

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN BANGLADESH SINCE 1990s

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DECLARATION

I declare that the Dissertation entitled "Islamic Fundamentalism In Bangladesh since 1990s," submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work and has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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*In loving memories of my
Dada & Dadi*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AASU	All-Assam Students Union
ABIM	Angkatan Belia Islam sa- Malaysia
AGP	Asom Gana Parishad
AIAPC	Anti- Islamic Activities Prevention Committee
AL	Awami League
AHAB	Ahle Hadith Andolan Bangladesh
AHIF	Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation
ARIF	Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front
ARNO	Arakan Rohingya National Organisation
BDR	Bangladesh Rifles
BKSAL	Bangladesh Peasants' and Workers' Awami League
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BSF	Border Security Force
BSS	Bangladesh Sangbad Sanstha
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CHTs	Chittagong Hill Tracts
DGFI	Directorate General Of Forces Intelligence
FEER	Far Eastern Economic Review
HM	Hizbul Mujahideen
HuJi	Harkat-ul-Jihad
HUJIB	Harkat-ul-Islami Bangladesh
HuM	Harkat-ul-Mujahideen
ICS	Islami Chhatra Shibir
ICM	Islamic Constitution Movement
IDL	Islamic Democratic League
IKNMB	International Khatme Nabuwat Movement Bangladesh
IIFS	International Islamic Federation of Students
IIFSO	International Islamic Federation of Student Organisations
IOJ	Islami Oikyo Jote
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence Bureau
Jamaat	Jamaat –e-Islami Bangladesh
JeM	Jaish-e-Mohammad
JKLF	Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front
JMB	Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh
JMJB	Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh
JSD	Leftist National Socialist Party
LeT	Lashkar-e-Toiba
LeJ	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MULTA	Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam
MMA	Muttahida-Majlis-e-Amal
MM	Muslim Mujahideen
NDFB	National Democratic Front of Bodoland
NLFT	National Liberation Front of Tripura
NLD	National League for Democracy
NSCN(I-M)	Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah)
NWFP	North West Frontier Province

PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PPR	Political Parties Regulations
RPF	Rohingya Patriotic Front
RSO	Rohingya Solidarity Organisation
SIMI	Students' Islamic Movement of India
SSP	Sipah-e-Saheba
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Asom
UNLF	United National Liberation Front
UNHCR	United Nation's High Commissioner For Refugees

PREFACE

One of the most intriguing obsessions afflicting the modern civilisation is the phenomenon of the so called “Islamic - Fundamentalism”. Islam is one of the most rapidly growing religions in the world and Islamic Fundamentalism is one of its more forceful manifestations. The rise of Islam based politics especially in various Muslim populated countries has caught the attention of the world and is emerging as one of the most hot and blazing issue which has become a sad and hard reality of the present day world. The worst thing is that it is continuously spreading its fangs.

Islamic movements have been gaining new momentum and attracting widespread media coverage since the 1979 “Islamic – Revolution” in Iran. Islamic movements, which are organised to gain state power, represent “an aggressive politicisation of religion”. According to their discourse, Islam is ‘as much a political ideology as a religion’.. Islamic fundamentalism connotes a search for the fundamentals of the faith, the foundations of the Islamic polity (Ummah), and the bases of the legitimate authority (al- shariyyah-al-hukm). And such a formulation emphasises the political dimension of the Islamic movement more than its religious aspects.

Despite the wide coverage, Islamic fundamentalism is a phenomenon that continues to be little understood. Perhaps, because this is so, it is also often feared. This is well reflected in the September 11 attacks which brought Islamic fundamentalism to the international spot light. In the aftermath of 9/11 incident, the scholars, especially the westerners regard it as the most dangerous trend, even more threatening than the communism of the past. This new phenomenon has brought to the forefront many new hot spots where fundamentalist movements have emerged around the world. Bangladesh is one of them. Bangladesh, the third largest Muslim country and one of the poorest nations in the world, referred as ‘Basket - case’ of the world by Henry Kissinger and which once remained tolerant society, where shocking poverty co-exists with a surprisingly sophisticated literary tradition and an exhilaratingly vibrant artistic milieu is gradually falling into the grip of Islamic fundamentalism.

Bangladesh is going through transformational and transitional phase. According to Bertil Lintner, a revolution is taking place in Bangladesh that threatens trouble for the region and beyond if left unchallenged. Islamic fundamentalism, religious intolerance, militant Muslim groups with links to international terrorist groups, a powerful military

with ties to the militants, the mushrooming of Islamic schools churning out radical students, middle-class apathy, poverty and lawlessness – all are combining to transform the nation.

In the light of fundamentalist activities, the fortunes of secularism in the country, which was born in the bloody environs of genocide, armed with the unconventional slogan of a language-borne nationalism, appears to be dwindling. Secularism was one of the fundamental principles of the constitution. However, shortly after gaining independence, Islam re-emerged in Bangladesh politics. The ruling elites failed to create a secular political domain, which developed an environment for the revival of Islamic politics. Due to their failure, the elites started the process of Islamisation as a means of overcoming their lack of legitimacy among the people. From 1975 to 1990, civil and military bureaucrats and their political parties patronised Islam and tried to use it as a vehicle to overcome their crisis of hegemony. Thus, the use of Islam as a political discourse and the failure of the nationalist elites to establish their hegemony over civil-society based on secular identities created a space for the Islamists to advance their politics in Bangladesh.

Moreover, even after the restoration of democracy in 1990s, in Bangladesh; no serious effort was made on the part of either BNP or Awami League to re-introduce secularism in the state or the constitution. They followed the footsteps of their predecessors and so the process of politicisation of Islam continued. The worst part is that, now the fundamentalist forces play a key role in the formation of government. To illustrate, the eleventh day of the September 2001 and the almost coincidental reversal of fortunes of the secular forces in Bangladesh – especially after the 1 October 2001 elections, which brought to power BNP and the four-party alliance, where Jamaat-i-Islami, as a key constituent, all this is giving momentum to Islamic fundamentalism which in turn is relegating secularism to the backseat. This has resulted in the increasing uneasiness with which the battle between rationalism, secularism and democracy on the one hand and religious bigotry and fundamentalism on the other hand is fought in Bangladesh.

In the light of all this, Bangladesh is increasingly engaging global attention – in the wake of the post-9/11 period because of the discernible rising graph of Islamic fundamentalist activities and terrorist acts. There is a growing concern in

neighbouring India and in the wider international community that there is danger of the situation getting out of hand unless timely effective action is taken.

Focusing on these aspects, the proposed study will analyse the resurgence of Islamic - fundamentalism in Bangladesh since 1990s. The main focus will be on the 'politicisation of Islam' i.e., how the essence of the religion has been hijacked to serve few vested interests. It will also undertake the detailed analysis of how the very essence of the formation of the state (i.e., secular Bengali nationalism) has been betrayed with the passage of time by the ruling leaders. There will also be an attempt to explore the local and external factors which have been responsible for the re-emergence of Islam in Bangladesh as a social and political significant force. An attempt will also be made to assess the factors which can be used to tide this menace and renew the spirit of Bengali nationalism encompassing the secular ethos. The First chapter will focus on the theoretical aspects of Islamic Fundamentalism in general and Bangladesh in particular. In the second chapter, an attempt will be made to trace the genesis of Islamic Fundamentalism in Bangladesh dealing with its' Historical development. The third chapter will shed light on the strategy adopted by the political leaders to utilize the immense potential of Islam for political purposes which sanctions the saliency of Islam in the public sphere and imparts new impetus to the politicization of Islam. This will encompass the time-period from 1990s till date. The fourth chapter will focus on external linkages which is strengthening the menace and in turn putting forth precarious situation for Bangladesh government to tackle it. Finally, in the concluding chapter, the assessment of the study will be done which will examine the validity of the proposed hypotheses.

CHAPTER: I

INTRODUCTION

Fundamentalism one of the hottest and blazing issues which have become a sad and hard reality of the present day world .It constitutes the biggest strain on the unity and integrity of any country. The worst thing is that it is continuously spreading its fangs. Though having different dimensions like ideological, fanaticism, sectarianism, bigotry but one dimension which is now assuming gigantic and horrifying proportion and has posed a major threat to security is religious fundamentalism. Religious fundamentalism is much more than extremism or terrorism; it is rather a powerful challenge to the existing order of the international system of secular nation-states. And it is a matter of great sorrow that fundamentalism has been provided shelters by few vested sections of society under the garb of different religions, one being Islam.

So, one of the most intriguing obsessions afflicting the modern civilisation is the phenomenon of the so called “Islamic-Fundamentalism”. Islam is one of the most rapidly growing religions in the world and Islamic fundamentalism is one of its more forceful manifestations (Hussain 2006:51). Islamic fundamentalism emerged into worldwide prominence in the late twentieth century and seemed to set the stage for the twenty-first century with terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The perpetrators and supporters of these attacks, and of other similar attacks in various parts of the world (for example, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Israel), legitimated their actions with reference to the religion of Islam.

Predictably, these events supported an already established Western perception of Islam as an atavistic religion that promotes violence and of all Muslims as fanatical extremists. The result is that the term “Islamic Fundamentalism” functions in common Western discourse largely as a pejorative epithet or label, obscuring the realities it is supposed to describe under a blanket of fear and revulsion (Greifenhagen 2004:63). Further, it functions to homogenise Islam in the Western imagination and cast suspicion on all Muslims as potential threats. Against this emotionally laden background, it is necessary to bring some clarity to the notion of Islamic fundamentalism, so that it may serve a descriptive and explanatory purpose.

At this juncture, many questions are posed:

- Is Islamic fundamentalism a new phenomenon?
- If not, why fundamentalism is on the increase?
- Are we moving to a more dreadful world than during the Cold War or any other time in human history?
- Will Samuel Huntington's prophecy of 'Clash of Civilizations'¹ thesis proves to be true?
- What has Islam to do with this revolt?
- Why is a link being drawn between Islam and fundamentalism?
- Why do we have these burst and cloud burst of fundamentalism, when our deepest beliefs deny divisive sentiments?

In this first chapter, an attempt has been made to explore the frontiers of Islamic fundamentalism in general and Bangladesh in particular. For convenience, the first chapter has been put under three sub-titles shedding light on genesis of Islamic fundamentalism, nature of Islamic fundamentalism and brief introduction of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh.

GENESIS OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM:

The word fundamental has been derived from the Latin word "*FUNDAMENTUM*" meaning foundation. Literally, it means basic rule or principles. Fundamentalism means the strict following of the fundamental doctrines of any religion or system of thought. However, the term fundamental is not used with any ideology and it is almost exclusively used in the context of religion. Whenever it is used in this way, fundamentalism is spoken of in a highly value laden manner almost invariably with negative connotations-something highly dogmatic, something that does not belong in the modern world, and something that has to be reckoned with (Ba-Yunus 1997). The term 'Fundamentalism' is said to have first seen the light of the day in 1920 when an editor of a prominent Baptist paper, alarmed at when he saw as a 'havoc' wrought by

¹As per Huntington's prophecy, the clash of civilizations will dominate global politics and that the faultlines between the civilizations will be the battle lines of the future (Huntington 1993).

'rationalism' and 'worldliness'. American protestant churches coined the term and defined fundamentalists as 'those ready to do battle royal for the fundamentals of Protestants' (Caplan 1987:157). A high point of the movement was reached in 1925 at the famous Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, whereby teaching the theory of biological evolution was prohibited in the state subsidized schools² (Nazmi 2004:3). The few definitions are cited here for its clarity.

Oxford Dictionary of current English defines 'Fundamentalism' as "maintenance, in opposition to modernism, of traditional orthodox beliefs such as the inerrancy of the scripture and literal acceptance of the creeds as fundamentals of protestant Christianity".

American college Dictionary (ACD) explains the concept of fundamentalism as a "movement of American Protestantism which stresses the inerrancy of the Bible, not only in matters of faith and morals, but literal historical record and prophecy, e.g. of creation, the virgin Birth of Christ, his second advent etc".

Further, According to Encyclopedia Britannica, the fundamentalists need not to be ascetics, though they may be found observing certain taboos. Most of them may be seen to evade the evils of the modern society, but at the same time they are not teetotaler in real sense of the term.

Jere van dyke writes, "Fundamentalism is a yearning for certainty, for an answer to despair, a desire for community, for peace, purity, God, a home and for eternal life. While fundamentalists, no matter what their religion, can be self-righteous, judgmental, even totalitarian, they have found purpose in life, happiness, and love among their fellow believers". Thus, fundamentalism may be defined as a movement that is radical in terms of its goals, extremist in terms of its methods and literalist in terms of its adherence to scripture (Ben- Dor and Pedahzur 2004:73).

As far as its relations and popular use with Islam is concerned, the use is problematic because of its Christian origins. There is no and there has never been any fundamentalist/non fundamentalist differentiation in Islam during the past fourteen centuries. Further, the expression Islamic Fundamentalism, and the very negative

² In their speeches, rhetorics and behind the scene activities of their leaders, the fundamentalists often appear to have quite militant, trying to impose their ideology on other churches. For details see Firnis (1963), and Marsden (1980).

connotations that go with it, may also be counter-productive. This is because to many a sensitive Muslim ear, it may sound like a deliberate effort to create a new rift in the already fractionated world of Islam. The connotation Islamic fundamentalism as put forth by Western policy makers, its initiations can be traced to the heightening of the Islamic consciousness characterised as revivalism, renaissance, and return to Islam or March of Islam. Its proponents frequently used the expressions like 'Baath-al-Islami' (Islamic renaissance), 'Al Usuliyyah Islamiyyah' (Islamic fundamentalism). It connotes a search for the fundamentals of the faith, the foundations of the Islamic Polity (Ummah), and the bases of the legitimate authority (Al Shariyyah Al Hukm). And also such a formulation emphasises the political dimension of the Islamic movement more than its religious aspects. Thus, Islamic fundamentalism is used in reference to Islamic movements or groups that use Islam as a political force to mobilise the public, gain control of governance, and reform society and state in accordance with their doctrinal religious agenda (Faksh 1997:73). Islamic movements which are organized to gain state power represent "an aggressive politicisation of religion" (Tibi 1988:9). According to their discourse, Islam is "as much a political ideology as a religion" (Roy 1994:7). As a result, though Islamic fundamentalism emerges out of reform (*Islah*) project of 19th and 20th centuries launched by Jamal al din al afghani, Md.Abduh, Rashid Rida, today in the hands of these fundamentalists, Islam is used as a charter for political action at the individual, regional and state level. Oliver Roy defines Islamism as "the perception of Islam more as a political ideology than as a mere religion... In this sense Islamism is a modern movement, the last wave of an anti –imperialist mobilization that dates back to the last century (Roy 2001:199). Further, Patrick Gaffney's give description of this period in Egyptian History as "a time of growing unrest and uncertainty, with rising social, economic and political expectations on a collision course with limited opportunities and resources" (Gaffney 1997:263).

The current period of Islamic fundamentalism is not something altogether new; for the most part it has simply taken on a new form and expression in response to conditions marked by rising tensions and frustrations. In the Islamic world, the belief has always been that the religion of Islam — its sources (the *Quran* and the *Sunna*, or prophetic traditions), its inherited ways, and its history – provides the principle that enables a virtuous and just society (Nazmi 2004:7). To get the holistic picture of this new

phenomenon i.e. Islamic Fundamentalism which has emerged on the world scene, it is necessary to see Islam through three different angles: Islam as a personal and group identity, Islam as a religious faith, Islam as a political ideology (Ruthven 2006).

Islam as Identity:

'Islam' in Arabic is a verbal noun, meaning self- surrender to God as revealed through the message and life of his Prophet, Muhammad. In its primary meaning (for example, as employed in the Quran and other foundational texts) the word Muslim refers to one whom so surrenders him or herself (from the active participle of the verb *aslama*, to surrender oneself). There is, however, a secondary meaning to 'Muslim' which may shade into the first. A Muslim is one born to a Muslim father who takes on his or her parent's confessional identity without necessarily to the beliefs and practices of the faith, just as a Jew may define him or herself as 'Jewish' without observing the Halacha.

In non- Muslim societies such Muslims may subscribe to, and be vested with secular identities. To cite, the Muslims of Bosnia, descendents of Slavs who converted to Islam under Ottoman Rule, are not always noted for attendance at prayer, abstention from alcohol, seclusion of women, and other social practices associated with believing Muslims in other parts of the world. They were officially designated as Muslims to distinguish them from (orthodox) Serbs and (catholic) Croats under the former Yugoslavian communist regime. The label 'Muslim' indicates their ethnicity and group allegiance, but not necessarily their religious beliefs. In this limited context (which may also apply to other Muslim minorities in Europe and Asia) there may be no necessary contradiction between Muslim and being atheist or agnostics. Generally there is little consistency in the way such labels are applied. Where Muslims, however secular or 'cultural', are beleaguered, as in Bosnia, a rhetorical generosity will include them among the believers. Thus, the words 'Islam' and 'Muslim' are disputed territory everywhere.

Islam as Faith:

The classical authorities made a distinction between Islam as professed by the Muslim on the one hand, and 'iman' or faith of the 'mumin' (believer) on the other. In the original wars that united the Arabian Peninsula the self surrender or submission to God, however sincere, occurred through the exterior agencies of the Prophet and his

followers. The Quran alludes to an incident when a group of Bedouin Arabs claim to have become believers and are told by God through the Prophet: ‘ you have not [yet] attained to faith; you should [rather] say: “ We have [outwardly] surrendered” for [true] faith has not yet entered your hearts’ (Quran 49:14). Faith would follow surrender to the Muslim Prophet, conviction the appeal of his divine charisma. The puritanical Kharijis (Seceders) cast their net very narrowly, denying grave sinners the right to call themselves Muslims.

The same puritanical tendency has been revived by militants groups today, who exclude lax or nominal Muslims from their definition of the ‘umma’, the world-wide community of believers. The Kharijis’ opponents, known as the Murji’a, allowed that virtually anyone could be considered a Muslim so long as they proclaimed the ‘shahada’³, the public declaration of faith enshrined in the formula that ‘There is no god but God; Muhammad is the messenger of God’. Most of the classical authorities took the broader view. Abu Hanifa, whose name was given to one of the four legal schools of Sunni Islam, stated that ‘those who face in the direction of Makka at prayer are true believers and no act of theirs can remove them from the faith’. This shows that Islam as faith connotes a very broad meaning.

Although seekers after political power tended to wrap themselves in religious symbols just as avidly as they did in the West in pre-modern times, with polemicists routinely accusing each other of heresy, the history of Islam, however scarred by violence, is remarkably free from the forms of religious intolerance. The crisis many Muslims are facing in adjusting to the realities of the contemporary world is not the result of some inherent lack of flexibility in the realm of ideas. Historically, Islam has shown enormous adaptability in accommodating different cultural systems within its overarching framework: the ‘Abrahamic family’⁴ of Western Asian monotheism that includes Judaism and Christianity as well as Islam. The crisis of modern Islam is not so much a ‘spiritual crisis’ as a crisis of authority-political, intellectual, and legal as well as spiritual.

³ The Shahada is more than simply a statement of belief; it also marks communal identification through a ritualised speech act. The text of the Shahada, spoken with proper intention, determines one’s position as a member of the Muslim community (Feener 2006).

⁴ The three monotheistic religious traditions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam are collectively referred to as the “Abrahamic” religions. They acknowledge a spiritual lineage through Abraham and teach that one God has communicated to humanity through a succession of prophets.

Islam as political ideology:

The word 'fundamentalist' has passed into English Usage to describe those Muslims who seek by whatever means to restore or establish an Islamic state. According to this view it is the task of the Islamic-state to enforce obedience to the revealed law of Islam-the Shari'a. The focus for those seeking to defend Islam against what they see as the corrupting effects of modern secularism and the 'West' is action rather than belief. So, it is in enforcing behavioral conformity (orthopraxy) rather than doctrinal conformity (orthodoxy) that Muslim radicals or activists look to a 'restoration' of Islamic law backed by the power of the state. Most Muslims belonging to the militant tendency challenge the fundamentals of the international order: in the terms of one of their most influential mentors, Sayyid Abul ala Maududi (1903-79), they aim to replace the sovereignty of the people expressed through parliamentary legislation, with the 'sovereignty of God' as revealed, in its perfection and finality, through the Shari'a (Ruthven 2006:4-5).

