

Role of Bengali Competitive Identity in the Creation of Bangladesh: An Overview

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Abstract: Many identities are deeply embedded in the Bengali psyche from ancient times to the present and this mentality has evolved into a diverse form over time. The creation of Bangladesh as an independent liberal state showed that a nation's identity cannot be developed by religious considerations alone, as after 1947 the East Bengal nationalism suddenly turned into the Bengali's own cultural motion against Pakistani conservative religious motion. This article will trace the root, the competitive identities and the ideas of nationalism of Bengali on the basis of an examination of assembled sources that led to the creation of a new nation named Bangladesh. This study will try to unlock the variety of Bengal psyche from ancient period to 1971.

Key Words: Identity, Bengali Nationalism, Pluralism

The establishment of Bangladesh in 1971 marked a watershed moment in South Asia's post-colonial order. Based on the aspirations of the Bangladeshi people for democracy, identity, and a more progressive society, a bitter and bloody war of liberation from Pakistan was fought under the leadership of the middle classes. It was the outcome of a growth in cultural-linguistic nationalism against religious rule. From the ancient era to present, many identities profoundly entered into the Bengali psyche and over time this psyche has been shaped in a diverse form. The creation of Bangladesh as an independent secular state significantly disproved the 'two nation hypotheses' that had served as the rationale for the creation of Pakistan in 1947 and showed that a nation's identity cannot be developed solely by religious considerations. A 'Bengali Nationalism' that emerged in response to West Pakistan's economic exploitation, imposition of religious hegemony and suppression of Bengali political voice provided the strength for the rising of a new state called Bangladesh.¹ This paper will try to explore how the Bengalis have developed their identity with a variety of complex variables such as 'Bengali culture',

‘religion’, ‘socio-economic modes’ and on the contrary its ‘orthodoxically conservative mind’. We will try to provide light on the development of nationalism in Bangladesh and its variety of potentially perplexing identities through a survey of pertinent literature.

Methodology

In this study, the content analysis of credible secondary sources has been employed. The methodology of this article would be mainly based on secondary sources and it would be written in interpretative method by reviewing the collected literatures. The research will be carried out with the help of various published books, articles published in journals, research reports, documents, papers etc. Moreover, in writing this article, an attempt has been made to verify the accuracy and acceptability of the information by reviewing the obtained sources. As a researcher, I have tried to refrain myself from providing any imaginary information based on own thoughts and feelings.

The article’s discussion frame would be split into multiple stages. For instance, a) what is the ethnic root of Bengali in terms of culture, society, and religion, b) how Bengali culture and society changed as a result of the spread of Islam, c) how Hindu and Muslim culture and society blended before British control, d) how the racial and religious nationalism resulted in the emergence of India and Pakistan, and, finally, e) how the advent of secular nationalism in contrast with religious nationalism helped to create an independent Bangladesh.

Diverse Identities of Bengali

Bangladesh saw two distinct national movements in the short period of 25 years. First, in 1947, which resulted in the foundation of Pakistan, and second, in 1971, which led to the creation of Bangladesh and its secession from Pakistan. The formation of identities was affected by these two dramatic ruptures, but in very different ways. The paradoxical condition

of the extinction of the *old* and non-creation of the *new*, existed after 1947. Several fusions of secularism, socialism, democracy, and language nationalism occupied East Pakistan's national political arena during this interim period. The study of nationalism and identities is particularly difficult in such diverse and dynamic environments. Thus the question is, how can we comprehend Bangladesh's diversity of identities? Is it fundamentally secularist, or does religion play a significant role in our life?² This essay will attempt to examine the development of Bengali's several identities and the events that led up to the Liberation Movement in 1971, whereas in 1947 Pakistan was created solely based on religious similarity. According to Ahmed Sofa, 'In this Bengal the ruling systems that were valid at different timelines came always from outside. Meaning during entire historical time, foreign rulers ruled Bengal.'³ We could take a brisk look at the range of identities that Bengalis have gone through from the ancient period to 1971.

