are effectively stateless, but statelessness alone can not explain the suffering of the Biharis during all of 1971 or since the independence of Bangladesh. The anger against them was so deep rooted and widespread that it can only be described as visceral in nature. Even now more than a quarter of a century later the existence of Biharis is just barely tolerated and they suffer from all kinds of prejudices. Bangladesh could not isolate or deprive a minority group of basic human rights if there was a world voice out there protesting. The Biharis would not have been marooned in that hostile land if there was a world out there to put pressure on the government of Pakistan to fulfill their moral obligation. Whatever the real or imaginary offences of the adult Bihari population in the period 1947–1971, most are either already dead or near death. The current generation of Biharis was not even born at the time of Bangladesh's freedom; however they can not escape the stigma of being Biharis and the abject poverty that comes with being a Bihari, with an abundance of other miseries. They deserve compassion from the world and in particular from the two societies most directly related to them, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Professor Abdur Razzak, a renowned scholar of Bangladesh defines Muslim and Bengali nationalism through the historical events of subcontinent where a religion, person, culture, language have taken a central role resemble the symbols. In a speech titled, he said "The millions who had identified themselves with Bangabandhu(Razzak:2001,pp.3-10) in 1971 what did they have common with this man and were not absent from the scene of action? There is no doubt that in 1947 these same millions had been swept by the idea of a Pakistani nation, millions who had not agreed to lose themselves in the identity of an Indian nation. By the 1971 a section of these millions were equally determined not to lose them in the identity of a Pakistani nation."⁵¹ Question may rise then why the same thing should not be happened in Bihari communities since they have different culture, language, and political interests?

Liminality, which Turner (1969) sees as by far the most important phase of social drama, involves a prolonged period in which the participant literally and symbolically marginalized, could be applied to perceive the Bihari situation. Reintegration is when the participant returns to society. The Bihari community and their situation may be perceived, of course in the broader sense, in terms of liminality. Their life and identity are in an intermediate situation, in some way, marginal. The root metaphors of their life have often been contested and challenged .In addition, in the liminal situation before reintegration, the symbols have multiple connotations.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Chapter 5

Boundaries: Living on the Edge

At the very beginning of my fieldwork, I was visiting a camp area – Hatikhana in Syedpur. I was looking for the house of one of my informants. I asked an old man and he replied that he would go along with me to locate the house. That old man was speaking Bangla in a non-Bengali accent. I directly asked (certainly I made a mistake), “when did you come to Syedpur?”, but the reply was more surprising: ‘No, we are local people, we did not come from anywhere.’ Again I insisted: “but your accent indicates that you are a non-Bengali.” Then he more confidently replied: No, I am a Hindu (*ami Hindu achhi*). I asked his name, he said: Abdul Khaliq!! In fact, my successive interrogation along with my appearance with a bag and notebook made him puzzled for which he was afraid of revealing his identity. I realized that only through interrogation and surveying it would be difficult to comprehend the crisis of identity faced by the Biahri of Syedpur, rather to contextualize this issue I must look through holistically. I decided to adopt an ethnographic to draw the canvas where the issue is depicted.

5.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to give a broad overview of social life in Bashbari, my study area, by looking into various dimensions such as social organization, education, types of occupation, sources of livelihood, and so on.

The major questions of this chapter are informed by the complex contemporary situations of Bihari people, confronting political situation and cultures. There are questions of the building and discovery of identity through and in ethnic⁵² distinctiveness and background, whether these allow for intercultural communication or even presupposes it, or to what extent the various levels of identity and the structural interrelations only bring fragmented, i.e., hybrid identities.

These and similar questions give evidence of a deeper requirement, even necessity, to arrive at a multicultural process of encounter between cultures without ending thereby the foundations of pluralistic societies. One has to distinguish between identification with the ‘Other’ (subject and object of identification are separate; external perspective) and identification with the self (subject and object of the identification are united in one person; inner perspective). On the other hand, identity cannot be comprehended as a static

⁵² It is obviously controversial to assign the term ethnic to Bihari people. Despite all the differences, this term has been used here to indicate their similarity of migrational history and language.

condition; but as one that is momentary constantly changing itself. Therefore, this chapter will go on with an attempt to comprehend the cultural context through the interpretations of lifestyle of Bihari people. As Geertz (1973) argued, 'it is not to turn away from the existential dilemmas of life for some empyrean realm of demotionalized forms; it is to plunge into the midst of them.' (Geertz: 1973:30) So their lifestyle and practice can be considered as a canvas where the colors of self and community identities are applied by different people.

Particularly, this chapter will focus on the issues that are directly or indirectly linked to the query of what Bihari people think about their lives and how they maintain their daily life. The issues of identity formation and shifting over the time and the changes and maintenance of boundaries are selected in the discussion for chapter four. It is basically history-based discussion. Chapter six will discuss the memories of immigrant people and how they interpret history what has taken them in present position- a diaspora community. Attempts will be made to understand their daily life activities especially through the issues, which represent their living This chapter deals with different aspects of life situation and social adaptation of Indian migrants, called 'Biharis' of Syedpur city of Bangladesh. In particular it focuses on their communal life, question of their identity, especially their maintained cultural boundaries.

5.2 Background

Syedpur has the largest concentration of non-Bengali Urdu-speaking people in Bangladesh. This people started to live here long before Partition. Nevertheless, Bengalis are also living in the city. Therefore, this area has been selected for the study to get a scenario where people of multiple cultures live in juxtaposition. For comparative purposes, this study also includes observations of the Bihari people living in the camps⁵³ and out side the camp, as well as Bengali people of Syedpur city.

There is few reliable literature exists on the Bihari people in Bangladesh (except a few newspaper articles, a few surveys done by NGOs in camp areas on their health, shelter, sanitation situation)⁵⁴. The ethnographic account of this chapter on social practice and

⁵³ After the Liberation war of Bangladesh, a total of 66 camps were established for the non-Bengali people who opted to go to Pakistan (Ilias, Ahmed: 2000).

⁵⁴ Some surveys are done by RMMRU, Al-falah and other organizations, most of these information are on the camp residents of Dhaka. Some write-ups like book by Ilias (2000) provide general information on Bihari people as a whole, but these are mere observations, not based on field works or primary sources.

day-to-day activities, beliefs, rituals, attitudes and feelings are completely based on fieldwork that was carried out in the period of September 2004 to June 2005.

In Syedpur city, the Bihari population is concentrated mainly in Islam bug, Golahat, Munsipara, Old Babupara, Mistripara, Basbari and New Babupara. All the localities of Biharis remain within the parameter of Syedpur Municipality. The roughly estimated size of the Biharis is more than 70 thousand. The Bengali-Bihari population ratio is almost same.

Bashbari has been selected as my field of investigation for several reasons: *Banshbadi* is one of the densely Bihari populated areas in Syedpur having almost 90% Biharis along with reasonable number of Bengali people also; besides this, another characteristic of the area is, many of this Bihari families living here migrated after Partition⁵⁵. In addition, it is an area where migrant inhabitants are diversified in respect of economic class, profession, and former homeland. More significant is that, two camps of stranded Pakistani⁵⁶ are situated here.

The total population of Bashbari is more than 5000. A benchmark survey was conducted in 404 households of ward number 14(the name of the area is Bashbari), it covered almost half of that locality.

This research specially aimed to be ethnography of Indian immigrants generally called Bihari. Participant observation is the key method of this chapter but focus group discussions (FGD), in-depth interviewing and a baseline survey to select a number of diversified households are the other methods that were used to conduct the research.

5.3 Locality: Togetherness and Isolation

After 1947-the year of Partition, the Indian Muslim emigrants came to Pakistan and mostly concentrated in the urban area, especially in the areas nearby railways. At that time, where railway was not established, Bihari concentrations were rare. Syedpur, Parbatipur, Dinajpur, Thakurgoan, Rangpur, Jessore, Khulna, Mymensingh, Chittagong, Dhaka were the areas covered by railway where most Biharis settled. While the districts without railway establishment, like Barisal, Patuakhali, Faridpur, Tangail etc. had very insignificant Bihari concentrations. This tendency was noticeable because of the fact that huge number of Indian Muslim railway workers opted for Pakistan and chose to settle in border districts of East Pakistan and railway junctions. Along with them, the migrant

⁵⁵ Partition of India in 1947.

⁵⁶ The Urdu-speaking migrants who are living in the camp are called stranded Pakistanis, since after Liberation many of them opted to go to Pakistan.

businessmen and civil servants preferred Dhaka and divisional towns as well as industrial areas. There were deliberate intentions not to settle in rural areas, probably because of less scope of employment in the rural areas

Indian emigrants were not only railway workers, servicemen and businessmen; but there were a significant number of artisans and farmers also. In North Bengal, some of them bought farmlands and started agriculture, but majority settled in urban areas. Due to their urban-based life, the migrants could not realize the mainstream trend of this new land and culture since this land was based on agriculture mostly. In industrial areas, they formed a separate non-Bengali workers' colony or locality. The middle class servicemen and businessmen settled in a particular area of town. Mohammadpur and Mirpur of Dhaka, Khalishpur of Khulna, Pahartali and Ambagan of Chittagong, Adamji Jute Mill areas of Narayanganj are the examples of that tendency.

In case of Syedpur, a very dense concentration of Bihari people all over the city is prominent in comparison to any other places of Bangladesh. There are two evident reasons behind that: first there had been a non-Bengali (mainly from Bihar and UP) concentration even before Partition, who had migrated along with the establishment of railway line and partly for business; second, after Partition, relatives and kinsmen of these people came to settle since they had previously known people here that provided a sense of security in a new land. Gradually, it became a suitable area for emigrants to settle. Throughout the 24 years of Pakistan regime, flow of Indian migrants continued in large scale. During the war of 1971, second flow of non-Bengalis rushed to Syedpur who sought shelter uprooting from adjacent areas like Parbatipur, Thakurgoan, Lalmonirhat, and Dinajpur. Now Syedpur is the most Bihari-populated area in Bangladesh

It is marked that the emigrants, Bihari people, have been living in clusters from the very beginning. A Bengali Hindu or a Buddhist family, alienated from its group may be found in a village or in a particular area of a city. But it is almost impossible to find a Bihari family living in that isolated way. Hindus and Buddhists have the share with Bengali Muslims of their Bengali culture, tradition and heritage, even they inherit the same mother tongue- Bengali, which the Biharis do not.

During the period of Partition, most of the Muslim migrant people from India had been railway staff, government service-holders, businessmen and factory workers by profession. Before, 1947, A number of non-Bengali was employed in the industries and factories of large cities like Kolkata, Kharagpur etc. To the migrants, such industries were known as *Lilua karkhana* (railway workshops). The number of rural people was insignificant among the first-comers.

The number of rural people was less among those who came earlier. After being distressed and uprooted from their homeland, the rural people from Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar, afterward came to this land with the connection of relatives. Those government service-holders settled in those areas where they were posted to go. The non-Bengali mill -workers, who used to work in the mills, particularly jute mills of Kolkata, Hoogly and nearby Kolkata, joined the new factories and jute mills of then Pakistan that were established by Non-Bengali capitalists. The railway factory workers, foremen, driver and other Muslim workers came to this side with options. Therefore, the migrant people clustered in those areas where there were railway factories or stations, and other factories or jute mills. There were huge differences of languages, cultures and lives of the migrants of different places. A tendency of homogenization of different communities that grows between proximity of language and locality from living in a cluster could not properly develop among them, because from the beginning of their living in Pakistan they were in a dilemma.

In order to survive among the dominant Bengalis, they mainly focused on their material survival and financial improvement because they experienced the uncertain life after getting distressed and financially looser by Partition. Their cluster grew up basing on economic and political aspects. They became the supporters of the other non-Bengalis of Pakistan. For all these reasons, the tendency of homogenizing different communities basing on kin relations and locality was interrupted in Syedpur in the earlier phase.

In some areas of Syedpur, like Khalashi Moholla or Islambag, the non-Bengali habitation is hundred –years old. Initially, the Partition-migrants started to live nearby these areas. Then they expanded to live in railway quarters of Munshipara, Khalashi moholla, Golahat. Within the period of twenty-four years with excessive flow of immigrants, the circumference of residential areas expanded. They lived in the houses that they purchased or managed by exchange, or the attained abandoned property of the Hindus who migrated to India.

The Mistri para and the Munshi para,, those had been the residence of Hindu laborers and middle class people, became the residence of migrants. The old elitist Babupara became the new locality of non-Bengalis.,

At least, fourteen thousand non- Bengali workers were involved with railway⁵⁷. Still half of the non-Bengali population is related with railway activities. During Pakistan period, a trend of demarcation in clustering between Biharis and UP migrants was remarkable. The

⁵⁷ It is a tentative figure, stated by Sayyid Ahmed, a retired railway officer.

migrants from Bihar used to live in cluster keeping away from the Up migrants. Some social associations and gathering also grew at that time, but demolished later on with the blow Bengali movements.

5.4 Housing: Residence or 'Home'

The traditional housing pattern of the Biharis is now in most cases in memories. Most of the migrant Biharis did not build the houses where they are residing presently. During the Partition period, they got shelter in government accommodations, enemy properties (abandoned houses of Hindus), and through buying houses from Bengali people. But the housing type of these people is quite evident in those houses that were built by the Bihari people. In Syedpur such houses are not much in number in comparison to the population.

Housing patterns of rural areas of Bihar and UP are similar. In both regions, rural houses of the poor people are mostly made of mud and roofs are usually made of straw or tally. Main complex consists of bedrooms only; the *baithak khana* (living room) was separate. *Bawarchikhana* (kitchen) was situated on other side of the yard. A long veranda is attached with the main house where the family members eat dinner together. In earlier days, most of the houses did not have any toilet. The yard was used for various purposes –like greater family gathering, *mehfil or milad* (religious gathering) and for drying crops. Some of the houses had a *goalghar* (cowshed). *Indara* (well) was not very common; instead there were three/four wells in the entire village; village women used to fetched water from there for household works.

The well-off families had brick-built houses with tin or tally made roofs. The main house comprised of bedrooms, the living room (*baithak khana*), *bawarchikhana* (kitchen) and veranda. Houses were built surrounding a large yard in the center. Sometimes the living room was attached with the main house but the *andarmahal* (private domain) was not visible from the outside.

Sayyid Ahmed (60), the retired supervisor of railway, gave an account of his house in the countryside of his former homeland. *"I can easily recall my village house yet, we lived in Munger of Bihar. It was an east-faced house, whose walls were made by muddy soil with tally made roof on the top. A long veranda and a vast yard were in front of the house. Living room was apart from the main house. There were mango and other trees surrounded the house. We got enough sunlight due to the position of the house. Toilets were quite far from the house premises."* This was the typical type of houses of the common people of Bihar. Tin and straw were also commonly used to make the roof. Brick-built big houses (which are called *haveli*) were rare. Only rich people used to live in that type of houses.

Family members used to take their daily meals sitting on a long veranda. The yard were used for drying crops and holding *majlish* (*milad*⁵⁸, *family festivals*). Every Bihari family, whether from Bihar or UP, prefer keep some free space in house, if he or she can afford. At present, such yards are very common in those houses that are made by the Biharis themselves. Such yards are made as the main center of the house on which the entire structure is formed.

There was a deliberate practice to keep the living room apart from the main house. Bihari people do not build toilets on the west side of the house due to *kiblah* (direction of prayer of Muslims). Houses are mainly south and east faced. Usually they make 'U' or 'L' shaped house, if it is not possible they prefer 'I' but a veranda is must.

There are a number of common symbols found in almost every house of Bihari people of Syedpur. The showpieces with the name of Allah (God) and the prophet, written on the doors gates and on the living room's wall are very common. The pictures of mythical *Duldul*⁵⁹ horse, *Pak panjatan*⁶⁰, and Arabic calligraphy as well as different written verses of the Holy Quran are also common. Bihari people are not very fond of trees, in Syedpur trees can hardly be found nearby the Bihari houses.

The Bihari Muslims, particularly the rural people, were not very accustomed with cultivation; most of them were artisans like weavers, quilt-makers, vegetable-sellers, craftsmen, and petty businessmen. Though Muslims in Bihar and UP had some lands and some of them used to let the land for sharecropping. But in general, the poor Muslims do not prefer to work as land-laborers, rather Hindu land laborers used to work in the fields owned by Muslims. Therefore, a peasant lifestyle was not prominent in the architecture of the houses. A number of Muslims were engaged as milkmen; therefore a cowshed was common among the *goala* (milkmen).

No particular trend or pattern of housing did develop among the Biharis in Syedpur. The reason behind is that, most of them after Partition, started to live in the abandoned or exchanged property of the Hindus. These houses were modified but not remodeled. Many of them lived in the railway quarters. Since permanent house building in railway

⁵⁸ Joint religious prayer (*dorud*) performed either on specific occasion or on particular purpose.

⁵⁹ Legendary horse of Imam Hussain (grandson of the Prophet).

⁶⁰ It refers to five persons- Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatema, son-in-law Hazrat Ali, and two grandsons- Imam Hasan and Imam Hussain.

properties is not approved, the Biharis used to build temporary houses on the railway plots. But a particular style of home-management is evident among the Biharis. Those who could manage their own houses mostly preferred L-shaped or I-shaped patterns. Those who could afford tried to make the *baithakhana* apart from the *andarmahal*.

The following tables show some general features of the surveyed households in Bashbari area. These tables do not contain the details of the houses, rather provides some superficial characteristics of the Biahri houses related with financial status of the residents.

Table 5-1
Types of houses of Bashbari area (out side the camp)

Pukka	semi pukka	Huts
156	89	85

Table 5-2
Types of houses (inside a camp of Bashbari)

Pukka	semi pukka	Huts
4	28	12

Since most of these houses are made on the leased land⁶¹, generally the houses are one-storied and made of brick-with tin-roof or tally-roof. A particular trend of houses is evident among those families, who could build their own houses- rooms on the three sides of the yard or an I-shaped house in front of the yard and wall on the other side of the yard. The yard is used for *milad mehfil*, familiy ceremonies. The toilets for defecation and urination are separate and detached from the main building. A separate toilet attached with *baithak khana* is seen among the rich-household.

Presently, a common pattern of houses are apparent with modern architecture are being followed, but still these are limited among the rich people.

5.5 Profession: Mere subsistence, Heritage or Survival?

The subject matter of profession of the 'Biharis is not a simplified one. There are historical, political as well as religious connotations that shaped and patterned the professional practices. It has been argued by many scholars⁶² that unlike the eastern part, most of the Muslims of northern parts were either foreign immigrants and/or the converted people largely from other religious groups like Hindu the artisan castes and

⁶¹ Mostly the lands owned by Railway.

⁶² see Eaton, Ahmed Imtiaz, Ghosh, Ahmed and many others.

Buddhists. After conversion, for most of them, professions remained the same. As such, Muslims comprised local converts largely from Hindu artisan caste and foreign immigrants. (Ghosh: 1998). Therefore, the Muslims who migrated from the Northern Part (Bihar and UP mostly) were artisans by tradition. These professional groups that constituted hierarchy were named as *Biradaris*. The professional groups like *Goalas* (milkmen), *Kunjera* (vegetable sellers), *Julahas* (weavers) belonged to lower castes or *chotti Biradaris*, whereas the *Syeds*, *Sheikhs*, *Mir*, *Mughals* and *Pathans* were the *badi Biradaris*. The details of the caste hierarchy have been discussed in another subsection of this chapter.

Now discussions will be made on the processes and factors that characterized the professional changes among the Biharis. Nevertheless, an inclination (either emotional or practical) towards belonging to the traditional profession is also existent among some them. There are historical, political and above all economic situation that transform the professional behaviors of all the people over the period, but for Biharis the situation is a bit complicated because their identity and feeling of belonging and existence are interwoven with their professional identity. At the first part, the traditional professional groups will be discussed.

5.5.1 The Traditional Professional groups

As it has been mentioned earlier, that most of the Muslim people belonged to artisan groups with some exceptions that were involved with agriculture.

Before the British rule, a large number of Muslims were employed in administrative jobs. Besides, there were certain professions that were patronized by Muslim rulers, their officials. The musical troops, dancers and singers, special cooks and chefs, perfume making etc. were such activities that were patronized by the rulers and their officials. In UP, some Muslim families were involved with agriculture, but not in the typical sense of 'farming' as farmer. They were either landlords (though only very few of them) or poor farmers. But working as land laborers (*khati majoor*) in other's land was not common among the Muslims, rather the poor preferred to artisan activities or industrial labor. The practices of cultivating own land and food production for own consumption were not very popular.

The Muslims of more northern parts like UP and other north areas were famous for their skill and expertise in artistry activities like craftsmanship, weaving, embroidery, cooking,

jewelry etc. Besides these, there were other professional groups like petty businessmen, fruits and vegetable sellers, musical instrument players. Each professional group had distinct names as follows:

<u>Professions</u>	<u>Local term in Urdu, Hindi and local dialects</u>
Peasants	<i>Raiyyans</i>
Land owners	<i>Zamindar</i>
Milkman	<i>Goala</i>
Petty businessmen	<i>Bania</i>
Vegetable sellers	<i>Kunjera</i>
Quilt makers	<i>Dhunia</i>
Weavers /cloth businessmen	<i>Ansari/Julha/Momin</i>
Wine seller	<i>Kalal</i>
Sweeper or cleaner	<i>Lalbegi</i>
Butcher	<i>Kuraishi</i>
Music instrument player	<i>Khaza moonsoori</i>
Tailor	<i>Idrisi</i>

Such names imply the distinctive characters of each profession. There were some changes in naming took place. The *julahas* – wanted to distinguish themselves by adopting the name *Mumins* (means believers) or *Memons*. This is a kind of Islamization of names of profession that they took up to have their different identity from their fellow Hindu professionals. So a Muslim weaver had become known as *Ansari* or *Mumin*, while the term '*Julha*' implied the Hindu weaver. In the same way, a *lalbegi* indicates a Muslim sweeper, where as *Methor* points to a Hindu person. However, changing of professional names did not apply to all professions, for instance, the term *Goala*- remained to all the milkmen irrespective of religious identity. One important point is here that some professions like carpet making, playing particular musical instruments (for example *shehnai*) were entirely occupied by the Muslim professional artisans- for that reason renaming was not required for such professions.

5.5.2 Professional Changes

Initially, the Muslims themselves rejected the British education since they were the defeated force by the British. After a long time of remaining apart from the mainstream education, they were deprived of government services. On the other way, the British did not trust the Muslims too. Therefore, access to the jobs that did not require much education like defense services, that employed many other non-educated community people like Gurkhas or Shikhs, was limited and denied for Muslims.

In the later part of nineteenth century, two types of reforms in Muslim society took place –on the one hand, there was Sir Syed Ahmed, who campaigned about the urgency of English education for the Muslims, on the other hand, an orthodox trend –of Deobandi school that emphasized on conventional teachings of Islam. However, slowly Muslims started to be integrated in the mainstream professions.

With the establishment of railway, and new factories and mills, scopes of employment increased. Railway was established in 1850s⁶³ –where a number of Indian natives including a huge number of Muslims were recruited. Again, along with the boom of jute cultivation in the later part of nineteenth century, a number of jute mills were established in many parts of West Bengal. The period till twenties was characterized by a relative shortage of labor –especially for jobs that require specific skills and this continued for a considerable time. Local labor became short with the explosive growth of the industries around 1900. Local labor was replaced by immigrant labor, mainly from the northwestern part of Bihar and the eastern part of the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh, UP). From then onto present, for jute mills, mainly non-Bengalis have performed as skilled and other unskilled labor.

With the growing industrialization and fastening urbanization of the early twentieth centuries other scopes were also opening up like petty businesses, rickshaw pulling, small vending, hawkers etc. At that time, Bengali Muslims were mostly dependent on agriculture. At the same time, clerical employment was also increasing that was mostly occupied by the educated Bengalis. As such, along with growing industrialization a number of non-Bengali Muslim population migrated to the urban and sub-urban areas nearby Kolkata.

⁶³ During that period, railways were established and expanded in many areas of the subcontinent.