However, this approach has been criticised. Historically, critics point out that no Islamic society, even during the high tide of Islamic civilisation, was governed exclusively according to Islamic law. There was always a gap between the theoretical formulations of the jurists and the de facto exercise of political power. Moreover, given the enormous cultural and geographical differences between Muslim societies, Islamic law was everywhere supplemented by local customary laws. In legal-historical terms, the Shari'a was never a reality. Moreover, the critics point out that the connotation 'political Islam' is misrepresentation. Far from being exclusively 'Islamic', the ideology or ideologies being advanced are really hybrids mixing Islamic concepts with twentieth-century ideas, liberal and totalitarian. The founders of modern political Islam --Maududi, Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), and the Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-89) -- were profoundly influenced by the Western political and intellectual cultures they professed to oppose. Thus Maududi's critique of Western materialism and moral decadence was informed by fascist attacks on democracy and an admiration for the dictators of the 1930s. Qutb's call for action against barbarism (jahiliya)⁵, far from being based on 'traditional' Islam, is thoroughly modern in its espousal of an 'existentialist', action-oriented commitment, while his claim that

⁵ It signifies the period of ignorance- a time akin to the pre-Islamic period of Arabian paganism when the community was ignorant of God and His commandments.

democracy and social- justice have Islamic origins is considered by some to be spurious, based on an ahistorical reading of Islam's sacred texts.

Likewise the 'Islamic' constitution of Iran, introduced by Khomeini in 1979, is a mixture of Western and Islamic forms, not an 'Islamic' constitution as such. Far from being subject to Islamic law, Khomeini made it clear that the Islamic state, as successor to the Prophet Muhammad, had the power to override Islamic law, even in such fundamentals of the faith as prayer, fasting and pilgrimage. Thus, Islam as religion should be distinguished from Islam as political ideology. To call the latter 'fundamentalism' is not only misleading; it makes a gratuitous concession to the advocates of political Islam by implying that the defense of Islam's 'fundamentals' invariably demands political action. Historically, Islam has gone through periods of expansions and vibrancy followed by revivalist movements that rose and fell, each seeking to reinvigorate the faith reestablish the true Islamic order in accord with its own vision. And the revivalist impulse in Islam lives on today.

Since the start of the nineteenth century, one can identify three periods of Islamic revival associated with the failure of various societies to deal with an accumulation of internal and external crises arising from socio-political and economic weakness and from foreign hegemony. The first in the nineteenth century was Wahhabis in Arabia, the Mahdis in Sudan, the Sanusis in North Africa (Libya) and Islamic reform in Egypt. The second period climaxed in the 1940s with the ascendancy of two major fundamentalist movements: Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimoun (the Muslim brotherhood) in Egypt and Jama'at-i-Islami (the Muslim society) in the Indian subcontinent.

The third and longest period of Islamic revival began in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab defeat by Israel and continued throughout the 1970s amid social economic dislocations, class disparities and authoritarian state structures. Islamism became a formidable force in the 1980s after the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979, sweeping across the region from the Maghreb to the Gulf. Vast stretches of Muslim lands have since come under its sweep. This is Islam as a political force that is, "Political Islam"- - challenging established regimes, shaking political life to its foundations, and calling for the revival of the early Islamic ethos of governance. As mentioned earlier, it seeks states and societies under Islamic regime. Power is the bedrock of the political Islam. To the Muslim activists, religion is the manifestation of faith and power and "faith"

itself gets ‘incarnated’ in the state. Thus, the Islamic state is the sine qua non in the struggle against the existing secular state.

Thus, despite their pragmatic use of religion, the context is clearly more political than religious, and it embraces politics both domestic and global. Fundamentalists “reaffirm the old doctrines; they subtly lift them from their original context, embellish and institutionalize them, and employ them as ideological weapons against a hostile world.... (In) remaking the world, fundamentalists demonstrate a closer affinity to modernism than to traditionalism”. And, finally, fundamentalism is not an expression of a religious revival, but rather a pronouncement of a new order, for “fundamentalists seek to replace existing structures with a comprehensive system emanating from religious principles and embracing law, polity, society, economy, and culture....(F)undamentalism contains within it a totalitarian impulse” (reference).

Fundamentalists, again, are modernists, not traditionalists, because they evaluate tradition in the light of modernity, and selectively retrieve silent elements of both in order to put forward a concept of political order, be this domestic, as in the case of Hindustan (Hindu India), or global, as is the case in Nizam Islami/Islamic order, which is in rhetoric expected to encompass the entire globe. Dar al Islam/the territoriality of Islam is identical with Dar al Salam / the world in peace, but only under the banner of Islam. In short, fundamentalists gain a boost from the failed policies of the secular regimes and proceed to question the secular nation-state as such. However, the divine order they envisage as an alternative model in reality leads to disorder. Moreover, this process is apt to be violent as fundamentalists politicise religion and fragment loyalties.

Religious fundamentalism occurs when the use of fundamentalism is systematised by an ideological and fanatical interpretation of a religious text (Venkatraman 2007: 231). According to Charles Kimball, religious terrorism functions on the basis of five essential principles. These are: means justify the end, holy war, blind obedience, absolute truth claims, and the ideal times. Kimball explains that “truth claims” are essential points in a religion “at which divergent interpretations arise”. Extreme interpretations of “truth claims” provoke the ideology upon which religious terrorism is based. However the “authentic religious truth claims are never as inflexible and exclusive as zealous adherents insist”. The staunch “truth claims” professed by religious terrorists allow them to use “religious structures and doctrines... almost like

weapons” for their movement. In the process, “religious convictions that become locked into absolute truths can easily lead people to see themselves as God’s agents. People so emboldened are capable of violent and destructive behavior in the name of religion” (Kimball 2003). This conviction creates fanatical interpretations and ideologies that give rise to religious terrorism.

The various movements now active in most Muslim countries work on certain assumptions:

1. The Muslim world is in a state of disorder brought on by centuries of political and moral decay.
2. This decay has resulted due to Western intrusion with an alien set of immoral secularist values and behaviors based on concept of materialism and nationalism.
3. To combat this perceived decay, they stressed on re-Islamisation of society which can be achieved only by re-politicising Islam.

The ugliest manifestation of Islamic fundamentalism is Jihad. So, it’s very necessary to shed some light on it to show how the core element of the terminology has been hijacked.

Jihad:

Etymologically the term comes from the Arabic root ‘JAHADA’ meaning ‘to struggle’ or ‘to strive’. Despite being frequently used, the term is little understood – and is often glossed as ‘Holy- War’. However, Jihad has a more complex meaning which is not linked to Islamic militancy and global radicalisation of Islam.

The Quran distinguishes between ‘the greater Jihad’ which can be translated as the ‘Transformation of the self’ and the ‘lesser Jihad’ which can be translated as the ‘outright warfare or militance against Islam’. The concept of Jihad is therefore carefully circumscribed. It also concerns when Jihad is legitimate and a Muslim duty, as well as, who has the right to call Jihad. Despite this fact, Jihad tends to be used as synonymous with armed struggle (Holy War) the concept has thus become a favourite among the religious right and is deployed to legitimate the use of violence against all enemies of Islam (Khan 2005).

The strife against evil, the ‘greater jihad’, might take a purely moralistic form; but at times of increasingly traumatic historical crisis, the ‘lesser jihad’ came to the fore.

This shows that the two jihads were interchangeable. The most active movements of resistance to European rule during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were led or inspired by renovators (mujaddids), most of them members of Sufi orders, who sought to emulate the prophet's example by purifying the religion of their day and waging war on corruption and infidelity. Such movements included the rebellion led by Prince Dipanegara in Java (1825-30), the jihad preached among the Yusufzai Pathans on the Northwest Frontier of India by Sayyid Ahmed Bareilvi in 1831, the Naqshabandi Chechen leader Shamil's campaign against the Russians in the Caucasus (1834-59), and Abd al-Qadir's jihad against the French in Algeria (1839-47). Not all of these movements were directed at resisting Europeans: the Mahdi Muhammad ibn Abdullah in the Sudan originally campaigned against the imperial ambitions of the Egyptians or 'Turks' he believed had abandoned Islam to foreigners; the 'New Sect' in China, led by another Naqshbandi sheikh Ma Ming Hsin, was behind a series of major revolts against the Sinicizing policies of the Manchu emperors during the nineteenth century (Ruthven 2006).

Here, one question arises that why is there such an elevated level of concern in the West approaching paranoia about Islam? Why this excitement about Islam at this juncture in History, as some of these movements being more than fifty years old or even older?

Heightened concern in the West about the Muslim world coincides with the demise in the mid 1980s of the Soviet Union, the socialist giant which remained a bogey for the Western powers for almost fifty years in the 20th century (Wright 1994). With the socialist specter out of the way, the Western elite needed another demon to exorcise and they found in the form of Islam. Before the exit of the Soviet Union from the international scene, developments in the Muslim world, such as the overthrow of the "Friendly Tyrants" in Egypt, in Syria, in Iraq, and to cap all that, in 1979, created serious concerns among Western policy makers who, however, found themselves without any well thought out or united policy to deal with these "delinquents", all their energies having been spent on containing the Soviet Union. To quote, Avineri:

A specter is haunting Europe- and the world in general: the specter of Islamic Fundamentalism. All the world powers have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this specter: the pope and the President of Russia, Helmut Kohl and Francois Mitterrand, French radicals and German police

agents, and of course the CIA and right-wing Israeli politicians (Avineri 1993:167).

Outside of Christianity and Judaism, Islam is the most known religion in the West. It is also perhaps, the most misunderstood religion in the West. This is so because most Western scholars have tried to understand it in terms of their own historical, moral and ideological biases. There exists a deep rooted suspicion of Islam dating back to the shocks that Europe received at the hands of early Islamic armies in the 7th century; and especially to the encounters during the Crusades. To quote Armstrong:

Even when Europe recovered from the Dark Ages and established its own great civilization, the old fear of the ever-expanding Muslim empire remained. Europe could make no impression on this powerful and dynamic culture: the Crusading project of twelfth and thirteenth centuries eventually failed.....This fear made it impossible for Western Christians to be rational or objective about the Muslim faith. At the same time that they were weaving fearful fantasies about Jews, they were also evolving a distorted image of Islam, which reflected their own buried anxieties. Western scholars denounced Islam as a blasphemous faith and its Prophet Muhammad the great pretender... In Mummings' plays he was presented as the enemy of Western civilization, who fought our own brave St George (Armstrong 1992:11).

Charles Lindholm states, "Contemporary Western enmity... is not simply a consequence of modern conflict. It is a reflection of the thousand-year rivalry between the Muslim Middle East and Christian Europe For economic, political and religious hegemony over the Western hemisphere and beyond – a contest dominated until recently by Islam" (Lindholm 2002). Initially, through the encounters of the Crusades, Western reaction to Islam was a fear of a Muslim invasion and a return to the days when Islam spread as far as Spain and Southern France. The Ottoman challenge that, in 1529, led to Suleiman's army at the gates of Vienna was a genuine concern and fear for the world of Christendom, and this was reflected in the Western Literature at the time (Jackson 2007: 2-3).

Islamic Fundamentalism as a threat has its basis in the fear that was prevalent in Western Europe during the sixteen and seventeenth centuries. Since Islam was perceived as a threat by the West, the Muslim Empires have been depicted as vast tyrannies, compared with an enlightened, liberal Europe. Hegel famously wrote in 'Reason in History', 'the Orientals knew only that one is free, the Greeks and Romans that some are free, while we know that all men absolutely, that is, as men, are free. As

the fear of Islam receded to be replaced by patronage, Western commentators, such as Max Weber, perceived the Islamic nations as arbitrary, personalised kingships with inefficient and corrupt bureaucracies. In the case of the Ottoman Empire, the Sultan as lacking any kind of moral purpose, other than the pursuit and retention of power. Authority was cruel, inefficient and irrational and based purely upon the ability of the leader to coerce' (Hegel 1953). However, Graham Fuller went with different viewpoint and wrote in 1995, "a civilization clash is not so much over Jesus Christ, Confucius, or the Prophet Muhammad as it is over the unequal distribution of world power, wealth, and influence" (Reference). Werner Ruf states, "Where God was pronounced dead all notions of morality have been turned into nihilism" (Werner2002:21).

This inaccurate image of Islam became one of the received ideas of Europe and continues to affect the perception of the Muslim world. Following the collapse of communism Islamism is likely to dominate the political discourse. But for all the anxieties about a future 'Clash of Civilisations' it seems unlikely to effect significant external political change. As Roy predicts the practical effects of Islamisation entails, not a confrontation with the West, but rather a cultural retreat into the mosque and private family space. With globalisation eroding the classic distinction between Dar-al-Islam and Dar-al-Harb the coming decades are likely to see a retreat from direct political action and a renewed emphasis on the personal and private aspects of faith (Roy 1994).

For all the efforts of political Islam to conquer the state on the basis of new collectivist ideology constructed on the ruins of Marxism-Leninism and using some of its materials, the processes of historical and technological change point remorselessly towards increasing individualism and personal choice-primary aspects of secularity. While regional conflicts such as Palestine or Kashmir or a political struggle for power as in Algeria may continue to be articulated in Islamist terms, any realistic assessment of the long-term prospects for the Muslim world must include the realisation that modernisation is inevitable. In the long term modernisation is a global process that need no longer be predicated on the Western cultural hegemony (Roy 1994). However, despite this optimism on important point which comes to the forefront after analysing it critically that as long as the underlying factors that make the current cycle of Islamic militancy a compelling issue are not satisfactorily resolved, there is no

reason to assume that its suppression is imminent, and even if it were, its future recurrence could easily be prevented (Khashan 1997:6).

Now, in the light of the above facts which have come to the forefront an analysis of Islamic Fundamentalism will be done in the context of Bangladesh and an attempt will be made to reach the facts.

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN SOUTH ASIA:

South Asia is the most populated region in the world and home to the largest concentration of Muslims on Earth. There are over 1.5 billion people in South Asia, which includes Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Srilanka, and Nepal. If one includes China, directly north, there are 2.7 billion people in this region, nearly one-half of the world's population. South Asia is home to nearly one half of the world's 1.2 billion Muslims. Nearly 30 percent of this region is Muslim (Ghosta 2006).

The emergence of radical and extremist Islamist movements has proved to be the principal source of instability in South Asia since the late 1970's. The rise of radical Islamist groups has been influenced by the leading ideologies of Islamic Fundamentalist thought i.e. Jamal-ud-din-Afghani (1839-1897), Mau Lana Abul Ali Mawdoodi (1909-89) leader of the Islamic revolutionary party of Iran, Hassan-al-Banna and Syed Qutb (1906-66) of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt formed in 1928. The concepts of Dar-el-Islam, Dar-el-Harb, and Jihad as advocated by the Islamic Fundamentalists envisage a perpetual state of confrontation. They prop up the Islamic political consciousness by politicising already existing religious traditions and practices and by resisting change and modernization. The concepts of 'Ummah⁶' or 'Millat' are being invoked to abet, support and legitimise the secessionist movements of Muslims living in non-Muslim states. Thus, Islamic Fundamentalism poses a challenge to the secular and democratic polity, pluralistic social order and inter-religious harmony (Warikoo 2006).

AFGHANISTAN:

The roots of Islamic Fundamentalism can be traced in Afghanistan with the rise of Taliban to power. The Taliban enforced their extremist religious and socio-political

⁶ It refers to the transregional definition of the Muslim collective which is bounded by religious affiliation. It stands for the just and equitable society and welfare of the community. The term umma can be used on two different levels simultaneously, one general and one specific, and then shows that both these understandings of the term have a solid foundation in the Qur'an itself (Pulungan 1994).

agenda turned Afghanistan into the hub of arms, drug-trafficking and international terrorism. Afghanistan remained fractured and turbulent posing great challenge to peace and security in the region. Despite the fact, that U.S. launched attacks in Afghanistan in the light of 9/11 terrorist attacks, violence is escalating in Afghanistan. So, ensuring sustainable security and stability in Afghanistan is a great challenge facing the international community.

PAKISTAN:

Islamist ideology and fundamentalists have been used as tools by Pakistan to expand its strategic, ideological and even economic frontiers in South Asia which is a major cause of conflict and instability in the region. The irony is that, these Fundamentalist groups have now begun to devour Pakistan itself. The Jihadi groups defy govt. in Pakistan and pose serious threat to its law and order and social equilibrium. Fundamentalists are a formidable force in Pakistan and enjoy power in two provinces- North west Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan. To illustrate, Muttahida-Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), a conglomerate of pro-Taliban parties emerged as a credible political force in October 2002 general elections in Pakistan. Other local religious fundamentalist groups like Sipah-e-Saheba (SSP) and Lashker-e- Jhangvi (LeJ) have made the situation even more dreadful. A newspaper report listed 55 training camps for the Jihadis spreaded all over Pakistan (Warikoo 2006).

INDIA:

It's a matter of great sorrow that India, known for its great civilisation, religious and spiritual Guru's role at the world stage, inclusiveness and catholicity is reeling under the fangs of Fundamentalism. All the great teachings of a accommodation, tolerance, plurality and diversity has been relegated to the background. The common masses have been left as mute spectators of these Fundamentalist forces like Sikh Fundamentalism, Hindu Fundamentalism, and Islamic Fundamentalism. All this has posed a great threat to the national integration forces. Though various regions have been afflicted with this, Jammu and Kashmir is the major victim.

JAMMU AND KASHMIR:

The Jammu and Kashmir province of India has been reeling under Islamic Fundamentalists, terrorists and foreign mercenaries, all trained from across the border in Pakistan, since 1989. During the first phase of militancy in Kashmir which started

in 1989, the Islamist Fundamentalist groups strived to “bring structural changes at cultural levels of Kashmir society”. Seeking to Islamicise the socio-political set up in the valley, the major advocate being JKLF. However, within a few months, a number of militant groups emerged advocating Nizam-e-Mustafa (system based on Islamic Shariah), as the objective of their struggle. The term Azadi gave way to Jihad. Various Islamist groups like Jamaat-e-Islami and its militant wing, Hizbul-Mujahideen, Allah Tigers, Jamiat-ul-Ulemma Islam, Al badr, Al Jihad force, Al UmarMujahideen, Muslim Mujahideen, Islamic student’s league, Zia Tigers and many such organisations proclaimed this objective. After this followed the brutal process of killing, massacres of innocent civilians who don’t adhere to their line. To illustrate, forced displacement of 3,50,000 Kashmir pundits (Warikoo 2006).

Thus, it’s quite clear that this new phenomenon has brought to the forefront many hotspots where fundamentalist movements have emerged around the world. Bangladesh is one of them. Bangladesh, the third largest Muslim country, and one of the poorest nations in the world, referred as ‘Basket-case’ of the world by Henry Kissinger and which once remained tolerant society, where shocking poverty co-exists with a surprisingly sophisticated literary tradition and an exhilaratingly vibrant artistic milieu is gradually falling into the grip of Islamic fundamentalism (Mukarji 2003:57). Bangladesh is going through transformational and transitional phase. According to Bertil Lintner, a revolution is taking place in Bangladesh that threatens trouble for the region and beyond if left unchallenged. Islamic fundamentalism, religious intolerance, militant Muslim groups with links to international terrorist groups, a powerful military with ties to the militants, the mushrooming of Islamic schools churning out radical students, middle-class apathy, poverty and lawlessness - - all are combining to transform the nation. Although these Islamic movements in the middle east and Bangladesh embrace similar discourses, share same Ideology and get many of the same foreign financial supports, “they (are) specific products of circumstances” within their own countries (Esposito 1997:23). These were sometimes created by government policies, other times local, cultural and socio-political contexts which have helped Islamic parties to expand their popularity in civil-society⁷ (Ahmed 2006).

⁷ Religiosity is also a part of indigenous culture, and for the masses, it is more a way of life than an ideology. Although the religious practices in Bengal are syncretistic, the followers of different religions still clash

Bangladesh is increasingly engaging global attention in the wake of the post-11 September 2001 period because of discernible rising graph of Islamic fundamentalist activities and terrorist acts. While the government dismissed international media and reports as “motivated western propaganda based on unvarnished lies,” there is growing concern in neighboring India and in the wider international community that there is danger of the situation getting out of hand unless timely effective action is taken. In the light of fundamentalist activities, the fortunes of secularism in the country, which was born in the bloody environs of genocide, armed with the unconventional slogan of a language-borne nationalism, appears to be dwindling (Mukarji 2003).