1. Multiple Religious Identities

Multiple religions have contributed to the development of the Bengali people's new identity. Religion seems to the modern mind as a permanent identity with distinct and well-defined beliefs and rituals, as it plays a significant role in social structure. A very peculiar and distinctive structure of Bengal emerged as a result of the ethos of Brahmanical and Islamic identities that penetrated deeply into the layers of society and it was characterized by the synchronic existence of local deities with the recently adopted Brahmanical or Islamic religious characteristics. These several faiths coexisted and were practiced simultaneously. In contrast to how religion appears to the modern mind as an unyielding affirmation with clear-cut beliefs, habits, and practices, Islam has been so intricately woven into Bengali culture that it is difficult to tell where one thread from local beliefs ends and another from Islamic belief starts. Over time, this has created a distinct Bengali Muslim identity that sets it apart from other Islamic believers around the world. In Bengal, both Muslims and Hindus honored

various shrines and Mazars as well as common deities and pirs.⁴

Religious pluralism refers to peaceful, amicable relationships in which the coexistence of several religions is very easily facilitated by tolerance, assimilation, adaptation, inclusivity and co-operation. This is referred to as a syncretic tradition.⁵ Since religion is a socio-cultural phenomenon, gradual encounters and intermingling between many religions are a natural and expected outcome.⁶

Niharranjan Roy believes that the pre-Brahmanical religion, which was exclusively local, gave Bengali old culture its profound roots.⁷ This culture also emerged following the arrival of Muslims in Bengal, which gave rise to popular, rural, and folk Islam. This expression unmistakably shows that rural Muslims had strong ties to the pre-Muslim past. The practice of Islam here has such specific characteristics as a result of the blending of native elements with those introduced from outside. The Pre-Brahmanical culture has also contributed to the construction of the widespread medieval Western Bengal Hindu identity, according to Jawhar Sircar.⁸ Hence, it stands to reason that the pre-Brahmanical local culture lasted into the Middle Ages and contributed to the interaction with the unfamiliar socio-religious culture that led to the development of a pluralistic mentality. At the same time, a new generation of thoughts and beliefs that were connected to traditional principles of the past and present regenerated the way that outsiders viewed as local religion. Moreover, there were few notable instances of a hostile conflict or opposition between Buddhism and Hinduism; rather, they were both integrated into the local religion. Even still, Hiuen Tsang's narrative reveals that the Samatata and Varendra areas were mostly populated by Jain communities. Hence, having the habit of eating fish-meat, the rise of *Tantrism* or *Sahajiya* or the development of composite Bengali language are actually the results of peaceful co-existence of Hinduism and Buddhism in Bengal.⁹ This is the reason why Niharranjan stated that '*Humanism*' is the specialty of Bengal personality.¹⁰ So, we can state with Jawhar Sircar's voice that Brahmins' humane and accommodating attitude drew the *Antyaja* masses closer to

them.¹¹ Here Sircar talked about the '*Bengal Brahmans*'. While on the other hand, the writer of Vedas, the Northern Brahmans, used to consider themselves as superior as God and prior themselves from the *Kshatriyas* as well.¹²

During the medieval era, the Chaitanya movement and Sufism coexisted. It is interesting to note that the locals were treated quite kindly by the Muslim overlords. They paid them to translate the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* into Bengali language. *Mangal Kabya* was written in this period. Muslims were not just tolerant but also cooperative and supportive to the Hindus. It began from Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah and continued to the Hussain Shahi dynasty. Like the ancient period, Medieval Bengal also was more liberal compared to North India. Bengal never imposed the *Jijya* tax on non-Muslims, and *Muhtasib* was never chosen to track out anti-Islamic behavior. Instead, Muslim rulers would choose Hindu administrative figures to work in their administration. According to Abdul Karim, Ilyas Shah appointed numerous *paiks*, *dhanuks* and *zaminders* from the Hindu community. So, it can be said that Bengal's state establishment and formation before British control was peaceful and correlated to each other, since its basis was humanism.¹³

2. Syncretistic Cultural Identities

Bengal was mostly inhabited by indigenous social groups during the prehistoric era, and these tribes had their own cultural and religious deities. This is the Bengali people's original ethnic identity. Then, during the early Vedic era, the adjacent indigenous Bengali people began to experience economic and cultural effects from the migration of Indo-Aryan populations from the north-western regions of the Indian subcontinent. Since then, Aryans have brought a variety of new customs with them. As a result, Hindu Vedic culture was merged into a new Bengali identity. Through Aryan invasions Vedic Hinduism was brought to India. And just like Islam, it took a while for it to spread to Bengal's eastern regions. Bengal only started to have significant Hindu influence during the