Consequently the non-Bengali Muslim population was on the path of changing their traditional professions, though a large portion is still living on those.

This first trend of migration and change of employment shaped their professional patterns in the second half of the twentieth century. Though initially, they were employed as unskilled laborers, gradually they developed particular skills and expertise in the specific jobs like jute industry, railway sheds and workshops etc. Therefore, the migrants of Partition were mostly appointed in the jute industries and railway workshops. For a long time, it was a popular saying in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) that ‘the Bihari workers can rightly identify and handle the quality of jute’.

At this point, a differentiation was created. Being a newly emerged country and also being the deprived part, not so many industries were established in the East Pakistan. The non-Bengalis of Pakistan then owned most of the few industries, and mostly textile and jute industries. The majority of Bengali Muslim population was based on Agriculture. The small part of educated Bengali Muslims was engaged in clerical and official jobs. Henceforth, the non-Bengalis mostly occupied the industrial labor after 1947. The local Muslims were the peasants and service-holders in general, and on the other hand the most of the immigrants were constituted the major part of the skilled industrial labor in Pakistan. So, it would not be an exaggerated statement that the identity of skilled labor was manifested with the Biharis and peasant as well as educated middle class identity with the Bengalis. Yet again, besides these skilled laborers, many other craftsmen, artisans, unskilled laborers also migrated over the period.

5.5.3 Professions of Biharis in Syedpur

When the bulk of Bihari refugees arrived in East Pakistan there was no land for them. Not being peasants or agricultural workers, they preferred to settle in urban and semi-urban centers. Many of them were self-employed small traders and mechanics, while others were government officials and clerks, teachers and professionals and skilled workers in the railways, the mills and factories. By the early 1960s, most of them were provided with cheap housing in refugee colonies of Dhaka (Mirpur and Mohammadpur), Chittagong, Syedpur, Khulna and elsewhere in northern and western parts of East Pakistan. The well-to-do section of ‘Biharis’ lived in private residential areas in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and other large towns.

The Pakistani ruling and business elites successfully hegemonized the 'Bihari' mass consciousness by distributing a few favors – jobs in mills and factories, railways and postal departments and cheap housing in several refugee colonies in Dhaka and elsewhere in the province, concentrating them in ghettos and isolating them from Bengalis, Pakistani elites and their Urdu-Speaking junior partners in East Pakistan exploited 'Bihari' loyalty to Pakistan, regarded by many as their 'promised land'. They often regarded the Bengalis as 'semi-Hindus', pro-Indians and disloyal to Pakistan.

Non-Bengali Muslim population had started to congregate to Syedpur long before 1947. When the railway workshop was established in 1870s, a number of factory workers joined here, most of who came from Bihar and United Province. The early localities of Syedpur town like Khalashi moholla and – developed at that time. The *Marwari* (non- Muslim but non-Bengali) businessmen also concentrated in Syedpur as well as other parts of Bengal when the jute industry flourished in the later part of 19th century. Since that time, Syedpur comprised a major concentration of non-Bengali people, though the migration of that period was slow and steady.

The large wave of migration started with Partition. During their movement to Syedpur or any other places to Bangladesh, many people came as service holders, mostly employed in railways. The skilled laborers of jute mills and railway workshops migrated to Syedpur and other places for similar factory works. As Syedpur was a railway workshop, a number of workers, mechanics, technicians and laborers relocated their setting but not their profession. In a rough estimate (by a respondent who was a workshop supervisor in Pakistan railway) around fourteen thousand non-Bengali people migrated to Syedpur and were rehabilitated in job. The number may vary, but the reality was that the number was huge in any comparison.

In other places, like Chittagong, Narayngonj and Khulna, a number of non-Bengali people concentrated basing on jute and textile mills – either as investors (Adamjee, Bawani) or as experts, technicians (the skills they developed through working in West Bengal mills and factories) or laborers.

The second wave of non-Bengali concentration changed the entire scenario of professions. Those people, who were uprooted from India having no certainty of income and home, joined old professions got by options or new jobs, started traditional businesses in new locality, or introduced entirely new business for their living in a new surrounding. All these livelihood activities, though not intentional and deliberate in all cases, contributed to change the backdrop.

Name: Akber Sahid Age: 58 Bashbari, Syedpur

‘Achanak kiu eay parwane se khali ho gae mahfil

kisika hat to hoga chiragoko bujhanese’

“Why suddenly the enthusiastic crowd disappeared, there is certainly a hand to put out the lamp”.

He is a *shaer* (poet); he loves to be recognized in that identity. In profession he is a village doctor now, but he did not start his career as a doctor. His father was an employee of British Indian railway department, and migrated from Kolkata after the Partition year 1947, he was originally from Chapra district of Bihar. Akber Sahid belongs to the Julha cast (Ansari), though he does not know when his ancestors really were weavers (julha)

At the end of 1960s his father retired from his job, and then he was quite young and a promising football player of Syedpur town. He got a job in railway department easily for his football and father’s background; he started his career as a workshop worker. He enjoyed both his football and workshop career there. He got married then and he could support the whole family. But the scenario was different after the independence of Bangladesh, he found himself as a subordinate of a Bengali colleague, who was his subordinate before liberation. One day he found that Bengali on his own chair, it was like the shift of power. He complained to the higher authority but they told him” you have to abide by, it is the time of Bengali, you may lose your job for your Bihari identity, you may be treated as collaborator”. Akber Sahid did not go to office after that, he resigned. He did not get his service benefits also. Many of his colleagues lost their job and did not get service benefits due to their Bihari identity.

After that he started his new career as a doctor assistant, In 1972 a Bihari doctor appointed him as his assistant to maintain his dispensary, after few years that doctor left Bangladesh and went to Pakistan. During that time Akber Sahid made himself as a compounder and being treated as a doctor by the community. He did his R.M.P degree later, and started to practice in Bashbari of Syedpur town. He has one son and three daughters. Son is a shopkeeper. His wife and his daughters do the decorative work on sarees in home. Two of his daughters are studying in Bengali medium, he does not know whether they get job or not after the completion of matriculation, He is a poor man he cannot afford farther education.

This people were welcomed both by general people and state as well. General people received initially with cordial heart out of Muslim fellow feeling. State arranged rehabilitation, relief, and accommodation for railway workers and even in some cases job. During the early days of the Pakistani government program for refugee rehabilitation in East Pakistan, the local Bengali population did not resent the arrival of displaced ‘Biharis’. They were welcomed as fellow-Pakistani Muslims, who had suffered and sacrificed for the attainment of Pakistan .Up to the early 1950s, the bulk of the East Pakistan Muslim middle classes were in a state of euphoria, created by their birth of Pakistan.

By 1951, a large number of Hindu professionals, clerks and petty officials, landlords and businessmen had immigrated to India. The East Bengali Muslims grabbed the vacant positions and ‘abandoned enemy properties’ left behind in the urban and rural areas. They

regarded the Bihari refugees as comrades-in-arms. To understand why the average Bengali Muslims did not resent the presence of the 'Biharis' one must understand how desperate they were to overthrow Hindu hegemony represented by the *zamindar-mahajan-bhadaralok* (landlord-moneylender-middle class), especially during the four decades up to 1947 (Hashemi:1992).

Still a number of migrated people remained jobless. Those, who had been formerly government service-holders and joined government service, again after their hardships of migration, also spent a significant period without job and home. Many of the migrants stayed in the rail wagons for months after months. In such an uncertain situation, they had to adopt whatever source of income they could afford for their own or families' subsistence. They adopted many professions like – hawkers (*feriwala*), petty business, grocery, barberry- what not.

Rangpur belt was famous for tobacco production, a new addiction and profession emerged based on tobacco. Gul- a kind of raw tobacco used for addiction was introduced and popularized by the people who used to work as laborers in or nearby Kolkata. The people who came from North India used to be addicted to *Khaini*. One rich non-Bengali person in Syedpur started his career in hawking homemade gul. The textile mill in Kazihata also provided a number of Biharis with jobs.

The third wave of professional change came after Liberation. Again, the Biharis lost their job and became homeless. Recruitment in jobs became difficult, almost impossible. Many of them were forced to leave the job and many were excluded. Even, those who retired in the post-1971 period were deprived of their retirement- benefits. Life became insecure due to the change in political scenario. In such a circumstance, most of them opted for Pakistan.

It took a long time to alter this insecure situation of home and life. During the late eighties and early nineties the situation improved. With particular incentives from Government production of Benarasi (a kind of saree) was especially launched. Nevertheless, Biharis were superior in terms of expertise and skill in Benarasi production. Besides, immense scope of the boutique business increased in the nineties. Bihari women became engaged in embroidery and decorative works on sarees and other dresses. This was also suitable for them as because they did not need to break the veils through coming out of home. Therefore, the business of sarees and dresses by involving a number of women who

remained inside the home mainly changed their gender division of income earning activities and connected women's labor directly to market.

Equal access to employment was cited most frequently as the right the community currently cannot access. Not only are they denied all government positions but due to their camp address and undefined status, wider discrimination in the job market remains a prime concern. Camp residents are not in a position to produce kinds documentations that employers require to prove potential employee's legal status (these may take from a 'local commissioner's certificate' or character reference from a local representative). Without these 'papers of citizenship', much of the market is inaccessible. Indeed, those who do find formal employment often face wage discrimination and inequality of treatment. As a result, the vast majority are pushed into informal sector, working as rickshaw-pullers, drivers butchers, barbers, mechanics and craft workers, earning meager wages.

Table 5.5.3.1 shows the limited scope of employment that obliged people to adopt different professions. The highest number of men is engaged in low paid wage labors like day labor, rickshaw pulling, factory work etc. A particular inclination towards small to middle businesses or self employment through tailoring, shop is also apparent.

Table 5-3

Profession and occupation taken by different age groups (Male), out side the camp

Age	Small shop keeping/hawking	Tailors/saree, jori decoration work	Low salaried jobs	Middle income service/business 5000+monthly	Laborers Rickshaw puller, masons Hotel, factory workers etc	Teacher Pensioner Imam Muazzin Doctor
5-15	2	1	0	0	22	0
15-25	30	23	20	3	55	1
25-35	45	15	16	42	4	0
35-45	40	5	15	15	43	1
45-55	17	1	20	15	30	0
55-65	6	3	6	9	11	P5, I1,M1
65+	5		5	4	2	P11D1T1

A number of men of the camp are hawkers and small shopkeepers: among them two persons are doing tailoring jobs, two are in other low- income earning jobs, and sixteen men are engaged in daily labor and rickshaw pulling.

Table 5-4
Profession/occupation taken by the females (outside the camp)

Age Group	Small business	Tailors/cloth decoration	Low incoming job	Maids, labors, gul factory workers	Middle incoming Job/business	Koran teaching	Pensioner
5-15	1	0	0	3	0	0	0
15-45	2	18	8	29	3	6	0
45+	1	2	3	6		2	4

On the other hand, many women are engaged in tailoring and embroidery works, though the highest number of women work as either maids or workers in gul factory. Four women are found who beggars, one camp woman doing sewing work, five of them work as maids.

Most of the people who live inside the camp have a very limited annual income that varies from ten thousand to twenty thousand per year (table 5.5.4). Only two families have annual income around 70,000- 80,000 tk. On the other hand, outside the camp an even distribution of families in all income groups is evident. Whereas within the camp, the highest number of families belonged to less than ten thousand taka annual income group, least number of families, outside the camp belonged to this group, though it does not imply a full solvency of the people. Rather, a major part of the non-camp resident Biharis belong to the categories of earning 10,000-40,000 tk per year.

Table 5-5
Yearly income wise distribution of people outside the camp

Income per year	Number of family
- 10,000	5
10,000-20,000	86
20,000-30,000	68
30,000-40,000	70
40,000-50,000	22
50,000-60,000	20
60,000-70,000	26
70,000-80,000	13
80,000-90,000	6
90,000-100,000	7
100,000+	13

Table 5-6
Yearly Income of the Camp people of Bashbari

Yearly Income (Taka)	Number of Family
- 10,000	20
10,000-20,000	15
20,000-30,000	5
40,000-50,000	0
50,000-60,000	1
60,000-70,000	0
70,000-80,000	2

The level of income increase, the number of families decreases steadily. The notable point is that some rich families of Syedpue also belong to the Bihari community.

Name: Zubaeda

Age: 60

Bashbari

She is her husband's second wife, his first wife died before 1971, leaving four children. Her husband was an employee of railway, when he lost his job after liberation Zubaeda took the financial responsibility, She just can read Quran, "In our days a very few number of Bihari girls went to school for education, especially who had rich financial and educational background in their family" She said. To face the reality she started to sewing work (comforter, genji, jute bag) with many of Bihari women at Bangalipur in Syedpur city. It was a project of a NGO. The financial condition of Bihari people especially who lost job for their Bihari Identity just after the liberation, was catastrophic. A huge number of Bihari women were compelled to work outside the house for survival for the first time. It could be hardly found a Bihari woman worked out side the house for income earning before 1971. Zubaeda said that my husband was dead against to the role of women working outside for income. Not only had he, every Bihari male thought in that way, they thought that it was a clear violation of Islamic principle. 'But hunger changed his philosophy, he admitted his wife to go outside the house for income. Now her children are quite young, they are working; her daughters are also working outside. Still she helps her daughters sewing works. Nowadays it will be hard to find a Bihari family whose eligible young female do not work or go to school. Either they are working or getting preparation for work.

Along with these, many other professions and businesses could be run since a mutual trust and comparatively good relation established again.

5.6 Marriage: Preference and Alliance

There is a popular saying among the Bihari community in respect of marriage, - 'bride and groom should matched to bones' (*haddy haddy me milna joruri hai*). This saying represents the coexistence of strong caste system among the Urdu-speaking migrant

community. Marriage between *Ashraf*–*Atraf* was almost impossible in old days. Almost all the respondents commented from their memories that these caste restrictions were strongly observed by the community people. Even among the *Atrafs*-the lower caste, there are many groups, mainly determined by occupation; inter-marriage between these castes was also prohibited through the social customs.

Among the *Ashrafs*, *Syeeds* are considered as supreme caste. It is believed that they are the descendants of Prophet Muhammad –other castes of this group like *Sheikh*, *Pathan*, and *Mughals* did not marry *Syed*'s daughter. They believed that there might be a chance to show dishonor to her in married life that would be serious sin. However, they are very interested to give their daughters to *Sayed*'s family.

People of different castes, irrespective of *Ashraf*-*Atraf*, prefer marriage between same castes, which is depicted in the before-cited saying. When this people experienced with unprecedented situations like riots, Partition and migration, their existent marriage values and norms started to undergo changes. Despite all sorts of differences within this community, a new mode of integration became essential to face the new situation jointly.

After coming to a new land, experiencing a new culture, language and people, the Indian migrants initially tried to mix up with the mainstream Bengali population. Muslim brotherhood was the key force behind that spirit and the same feeling was initially active also in the Bengali Muslim community. The question of social security in a new land was the other cause to get married in a Bengali family. Marriage played a major role to make integration between different castes, people of different regions among the migrant community. Marital relation to Bengali family provided some kind of social and political security. So in marriage, caste systems started to loose its importance within the community.

Some respondents said that marriage with Bengali people was becoming unpopular from 1971 due to different political stands of these two communities in regard of governance of then Pakistan. Besides, Bihari people believe that Bengali males prefer to take more than one wife; these were the causes of reducing the rate of inter-Bengali –Bihari marriage.

The 50s to half way to 60s was the period when the migrants were getting a shape of an integrated community. Urdu played an important role that shaped the community while the migrants were different in language and dialect. During that period, the question of *Khandan*(descent), region(Bihar, UP and others) and language started to get importance

again . Because in the meantime, Bihari people as a community established themselves socially, economically and politically with the assistance of state.

But Independence movement of Bengali people and the Liberation War of 1971 put the community in a stage where the community itself was at a stake. The uncertain situation after Liberation, almost demolish caste system practices in everyday life of Bihari people. Their preferred option of going to Pakistan made difference larger between the Bengalis and Biharis. So, intermarriage was almost stopped since then. As a community, Bihari people experienced second phase of complexity in their life after the Liberation of Bangladesh. It almost smashed the socio-economic political states of Bihari people. Now -a-days in marriage, Bihari people consider the socio-economic status of family primarily but not castes as first qualification, while marriage between *Ashrafs* and *Atrafs* is being common. Now there is almost no question about intermarriage between different lower castes (*Ansari, kashab, kalal*), that was also difficult to happen in the past.

5.6.1 Rules of Marriage

In the past, *Biradari* was strictly maintained in marriage within the migrants (especially among Bihari and UP people who contain the larger part). Though in Islam, caste system is not allowed, the Muslims of all over India observed this custom absorbing from their centuries-old neighbor –the majority Hindu Population. Because an only a few number of Muslims came to India from Middle East and other parts. Most of the Muslims were converted from Hindu and Buddhist. So thousand years of old marriage customs of Indian society had a significant impact on converted people.

No marriage takes place in the month of *Muharram*⁶⁴, it is not that that in this month of marriage is prohibited but the Bihari people usually do not observe joyful events in this month since the sad story of *karbala*⁶⁵ occurred in the same month.

Sheikh Ahmed Parvez

Age:42

Bashbari

He got married at the age of his 30; he represents the second generation of the migrants. Ahmed Parvez was born in the soil of Bangladesh. In 1971, he was just 6-7 years old boy. He himself selected his bride, At first, his family did not agree about that bride, because she is from *Goala* family, which is considered as a lower caste in comparison to them. “Almost one year was spent to convince the family,” said Mr. Parvez. His mother said that it was quite absurd to think of that type of marriage in their age. Her marriage had taken place when she was only 10 years old, even she herself did not know about her marriage, “we had to abide by our guardian’s decisions especially the decision of father.” “In our days, after marriage we preferred to reside with the extended family, now I am with my elder son but

⁶⁴ First month according to Arabic calendar.

⁶⁵ The Prophet’s grandson Imam Hussain was killed in an unfair battle at Karbala.

my younger son preferred to live separately. The two major things are losing its importance in marriage, one is *biradari* and the second is *rusum* (rituals, customs) of marriage,” she added. But we tried to do all the things in my son’s marriage.

From the 1st Up to the 13th of Safar month marriage is avoided due to time of Prophet Muhammad’s illness. Before the Eid-ul-Azha in the month of *Zilhaz*⁶⁶ marriage do not take place

Previously, wedding did not take place in the month of *Ramadan*, presently there is no barrier, but still less significant. *Safar*⁶⁷ is also excluded as month of wedding since it was the month while Prophet was sick at that time. After the two major festivals Eid ul fitar and Eid ul Azha and in the month of *Rabiul Awwal*⁶⁸ observing marriage ceremonies are especially encouraged.

In the past, Friday was generally avoided as a marriage day in because of Jumma⁶⁹ prayer, but nowadays Friday is preferred not only for being weekly holiday but also because it is a holy day and marriage is also a sacred issue.

Usually, father used to take the decision of marriage of his son, but the older males of the family used to play a significant role in deciding bride/groom, family etc. Even at present times, father of the bride or groom used to follow the decisions of elder males of the family (like elder uncle, maternal uncle, grandfather and so on). The matchmaker (*Agua*) used to remain as a middleman between both families and maintain the liaison up to the final stage.

According to *Islamic shariaat*⁷⁰ marriage is not legitimate without the uttered consent of the bride, and the final approval remains on the groom. In reality, the bride and groom remain inactive and submissive to the customs, formalities and heritage. The final decision and approval depend on the fathers of bride and groom. Basically, the society and its male spokesmen make the decision.

At present, the changes of formalities and traditional customs took place regarding the issues of caste, bride selection by groom himself and the unquestioned power of the family elders. Now-a-days, females of grooms family goes to brides family after the groom gives consent, again the decision still finally made by the male members of the

⁶⁶ Twelfth month according to Arabic calendar

⁶⁷ Second month in Arabic calendar.

⁶⁸ Third month in Arabic calendar.

⁶⁹ The weekly prayer in the noon that has special significance.

⁷⁰ Prescription and guidelines for living of Muslims.

family. After the groom himself selecting bride, taking parents' consent is also very common. The issue of *Biradari*, which was the major criteria for marriage in the earlier age, is not as much active as it was before, but still it did not lose its entire importance. Still the upper castes do not prefer to give their daughters to lower castes, if they avail groom having other qualifications like education, marriage from their own caste. Among the lower castes, the *kalals* do not prefer to marry outside the *kalals*. Still, education and financial condition is considered to be the major qualifications of a groom, not the caste. The importance of such bride/groom who resides in Pakistan or soon will go there is evident. Therefore, there are lots of examples, particularly among the camp-residents, who paid dowry to the groom during daughter's marriage, since the groom was supposed to go to Pakistan. In such cases, many men took the money leaving the bride alone and did not come back.

However, there is a question of security regarding those grooms, who are capable to live in India, Pakistan or in other country. Besides this, there is also an increasing tendency among the youths to have love-marriages, even with the Bengalis. Marriage with well-off, socially and politically powerful Bengalis is not less in number. Among 370 families of the survey areas, there were such twenty families in this area. If marriages and selection of spouse do not follow the tradition and norms of the society, (for instance, love-marriage without parents' consent) the couple are not accepted by the society. If such couples are accepted later on, still the older people do not accept such things by heart. The status of the in their respective in-laws families of the couple remain lower than those couple who are married with families' consent. Particularly, the bride has to bear most of the humiliation.

Ayesha

age 24

Bashbari

She was only 16 when she got married. She was then student of class IX. A Bengali youth, who is also a migrant Bengali from West Bengal, chose her seeing in a marriage ceremony and delivered proposal to her parents. Her family was not interested to; instead they were interested to send her Pakistan where her elder brother was living. There was a dream and plan to go Pakistan one by one. So they refused the proposal. But the boy was very tenacious, he threatened the family and at last he succeeded, Ayesha's family gave consent under the pressure of that Bengali man. Now they have two children, The marriage between Bengali Bihari was not new in Ayesha's Family. Her elder sister's husband also a Bengali. She did not find any difference with Bengali marriage.

The familial formalities start from the phase of final selection of spouse. When the decision of marriage is finalized, then starts the conversation of transaction, demands of the groom, ornaments of bride and *denmohor* (brideprice). If these things are settled, two families start to behave like relative in all aspects of familial, religious, and ceremonial

programs and take part. The Urdu-speaking people take place to grow intimacy between the families. Therefore marriage does not take place immediately after finalization of the decision. Unlike the Bengalis, they can't think of marriage while go to select bride.

The essential ornaments supposed to be given by the groom are *Noth* (ornament of nose) and *tickly* (ornament for forehead). The *noth* is very important symbol of married woman, as it is among the Bengalis. It is still significant at least in formalities, if not in daily use. All the required materials like bed, mattress, pillow, utensils are given.

A day of ritual, usually three days before marriage, is called *Lagan*. On this day, the groom's family members, usually the females go to bride's house taking fish, curd, sweet, sari, and other accessories as gifts. Along with these things, they also take turmeric and smear the turmeric to bride. The bride wearing the *saree* brought by the groom's family is set in the yard or in a particular room, and women of both sides smear turmeric to the bride one by one. In the past, there was a tradition of musical program, but these are not performed frequently at present.

The old people still love to talk about the luxury of *Lagan* in previous days. According to them, weeklong wedding ceremonies used to take place when there were much luxury of joy, music, dance and feast.

After *lagan* program in bride's family, turmeric and other accessories for male are sent to groom's family too. *Lungi*, *gamchha* and *genji*⁷¹ are sent for the groom. After the groom is smeared with turmeric, both bride and groom was given mostly sweet foods, avoiding salted anything. This particular diet is continued up to wedding. Presently, such practices are not strictly followed.