In third section of this chapter, an overview of Islamic fundamentalism phenomenon development in Bangladesh will be presented. Though its historical development covering the period 1905 onwards till 1990 is dealt in the second chapter, the liberty is taken to outline its brief sketch in this section to avoid readers’ inconvenience.

Historically, the Muslim identity of present day Bangladesh was sought to be established way back in 1905 and 1947 when the British first divided Bengal on the basis of religion: Hindus and Muslims. Moreover, Islamic consciousness was also brought about in the Muslim peasantry of Bengal by fundamentalist Wahabi and Faraizi movements in the 19th century (Chaudhary 2007). Most of the scholars agree that fundamentalism is largely the result of the activities of one party Jamaat-e-Islami, which was founded by Sayyid Abul-ala- Mawdoodi (1903-1979) on 26 august 1941, at Lahore. After the foundation of Pakistan state Mawdoodi left Pathankot for Lahore, and here he led the Jamaat-e-Islami, with a view to introduce Islamic administrative system in his country. With the passage of time, the organisation has covertly and now overtly has expanded its sphere of influence and gradually giving a setback to the secularist and progressive force

After the formation of Pakistan, the Bengali Muslims in East Pakistan, with their varied literature and culture, view of life and nationalist feeling based on their distinct ethnicity and language, tended to tilt towards secularism. They realised the significance and importance of factors other than religion for the formation of society, community, nation and state. But the rulers of West Pakistan and a part of Bengali Muslims in East Pakistan ignored this trend, so that cultural communalism and Islamic fundamentalism came to be nurtured by and large. To illustrate, the large

scale Hindu-Muslim riots in the 1950s, conspiracy to change the Bengali script and the introduction of military rule in the year 1958 by demolishing democracy were directly linked to the fundamentalist philosophy with cultural and political dimensions.

The failure of the Pakistani elites encouraged the Bengali nationalists to seek a counter ideology that would ensure their hegemony and preserve their interests within the structure of an integrated Pakistan. As a 'consequence, they chose secularism to oppose religion-based nationalism, where all Muslims were imagined as a nation. However, as we know, most of the Bengali nationalist elites supported the Muslim league's "Two-Nation" theory in 1947 and advocated the creation of Pakistan, yet later when they found that they were highly circumscribed in the Pakistani political structure as well in the party, they shifted their position and started promoting secularism by establishing a new political party called the East Pakistan Awami league.

Moreover, most of the inhabitants in East Pakistan realised, especially after the crackdown by the Pakistani military on 25 March 1971 that their interests would not be preserved within the framework of Pakistan. And contrary to Bengali spirit of nationalism, during the lengthy months of struggle for freedom, the Pakistan army had settled themselves in Bangladesh and their continuous presence gave a strong fillip to fundamentalist politics in Bangladesh. Finally, the Awami league captured state power in 1972 after the joint force of Bangladesh freedom fighters and the Indian Army defeated the Pakistani military regime on 16 December 1971. Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, the leader of the Bengali nationalist elites, declared that Bangladesh would be a secular democratic state. However, shortly after gaining independence, Islam re-emerged in Bangladesh politics. The ruling elites failed to create a secular political domain, which developed an environment for the revival of Islamic politics.⁸ Due to their failure, the elites started the process of Islamisation as a means of overcoming their lack of legitimacy among the people. From 1975 to 1990, civil and military bureaucrats and their political parties patronised Islam and tried to use as a vehicle to overcome their crises of hegemony. Thus, the use of Islam as a political discourse and

⁸ The term 'elite' signifies dominant groups and classes. At the time of United Pakistan, various sections of the middle class merchants, landlords, lawyers, high-ranking government officials, and leaders of political parties belonged to the elite section in East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). The elites remain divided about the questions of nation, nationality, identity and the role of secularism and religion in the state and civil-society. Here, Bengali nationalist elites refer to those who supported the 1971 Bangladesh war of liberation on the basis of Bengali nationalism and secularism

the failure of the nationalist elites to establish their hegemony over civil society based on secular identities created a space for the Islamists to advance their politics in Bangladesh (Ahmed 2006:149).

Moreover, even after restoration of democracy in 1990's in Bangladesh, no serious effort was made on the part of either BNP or Awami League to reintroduce secularism in the state or the constitution. They followed the footsteps of their predecessors and so the process of politicisation of Islam continued. The worst part is that, now the fundamentalist forces play a key role in the formation of government. To illustrate, the eleventh day of the September 2001 and the almost coincidental reversal of fortunes of the secular forces in Bangladesh -- especially after the 1 October 2001 elections, which brought to power BNP and the four-party alliance, where Jamaat-i-Islami, as a key constituent, all this is giving momentum to Islamic fundamentalism which in turn is relegating secularism to the backseat. This has resulted in the increasing uneasiness with which the battle between rationalism, secularism and democracy on the one hand and religious bigotry and fundamentalism on the other hand is fought in Bangladesh.

Thus, it's quite clear that the promotion of state sanctioned Islam is designed to convince the masses that the political leadership is in tune with the cultural and spiritual mood of the nation, and that it is fulfilling its role as guardian and protector of the nation to promote and defend the nation's value system which is encapsulated in Islam. In this respect, Islam has become a pillar of legitimacy for the state. This is a desperate response to genuine and widespread social anxiety regarding the future of Muslim societies in an increasingly integrated world.

After this theoretical part the focus will be on the historical development of the phenomenon i.e., Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh in the following chapter. It will cover the different phases-1905-1947, 1947-1990. It will be presented in the analytical manner.

CHAPTER: II

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN BANGLADESH

Where there is a free flow of political activity, Islamic ideology generally remains separated from the mainstream of politics, but where the flow is thin or truncated and where the political institutions are less developed and function under restrictions, religious activities get mixed up with politics and tend to flood the social terrain. Islamic slogans then are used not only by the ideologues of national liberation movements and champions of progressive forces but also by conservative and reactionary regimes. In the Muslim world in general and South Asia in particular, Islamic slogans in most cases have strengthened the hands of the privileged classes; this has been possible in a social environment where the flow of political activity is feeble and democratic institutions and organisations are weak and fragmented (Ahamed and Nazneen 1990: 795-808).

The birth of Pakistan, of which Bangladesh was a part from 1947 to 1971, was the result of a demand for a separate homeland for one of the principle religious communities of the Indian sub-continent, the Muslims. Later, the idea of religious nationalism was discarded when Bangladesh was born, in 1971, out of a movement based on secular principles. The leaders of the Bangladesh movement were successful in articulating the demands for independence, and in convincing the people of the exploitation that had been perpetrated through the use of religion. After Bangladesh gained independence in 1971, Islam was relegated to a position of minimal importance, religion-oriented political parties were banned, and secularism was officially proclaimed a state principle. Yet, within a few years, Islam gradually re-emerged as a strong force in Bangladesh society, and the country discarded the principle of secularism in favor of Islam (Huque and Akhter 1987:200-225). This presents a very complex picture of 'Bengali Nationalism' which is always swinging between two forces i.e. secular and non-secular. In blending and balancing secular and non-secular elements of their political culture, Bengali Muslims have demonstrated significant pragmatism. However, the way Islamic force is

overshadowing the secular forces in recent years, it has opened floor for many questions. To cite few:

1. Is this due to Islamic revivalism?
2. Is the resurgence of Islamic Fundamentalism in West Asia in any way responsible for this trend?
3. Have the sagging economy or the lack of a free flow of political activity in Bangladesh had anything to do with it?
4. Is the Islamization process paving way for 'Talibanisation of Bangladesh'?

This chapter presents an historical appraisal of Islamic Fundamentalism in Bangladesh. It covers three phases – initial phase till 1947, 1947-1971, 1971-1990. The focus here also is on the various agents and forces within Bangladesh society that continually reinforce the place of Islam. This study shows that both the state and large sections of the population have been using Islam for political purposes. While secularism, democracy and independence of the country are burning issues in the political arena, nobody can ignore the cultural and political aspects of Islam in Bangladesh. Various groups of nationalists, sections of the Ulema representing both the political and non- political organisations and even members of the armed forces from time to time have championed the cause of Islam – some of them by openly demanding the transformation of the country into a Shari 'a- based 'Islamic- state' and some by opposing liberal democratic and secular institutions.

Before reflecting light on a Historical overview of Islamic Fundamentalism in Bangladesh, first the nature of Islamic movements in Bangladesh is discussed.

The nature of Islamic movements in Bangladesh:

In Bangladesh, Islamic movements have another dimension – they are primarily rural based, agrarian and reflect peasant culture and behavior. The country is predominantly agrarian, more than 80 percent of the population being rural, mostly impoverished peasants primarily depending on primitive modes of cultivation, having incomplete access to the means of production, lacking power, security of tenure and viable means of sustenance and employment. Bengali peasants, being traditional, fatalist and religious if not pious by nature, often resort to religion as a means of identity (Hashmi 2003). The peasant political behavior and culture are not devoid of

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religion. Their mundane activities, including the political ones (in power perspectives) are inspired by their moral economy,⁹ which again, is subject to their religious belief system. Consequently peasants' violent acts and proclivity to anarchy in the name of religion, often classified as 'pre-political' activities of the 'pre-modern', are generally labeled 'Islamic' militancy, fanaticism, and 'Fundamentalism' if they happen to be Muslims. Hence the 'peasant factor' towards understanding Islam in Bangladesh society and politics is very significant (Hashmi 1994).

Although the 'peasants' Islam', or what we may call the 'little traditions', to paraphrase Redfield, represents the mainstream of Islam in Bangladesh, urban Muslim elites and their rural counterparts, representing the 'great traditions' of Islam, have been the main custodians and guardians of Islam in the country. It is, however, interesting that not only the 'little traditions' of Bangladesh are very different from their counterparts elsewhere, but the 'great traditions' of Islam as believed and practiced here are also unique. The synthesis of the two traditions, leading to syncretism, is what prevails as 'Islam' in Bangladesh. Despite their concerted efforts, the Islamic puritan reformers, the 'Wahhabis', Faraizis, Tayyunis and others since the early nineteenth century, have been unable to make significant changes in this regard. While sections of ultra-orthodox Muslims claim to be adherents of the Islamic 'great traditions', they have also inherited syncretistic beliefs and rituals as their forebears were not immune to the 'little traditions' of Arabia, Central Asia, Iran and north-western India and Bengal (Roy 1983).

The four broad categories which have influenced the Islam in Bangladesh are (a) the militant reformist ('Fundamentalist'); (b) the fatalist; (c) the 'Anglo-Mohamedan' ('opportunist' and 'pragmatist'); and (d) the orthodox (including pirs and Sufis, often escapist). The fatalist or escapist groups represent the bulk of the poor unemployed or underemployed people having a next-worldly outlook philosophy. They often belong to the Tablighi Jamaat; a grassroots based puritan movement originating in northern India in the 1920's, which has millions of adherents in Bangladesh. Unlike the militant reformists belonging to the Jamaat-i-Islami and other groups, including the clandestine ones, the Tablighis represent a pacifist, puritan and missionary movement.

⁹ For more details see, James C. Scott, *The moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976, pp.5,9,13-55; also, Taj I. Hashmi, 'Moral, Rational and Political Economies of Peasants: An Appraisal of colonial Bengal and Vietnam', *Second International Conference on Indian Ocean Studies (Proceedings)*, Perth, 1984.

Sufis and Pirs represent mystic Islam. They belong to several mystic orders or Tariqas, having muridans or disciples among all sections of the populations, especially among peasants. They exert tremendous influence on their muridans. They may be politically motivated having renowned politicians, including General Ershad, as their muridans. The Sufis are generally opposed to the Jamaat-i-Islami and Tabligh movements. While the militant reformists, including the Jamaat-i-Islami, are in favor of an Islamic state as an alternative to the existing system of government in Bangladesh, the 'Anglo-Mohammedans' are the anglicised or Westernised Muslims aiming at synthesising Islamic and Western values for temporal benefits. They can be believers, agnostics and even atheists, but for the sake of expediency, political legitimacy, and social acceptance and above all, power are often vacillating. They popularise a version of Islam which could be avowedly anti-Indian and tacitly anti-Hindu. They are very similar to the Pakistani ruling class who, since the inception of the country, has been promoting the communal, anti-India or anti-Hindu Islam for the sake of legitimacy.

However, despite their mutual differences and enmity, especially between the orthodox ulema or pirs and the Jamaat-i-Islami, these groups have certain commonalities. All except the 'Anglo-Mohammedans' oppose women's liberation, Western codes of conduct, law and ethics (even dress and culture) and are in favor of establishing Shari'a or Islamic law. The most important aspect, which is common to all the four categories, is their stand vis-à-vis India and Pakistan. They are invariably anti-India and pro-Pakistan. It may be mentioned that the ulema belonging to the 'Wahhabi' school of thought, who run thousands of madrasas or Islamic seminaries with an ultra-orthodox and conservative curricula throughout Bangladesh, are inimical to the Jamaat-i-Islami and its founder, Mawlana Mawdudi (1903-79).¹⁰ The counterparts of these seminaries in Pakistan and Afghanistan, known as quami (national) madrasas, produced the Taliban. The 'pro-Taliban' groups in Bangladesh, for ideological reasons, are opposed to the Jamaat-i-Islami. However, as happened in Pakistan, they might unite against common enemies at the height of polarisation between Islam and some other forces, especially in the wake of September 11, the war in Afghanistan (2001-2) and the Israeli invasion of the Palestinian territory in March

¹⁰ This reflects the views of the anti-Jamaat Muslim clerics; mainly belonging to the Deoband School of thought who run the Qaumi madrasas in the sub-continent.

and April 2002 (Hashmi 2003). Thus this presents a very unique feature of nature of Islamic Movements in Bangladesh.

A Historical overview:

There are disagreements among the scholars regarding the exact date of the advent of Islam in the Bengal Delta. Some scholars believe that efforts to preach in this region started in the eighth century. Attempts to preach Islam were not concerted or well organised, however, the conversions in Eastern Bengal were peaceful, and the religion (Islam) was accepted by a large number of the inhabitants. The basic elements of Islam – the concept of one God; faith in the Prophet; and belief in truth, justice and equality- were gradually blended into the lifestyle of the Muslims of this area. Islam received government support in Bengal since its conquest by Ikhtiaruddin Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khiljee in the early thirteenth century. He recognised the need for a sustained growth of culture for Muslims, and as a result he established mosques and madrasas in various places. However, there were also attempts to propagate Islam in Bengal by Pirs (spiritual leaders) and Sufis (Islamic mystics) before Khiljee came to Bengal (Talib 1980:191).

For Sufis, in Bengal, the task of conversion was facilitated by the fact that the masses were downtrodden; their plight aggravated by the revival of Hinduism during the Sena period (A.D. 1100-1250). This was followed by Wahhabi and Faraizi movements. The 'Wahhabi' and Faraizi leaders, and especially the most influential Mawlana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri (1800-73), a former 'Wahhabi'- turned 'loyalist' Islamist reformer of the nineteenth century, brought the syncretistic Bengali Muslims, mainly peasants, into the fold of Shari'a-based, orthodox and puritan Islam. The Faraizi movement was spearheaded by Haji Shariatullah of Faridpur district. It became more pronounced under the leadership of Shariatullah's son, Mohammad Mohsin popularly known as Dudu Miah. Under Dudu Miah, the seeds of Bengali Muslim nationalism that had been planted by Shariatullah in the mid-nineteenth century began to sprout. The catalytic role of Dudu Miah was carried forward by Bengali disciples of Syed Ahmed and Karamat Ali and also Fazlul Huq during the later nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, and by Maulana Bhashani and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the second half of twentieth century Zillur R. Khan (1985). All of these figures – whether religious or political – were instrumental in raising Bengali Muslim consciousness

against exploitation by Hindus, the British, and the West Pakistani industrial-entrepreneurial elites.

The emergence of a stronger and sharper sense of a collective Muslim identity, and its close and direct bearings on the growth of separatist Muslim politics are matters of common concern among scholars. However, the Bengal phenomenon does not reveal a uniform and unidirectional search for an exclusive Islamic identity. The Bengal Muslim search for a collective identity was clearly caught between the two opposite pulls of an extraterritorial Islamic ideology and of a local geographical Bengali culture. The Bengali Muslim participation in the separatist Muslim politics, leading to the partition of India as well as Bengal, is the determinant in this historiographical perspective (Ahmed 2003). A close investigation of the Muslim of the Muslim Bengali literature in the late 19th and 20th centuries reveals, however, unmistakable tensions, vacillations and even clear conflicts in Bengal Muslim's self-perceptions and self-statements – uncertainties that one may also detect in the complex and dissimilar patterns of modern Muslim politics in Bengal (now Bangladesh).

The first step towards the mobilisation process was through the extensive Islamisation of the masses. Karamat Ali and his hundreds of successors, who adopted a pro-British loyalist attitude out of pragmatism after the failure of the Indian mutiny of 1857-8, not only Islamised the bulk of the Bengali Muslims but also created a strong sense of belonging to a Muslim community in the sub-continent. In the absence of a powerful modern Muslim leadership in nineteenth century Bengal the Ulema emerged as the leaders of the Muslim community both in the arenas of politics and religion. The Hindu revivalist movements and the anti-Muslim socio-economic and political stand of the bulk of the Hindu elites and middle classes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries further strengthened the hold of Ulema and their patrons, the Ashraf (aristocratic, upper-class Muslims), on the Bengali Muslim masses. The Hindu opposition to legislative and other government measures to benefit the Bengali Muslims, such as the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, its amendments, the enactment of the Bengal Free (rural) Primary Education bill and the establishment of the Dhaka University in Muslim majority East Bengal, further antagonized Muslim leaders (Hashmi 2003).

The re-emergence of the Ulema in the arena of Bengal politics in 1919 spearheaded the pervasive anti-British Khilafat (caliphate) movement, Islam and Ulema continued to play very important roles in the political mobilization of the Bengali Muslims up to the partition of 1947. The Muslim elite, the 'ashraf-ulema-jotedar' triumvirate, representing Muslim aristocrats, clergy and rich peasants or petty landlords, successfully mobilised Bengali Muslims against the dominant Hindu 'zamindar-bhadralok-mahajan' triumvirate. Besides these the other significant factors which played an important role can be described in the following points:

Movement of Ideas:

As mentioned in the preceding pages, the Wahhabi and the Fairaizi movements exercised considerable influence on the minds of the Muslims of Bengal. The leaders of the uprisings might not have turned Dar-ul-harb into Dar-ul-Islam, but their efforts succeeded in rending the Muslim mind asunder on the religious issues. A furious controversy arose over what to do or not to do about the socio-religious life of the Muslims of this province, which had developed many syncretistic tendencies. The debate went on unabated for nearly two decades while a flurry of religious activities during the late 19th century turned out to be the most remarkable development of the period. Neither did the fundamentalist – traditionalist controversy cease to exist nor was there any dramatic change in the life of an average Bengali Muslim. But the entire episode of conflict and confrontation gave birth to a sharp sense of separate Islamic identity –an overzealous respect for the faith.

The change in the social scene, when the 19th century rolled into the 20th century, was marked by the emergence of an educated middle class who, apart from taking control of the social regeneration movement, added a new dimension –an intellectual fervor to the controversy. More specifically, debates and polemics regarding the socio-religious life of the Bengal Muslims henceforth were couched in different terms. The discussions became more academic and intellectual than theological. The new initiative in social and religious action came from three distinct groups; first, orthodox, clinging to the basic form of Ulema ridden Islam; second, the moderate revisionists, trying to create a modus vivendi between the orthodox ideology and a radical position; and third, the radicals who, on the whole, gave a novel and a most fascinating connotation to Islam (De 1998). However, it would be wrong to assume that each of these different categories of opinions formed single, cohesive and well-

integrated groups. Intra- sectional squabbles, allegations and counter-allegations on theology, Islamic norms and social behavior became distinctive features of their movements.

Besides this factor, the different associations and organizations which emerged on the scene also helped in building up Muslim solidarity.

Impact or Role of Associations or organisations:

At the start of the 20th century the panorama of the social scene of the Muslims of Bengal opened up with a definite quest for social consolidation. The trauma of disarray and disunification, frustration and exploitation, which they had experienced as a community during the preceding century due to their non participation in the socio-political mainstream of contemporary Bengal, had not only rendered them wise but also galvanised them into action resulting in the growth of association catering to the socio- political need of the time. A new generation of professional middle class, who had slowly been emerging to social prominence, now came to the helm of affairs and began to dominate. During the last quarter of the 19th century, with the government's special impetus to the growth of Muslim education along with a remarkable change in Ashraf attitude in favor of Western education and other agro-economic factors, helped increase the number of educated Muslims and contributed to the creation of a sub-elite group with a remarkably different outlook and attitude from their predecessors (De 1998).