Mauryan Empire. Even then it was a difficult process because Asoka, the third and greatest Maurya, switched to Buddhism. As a result, Bengal's synchronized engagement with Buddhism from the beginning of its history mitigated its contact with Hinduism. Bengal's peasant culture never developed the same level of rigid hierarchies as the Hindu caste system that had already been established further west. Bengal did not consolidate a Brahmanical caste society until the fifth century AD during the Gupta empire, and even then, it was only in the western regions of Bengal.¹⁴ Beyond the Padma River, the eastern portion was still covered in thick forests. Where they existed, Hinduism and Buddhism were loosely incorporated into prehistoric animist cults.¹⁵

Mohammad Bakhtiyar's entry during the Middle Ages marked a new stage in Bengal's process of creating its identity. Those who lived in the east of the delta during this time eventually began to be influenced by Islamic cultural ideals and mosque sponsorship. Hence, Bengali culture and society adopted a set of syncretic values that place an emphasis on tolerance for religious influences. The Bengali population has always been open to various ideas and civilizations.

Richard Eaton has explained few causes of the Islamization of Bengal like forceful conversion, social liberation, etc.¹⁶ However, Joya Chatterji addressed that Sufis played an important role in the process of Islamization in Bengal. Even though Islam first appeared in Bengal in the 12th century, it wasn't until the entrance of the saints during the Mughal era in the 17th and 18th centuries that it could reach the general populace. She stated that, "In some districts of Bengal, sufi pirs (saints) had won many converts to Islam; in Dinajpur, for instance, where the pir tradition was strong, many Rajbangshis had converted to this variant of Islam and were known as nyasas."¹⁷

The powerful Hindu revivalist forces and movements like Vaishnavism had to face opposition from Muslim sufis and leaders. The only solution to the issue was the Bengalification

of Islam, or adaptation to and absorption of local customs and practices.¹⁸ As a result, Muslim sufis and preachers began promoting a new strain of Islam that had Bengali culture and language at its foundation. Muslims in Bengal continued to promote a distinct Bengali Islamic identity and this linguistic accent and consciousness.¹⁹ Moreover, this cannot be denied that nature's hardship profoundly influenced and molded their understanding of religion and civilization. Additionally, Alam claims that, folk beliefs and various non-Islamic principles, especially Hinduism, affected the shape of Bengali Islam and could not be eliminated by the introduction of Islam in those areas.²⁰ These historical sources make it abundantly evident that Muslims in Bengali-speaking Bengal have two main origins: i. Muslim roots (those who are descended from Seljuks, Mamluks, Mughal) and ii. Hindu ancestry (converted). Based on the previously indicated split of the root of origin, the status of the Bengali Muslims was divided into two halves. Nevertheless, within this sociological diversity of the Muslim community, political Islam developed in Bengal under the British rule of the 17th century and the second-largest Muslim ethnic minority in the world was created as a result of this mingling of Islamic and indigenous customs. So, the concept of identity distinction within Bengali society is very new.²¹ In this way, no matter what their religion was, Bangladeshi women still used to wear the Bindi red mark, which is typically linked with Hindu customs, unlike any other Muslim society. Bengal actually developed traits that were a syncretic tradition of Bengal.

Essentially, Islam in Bengal assimilated local culture and developed a strong sense of Bengali identity. In Bengal, where their religious inclination and devotion have historically been all-inclusive in nature, the culture and society have historically developed within syncretic socio-cultural ideals. On the other hand, the inhabitants of this deltaic region have always been sufficiently accepting of all ideals and currents of various socio-religious and cultural origins. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Sufism, Tantrik, Christianity and other religions are tolerated

within their own tribal culture. One may observe the same socio-cultural and religious lineages in the deities and their adoration in this syncretic Bengali civilization.²²

3. Literary Syncretism

There is no denying that religion is one of the key components of the richness of Indian diversity. This richness is further strengthened by the practices and acceptances of religion as well as the responses to these in the various parts of the huge subcontinent. No other nation in the world embraces the incredible diversity of ethnic groups, the abundance of mutually unintelligible languages, the wide range of topography and climate, the variety of religious cultural traditions, and the wide range of economic development levels like India does.²³ What we can feasibly refer to as near pluralism led to syncretism, a highly unique religio-social phenomenon observed in Bengal.²⁴