5.6.2 The Wedding Ceremony

The culture of 'Biharis', most of the people who have their origins in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, certainly provides glimpses of northern Indian culture despite of few dissimilarities. On the other hand, among the 'Biharis' there are also people from the southern and western parts of India, though they are very few (not more than one to two percent of the entire non-Bengali population) in number, which certainly creates significant differences with the culture of northern part. In reality, for many years' juxtaposition with the northern part people, many of their individual traditions have become merged. Since they were few in numbers, other Biharis of northern part became

⁷¹ Local names of common cloths, garments, mainly the Muslim males of the sub-continent use in their daily life.

their in-laws. Nevertheless, there is also an immense influence of Bengali culture both in the past as well as in the present. Since Bihar is very close West Bengal, and also for the reason that many of the non-Bengali population came from West Bengal especially from or neighboring places of Kolkata, there had been a process of merging with Bengali culture, even before 1947. After 1947, this assimilation became more intensified. But on the other hand, it should also be noted that though Biharis were minorities, many of the non-Bengali traditions, ceremonies have also been adopted by the dominant group-the Bengalis.

But it would be a very sweeping generalization if we call it as a two-way process of adopting each other's traditions. Among the Biharis, many of their traditional ceremonies and rituals are not being observed at present; rather most of the things lie in their memories. Though, it cannot be said that they follow the Bengali tradition fully, rather what can be assumed that the urban context and lifestyle creates a situation can be said to be a 'melting pot' where many traditions like wedding ceremonies became homogenized. Still there is an inherent tendency to keep differentiation, if not in practice, in perception at least.

A professional group-'*Agua*' (male) or *Agua*in (female)-the matchmaker used to play a vital role to make a wedding between two families. In the past, they were the essential part of marriage. Now a day some of the relatives may play the role of matchmaker, but still there are some *Aguas* in Syedpur.

The professional or non-professional *Agua* brings information about eligible bride or groom. If the families initially agree, then a date is fixed to visit bride's house by the females of groom's family. Usually, groom's mother does not visit the bride's house, rather groom's aunts (father's sister, uncles' wives) or sister-in-law (brother's wife) make the primary visit to nominate the bride. If the primary selection is made (by the females), the final conversation process starts. The conversation includes issues of transaction, date of wedding, organization of the ceremony etc.

The bride's family places their demand about the gold ornaments (particularly about the amount). Basically, the amount of gold is a part of the brideprice (*denmohor*) that is partially paid by gold ornaments. The higher the class is, the higher the bride price is. On the other hand, the groom's family gets the furniture (bed, mattress, pillow in particular along with other furniture) and utensils. These are not demanded; rather these are essential 'gifts' from bride's side. The quality of these gifts varies according the class of the families. Most of the conversations and negotiation take place regarding issue of

‘dowry’. The subjects of dowry vary from cash payment to kinds like motorcycle, bicycle, television, refrigerator, conveyance to go Pakistan. The last one, i.e. - arrangement of sending the couple to Pakistan --- has now replaced all other dowry materials in priority, especially among the camp residents.

Then they fix the day of engagement called ‘*Mangnee*’. In that occasion, the grooms’ family goes to bride’s house with one set dress, bride’s family also do the same for groom. The date of marriage depends on the date of *Parcha kita*, i.e a custom before the marriage, though it is not observed in present day. On that day, a piece of white cloth is divided into two pieces by a *khalifa* (tailor), and two pieces are sent to two families and they dye it with the color of *sweuly* flowers’ orange parts. These two pieces of cloth are used as handkerchiefs of bride and groom. The date of marriage cannot be settled in the same moon of parchakita. At present, though Bihari people do not observe all these things but in practice they take enough time from the primary stage to fixing the final day. They say that marriage in short notice is unthinkable to them even in today’s fast life. In the old day there was a custom of giving some money to the villagers by groom’s family that was called *Gramvati*. The following event is Lagan, which is described before.

5.7 Kinship

In non-industrial kinship, descent and marriage are basic social, economic and political building blocks of all sorts of social relations. Kinship entails rights, obligations affection and childcare. The significant point is how people in different cultures define and calculate kinship. With the growing industrialization and major trends of migration, kinship systems are changing over days. This section would deal with what kind of kin groups exist in Bihari community.

Kin groups are social units whose members can be charted and whose activities can be observed. The descent group is a basic kin group among non-industrial food producers. Unlike families, descent groups have perpetuity –they last for generations. For most of the Biharis, joint and extended families have been major units of kin groups, though the number of nuclear family is emerging day by day. Due to their geographic mobility associated with their historical emigrational factors, family isolation increases.

On the other hand, existence of extended family (the family that includes more than one couple and generations: (Kottak:2000) is a kind of adaptation to poverty for migrated population(stack:1975) Unable to survive economically as nuclear family units, relatives band together in an expanded household and pool their resources. Adaptation to poverty

causes kinship values and attitudes to diverge from the general trends of kinship change among the Bengalis. Such cases occurred when the Biharis first migrated to this land. Even now a day, there are many families where part of the family or a member lives in other country.

Table 5-7
Family Type of Surveyed Area

Area	Nuclear family	Extended Family	Total
Out side the Camp	195	136	331
Inside the camp	20	24	44
Total	215	160	375

Some members of 56 families of surveyed area Bashbari of Syedpur are living abroad. Some of them are living in Pakistan, members of eleven families are living in India, six families have their members in Saudi Arabia. Inside the camp, out of total 44 families, seventeen families have their some family members in Pakistan while one member of a family went to India. Joint families are not larger out side the camp, though strong ties are maintained. In camp, joint families are larger in number.

Marital relation with Bengali Bihari exists in 10 families (Bengali wife or husband), but a significant number of respondents said that they have Bengali relatives although they are not living with them and in the same area.

Despite their isolation and increasing number of nuclear families, in their cognition the family consists of their husbands or wives and their children along with parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. The family ties are so strong that these are perpetuated regularly. On any family occasion, does not matter wherever and how far they stay, all the relatives of the entire descent are informed, even if they do not come.

Descent line is exclusively patriarchal. In terms of surname (title) is essentially followed by patrilineal line and property inheritance strictly Muslim inheritance law is followed. Relatives from fathers' side are given importance in the significant social occasion of decision- making like marriage. The *Badi Abba* or the grandfather plays the most important role in decision -making. The whole family entirely depends on the decision-making of these respected persons. In the absence of grand father, the eldest son (may be father's elder) *Badi Abba* plays the important role. Even if the families do not live together, important decisions are jointly taken. Maternal side is informed, but do not play significant role in decision- making except some exceptional cases.

Patterns of residence are mainly patrilocal – the bride stays with groom's family. If there are many sons, and the elder brother becomes established, he enjoys most of the privileges and inheritance. The weaker one stays separately (some cases). Living of parents depends on the capability and willingness of the sons. Unmarried and deserted or divorced sisters are also larger who stay with brothers or parents family. She is considered as burden.

Biradari is the important social unit in terms of marriage and maintaining other social relations. The parts of Beradai have been discussed in detail in the 'marriage' and 'Profession' section. Joking relationships are apparent among the marital relatives, but not among the young people. For instance, bride's father and groom's mother can have a joking relationship, and vice-versa. But same relationships among the brothers and sisters of bride and same of groom are not common, since a possibility of execution retains there.

5.7.1 Fictive kinship

In general, ethnic ideologies, appropriates symbols and meanings from cultural contexts which are important in people's everyday experience have a significant role in social relations. This kind of symbolism can be extremely powerful in mass politics. There is also an indication the view of nationalism as form of metaphoric kinship. Kinship terms is frequently used in nationalist discourse (mother-country, father of the nation, brothers and sisters, and so on), and abstract community postulated by nationalists may be likened to the kin group. Although principles of kinship vary, the members of every society have some notion of family obligations. Kinship and kin organizations are basic features of social organization in most societies. Nationalism appeared, and continues to appear, in periods when the social importance of kinship is weakened. One may perhaps go so far as to say that urbanization and individualism create a social and cultural vacuum in human lives in so far as kinship loses much of its importance. Nationalism promises to satisfy some of the same needs that kinship was responsible for. It offers security and a feeling of continuity. As a metaphor, nationalism symbolizes that the members of the nation are a large family. It is an abstract version of something concrete which every individual has strong emotions about. In this way, nationalism appears as a metaphoric kinship ideology tailored to fit large-scale modern society –it is the ideology of the nation-state.

When the Biharis first came here, the Bengali Muslims felt them as their fellow Muslim brothers, since it was the major philosophy of Partition, though this honeymoon was short-lived. In the initial period, all the Muslims of this land felt this way. Some differentiation belonged basing on the original place of migration, for example

differentiation between the migrants of Bihar and UP existed at that time, though not prominent. At that time, many Biharis had established fictive kinship ties with Bengalis – like *Dharma Baba*, *Dharma Ma*, *Bhai*, and *Dost*. Establishment of *Dost* (Friend) was also an occasion of celebration.

When the Independence Movement started, the Biharis take side with the West Pakistanis, and the feeling of brotherhood shattered. This crisis mounted in 1971. Since then the sense of mutual distrust increased day by day. On the other hand, despite their internal differentiation feeling, all the migrants felt acquainted with each in terms of their suffering, identity crisis and vision. Then the feeling of Bihari, though not nationalist in the typical sense, united them all in terms of their non-Bengali identity.

Although kin groups and ‘tribes’ were economically relatively unimportant in the town, group membership was emphasized to the extent of being overcommunicated (Goffman, 1959) in public rituals as well as in causal interaction. This means that ethnicity was deliberately ‘shown off. In other polyethnic situations ethnicity may rather be undercommunicated, which means that actors try to play it down and not to make it an important aspect of a situation.

Although people in towns were not socially organized along tribal or ethnic lines, they grew strongly self-conscious of their ethnic identity under these circumstances of extensive contact with others. They developed standardized ways of behaving vis-a`-vis each other, and oriented themselves socially according to the ethnic ‘maps’ which would have been quite superfluous in a village setting, where most of one’s contacts were intraethnic. Many of the new social subsystems that developed in the urban environment, such as clubs and peer groups in *Musahera*, were based on ethnic membership. *Muharram* is one of such observations that this way people’s social identities were established and emphasized in a striking way.

5.8 Language and Education

5.8.1 Language

Sociologists and cultural anthropologists, Durkheimians and some Marxists, all look to language in their search for a key to understanding social life. The twentieth century philosopher, Wittgensteinn, argued that ‘the limits of my language means limits of my world’ and in his later work he developed a powerful view of social reality as a range of ‘language games’ with distinct sets of rules. Social theorists of many persuasions have

utilized Wittgenstein's concept of language games. For example in his anthropological works, Clifford Geertz (1973) sees culture consisting of clusters of rule-governed forms of life, a multiplicity of cultural systems. For him Culture is 'conducted in the context of systems of communication, using symbols linguistic, material and behavioral.

It is the sets of relationships signified in language, which classify and give meaning to our experience. English, German, Chinese and Hebrew and so on, exist as languages in this senses and their existence is not dependent on their use by particular speakers. Quite the reverse, our ability to speak, to understand and be understood depends on the existence of languages as systems. Structuralists make an important distinction between language as a system and particular bits of linguistic behavior. Chomsky has distinguished linguistic competence from performance.

This insight helps to understand the way in which individuals produce comprehensive and acceptable social behavior, even though the overall system of social relationships continuing their society to obscure to them.

Linguistically, Bihari Muslims were not homogeneous. North of the Ganges, Awadhi was spoken as far East as Muzaffarpur district, south of the Ganges as far east as gaya. In Chmparan district, the Awadhi was spoken by the better-off Muslims was called Shekhai or Musalmani. On the other hand, the Awadhi spoken by the low-caste was called julhai boli, but was quite different from the Maithili Julha boli spoken in darbhanga district. The version of maithili spoken by the Muslims of east Purnea was locally known as ganowari. It has been argued that Bihari Urdu, unlike the Urdu evolved in Delhi and UP, was "overwhelmingly plain and simple" influenced by Magadhi and Bhojpuri, with scores of authors being based in villages and public places.

Even today, most Bihari Muslims speak Magadhi, maithili and bhojpuri, not Urdu. However, a higher percentage of Urdu speakers were recorded in 1961 than ever before in the history of Censuses both in U.P, and Bihar. It has been suggested this was because until then the potential population of Urdu speakers had not been fully mobilized to identify with Urdu. The fact that Hindi-Urdu controversy in pre-1947 Bihar was somewhat less intense than in U.P. has been attributed to Muslim and Urdu culture being more deeply entrenched in U.P. And the Muslim League was becoming stronger there than in Bihar.

Migrants from India are commonly known as Urdu speaking and Urdu is their mother tongue, but in reality they are diversified in respect of language. In the time of Partition, Urdu was used as language of education, literature of Muslim community. It is a language

of the Northern part of India, especially in UP, and adjacent areas. Even in Pakistan, there was very little use of Urdu in that time. Regarding history, Urdu is not an old language. It was created in the time of Mughal regime. Then the role of that language was lingua franca of different region's soldiers of Mughal army. The dress of a soldier is called *urdi*, the word Urdu was derived from that. Urdu as a language signifies the blending and intermixing of different linguistic streams. It presents a linguistic synthesis by borrowing from different sources like Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and Hindi.

Table 5-8

Mother tongue wise distribution of total surveyed families

Language	Hindi(mother tongue)	Urdu	Hindi was mother tongue	Bengali
No. of Families	38	154	183	29

Ahmed Ilias, director of Al Falah Bangladesh, described an incident related with Urdu-medium education. In 1972, after the country was liberated, Urdu as a medium of education was banished from the new country's education policy, and there were no option to appear in matriculation exam for those who studied in Urdu medium. The certificates of Urdu medium lost its value, at this hard time his organization patronized 10 Urdu speaking students to take exam in Bengali medium. They passed before Independence but that was not recognized by the new liberated state, which was why they took part in SSC exam again, they took Urdu as an optional paper through the special permission of Dhaka Education Board. They did very good in exam, all got passed, and 3 or 4 of them got 1st division also. That is a story of after all success, but there were thousands stories, those were full of miseries, thousands of students who studied in Urdu medium, left schools colleges in that time. "Whether Bangladesh their country or not, they thought about the use of Bengali education if they would migrate to Pakistan? Neither the country nor the Biharis decided then, it took longtime to decide the very crucial decision, the question of education of the community remained answerless almost 15 years. By the end of 1980s, we started to send our children to schools in large scale."

Nazir Ahmed, a poet, (30) who writes Urdu poetry in Bengali alphabets. Though he is Urdu speaking, cannot write Urdu alphabets properly. He loves poetry (*sher*), he studied in Bengali medium now he is working in a NGO. He is a regular participator of *mushaeras* in Syedpur city. "I can read and write Urdu but it is not good, if I learned it in schools then my writing and reading would reach up to the mark. I have a plan to improve it". In Syedpur like all other places of Bangladesh where Bihari reside, Bihari boys and girls are getting education in Bengali medium. There is very little number of families where their youngsters are learning Urdu by the elders.

Ashraf Ul Haque Babu a *mashhur shaer* (famous poet) of Syedpur, who publish a Bengali weekly, He is asked, “Why not Urdu weekly?” He replied “Who will read it? Present generation cannot read or write Urdu, we have a lot of Urdu speaking people but it is very little number who can read or write Urdu”. Bihari children go to Bengali medium schools, there is no alternative. They are more fluent in speaking, reading and writing Bengali than Urdu, Urdu is spoken mostly in Family and within the community people. “More than sixty thousands Bihari live in Syedpur city but we don’t have an institution where our children can learn their mother tongue Urdu. I’m not accusing the state and my own community; I’m just telling that is the reality.”

Is this linguistic retention chosen or imposed, and is it an asset or a handicap? Linguistic retention enables a minority to remain distinctive; simultaneously it prevents the group from achieving equality in a country with other official language(s). Evidently, this problem is relevant for the discussion of the rights of ethnic groups to be distinctive versus the right to be treated as an equal within a state. Both majority and minority will usually have a particular interpretation of this dual principle, and their respective interpretations may be at odds with each other.

The state may be accused of injustice both if it promotes equality and if it promotes difference. If the state stresses equal rights and duties, minority members may feel that their cultural distinctiveness is not being respected; that their boundaries and identities are threatened.

5.8.2 Education

Although no formal restriction prevents access to government schools, camp addresses do cause problems for “Bihari” children seeking admission. Although this appears to be changing, rules vary between institutions, and access is dependent on the attitudes of individuals in charge. More significantly, rampant discrimination within mainstream society as a whole, and continued bullying on the part of teachers and classmates alike continues to discourage attendance. Together with lack of resources for school fees or materials, educational facilities thus remain inaccessible to the majority.

Table 5-9
Educational status of the surveyed Urdu speaking population (Male)

age group	Illiterate	Koran reading	Urdu primary	Urdu secondary+	Bengali primary	Bengali secondary	Bengali HSC+	Arabic/English
5-10	22	06	0	0	65	0	0	0
10-20	45	12	0	1	121	123	04	A5
20-30	35	18	1	1	65	82	24	A1
30-40	33	12	05	0	24	45	15	A1
40-50	25	10	13	1	11	45	07	E1
50-60	09	10	07	10	06	10	03	E8
60-70	12	10	07	04	01	09	0	E4
70+	07	07	07	02	0	0	0	E3, H1
total	192	85	39	19	193	314	53	24

Table 5-10
Educational status of the surveyed Urdu speaking population (Female)

age group	Illiterate	Koran reading only	Urdu primary	Urdu secondary+	Bengali primary	Bengali secondary	Bengali HSC+	Arabic/English
5-10	10	8	0	0	50	0	0	0
10-20	25	25	0	0	100	140	11	0
20-30	19	61	5	0	46	70	19	0
30-40	29	50	08	0	21	27	2	0
40-50	25	35	10	0	21	7	0	0
50-60	33	23	3	0	5	0	0	0
60-70	18	14	1	1	1	0	0	0
70+	11	7	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	170	223	28	1	244	244	32	0

Among the Biharis, the practice of admission to formal school and continuation are not very well-practiced. There are many causes of reluctance: poverty is the major cause that many of the families could not afford their expenditure. On the other hand, since they are not allowed to join the government services, many loose interests in higher education, instead involving in family business brings them to the possibility of future. Interestingly, though they feel and like to be introduced as Urdu-speaking community, such enthusiasm is not found in receiving Urdu-education. Neither any inclination towards madrasa education is prominent. Basically, in their struggle of life they prefer education that have prospect in job market.

5.9 Gender Relations

Women are in a marginal position in the Urdu-speaking community. Women cannot play any vital role in decision –making process of the Family. Some of the old-aged(more than sixty years of age) ladies who migrated to Syedpur from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh said that they had to be totally obliged to the decision of their fathers regarding their marriage, mothers could never argue or negotiate except supporting that decision. These ladies also feel that such issues should be dealt and decided by the male members of the family.

There was no conscious decision making in the regard of taking child either by husband or by wife. They believe that having child absolutely depends on Allah; man can do nothing for this. It was unthinkable in their time that women would be working outside the home. Girls used to get married at the age of ten-fifteen years. The *Biradari* or caste system was strictly followed in the marital issues – which is called “similarity in bones” by the Urdu-speakers. Marriage relations of upper castes like *Sheikh*, *Sayed*, *Mughal* and *Pathans* with the *Atrafs*(lower caste) were almost impossible to take place, even among the lower castes, marriage among different *Biradaris* was also impossible . In some cases, women remained unmarried for the rest of their life if eligible husband from their same *Biradari* could be managed.

Women were not admitted to any formal education system, even in learning to read and write in mother tongue. Women used to learn to read the Quran only. It was a common belief that if women could write in their own accounts, they would write about their sorrows and miseries to their parental family. Zubeida, a sixty-year old lady said, it was thought that the girls knowing reading and writing would write love letters that would be humiliating for the family and descent (khandan)

Purdah was strictly observed in society. Speaking in a loud voice, frequent mobility was strictly prohibited. Women used to take food at the end of other family members’ meal, though young female children were served with male family members. Women were considered as eligible for marriage at the age of ten, while many of the girls of that age could not understand what really meant by marriage. During the wedding, when the bride was supposed to express her consent, father used to over shadow her voice by saying ‘yes’. Women’s muteness was positively considered as her shyness. Comparing with the present status of women, they argued that it was unthinkable at that time that women

would work outside home; those who used to work outside the home were rebuked by society.

Zubeida, one of such ladies, came out of home and worked as a tailor for family's survival when her husband lost his railway job after liberation. Her husband permitted her to go outside. – Their long-lasting beliefs and values were shattered by the question of survival. For the first time, many other women like Zubeida in Syedpur, started working outside home and taking responsibility of the family. They performed the tasks of Benarasi Saree, Weaving crush, embroidery working, as laborer in Gul factory, even as teachers of reading the Qumran. Only recently, some of them being educated working in NGOs.

According to them, women had to stay within the strict frameworks of *Purdah*, they still observe *purdah*, but what changed is living in seclusion. Now only in a limited number of families women live inside home only. In Pakistan period, there was an increasing tendency among the Urdu-speaking people to educate women in formal schools and colleges. After Partition, major problem faced by the community is residence. Immigration by the Indian Muslims to Syedpur took place through out the Pakistan period. There were significant cultural differences within these immigrants. When this diversified group of people was taking shape of an Urdu-speaking community, education in Urdu was gradually becoming important. Some of the girls started to go to school since then. Salma Begum is one of such pioneers, who continued her study up to class seven in Urdu medium. According to her, at that time, though girls started to go to school, but their education were not continued too long. Education up to class five to eight was considered as adequate for girls.

Munni Begum, now she is 40. She passed 15 years after her marriage. It was a courtship marriage, her husband Momed Ali, was her sister in law's brother. He was not regular employed person, and could not maintain properly his family. After two years Munni Begum gave birth of a dead child. Her mother in law then treated with her in that way that it was her fault. In those worst days her husband expressed his plan to his wife and parents of going to his wife and parents Pakistan. Wife sold all her ornaments and old parents gave him money. One day he moved to Pakistan and he did not come back. Another stigma then imposed upon Munni Begum, for her reason old parents lost their son. Munni Begum left husband's house and went to own parent's house. But after some days she lost her parents successively, she was then depended on her brothers. Brothers arranged the second marriage of their sister with a cousin. Now Munni Begum has a son, she wants to forget all the things but she cannot, she cannot forget such humiliation, she knows if she were a male no one could do such humiliation to her.

After liberation of Bangladesh, most of the Urdu-speaking people lived a kind of captive life. Many of them had dreams to go to Pakistan, but in reality thousands of Urdu-

speaking people could not leave though the Pakistani soldiers safely returned home. Thousands of non-Bengali people, after loosing their railway job, lived an inhuman life in Syedpur. Like Salma Begum, many other ladies came out of veil and seclusion for their livelihood. Out of the disappointment of failing to go back to Pakistan, a number of non-Bengalis increased who wanted to remain in this land. With a conscious intention to adapt with this newly emerged situation, the non-Bengali people living outside the camp, was forced to send their children to Bengali-medium educational institutions. Now the number of graduates is not insufficient among the non-Bengali people in Syedpur. But the issue of their job placement is not that much easy due to their identity crisis. They have to take government and non-government jobs hiding their original identity. Just after Partition, some marriages between Bengali and non-Bengali took place, but while the difference and distance were in increase, such marriages were almost halted, and gradually distance and distrust increased. Such tendencies increased in both sides.

Tendency of polygamy among non-Bengalis is not much prevalent as among the Bengalis, according to the males. On the other hand, women consider that economy is the main reasons for marriage-- those non-Bengali males who are well off also marry more than one wife. Shakila, a lady of forties, said that her husband married again without informing her. She knows that there is law on her side, but in this state where her identity is not recognized how can she take protection of law in this matter?

From a discussion with the women, it was found that most of the women believe that uttering 'Talaq' thrice confirms divorce in an Islamic way.⁷² Re-marrying is not possible without *hillah* marriage. Shakila cited such an incidence of her relative who after divorce re-married his wife through *hillah*. The examples of leaving wife and not bearing expenditure are not less frequent among the Urdu-speakers- opined the women.

Being lured by the condition of bearing conveyance to Pakistan, many men moved to Pakistan leaving his family or wife. Not only to Pakistan, but many men moved to other districts of Bangladesh.