The 20th century thus witnessed the emergence of lesser elite who, unlike their predecessors, could think beyond the periphery of their own parochial interest. The disorganised socio religious movement initiated during the late 19th century by the village mullahs in conjunction with a handful of influential political elite henceforth began to take a definite shape in their hands. Thoughts and theories were introduced, more money was pumped in, and what was more important, a group of Bengali Muslim middle class intellectuals began to give serious thoughts to carry out a thoroughly practical programme of revivalism and reform. The result of such an attempt was the creation of several organisation and association like Islamic Mission Samity which gave the slow pace movement momentum. Infact, various orthodox Muslim Organisations, such as, Jamaat-e-Islam (1941), Jamaat-i-ulama i-Islam (1945) and different other centers of the Pirs in Bengal, strengthened the ' Muslim Identity'

among the ‘ Bengali Muslims’ and directly or indirectly helped the Muslim League leaders to built it up as a mass organisation (De 1995:16-37)

British Policy:

This is another significant factor which strengthened Muslim solidarity in historical retrospect; it is difficult to see how the inner dynamics of the Bengal Muslim society were powerful enough to transform it into a political community without the massive inputs resulting from the British policies as well as the intransigence and inadequacies of the Hindu Bhadrakok's positions and policies. In the growth of ethnic politics the crucial importance of the attitudes and policies of the government, with its enormous capacity for distributing economic and political favors and patronage, has been widely recognised. Muslim ethnicity in Bengal, as elsewhere in India, owed a great deal to the British interest in helping to forge their separatist political Identity as a counterpoise to the formidable nationalist challenge at the British Raj mounted by the Bengali Bhadrakok (Ahmed 2003). The mobilisation in the name of a separate Muslim identity, by 1947, led to the transformation of East Bengal into the Eastern wing of Pakistan. The arousal of Muslim communal solidarity among the bulk of Bengali Muslim masses as alternative to class solidarity demonstrated that religion and ethnicity had the potential to become more important than class differences. However, if the later picture of emergence of Bangladesh is taken into account, this view does not go too far as, if the partition of Bengal saw the vindication of the Islamic identity, the emergence of Bangladesh on the ruins of the Islamic Brotherhood of Pakistan more than merely raises doubts about some of these Islamic assumptions. The story is, however, a continuing one. The developments in Bangladesh since its inception seem to reinforce the persistent image of a people still groping for a commonly acceptable identity.

Before shedding light on the developments which took place during 1947-1971 paving way for linguistic or cultural nationalism and in turn relegating religious nationalism to the backseat, the attempt is made to trace the seeds of Bangladesh by focusing on the language factor.

Seeds of Bangladesh:

It is all the more interesting to see that the demand for separation did not necessarily mean identification of interest with the greater Pakistan movement. Already some

amount of maneuvering existed on the part of Bengal Muslim leaders to make the people understand the truth of non-Bengali domination over the Bengalis. The rebel politicians of Bengal, Fazlul Haq, long before the parting of ways with the Muslim League big brothers expressed his thorough disgust during Bengal Muslim Conference held at Sirajganj in 1331 BS, regarding unwanted interference of the Calcutta based non-Bengali Muslims in the affairs of this province. Apart from making the demand that most of the posts of members of Bengal Muslim League be filled in by the eligible candidates from 'mofussil' or rural areas, Haq made a trenchant criticism of those non-Bengali Muslim leaders of Calcutta who, in his consideration, not only used to ride roughshod over the sentiments of the native Muslims but also used to take arbitrary decision on important issues. Haq's accusation appeared in a more pungent form almost after a decade and a half while he, in his letter of 8 September, All-India Muslim League and the National Defense Council, with unprecedented courage and outspokenness declared that 'I will never allow the interest of 33,000,000 of the Muslims of Bengal to be under the domination of any outside authority however eminent it may be. At the present moment I have a feeling that Bengal does not count much in the counsels of political leaders outside our province although we constitute more than one-third of total Muslim population of India' (De 1998).

Actually, the idea of Pakistan as envisaged by the Bengali Muslims was very different from that of the Muslims in other parts of India and certainly different from what Jinnah had in his mind. It was not a question 'how Muslims would get a share of power in the rest of India, but rather the ideal of an independent sovereign state consisting of the whole of Bengal and Assam, which was the real motivating force behind a movement which, for the lack of a better name called itself the Bengal Muslim league'. Subsequent events which took place between 1946 and 1947, frantic efforts made by a handful of Muslim politicians like Abul Hashim and Suhrawardy to uphold the demand for an independent Bengal proved beyond doubt that if the Muslims of Bengal were averse to any kind of Hindu domination so were they towards any kind of Muslim domination coming from without the province. Sila Sen quite aptly remarked that 'Many a Muslim leaders sincerely felt if Pakistan meant the partition of Bengal into two parts and domination of Bengal Muslims by the Muslims

from the West then an independent status of Bengal outside Pakistan was a desirable proposition preferable to Pakistan' (De 1998).

As a matter of fact this spirit of independence, apart from gaining a political viability, received enthusiastic applause from the domain of language and literature. Although the book 'Pakistan' written by Mujibar Rahman Khan was a vindication of Pakistan demand yet the author hinted at creation of two independent states – one in the North-East and the other in eastern India. A map included in the book clearly showed the zones in the west as Pakistan and the zones in the east (Bengal and Assam) as Purva Pakistan. Even a staunch pro-Pakistan leader like Maulana Akram Khan in his presidential address at the 12th Annual General Meeting of the Assam Muslim Association and the Central Khuddamal Hejjaj Society, Calcutta, held on 3 March 1946, at the Muslim Institute Hall, Calcutta, referred to the creation of Eastern Pakistan consisting of Bengal and Assam as a separate unit.

The reason of this distinctivity was of course Tamuddin or culture, and emphasising on this aspect Abul Mansur Ahmed very clearly pointed out that cultural individuality of the people of 'Purva Pakistan' had not only rendered them different from the people of other provinces of India but also from religious brothers of Pakistan. If the Muslims of Bengal had thrown down the gauntlet before the league big brothers who wanted to establish political hegemony so did they challenge to thwart the attempt of cultural conquest through Urdu. It is a fact to reckon with that the establishment of the East Pakistan Renaissance Society was positively a step towards 'Tamuddini Azadi' or cultural freedom, but it did not mean succumbing to the influence of Urdu. In a seminar organised by the society on 19 December 1943 in Calcutta one of the speakers, Mizanur Rahman, in no uncertain terms declared that there was no qualms in accepting Bengali of the Muslims differed from that of the Hindus on the more frequent use of Arabic and Urdu words, i.e. mussalmani words (De 1998).

In all certainty the majority of Muslim intellectuals became rather apprehensive of non-Bengali domination of politics and culture of 'Purva Pakistan' through the medium of Urdu. When on 3 June 1947, the Mountbatten Plan regarding partition was declared and the creation of Pakistan almost became a certainty, the said apprehension became stronger. Abul Mansur Ahmed giving vent to this feeling four years ago maintained that if Urdu be allowed to become the state language of 'Purva Pakistan', it would certainly lead to the creation of a certain Urdu-knowing dominant minority

who would be the factotum of non- Bengali Muslim interest in this region and would establish a linguistic aristocracy leading to the destruction of cultural independence of the Bengali Muslims. If, on the other hand, Bengali be made the state language a large section of educated Bengali Muslims would get considerable facility of participation in the process of ' industrialisation, economisation and educationisation' of 'Purva Pakistan' and most important of all there would take place a cultural revival of the Bengali Muslims. Ahmed in his contention was supported by many other intellectuals like mahbub Jamal Jahedi, Farrukh Ahmed, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, Dr Motahar Hossain, Abul Kasem, Dr Muhammad Enamul Haque and Abdul Haque, who could hardly reconcile themselves with the fact that 'purva Pakistan' would be dominated by Urduwallas. While Mahabub Jamal Jahedi opined that Urdu appeared to be a foreign language for the Bengali Muslims, poet Farrukh Ahmed made the remark that if any language other than Bengali be accepted as a state language of Purva Pakistan that would certainly lead to the destruction of Islamic culture. Dr Muhammad Enamul Haque, at the same time, expressed his fear that if Urdu be made the state language of Purva Pakistan this land would be subject to repression by the West Pakistani Urduwallas. Kazi Motahar Hossain predicted that if Urdu be imposed forcefully upon the Bengalis of East Pakistan, the relation between East and West was sure to terminate.

With remarkably dexterity the Bengali Muslim intellectuals fought against the alien presence of Urdu and expressed their utmost concern to safeguard the Tamuddini Azadi or cultural freedom of the Bengali Muslims so long endangered by Hindu domination. Abdul Haque in an article, 'Pakisthaner Rashtra Bhasa', published in the 'Azad' categorically stated that apart from political freedom, the Muslims of Purva Pakistan should get linguistic freedom; otherwise any attempt towards achieving independence would be an exercise in futility. Immediately after partition, at the behest of a few students and teachers of the Dhaka University, one association called Tamuddin Majlis was established on 1 September 1947 to mobilise public opinion in favor of making Bengali the state language of Purva Pakistan. Meanwhile, on 7 September 1947 in a meeting held at Dhaka under the auspices of 'purva Pakistan karmi sammelan' the following resolution that Bengali should be rendered the medium of instruction and language of court was taken. On 15 September 1947, the 'Majlis' brought forth a brochure entitled Bengali or Urdu – the state language of

Pakistan, which contained articles written by Professor Kazi Motahar Hossein and Ittehad editor Abul Mansur Ahmed. While apart from these two, it contained a resolution written by the Professor of the Chemistry Department, Abul Kashem, making a detailed clarification of the demand that Bengali be given proper importance in educational and cultural life of Bengal (De 1998).

The resolution contained the following aspects. Firstly, Bengali must be made medium of instruction, court language and office language. Secondly, the central government of Pakistan should give recognition to both the languages Urdu and Bengali, and while Bengali should be the medium of instruction, Urdu should remain as inter-provincial language and be retained as a second language in higher classes of secondary schools. The Majlish's efforts to popularise Bengali came under attack from periodicals and magazines like 'The morning news', 'Pashban' 'Assam Herald', and 'Yugabheri', yet there had been few like Insaf, 'Naobelal', 'Jindegi' and 'Desherdabi' which extended their support. Any way, the Bengali- phile Muslims of erstwhile East Pakistan carried on their struggle undeterred. On 31 December 1948, Dr Shahidullah, in his presidential address before the 'Purva Pakistan Sahitya Sammelan' held at Dhaka implored the citizens of the new born state to cultivate Bengali Language and literature with all earnestness since through a historical process of development they had come to be known as the Bengali community. Few months within the 'Sahitya Sammelan' on October 1949, after a meeting held at Fazlul Haq at Dhaka the national language Action Committee was formed at the initiative of Tamuddin Majlish, while in the same year, East Bengal Language Committee appointed at the behest of the government of East Pakistan put forward its recommendations that a kind of language termed as 'Sahaj Bangla' based on the words, idioms and phrases in common use in East Bengal specially those in the Punthi and the popular literature and avoiding Sanskritisation of the language as far as possible be allowed to develop.

The next few decades East Pakistan witnessed tumultuous events bringing into fore the bitter struggle of the Bengalis against alien domination in the field of politics, economy and culture. Martyrs' blood of 'Eukushe February'¹¹ was an embodiment of

¹¹ 21st February, 1952, this was the day when the volcano of opposition against West Pakistan elite erupted in the form of Language riots spearheaded by students of Dhaka University on account of imposition of Urdu alone as the Lingua Franca of Pakistan by Khwaja Nazimuddin, the Governor-General. Many students were killed in police firing. So this day "Ekushey February" (21 February)

a nation's yearning for cultural freedom. Thus it's quite clear from the above description that religion though played an important role for a time being, still it has not been a sole factor to meet the aspirations of the people of East Bengal and whenever the circumstances have been averse to the religion factor, they have went for the other favorable notions without much hesitation. So the people of East Bengal have often presented a very complex nature back to the earlier time. They have always been swinging between two forces i.e. religious and secular and as a result presenting a very complex phenomenon time and again. So it is very difficult to put them in a particular compartment or to relate it to Islamic Fundamentalism of present day.

After tracing the seeds of Bangladesh, the focus will now be on the developments which took place during the period 1947-1971 which forced the people of East Pakistan to go for cultural identity distinct from their counterpart religious identity.

Second Phase: 1947-1971:

Despite the constant harping on the themes of Islamic solidarity and Muslim separatism under the aegis of the Pakistani ruling classes during 1947 and 1971, the bulk of the East Bengali Muslims distanced themselves from 'communal Islam'. Not long after the partition of 1947 they showed a preference for secular institutions for the sake of their Bengali identity. The clash of these two identities, 'Islamic' (Pakistani) and 'secular' (Bengali) ultimately led to the creation of Bangladesh. This was possible after the mass emigration of members of the Hindu 'zamindar-bhadralok-mahajan' triumvirate to India and the emasculation of the rest of the hitherto dominant Hindus in East Bengal in the wake of the partition. Not long after the partition it dawned upon sections of the East Bengali Muslims elites that Pakistan, the promised utopia of Muslim separatist leaders, was nothing but a mirage – the 'promised land' of South Asian Muslims was a deception to exploit the eastern wing as a colony of the western wing of Pakistan (Hashmi 2003).

Bengali Muslim nationalism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became transformed into Bengali nationalism in the second half of the 20th century, due to

came to be known as "Shaheed Dibas" (Martyrs' Day) and a "Shaheed Minar" (martyrs' memorial) was built in the memory of martyrs.

essentially various factors. To illustrate, though religion provided an ideological basis for creation of Pakistan but this was seemingly inadequate to cement the geographical, cultural and ethnic differences of East and West Pakistan. The absurdity of clubbing the two wings together was adequately shown by Maulana Azad thus, "Mr. Jinnah and his followers did not seem to realize that Geography was against them. These two regions, East and West Pakistan have no point of physical contact. People in these two areas are completely different from one another except only in religion. It is one of the greatest frauds on the people to suggest that religious affinity can unite areas, which are geographically, economically, culturally and linguistically different. No one can hope that East and West Pakistan will compose all their differences and form one nation" (Azad 1969). Other factors which added fuel to fire are: Jinnah's decision to adopt Urdu as the only national language, which led to a massive conflict in which a number of Bengali students lost their lives. Further, the result of decisions by the central government of Pakistan to set aside the 1954 elections (in which the Muslim League party was routed) and to put Fazlul Huq (who was elected the chief minister of East Bengal after the termination of the League Government) under house arrest. Various other policies were pursued by West Pakistani rulers which further alienated Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan. Ironically, most of the policies designed to bring Bengali Muslims closer to West Pakistani Muslims proved disintegrative in practice. Viewed against the neglect of Bengali Muslim interests during the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war, when East Pakistan was left defenseless, and after the 1970 cyclone, which claimed about one million lives in East Pakistan, the earlier discrepancies, injustices, and suspected conspiracies of power wielders became even more pronounced in the eyes of the Bengali elites and sub-elites. A genuine revolution of rising expectations had reached its apex in 1971 when the inaugural session of the national legislature, in which a Bengali Nationalist party (the Awami League) held a majority of seats, was postponed by the Yahya Khan Junta.

After this followed the ruthless suppression of Bengali Muslims by the West Pakistan military junta. The subsequent civil war between the Muslims of the two regions culminated in the Indo-Pakistani war of 1971 and the surrender of 93,000 West Pakistani soldiers in East Pakistan. But even this, the only civil war in this century to succeed in establishing an independent country, failed to diminish the strength of

Islam as a strong ideology. Many thought it reasonable to think that the bloodshed of civil war would give way to secularism in the politics of the new nation of Bangladesh, and for many years Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and other Awami league leaders seemed to subscribe to that logic. The ruling Awami League inserted four basic principles of state policy in the first constitution of Bangladesh that made no reference to Islam. On the Contrary, emphasis was placed on secularism along with nationalism, socialism, and democracy as the founding pillar of the Bangladesh polity. Soon, however, this line of thinking was solidly rejected by the vast majority of the people of Bangladesh (Zillur R. Khan 1985).

The framing of the constitution was swift and uncomplicated, and a Parliament was elected consisting almost entirely of members of a single political party, the Awami League.¹² The preamble to the constitution stated secularism was one of its Fundamental principles. Article 12 of the constitution specified that the principle of secularism would be realised by the elimination of: communalism in all its forms; the granting by the state of political status in favor of any religion; the abuse of religion for political purposes; and any discrimination against, or persecution of, persons practicing a particular religion. Article 38 provided for freedom to form associations, but provided that “no person shall have the right to form, or be a member or otherwise take part in the activities of, any communal or other association or union which in the name or on the basis of any religion has for its object, or pursues, a political purpose”. The constitution prohibited the operation of a number of political parties which had striven to establish Islam in Bangladesh. (Huque and Akhter 1987).

Article 41 of the constitution stated that every citizen had “the right to profess, practise or propagate any religion”, and that no person “attending and educational institution shall be required to achieve religious instruction”, at the same time, politico-religious party organizations were abolished, and “the formation of such organizations” was prohibited (Barua 1978). The confusion of the framers was evident, as secularism and the encouragement of religion were both embodied within the provisions of the same constitution. After the constitution came into force in 1972 Mujib found himself under increasing pressure from the Awami Ulema, a vocal and powerful section of Islamists within his party, for the reversal of secularist decisions

¹² For a description of the framing of the constitution of Bangladesh, see Abul Fazl Huq, “Constitution-Making in Bangladesh”, *Pacific Affairs*, 46(1), (spring 1973), pp. 59-76.

that he and a few leaders around him had made on their own without widespread consultations. Although constitutionally Bangladesh was secularised, the nature of the society could not be altered. Islam was temporarily discredited as an instrument of exploitation that had been used by the Pakistani rulers. But the leaders were aware of the need to enter the Islamic bloc in order to obtain aid, and there was strong public sentiment in favor of Islam. A short time after the constitution was framed; there were attempts to woo the friendship of the Muslim states. By 1974, the new state of Bangladesh was able to secure recognition from most Islamic countries, and the same year Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the prime minister, attended the Islamic summit held in Pakistan. Bangladesh was also one of the founder members of the Islamic Development Bank, established in 1975. Mujib continued to strengthen the Islamic connection “by identifying with the Arab cause against Zionist aggression, extending material help in the hour of need, paying state visits and even by reviving some of the defunct Islamic institutions in Bangladesh” (Husain 1986:260-61).

Actually, secularism did not reflect the spirit and attitude of Bangladesh society, which might have been expected to change radically after the liberation war of 1971. Moreover, due to Bangladesh’s increasing dependence on the Arab states for financial assistance, the government could not develop and pursue a programme of educating the masses and following up the adoption of secularism as a state principle. The public were offered vague explanations of secularism, and it was generally (mis) interpreted as increased dependence on India and continued discrediting of Islam. The government’s activities added to the confusion. Mujib had a complicated approach to Islam. On the one hand he promoted the idea that secularism ‘did not mean the absence of religion’ and offered generous state patronage to madrasa education, while on the other hand, he saw religion as ‘a shadow, the ghost of the past one did not know how to deal with’. Such contradictory acts of the government were not surprising. The Awami League, the ruling political party, originally launched as a vehicle of protest by the Bengali middle class, was politically radicalised over time, particularly during the liberation war¹³ (Maniruzzaman 1973). Although the leaders represented mostly Muslim middle class interests, the party has always enjoyed the support of the non-Muslim Bengalese, and it tried to project a secular image. Also,

¹³ Also see the same Talukder Maniruzzaman’s *The Bangladesh Revolution and its Aftermath* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Books International, 1980), pp.26-27.

after 1971, in their efforts to demonstrate gratitude for assistance during the liberation war, the Awami League leaders sometimes offended the religious Muslims by their pro Indian statements and activities.