In *Yusuf Zulaikah*, despite the poet's assertions that he based his writings on the Quran and kitab, there are still elements of local culture in them. Shah Mohammad Sagir, a poet, drew heavily on Hindu metaphors to explain the Quran's narrative. According to Sagir's accounts, The Bengali Yusuf was unable to lead his country, 'while Yusuf of Egypt was idolized as a ruler.²⁵ Moreover, local people had a significant impact on marriage and other social rites. Ibn Amin and Bidhu Prabha were married in *Svayamvara* gatherings, which are uncommon in Islamic culture but very well known in Vedic religious society. When addressing the union of Zulekha and Aziz, Sagir draws mention to the jewelry and clothing worn by the people as well as other customs that were foreign to Perso-Arabic Islamic society.²⁶

Bengali literature also shows evidence of Muslim and Hindu social interaction. Muslims were invited to the Hindus' celebrations. Nine hundred Muslim singers (qawwal), according to Vijoy Gupta's *Manasa Mangal*, attended Laksmindar's wedding party, the son of Chand Saudagar. On the occasion of

their celebrations, the Hindus also gave the Muslims gifts and presents. Muslim writers in Bengal aimed to spread Islam's cultural legacies, which were centered on the exploits of Islamic historical, legendary, and mythological heroes to Bengal's Muslim populace. In fact, Muslim heroes and heroines were either substituted for Mangal deities, or found their appropriate place in the familiar realm of the Mangal-pantheon, as stated by Karim. He said that- "A huge literature grew up in Bengal towards the beginning of the 18th century A.D. centering round the Satya-Pir. While the Muslim writers call him Satya Pir, the Hindus change the word Pir for Narayana though there is hardly any difference between the Satya-Pir of the Muslims and the Satya-Narayana of the Hindus."²⁷

In addition to this shared literature, Hindus and Muslims shared a reverence for goddesses like Bon Bibi and Sitala. A tiny but powerful group of Muslim urbanites who maintained the Mughals' ruling-class ethos, were proficient in Urdu and Persian, and frequently claimed descent from the west of the delta as their ancestral home.²⁸

4. Islamic and Non-Islamic Boundaries

From the medieval period, like Vedic religion, Bengali Muslims too started to divide themselves. It created a new layer in Bengali Muslim identity. The *Ashraf* and the *Atraf* are two social strata among Bengali Muslims that were created as a result of the Perso-Islamic political and cultural growth in the area. In Muslim society, the *Ashraf* were seen as the governing elite, representing Perso-Arabic cultural ideals. The *Atrafs* were regarded as lesser professional Muslim classes who descended from native people, primarily from Bengal's south-eastern regions. *Ashraf*s who did not cultivate the soil and despised the plough, viewed themselves as 'good' Muslims. People of the *Ashraf* class often believed that their ancestors had arrived to the Indian subcontinent not to join native peasant fellow cultivators but rather to rule a great empire. Herein laid the foundation for the social division between *Ashraf* and non-farming Muslims in rural areas, which had become wider in the

context of political and religious activities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁹ In the past, the *Ashrafs* also dominated and forewarned the Muslim ruling elite about how to deal with non-Muslims and to keep them away from important positions of authority. As a result, there were sporadic conflicts between Bengal's Hindus and Turkish religious leaders. By the end of the fourteenth century, the Sufis and the Firdausis gave the monarchs an instruction to maintain the Islamic character while not reducing Hindu participation. Even throughout the Mughal era, the masses were mostly allowed to follow their religion without interference from the ruling elites, even though there was a division between Islamic and non-Islamic communities at the highest levels.³⁰

5. Divisive Identities of Bengali during British Period

A. Separate Religious Identity

From the discussions above, we may safely assume that the idea of dividing religious identities within Bengali society is relatively new. The contemporary mind established a distinct religious identity with distinctive and clearly defined rituals, concepts, and patterns. The growth of these inequalities was significantly influenced by British colonial policies. The sectarian division of labor served to strengthen the distinct socio-economic identities of Bengal's Muslim and Hindu residents. Since then, it has been increasingly important to understand colonial India's use of religion to inspire political support. The two most significant events that can be considered the turning point in Bengali Muslims' growing political and religious consciousness in British India were the division of Bengal in 1905 and the founding of the Indian Muslim League in 1906. The pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods all contributed to the shaping of the religious borders. The reform efforts in both Islam and Hinduism helped to solidify the two communities' separate religious identities. The *Shudhi* and *Sangathan* movements were launched by Hindus in upper India, whereas *Tabligh*, *Tanzeems*, and *Firduasi* were largely started by Muslims in the Indian

subcontinent. The *Wahabi*, *Faraizi* and *Tarika-e-Mohammad* movements in Bengal, especially those led by Titumeer and Haji Shariatullah, gave Bengali Muslims a unique identity. These conservative schools of thought emphasized 'Pure Islam' and urged Muslims to stop practicing Sufism.³¹ Divergence has also been caused by reform activities in Hindu society at the same period. The border dividing 'Non-Islam' and 'Islam' appears to have been porous, fragile, and moving among rural Bengalis during the pre-modern era. Hence, it can be seen that although the kingdom's ethos and origins were those of the middle east, its politics were firmly rooted in Bengal.³²