Fahmida

Age :42

Her first marriage was happened when she was just 14 years old. Her husband tortured her mentally and physically. She failed to give birth of a baby within the two years of marriage, that was her main fault. After some days she found that her father in law wanted to seduce her. It was beyond imagination to her, she told it her own parents, and they claimed divorce. After few years her parents arranged another marriage with her cousin who resided in India. After the marriage she migrated and lived with her husband. In husband's family her grand mother in law did not like her because she failed to give birth a baby but her

⁷² uttering 'talaq' is percieved as divorce though the state law does not accept this.

husband was quite considerate then,. Ten years passed in that way, once they both visited Bangladesh and her husband left her for India and it was forever. He did not come back. Fahmida could not believe this at first but days made her realize that it was life, specially a woman's life. She started tuition (Koran), leaving all the past, when she was 32 she got another proposal from a married aged man. He insisted her, she told that she could not give him children; but the man was tenacious, her family agreed and she got married for third time. After two years she gave birth a baby, now that baby is 7 years old. Now Fahmida thinks how much she paid in her life, why so many hazards and humiliation in a single life? She says "society tells me- forget all the pasts, now you are happy. I agree but sometimes I can not refrain myself from thinking why I'll forget and forgive all, twenty years are not matter of joke."

It is essential for the bride's family to pay dowry. Providing bed, utensils, ornaments to bride, bi-cycle and watch for bridegroom etc. are considered as essential goods to be paid, though the Biharis refused to consider these as dowry.

Now the *Biradari* issue is not as much active as it was in past. But still there are examples of women who remained unmarried, but no example of man who remained unmarried for mis-match of *Biradari*.

Family planning is not very popular among the Urdu-speaking people for many reasons. First, the vast population of Biharis remained out of the state activities. Secondly; it was believed that family planning is anti-Islamic. Baby, an enlightened and conscious lady said that in Jumma prayer the *Imam*⁷³s preached that human being is not allowed to adopt family planning. Baby, herself, thinks that not family planning, but feticide is a sin. All the methods of family planning are applied to women. For example, Shakila (a respondent) said, ligation was applied, even without women's consent, under the BAVS program of family planning. Another respondent Baby said, she knows a woman who was going to die for the complexities of using Copper T. The rates of using temporary and permanent measures are very low in married males, they cited.

In the war of 1971, a number of Urdu speaking women were raped by the Bengali miscreants, those were not documented, and also not recognized yet but that that was happened along with thousands victims of Bengali women. In Syedpur, such incidents were not happened then really, but in other Bihari populated regions and areas in Bangladesh, like Dinajpur, Thakurgoan, Lalmonirhat, Parbatipur, Mymensingh, Shantahar, Rangpur many Bihari women were raped. A large number of affected people gathered in Syedpur at that time due to comparative safety. Baby Begum and Ayesha said that they know a woman who was raped at that time, now resides in Rangpur with her Bengali Freedom fighter husband. Both male and female respondents did not say that

⁷³ Community leader for the Muslims, authorized by Islam, conducts group prayer.

Bihari males stepped ahead to marry those women after 71. They said that was happened but they do not want to recognize the persons not even to the Bengali people but also in their own community.

They believe that if such incidents were disclosed to the society the victims would not be acceptable by the society. Even in the cases while conversation on marriage goes on place but finally marriage does not take place, such eligible girls are considered as ill omened (apaya). The whole family then turned into the object of rebuke and ridicule, even the possibility of marriage of that girl would become difficult to happen. Formerly courtship marriage was almost unthinkable within this community, but now a day though the bride and groom choose each other, formal marriages take place with the consent of guardians. If the parents or guardians do not give consent in courtship marriage, usually relatives do not participate in the program. In such cases, the couple has to live a cast-out and relative less life. In such situation, the bride's condition is worse since she is considered as shameless.

5.10 Class and Stratification

The Marxist view of social classes emphasizes economic aspects .A social class is defined according to its relationship to the productive process in society. In capitalist societies, according to Marx, there are three main classes. First there is a capitalist class or bourgeoisie, whose members own the means of production (factories, tools and machinery and so on) and buy other people's labor power and employ them. Second, there is petty bourgeoisie, whose members own means of production, but do not employ others. Owners of small shops are typical examples .The third and most numerous in numbers, that is the proletariat or working class, whose members depend upon selling their labor –power to a capitalist for their livelihood. There are also other classes, notably the aristocracy, whose members live by land interest and lumpen proletariat, which consist of unemployed and underemployed people –vagrants and the like. The adherents of the theory nevertheless still stress the relationship to property in their delineation of classes. Another part of this belief is that oppressed classes would eventually rise against their oppressors, overthrow them through a revolution, and alter the political order and the social organization of labor.

The Weberian view of social classes, which has partly developed into theories of social stratification, combines several criteria in delineating classes, including income, education and political influence. Unlike Marx, Weber did not regard classes as potential corporate groups; he did not believe that members of social classes necessarily would

scene. Still, as the result of such movements, British education system started to expand among the general Muslims in a limited extent. An informant Said Ahmed (65) said that in his boyhood days, while he was a young boy, he witnessed a big incident of violence on that issue, an *Atraf* college boy (julha) of his area sat in the same line of *Ahsrafs* in a party. He was slapped by an *Ashraf*. That incident was not easily reconciled. Julha Muslims did not compromise easily. It was the first tendency he saw of weakening caste system. Most of the old respondents said, during their life in India, Birdari was strictly followed in marriage issues at least, if not in other aspects.

The class situation also fluctuated also. Many of the migrants, seeing the Bengalis bought cultivable lands that were let for sharecropping by the Bengali *Adhiars*⁷⁴. As such neither they were typical proletariat laborers, nor typical farmers. Needless to say that, the largest bulk of the Bihari migrants also came, who lost their entire property behind. Therefore, many of them came here as being truly proletariat too, though for many situation shifted over time. Later, some of the Biharis in Syedpur owned land, house and other properties. As such a process of a formation a new middle class was going to emerge, which again was shaken by 1971.

Many of the Bihari lost their property either burnt or looted. After 1971, most of them had to gather to the camp losing house and all other properties they had. Many of them lost their job. Hence, in the post-1971 period onward, they joined any job, whatever they could afford. In that situation the camp residents were the true proletariats who had nothing to sell except their labor. Still these laborers are not less in number. In general, the over-all poverty and pauperization increased in Bangladesh over the period. But for the Biharis, the situation is different, because for many accesses to labor market was either denied or limited. For example, receiving education in formal schools and government job are strictly restricted for the Biharis living in the camp due to their non-citizen identity. As such, it is almost impossible for them to create a middle class feeling, which certainly looks for assurance and comes out of living stereotypical life. Those who came out of the camp and started business or joined other livings are now in different situation. Many of them are receiving education and joined different services (though not government). In Syedpur, most of the factories are owned and the Biharis run businesses. Among such businesses there are gul factories, workshops, food etc. For many of them mercantile businesses are preferable. This is partly because it was their tradition and partly because such businesses do not require much establishment.

⁷⁴ Sharecropper, who produces the crops and gets the half of total production.

The businessmen employ both Bengali and non-Bengali people as laborers. Do they discriminate? According to the laborers they do not, rather their Non-Bengali employers sometimes exploit the Biharis. Since Job market is restricted and limited for the Biharis, the labor is cheap that is easily extracted by the employers. In general, Bihari laborers render their services in low rate. One person said that the authority of Haque Battery (who is also a Bihari) used to say to the Biharis: I am also a Bihari, I know you people bone and flesh, do not try to manipulate me. Even Bihari laborers are not that much involved in trade unions, because they do not want to increase their risk by being victimized in the eyes of the employers due to their inherent insecurity.

The non-Bengali businessmen sometimes joined the Chambers of commerce of Associations of businessmen; even they hold central positions too. In such cases, it seems they are quite integrated with the Bengali businessmen for their class interests. While the poor group is not united with the Bengali poor for their class interest at all. Still, a sense of insecurity lies for all. Therefore, those rich people who can afford often prefer an establishment outside Bangladesh, preferably Pakistan, if not possible then in India. But these insecurity feelings do not unite them for long. Political interest sometimes create a unity, at least it was most effective during the eighties when an inclination and vision to move towards Pakistan united them politically. Gradually, the dream shattered, for many of them, especially the third generation considers Bangladesh as their land and they seek their establishment here.

Therefore it can be said, that majority of the Bihari population is petty business class, though not the middle class in *perception*. The factory-owners and big business men, though control means of production and employ labor, but the other required supports from the state supports are not sufficient for them, since every time they live in uncertainty. A middle class is emerging, but basing on business mainly, or those who are receiving education by losing their identity. The rest of the population remains in laborer class.

Finally it can be concluded that their ethnic identity restricted them to emerge in their respective economic classes fully, while their class identity refrained them to unite politically.

5.10.1 Stratification

To understand the stratification, major conceptual tool is *Biradari*. *Biradari* indicates the profession, status and descent. The details of professional groups have been discussed earlier. So this section would focus on the stratification aspects of *Biradari*. In Urdu, they

were called, as '*sharif biradari*' and '*choti biradari*.' The former was similar to *Ashrafiia* of Bengal, which was comprised of Muslim Zamindar and other segments of middle class society. The majority of the lower class was comprised of Ansaris or Momin Brothers. In Urdu, they were called, as '*sharif biradari*' and '*choti biradari*' The former was similar to *Ashrafiia* of Bengal, which was comprised of Muslim Zamindar and other segments of middle class society. The majority of the lower class was comprised of Ansaris or Momin Beradari.

There is no principle for a cast and creed in Islam. Nevertheless, factions emerged within the Muslim society in Bihar and other provinces of India mainly as reflection of the Hindu cast system.

Among the *sharif biradari*, *Meer*, *Mughal*, *Sheikh*, *Syed*, and *Pathan* were prominent, and formed the middle and lower classes in Muslim society. The '*Choti Biradari*' which, in addition to their various economic status, were further divided into several occupational groups such as *Julaha* (weaver), *Kunjra* (fruit and vegetable grower and seller) *Kalal* (wine dealer) *Qasab* (butcher) and *Dhunia* (cotton carders)

In general there are two major divisions of *Biradaris*: the *Sharif* or the upper *Biradaris* and the *Razils* or lower *Biradaris*. The *Sayeds*, *Mughal*, *Pathans* and *Sheikhs* are the *Badi biradaris* who enjoy higher status in the community. Earlier these *biradris* were well off and both financially and socially dominant. Marriages, mixing etc, were strictly restricted between low and upper *Biradaris*. Now-a-days, with their socio-political turbulence many of the families of *Sharif Biradaris* lost their position and affluence. Many of them had to adopt different professions leaving heir traditional professions for survival, which is certainly disgraceful for them. But social statuses are still remaining if not as strictly as it was before. For example, marriage between *Razil* and *Sharif* is still difficult, though there are some exceptions that have taken place.

On the other hand, the *razils* that include petty businessmen, fruit and vegetable sellers, wine sellers, butchers, barbers in the strict sense of the term, had changed their professions too. These professional changes sometimes changed their social status also – in many cases the change is up rising but it contradicts with their social status still. So when a *Razil* or person from *choti biradari* becomes financially affluent that certainly changes his position in the society, but that does not imply that he can marry a daughter from the *Badi Biradari*. Particularly, *Sayeds* do not prefer to marry to other *biradaris* since they are considered to be the descendants of the prophet.

Political power is still a source of influence. Those who are the camp chairmen or chairmen of relief committee enjoy higher status over others, even after leaving their position. In the same way, the leaders of SPGRC and other political organization have immense influence and higher social status than others. Now a days a number of Biharis are taking active part in mainstream education, some of them had already been elected as ward-commissioners in Syedpur Municipality also. Nevertheless, these ward commissioners remain in higher status than others.

Religious leaders and the Poets (*shaers*) also enjoy different sort of respect from others too. This respect is more passionate and instinctive. Besides all these, the people who came out of the camp and receiving education certainly have social status in the community, since they become the spokesmen of the community. The journalists, writers, NGO workers are respected and honored irrespective of their *Biradari*. For example, all honors a university graduate person from *razil* class. In general, the class climbing is possible but *Biradari* is more rigid. The interesting thing is while their relationship with Bengalis may be marital or other, such *Biradari* does not matter at all except the case of Sayeds. Though things are changing over the period both the Bengalis and Biharis consider Sayeds as special group (since they are the descendants of Prophet). Still unlike the examples of status shift is not taking place among the Biharis. May be in a vulnerable condition, the stratification and caste systems become more rigid as it happened among the Hindus of Bengal during the Muslim rule.

5.11 Power Structure and Legal system

When railway lines and workshops were first established in early sixties of the nineteenth century, a number of non-Bengali from the north as well as east Bihar and from United Province were brought by the British, around seven thousand non-Bengalis migrated to Syedpur in that period. (Ahmed Ilias 2003). According to Abdur Razzak, the eighty-year-old key informant, his maternal grand father came here in the early period of twentieth century. Abdur Razzak and his relatives came to Syedpur long before Partition with this connection. Whatever the exact figure was, there was no doubt that a good number of non-Bengali populations from Bihar and UP concentrated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Before 1947, the number of Biharis in Syedpur reached around 11,000, which constituted one –third of the total population. The other two-thirds comprised of the local Hindus, most of who migrated to India after Partition. The number of local Bengali Muslims was

insignificant at least in Syedpur town rather they mostly concentrated in the surrounding villages.

According to Abdur Razzak, at that time (before 1947) there were around seventy families who belonged to the *Ashraf* groups. They had their own judicial system which was Panchayat, the members of the panchayat was a kind of selection of wise or old people, who were acceptable to the community, these leaders of Panchayat were called *sardars*. They were selected, not elected.

Different *biradaris* had their own Panchayats, for example at that time, there were twelve *Sardars* among the *Ansari biradari* only. They were responsible to settle any sort of disputes or conflict arose among the *Ansaris*. In complicated problems, they used to take decisions after a joint conversation. Usually the problems, they used to settle were local in character, like settling disputes on land, or disputes on marriage and related affairs. The severe criminal acts like murder used to be dealt by the Court.

After 1947, importance of *Sardars* decreased gradually. Instead of *sardari* system, other formal institutions replaced the *Sardars*. For instance, a high and influential might play the role of Judge among the railway workers. A leader of political party from the community, mainly Muslim League, also had influence in settling disputes. Henceforth, the judicial system became more formalized. The *sardars* are still there, but they only inherit the name *Sardar* from their ancestor, though originally the system was not based on descendants.

When Syedpur came under municipality in the 1950s, then the ward commissioners from respective community also exercised same power and authority. Such practices are still remaining. Now there is a female ward commissioner also from the Bihari community.

Since then, the disputes were dealt more formally, if not institutionally. After 1971, the situation became complicated. On the one hand, they lost their identity as citizen of newly emerged Bangladesh state, and on the other they lost their property for which they had to face the court. Those Biharis who resided outside the camp, rather more easily merged with the mainstream. Some of them filed cases to claim their property and won as well. There are some camp-residents also.

Other disputes on the issues like violence, dowry, theft, mugging, family disputes are usually settled by the Ward Commissioner, or the Relief Chairman of the Camp. The SPGRC (Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee), established with a vision to rehabilitate the Biharis in Pakistan, is a political force now. As such, they also exercise power and authority over the community, especially among the camp-residents. Usually,

these different groups settle the personal conflicts and quarrels, though the issues relating to dowry or alimony of wife etc are not very common, because women do not prefer to bring these issues to the public. Such problems are usually resolved within the family, or the greater family. But the major legal issue of the Biharis is fighting for their identity crisis that restricts their access to law enforcing agencies.

Now-a-days many of them are getting involved in mainstream political parties like BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat –e-Islami, and even Awami League. Muslim League, which one of the proponents of Pakistan, gradually lost their importance in the mainstream politics, there only few old men are found who still support Muslim League. Once, particularly in Pakistan period, there was a strong influence of leftist politics, many of them were involved with NAP Bhasani (such activists are still alive) they were active supporter of Liberation movement, even some of them were freedom fighters, may be not so many, but still they were.

5.12 Food, Dress and Lifestyle

As the most powerful instrument for expressing and shaping interactions between humans, food is the primary gift and a repository of condensed social meanings. Any food system has multiple material, socio-cultural, nutritional-medical dimensions.

5.12.1 Food

Food embodies world history like no other substance. Many diets and cuisines across the world are at one and same time ‘local’ and ‘global’. Ethnic cuisines have always existed though called by other names .the cuisines of other groups were always a part of one’s life-as markers of cultivation and class, as indicators of social status or as esoteric rituals, meant for adventures, travelers and, beginning in nineteenth century, anthropologists.

Many societies have similar ideas of occasion when it comes to food. Major festivals- *Eid-ul Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Azha* are the identical religious festivals for both Bengalis and Biharis. The festival foods are almost common. Nevertheless, a process of cultural exchange has been taking place through foods. For instance, preparation of halooa and roti were not common practices among the Bengalis before Partition, accepting from the Biharis now it has turned to be an obvious ritual. In the case of festival foods, the dishes are almost common because both communities prepare *Mughlai*⁷⁵ food. There food has become a measure of one’s tolerance of social and cultural diversity. When it is not occasion, it is a combination of occasion and lifecycle.

⁷⁵ Usually some version of Mughal food, the word derived from Mughal.

Migrated Urdu speaking people of Bangladesh, are mainly from Bihar and UP province of India. These states are in the northern part of India, staple food of that region is wheat. *Roti* of wheat is their every day's meal. Said Ahmed (65) an informant said "In my days of boyhood I saw Rich people of our village ate *roti* and meat and the poor ate generally *liti*, a kind of heavy *roti* which was prepared by powder of maize, kheshari and arahar, motor lentils, each *roti* weighted almost half kg". They also ate *gajra* (carrot), *sakarkhan* (sweet potato). Rice was not taken in every meal, at best once in a day, poor took *dhankuthi* rice which was *mota chal* and rich took *milkuthi* rice (finner rice), maximum poor could not afford rice and wheat, although *roti* of wheat their's favorite food. Nowadays migrant Bihari, UP people eat rice at least once in a day, even they take *panta* (rice of previous day mixed with water), but still they prefer *Roti*. They prefer meats than fishes, potato is their favorite vegetables. They love *kabab*, *roti*, fried and meat items like *shami kabab*, *shik kabab*, *nehari*, *chops*, *fuluri*, *piaji*. In festivals, marriage, parties they prefer *Biriani*, *Murag polaw*, *Murg-e-musallam*, *rejala* of beef.

In two Eids, *semai* is must, *firni*, *zarda* are other items. In the day of *shab-e-barat* Urdu-speakers make different *halooas* with *suji* and lentils;" in past time no marriage could take place without *thekua*, a kind of fried flour's cake."- said Said Ahmed. In the every entertainment of gests *sarbat* (drinks) is essential. In the mourning month *Muharram* they prepared *Malida* with *roti*, sweets. from the 7th to 13th of *Muharram* they avoied salts, for the Paikes (who offered themselves for Imam Hossain especially on those days) it is prohibited. *Rot* is another item, which is prepared by flour with *kichmich*, nuts, and *akhrots*.

5.12.2 Dress

In old days Bihari male people generally wore *lungi*, *dhoti*, long shirts, *pajama*. In rural areas *lungi*, *dhoti* were very common, they prefered long shirts for the upper portion of the body. A *gamcha* was very common on the heads or shoulders. Rubbers made slippers are their foot wears. Old aged people used *kharam* (wood made footwear). UP people prefer *salwar*, *panjabi*, *kurta*. People of the urban area preferred to wear *pajama*, *panjabi* and *fez* or *zinnah* cap on the head. Rich and aristocrat people wore *serwani*, prince coat, *salwar pajama*. Then they used leather made royal shoes.

A popular image of a Bihari woman always depicts a lady with *salwar* (typical trouser) *kamiz* (dress for upper part) and *Urni* (veil/scarf) in contrast to the image of Bengali women, who irrespective of all ages wear *sarees*. In reality, *salwar kamiz* is not the traditional dress for women in Bihar. Rather they usually wear *sarees*, with particular style that is different from the style of Benglaies. That style have become popular among

the Bengalis in festivals. Interestingly, many Bihari women now wear sarees in Bengali style.

Actually, *salwar kamiz* is the traditional dress for the women of far northern part – upper Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Elite Muslim used to wear *salwar kamiz* in earlier days. Bihari women and other Muslim women adopted this dress basically for their inclination elitist Muslim culture and to distinguish themselves from women of other communities. In fact, at present, for its practical convenience this has become the most popular dress for women all over South Asia irrespective of age, religion and ethnicity.

Still there are specific significance of the dresses of Bihari women. Usually they are skilled of embroidery and their festive tinselled (*chumki*) dresses are distinct for glitters (*jori*). In fact, Bengalis often use the term ‘like Bihari dresses’ for tinselled dresses. Such glitters and spangles are prominent in festive occasions. Children also dress up in colorful wearings.

Typically, Bihari people are fond of bright colours: orange, yellow, blue etc. The most popular colours they often choose for their dresses are green and red, making relation to the story of *Muharram*. Green is often perceived as the colour of Islam, and red is related with blood. Along with all these, use of heavy gold and silver ornaments in all possible parts of the body represent the jovial celebration of different occasions.

5.13 Religion, Belief and Practices

The movement of Islamic revival and reformation, which arose in the second half of the 19th century, may broadly be divided into two streams: Traditionalist and modernist. Both claimed to be inspired by the teachings of Shah Waliullah, but while the former emphasized going back to Koran, the Hadith and the Sunnah, the latter, without detracting in no way from the value of these, emphasized *ijtihad*⁷⁶ and called for a reinterpretation of Islam with help of reason and argument, keeping in view the requirements of contemporary world. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was the proponent for this trend who promoted for the urge of reform and modern (mainly British) education as well. Aligarh became the main center for his preaching. Syed Ahmed Khan, in short – became the herald of a new age and founder of their consciousness. His followers and supporters mainly belonged to the ‘incipient Indian bourgeoisie, created by and developing under the bureaucratic and industrial imperialism of the British, as it more and more reached the

⁷⁶ Term is used for freedom of explaining Islam.

northern, Muslim parts of India,⁷⁷. Mainly landlords and government servants in UP and Punjab, who were keen to progress under the new dispensation without having giving up their past and cultural heritage, became the main followers of Aligarh school. Still Sir Ahmed Khan's one of the major contributions is his translation work of standard books on politics and economy into Urdu.

Deoband became the center for the former part. The religious seminary at Disband (near Delhi) was founded in 1867 by a group of *Ulemas*⁷⁸ led by Muhammad Qasim Nanaoutovi and Rashid Ahmed Gangohi; both disciples of Imaduallah, a famous divine of the Waliullah School. The seminary gradually established itself as the leading center of learning in the field of Islamic theology in India, and second only to the seminary at Al Azhar (Cairo) in the entire Muslim World. (Prasad: 2000, p.139) The main emphasis was on training in Islamic theology so that they might be able to provide religious guidance to Muslims in regulating their lives according to the tenets of Islam. For them Islamic revivalism is essential to regain the glory of Muslims and that could only be achieved through following the paths of Hadith and Sunnah.

The Bihari Muslims, since most of them, were poor and belonged to the lower castes could not feel integrated with the Aligarh trend, neither they were whole-heartedly acquainted with the Deobandi conventional traditional, though both trends were existent there. Due to their close contacts with Hindu community, it was very difficult for them to strictly follow the rules of Quran and Hadith. However, a middle path of Reza Shah Berelvi was most popular among the Biharis. His teachings were similar to the teachings of Deoband, but major mode of his education was Urdu, which made it more popular and acceptable. The cult of Pir, mazar based popular practices among the Biharis, which are strongly prohibited by Deoband School, were not restricted by Berelvi, though his major emphasis was on the paths of Quran and Hadith. Thus the Bihari Muslims loved to follow the middle path. Even today mazar-based practices are common. Almost all the families are some how follower of any Pir. The more they talk about Islam and express their agitation against Hindus and Bengalis (some believe that Bengalis are not pure Muslims), the less interest in receiving Madrasha education is seen among them. The education they receive or prefer to receive is mostly job-market oriented.