Mujib's secularist policy was motivated by several important factors. First, it was through the continuation of a secular political platform that he hoped to retain the loyalty of the Hindu minority making up 12% of the population of Bangladesh at that time. Prior to 1971, realising the importance of Hindu support, the Awami Muslim League Party, led by Suhrawardy, had dropped the word "Muslim", becoming simply Awami League. Not only was this decision designed to woo Hindu voters but also to pacify progressives within the party. The demand to secularise politics was made by leftist parties as well. Historically, in East Bengal, the leadership of the Marxist parties has been primarily Hindu (Maniruzzaman 1973). Further, two things prevented Mujib from making any structural changes in Bangladesh's political system, or to give it an Islamic slant. First, such a posture would have cast doubt in the minds of Hindus who suffered most in the Bangladesh-Pakistan civil war because of their espousal of secularism and their loyalty to Awami League. An Islamic constitution would undoubtedly have discouraged those who had returned to Bangladesh after the war with the intention to stay. Mujib did not wish to be the cause of another exodus of Hindus to India. Second, Islamisation of the constitution would have strained Bangladesh's relations with India (Khan 1985:847).

At the same time, the abysmal failure of Mujibism to alleviate poverty and restore law and order eventually led to the Islamisation of the polity. The failure of the 'welfare state' forced a large section of the underdogs to cling to Islam either as a means to escape from the harsh reality or to achieve their cherished golden Bengal through piety, Islamic justice and egalitarianism. The overall situation of the country in the wake of the liberation of 1971 was simply unbearable for the bulk of the people. Although they were relieved of the nine-month-long reign of terror under the Pakistani occupation army, the liberation did not bring an end to suffering and exploitation. Fellow Bangladeshis, genuine and pseudo freedom fighters, mostly donning the Awami hat, started a reign of corruption, nepotism and lawlessness throughout the country. While Awami leaders in the name of socialism were busy plundering the nationalised industries, banks and insurance companies and the 'abandoned' non-Bengali properties, previously owned by Urdu-speaking refugees

from Bihar, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, the bulk of the Bengalis were soon turned into disillusioned, hungry and angry masses. By 1974, Bangladesh had already become 'the basket- case' of Henry Kissinger .The floods and subsequent famine of 1974 killed thousands and impoverished the bulk of the population. The price of the consumer goods rose ten to twenty times in the mid-1970s. Hyperinflation, corruption and a general scarcity of basic goods turned the average Bangladeshi against India and the Awami league (Hashmi 2003:109)

Disenchantment swelled the ranks of the opposition groups and political parties, including the Leftist National Socialist Party (JSD) and the clandestine Maoist Sarbahara Party of Siraj Sikdar. A large number of them, including many erstwhile collaborators of the Pakistani occupation forces, joined hands with Mawlana Bhashani (the champion of 'Islamic Socialism') who soon after the liberation started a vitriolic anti- Awami, anti-Indian campaign. Bhashani's popularity and the sharp decline in that of Prime Minister Mujib paved the way for the rise of various Islamic groups not long after the assassination of the latter in 1975. Though, by early 1975; the Mujib government had crushed both the JSD and the Sarbahara party, the secular and leftist opposition groups. While the bulk of the JSD leaders were behind bars, in January 1975, Siraj Sikdar was killed in police custody. The straw that broke the camel's back was the introduction of the one party government under Sheikh Mujib, in the name of the so called Bangladesh Peasants' and Workers' Awami league (BKSAL).¹⁴ This act established a Soviet style government where top ranking bureaucrats, university teachers, and the chiefs and deputy chiefs of the armed forces, had to join the BKSAL. This act in January 1975, on the one hand killed the remnants of democracy, and on the other both secular and Islamic politics underground- the only option for the people Zillur R. Khan (1984).

Third Phase: 1975-1990:

Thus, it's quite clear that to a large extent a stagnant politico-economic situation during the Mujib era resulted from Mujib's failure to understand that ideological support was essential for Bangladesh's political development. For the Muslims of East Bengal that support had to come from Islam through submission to God. The

¹⁴ This was one party government introduced by Sheikh Mujib in the name of so called Bangladesh Peasants' and Workers' Awami League on Soviet style government. He resorted to a new slogan of 'religion, hardwork and socialism'.

government of sheikh Mujib lost sight of this fact and tried to substitute the Western liberal ideologies of secularism, nationalism, democracy, and socialism. Nationalism and secularism together tend to undercut the chances of the unity of Ummah on the outside and, at the same time, limit the scope of Islam internally to a private creed¹⁵ (Rahman 1968:280-82). Whenever nationalism has been allowed to relegate Islam to the status of a particularistic creed, development and change become retrogressive or short-lived (as happened in Turkish, Arab, Pakistani, and Iranian nationalism) (Khan 1980). Had Kemal Ataturk, Mohammad Mosaddegh, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman combined Islam with their nationalist movements, probably Turkey, Iran, and Bangladesh would have been spared the socio – economic and political instability that plagued them. Mujib’s successors –seemed to understand the dilemmas of Muslim nationalist leaders who sought only secularist means to realize national goals.

In the long run, the Islamic parties outpaced the various secular or leftist parties in the wake of the overthrow of the BKSAL regime in August 1975. Henceforth, both the military and civil governments of the country promoted Islam to contain the militant one promoted by the grassroots based well organised Jamaat-i-Islami and other groups. Moreover, General Zia’s government (1975-81) withdrew the ban imposed on all Islam oriented political parties by the Mujib government for their active collaboration with the Pakistani occupation forces in 1971. Zia and his successors promoted Islam and Islamic Parties, including the Jamaat and Muslim League, for the sake of legitimacy and for containing the Awami League. Partly because of his understanding of the historical role of Islam as a powerful political ideology and partly because of the newly acquired economic power of the Muslim countries, Zia often adjusted his secularist position to meet conservative demands, at home and abroad. Zia started using Islam –based political Discourse to legitimise his power and to gain support from civil society. Zia at heart never believed in resurgence of Bengali as a nation, and during his rule fundamentalism, fanaticism and communalism gained foothold in the country. He introduced ‘Bangladeshi nationalism’ in place of secularism and ‘Bengali nationalism’ that was secular in the essence.

¹⁵ A total way of life that Islam (total submission to God) creates provides guidance for individual, social, material, moral, economic, political, legal, cultural, national and international aspects of human existence and transcends the limits of any private creed and the conceptual boundaries of most religions.

To Islamise the political system, Zia significantly altered the secular nature of the Bangladesh constitution. One of the first amendments in this regard was the insertion of Bismillah-er-Rehman-a-Rahim (In the name of Allah, the beneficent and the merciful) at the beginning of the constitution. He also began to practice Bismillah-er-Rehman-a-Rahim as a preface of his addresses. Further, he omitted Article 12 of the constitution, which had ensured the implementation of the ideal of secularism. His military government amended Article 8(1) of the constitution, which declared secularism as the fundamental principle of state policy. The Article was replaced with a proclamation in 1977, with words asserting “absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah”. The military government also added Article 25 to the constitution, “stabilizing, preserving and strengthening fraternal ties with the Muslim states on the basis of Islamic Solidarity” (Ahmed 2006). Article 38, which forbade any political activity of the religion-based parties, was also withdrawn.

Zia’s planned process of Islamisation of the state helped him gain support from various Middle Eastern countries, especially from Saudi Arabia, with whom Bangladesh had no diplomatic relations at the same time of Mujib era. Zia’s politics of Islamisation and his “soft attitude toward Pakistan” helped it to become the member of the organizations like organization of the Islamic conference (OIC), Islamic Front etc. Moreover, the constitutional changes proved conducive for the Islam-based parties to re-establish themselves in Bangladesh. To gain support from these parties, his government also gave voting rights to the Islamic activists, who had lost them after 1971 due to their active collaboration with the Pakistani army. At the time of Zia regime, the former ‘ameer’ (president) of the Jamaat, Golam Azam, came back to the country without Bangladeshi citizenship. He secretly retook control of the Jamaat, encouraging party workers to rebuild the organisation. Thus Zia’s policy of employing Islam for political gain created a favorable environment for the Islam based parties, especially the Jamaat, to restructure their organisational branches. So, Zia’s “overtly pro-Islamic stance” led to the resurgence of Islam-based politics. Five Islam based political parties – Muslim League, the Islamic Democratic league (IDL), Khilafat-i-Rabbani, Nizam-i-Islam, and the Jamaat were banned during the time of the Mujib government because of their role against the independence of Bangladesh. These parties were nevertheless legally endorsed by the Political Parties Regulations (PPR) of 1976, and as a result they came out from the underground. As a part of his

strategy, Zia granted permission to these parties to function openly to counter Bengali nationalist and leftist parties. Besides political platforms, Islamic parties, especially the Jamaat, started using various non-political organisations such as mosques, madrasas, clubs, and NGOs to elevate their political activities. Further, additional factors, such as grinding poverty, pervasive illiteracy, foreign aid dependency to improve the socio-economic conditions have helped the Islamic parties to promote their political objectives during the Zia regime.

General Zia was assassinated by a group of military officials on 31 May 1981 and the BNP government was overthrown by a military coup headed by General Ershad in 1982 after the assassination of Zia. After seizing state power, General Ershad followed the footsteps of his predecessor and began to use Islam as a political discourse to overcome his legitimacy crisis. Like Zia, he also established a political party (Jatiya Party, national party) with the help of military-civil bureaucrats and leaders from different political parties. Ershad declared Islam to be a state religion by introducing the Eighth Amendment to the constitution, passed in June 1988 in the absence of major opposition political parties due to their boycotting the parliamentary election under the Ershad regime. During the Ershad period, large amounts of money came from West Asian countries to establish Islamic institutions. An Islamic university was set up in April 1986 with the donation of U.S. \$67,415 (Ahmed 2006). Ershad set up religious seminaries in many mosques and announced a programme of establishing Islamic missions in all the 460 upazilas (sub-districts). In contrast with any of the previous military rulers since the formation of Pakistan, Ershad started using mosques as a political platform. Moreover, for the first time since the independence of the country, Islamic parties gained limited recognition from the secular parties, which helped them to gain acceptance in civil-society. At least 64 Islamic parties were active in Bangladesh politics during that time, although most were very small. However, General Ershad was overthrown by a mass uprising in 1990. After his removal from power, Bangladesh returned to civilian rule. But the civilian rulers took no initiative to re-introduce secularism in the state or the constitution.

Concluding Observations:

The History of Bengal Muslims is, in a very real sense, a History of a perennial crisis of identity. The sharp polarity between the Ashraf¹⁶ – dominated extra-‘Bengal Islamic ideology’ and that permeated by the forces of regional Bengali culture has been a persistent and a critical factor in their History. The 16th and 17th centuries saw the emergence of Muslim cultural mediators in Bengal, who performed a historic task of mediation between the conflicting cultures by reconstructing a syncretistic Islamic tradition for the masses of Bengal believers. The gulf, thus, remained bridged until, in the 19th century, the Islamic fundamentalists, revivalists and reformists opened up once more the hiatus with their vigorous and vituperative campaigns against indigenous traits in the Muslim Bengali culture.

The economic and political needs of the Ashraf geared to recovering their first ground to the British and the Western educated Hindus, combined with similar interests of the rising educated Hindus, combined with similar interests of the rising educated middle class Muslims, aspiring to become the new Ashraf in the Bengal Muslim society, contributed further to the process of an Islamic resurgence and a corresponding denigration of the Bengali culture. The pressures on the rationale, legitimacy and continuity of the Bengali cultural ethos for Bengal Muslims are overwhelming. The demands for Islamisation of life in Muslim Bengal were pervasive and extended to cover Muslim’s language, literature, dress, names; religious and social conducts, beliefs, superstitions, and so on. For the second time in the History of Bengal Muslims there was a crying need to defend and reassert the inalienable Bengali attributes in the making of their own personality, and the cultural mediators emerged once more in response to those historical challenge. The challenge confronting them was even more serious and difficult than that of their medieval ancestors. The latter did certainly not have to confront such a massive alignment of forces against them, actively engaged in severing and supplanting their local roots.

The modern Muslim mediators held their ground and spoke their minds with the strong courage of their convictions. They achieved perhaps mixed results. Obviously, the political facet of their work, insofar as it embraced the concept and hope of a supra-religious ‘Bengali Nationalism’, remained unrealised. The reasons for this

¹⁶ It signifies the aristocratic, upper-class Muslims.

failure are of course, varied and complex. The success of the Muslim separatist movement is part of an infinitely much larger and more complex story. Apart from the very strong opposition of a powerful combination of the Islamic forces, as mentioned above, the persisting strength of the social and cultural process of 'Ashrafisation'¹⁷ in the Bengal Muslim society, the growing Hindu assumptions of the nascent modern Bengali culture, and finally, the conflict of economic and political interests between the educated Hindus and Muslims – all combined to bolster up the Islam against the Bengali identity.

However, when the circumstances emerged in favor of Bengali Identity, it resurfaced in the form of linguistic nationalism paving way for People's Republic of Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, secularism was introduced under special circumstances, and it was expected to succeed merely through being sanctioned by the constitution. But Islam has an ingrained and overwhelming influence on the values, norms and lifestyle of people in Bangladesh. In fact, most of the social forces operating within the country contribute, in some way or another, to the entrenchment of values whose origins may be traced to the tenets of Islam. "A member of the Muslim community may be an atheist, but the social institutions, personal laws, customs, traditions, history, art and literature which have helped to mould his individual and social existence have been closely related to Islam" (Smith 1966). The impact of Islam is felt in every sphere of life. Bangladeshis are gradually and systematically trained to grow up and live in a society where Islamic values predominate, and they contribute to its transmission from one generation to the next. In Islamic societies, religious education is inculcated "both at home and at school, in the mosque and in the street, and through all communication media". (Reference) Starting from birth, the Bangladeshi receives overt and subtle guidance that inculcates habits which are in conformity with the practices of Islam.

The factors that contribute to the process of Islamisation may be divided into groups. The family, mosques, religious schools, Muslim spiritual leaders, shrines, religious meetings and movements, and Islamic literature and festivals have worked persistently to strengthen the pace of Islam in the society. Universities, colleges and schools, the mass media and political parties are agents that could be used for or against the interest of religion, depending on the circumstances, but in Bangladesh the

¹⁷ The quest for achieving higher status and recognition in the Bengal Muslim society.

net effects have been pro-Islamic. The combined influence of these factors is so strong in the country, that even constitutional sanctions to secularise the society are almost necessarily ineffective. Thus, considering the nature of Bangladeshi society and the various institutions and forces operating within it, the entrenchment and resurgence of Islam in the country are not surprising. The only attempt at secularising the country failed as the society and the overwhelming Muslim majority of its population did not undergo a change of lifestyle and outlook. The people of the country face frequent natural calamities, recurrent crises of poverty, sickness and in the absence of adequate government resources and facilities to cope with them, become more dependent on their faith in religion. Such attitudes receive regular nourishment from the various social forces and institutions which reiterate that the ultimate solution lies in Islam.

Numerous factors persistently strengthen the ideals and appeal of Islam. These forces are so strong that the agents who, under other conditions, might be used to secularise the society are in fact harnessed to the cause of religion. The government too contributes to the process by using Islam to its advantage. Within a brief period, Bangladeshis became disillusioned with the ideal of secularism as the government which sought to establish it failed to meet the high expectations of a country which had just won its war of liberation. The rulers failed to rise to the occasion, were accused of incompetence and various misdeeds, and were removed from office. Given a favorable opportunity, the forces in favor of Islam re-emerged, and soon a definite bias towards Islam was evident in the policies and actions of subsequent governments. The ruling elite emphasised the Islamic way of life in order to retain its position and divert attention from the government's failures. Moreover, faith in Islam is constantly being nurtured and strengthened among Bangladeshis through various forces.

The ideals and values of Islam are deeply embedded in the Bangladesh society, entrenched through the persistent impact of a whole range of institutions (Haque and Akhter 1987:225). Outlooks and practices are blended into the lifestyle in such a way that even conscious and deliberate attempts to relegate Islam to the background can have little effect. On the other hand, the strong undercurrents of religious sentiments will surge again with renewed vigor, in the face of every threat to Islam, thus reaffirming its dominance in the society. Events in Bangladesh graphically illustrate the triumph of traditional values and forces over attempts at secularising the society.

Thus, the principle question facing Bangladesh today is to what extent a given country can maintain its identity through national sovereignty and still seek the ultimate political goal of an Islamic world community or Ummah.

CHAPTER: III

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM SINCE 1990

In this chapter the focus will be on the growth of this phenomenon i.e.. Islamic fundamentalism during civilian or democratic rule. The attempt will also be made to reflect light on the different factors which has contributed in strengthening this menace day by day. Further, its impact will also be reflected and finally prognosis of the chapter will follow.

After the removal of Ershad, Khaleda Zia, the widow of General Zia, was elected as the Prime Minister. She did not alter any policy of Islamisation adopted by Zia and Ershad. The Prime Minister sought support of the Jamaat in the parliament to form a government. Not only the BNP but the Awami league also sought Jamaat's support in electing their candidates to the office of President of the state. To win the support of the people in the 1991 parliamentary elections, various political parties, including the Awami League and some Leftist parties, used religious symbols and slogans. Like the previous military rulers, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia also relied on Islam maintained close relationships with Islamic parties (Ahmed 2006:157).

In the 1996 parliamentary election, the Awami League won most of the seats. It regained state power after 21 years. Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Mujib, became Prime Minister of the country. The Awami League government also compromised with the Islamists. They did not change anything related to Islam that was adopted in the constitution by the previous rulers. Various religious practices at the state level continued. The Awami League frequently used religious symbols and slogans for gaining popular support. At the time of the Hasina regime, Islamic parties published many well- read magazines, journals, and newspapers. The former ruling party, the BNP, formed an alliance with the Jamaat-i-Islami, the Jatiya party, and the Islami Oikyo Jote (IOJ, the coalition of Islamic Parties) to organise a movement to protest against various policies of the government. This alliance helped the Islamic parties gain several seats in the 2001 parliamentary election. Jamaat won 17 seats in the 2001 parliamentary election. For the Islamic parties, "armed struggle against a wicked government" is an essential part of the religious faith. They are now organising campaigns against the syncretistic traditions of the country. For example, in one of the

public meetings, Jamaat's parliament member Delwar Hussain Sayidi said that the various festivals related to Bengali culture and tradition were anti-Islamic and originated from Hindu religion and practices (Ahmed 2006:149-159). The activities and the goals of the Islamic parties and groups are similar, whether they work openly or underground; these are to establish a theocratic state, to eradicate the syncretistic traditions of Bengali culture and practices, to prevent any form of western culture and education, and to subjugate women by forcing them to stay at home, wear the veil, and be educated in a separate system.

According to various national newspapers, several other Islamic groups are also active in Bangladesh politics covertly, and were believed to run several arms training camps in some remote areas of the country. These groups were basically organised for the Bengali youths who went to Afghanistan to take part in the war against the Soviet military presence there. After the war was over, almost all of them returned to Bangladesh. They organised underground Islamic parties with the help of foreign money and arms, mainly from the Middle East and Afghanistan. Islamic political activists established a good number of madrasas, like those established by the Taliban followers in Pakistan. The aims of the underground Islamic groups and Islamic political activists were to overthrow the elected government through armed struggle and to replace the Western model of democracy with a theocratic state. Regardless of their ideological differences, all of the Islamic parties in Bangladesh aim to repudiate all identities that are not Islamic. To accomplish these goals Islamic parties especially the Jamaat, are now organising massive campaigns to create a sound atmosphere for establishing a theocratic state. They are using various institutions such as colleges and universities, seminaries, mosques, religious assemblies, and NGOs as their platforms to propagate their political and religious ideals in civil society. Moreover, it is suspected that some Islamic parties and underground groups have been trying to develop armed branches to organise an armed Islamic revolution (Ahmed 2006:149-159).

Thus, it is quite clear that even in civilian regimes, however, the elites (whether self-identified Bengali or Bangladeshi) have shown no interest in reintroducing secularism in the state. The Bangladeshi elites have not tried to alter any of the Islamisation process because Islam is the basis of their politics. Both Awami League and BNP, the two principal political forces in the country, are equally willing to seek and benefit

from the support of religion. Now, I will cite some factors which have aggravated the menace of fundamentalism in Bangladesh in the civilian rule period.