B. Bengalis' Distinct Economical Identity

The idea of structuring a bold agricultural system was influenced by both Brahmanical socio-cultural system and Perso-Islamic religious preachers under the protection of mosques. Hence, in pre-modern Bengal, the extension of agricultural practices and wet rice production is closely related to the expansion of Islamic religious and cultural practices. As these two different religious beliefs spread eastward, Brahmins and Ulama both played a key role in passing along new agricultural techniques. These techniques were loosely based on the 'Hindu culture', which was supported by Brahmanical hierarchical social orders, and 'the Islamic culture', which was supported by mosques or *dargahs*. Sufism, a major source of Islamic influence that was connected to deforestation and agricultural growth, had shaped Bengali society's inclusive cultural norms.³³ In light of this historical perspective, it is clear that the development of socio-cultural identities in premodern Bengal was significantly influenced by the need to survive economically. Eaton also notes, only in Bengal have the bulk of the native populace taken up Islam of the ruling elite, under the pretext of mosque patronage.³⁴ Village mosques and shrines were crucial in spreading Islamic principles and Mughal rule throughout the area. However, The Mughal government frequently did not directly intervene in the religious affairs of any faith and hired officials from all the many religious communities. For instance, the *Marwadi*

commercial group that had settled in Bengal and served as the primary source of military funding was preserved by the Mughals.

Moreover, marsh, swamp, and jungle covered the eastern section of Bengal. Yet, the major river systems' rerouting to the east was transforming this terrain into potentially profitable agricultural land. People had to relocate to new areas as the agrarian frontier moved East, especially during the Mughal era. It was necessary to build new settled societies out of previously unsettled peoples, and this could only be done by organizers with the authority to establish new social structures. The mighty rivers of Bengal, which were moving eastward throughout this time and creating new areas for cultivation, are the true forces behind this development, according to a wealth of evidence provided by Eaton. In order to clear the forest and bring in people who could settle down and engage in agriculture, the Mughal state started awarding land concessions to organizers. Eaton's analysis is significant because it reveals that the '*conversion*' of Bengal did not include sizable numbers of people leaving one organized religion for another. The Mughals were always unconcerned as to whether Hindus, Muslims, or even Christians acquired land concessions. On a frontier where organized religion was still a novelty for a large portion of the population, Islam instead provided the first organizing philosophy of settlement and social discipline. This justification also sheds light on the long historical roots of Islam as a motivating ideology in Bengal.

When the East became populated, more seasoned Hindu landowners and bureaucrats from the West moved in, supporting Mughal rule and establishing themselves as higher level tax collectors or *Zamindars* with their financial resources and formal administrative abilities. The control of land and taxation at the village level was frequently in the hands of Muslims, many of whom were descended from the early settlement organizers, while higher level tax collection and administration over groups of villages passed to the primarily Hindu zamindar class. This densely tier system of land administration emerged over the centuries. The Muslim elite

was at the top in the provincial capital, which moved around but was situated in what is now West Bengal at the time the British arrived. Once the British expelled the Muslim *nawabs* and aristocracy from Murshidabad, Bengal's social structure generally resembled that of a sizable peasantry made up of both Hindus and Muslims, with the mostly Muslim peasantry of the East ensuring an overall Muslim majority. At the top was a zamindar and administrative class that was predominately Hindu. This group quickly made peace with the British and benefited right away from membership in the new administrative system. The British Empire had a very clear incentive to act in a way that would strengthen their grasp on power in response to the census findings of 1872. A consensus started to form in the British study of this data, which was encapsulated in James Wise's work. Without any supporting data, he implied that widespread conversions to Islam had been accomplished 'by the sword' and that some converts had come from lower castes seeking to flee the oppression of their caste-based Hindu overlords. Even though this balanced study made no mention of any relevant historical facts, especially in the case of Bengal, it tacitly offered a critique of both main religions. Nonetheless, the assertion that Islam had utilized violence to convert Hindus resonated true with some early Islamic iconoclasm experiences, particularly in western India, where there had been temple destruction and other violent acts. This perception of Islam in Bengal quickly spread among some of the Hindu elite. Paradoxically, the leadership of Bengal's Muslims at the time did not adopt the equally unsupported assertion that conversions were motivated by the desire for social freedom as proof of Islam's superiority as a social system. The declining Muslim nobility, who were the offspring of the elite that the British had driven out, made up the majority of the Muslim leadership in Bengal in the late nineteenth century. The concept that Bengal's Muslims were converts from the lower classes offended this fading class of aristocrats viscerally, and they spent a lot of time trying to prove that Bengal's Muslims were primarily outside immigrants like themselves. It is not surprising that they were unable to garner any support for their political goals given their socio-economic distance from