For Biharis, one of the major rituals is saying *Azaan* (call for prayer) *to ears of the newborn*, which implies that accepting the newborn to world as a Muslim. Some of the

⁷⁷ Smith W.C., *Modern Islam in India*, London, 1946.

⁷⁸ Islamic religious scholars.

Biharis, Bengalis are delivering their child in hospitals where no Azaan is recited, the born child is no Muslim at all.

Most of the Biharis are found to say their prayers regularly, irrespective of male and female. Comparatively young people are less sincere in practicing religious task regularly. But belief in Allah and the Prophet is strongly prevailing among them. They often express strong belief in fate (*Taqdir*) since their life compelled them to think that way. The way usually general Muslims used to think that *Taqdir* can be changed by virtue of *Tadbir* (*lobby means following Allah's way*) is not so popular among them rather a feeling of uncertainty prevails their perception.

Maintaining *manat* (sometimes called *minnat*) is a common practice. Manat means a kind of promise made on the wish to realize any wish or desire. Manats can be made on several expectations like marriage, job, having child, examination, and particularly recovery from problems or diseases. One can make *manat* individually, or can go to a particular place like *mazaar* or *dargah* (Shrine) to make *manat*. The promises may have different forms like praying (a particular number of *namaaz* prayers), observing *roza* (fasting), arranging *millad*⁷⁹ to offer feast. The particular feast for *dargah* or *mazar* is called *Shirni*. *Sadka*, giving life instead of life, is very popular in cases of illness and accident. Every Thursday night *zikr* (*incantation*) is observed in the mosques where many of the Bihari males participate.

5.13.1 Pir Cult

Islam of South Asia is often described in terms of syncretism (Gardner 1999). The *Pir* (or *Sufi* saint), it is argued, played a key missionary role in the early days of Islam, allowing the orthodox *Sunni* faith to merge with indigenous culture, and ensuring acceptance amongst the masses. *pirs* are generally charismatic figures or gurus (murshids). Many such figures are belonging with the culture of South Asia.

It is argued that around twenty five Sufis were preaching in Bihar in twelfth century, whilst some orthodox features are usually retained by *sufi* cults, their focus tends to be upon internal pathways to God, rather than the external *adab* (correct procedures). Practices ranging from meditation to tantricism, the use of intoxicants, or song and dance, are often present in the cults, making them more accessible, or so it is argued, to the indigenous population. The implied opposition between orthodoxy and Sufism, is, however problematic. Whilst Sufism may be a popular version of Islam, it can also be highly orthodox. Indeed, the term covers such a broad range of praxis that it is

⁷⁹ Extolments of Prophet Mohammad in group.

almost meaningless. In South Asia, whilst some cults reject the Quran and use tantric means to reach God, others embrace scripturalist doctrine. It is equally impossible to equate Sufism with a little tradition, since it is found all over the world, in cities as well as villages, and amongst the elite as well as the masses.

The category of South Asian *pir* also refuses to be placed in one particular camp: *pirs* are sometimes saints of the highest order-such as Shah Jalal, or the greatest South Asian *pir of all*, *Chishti* of Ajmir. Other living *pirs* are descendants of an original holy man, having inherited the saintly mantle through their ancestry, in the same way that the Caliph is passed through generations. In Bihar, the term may also be used for various spirits that are worshipped by local Hindus, or simply for ordinary *mulla*(clergy) when the speaker wishes to denote particular respect. *Pirs* have committed devotees (*muridan*), many people only visit a *pir* if and when the need arises, and have no real allegiance to any particular figure. The range of characters that claim *pir*-hood, often independently of any existing brotherhood, means that local Sufism tends to have a fragmented and individualistic flavor.

There are a number of *Pirs* and followers among the Biharis. Among them, the *Gadinashin* (presently ascended) *Pir* of Kasuasa Sharif (in Bihar) - Naim *Ashraf* have most of the followers among the Biharis in Syedpur. Tayabji Zilani, a *pir* in Rajshahi though he is a non-Bengali, also has many devotees. In the cults of living *pir*, devotees express extreme deference and subservience. The *pir* is believed to possess special spiritual power, which allows him to communicate directly with God and to perform miracles. These miracles are often used to legitimate their power, as proof of their special relationship to God. What is important is the telling of these miracles, and peoples' belief in them, rather than their objective reality. Only through the *pirs* guidance can God is found. Many Bihari followers of *Pir* cult speak of their need for an intermediary with God, since they are too lowly to approach Him directly.

Followers of different *pirs* belong to almost different sect; on the other hand, followers of same *pir* feel a fellow brother hood feeling-called --- *Murid bhai*. Other followers who are not so involved in the cult may visit the *pirs* at times of particular need--- sickness, economic crisis, marital problems and so on, bringing material offerings(*shinni*) such as sacrificial meat. The *pir* will usually respond to the requests for help with *tabiz* amulets, the giving of *food* (blowing on the supplicant) or in some cases utterance of *dua* (spell or incantation). The effectiveness of these spiritual aids is believed to hinge on how powerful the *Pir* is thought to be or how 'hot'. The graves of *Pir* are venerated as shrines, whilst disciples or male next kin usually inherit their-*pir*-dom. Every year, on the death or birth anniversary of the legendary *Pir* is observed with carnival and great feast involving

religious programs that is usually called '*urash*'. *Urash* is also observed on the birth and death anniversary of the Prophet. People from different areas join these gathering that make it a social and religious gathering as well.

5.14 Rituals and Festivals

In common, Biharis are festival loving community; most of their festivals are based on religious events but observed with so much color and enthusiasm that make these rituals and festivals different from other Muslim community. However, following the middle way, many of the Bihari religious rituals are different from their other fellow Muslim community and often assumed to be influenced by Hindu rituals. For example, lightening (tarabazi) in *Shab-e-Barat* is closely related with the *Dewali* festival among the Hindus of Northern India. Procession of *Tazia* in *Muharram* has similarities with the processions of *Dol* or *Bijaya* procession of Durgapuja. It is not to say that these festivals have similar connotations, rather what I am arguing here is that the way of observation and practices are familiar among the common people.

Bihari people are very much enthusiastic about their festivals; they observe too many festivals a year. Those are mainly religious festivals like *Muharram*, *Eid-ul-Azha*, *Eid-ul-Fitar*, *Eid-A-Miladunnabi*, *Shab-e-Barat*, *Kunda* etc. Bengali Muslims also observe these festivals but there is a distinct difference in observance of Bihari people. Bihari people observe these days in a very colorful and enthusiastic way. In those days, the scenario of Syedpur becomes very special and distinct from the other area of Bangladesh where Bihari people do not exist.

The Biharis observe *Eid-ul-Azha* and *Eid-ul-Fitar* – the two major Muslim festivals with so much enthusiasm that every family tries to wear new dresses, cooks special dishes and visits relatives and friends. In Syedpur, these two religious festivals are observed in very celebratory mood. In observance of these days represent Bihari-Bengali acculturation, I have seen many colorful wall paintings in Syedpur town during these festivals, in those picture there were typical landscapes of Bangladesh, plane green land, huts, river, coconut trees etc. At the same time mountains, girls dressed with *salwar-kamiz* and *urni*, carrying different shaped-waterpots are quite common in those illustrations.

During *Eid-ul-Azha*, Bihari people try to sacrifice animals in the name of Allah if they can afford. Before *Kurbani* (sacrifice), usually they decorate the animal with *mala* (garland), *joris* (golden or silver threads). These are now common practice of urban Bengali people also but it is not common in rural Bangladesh. Before slaughter the animal should be fed with sweets and water and on that occasion female members are allowed to see the sacrifice.

There is a particular specialty in observance of *Eid-e-Miladunnabi*, birth and death anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad. For the Biharis, that day is *jashne juloos*, a jovial procession arranging *naatkhani* and *mushaera* in different places of the town. During *Shab-e-Barat*, the practice of distributing home-made sweets, especially *halooa* and *roti*, kindling at night, exploding crackers are not Bengali Muslims' own practice. Syedpur, in *Shab-e-Barat* takes a very outstanding stand, the whole city never sleeps at that night, and people spend the whole night with prayer. Children are seen playing with *tarabaji* at the street, also in late night is a very common feature, thousands of people rushing towards mosques or towards graveyards through the entire night.

There are not a gulf of difference between Bengali and Bihari people in observance and beliefs about above-mentioned religious days and festivals. But *Muharram* is the distinctive festival that (history) makes the differences, especially in observance of *Muharram* between Bengali and Bihari people. It is commonly believed by Bengali Muslims that most of the Bihari people are *shiaite* and they observe *Muharram* in a very colorful and at the same time in a very mournful ways. In reality, the *shiaites* consist a small fragment of the 50-60 thousands Biharis in Syedpur. There are only 100-150 *shiaite* people among the total non-Bengali population. *Shiaites*, Bengalis and Bihari observe this day in their respective ways. Bengali *Sunnis*⁸⁰ observe *Muharram* with prayer and due respect too, but they consider the activities of Bihari people are too much and these are kind of violations of Islam.

From the first day of Arabic calendar month *Muharram* the *Shiaites* start *matam*- it is loud lamentation with the description of *Karbala battle*. *Marsia*- a form of lyric describes the *Karbala battle* and the heart-rending death of Imam Hossain. With this description *shiaite* men and women hit their chests with their own hands.

Muharram

18-02-2005

“The whole city was looking different than the other days. Approximate 60-70 thousands Urdu speaking people of Syedpur were in very enthusiastic mood. *Muharram* the festival, through which we can recognize the Biharis as a community. Like all Muslim religious festivals Bengali also observe the 10th of *Muharram* (*Ashura*). The Biharis observe this festival throughout the month. The sounds of drum beating was in everywhere of the city. A number of groups were collecting money for *Tajia* procession. I found everybody irrespective of age, gender, class was so much enthusiastic. Ana, a boy of 13 years old, he told me about the *pikes*, he also introduced me with the number of *pikes* who were

⁸⁰ Sunni is the major sect in Islam, there are other sects. Shiates are different from the Sunnis, because they also consider Hazrat Ali .Prophet's son-in-law as an important religious person.

roaming the city with bear foot. They will do that up to 10th, they started from the 7th of Muharram, during this time they would not eat salty food. He told “our parents, grand parents did *manat* (a kind of promise or commitment) in the name of Imam Hossain, we have to wear pike (soldier) dress and abide by all the instruction of the *khalifa*”. Usually parents do *manat* for the recovery illness of their issues. *Manat*'s range can be last one year to life long time. *Khalifa* is the chief authority of an Imam Bara. Imam Bara is that place where the *Tajia* is installed. The big red and green flags were flapping everywhere. People were coming to Imam bara with their foods to do *Fateha*, after the *fateha* food could be offered to others to eat. From the *saptami* to *nabami* (7th to 9th Muharram) people do many things like *marsia* (song of lamentation), *Natkhani*, playing with bamboo sticks called *jharna khela*, displaying sword fight and *lathi khela*. I have observed these activities through out the night, it seems that people do not sleep in those days. After the *tajia* procession on the 10th, that structure

(normally it is a shape of mosque, a war tent or fort structure made with paper, wood and other things) is brought again on the *Imam Bara*. All the things, which are used in *Muharram* activities, notified as sacred things. The symbols of *Karbala* like *duldul* horse, *pak panjaton*, flags, even the playing materials, pike's dresses, and ropes everything is being brought. It is not allowed to perish these things; those are buried in religious way that is why Bihari people call this process as *Dafan*. *Mushaera* and *Kawali* are happened on that occasion throughout the night. Except the 100 to 150 *shiaite* Muslims family all are *Sunnis* in Syedpur, *Shiaite* Muslims observe *ashura* from the first day of the month, and started *matam* at least till the *teeja*. On the 13th both community (*shiaite*, *sunni*) observe *teeja* as the *kulkhani*⁸¹ of Imam Hossain.

Shiaite Muslims carry a cradle (*Jhula*) and coffin (*Tabud*) instead of *Tajia*. they also carry a red spotted big white flag called *Alamdardar*, and a number of black flags all these represent the sad memory of *Karbala* battle field. They used to *matam* in the *Muharram* procession. They hit themselves on the chests with their hands and chant lyrics of *Karbala* battle. They used to use knives, blades, chains for shedding blood but in recent days they aborted that practice due to the prohibition of the state. Now-a-days *shiaites* of Syedpur arrange blood donation in memory of bloodshed of *Karbala*.

From the first day of *Muharram* to the last day, there are so many practices. At the first day a little amount of soil, collected from a holy place called *Karbala* by the local people, is put in the *Imam Bara* (a preserved place where the *Tajia* to be placed) by the respective *Khalifa* (who is in charge of *Imam Bara*) and in last day of the festival, he conducts the *Dafan*.

5.14.1 Fateha

Reading in every religious day and festivals *Fateha* is indispensable. Before taking and distributing foods and sacrificed meats to other fellows *Fateha* is essential. Reciting *Fateha* is a very common practice to offer something like foods, things use in religious purpose. They recite *fateha* for the sacrificed meat of *Kurbani*, same they do in *shab-e-barat*, it is for making the foods sacred which they offer to in the name of Allah for getting blessings. Urdu speaking people read *fateha* in marriage, *sunnat-e-khatna*,

⁸¹ Religious ceremony, observed after the death of a Muslim.

(circumcision) on *birthdays* of religious men, in the birth and death anniversary of Prophet Muhammad, *Barapir* (great *pir*) Abdul Kader Jilani and also in Muharram. Bihari people considered this month as a month of mourning and the highest sacrifice for Islam as well as bravery.

All foods and the things, which are used in Muharram like *jhandas* (flags), dresses, other materials used in *Tajia* procession, playing materials, and weapons for show respect to the memories of Karbala battle need to be sacred through *Fateha*. In *fateha*, four suras from Koran, which are started from the same Arabic word *kul* (sura *nas*, *falak*, *kaferun*, *ekhlas*), *dorud* (extolments of prophet) of the prophet and sura *fateha* are the main verses.

5.15 Associations

5.15.1 Mushaera

*“Sukh nagariko chor ke apni
Dhukh nagrime aye log
Sab kuch to malum tha lekin
Jane che dhoka khae log
Maey ne manga pear ka sagar
Jahar badane ko aye log.....”*

“Leaving the city of happiness, people come to the city of miseries. Everything was comprehended but people were cheated. I beg the ocean of love, but people come to increase poison”.

This *sher* (piece of poetry) is written by late Ahmed Rizvi, a renowned *shaer* (poet) of Syedpur. In its every line the pains of migrants are depicted. They left their homeland for a dream but they got an unsecured and miserable life. The Bihari people of Syedpur love poetry (they call it *Gazal*), the meaning of this word actually the narration of beauty of women. Women, Sharab (wine), love, God, are the main area of interest to a *shaer* who writes *gazals*. Every *gazal* must have minimum 14 lines; a *sher* consists of two lines. The first two lines of a *gazal* is called *matla*, the last two lines are called *makta*, just the before *sher of makta*, is called *akheri*, usually in that *sher* the poet included his or her name. In what way and where the poets recite their *shers* or *gazals* before their audience, is called *Mushaera*. When people gather for a mirthful occasion, the gathering is called *Mehfil*. The word *Majlish* means very objective gathering, it has very certain objective. The gathering of listening and reciting poetry is called *Mushaera Mehfil*. The poets recite

their shers in very cordial way (which is called *Adab*), in reply of audience *shaer* used to bow the audience with *Salam* (salute), within the recitation the audience also participates with their comments that makes the session very lively. When they (the audience) are moved or agreed with the view of poets they used to comment like *beshakh* (certainly), *bahut khoob* (very good), *wah* (a sound of admiration). When the poet seek permission for recite further, then audience give the permission with citing word *ershad* (o.k. you can recite). The very distinct characteristic of a *Mushaera* is two-way participation. The poet and the audience both are directly connected throughout the whole session of a *Mushaera*.

In Syedpur no occasion of Bihari people can be held without *Mushaera*, in religious festivals, *Naatkhani Mushaera* (admiration of Prophet Muhammad) is a must.

5.15.2 Kawali

It is a form of music of northern part of Indian subcontinent; Kawali is a group vocal participation. It is popular mainly in Muslims of India; this vocal musical form is borne by the Indian *Sufis* who came to spread Islam not through the sword but through love. Many Muslim *Sufis* encouraged music to get the almighty. In the hand of the followers of those Sufis, *Kawali* was formed. In *kawali* there is one or two main singers, and the rest just follow the main vocalists with rhythmic claps. This troupe is called *kawals*. In Syedpur *kawali* is very popular. In every mirthful, religious event they like to arrange and participate in *kawali*. Throughout the night people like to listen to *kawalis*. A *kawal* said to me that in the winter season people of Syedpur get *kawali* fever, you could hear the *kawalis* in almost every night.

5.15.3 Circumcision (Sunnat-E-Khatna)

It is observed in Bihari community, almost with as marriage ceremonial enthusiasm. In old days singing, dancing, drum beating were very common on that occasion. The boy who will get to be circumcised, at first he takes *oju* (cleaning some parts of body with water), then wear new dress after that he says a short prayer or do *sejda* in a masque. After those activities, usually father bring him on the yard or place where family men give turmeric touch on his body. Then the main time arrives, in old days *hajam* (who do it with traditional equipment like bamboo made blade) did the main task, at present most cases are done by the doctor. On the 10th of Muharram, there is a tradition to do Khatna in that day. In previous days, these occasional programs took three to seven successive days. Nowadays it is one to two days occasion.

5.16 Security and Property Rental/Bank Accounts /Passports

Issues of insecurity in the camps were also regularly reported by the community. In camps, insecurity took the form of camp gangs, drugs and a lack of police protection, while outside the camp security issues related to encroachments onto camps land by Bengalis, and the camp residents' inability to complain, appeal or fight against the dominant community. Without legal support the Urdu-speaking community remains vulnerable to exploitation and abuse

A number of respondents reported difficulties in trying to access or rent offices or living space in attempts to leave the camps and be assimilated in the wider society. Access to bank accounts is also denied on account of their lacking a permanent address. Camp-dwellers also desire passports, and the opportunities associated with labour migration, but these too are inaccessible given their camp status.

5.17 Conclusion

The findings and discussions above suggest that there are great varieties of cultural behaviors, norms and practices that the Urdu-speakers belong to. And more importantly, despite their cultural assimilation, which is taking place over last sixty years, still there exists tendency to inhere norms and behaviors which certainly allow them to have a particular identity. As Geertz (1973) argued the rituals are important to describe where collective meanings are expressed. I believe that in their norms and rituals particularly in marriage, *biradari* system, *Mushaera*, *Kawali*, *pir cults* and even in daily food intakes they invoke their identity that distinguish them from Bengalis and also among themselves. This 'identity' is one which they themselves want to maintain, not a labeling by outsiders of their community. Nevertheless as 'Biharis' are significantly not a homogeneous community, though there are commonalities. The still-existing *biradrai system* establishes caste boundaries, whereas *Mushaeras* and *Kawwalis* are occasions where boundaries are dissolved. This identity formation and boundary maintenance are the specific spheres where they have their own agency. But when the external crisis and realities, label them differently, that not only put their life in a crisis but also shatter all these boundaries and identities they want to maintain within the community.

Chapter 6

Living in Diaspora

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses how historical events are re-interpreted and perpetuated by different people. Never before in South Asian history did so few decide the fate of so many. And rarely did so few ignore the sentiments of so many in the subcontinents. Such impressions need to be reflected in our historical discourse. In public memory, however the violent disturbing realities that accompanied partition have remained blanketed in silence. And yet in private, the voices of have never been stilled and its ramifications have not yet ended. Urvashi Butalia (1998) in her book *The Other Side of Silence*, the outcome of a decade of interviews and research looks at what Partition was intended to achieve and how it worked on the ground, and in people's lives. By taking suggestions from James young(1990) she also argues “ it is not only the ‘facts’ of any event are important, but equally how people remember those facts, and how they represent them’(Butalia.1998 :p-10) The question might well be extended to ‘Biharis’, for how do we know this event except through the ways in which it has been handed down to them, through fiction, memories, testimonies, through memories individual and collective, through the communalism it unleashed and, only as one of these aspects, through the histories produced. This collection of memories, individual and collective, familial and historical, is what make-up the reality of Biharis’. They illuminate what one might call the ‘underside’ of its history. They are the ways in which we can know this event. In many senses they are the “history’ of the event.

In this chapter I examine the effects of violence, trauma, exile, identity shifting and and remaining in a state as ‘stateless’ on individual lives, how survivors grapple with ‘normal’ life thereafter and, importantly, the implications of trying to retrieve long suppressed memories decades later.

Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle discloses a productive ambiguity in the classical Greek conception of truth. While truth is linked to the deconcealment of ‘beings themselves’, its opposite is not untruth, as the latter connotes the *distortion* of beings and not just their hiddenness. Untruth exists, therefore, ‘where something is lacking in truth’ (Heidegger, 2002a: 64). Moreover, untruth does not correspond to non-truth (in the sense of the falsity of propositions that do not agree with the world), as this presupposes a mode of being which stands as truth (e.g. a transparent encounter with things as they are). An important aspect of Heidegger's reading (2002a: 71) is to show how Aristotle detaches

truth from untruth, and excludes the latter: 'the only possible opposite to this kind of deconcealment is undeconcealment (*unentborgenheit*), which, however, can never, according to its own nature be distortion or untruth'

Weber notes that the 'persistent effect of the old ways and of childhood reminiscences continue as a source of native country sentiment among emigrants even when they have become so thoroughly adjusted to the new country' (Weber, 1987, p.18). This discussion and definition clearly sits well with the experiences of the Biharis in Syedpur. Most of the old-aged respondents suggested that mentally and ideologically, their loyalties still lay with the motherland as it was the country of their birth and as Weber's argument suggests, they feel that memories of their childhood spent in Bangladesh and the fact that they have physical similarities with non-Bengali people from Bangladesh acts as a 'source of native country sentiment' even though they have been residing in Syedpur for over forty years. For example, one respondent powerfully claimed that *'my mother, my brother, my sister are all in Bangladesh. I was born and brought up in Bangladesh, I still have happy memories of my childhood with Bengali friends, emotionally, I have belonged to Bangladesh'* (Source: Interview). This powerful statement opens up Anderson's debate surrounding nationalism, identity, territorial boundaries and the role of the state.

I base this research on the assumption that attributing an identity to some thing or some one is constitutive; it does not simply relay an already existing character but *posits* a character for that object or person. It is important to consider life lived in place as distinct from life imagined or memorized in an identity discourse. One moves across a landscape which one recognizes and engages in terms of the practices one carries out in and on it. Some domains are significant in terms of their relation to kinship relations, others in terms of other practices of reproduction carried out upon them - growing and consuming the foodstuffs one lives on, spinning and supporting the web of sociality which maintains one's self and community.

6.2 Nurturing Memories: Transmission

Exchanging and sharing narratives of place, whether traumatic, nostalgic or political in nature, has the potential to create and redefine local kinship groups and identities, as well as to revitalise local struggles and create a sense of common history for people "at home" and "abroad". Shared and contested struggles over place contribute to the overall process of producing translocal social fields. Thus, it is my interest to show that even in times of globalisation and transnational migration, people always find themselves in some relationship to the places they move through. They are never "nowhere". In this context, I understand "place" not so much as a fixed and stable given but rather as a process of

construction and reconstruction. People understand, narrate and engage with “their places” in different ways, depending on the specific time, place and historical situation as well as on their gender, age and class, and on their social and economic environment. It is, therefore, my specific interest to explore how narratives of place and processes of place-making are linked to movement and migration experiences. How does people's perception of their “place of origin” change from a distance and/or over time and how do places change through people's movement? Finally, As compared to the long history of anthropological studies on collective remembering, the question of how the social construction of ‘forgetting’ works has received only scant attention. Yet forgetting is undisputably an inseparable part of any process of social memory construction. Scholars argue that there is no straightforward relationship of artifacts to memory as is suggested by the general western mode of thinking, but that these may just as well serve as agents of forgetting⁸². From an anthropological perspective, the examples included present highly interesting studies of the social construction of memory through processes of in and exclusion. Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle discloses a productive ambiguity in the classical Greek conception of truth. While truth is linked to the deconcealment of ‘beings themselves’, its opposite is not untruth, as the latter connotes the *distortion* of beings and not just their hiddenness. Untruth exists, therefore, ‘where something is lacking in truth’⁸³ an important aspect of Heidegger’s reading⁸⁴ is to show how Aristotle detaches truth from untruth, and excludes the latter: ‘the only possible opposite to this kind of deconcealment is undeconcealment (*unentborgenheit*), which, however, can never, according to its own nature be distortion or untruth’. Now we would look at the nationalist history of Bangladesh where the miseries of Biharis have seriously been excluded for long.