Political Opportunism:

The short sighted policies introduced by post-1991 democratic governments, have placed Bangladeshi society firmly on the path of fundamentalism. Driven by political calculations, political parties are unwilling to recognise the religious fundamentalism that is brewing in the country. On the contrary, they have begun to adopt positions that are friendly to the increasingly – conservative segment of the society. The various incidents taking place in Bangladesh will give a clear of a ‘shrinking of liberal space’¹⁸ in Bangladesh (Datta 2007:145-170). To illustrate,

1. Non recognition of Ahmaddiyas Jamaat as Muslims which constitute about 100,000, of the population. They have always been the principle target of religious tolerance;
2. Attempts to ban foreign television channels because of their ‘ un-Islamic’ content;
3. Banning of the feature film Matir Moina because of its negative portrayal of a madrassa student;
4. Periodic attacks against secular authors, poets, leaders and media personalities because of their criticism of religious fundamentalism;
5. Fatwas against various leaders and target groups that often led to individual or mob violence;
6. The mushroom growth of militant groups committed to the establishment of an Islamic state in Bangladesh;
7. The cancellation of women’s sports events in response to demands from religious groups such as Islamic Shashantantra Andolan (Islamic Constitution Movement or ICM) and the Anti-Islamic Activities Prevention Committee (AIAPC). (For example, the first- ever women’s wrestling competition scheduled for 4 July 2004 was cancelled because of threats from the ICM).

¹⁸ Many Bangladeshi authors like Haroon Habib, Shariar Kabir and Saleem Samad, as well as Samina Ahmed, South Asia Director for the International Crisis Group, and Abbas Faiz, South Asia Region Researcher for Amnesty International, have referred to this phenomenon occurring over the last few years in Bangladesh.

Religious intolerance particularly manifests itself through the Fatwas issued by various religious leaders. Significantly, since the controversial Fatwa against Taslima in 1994, the incidence of these edicts has greatly increased. According to Bertil Lintner, who has been largely instrumental in exposing the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism in Bangladesh, writes, “The Muslim radicals first came to international attention in 1993, when author Taslima Nasrin was forced to flee the country after receiving death threats from Islamic Fundamentalists who objected to her critical writings about what she termed out dated religious beliefs. Fundamentalist groups offered a \$5,000 reward for her death” (Mukarji 2003).

Growth of Madrassas:

A powerful incentive for religious fundamentalism in Bangladesh could be located in the accelerated growth of madrassas. Cadres for the militant organisations have been recruited from the thousands of madrassas (Islamic schools), that have mushroomed throughout the country. The madrassas fill an important function in a country where basic education is available only to a few, especially in the impoverished countryside, but, as Bangladeshi journalist Salahuddin Babar said: “Once the students graduate from the madrassas, they either join mosques, so there is employment in that field. But they find it difficult to get employment in secular institutions. Certain quarters grab this opportunity to brainwash them, make them into religious fanatics rather than modern Muslims” (Babar 2002). A retired civil servant has called the madrassas a “potential political time bomb”. According to estimates, there are at least 64,000 in Bangladesh, most of which are beyond any form of governmental control or supervision. Moderate Muslims note that the Taliban was born in similar madrassas in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province and in afghan refugee camps, where they promoted a new radical and extremely militant model for ‘Islamic revolutions’ (Lintner 2002).

Since the foundation of Bangladesh, various governments have contributed to the growth of madrassa education. While the advent of military rule spurred their steady growth, their numbers really accelerated in the 1990s, which suggests that the democratic governments played a key role in the process.¹⁹ This unbridled growth,

¹⁹ For example, the number stood at 2,386 in 1978 and just over 2,700 in 1988. See testimony of Samina Ahmed to US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing on Combating Terrorism through Education –the Near East and South Asia, ‘U.S. should condition Education Aid to Pakistan,

symbolises two distinct but inter – related developments. At one level, it indicates a gradually- declining role for the state in education – one that is being filled by the madrassas (Maitra 2003). The inability of the state to provide basic primary and secondary education in rural areas works in favor of the madrassas which have a better network in these areas. With just over 2 percent of GDP being spent on education, the state education system has become insufficient to meet the growing demands upon it. During the past two decades the number of students registered in junior and higher grade madrassa increased by 818 percent as against a 317 percent growth of pupils in ordinary secondary schools²⁰ (The Daily Star 2005).

Secondly, in contrast to the state run schools, madrassa offer a very narrow religious curriculum that focuses on Quranic teachings. Though important in the development of moral values, such exclusivism not only limits the scope of the students' knowledge but impedes their job opportunities. Employment avenues for graduates trained solely in Islamic studies are limited to the madrassa system or its affiliated activities. The limited educational basis of this system precludes them from most government jobs. Since the late 1980s, efforts have been made to modernise madrassa education by including secular subjects in the curriculum of madrassas under the Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board. But the impact has been marginal.

These two impediments – namely non imparting of secular and non availability of jobs outside the religious education system – ironically work against madrassa education. Easily available, madrassa education has not proved to be easily absorbable in the job market. The unemployment rate among madrassa – educated graduates is higher than that of products of the ordinary educational stream. As a result, madrassa education has had a direct impact upon the growth of religious fundamentalism in Bangladesh. Driven by a radical worldview and saddled with more or less permanent unemployment, many youth find militancy an attractive alternative. The traditional argument about poverty breeding terrorism is valid for Bangladesh

Bangladesh', International Crisis Group. [[http:// www.iacfp.org/p_news/nit/iacpa-archie/2005/04/29/cap-icgl-29042005.html](http://www.iacfp.org/p_news/nit/iacpa-archie/2005/04/29/cap-icgl-29042005.html)], accessed on 18 April 2008]. For more details see Government of Bangladesh, *1980 Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Government of Bangladesh, 1981), p.421

²⁰ for a detailed study on madrassa education in Bangladesh, see Uzma Anzar, 'World Bank Report on Islamic Education: A Brief History of Madrassas with Comments on Curricula and Current Pedagogical Practices', Draft Report (World Bank, March 2003) [siteresources. Worldbank.org/ EDUCATION/ Resources/ 278200-11217032742]

(Daily Star 2005). If the rise of Osama bin-Laden destroyed the symmetry of the poverty- terrorism linkage, the growth of madrassas in Bangladesh shows that when poverty stricken youth have no hope of a decent living, they can as easily be drawn into criminal and terrorist activities for material as for doctrinal reasons. However, madrassas are not the sole cause for the rising fundamentalism in Bangladesh. However, the rapid growth of militancy has compelled Bangladesh to take a closer look at the madrassas and their negative influences. While political compulsions prevent political parties from adopting a stronger position vis-à-vis- madrassas education, there have been growing calls for the 'streamlining' of religious schools from scholars and commentators (Lintner 2002).

Upsurge of Religious Parties:

The most striking development in Bangladesh following the return of democracy in 1991 was the growth of religious parties.²¹ In tune with his secular politics, shortly after the formation of the state Prime Minister Mujibur banned religious parties and proscribed them from participating in elections. His assassination in August 1975 and the subsequent advent of military rule brought about a definite shift. Desperately needing a constituency that would accept and legitimise their role in politics, General Zia and his successors sought to placate conservative religious leaders: the ban was slowly relaxed; political participation allowed; and the clergy was gradually recognised as a player in national politics. Therefore by the time the first multi-party elections were held in February 1991, Jamaat-e-Islami was legal, erstwhile religious leaders who had supported Pakistan during the liberation war of 1971 had been accommodated politically, and religion was no longer a taboo in Bangladeshi politics. Since then, religious parties have flourished in the country- although, conscious of their limitations, they have often joined hands with the larger parties to consolidate their support base. Conversely, political compulsions compelled the two large parties, the Awami league and the BNP, to forge closer ties with the religious parties. The verdict of the October 2001 elections vindicated the growing power of the religious parties as Jamaat-e- Islami emerged as the primary beneficiary of this trend.

²¹ The different religious parties (Jamaat-e-Islami, Muslim League, Islami-Oikyo Jote and Islami Jatiya Oikaya Front) won 14 seats in the 3rd Jatiya Sangsad elections in 1986, 18 in the 5th Jatiya Sangsad elections in 1991, 4 in 7th Jatiya sangsad elections in 1996, and as many as 33 seats in 8th Jatiya Sangsad elections in 2001.

A recent study suggests that the diminishing role of the state in overall welfare and developmental programs has accorded a space to religious groups and religious political parties to endear themselves especially to the rural populace hitherto largely untouched by progress.

“The result of such preparation was capturing the village by using deep tube-well- centric society, peasant society, Mosque and Madras (sa) whatever is the medium, establishing (an) undisputed stronghold in religious institutions, capturing the state institutions, capturing the economic- activity-based institutions, and in the name of private institutions taking (a) position among the low- income groups of people of the villages and towns and strengthened their presence. To execute this strategy, (the) economic institutions of fundamentalists played (a) definite role. Likewise due to adopting this strategy those institutions were also strengthened. And these generated synergistic effects. In this respect, religious fundamentalists were not idealistic in the least in giving political leadership; in fact, they were realistic manifold (sic). Following this process, during half a century, they have now reached a position where they can get an average vote of 15,000 people in each of the seats of the parliament. At the same time, they have now acquired the capacity to spend millions of black money and use... muscle power in national parliamentary elections. On the other hand, as displayed on 17th August 2005, they are well capable of organizing nation-wide serial bomb blasts and that with 100% military accuracy. By no means is this a weak opponent (Barkat 2005).

With its large welfare network activities, Jamaat-e-Islami enjoys considerable support in rural areas. It has organisational bases (accompanied by affiliated madrassas) in all 64 districts of Bangladesh. All this shows that religion has firmly entrenched itself in Bangladeshi politics. The growth of Jamaat-e- Islami has impacted on the polity in two ways. With its large base and organisational skills and welfare programs, it has lent credibility to the religious style in political life and second, its participation in the democratic political process has provided a congenial atmosphere for the growth of militancy and fundamentalism. A number of conservative, strident and militant religious groups have found ways to voice their opinions without much opposition from within the system (Datta 2007:145-170).

Clandestine Fundamentalist Organizations:

A disturbing trend in the country is the apparently uncontrolled and haphazard growth of clandestine religio – fundamentalist organisations, promoted by mainly rural youths alienated from the city – based political elite and clearly enamored of the grassroots-based village mullah (Mukarji 2003). On a website the following report, during 2002, discloses one such scarcely heard-of- groups.

Entitled “severe bomb blast at dinajpur: again on the day following Eid-ul-Azah, “the report said:

Many Historians think that History repeats itself. But we didn't think that our terrorists or their godfathers read the writings of those historians who believed in such social dynamics. The terrorists made history at least in the domain of terrorism in Bangladesh to repeat itself. These people have not forgotten the events of Mymensing where precisely on the day following Eid-ul-Fitr five cinema halls were the scene of severe bomb blasts in which at least 18 people died and hundreds of people were severely injured. The notorious anti-social elements backed by fundamentalists of different political parties once again reminded us that whether Operation clean Heart is on or off, they can do any menace whenever and wherever they want to.

The report continued:

This time they have chosen the northernmost district town of Dinajpur. According to the late night news as reported by channel 1, a severe bomb explosion took place at the heart of the town in a house located at a mohalla (locality) known as chhoto Gurgola at about 6.30 morning today (13 February 2003) the day following Eid-ul-azah. According to the report, as many as seven bombs were exploded in a house that has been almost completely destroyed. Several persons have been injured. The police have cordoned off the house and journalists were barred from taking pictures of the place of occurrence, the damaged house or the injured persons. According to the report, many eyewitnesses said that just immediately after the explosions, a microbus removed at least two injured persons to an unknown destination. The police are keeping silent about the matter and have not been able to trace the fleeing microbus with its passengers. However, the police arrested three persons from within the house all in a severely injured condition. They are Shagu, shafiquel and Badal. The eyewitnesses opined that the bombs had exploded perhaps while some were being made. It is learnt that after two minutes of interval, two bombs and

then within 15 minutes a total of seven bombs were exploded. The police have confiscated a mobile telephone, few publications of an organization named Jamiyatul Mujahedin and some monograms describing how to make bombs., nails, sand and other materials including explosives thought to be useful for bomb- making . This event is a reminder to all of us that whether Al-Qaeda or no Al-Qaeda or whether ISI agents are active or not in Bangladesh, armed terrorist groups contributing to fundamentalism and conservatism are very much active in Bangladesh and that they are fast learning the know-how of making and using modern weaponry.

The website thereafter investigated the little- known Jamiyatul Mujahedin and came up with the following information:

Nobody knows how the organization came into existence and how it is being funded. Is it just an indigenous group or part of a greater network nationally or internationally connected? It is learnt that Islamic institutions such as madrassas (Islamic religious schools) for girls, a Jikir training centre for women. The organization has 21 branches offices in the sadar upazila itself. The same Hafiz Shahidullah took on rent a house from one Shahid Hosain Ratan at a monthly rent of TK 2,500 where a women's madrassa has been operating. In another locality known as Suihari, the same Hafiz took on rent another house from one Abul Hosen where he has started the said Jikir training centre for women. Sometimes back a report regarding questionable activities of the Jikir centre was published in a popular national daily. There are other people like Hafiz Shahidullah who either in their own names or under fictitious names are running these activities of the organization. A question (that keeps) peeping in the mind is how deep the root of the Dinajpur bomb blast lies. Does the Dinajpur explosion have any connection with the Mymensing episode or are the two just isolated events carried out by two isolated terrorist groups/ The report alleged that the persons injured in the bomb blasts escaped successfully and had since been under treatment clandestinely . While not alleging any collusion between the alleged bomb makers and the law and order machinery, the report implied that the police were not quite forthcoming on the matter (Mukarji 2003).

Credible reports available from both Bangladeshi and international media and from foreign diplomats stationed in Dhaka indicate that the government is adopting lenient attitude towards the growth of fundamentalism and the presence of various militant groups operating with impunity. To cite, the Khaleda Zia government in power in post -9/11 period dismissed all these allegations as “motivated Western propaganda” to

tarnish the image of Bangladesh. She said that there were three sets of “false” propaganda against her government. The one that she was running the country with the help of Islamic fundamentalists “was not true,” she countered. With regard to the second, she said, “my party, Bangladesh National Party (BNP), won nearly two-thirds of the seats in the last general election and we could have formed a government by ourselves. Yet, we decided to form a partnership with Jamaat-e-Islami to honor a commitment made before the election.” As for the third “lie”, she said, “The third propaganda is that Bangladesh is playing host to the Jihadis (religious fighters) from Afghanistan and beyond and that Bangladesh has allowed deadly cargo to be imported secretly and, therefore, people should be afraid of Bangladesh... Again, this is complete fabrication. The picture is quite opposite. Bangladesh supported the western move in dislodging the Taliban government in Afghanistan” (Mukarji 2003).

However, the incidents that are taking place since last two decades expose the shadowy display of Islamic fundamentalism with the authorities succumbing rather cozily to its diktat. Instead of acting on reports in the media concerning the presence and growth of religious fundamentalism, the government opted for intimidatory tactics:

1. In April 2002 the Hong Kong –based Far Eastern Economic Review carried a story by Bertil Lintner that highlighted religious extremism in Bangladesh. The government retaliated by ordering the confiscation of the offending issue.
2. In November 2001 noted journalist Shariar Kabir was arrested for visiting India to document the plight of Hindu refugees who had fled Bangladesh following the October violence.
3. In November 2001 journalist Saleem Samad was charged with sedition and conspiracy for helping Britain’s Channel 4 make a documentary on Bangladesh.
4. An expose of militant activities in Chittagong resulted in a mob attack against the Bengali- language daily Prothom-Alo in August 2004.
5. There was growing incitement against journalists critical of the militancy, Jamaat-e-Islami MP Maulana Delwar Houssain Sayeedi warning in March 2002: ‘The blood of journalists who cannot tell the difference between

Muslims and Islamists should be analysed to see if they are true Muslims' (BAR 2003).

In the light of all these incidents which present a very grave scenario, it is necessary to reflect the divergent views of various journalists who have worked in Bangladesh to put forth real picture of this new trend. These varied views can help in the proper analysis of this phenomenon as it brings to the forefront the views of two generations.

Journalist Moinuddin Naser, who has been living in New York since 1999, worked as a journalist in Bangladesh from 1978 to 1999 and is a former editor of the New York, based 'Bangla-Patrika', a Bangla-language weekly. As per Naser view, Bangladesh is not heading toward an Islamist government. He argues that History precludes such a thing from happening. Historically, the Muslims of East Bengal (Bangladesh) share a language and cultural and ethnic heritage with Hindu Bengalis in their midst and to their West in India. In 1948, British and Indian officials divided the Indian subcontinent based on religion. East Bengal, the area surrounding the delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers, became East Pakistan. For 23 years, East Bengalis shared a government with their fellow Muslims in what is now Pakistan, traversing barriers of language, culture, and 1100 miles of Indian territory.

After a divisive election and Bengali demands for autonomy, the two Pakistans fought a war in 1971. The result (thanks in part to an Indian intervention) was an independent Bangladesh. "Bangladesh was liberated on the basis of cultural differences", Naser explained. "Bangladeshis believe in Bengali culture, and they do not like to be repressed by the more aggressive, religion- minded people of Pakistan". Since then, Bangladesh has maintained its position as a secular Muslim democracy. In recent years Islamic parties have entered into Bangladeshi mainstream politics most notably the government coalition member Jamaat-e-Islami in 2001. Naser described the Jamaat as a legitimate political party with no connection to Al Qaeda, or to 'jamaats' (Islamic parties) in Pakistan or India Naser believes that jamaat wants "to see Islamic rule through democratic means".

Sayeed Ur-Rabb, the editor-in-chief of the weekly 'Thikana', the first and most widely circulated Bangladeshi paper in the United States follows the same line. According to Rabb, the Jamaat is losing popularity and seats in parliament despite forming a coalition with the Bangladeshi national party (BNP). "The jamaat will

never come to power,” he explained, because “Bangladesh is a very moderate country”. After listening to list of acronyms of Islamic militant groups mentioned in an article in the *Statesman*, Monjur Hossain, advertising director of the ‘Thikana’ responded: “these groups do not exist in Bangladesh.” Rabb and Hossain believe that Indian propaganda is responsible for much of the alarmism surrounding Islamic militancy in Bangladesh. They have criticised India for promoting Hindu fundamentalism under the government. “If you go to India, you will see a lot of fighting (between) Hindus and Muslims. They bomb the mosque,” Naser said. He was referring to the bombing of India’s Babri mosque in 1992, when Hindu fundamentalists, backed by the rising nationalist party, destroyed a mosque that they believed sat on top of Rama’s birth-place. “But in Bangladesh you will never find that,” Rabb said. In Bangladesh some Muslims took to Dhaka’s streets, attacking Hindu establishments, but politicians swiftly condemned all religious violence, which never reached Indian proportions. It is a point of pride for Rabb, as for many Bangladeshis, that religious tolerance, and not religious fundamentalism, is held in high esteem in Bangladesh (Muraskin 2005).

Even a non-Bangla reader can tell from scanning the pages of the ‘Thikana’ or ‘Patrika’ that Bangladeshis don’t resemble strict Islamists. Pointing to secular, criminal forces as the real problem in the country, Naser and Rabb criticised the government and the criminal way in which it has allowed the country to operate. “Bangladesh is infested by the thugs and goons of the secular forces”, Naser said angrily. Rabb described these forces as “miscreants”- not terrorists. He explained that journalists are targeted specifically by the people they write against, and politicians are murdered by henchmen of the rival party-acts of targeted violence. Such crimes usually go un-prosecuted. Rabb’s brother M.M.Shaheen, who founded *Thikana* and has since returned to Bangladesh to become an independent minister in parliament, received threats from the Finance Minister’s son for exposing an embezzlement scheme. Despite its promises, no government has, as yet, managed an independent judiciary. Rabb sees this lack of judicial independence as the deepest systemic ill in Bangladesh.

Naser deplores the paralysis of Bangladeshi’s “quasi-democracy,” where ministers belonging to one party or the other are constitutionally bound to vote along the party line. “If she says ‘the sun sets in the East’, you have to raise your hand”, explains

Rabb, and instead of doing their jobs as civil servants, “everyone is trying to please these two ladies”, Rabb emphasised that to the impoverished masses, democracy means very little. Both Rabb and Naser see a pressing need for reformers in Bangladesh people completely free from the corruption of the old parties. However, contrarily, Arnold Zeitlin, an American journalist who has reported extensively on Bangladesh since 1969, holds a different view. Zeitlin writes from Dhaka, where he is working to record the experiences of the political figure and owner of the ‘Ittefaq’ newspaper, Anwar Hossain Manju. “Because Bangladeshi borders are so porous, because enforcement of law and order is so poor, because the system is so corrupt, anyone can easily obtain a Bangladesh passport and fake visas,” Zeitlin notes. Consequently, “Bangladesh is rapidly becoming a conduit for extreme political and religious views”.