Bengal's peasantry. The political mobilization of the East Bengal peasantry had to wait until new intermediate class organizers from the middle and upper peasantry arrived on the scene.³⁵

Hindus and Muslims in Bengal developed different socio-economic identities as a result of this sectarian division of labor. Since 1835, a pyramidal colonial education system has been in place to produce a group of lower echelon civilian administrators who are in charge of the judicial and financial branches of the colonial state in urban and semi-urban areas. This solidified unfair conditions and chances, which caused Bengali Muslims to be excluded from receiving a western education.³⁶

6. Bengalis Political Identity in Pakistan

Bangladesh's postcolonial history is separated into two parts. The first one is the British invasion, and the second is Pakistan's rule.

The British presence in the Indian subcontinent was regarded as 'foreign' from the beginning until their withdrawal in 1947. They were also thought of and seen as socially superior to the oppressed majority. The British Raj, whose intentions were previously covered in detail, completely determined the territory that makes up modern-day Bangladesh. This is an instance of colonization of Bangladesh's actual land.³⁷

As West Pakistan broke the economic and social trust of the area after 1947, those Muslim leaders who spoke Bengali embraced their identities as ethno-cultural nationalists. In essence, Bengal had two distinct identities during the British rule. There was initially a limited number of Bengali Muslims who understood the importance of maintaining their Islamic identity. The majority, composed primarily of farmers and commoners, was also increasingly involved in social and economic consolidation. As a result, a sizeable portion of Bengalis were more worried about maintaining their way of life than their religious identity. Despite this, the newly educated

middle class, who was worried about preserving their own language and culture, was what initially spurred the uprising. Hence, we have yet another disputed Bengali identity here. The viewpoints of the educated middle class and the typical peasant, however, were different. One attempted to maintain culture, while the other aimed to maintain the economic. Nonetheless, both were secular on the inside or in their minds.

The West Pakistani government had implemented a number of policies to strengthen its control over the Bengali Muslims. They initially attempted to define the identity of its citizens in terms of religion. In 1948, Muhammad Ali Jinnah declared "Urdu" to be the national language.³⁸ The leaders of the up-country-dominated Muslim League redefined Pakistan's cultural and political boundaries using the imagery of the vice-regal political culture as well as Bengali Islam that had been Persianized and Arabianized, instead of creating a bridge to work with Bengali Muslim political elites on cultural and economic issues. Both non-higher and tertiary levels of education were to be taught in Urdu, and the Arabic script was to take the place of the Bengali script. In an effort to eliminate the impact of Sanskritized vocabulary in Bengali literature, encouragement was given to Muslim Bengali writers to write in *Chalit Bhasa*. In order to hide the emergence of elites and the Punjab-centric identity of the Pakistani state, the emphasis on religious identity was employed as a front. The aforementioned self-assigned civilizing missions of West Pakistan suppressed the hopes and problems of the people of East Pakistan. As a result, the Bengalis, whose loyalty to Pakistan was predicated on the notion that they would exercise regional autonomy and share power at the federal level, found themselves effectively abandoned from the very inception of Pakistan. The cunning strategies have resulted in differences in the economics of Pakistan's two provinces. The elites of West Pakistan dominated the center and monopolized power.³⁹