The research explores that often the elder people of the Biharis have an idea of their childhood where ‘previous residence’, which had been big and spacious, where they were happy and lived happily with other communities, even with the Hindus. The description of previous houses could be explained as a relief from present bitter living in small rooms. Interestingly, rarely they mentioned of any communal dispute before 1947. One reason for such construction which may some extent become an exaggeration is to get relief of the present they suffering. Here while the spontaneous constructions are not socio-politically shaped.

⁸² Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler, eds. 1999. *The Art of Forgetting*. Oxford and New, Detienne argues, in the increasingly nationalist research orientation of (French) historians. Marcel Detienne. 1999. *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*. New York: Zone Books

⁸³ Martin Heidegger, (1997: 64).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

On the other hand, conscious socio-political ideologies also construct memories where some memories supersede the others, thus while describing their youth they talked a lot about the Hindu-Muslim discrimination and so on. Similarly they talk about the Pakistan period and Bangladesh. Such memories are not only individual, these are shared, nurtured and transmitted to generation and also negotiated in understanding how identities are produced and reproduced in translocal social contexts.

Where does this power of place come from? What makes it, especially in the hands of poets, intellectuals and politicians, such an effective means of arousing collective sentiment and mobilising common action? This is where it becomes helpful to introduce Appadurai's contribution to the construction of a general theory of 'locality production' and, in particular, what he has to say about the 'contextual' nature of locality. He defines locality as a 'phenomenological quality', or 'dimension' of social life, to be distinguished from 'neighbourhood', which he defines as an 'actually existing' social form in which locality is 'realized' (1996, 178-9). He chooses 'neighbourhood' as an alternative to 'place', on the grounds that neighbourhood 'suggests sociality, immediacy and reproducibility' (op. cit., p. 204). I do not think it would misrepresent his meaning to treat 'locality' as synonymous with 'sense of place'.

Looked at in this way, one can ask how the relationship between locality, as sense of place, and neighbourhood, as a 'substantive social form' is affected by what Giddens calls the 'dynamism of modernity' (Giddens, 1991, p. 20). Appadurai is at pains to point out that, in both modern and pre-modern settings, locality is an inherently fragile social achievement. Even in the most intimate, spatially confined, geographically isolated situations, locality must be maintained carefully against various kinds of odds (1996, p. 179).

Despite the fact that most anthropologists who write about such situations take locality, as do their subjects, for granted, the ethnographic record is full of evidence that 'hard and regular work' (Appadurai 1996:180) is needed to produce and maintain a sense of place. This 'work' includes everything from the building of houses and settlements to rituals of all kinds. Rituals of naming and initiation are particularly relevant to place-making because, with their spatial and temporal symbolism, they are designed to produce 'local subjects, actors who properly belong to a situated community of kin, neighbours, friends and enemies' (Appadurai 1996:179). The work of locality production is, always and everywhere, a constant struggle to keep at bay 'an endemic sense of anxiety and instability in social life' (Appadurai 1996:179).

We cannot expect to get very far then, in understanding the impact of modernity on locality production, unless we go beyond the initial insight that locality is everywhere an

‘inherently fragile achievement’. What can take us further, I believe, is Appadurai’s analysis of ‘the problem of context’. I have found this analysis particularly helpful in thinking about the recent experience of the Biharis, as they have been drawn into the locality producing ‘camps’ of Bashbari. Many of them said that they did not want to leave camp even though they could afford because of many reasons. Inside the camp, there are all Biharis, they can speak in their own language, and more importantly there is no one with whom they felt to be ‘contested’. But those who psychologically belong to present day Bangladesh have the feeling of belongingness because they could connect their existence through their neighbouring relations and other relations. As such, it was easy for the to have feeling of locality

Monsoor Alam Murad (52), a commercial artist, borne in Parbatipur. In his boyhood he had a lot of Bengali friends, He studied in an Urdu school, but he had Bengali school friends. He can recall his Urdu speaking teachers, along with them he remembers his Bengali teacher Mr. Mokbul, he loves him very much. In 1971 he passed S.S.C exam with first division. He wanted to be a doctor, after the independence he could not continue his study because his Urdu medium background and his father’s job termination.

“My father and my grand parents migrated in East Pakistan during partition of 1947. I had come to know from my father that they left their country India with a dream of separate land of the Muslims. Hindu people killed my paternal uncle and aunts, looted our assets, money and destroyed our houses. Neheru, Patel were the leaders of the riots and the partition. We lost everything Hindus were the beneficiaries”. His father was a railway worker, he opted for East Pakistan. After coming in a new land they resided in a bogie few months at last they got allocation of railway quarter. People of East Pakistan received us warmly. People of this land were plain living, they were not rich, and they wore short cloths like Chakmas. Hindu and Marwari businessmen exploited them, after the partition maximum Hindus were gone, we replaced them. Those days were fine, with Bengali people and other Indian migrants like Marwaries we resided here peacefully. After the language movement of 1952 situation was not the same as it was before. Mr. Jinnah was not right, the demand of language movement of Bengali people was right indeed. With this opinion he also added that after 1971 we people lost our own right of mother tongue in Bangladesh, which country has a glorious history of fighting for mother tongue. I was compelled to leave study and dream of becoming a doctor because of my Urdu medium education.

In 1970 we lived in north yard of Parbatipur Junction, political unrests were increasing day by day, some Bengali people set fire on our house we fled to new colony of Parbatipur. In December of 1971 we took shelter in Syedpur because of most of the attacked and feared Biharis of adjacent areas gathered in Syedpur city. Syedpur was captured by the West Pakistani military and the Biharis throughout the nine months of independence war.

In 1971 Monsoor Alam was 14, he can recall those days, but he does not want to, “My children want to know about those days, but it is very much painstaking to me. “ He managed to get his name in the voter list after four years of liberation. He has relatives both India and Pakistan. He visited India, to see his ancestral land in 1972, but he backed. He wants his children live in this country with Bangladeshi identity, with respect. Which is his wataan? In reply he said

Bangladesh. I borne here, it's my country, if she denies and I get citizenship in another country I will go there with my family as I need right, I need identity.

Neighbourhoods - the 'substantive social forms' in which locality is 'realised' - imply context in two setting' for the conduct of meaningful human action and for the production of 'local subjects' (Appadurai, 1996:184). Second they *require* and *produce* contexts: they have to be carved out from 'some sort of hostile or recalcitrant environment' which may include other neighbourhoods (Appadurai, 1996:186). In this sense, 'The production of a neighborhood is inherently colonizing' because it 'involves the assertion of socially...organized power over places and settings that are viewed as potentially chaotic or rebellious' (ibid. : 183-4). Appadurai calls this the 'context-generative' quality which is a necessary aspect of all locality production. But although all neighbourhoods are 'inherently colonizing', some are more colonizing than others. What makes the difference is '.....the relationships between the contexts that neighbourhoods create and those they encounter. This is a matter of social power and of the different scales of organization and control within which particular spaces (and places) are embedded' (ibid. p. 186).

Second, leaving the link between place and personhood ambiguous, tacitly confirms the nationalist view of the world which was responsible for creating the so-called 'refugee problem' in the first place. Hanna Arendt, in *Origins of Totalitarianism*, writes that what was 'unprecedented' about the condition of European refugees at the end of the Second World War was 'not the loss of a home, but the impossibility of finding a new one.....This moreoverwas not a problem of space but of political organization..' (1966, pp. 293-94). It was a problem, that is, of the political organization of space according to the nation-state model, which takes for granted the isomorphism of people, culture and territory. Commenting on Arendt's use of the word 'home' in this passage, Nicholas Xenos notes that 'home here signifies a place in the world in so far as such a place makes... action meaningful through shared understandings and a shared interpretation of action' (1996, p. 243)

He goes on to distinguish this meaning of home, which accords closely with Appadurai's 'neighbourhood', from 'homeland'. 'Homelands are places that are unchanging and to which one must return no matter how hostile they may be to the returnee'. Homes, by contrast, 'can be made and remade, if there is space for them' Therefore, when the Biharis by their country of origin and also the country they live in, 'Pakistan' was the only place left for them with which they could relate that oneday their ancestors came to then Pakistan and was accepted .As such *watan* –the homeland have different meanings to different people –some connect it with land of origin, some with land of dream (Pakistan) and some with present living.

6.3 Interpretation of 'history'

How should one look at the history? Nevertheless people have their own interpretations that eventually reshape the history and facts. As compared to the long history of anthropological studies on collective remembering, the question of how the social construction of forgetting works has received only scant attention. Yet forgetting is undisputably an inseparable part of any process of social memory construction

Muhammad Mushtaq

Md Mushtaq (55), son of Moinuddin Ahmed, an eminent Bihari leader of Muslim League in the 1960s lives in Bihari camp in Mirpur, Dhaka. Being a child of an affluent family, his childhood spent in much luxury. He studied in renowned education institutions like Saint Gregory's School, Wills Little Flower English medium school and Quaid E Azam College. Ironically, none of his sons except the youngest one could ever go to school.

On March 25, 1971, on the day of Operation Search Light we wake up in the midnight with heavy sounds of anti-aircraft gun and brush fire. I could never think of such a military action on public even in my wildest hunch. However, the night passed and I came out to see our neighbour Engineer sahib, who was also Bihari. We were saying, today we did not hear *azan* (call for prayer). Then I saw Shah shaheb, our Benglai neighbour going to the mosque. He recited *azan* and said his prayer. Suddenly a group of Biharis comprising arrived having sticks and knives in their hands. Having red *puttee* (a piece of cloth) on head and chanting slogan "Pakistan Zindabad" the group proceeded towards the mosque. A Bihari, named Abul who had come from kolkata in 1964, was leading the procession. Seeing this, we ran towards the mosque. By this few minutes, they attacked Shah Shaheb, stabbed him desperately and left the place. We repented that if we would have joined him for prayer, such accident might not take place. However, we called on nurse who was also our neighbour and she advised to take him immediately to any hospital. I, myself driving our car took him to hospital. On the way, I was encountered by Abul, he addressed me as a 'broker' of Bengalies. Shah Shaheb died at night in hospital. I went to his house. His son and my friend Shahin went in hiding; only the women – Shah Shaheb's wife, daughter and a sister were staying there. I brought them along with me; they stayed in our flat for three months. Then they went to their relative's house.

By this time, Abul became the leader of the Biharis who murdered many Bengalies and looted the many houses. Our family physicians Dr. Mallik and his family members were brutally murdered. My father saved and rescued a number of Bengali families. The stunning surprise was still waiting for me. On December 16, 1971 I came out of our house and saw that a procession was coming chanting 'Joy Bangla'—and the procession was led by none other than Abul!

We, the Biharis who came immediately after Partition, always had a good relationship with local Bengalies. A bulk of Biharis came after the Kolkata riot in 1964, not from Bihar but from kolkata. These newcomers were always vindictive to local people and mostly they were the perpetrators in all crimes during 1971. This people also disliked us because we were affluent and had a prestige in society.

I was imprisoned on January 16, 1972 and set free on March. While I was in jail, I heard that my father was shot dead by Muktibahini. My maternal uncles were

killed too. My grandfather's brother went to find my uncle, and none of them returned home. The Bengalis occupied our three house, car and 16 katha plots in Manipuripara. My mother could save her 150 *bhari* (1500 gram) gold ornaments. A Bengali friend of my father gave us shelter. However, I was the only living adult male member along with other fourteen females(my mother, five sisters and two brothers, six cousins, widowed aunt) went to Mohammadpur school camp. We shifted Mirpur camp in 1973.

Depending on my mother's ornaments I started business. Nevertheless, my father's old Bengali friends supported me in many ways. At present, my sons are grown up, but I could not afford to educate them. But I think I am not responsible for this, history and time shaped our life this way. I founded an association named Welfare Mission of Biharis. Our major objective is the welfare and rehabilitation of the Biharis .

Veena Das (1998) provides a valuable counter-argument to these critical reflections on human rights machinery. Although Das is fully aware of the denial of experience through law and the perils of instrumentalization, she makes the case for a more public role for anthropologists, and she recounts her own experiences of gathering testimony to be used in legal indictments in cases of communal violence in India. The article argues for a more engaged and public role for anthropology in bringing to light the 'eventedness of everyday life' and reflecting upon the tension between this domain and that of state/legal discourse.

Madina, Begum, she claimed that now her age is 100 years. She sales banana, olive on the street in Syedpur. She was borne in Banaras of Uttar pradesh of India. She got married there; her husband worked in Lilua (railway workshop) factory. In the year of partition her husband sent her with the children to Syedpur but he stayed in India for his assets and land. She says that partition snatched land, home, assets from us but I lost my parents even my husband also. I left my motherland with the dream of land of Muslims, my husband transferred to Syedpur railway workshop but he did not come. I am not happy with the partition of 47 which took such miseries in my life. In spite of that I would be happy if Pakistan sustained, war would not have happened.

I came here with my children, At first we resided in an abandoned bogie of train, local people were then very compassionate. I fought a lot for my family member's survival. After the language movement of Bengali people, mistrust begun to increase between two communities. In reply of a question "Who were the beneficiaries of these historical events like the partition and the independence of Bangladesh?" she said in striate way "First the Hindus and later the Bengali people. I think that it is better not to know the fact because nurturing of bitter memories may bring the hatred that will cost more."

She visited India before 71 when her husband was ill after one week she came back. Her relatives still live in India but she does not want to go there, because she does not know whether living in India will be less hazardous, when she does not have any assets.

She has strong opposition of political activities, she cited some historical years like 52, 54, 65, 69 and 71, the political meetings, processions all these made her life difficult. "Political leaders were busy with the job of making hostility among the Biharis and Bengali. I hate politics".

After 16th December she did not give option to go Pakistan but she was then interested to go India “I wanted to know that what was the mystery, for that my husband left me and his children and did not come here. “

Now she is a voter, with a positive drive she included her name after a number of years of independence. She thinks that she enjoys all social rights like other Bengali in Syedpur, “If my children could have learnt Urdu” she sighed. She knows that the language was the main issue of hostility that is why she also thinks that this demand may create unrest.

“Remembering all these things I want to be identified as Urdu speaking Bangladeshi, I do not want to remind, even in mistake, the memories of miseries, riots, partition, war, bloodshed. I myself want to forget, my children also do not want to hear since there is no use of these remembrances. I advise the future generation, live like brothers the Bengalis, the Hindus, the Biharis. Keep the promises that no more bloodsheds among the brothers. My life is ending what more can I expect?

Therefore, the way Biharis remember their grief is similar to the way Bengalis talk about their suffering caused by Biharis. Rarely each group identify their part that caused suffering to the other. Even if they do, there are justifications.

6.4 Shared feelings: Cultural Heritage

Artifacts of culture -- which we collect and arrange, like butterflies, to display the history of civilization -- are instruments and icons of civilizing power: we appropriate and deploy their past in the present but they also bear the legacy of their earlier uses for the same ends. So historians face the problem of how to treat this evidence historically without succumbing to it. For civilizing power only works in history: it has been preserved historically and deployed to create convincing histories. There is no world of freedom outside civilization -- where history is pure agency and contingency -- but civilizations are historical phenomena and to comprehend them we need methods that escape their civilizing power/knowledge.

Nevertheless, if one unequivocally speaks of a Bihari diaspora, it is because other forces have emerged to cement the widely disparate elements from the Indian sub-continent into a ' Bihari ' community. One can point, for example, to Urdu language, Muharram, Kwwali and food. The popular Urdu language provides a considerable element of commonalty to Bihari communities, even among those where Hindi is also spoken, a profound homage to the Urdu's rootedness in the deep mythic structures of Muslim identity. Across the globe, the popular Urdu commands an extraordinary commitment from Indian Muslims. Bihari communities everywhere are also showing evidence of an alarming susceptibility to a resurgent Islam; and if Muslims in India are willing to accept the idea of a pluralistic Islam, diasporic Bihari appear to know the meaning and contours of Islam better than Muslims in Bengal.

Likewise, Biharis routinely invoke Muslim identity with a self-assurance that would be both mocked and contested. Finally, in the matter of food, one beholds with amazement how *Mughlai* food has become *the* cuisine of India, entirely synonymous with Muslim food. In the Bihari Diaspora, the plurality of India is condemned to disappear, even as the most esoteric traditions are given a fresh burst of life, and a unitary vision of 'Indian Muslimness', and of north India, appears poised to dominate

6.5 Rituals: Meanings

Within this tension, a slow cultural accumulation process is going on. At present, third generation of Biharis is living in Bangladesh. Their life and living are acquainted with Bangladesh while their dream and vision belong to Pakistan, the country where their ancestors did not live in. They have their deliberate practices to keep on their cultural identity and heritage, while assimilations of cultural phenomena are obvious. Nevertheless, in their daily life, they interact with the mainstream Bengalis, therefore, over the period many things have been changed. As such, their cultural identity is also being maintained, shifted and modified. Where does the identity really belong? And where does lie the conflict of identity? Is it in the behaviors or practices or in the shared feelings and cognition that at some point become explicit but remain implicit unendingly?

6.6 Perception of Self: Who are 'They'?

Over the past thirty years, literature regarding identity politics among resettled refugees and immigrants has grown to abundance. Indeed, identity is one of the key points of analysis in refugee life and mechanisms of refugee control (1991). Malkki confirms this, writing, "identity is a highly mouldable, dynamic key-element in the creation of peoples' (self-) images, especially when it comes to refugeeness" (1992: 308).

Jamaluddin

Jamaluddin was born in Patna in 1944. His father was a government official in the Customs department. In the beginning of 1946, the family shifted to Bogra (in East Bengal) due to his father's transfer. After Partition, his father was transferred to Railway department. Jamaluddin's other two brothers and sisters were born in Bogra and Rangpur. Jamaluddin passed secondary exams in 1966 and higher secondary level in 1968. He studied in renowned schools and colleges of Rangpur, where he had many fellow Bengali classmates. He got admitted to Dhaka university and completed his BA(honors) in 1970. He had a dream to appear at the East Pakistan Civil Service exam to join government services. But he could not realize it because by this time war started. His father died in the same year. He returned to Rangpur.

"That was a difficult time. Being the eldest son, I had to take the responsibility of the family. The Punjabi soldiers used to insist to join them; on the other hand, Bengalis looked with suspicion. All these made our life difficult. There was no

way to go back to Patna. And therefore, like other non-Bengalies I also found it the right decision to go to Pakistan. I was compelled to take this decision because by this time we had to leave our government house, because of my father's death. After Independence of Bangladesh, there was a policy to send the government non-Bengali officers to Pakistan on a priority basis. Since the railway department was under the Province government, not directly controlled by the central government our shifting became delayed. Then I applied to District commissioner and also to Major General Mustafizur Rahman, the Commander of Rangpur regiment. Major general ordered me to prepare a list of non-Bengali civil servants' families living in Rangpur. I made the list by four days and seeing the list he arranged to send all the 317 families to Pakistan. It was Nasim Khan (later on the leader of SPRGRC) did not allow us to go with the logic that if the government officials go back, other general Biharis would not be able to go back. I had a severe argument with him. I opposed his claim as the leader of all stranded Pakistanis. Finally, he managed to postpone our movement and we got stuck. Even later on, I had to face problems created by him. He always disliked me, because I never supported him as a leader of the Stranded Pakistanis.

In 1973, I shifted my family to Dhaka. We started live in a small rented house in Mirpur. I tried desperately for a job, but at that time it was really hard for a non-Bengali to get a job. In 1974, one of my Bengali friends informed me that a company was looking for a non-Bengali person who could efficiently speak and type English. I got a job there. My salary was 350 taka per month. I continued my job there upto 1990, till the company got closed. Starting from 350 taka my salary increased upto 4000 taka per month. The owner of the factory was a Bengali and he was a kind-hearted person. The manager was a Hindu and always looked for my faults. He always reminded me that I am non-Bengali and my task is to become oppositions to the Bengalis. And he also used to complain to the owner against me. I showed the proof to the owner and that manager was discharged. Then owner recruited me as the manager, again the Accountant of the office opposed: "they are non-Bengali collaborators and there is no difference between a Hindu and non-Bengali collaborators". Still our proprietor appointed me as the manager. Unfortunately owner died next year and his sons closed the industry. Then I joined another industry where the owner was non-Bengali and I felt that I was not being properly evaluated then I left that job. Now I am working in Gaco Pharma and get salary of Taka 4000.

We don't have the ability to alter something which Allah already fixed for us, but I only did not compromise where I had to lose my dignity.

I got married in 1976. It is the same year while my two brothers and brother-in-law (sister's husband) moved to Pakistan. They also insisted me to go. I did not go because at that time I was just newly married and had an apprehension whether I would get job there. And above all, I have an involvement with this country, if I am given opportunity to go to Pakistan I won't go. This is my country and I was brought here. My brothers are here. I won't like to say that I did not get anything in this country. A number of Bengalis are also living in distress, like many non-Bengalis are also well-off than me. I just regret for keeping my sons illiterate. Being an educated it is really unbearable if you see your sons are not educated only because of monetary problems.

I firmly believe that the claim as 'Stranded Pakistani' actually augmented the crisis of the camp-residents. Due to this demand, the local bengalies think that all the non-bengalies are fascinated for Pakistan which is not true. It is mostly the

members of that particular group who are responsible for having the negative of the camp- residents”

Jamaluddin convicts the communal leaders rather than the British for Partition. He also argues that the Independence War of 1971 was a just one, because West Pakistan was exploiting the east. He also added that Bangladesh could not enjoy the benefit of Independence often they lacked Intelligent Leaders except Suhrawardy and Fazlul Huq. Killing of Intellectuals at the edge of Liberation is the indication of this.

As it is well documented, the Biharis commonly grappled with changing identities in strange, foreign contexts, often in unknown languages, among unknown people, amidst an unknown land and unfavorable condition. Indeed, their professed alienation and identity confusion is easily understood, given the social and cultural transformations that occur upon entry.

6.7 ‘Home’: ‘Residence’, ‘Homeland’ ‘Watan’

This research investigates the way Biharis communities which experience antagonisms in locations they perceive as exilic imagine places in which those antagonisms will be extirpated and their identities fully realized. For the most part my focus is on processes of constructing images of a ‘homeland’ from a position outside its borders, and thus the paper largely deals with dislocation and identity construction. Nonetheless, there is implicit in the project of imagining a homeland from a position of exile the prospect of a movement through which exiles ‘return’ to make themselves ‘at home’ in terrain they heretofore could only imagine. I suggest, using historical and contemporary examples, that returning exiles, rather than finding a place which corresponds with their fantasies, often not only find that ‘home’ is unfamiliar but also that it is occupied by others uncannily similar to the antagonists with whom they struggled while ‘outside’. I note a recurrent recursivity in exilic identity which suggests that ‘return’, rather than being an escape from the antagonisms of exile and other impediments to identity, is in fact an occasion for violently reinscribing those antagonistic relations onto new settings.

For the most part, the chapter largely deals with dislocation and identity construction. It can be suggested that using historical and contemporary examples, that returning exiles, rather than finding a place which corresponds with their fantasies, often not only find that ‘home’ is unfamiliar but also that it is occupied by others uncannily similar to the antagonists with whom they struggled while ‘outside’. It should be noted that a recurrent recursivity in exilic identity which suggests that ‘return’, rather than being an escape from the antagonisms of exile and other impediments to identity, is in fact an occasion for violently reinscribing those antagonistic relations onto new settings.