Zeitlin has written that the Jamaat-e-Islami party is “seeking power though democratic means in much the way Nazis in the early 1930s sought power through the ballot box” Naser had said that the Jamaat’s vote was 12% in 2001 and was the same in 1970, at the country’s first election. Zeitlin pointed out, however, that the Islamist party has been gaining influence through the popular vote. Though the BNP and the Awami League received roughly the same amount of votes, the BNP received 180 seats in a House of 300, with Jamaat endorsement of BNP candidates making up much of the difference. Tareen Hossain, Manju’s daughter, explained that “a lot of the politicians in Bangladesh are (now) joining hands with the mullahs”. Her grandfather Manik Mia was a mentor to Bangladesh’s principal founder and former president Mujibur Rahman. Her father served as Minister of Energy of the Jatiya Military Junta in the 1980s, but afterwards split off to form his own more democratically – minded faction. Born when the country was two years old, Tareen grew up surrounded by secular nationalist politicians – now the old guard in Bangladesh.

She couched her criticisms in American political language: “its lot like what you see here: you have to get the Bible belt to win the presidency. Religion is an easy card to play”. Hossain believes that fear of threats from the West increased fundamentalists’ popularity. The Jamaat was never in parliament before 9/11. Somewhat disdainfully, she added that the Jamaat does not practice Islam as outlined in the Quran. Instead, she said, it is similar to Wahabism, the belief system embraced by Al Qaeda. Zeitlin pointed out that the Jamaat is only one of several Islamist groups, and he affirmed that

those groups in the 'Statesman' indeed exist in Bangladesh, though he re-iterated that no Indian media is a reliable source on its eastern neighbor. To quote:

Madrasahs run and funded by Islamic religious organizations are jammed with students learning that Christians and Jews are threatening to bring down Islam as well as other anti-west vitriol. They are fertile ground for the growth of militant Islam seeking to impose Islamic law on Bangladesh (Muraskin 2005).

Hossain compared madrasahs to boarding schools, where poor young people receive free meals and a roof over their heads. Hossain is not optimistic about the future of Bangladesh, where, she said, "the last election was rigged like nobody's business. She added, "Hindus are more oppressed than ever", though inter-religious violence is not as bad as in India. She said, 'The world is losing its last moderate Muslim Democracy', According to Enayetullah Khan, editor of the Bangladesh weekly Holiday, the issue reflects the struggle of a young and fragile nation to find a national identity: "We are having a bit of an identity crisis here. Are we Bengalis first and Muslims second, or Muslims first and Bengalis second? This is the problem. And when Muslim Identity becomes an Islamic identity we're in real trouble". Here, the question arises that why these difference of opinions among these scholars exist for the same phenomenon i.e., rising of Islamic Fundamentalism in Bangladesh. According to Tareen Hossain, "The older generation will hate to admit that fundamentalism is rising". She says that her father's generation tends to be more idealistic and romanticise Bangladesh, she said; after all it is the nation they fought to create (Muraskin 2005). Moinuddin Naser, further says that he has observed the rise of disorganized Islamic militants- not Jamaat members- and was "scared that Bangladesh may be a sanctuary for terrorists". Zeitlin agrees that in backward countries; where the machinations of parliament are far removed from the common people, popular trends must be taken seriously. Traveling through a country where women have not been expected to cover up for over a century, he noticed more and more village women wearing the 'Burqa'. Slowly, a more conservative, possibly militant, form of Islam seems to be seeping into Bangladesh.

After analyzing these varied views the question which is posed before us is: Is an Islamic Fundamentalist government in Bangladesh inevitable?

Islamic fundamentalism is, however, not rising in a vacuum and to obtain a fuller picture, one has to take into account two other parallel and inter-linked developments, the continuing persecution of religious minorities and the frequent trampling of human rights of those especially who actively fight Islamic fundamentalism i.e., moderate and secular individuals and institutions. To illustrate,

- On 14 February 2005 a bomb blast disrupted a Valentine's Day function at Dhaka University.
- On 14 February 2005 a bomb detonated near the Ekushey Book Fair held at the Bangla Academy.
- On 14 May 2005 a bomb blast occurred at a circus in Bagerhat.
- In March 1999 a bomb blast disrupted the New Year's celebrations in Udichi.
- On 19 January 1999 prominent poet Shamsur Rahman, well-known for his secularism and criticism of growing communal intolerance, was attacked by religious fundamentalism inside his house.
- On 14 April 2001 eight people were killed in a bomb explosion set off by suspected Islamic militants at a Bengali New Year cultural function in Ramna, Dhaka.
- On 3 June 2001 ten persons were killed and 25 others injured in a bomb blast at a Catholic mission church at Baniachar, Gopalganj district.
- On 28 September 2002 a bomb went off inside a movie theatre in Satkhira in south-western Bangladesh. Minutes later another bomb exploded at a nearby site that was hosting an outdoor exhibition.
- On 7 December 2002 Id-ul-Fitr, a national holiday, was disrupted by bombs exploding in four cinema halls in Mymensing.
- On 17 January 2003 seven persons were killed and 20 others injured in a bomb blast at a fair in Tangail.
- On 4 December 2003 the leader of an Islamist outfit, Jaise Mostafa, who is also the Khatib (preacher) of Rahim Metal Mosque in Tejgaon, vowed to offer 'Juma' (Friday) prayers in the Ahmadiyya Mosque of East Nakhalpara. He honored his promise after 'grabbing' the mosque the following day.

- On 5 December 2003 KNASC issued an ultimatum calling on the government to declare Ahmadiyyas ‘non-Muslims’.
- On 12 January 2004 two persons were killed and 37 others injured by a bomb explosion at the shrine of Sufi saint Hazrat Shahjalal in Sylhet during the annual ‘Urs’celebration (the anniversary of the saint’s death).
- On 23 January 2004 Amra Dhakabashi and HKNA held a joint meeting in Dhaka at which the government was warned that it would pay a heavy price unless it declared the Ahmaddiyas ‘non-Muslims’.
- On 27 February 2004 Humayun Azad, a professor at Dhaka University, was stabbed in front of the Bangla Academy in Dhaka. The attack was seen as retaliation for his book Pak Sar Zamin Saad Baad (the first line of the Pakistani National Anthem) which was critical of religious groups who had collaborated with the Pakistan Army during the Liberation war (The Daily Star 2004).
- On 1 March 2004 a bomb blast at an international trade fair in Khulna killed one person and injured over 50 others.
- In March 2004 the US government added Delwar Hosasain Sayeedi, a Jamaat-e- Islami member of the Jatiya Sangsad, to its ‘no-fly’ list of individuals whose entry into the US was declared undesirable.
- On 19 March 2004 Islamists belonging to International Majlishe Tahaffuze Khatme Nabuwat Bangladesh tried to capture Ahmadiyya mosques in Barguna district.
- On 20 May 2004 a grenade was thrown at a prayer meeting at the Hazrat Shahjalal Shrine in Sylhet again, injuring Anwar Hussain Choudhury, the British high commissioner to Bangladesh. Scotland Yard attributed this attack on the envoy (incidentally a man of Bangladeshi origin) to Islamic extremist groups.
- On 11 July 2004 a number of politicians, journalists and intellectuals received death threats from an Islamic outfit calling itself Mujahideen-al- Islam. Since then a number of Awami leaders, especially Sheikh Hasina, have received death threats from militant groups (The Independent 2004).

- On 13 August 2004 Khulna police thwarted attempts by activists of the International Khatme Nabuwat Movement Bangladesh (IKNMB) to destroy the Nirala Ahmadiyya Mosque Complex.
- On 18 August 2004 a group of Chittagong men, incensed by a newspaper story about alleged Islamic militant activities in the town, attacked the premises and journalists of the Bengali- language national daily Prothom Alo.
- On 21 August 2004 Awami leader Sheikh Hasina was attacked at a party rally. Twenty people including senior Awami leader Ivy Rahman died in the mayhem. According to the US State Department, HUJI was behind the attack (The Independent 2005).
- In September 2004 Christine Wallich, World Bank Director for Bangladesh, was forced to leave the country following a death threat believed to be from HUJI.
- On 4 October Islamists demanded the cancellation of a women's football tournament being held in the capital. Women playing such a game in public, they argued, were against Islamic tradition.
- In November 2004 Ziaul Huq Zia, a leader of the Bangladesh Chatra, the student wing of the Awami League, was killed by members of JMJB.
- In December 2004 threats from a little known HUJI splinter group almost jeopardized the India-Bangladesh cricket series.
- On December 2004 Professor Muhammad Yunus, a teacher at Rajshahi University, was stabbed by suspected members of Jamaat-e- Islami.
- On 13 and 16 February 2005 Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) offices in Joypurhat and Naogon were attacked by members of JMJB. A member of the group boasted to a magistrate after his arrest that the group's bomb squad would continue its attacks on NGOs like BRAC and Karitas and on cultural activities deemed un- Islamic (Datta 2007).

- On 14 February 2005 a bomb detonated near the Ekushey Book Fair being held at the Bangla Academy.²²

The bomb blast at the New Year's celebrations in Udichi in March 1999 was the first major act of terrorism in Bangladesh and the indication of an upsurge of religious fundamentalism. According to the Department of State's 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices', the Bangladesh "government's human rights record remained poor and the government continued to commit numerous serious abuses"

... extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, and politically motivated violence were among the most egregious violations. Security forces acted with impunity, and committed acts of physical and psychological torture. In addition violence against journalists continued, as did infringement on religious freedoms. Government corruption remained a significant problem. Violence against women and children also was a major problem, as was trafficking in persons (CRS Report 2007).

'Human Rights Watch' found in 2006 that the BNP government had "aligned itself with extremist groups that foment violence the minority Ahmadiyya community". Ahmadiyyas are a self identified Islamic community that differs with mainstream Islam on whether the Prophet Mohammad is the final prophet. BNP government coalition partners JI and the IOJ do not recognise Ahmadiyyas as Muslims "and have been involved in fomenting religious violence against them and other religious minorities". The government has also been accused of failing to prosecute attacks against journalists by supporters of the BNP. Bangladesh's elite anti-crime and anti-terrorist RAB is thought to be responsible for killing at least 350 people in custody and for the torture of hundreds of others. The government's failure to punish RAB members for unlawful killings and torture is viewed as indicative of consent for RAB actions. The RAB was created in 2004 and is known to torture by boring holes in suspects with electric drills as well as using electric shock and beatings. The RAB has attributed deaths associated with its operations as the result of crossfire. The case of Bangladesh Weekly Blitz editor Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury highlights how the rise of Islamist tendencies have undermined Bangladesh's image as a tolerant Muslim state. The BNP government brought charges against Choudhury stating that:

²² The Ekushey Book Fair is held annually to mark the 21 February anniversary of the language movement of 1952.

By praising the Jews and the Christians, by attempting to travel to Israel and by predicting the so-called rise of Islamist militancy in the country and expressing such thoughts in writing inside the country and abroad, you have tried to damage the image and relations of Bangladesh with the outside world. For which, charges...are brought against you (CRS Report 2007).

After 17 months in prison Choudhury was released, though his offices were bombed and the government continues to press the charges against him. Choudhury could be hanged if convicted. If one examines the chain of incidents since then, a pattern is discernible. The future for the country's religious and ethnic minorities appears bleak as "Bangladeshi Nationalism" is becoming synonymous with a stronger Muslim identity and Islamic groups are becoming increasingly fierce in their public statements and actions.

Proliferation of Small Arms:

This is another important factor which is enhancing the menace of fundamentalism in Bangladesh. According to recent estimates there are at least 250,000 illegal firearms in the country. Recently the Chittagong Hill Tracts has become the principle conduit for trafficking small arms into Bangladesh. Some say that Bangladesh is on the verge of becoming the 'biggest clandestine arms supplier' in South Asia (Kumar 2004). Besides the large number of firearms entering through the borders, small arms are also manufactured locally in illegal factories within the country. Studies indicate there are about 1,000 such illegal arms factories, run mainly with foreign spare parts (Ahmed 2005). With the huge financial backing that the militant groups enjoy, easy access to arms and ammunition has made it possible for them to spread havoc and terror without much difficulty.

Reaction to War on Terrorism:

Any meaningful discussion on fundamentalism in Bangladesh would be incomplete without the Al-Qaeda dimension. 9/11 and the US 'war on terror' redefined the role of the fundamentalists in Bangladesh. Whereas ethnic militant organisations in South Asia such as the LTTE,²³ the National Socialist Council of Nagaland and to some extent the communist party of Nepal (Maoist) were showing caution in the aftermath of the events of Ground Zero, the Islamic militants were getting more active. Recruits

²³ Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the main militant organization representing the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

from the madrassas were plenty and the US led coalition against Afghanistan was uniting the Islamic hordes (Saikia 2003). The rabble rousing had continued in the interregnum, with the Islamic militant groups in Bangladesh taking out protest marches against the US and with the public burning of the US flag. Writing about the events, Bertil Lintner of the Far Eastern Economic Review states:

Maulana Ubaidal Haq, preaching to hundreds of thousands of people, including cabinet ministers, at the national mosque in Dhaka, condemned the US war on terrorism and called for a jihad against the Americans.

“America President Bush and is the most heinous terrorist in the world. Both Americans and America must be destroyed. The Americans will be washed away if Bangladesh’s 120 million Muslims spit on them”, the cleric snarled in an address marking the Eid-ul-Fitr Muslim Festival in December 2001 (Perry 2002)

The Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER) was banned in Bangladesh and Bertil Lintner was pilloried for his writing. But, facts have a way of getting out, and another bombshell came by way of a Time Magazine article six months after the Far Eastern Economic Review story had surfaced. The story Deadly Cargo with a Chittagong dateline was written by Alex Perry, and it contained information about the presence of the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi presence in the Al-Qaeda network has been corroborated by other sources as well. In a televised interview to CNN in December 2001, American “Taliban” fighter, John Walker spoke about the linguistic divisions of the Al-Qaeda directed Ansar²⁴ brigades, which were Bengali, Urdu and Arabic – which is suggestive of the fact that the Bangladeshi contingent in the Al-Qaeda was considerable.

Further, in 2001 an issue cropped up again during the campaign for the Jatiya Sangsad elections. There were fears that some of the Taliban activists who had fled Afghanistan following the US offensive had taken refuge in the country (Shahin 2005). During the campaign, ‘Aamra hobo Taliban, Bangla hobe Afghan’. (We will be the Taliban, Bangladesh will become Afghanistan) became a popular slogan among religious voters, and it was not uncommon to find rickshaws in Dhaka plying their trade with Bin-Laden posters prominently displayed. The controversy received

²⁴ Helpers of the prophet.

further impetus in April 2002 when Bertil Lintner warned in the Far East Economic Review that:

A revolution is taking place in Bangladesh that threatens trouble for the region and beyond if left unchallenged. Islamic fundamentalism, religious intolerance, militant Muslim groups with links to international terrorist groups, powerful military with ties to the militants, the mushrooming of Islamic schools churning out radical students, middle-class apathy, poverty and lawlessness- all are combining to transform the nation (Lintner 2002).

This led to uproar in the country, and the government banned the issue. The whole episode, however, led to increasing debate inside the country over growing Islamic fundamentalism and its adverse consequences for the society.²⁵ Though the prospect of the Talibanisation of Bangladesh looks remote. Yet there are persistent indications that pro-Taliban and pro-al-Qaida elements are present and active in the country.

The revival of the Islamic fundamentalist forces in Bangladesh was manifested in the

- Re- emergence of the Jamaat-e-Islami as a small but well- knit political party;
- The emergence of smaller Islamic parties and coalitions such as the Islami Oikyo Jote, which are often more radical than the Jamaat;
- Emergence of militant underground Islamic groups such as the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI);
- Creation of new safe houses and bases of Pakistan- sponsored militant groups like Hizb-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, Lashkar-i-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed;
- Growing synergy of action between these new Islamic terrorist groups and older parties such as the Freedom party which has large number of former military officers opposed to the Awami League and
- Growing co-operation between Bangladeshi Islamic radical groups and those in eastern and northeastern India and in Burma's Arakan province.

²⁵ For example, the pro- Awami Daily Star periodically carries long write-ups on religious extremism and in the process often gets into difficulties with religious parties such as Jamaat. On the role of religious extremism, see also Bertil Lintner, ' Is Religious Extremism on the Rise in Bangladesh?', in *Jane's Intelligence Review* (May 2002); Alex Perry, ' Deadly Cargo', *Time Magazine* (15 october 2002); and Haroon Habib, ' Report and Reality', *Frontline* (9 November 2002).

Possible Impact:

The question which is posed is: what can be the impact of the growing fundamentalism upon the society of Bangladesh? Restoration of real democracy would not only be delayed, but may be finally stalled. Democracy cannot be restored without demolishing the authoritarian structures, including the fundamentalist forces, which have been raised over the years of military rule and continuing with its full momentum even in civilian rule. Democracy does not merely mean the holding of periodical elections and alteration of one set of people in power by another. Democracy establishes a set of norms for the running of the society; it guarantees fundamental rights, it liberates the people from obsolete ideas and prejudices, it protects people from arbitrary actions of the strong, and, above all, it establishes a society based on the rule of law. Fundamentalism, which is totally an undemocratic ideology, still has the upper hand. If it is not checked, the condition of the minorities, including the Ahmadis and the Kadianis, may further worsen. Their stay in Bangladesh may be made impossible. The worsening societal situation, along with economic crisis, would surely force the common people irrespective of caste and creed to leave the country. This would lead to bilateral problems with the other countries (Chakravarty 1995).

The tide of fundamentalism in Bangladesh can be checked if the country embarks upon an economic development capable of providing the bare necessities of life to the common people. Political forces which claim to be democratic shall have to leave slogans likely to hurt the sentiment of others; they shall have to call "spade a spade". There cannot be any compromise on ideological issues. Despite, Bangladesh being predominantly an agricultural country, unfortunately, the peasant movements have so far remained very weak. The anti-fundamentalist movement should start with the launching of peasant movements against landlordism, uncertain sharecropping system and such other legacies of the feudal order. Bangladesh has a tradition of progressive socio- cultural movements. That tradition needs to be restored. Bangladesh had also a very strong tradition of Sufism. A number of top class Sufi saints who were born and flourished in the country, have left behind legacies of religious tolerance and universal humanism. The progressive forces should formulate plans to launch cultural movements to spread the Sufi ideals among the people.

Concluding Observations:

In the backdrop of the above discussion, it is hard to escape the reality that Bangladesh once described in a liberation war as the “golden land of Tagore, the dear land of poet Nazrul and Jibanananda”,²⁶ has emerged as the second front of Islamic terror in South Asia. It has become a safe haven for jihadi outfits who want to turn Bangladesh into a “Dar-ul-Islam” (land of Islam) from a “Dar-ul-Harb” (land of infidels) (Bhaumik 2003).

Despite this bleak picture, the optimism of overcoming this menace cannot be ruled out as compared to all other Islamic countries, Bangladesh presents a totally different picture. For the progress of the country and its overall development it is necessary to free it from the clutches of these fundamentalist forces and the political gambling and short sightedness of the leaders to pursue their vested interests. All this can be overcome by ensuring the tenacity of secularism, the spirit of Bengali nationalism, liberalism and tolerance in the society to pave way for the secularist and progressive forces.

²⁶ Secular poets – before the partition of India – who popularized Hindu-Muslim unity.

CHAPTER: IV

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN BANGLADESH

AND IT'S EXTERNAL LINKAGES

The growing involvement of Bangladeshi nationals in terror attacks across India has raised concerns over the growing clout of Islamic fundamentalism in the South Asian country. The presence of extremist anti-India forces in the neighborhood could emerge as the biggest security challenge for New Delhi in the coming years. The terror attacks in Ayodhya, Bangalore, Delhi, Varanasi and Mumbai, recently Rajasthan were executed, among others, by Bangladeshi extremists (Chaudhary 2007). Their growing influence in the Indian Sub- continent signals the rise of intolerant forces, which are non- secular and anti-democratic.