7. Secular-Linguistic Identity: The Consciousness

The 1948-1952 language movement had reawakened Bengali cultural nationalism. Hence, from the middle of the 1950s onward, democratic and secular elements in the society had voiced their complaints, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. With 10% of Pakistan's overall population at the time, the minority populations had grown to be a powerful force that demanded a say in national politics. The Awami League recognized the problem of language as a crucial political one at the same time that it was becoming more well-known and prominent. The secular AL faction overturned the party's earlier stance in 1955 and welcomed all Pakistani citizens, regardless of creed, caste, or religion. The Awami Muslim League's official name had been changed to the National Awami League. As a result, the party soon gained support from both populations' grassroots and became a major political force. It was the first political party to make a significant advancement in the State's communal politics. Hence, the fight for self-rule for the people of then-East Pakistan came to encompass the struggles for democracy, regional autonomy, social justice, secularism, and nationalism.⁴⁰

8. Bengali Mind and Its Contesting Identities to Create 'Bangladesh'

According to Peter Robb- "I do not mean that race, nation and religion became identical, but that they were similar in form. The modern politics of identity may be defined as politics about type instead of issues: politics for gays or Dalits, say, rather than about justice and tolerance or against poverty and disadvantage. Here the link between identity and nation is revealing".⁴¹ He stated that, to some Indians geography is treated as worshipping matter. The British tried to redefine the fixed frontier of India with ideal subject, common culture. However, the divisions of space, period and class showed it was not united always. Successive reorganizations of the Indian states, and the secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan show that many of these regional identities have not survived the pressure for unity."

It would be appropriate to say that India was made for pluralism because of the seeming diversity of heritage that can be seen in various parts of the huge nation, emerging from its geography, and engraved in its history. Bengali people's historical events show that Bengali people formed a type of social conduct that led to a distinctive Bengal mindset. So, it can be told that, although Bangladesh is a new nation, its socio-religious patterns date back thousands of years.⁴²

That's the reason Bangladeshi citizens opposed those atrocities in order to uphold the fundamental principles and values of their society. They either engaged in combat with the Pakistani Army in 1971 or just elected a secular alliance to power in opposition to the forces of intolerance. Due in significant part to the syncretic secularist traditions that existed in Bengal's early history, the '*Bengali*' identity has developed. The Islamic affiliations that were initially formed during the campaign for Pakistan and later by a process of deliberate Islamization by the reigning military and political regimes were used to build the Bangladeshi identity. These structures' nationalistic ideologies actively exclude minority groups, from Bengalis to non-Bengalis and from Islamists to non-Islamists. Thus, in terms of increased expectations for self-identity, liberal democracy, and a progressive society among a significant portion of the population, the creation of Bangladesh marked a socio-political revolution. It may have shown that religion alone is insufficient to create a strong sense of national identity. The result of cultural-linguistic nationalism rising up in opposition to religious hegemony was Bangladesh. Paradoxically, Bangladesh's political systems have not clearly reflected the goals of the independence movement within a short period of time. The principle of keeping religion and politics apart was absent from political discourse, and the flirtation with secularism was brief. Soon after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed, the process of political Islam slowly got under way as military dictators turned to religion to establish legitimacy and deflect attention from the critical issues with governance. Because of this, Bangladesh's political elites in power have

formed the identity within ‘*Bengali*’ and ‘*Bangladeshi*’ nationalistic tendencies over time, either to advance the right to self-determination or to facilitate the ruling goal.⁴³

As a result, the 1971 separation of Bangladesh and Pakistan was not just a result of distance. Undoubtedly, the Bengali people have always had a diverse and heterogeneous mindset. History has shown that the Bengali soul cannot tolerate lengthy periods of suppression. The creation of the ‘*Bengali*’ identity is largely a result of the syncretic secularist traditions that predominated Bengal's early history. These social norms have experienced multiple assaults and harm over time. Yet, Bengalis were compelled to found their own country due to their numerous identities. Because of this, after 1947, religious factors were not the only ones considered. Because maintaining diversity and multiplicity is necessary for maintaining societal harmony and tolerance.

In conclusion it can be said that the Bengali people’s mentality of adapting to the new has made Bengali identity different and unique, which accelerated the coexistence of Bengalis on the basis of effortless mutual interaction till the medieval period. Religion never got a chance to play the major role here. Nevertheless, the arrival of the British in Bengal brought about a momentary but profound change in the mind of the Bengalis, which was entirely based on religion and sect. As a result of religious disharmony, two new states named Pakistan and India were born. However, partition in 1947 could not solve the crisis of self-identity of the Bengalis. The historically proven pluralist form of the Bengali identity had to re-emerge which led to their fight against discrimination, eventually giving birth to an independent Bangladesh.

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