When one imagines a landscape or a territory, what one imagines is a *mis-en- scene* - a place in which one can envision oneself as being able to enact certain kinds of activities. With home lands imagined from exile we encounter *mis-en-scenes* constituted as sites where exiles will be able to be themselves because the antagonisms which prevent self-realization in exile will have been disappeared. My argument is, however, that images of essential identity - of who people *really* are - are themselves constructed as responses to encounters with antagonisms. In this sense the state of Bangladesh, where the self is exiled. These images are already so constitutively involved with the antagonists which they are imagined to counter that when exiles come to play out their 'real' selves 'at home' they can only recognise those selves when invoking those antagonists. When, therefore, exiles return to what they envisage as their homelands what they most often end up doing is re-establishing once again the terrain of the exilic space in which they came into self-consciousness. Again 'Pakistan' is the place of their dream where they wished to escape from exile. A fundamental part of that space is the antagonistic other, and if that other has not followed them home from exile they have to find another to take its place.

Giddens, for example, depicts the difficulty of operating with society as equated with the nation state (1990: 64). Gupta and Ferguson (1992) have stated that the distinctiveness of societies, nations and cultures is based on a seemingly obvious division of space. It is often implicitly taken for granted that they occupy "naturally" discontinuous spaces, which is the best exemplified in the school atlas representation of the world as a collection of yellow, green, red and blue countries that make up a global map with no vague or fuzzy spaces. Classical "ethnographic maps" have tried to illustrate the spatial distribution of peoples, tribes and cultures as transcending nation states. Nevertheless, in all of these cases, space is the unquestioned central organising principle.

There might still remain questions about whether there is an Indian diaspora. It is with respect to the Jewish people that the word 'diaspora' was first employed, as it suggests the idea of dispersal and fragmentation; and in much of the literature there is a presumed relationship between the diasporic community and the land which they left and to which the possibility of return always subsists, or what we are apt to term 'motherland' or 'home'. For the Biharis the 'motherland', 'home' are difficult one because for many of them the origin is 'India', residence is 'Bangladesh' and home is 'Pakistan' For many of the new generation, 'home' is Bangladesh, though they are not recognized by Bangladesh state. A mythical sense of who the Biharis was manifested itself in a ritualistic and ideological agenda for remaining pure and united in anticipation of returning to and redeeming the homeland. While the hope became gradually deem, and the new generation emerged who

never saw Pakistan, brought up in Bangladesh and /or connect themselves with this land. As such, seeking repatriation by some of them in this country (Bangladesh) is also comprehensible as Arjun Appadurai (1996) argued that locality can no longer be perceived as a given social reality placed in a bounded site. In his view, producing locality is a constant struggle, as the Biharis are constantly making and unmaking a place to define and produce locality (1995: 213). Furthermore, processes of identity alteration rendered 'home' a bewildering, unfriendly, and unfamiliar place, thus challenging the assumption that 'Bihari' identity and notions of home depend solely on a territorial connection with Bangladesh, instead suggesting that they rely heavily on the relationship with Bengali community.

6.8 Future: A Journey to 'Home'?

'Home' is largely the return to a community, and thus, insofar as Biharis' new identities enforce their social estrangement, home – as a place of belonging and affinity – is no more. Far from reestablishing lives to their pre-displacement status, or initiating the natural reconnection between people and place, resettlement for many third generation meant the return to a whole new world of challenges and struggles, profound transformations conditioned by the social realities of violence, and a new relationship to the social space of home. At present there are two trends can be identified: going back to Pakistan (mostly by the older) and predominantly to be rehabilitated in Bangladesh with full citizenship.

Indeed, the harsh social realities of Biharis' lives complicate this approach, presenting yet another formidable challenge upon resettlement. As we have seen, economic and social factors are in constant and dynamic interaction, since while many Biharis are excluded from economic opportunity due to their social status, others are aided in their social lives when allowed to participate in the economic sphere. Instead of existing in isolation from one another, economic and social realms constitute a reflexive relationship within the widow's life, and should thus be treated in collusion with one another. Dynamically influencing each another, economic and social aspects of return must be approached through holistic strategies which integrate the two so as to deny neither the social constraints upon economic rehabilitation nor the economic implications of social status.

The reason why it is unfortunate not to emphasize the constructed nature of place in the study of displacement, is that this hampers understanding of what displacement means to the displaced - how it is experienced. For it is clear from the many studies we have of diasporic and transnational communities, as well as those I mentioned earlier by Hirschon, Malkki, Parkin and Rodgers, that the experience of displacement is not only

about the *loss* of a place, and the pain and bereavement this entails. It is also, and inevitably, about the struggle to *make* a place in the world, a place 'which makes action meaningful through shared understandings and a shared interpretation of action' (Xenos 1996:34).

6.9 Conclusion

This research combines a narrative approach with anthropological analysis, acknowledging the increasing need in refugee studies for culturally specific knowledge informed by the experiences of people themselves... who are involved in the everyday struggles of war and flight. It is based upon narrative accounts of Bihari People's experiences of resettlement, and emphasizes the social and political forms of violence which have profoundly shaped this return. And yet, the stories that respondents tell of resettlement are only in part about a political or social experience. They are also personal stories, about pride, anger, truth and lies, secrets, deception and discovery, crimes, punishment, love and forgiveness, suffering, sin and retribution. And are thus eloquent testimony to the human nature of both flight and return. These narratives bear testimony to the power of violence to destroy personal identity and private memories, and thus rendering the recreation of 'home' a crucial aspect of repair and recovery in the aftermath of war. Through oral history, this essay explores the meanings of home and family in the memories and experiences, which are part of the post-national diaspora.

Chapter 7

Emerging New Voices

7.1 Introduction

Over the years major organizations of Biharis were looking for 'repartitaion' in Pakistan. During the first half of the 1990s, a wave of new voices emerged who were claiming repatriation not in Pakistan, but in Bangladesh as citizens. A case was filed in the Supreme Court in 2001, to claim the justification of 'citizenship rights' and ten 'Biharis' were agreed as 'citizens'. A group of organizations came in the scene; they drew attention of Bangladesh 'civil society'. NGOs, international donors and human rights organizations also extended their campaign and activities for the development of this people. On the other hand, in their campaign, the previous organizations accused these organizations to destroying the hope of 'going back to Pakistan'.

There are several international reports⁸⁵ describing hardships faced by the 240,000 to 300,000 Biharis who live in 116 severely overcrowded camps throughout Bangladesh. Refugees International also sent a two week mission to Bangladesh on February 18, 2006 in order to facilitate citizenship for the population⁸⁶.

The recent crackdown on illegal property by Caretaker Government has generated a new set of concerns as many slum dwellers and some 'Bihari' communities around the country have already felt the brunt of these efforts, posing a new challenge for integration with dignity.

As a recent development, in September 2007, the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh approved the citizenship rights of those who were born after 1971; thus a number of camp-residents, who are born after 1971, became voters in Bangladesh for the first time in their life.

This chapter explores the organized activities and agenda of different organization that certainly leave 'Bihari identity' in a new direction. And of course, there is a complex interplay of local forces, forms of inequality, and pervasive nationalist ideology in particular.

⁸⁵ 'The Biharis in Bangladesh' Minority Rights Group, Report 11, 4th edition, January 1982 and, the report by *Refugees International*, Washington D.C., January 2006.

⁸⁶ http://www.staelesspeopleinbangladesh.net/bihari_bangladesh.php.

7.2 International Conventions

The international conventions are norms of conduct, which are arrived at after extensive discussions and negotiations, often spread over many years, between multiple State parties. Conventions that may govern relationships between Bangladesh State and Biharis are as follows. International conventions represent a consensus of opinion among many sovereign states as to minimum standards of behavior for any State regardless of their economic development, national laws, cultural norms or social mores

Certainly, the immediate post-war response to the 'Bihari' experience combined humanitarianism and politics, but there was equally a gathering understanding of the refugee as someone who was part of an international problem, who was to be protected by the international community; and who was, indeed, an emerging rights-holder.

Rights, as such, are not mentioned very often in the 1951 Convention, but they were very much in the minds of the drafters. They frequently referred to the Universal Declaration and ensured its mention in the preamble. The formal scheme of the Convention, however, remains one of *obligations between States*. The refugee is a beneficiary, beholden to the State, with a status to which certain standards of treatment and certain guarantees attach.

However following international conventions that are relevant with Bihari rights

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights
- International Covenant on Civil And Political Rights
- Convention on The Rights Of The Child
- Declaration on the Rights and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. (Provided for information only)
- Convention on Reduction Of Statelessness Human Rights and Arbitrary Deprivation Of Nationality
- Convention Relating To Status Of Stateless Persons
- Housing and Property Restitution: Refugees and Internally Displaced Person
- Forced Evictions
- Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide
- The Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.
- Convention on the non-applicability of Statutory Limitations to war crimes and crimes against humanity
- The right to return of refugees and internally displaced persons

Bangladesh and Pakistan are signatories to the following conventions:

Bangladesh

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Pakistan

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

These conventions may be considered absolutely fundamental and are generally enjoyed by the rest of the populations in Bangladesh and Pakistan. In every case the violations are grievous and chronic.

7.3 Dilemma and Demand

Indeed, as the language of repatriation suggests – its operational vocabulary riddled with terms such as ‘reintegration’ and ‘rehabilitation’ – scholars and policy-makers alike assume that return ‘home’ reverses the negative experience of displacement, naturally reestablishing roots, repairing lives to their ‘normal,’ pre-displacement status, and offering up a “therapeutic intervention” (Foucault 1979; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Malkki 1992) which terminates displacement and restores people to a familiar environment (Stamou 2000). To this end, displaced people “are seen as the product of crisis; their situation is abnormal; repatriation will resolve the crisis and restore normality” (Ranger 1994: 281). Furthermore, the presumption of familiarity which words such as ‘reintegration’ reflect, betray an obliviousness to time and an institutional neglect of important historical and socio-political processes and changes which are continually taking place in both displaced populations and their homes. Assumed to be the “end point of a refugee’s trajectory from flight to return” (Farwell 2001: 43), return is thus conceived of throughout international imagination as a timeless process by which people naturally resume their lives, as though returning to a “negative” (Warner 1994: 161) or empty physical space, void of history and socio-political realities. As Warner notes, institutional conceptualization of return “denies the temporal reality of our lives” (1994: 169) and in doing so, fails to attend to the changing personal, historical, social and political contexts through which ‘home’ is continually redefined, particularly upon return.

With the liberation of Bangladesh in 1972, the majority of the Urdu-speakers in the country applied for so-called ‘repatriation’ to Pakistan through ICRC (International Committee of Red Crescent). The situation was dogged by legal complexities and political considerations on the part of the three countries involved. Although some

163,000 were successful in moving to Pakistan, thousands were left in a country that refused to accept them. The government of Pakistan claimed that it had fulfilled its obligation under the Simla Accord, taking back all those who it was obliged to take back. This claim, however, was disputed by the Government of Bangladesh. Since then, successive governments in Pakistan under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Gen. Zia ul Huq and Nawaz Sharif have issued public statements promising to take back these 'stranded Pakistanis'. In 1998, the then Finance Minister of Pakistan, Sartaj Aziz, in a joint statement with Makkah-based Islamic relief NGO, Rabita Al Alam, even appealed to the international community to contribute to fund set up to repatriate the 'Stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh'. Needless to say, such contradictory statements from the Pakistan Government contributed to further confusion about the Urdu-speakers' identity and worked against their integration efforts in Bangladesh.

Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC)

The organization was established in 1976 under the leadership of Nasim Khan to preserve the interests of stranded Urdu-speaking community who were in a vulnerable and marginalized condition in the post-1971 period. This organization started working actively for the repatriation of Bihari communities living in Bangladesh. In recent times, they have made a little change to their agenda. They summarize their agenda as: *we are not against the rehabilitation in Bangladesh, but still our major agenda is repatriation.*

"We want to stay in Bangladesh; we don't want to leave this country. We know this land its people. The people of this land provided their cordial support to us when we first came here after Partition. We did not forget that. We have been living here with the Bengalis for long. But we were the victims of brutal attack and violence for the instigation of some *Beiman* (traitor) and selfish leaders. A segment of the nation, which once pulled us to their heat, executed brutal torture on us. Not all of us were *Razakars*. Many Bengalis were also *Razakars*, but their property was not captured or looted. Then why, we as a community were entirely attacked? At that time we were, that we are still. Bangladesh government made our situation more vulnerable after adopting the policy of repatriation to Pakistan. This is how we found that all our pride and heritage vanished to dust." Mr Shawkat Ali, the secretary General of SPGRC showed a person saying that 'five year ago you could see his house, where there is a high-rise building now. And he has been living in eight feet by eight room in the camp.'

'We could prove our strength and activism by repatriation of around 150,000 stranded Pakistanis to Pakistan between the periods of 1976-1993. The last repatriation took place in 10th January, 1993.'

Again they have the understanding that Pakistan is not a land of all happiness. It is their common understanding that both parties are taking advantage of their situation. Each government of Bangladesh was unfair to us. Again he raise the question of Islam that the way a Muslim –majority country behaved towards a Muslim community will never be approved by Allah. And for that reason, the Bengali nation is not in peace. It is the government of Bangladesh who wanted us

to leave this country by option. If they would have said that it is your country, you people live here, we could have lived here and consider it as our shelter. But none of the governments ever thought of keeping us in this country, so we do not want to live here as unwanted. . It is not the hatred, but a passionate anger that was expressed in his sayings.

There is a non-local junior high school in the Geneva camp that was established in 1974. The medium is Bangla, Urdu is also taught here in order to keep mother tongue alive among the new generation. This school never received any fund from government, even the books of primary, those are freely distributed were never allotted . The school run by the fund of different development organization. At present, PLAN international and Surovi are the major donors of the school.

SPGRC considers the urdu-speaking people as stranded Pakistanis because: The land was named Pakistan when we first came here .The Government of Bangladesh also identified us as Pakistani and adopted the policy of throwing out, so we are already stranded Pakistanis.

7.4 The Third Generation and Integration

According to Abrar-Redclift study, a high proportion (87%) considered effective Bangladeshi citizenship important to reducing discrimination. Thirty seven percent considered it important only if accompanied by 'rehabilitation' measures. Understandings of 'rehabilitation' varied, but the majority believed this to included

We are born in Bangladesh, Bangla is our Language, and we hope to get citizenship.

The Stranded Pakistanis Youth Rehabilitation Movement (SPYRM) observed a human chain programme while a dialogue was taking place between Bangladesh and Pakistan Governments at the outset of SAARC conference in 2005. They used the above mentioned slogan in the banners and posters during that programme. In 1998, the organization emerged as a non-political organization from the inherent inspiration of that slogan and was named as SPYRM.

General Secretary of the SPYRM, Shahed Ali claims that they are the first to place initiatives to raise the issue of rehabilitation of the Stranded Pakistanis actively in the media and to the civil society. They also claim that they have created a strong ground for Bihari community by arranging processions and meetings by for reducing their organizing thousands of people in the street to express their demands for reducing their distress. They also appealed a writ to the High court titled *what is our identity*. SPYRM was also successful while they appealed to the High court to exclude the camp from the recent uprooting activities of the caretaker government and High court halted the activities in camp.

The organization, though formally started in 1998, had its inspiration two years before that .At that time, it was planned the organization would be named as Stranded Pakistanis Youth *Repatriation* Movement. Before the formal launching, some discussions and seminars were arranged. At those

meetings, teachers, lawyers, administrators and other professionals expressed their opinion regarding the Bihari issue. From those discussions the founders and initiators realized that the claim of repatriation of a huge camp-living population to Pakistan is not realistic after 34 years of separation of Bangladesh. As such, they shifted their ideology from *repatriation* to *rehabilitation*. No wonder that, when they shifted their stand from repatriation to rehabilitation, they were mostly opposed by SPGRC, the organization that has been claiming repatriation since its origin in 1976. Thus these two organizations created a new polarization through following completely two different directions for the community. From the very beginning, the organization has the goal to raise self awareness regarding their identity. Besides this, the other goals are:

- Provide Government initiatives to ensure ‘normal housing’ to the people who are now living in ‘inhuman housing’ in the camps. The rehabilitation should be encouraged in the same district where they are living now, inter-district shifting is not desirable.
- Provide employment opportunities to the people who are illiterate but potential active.
- Ensure all the required supports to the new generation to receive mainstream education
- State recognition as citizen the camp residents should be included in the voter list.

SPYRM authority maintains that these claims are very realistic ways to solve the problems faced by the community. They find that the major obstacle of realizing the goals is not only the lack of sincerity of the government, rather the movement directed by SPGRC. For instance, due the SPYRM initiatives, around 32,000 camp residents from 11 camps were incorporated in the voter list, but SPGRC raised heavy protest against by saying that once they incorporate their name in the voter list, government would uproot them from the camp and the Pakistan camp will never take them back.

SPYRM also points to the reality that many poor people of Bangladesh are living inhuman life for long. But the situations of the Biharis are slightly different from this, because they rarely get the opportunities to change their fate. They perceive ‘normal life’ as those opportunities provided by the state to citizens to maintain their basic needs.

Equal employment opportunities, access to education, training and skills, improvements in living conditions and relocation outside camps. Significantly, 86% believe ‘rehabilitation’ to require integration with mainstream Bengali society, arguing that exchange of culture, values and ideas with the wider community were critical to being able to counter discrimination.

Shabana

S.M Shabana is one of the ten new generation Urdu-speaking youths who appealed for citizenship and won the verdict. She describes her experience;

My Dada(Grandfather) came to Mymensingh from Uttarpradesh, where he had been a train driver. He gave option to shift to then East Pakistan. He continued his profession as a train driver in Mymensingh. My father spent his childhood in Mymensingh, though he was born in Nagpur, India. After completion of his graduation, my father started a rice-mill there. Both my maternal and paternal families used to live in neighbouring houses. In March 1971, my dada, chacha(paternal uncle) and two mama(maternal uncle) s were killed. That day, a friend of my uncles, named Rabi called on them and took them along. Rabi was very close to my uncles who came to visit the family regularly. He along with his associates killed my uncles in the courtyard. Seeing this, my Nani (Grandmother) became insane. Then the full family shifted to Dhaka. We had a house in Nurjahan road, where they started to live.

My mother and her sisters were pretty; as such they always had to live in tension. A Bengali man wanted to marry my mother and one day he came to take her forcefully. While he was dragging her out of the house, she ran away to the road, where a troupe of Pakistani soldiers was passing by. Since then my mother and her sisters used to live in hiding. If any Bengali man came to the house, they were 'packed' in jute bags.

In 1972, Bengalis occupied both houses in Mymensingh and in Dhaka. Even they also took possession the rice –mill. Turning to utterly poor, the family took shelter in Geneva camp, where we were born. My grandmother (Nani) and two of my aunts were sent to Pakistan. In fact, my mother was to go with her mother in the first trip. If that would have happened, the family would become split. My parents, dadi (grandmother) and fufu(aunt)s were to go in the next trip, but unfortunately they could not. Thus the greater family, who maintained to live together, became split. And since then my mother could not see her mother and sisters ever.

My father joined SPGRC as Line-in-charge. We had a very tough time then, because the big family of nine members depended on his income. Females tried to provide some support by doing embroidery work, though it was minimal. Our financial crisis resolved to some extent when my elder sister and I started jobs. We rented a house outside the camp, because of the vexing by some miscreants in the camp who wanted to marry my sister. It was a difficult decision for my mother because she used to feel more homely where he had many other relatives and familial acquaintance.

I studied up to eight grade in the non-local junior school inside the camp. With two other friends, I got admitted to Mohammadpur Girls School. That was bitter experience—classmate, teachers used to laugh at us for our pronunciation. They did not like us for our non-Bengali origin and residence in the camp. However, we received private coaching in Mathematics from a Bengali teacher, Tipu Sir. He was a very helpful person, and mostly for his teaching and cooperation it was possible for to

pass in mathematics in SSC. In 1994, I was admitted to Tejgaon College, where the behavior of students were quite opposite in comparison to our experience in school. They were very cordial and cooperative. I had some good friends there and they are still my friends. At preset, my sisters are well established. I have been working in an NGO named Al-falah that works for the camp residents. Despite our efforts, SPGRC who are still the most powerful organization of the camp residents does not appreciate our activities.

Still I could not do anything to reduce my mother's pain. She cries for her sisters, her departed mother who wished see her daughter before her death.

Interestingly, they also believe “stranded Pakistani” is a label that did not reduce the crisis of the community, rather sustained and increased the crisis day by day. SPYRM rejects to take the label of Stranded Pakistanis since this only increases the crisis and confusion among the camp people.

7.5 The Youth and Voting: Quest for a Better Living?

Urdu-speakers now established outside of the camps have largely gained access to voting rights. Camp residents, however, having in the past been denied the same opportunity. While little is known about recent amendments to the roll, around 160, 000 persons residing in the camps are thought to have now been added to the electoral list as a result of process initiated within the community. Camp residents, however remain skeptical about actually being able to vote. Many camp residents articulated the need for voting rights in order to acquire official status. The entire community not only requires enrolment, but with it also assurance that this right would be honoured.

The home ministry's earnestness to seek advice from the law ministry must also be seen as a major departure from the traditional bureaucratic mode of turning a blind eye, wishing that the problem would somehow wither away. However, one need to point out certain fallacies that exist in the reasoning in the observations of the inter-ministerial committee, as reported in sections of the print media.

The inter-ministerial meeting recommended that among the camp dwellers those who were born after 1971 be given citizenship status and thus be enrolled as voters and included in the national ID card scheme. A section of the print media reported that those who were minors in 1971 would also be covered. The meeting further noted among those who fall into these categories only the ones who showed allegiance to Bangladesh will be entitled to citizenship. It appears that the above decision is in breach of the citizenship law of the country. The laws regulating the citizenship of Bangladesh are the Citizenship Act,

1951 and the Bangladesh Citizenship (Temporary Provision) Order, 1972 generally referred to as the President's Order 149 of 1972 of the order states that 'every person shall be deemed to be a citizen of Bangladesh. Who or whose father or grandfather was born in the territories now comprised in Bangladesh and who was a permanent resident of such territories on the 25th day of March, 1971, and continues to be so resident; or II. who was a permanent resident of the territories now comprised in Bangladesh on the 25th day of March, 1971 and continues to be so resident and is not otherwise disqualified for being a citizen by or under any law for the time being in force.'

As per above provisions all Biharis living in Bangladesh before 1971 have automatically become Bangladeshi citizens as Bangladesh became independent. They are as much Bangladeshis as rest of us. In this context, the following observation of the High Court in the case of Abid Khan and others vs Bangladesh (DLR .55) is pertinent.

We do not think that only because of the concentration of Urdu-speaking people, who were citizens of the erstwhile East Pakistan, the so-called Geneva Camp has attained any special status so as to be excluded from the operation of laws of the land including the said President Order, the Electoral Rolls Ordinance, 1982 or the Citizenship Act, 1951. So, mere residence of the first group of the petitioners at the Geneva Camp cannot be termed as allegiance to another state by conduct.' The inter-ministerial meeting's decision stipulated that even those who were born after 1971 would have to show their loyalty to Bangladesh. This is absolutely unwarranted. Children born in the camps are as much Bangladeshis as children born outside in Bengali households. Here again we may refer to the judgment of Abid Khan's case.

That residency in the camps is not to be construed as a bar to obtain Bangladeshi citizenship is reaffirmed in para 26 of the judgment which states 'it is found that the petitioners are citizens of Bangladesh and their residence in the Geneva Camp, Mohammadpur is not a bar to be enrolled as voters and therefore they are entitled to be enrolled in the electoral roll and registered as voters if they are not otherwise disqualified to be included as such under section 7 of the Election Rolls Ordinance, 1982. Even if one accepts the position that those in question would have to show their allegiance, the follow-up questions that would arise are how they would demonstrate that allegiance and how the state would assess if the allegiance shown is genuine.

Association of Young Generation Urdu-speaking Community (AYGUSC)

AYGUSC asserts that our ancestors came from different parts of India. We are born and brought up here. Bangladesh is our homeland, but Urdu is our mother tongue. The desire to go back to the state that we never came from and we have never seen is completely unreal and irrational. Our relationship with social,

cultural economic and political structure is more intense than the said relationships with any other country. The desire or claim to repatriation to Pakistan by showing linguistic and religious similarity is too much obsession. Since its liberation in 1947, none of the governments in Pakistan followed the Islamic *Shariat* law. Pakistan has also been going through different crises, even sometimes more severe ethnic crises than in Bangladesh. As such none can assure that migrants would live comfortably in Pakistan. The Biharis who went back to Pakistan are also facing discrimination by other communities. Therefore, considering the contemporary socio-economic and political reality, AYGUSC attempts to organize the camp-resident Urdu Speaking youth generation to move for their citizenship rights. Though they do not have the organized networks like SPGRC or SPYRM, still they are hopeful.

Secretary General Mohammad Hasan declares that the camp-resident Urdu Speaking people can no way be said to be the Stranded Pakistanis. Because they are constitutionally the citizens of Bangladesh. The AYUGSC objectives are :

- Recognition of the community as linguistic minority
- Since there is a constitutional recognition, so the basic human rights should be established through social and political recognition.
- Formulate a proposal acceptable to all for the rehabilitation of the community and take actual measures for it.
- To sustain the approved facilities (water, electricity and sanitation) as long as the community is completely rehabilitated
- Provide opportunities and access to primary and secondary education for all the camp children
- Remove discrimination in employment
- Mobilize the civil society to play strong role for this community

Their strategy is to some extent different. In stead of gathering so many people in procession, they are trying to create awareness and address the national and international community through meetings and seminars. AYGUSC is reluctant to accept that the Urdu speaking people are not the citizens of the country. Last year ten members of the organization proved the justification of their citizenship claim by appealing a writ to the High court. Their claim is also opposed by SPGRC. Due to the activities of SPGRC around 105 thousand Urdu-speaking people were migrated to Pakistan by 1993 being known as stranded Pakistanis.

It is important to note that in 2007 the Caretaker government has taken an initiative to accord voting rights and include in the national identity card scheme a section of the camp-dwelling Urdu-speaking community in Bangladesh. The chief adviser and the chief election commissioner acknowledged the introduction of national ID card that will have major ramifications for the livelihoods of the disenfranchised Bihari community.

7.6 'Development'

The uprooted and the social movements and organizations that have taken up their cause under the various banners of human rights, environment, indigenous peoples, and other

related issues are now in the forefront of what some have referred to as an emerging transnational civil society. Posited as an increasingly common feature of world politics, transnational civil society is composed mainly of nongovernmental organizations and social movements from the entire world that focus on a broad spectrum of issues such as trade, democratization, human rights, indigenous peoples, gender, security, and the environment often in opposition to the state and private capital. Development projects have increasingly become the contexts in which these interests and issues are contested and played out through different models of development by local and non-local individuals and group

The issue of securing effective citizenship rights for camp-dwelling Biharis has been a matter of concern for some Bihari community groups and a few Bengali activists. While successive governments and the mainstream civil society organisations – think-tanks, service-delivery NGOs, even human rights organisations and legal aid bodies – have largely been oblivious to the plights of the community, the Dhaka University-based Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit has been in the forefront in conducting research, publishing policy briefs and organising a series of consultations to draw attention of the policymakers and the mainstream Bangladesh society. The meeting of three Bihari community organisations led by Al Falah with the chief election commission in June this year led the latter to seek advice from the government.

7.6.1 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Without governmental support, an even greater urgency for non governmental facilities has been largely ignored. Some national NGOs that earned international recognition for working among the marginalized have so far remained unconnected with the ‘Bihari’ issue. Other organizations that have attempted to provide services in the past discontinued their work without adequate monitoring and evaluation of follow-up processes. Facilities provided in the past have very often been sub-standard, and on the whole it is only a few ‘micro credit’ organizations that remain.

It is not only the state, but the entire framework of Bangladeshi society which needs to be held responsible for the Urdu-speaking community’s marginalization as illustrated below. Neglect on the part of mainstream civil society has increased and widespread ignorance of the plight of this disenfranchised group. There has been very little interest amongst mainstream human rights organizations, legal aid bodies, or women’s and children’s organizations in the ‘Bihari’ issues. Voices need to be raised and wider society informed if sufficient pressure is to finally force the Government to address the issue.

As the future success of the community is dependent on acceptance from the public at large, the role of media is the key. It is largely discrimination on the part of individual employers, teachers and doctors that currently prevents access to equality of treatment. As such, increasing awareness among Bengali society and the generation of broad acceptance is essential. Rights offered by the state are meaningless if discrimination is to continue at present levels.

The forced resettler, as a person displaced 'in the national interest' to make way for a development project, makes visible a contradiction between the nation-state as, on the one hand, the ultimate source of legitimate political control and the principal agent of development in a given territory and, on the other, a community of equal citizens. The empirical evidence suggests the latter answer is correct. In case after case of forced resettlement, we see the state exercising its right to expropriate private property for public use against a relatively impoverished and powerless group of its own citizens, with typically disastrous consequences for their economic, physical, psychological and social well-being.

Two of these effects are particularly relevant to the comparison of forced resettlers with refugees: landlessness and loss of 'social capital'. According to Cernea, empirical evidence shows that loss of land 'is the principal form of decapitalisation and pauperisation' of forced resettlers (Cernea, 2000:23) and that 'Settling displaced people back on cultivable land...is the heart of the matter in reconstructing livelihoods' (ibid :35). Loss of *social* capital refers to the disruption and disintegration of the informal social support networks which are vital to economic survival in communities where individuals and households are vulnerable to short term and unpredictable fluctuations in income. Both of these potentially impoverishing effects of forced migration clearly apply to those forced to move by conflict, whether across international borders or not, at least as much as they do to those forced to move by development projects.

AL falah Bangladesh

From their inception, Al falah has its own way to understand the Bihari issue. They maintain that only the people who came from the Bihar state of India could be named as Biharis, other camp-residents who came from other parts like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh of India cannot be said to be Biharis. So this organization claims to identify themselves and the camp residents as Urdu speaking Bangladeshis.

The initial agenda of the organization was to continue the previous activities of Dhaka camps project among the camp-residents. During the period of 1980-85, the project attempted to create a different stand along with its common understanding on deprivation and distress of the Urdu-speaking community. At this time, this project proposed some agenda that

are total opposite to the proposition regarding the repatriation agenda of SPGRC. The individual characteristics of Al-falah are :

- To accept the reality of living in Bangladesh, in stead of an infatuation repatriation to Pakistan.
- To shift the tendency of identity formation as Stranded Pakistanis for which is necessary for rehabilitation.
- To provide support for technical and workshop mechanical training to the camp residents.

To realize these objectives a school named Al-falah Model tutorial was established, where the Urdu-speaking children could learn Bengali up to class eight. Another training centre in Nurjahan road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka offered training on typing, carpentry, motor mechanism and on other technical sectors. The organization established example how rehabilitation should take place. It is also notable that these projects got closed by 1987- 1988 due to fund constraint. Al falah was strongly opposed by SPGRC, which was the only organization of Biharis till then. Actually, they were standing on two different poles of ideology and politics from the very beginning.

From 1990 -2006, Al Falah continued many projects from funded by BPFC, UNDP, UNHC and some other organizations. In 2001 Al Falah had an initial thought of changing their name because there Canadian fund was stopped due to the similarity with Al-Quaida. Finally they could go on with their name. From their inception they are working with mainstream development discourse, therefore adopted the rights based approach. The agenda that they adopted from the beginning were more modified and changed over the period.

At this moment, Al -Falah is emphasizing on mobilizing the new generation of Urdu-speaking community for rehabilitation. In this sense, they consider the recognition as citizen is the most important issue. They believe that the only way to resolve the deprivation of the camp-residents is the state-recognition as citizens.

7.7 Conclusion

As a result of increased multidisciplinary inquiry into refugee resettlement, refugees' psychological adaptation has recently come to the fore in both academic literature and organizational agendas. Indeed, it is now generally understood that refugees who have lived through violent experiences such as war or torture may suffer profound psychological distress during resettlement, given that traumatic events are rarely isolated incidents, but rather violent processes which persist in destroying the psyche long after their actual occurrence, even when far distant from danger (Manz 1995: 161). Permanent resettlement and its founding principle of *non-refoulement*, however, may afford refugees some degree of psychological assurance by implying that they should never again have to

face their perpetrators or the scene of violence, and thus they may cope with their memories and experiences of violence in a setting vastly removed from that in which the trauma occurred.

On the other hand, the myriad of psychosocial issues that accompany returned migration have rarely been addressed by researchers or the NGO community. Repatriation programmes typically emphasize infrastructural assistance and material aid rather than psychosocial support during reintegration. As mentioned previously, predominant approaches to repatriation stifle sophisticated investigation into psychological dimensions of return given that psychological rehabilitation is generally assumed to follow naturally after successful economic reintegration. Thus denying the historical, political and psychological contexts in which 'home' is continually situated, conventional wisdom regarding repatriation implicitly suggests that return involves a natural process of reconnection between people and place, and posits a fixed, static, relationship between the two which excludes troubling historical and socio-political realities so often embodied in a physical place.

As I will argue, many returnees are also involved in similar processes of psychological adjustment, though they must negotiate traumatic memories and experiences of violence midst the very physical, historical and political contexts which produced them. It is this very return – to the physical site of violence, the political site of repression, and the emotional site of memory – which creates great challenges for many resettled Biharis, and renders the process of psychological adaptation a formidable one in its own right, not necessarily following the physical return 'home'. As research among resettled Biharis revealed, unresolved memories of violence can render resettlement a highly troublesome process, particularly when 'home' is a place replete with traumatic historical events, continued political repression and forbidden memories. Far from natural processes of reintegration, returnees must often negotiate anew the meaning and place of their memories within the physical, historical and political spaces of home, and are thus engaged in continuous struggles to reconcile their haunted reflections of the past with visions for a future, despite the violence and silence still alive within their homes.

Chapter 8

Summary and Conclusion

In 2007, when Caretaker government of Bangladesh approved the voting rights of Biharis who were born after 1971, a strong opposition came from Sector Commanders of Liberation War (see The Daily Prothom Alo, October 24, 2007). In a forum organized by all the Sector Commanders they blamed the government for taking such an initiative and threatened that they would not attend any meeting where the Biharis will be present. Why have they done so? I argue that their introduction in the society as ‘Sector Commander’ is a root metaphor for their public arena that can be contested by another changing root metaphor of ‘stranded Pkistanis’, who are now ‘Bangladeshis’. This research takes this point seriously, because though the legal initiatives are taking place, still it is a long way to make changes in these metaphors.

It becomes difficult to reduce the basis of ethnic or national identity to the lowest denominator because this basis, whether, religion, language or culture, tends to shift, other considerations assert themselves, both historically as well as at certain points of time. While in the formation of Pakistan state, religion was the denominator in spite of the difference of space, location, culture, language, history of the people of two parts of Pakistan, which components of difference came into play during the freedom movement of Bangladesh. Even, later on, the ‘Bihari’ term homogenized the identity of all non-Bengali inhabitants. Such identity formations are important because this is how a certain group of people are perceived and treated by others, and related to the greater context. This process of homogenization however, has tended to project one particular region, language or ethnic group over others. The process of forging a national or ethnic identity has therefore been one of suppression and domination. This research attempts to investigate how the identity of the Biharis has been formed and changed over the period of time, how the Bihari people and others perceive and practice this identity.

All evidence collated from an analysis of the field, primary and secondary research points overwhelmingly towards one conclusion – a distinct strand of long-distance nationalism exists within the Bihari community of Syedpur which ‘links’ them emotionally, financially, ideologically, socially and politically to an imaginary ‘homeland’. The tenets upon which these nationalist feelings are based are centred on memories of childhood, common ancestry and heritage, linguistic commonalities and a shared value system with the land of birth, the ‘motherland’, and not the country of settlement. The complexity of the arguments of ethnicity and nationalism put forward by Weber, Smith, Anderson, Glick Schiller and Eriksen demonstrate that the global Bihari community live within a

transnational social field constructed largely through remittances, letters, trading of goods, and memories and also via participation in transnational household ceremonies and rituals. This heightened link with the homeland is strengthened further with the failure of the Bangladeshi national project which has treated migrants unequally based on the social markers of heritage, customs and political stands. This exclusion from mainstream dominant society has propelled the Biharis to seek their sense of belonging and identity elsewhere. But now when the scenario is changing there remains reluctance from Bengali side because of the threat that recognition of one truth (that is of the Biharis) may hide the other truth (of the Bengalis). I do firmly believe here that truths are different and multiple and often meanings and interpretations are incorporated with the truths. It would be better to say that they are acting in a world where certain actions are sensible (acceptable, recognized, plausible, expected) and others are not. For example, the majority of Bangladeshis accept Biharis as 'Stranded Pakistanis' even though many recognize the both way attacks and help, support.

Citing a story of Morocco, Geertz offers that the ethnographical description is always thick and that the interpretations of the players, in addition to facts and observable gestures, always enter into it. He also talks about 'constructions': Reporting whatever event is in reality reporting the way in which someone in particular understood what happened; it is also reporting the interpretation which someone gives of the way in which the other protagonists have understood or interpreted the entire incident. If the ethnographer can himself believe, more or less, or make his reader believe that he is dealing with 'raw facts', it is only because he began by adopting, without saying it and perhaps without realizing it himself, a unique system of interpretation. To describe the relationship between the Moroccan incident and Ryle's example, Geertz himself indicates an important difference: the two boys, in the philosopher's example, have a code, which they are using to communicate, whereas the Marmusha players have instead 'frames of interpretation' which enter into conflict. In that part of Morocco in 1912, things are more complicated: everything must be explained and, in addition, the explanations themselves are not, in the end, entirely understood by the actors in the scene. At bottom, Cohen's misadventure applies to a 'babelian' situation, to a 'confusion of tongues' (Geertz 1973: 9). The poor soul does not know which authority to appeal to. If he lodges his complaint with the French authorities, they declare themselves incapable of acting. If he turns towards the traditional Berber authority, the latter enters into action in satisfactory fashion as long as things take place far from the French fort. But as soon as he returns to the city, the colonial power reasserts its authority. Similarly the Biharis, once living their original home did not know where to go and how to solve the crisis of identity. A group of them sided Pakistan having an understanding that might resolve their crisis, similarly Bengalis

thought recognizing them as citizen would add more crises to their identity as 'Bengalis'. The relations are not only an illusion by which political forces manipulate for mobilization of the masses to achieve pragmatic goals. Distribution and acquisition of prestigious symbols is a real and rational subject for ethnic conflicts. The problems of prestige and symbols are quite different from material interests.

Behavior belongs to the domain of the observable, that of facts (physical as well as social), and these facts make up the whole of that which can be described. On the other hand, the meaning of this behavior – the ideas, the representations, the values that are inwardly connected to it (the 'symbolic') – would exist only in the mind (the hypothesis of a 'collective mentality', however strange it may be, is inherent in all usage of the notion of culture). In order to have access to it, one must pass through the mediation of signs (for example, words, sentences, gestures, speeches, writings), that which presumes an interpretation.

If, just by watching our nearby neighbor, 'Biharis', we do not understand what they are doing, because we do not understand what they intend to do (or what his or her 'doing' 'means'), this ignorance becomes clearly unfathomable when the cultural difference of 'Others' is added to it. As for doing ethnography, it is not only observing what human beings but understanding the meaning of what they do, taking into account a universe of meaning which is profoundly foreign to us. Ethnographic data could only be representations of representations, constructions of constructions.⁸⁷

Whilst the nation -building is an indispensable framework for understanding Bihari emigration and should not be discounted from analysis, I would like to end with a comment on the transnational nature of identity in contemporary world politics. In this lucid and everchanging social setting, we should accept that our personal and social boundaries will need constant re-invention and re-definition. What the Bihari migratory experience highlights is that groups and human beings are fluid and constantly engaging in a process of physical movement which precipitates an identity.

⁸⁷ 'What we call our data are really our constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to' (Geertz, 1973: 9).

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Appendix

Checklist for Chapter 4 & 6

Chapter 4: Identities and Boundaries: Formation, Changes and Maintenance

- Name
- Household

Name	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Education	Profession		Income	Mother tongue
					Primary	Secondary		

- Where were you born? When?
- Where did you spend your most part of childhood?
- Who were childhood friends?(describe them)
- Who were your neighbours?
- Did they come to your house? Did you visit them? How frequent ?
- Who were school friends? (describe them)
- Who were your teachers? (describe)
- Did you face any problem while getting admitted to school? If Yes, describe? How did you solve the problem?
- Did you face any language problem in school?
- Did you face any problem in schools? (ill behavior of classmates or teachers)- describe
- How did you manage?
- How many 'Biharis "did study in your school? Did they face problem?
- Were you in any other profession before? (if yes, describe type, colleagues, employers and their behaviors) Why did you leave that job?
- If no, were you refused? Why?
- What did you do now?
- Who are you colleagues and employer? How did they know about you?
- Do you feel any discrimination? (Describe) How do you manage?
- Are you married? Where did you get married, How, why?
- Is it your first marriage? If no (describe the previous)

- Do you face any problem with your spouse?(language, culture, education)
- Do you have any issue?
- What is their language? Religion and culture?
- Do they (children) face any problem? How do they manage?
- Did face any legal hazards? How did you manage? What was behavior of Law enforcing agents?
- How did you feel? Any discrimination?
- Are you involved with any political party? Which one? post or position
- Have you heard of 1947?
- What did happen then?
- Who were responsible?
- Who suffered most?
- Who gained most?
- Where did you learn about all these?
- If old, do you share these with others? With whom? Why
- Do you know about 1971?
- What did happen then?
- Who was responsible?
- Who suffered most?
- Who gained most?
- Where did you learn about all these?
- If old, do you share these with others? With whom? Why
- Do you feel that others should know that? Why?
- Have you visited India? When and why?
- Do you have relatives there?
- Have you visited Pakistan? When and why?
- Do you have relatives there?
- What is your country?
- Watan? Desh?
- What is your major crisis?
- What is your future plan?

Chapter 6: Living in Diaspora

- What was your experience in 1946-52?
- Were you or your family members affected? If yes give details.
- If not, have you heard of any such things? Where, how what happened?
- Who did attack whom? Who were the perpetrators?
- Who were responsible?
- Why did Partition take place? Who were the major victims?
- Were you happy with this?
- Did you take part in any procession? When how why?
- How did you feel?
- Did you take part in any sort of attack or perpetration?
- Why have you chosen to come here
- Did you have any connections before you come here? Give details..
- Give us the details of your journey to Pakistan.
- What did you do after you come here?
- Did you shift your job? How many times? Why?
- How did the local people receive you when you came here?
- What were places and forms of interaction?
- How did you perceive east Pakistanis and their political ? (relate 1952)
- Other immigrant Indians?
- Did you find any change of behavior of the Bengalis? Why how?
- How did you perceive the political events? (1954, 62, 65, 69, election 1970)
- What were you doing before and during 1970-71?
- Were you affected any way? How?
- What were the changes in your life after 1971?
- Did you want Bangladesh? Why?
- Did you take part in any attack?
- How did the Bengalis behave with you?(during after 1971)
- Do you find any change of behavior at present?
- Did you opt for Pakistan? Why?
- What did happen?
- Did any of your relatives leave Bangladesh? Why?
- What is your future plan? Where do you want to leave?
- Where do you want your family members to leave?
- Are you a voter?
- What are the social rights you possess?
- What are the social rights you do not possess, but you wish to?
- Did you ever try to get the rights? How? Why
- How do you want to identify yourself?
- Do you share your feelings and memories with your descendants?
- Do they want to listen to you? How do they react?
- What would you tell the future generations?

Checklist for Chapter 5

Name:

Age: Relation to the Household Head:

Address:

1. From when have you/your family been in Bangladesh, describe in detail
2. Had there been any relation or acquainted persons here before you/your family came - describe about them
3. Why did you come here and how?
4. Where did you reside here first? Tell us details about that period
5. Where did you/your family use to reside in India?
 Was that a village or town?
 -Did all the family members migrate at that time?
 Was there anyone who preferred not to leave?
 -tell us about your family members who came to East Pakistan/Bangladesh?
 -Did any of your family members go back to India/Pakistan afterwards?

Marriage/ Kinship

1. What are the issues to be considered for marriage in your family (make a priority list)
 Former residing area
 Caste and language
 Family status
 Social status
 Education
 Economic condition
 Present residence
 Age

Why?

2. After coming here what type of relation have you made with the local people
 Marital
 Fictive Kinship (father/mother/brother/sister/son/daughter)
 Relation on the basis of religion
 Friendship
 Business/ colleague

How was the relation with them afterwards?

3. Are you or any of your family members followers of Pir or other religious practice/institution?
4. Where do your present kinsmen reside?
 In which situation you communicate with them?
 -Family decision (marriage/ assets)
 -Festivals (religious/social)
 -Others

Frequency of communication: Regular Irregular Rare

5. Who does play the major role in the decision-making about

-Marriage /Divorce/ Polygamy

-Type of transaction of assets in marriage

- Property inheritance

Language

1. What is your mother tongue?

2. What is your ancestors' language? Does it have any local name? (with which major language is it related)

3. Your preference of use of language in the context of place and situation

-In family

-In office

-Communication

-Business

-Festivals/Occasion

-Medium of Education

-Others

4. Practice of language

Language	Mother tongue	Speaking	Writing	Reading	Education
Bengali					
English					
Urdu					
Hindi					
Others					

4. (If educated)What are the books you read? Who is your favorite writer?

What type of song do you love to listen to? Favorite TV channel, which programme do you love to watch? Do you participate in Mushaera/ Kawali ? Do you enjoy it?

Gender relation

1. Number of Female members in your family

Their educational qualifications

Economic status / Profession?

2. Do they participate in decision making ? if they do, in what issues ?

Familial

Economic

Social

3. Do the females go outside alone?

Generally, why do they go outside?

Do they wear veil? Do you cast vote?

4. In which sectors the positions of women have changed after the migration in this country?

5. Are the female members of your family engaged with any organization?
What type of work do the females of your family do?
What are the works of the males? and what are the females' work ?
Are you satisfied with the position of females in your family? Why?

Social Stratification

1. Does the Ashraf –Atraf classification of Muslim society exist at present ?
If exists, in what issues ? (Sheikh, Sayed, Mughal, Pathan etc.)
How are these observed in marriage, feast, and occasions?
2. On which matters does the social status depend? Type of classification in the community in the terms of family status, money-wealth, educational qualifications, political linkage.
3. Who are the important and hounered persons in your society? Why are they important? Who were the dignified in the past? Has the situation changed at present time?
4. What are the processes of class/social mobility?

Power structure

1. What are the determinants of social power? Money/political connections/educational qualifications (if yes, which education?), caste or family status.
2. Does the local judicial structure/system exist in the community? Reliable and preferred judicial system (governmental, social, tradition system of the community)
3. What are the types of judicial system in respect of conflict/problem?
4. Are you engaged in any political/social/religious organization?
5. What are the types of conflict occur in the community (Shiaet – Sunni, Bengali- Non Bengali) or other sectors?
6. Do you face any discriminatory practices from the state legislative system and law enforcing agencies due to your Bihari identity?
7. By which principle and process are your own legal systems conducted? Who are the concerned personnel?

Checklist for Organization

1. Brief description

- When started
- Who initiated
- Members
- Staff
- Agenda
- Activity
- Goal
- Working area
- Coverage
- Partners
- Donors/sponsors

2. How do you perceive "Biharis" "Bengalis"?

- Point of differentiation and identification
- Why have you chosen these criteria

3. Have you been working on the same issue from the beginning?

- If not what were the changes
- Why did you change

4. Whom do you want to address? Why have you chosen them?

- As stakeholders
- As concerned civil society
- What would be the possible outcome?

5. What is your vision? (like rehabilitation etc. How do you perceive that?)

6. What are the other organizations working with same/similar agenda?

7. Why are you (not) working together? Why?

8. Who have already shown interest to work with you? (Organization/associations) Why did they do so?