Incidents of extremism and terrorism have witnessed a sharp increase in Bangladesh in recent years, with the number of attacks in 2005 exceeding the total number of incidents in the preceding five years. Most of the attacks have been directed against religious minorities, intellectuals and journalists, as well as against politicians belonging to secular parties and leftist activists. Fundamentalist extremists in Bangladesh have sought to impose an Islamic way of life on people in rural areas, often through use of force. Women have been coerced into veiling themselves and men forced to grow beards and wear skull caps. Many who defied these rules have been tortured and killed. Cultural groups and cinema halls have been targeted as well. In the immediate term, Bangladesh's secular tradition is under threat from the rise in fundamentalism. The growing Islamic fundamentalist movement, which is linked to Al-Qaeda and Pakistani intelligence agencies, is slowly converting Bangladesh into a new regional hub for terrorist operations (Chaudhary 2007).

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to point out in detail the factors which have been responsible for strengthening Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh. Beside this, an attempt will also be made to present a critical analysis of the consequences which Bangladesh can witness in its foreign policy in the light of this new trend. The focus will be primarily on India and U.S.

Since its inception, Bangladesh has been suffering from an identity crisis. In search of identity, it has been oscillating between Islam and Bengali culture. This dilemma

manifests itself in the posturing of all its institutions including the armed forces. Like most of the countries born through a revolution, good governance has eluded Bangladesh. The country is today characterised by extreme poverty, rampant corruption, over population, violent political culture, growing Islamic fundamentalism and politicised armed forces. Bangladesh is the most densely populated nation in the world; wherein some 140 million people squeezed in an area of 144,000 sq km (Singh 2006).

As long as politics in Bangladesh remains mercurial and inimical, the country will continue to remain volatile, with the perpetual possibility of a military take over in case of anarchy. Military rulers have been at helm for more than 15 years out of the 33 years of its existence. The armed forces continue to be treated with suspicion by political parties of all hues and they seek to divide their loyalties by playing favorites. The lack of political culture and governance has created ideal conditions for breeding of Islamic fundamentalists who are gravitating from the fringe of political discourse to the core. The pernicious level that Islamic fundamentalism has acquired in Bangladesh was evidenced by the 400 simultaneous bomb blasts on 17 August 2005, which covered all the 64 districts of the country barring one. The Islamic fundamentalist parties like the Jamiat-i-Islami and the Islamic Okiyo Jote were part of the ruling dispensation; a parallel that Bangladesh shares with Pakistan (Singh 2006). The present situation obtaining in Bangladesh is an outcome of various factors. The factors which have been the root causes for strengthening this menace can be highlighted in the following points:

Rise of Jamaat and Role of Madrassas:

The Jamaat²⁷ was founded in 1941 in undivided India by Maulana Abul Ala Maududi and had grown out of the 'Darul Uloom', the then most prestigious Islamic University in the subcontinent. It was located at Deoband in the Saharanpur district of what is now Uttar Pradesh, and thus became known as the Deoband Madrassa (seminary). The Deobandis had actually arisen in British India, not as a reactionary force, but as a forward- looking movement to unite and reform Muslim society in the

²⁷ The Jamaat-e- Islami, formed in 1941 by Abul Ala Mawdudi, was opposed to the creation of Pakistan. Later, during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation movement, it collaborated with the Pakistan army in East Pakistan and its members have consequently been considered to be anti- liberationists. Of late, the Jamaat-e- Islami adopted an anti- US stance, especially in the wake of Operation Enduring Freedom. It was a coalition partner in the BNP government of 2001. Two of its members, Matiur Rahman Nizami and Ali Ahsan Mohammad, were ministers in the Khaleda Zia cabinet.

wake of oppression the community faced after the 1857 revolt, or “Mutiny” as the British called it²⁸ (Babar 2002). But in independent Pakistan – East and the West – new Deobandi Madrassas were set up everywhere, and they were run by semi-educated mullahs who, according to Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid, “were far removed from the original reformist agenda of the Deobandi School” (Rashid 2001:89). Over the years, the Deobandi brand of Islam has become synonymous with religious extremism and fanaticism and it was from these Madrassas that Afghanistan’s dreaded Taliban (‘Islamic Students’) emerged in the early and mid-1990s (Lintner 2002).

The Jamaat was, from the beginning, inspired by the ‘Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen’ or the Muslim Brotherhood, which was set up in Egypt in 1928 with the aim of bringing about an Islamic revolution and creating an Islamic state. When they had come to accept Pakistan as the Islamic state, Bengali nationalism became totally unacceptable. The Jamaat’s militants fought alongside the Pakistan army against the Bengali nationalists. Among the most notorious of the Jamaat leaders was Abdul Kader Molla, who came to be known as ‘the Butcher of Mirpur’, a Dhaka suburb that in 1971 was populated mainly by non-Bengali Muslim immigrants (Salim 2000). Today, he is the publicity secretary of the Bangladeshi Jamaat and, despite his background, was granted a US visa to visit New York in the last week of June 2002. In 1971, he and other Jamaat leaders were considered war criminals by the first government of independent Bangladesh, but they were never prosecuted as they had fled to Pakistan.

The leaders of Jamaat returned to Bangladesh during the Zia and Ershad regimes because they were invited to come back, and they also saw Ershad especially as a champion of their cause. This was somewhat ironic as Ershad was – and still is – known as a playboy and hardly a religiously minded person. But he had introduced a string of Islamic reforms and he needed the Jamaat to counter the Awami League, and like his predecessor Zia, he had to find ideological underpinnings for what was basically a military dictatorship. The problem was that the Jamaat had been discredited by its role in the liberation war. However, as a new generation emerged, that could be ‘corrected’ as the Jamaat’s Islamic ideals were once again taught in Bangladesh’s madrassas which multiplied at a tremendous pace.

²⁸ For an excellent account of the rise of the Deobandis, see Salahuddin Babar, “Rise of the Right”, *Probe Newsmagazine* (Bangladesh), March 1-15, 2002.

The madrassas fill an important function in an impoverished country such as Bangladesh, where basic education is available only to a few. Today, there are an estimated 64,000 madrassas in Bangladesh, divided into two kinds. The Aliya madrassas run with government support and control, while the Dars-e-Nizami or Deobandi style madrassas are totally independent. Aliya students study for 15-16 years and are taught Arabic, religious theory and other Islamic subjects as well as English, Mathematics, Science and History. They prepare themselves for employment in government service, or for jobs in the private sector like any other college or university student. In 1999, there were 7,122 such registered madrassas in Bangladesh (Babar 2002).

The much more numerous Deobandi madrassas are more 'traditional'; Islamic studies dominate, and the students are taught Urdu (the national language of Pakistan), Persian and Arabic. After finishing their education, the students are incapable of taking up any mainstream profession, and the mosques and madrassas are their main sources of employment. As Bangladeshi journalist Salahuddin Babar points out: "passing out from the madrassas, poorly equipped to enter mainstream life and professions, the students are easily lured by motivated quarters who capitalize on religious sentiment to create fanatics, rather than modern Muslims" (Babar 2002).

The consequences of this kind of madrassa education can be seen in the growth of the Jamaat. It did not fare well in the 1996 election, capturing only three seats in the parliament and 8.61 percent of the votes (SEHD 2001:101) Its election manifesto was also quite carefully worded, perhaps taking into consideration the party's reputation and the fact that the vast majority of Bangladeshis remain opposed to Sharia law and other extreme Islamic practices. The 23-page document devoted 18 pages to lofty election promises, and only five to explaining Jamaat's political stand. The party tried to reassure the public that it would not advocate chopping off thieves' hands, stoning of people guilty of committing adultery, or banning interest – at least not immediately. According to the SEHD, "the priority focus would be alleviation of poverty, stopping free mixing of sexes and thus awakening the people to the spirit of Islam and then eventually step by step the Islamic laws would be introduced" (SEHD 2001:101).

But in October 2001, the Jamaat emerged as the third largest party in the country and its militant youth organisation, the ICS, became especially bold and active. Like, the

HUJI, the ICS also draws most of its members from the country's many Deobandi madrassas and it also has its own network of international contacts. The ICS is a member of the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations as well as the World Assembly of Muslim Youth and has close contacts with other radical Muslim groups in Pakistan, the West Asia, Malaysia and Indonesia. At home in Bangladesh, it has been implicated in a number of bombings and politically as well as religiously motivated assassinations.

On April 7, 2001, two leaders of the Awami League's youth and student front were killed by ICS activists and on June 15, 2001, an estimated 21 persons were killed and over 100 injured in a bomb blast at the Awami League party in the town of Narayanganj. Two weeks later, the police arrested an ICS activist for his alleged involvement in the blast. A young Islamist militant, Nurul Islam Bulbul, is the ICS's current president, and Muhammad Nazrul Islam its general secretary.

For many years, the mother party, the Jamaat, was led by Gholam Azam, who had returned from Pakistan when Zia was still alive and in power. He resigned in December 2000, and Motiur Rahman Nizami took over as the new chief of the party amid wide protests and demands that he be put on trial for war crimes he committed during the liberation war as the head of a notorious paramilitary force, the 'Al-Badar'.²⁹ In one particular incident on December 3, 1971, some members of that force seized the village of Bishalikkha at night in search of freedom fighters, beating many and killing eight people. When Nizami's appointment was made public, veterans of the liberation war burnt an effigy of him during a public rally (BBC 2000). In October 2001, Nizami was appointed Minister for Agriculture, an important post in a mainly agricultural country such as Bangladesh. His deputy, Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mujahid, became Minister for Social welfare.

The terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001, occurred during the election campaign in Bangladesh, when a Caretaker Government ruled the country. But, the outgoing Prime Minister, the Awami League's Sheikh Hasina, and then opposition leader Khaleda Zia of the BNP, condemned the attacks and both, if they

²⁹ The anti-liberation force during the Liberation War of 1971. Islami Chhatra Sangha, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami formed the nucleus of this group and madrasa students were the members of this group. Besides this, the other two groups were Razakars (Abbas Ali Khan started organizing this group in Bogra) and Al Shams consisting of the student wing of the Muslim League. These three groups organized the executive wing of the Peace Committee and collaborated with the Pakistani Army and led terrorist actions against the supporters of the Liberation, both in urban and rural areas.

were elected, offered the United States use of Bangladesh's air space, ports and other facilities to launch military attacks against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Many Bangladeshis were moved by the loss of as many as 50 of their countrymen in the attacks on the World Trade Centre. While some of them were immigrants working as computer analysts and engineers, most seem to have been waiters at the Window on the World restaurant who were working hard to send money back to poor relatives in Bangladesh. A Bangladeshi embassy official in Washington branded the attacks "an affront to Islam...an attack on humanity" (Lintner 2002).

Jamaat's stand on the 'war against terrorism,' however, contrasts sharply with that of the more established parties. Shortly after the US attacks on Afghanistan began in October 2001, the Jamaat created a fund purportedly for "helping the innocent victims of America's war". According to the Jamaat's own announcements, 12 million taka (\$210,000) was raised before the effort was discontinued in March 2002. Any remaining funds, the Jamaat then said, would go to Afghan refugees in camps in Pakistan (Holiday Report 2002).

The International Crisis group (ICG), in an October 2006 report on Bangladesh, agrees that fundamentalism is on the rise but tempers its view. "A creeping process of Islamisation is indeed underway; some of it channeled deliberately by political organizations with long- term agendas to transform Bangladesh into a strict Islamic State." Further, it states that, "their efforts appear to be helped, at least indirectly, by an inflow of Gulf funding for madrassas, mosque construction, and Islamist development efforts, as well as a long- standing subsidy for petroleum imports. The moderate majority has not actively resisted Islamist encroachment. The 'tolerant mass' hasn't been making headway against extremists, despite its huge size. This is partly out of fear (moderates don't want to put themselves at risk), but also because they are disillusioned with politics in general" (Van Dyk 2007).

Thus, it's quite clear through the above description that Jamaat's activities are strengthening this menace of Islamic fundamentalism which is gradually eroding the secular ethos of Bangladesh.

The Rise of Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) And Other Extremist Groups:

The growth of the Jamaat during the Ershad regime paved the way for the establishment of even more radical groups when the BNP returned to power in 1991.

According to Bangladeshi journalists, in the early 1990s Bangladeshi diplomats in Saudi-Arabia issued passports to Pakistani militants in the kingdom to enable them to escape to Bangladesh (Lintner 2002). Other extremists from Pakistan and perhaps also Afghanistan appear to have been able to enter Bangladesh in the same way during that period.

These men were instrumental in building up HUJI, which was first formed in 1992, reportedly with funds from Osama bin Laden. The existence of firm links between the new Bangladeshi militants and Al-Qaeda was proven when Fazlul Rahman, leader of the “Jihad Movement in Bangladesh” (to which HUJI belongs), signed the official declaration of “holy war” against the United States on February 23, 1998. Other signatories included bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri (leader of the Jihad group in Egypt), Rifa’i Ahmed Taha aka Abu- Yasir (Egyptian Islamic Group), and Sheikh Mir Hamzah (secretary of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan) (Lintner 2002).

HUJI is headed by Shawkat Osman aka Maulana or Sheikh Farid in Chittagong and, according to the US State Department, has “at least six camps” in Bangladesh (Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001). Like the ICS it draws most of its members from the country’s Deobandi madrassas, and, also like the ICS, the group has shown that it is capable of extreme violence. The outfit also calls themselves the ‘Bangladeshi Taliban’³⁰ (Sentinel 1998). Bangladesh’s Islamic radicals first came to international attention in 1993, when author Taslima Nasrin was forced to flee the country after receiving death threats. The fundamentalists objected to her critical writings about what she termed outdated religious beliefs. Extremists groups offered a \$ 5,000 reward for her death.³¹ She now lives in exile. While Nasrin’s outspoken, feminist writings caused controversy even among moderate Bangladeshi Muslims, the entire state was shocked when, in early 1999, three men attempted to kill Shams-ur-Rahman, a well-known poet and a symbol of Bangladesh’s secular nationhood. During the ensuing arrests, the police said they seized a list of several intellectuals

³⁰ A newspaper reported stated that a total of about 3,500 Bangladeshis had been trained in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to fight in the Afghan War under Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Later, many of them returned to Bangladesh. About five hundred such trained cadres are said to be active in Bangladesh. The Taliban had reportedly established a liaison office in Dhaka and was publishing a paper by the name of ‘Jago Mujahid’ that was edited by a Mufti Abdul Haque. See United States Department of State (2001), *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, Washington, D.C.

³¹ The first ‘Fatwa’ was declared against her for her writing ‘Lajja’ in 1993.

and writers, including Nasrin, whom Bangladeshi religious extremists branded “enemies of Islam” (Ataov 2001:150).

Bangladeshi human rights organisations openly accuse HUJI of being behind both the death threats against Nasrin and the attempt to kill Rahman. The US State Department notes that HUJI has been accused of stabbing a senior Bangladeshi journalist in November 2000 for making a documentary on the plight of Hindus in Bangladesh, and the July 2000 assassination attempt of then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. As with the Jamaat and the ICS, HUJI’s main stronghold is in the lawless southeast, which includes the border with Burma. With its fluid population and weak law enforcement, the region has long been a haven for smugglers, gun runners, pirates, and ethnic insurgents from across the Burmese border. The past decade has seen a massive influx of weapons, especially small arms, through the fishing port of Cox’s Bazaar, which has made the situation in the southeast even more dangerous and volatile (SAS 2001:181).

Typically, the winner in the 2001 election in one of the constituencies in Cox’s Bazaar, BNP candidate Shahjahan Chowdhury, was said to be supported by “the man allegedly leading smuggling operations in (the border town of) Teknaf.” Instead of the regular army, the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles were well connected with the smuggling activities and thus could take partisan roles” (EPE 2001:99). In one of the most recent high profile attacks in the area, Gopal Krishna Muhuri, the 60 year old principal of Nazirhat College in Chittagong and a leading secular humanist, was gunned down in November 2001 in his home by four hired assassins, who belonged to a gang patronized by the Jamaat (A.I.Report 2001). India, which is viewing the growth of Bangladesh’s Islamic movements with deep concern, has linked HUJI militants to the attack on the American Center in Kolkata (Calcutta) in January 2002, and a series of bomb blasts in the state of Assam in mid-1999. On May 10-11, 2002, nine Islamic fundamentalist groups, including HUJI, met at a camp near the small town of Ukhia south of Cox’s bazaar and formed the Bangladesh Islamic Manch (association). The new umbrella organisation also includes one purporting to represent the Rohingyas, a Muslim minority n Burma, and the Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam, a small group operating in India’s northeast. By June, Bangladeshi veterans of the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s were reported to be training members of the new alliance in at least two camps in southern Bangladesh

(FEER 2002). HUJI's involvement is suspected in the terror attacks in Delhi, Varanasi, Lucknow, Mumbai and recently Rajasthan. This may no doubt mar the bilateral relation of Bangladesh with India if the Government doesn't take stringent steps to curb the activities of such militant organisations.

The Plight of Rohingyas:

The Arakan area of Burma was separated from the rest of the country by a densely forested mountain range, which made it possible for the Arakanese – most of whom are Buddhists – to maintain their independence until the late 18th century. Contacts with the outside world until then had been mostly to the West, which, in turn, had brought Islam to the region. The first Muslims on the Arakan coast were Moorish, Arab and Persian traders who arrived between the 9th and the 15th centuries. Some of them stayed and married local women. Their offspring became the forefathers of yet another hybrid race, which much later was to become known as the Rohingyas. Like the people in the Chittagong area, they speak a Bengali dialect interspersed with words borrowed from Persian, Urdu and Arakanese (Yegar 1972).

There is no evidence of friction between them and their Buddhist neighbors in the earlier days. Arakanese kings ruled until the Burmese invasion in 1784. Burmese rule lasted until the first Anglo-Burmese War of 1824-26, when Arakan was taken over by the British along with the Tenaasserim region of southeastern Burma.

When Burma was a part of British India, the rich ricelands of Arakan attracted thousands of seasonal laborers, especially from the Chittagong area of adjacent East Bengal. Many of them found it convenient to stay since there was already a large Muslim population who spoke the same language, and, at that time, no ill feeling towards immigrants from India proper- unlike the situation in other parts of Burma, where people of sub continental origin were despised. At the same time, Buddhist Arakanese migrated to East Bengal and settled along the coast between Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar. The official border, the Naf River, united rather than separated the two British territories.

But the presence of a Muslim minority in Arakan became an issue after Burma's independence in 1948. The Buddhist and Muslim communities had become divided during the Second World War; the Buddhists had rallied behind the Japanese while the Muslims had remained loyal to the British. Some Muslims, fearing reprisals from

the Buddhists once the British were gone, rose up in arms, demanding an independent state and the Burmese army was sent in to quell the rebellion. Predominantly Buddhist Burma never really recognised the Arakanese Muslims who in the 1960s began to refer to themselves as “Rohingya,” a term of disputed origin – as one of the country’s “indigenous” ethnic groups. As such, and because of their different religion and physical appearance, they have often become convenient scapegoats for Burma’s military government which launched a campaign code- named Naga Min (dragon King) in Arakan, ostensibly to “check illegal immigrants”. Hundreds of heavily armed troops raided Muslim neighborhoods in Sittwe (akyab) and some 5,000 people were arrested. As the operation was extended to other parts of Arakan, tens of thousands of Rohingyas had fled, causing an international outcry. Eventually, most of the refugees were allowed to return, but thousands found it safer to remain on the Bangladesh side of the border. Entire communities of “illegal immigrants” from Burma sprung up along the border south of Cox’s Bazaar, and a steady trickle of refugees from Burma continued to cross into Bangladesh throughout the 1980s.

The immensely wealthy Saudi Arabian charity ‘Rabitat-al-Alam- al-Islami’ began sending aid to the Rohingya refugees during the 1978 crisis, and it also built a hospital and a madrassa at Ukhia south of Cox’s Bazaar. Prior to these events, there was only one political organisation among the Rohingyas on the Bangladesh-Burma border, the Rohingya Patriotic Front (RPF), which was set up in 1974 by Muhammad Jafar Habib, a native of Buthidaung in Arakan and a graduate of Rangoon University. He made several appeals most of them unsuccessful to the international Islamic community for help, and maintained a camp for his small guerrilla army, which operated from the Bangladeshi side of the Border. In the early 1980s, more radical elements among the Rohingyas broke away from the RPF to set up the Rohingya solidarity Organization (RSO). Led by a medical doctor from Arakan, Muhammad Yunus, it soon became the main and most militant faction among the Rohingyas in Bangladesh and on the border. Given its more rigid religious stand, the RSO soon enjoyed support from like-minded groups in the Muslim world. These included Jamaat-e- Islami in Bangladesh and Pakistan, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hizb-e- Islami in Afghanistan, Hizbe-ul-Mujahideen in Kashmir and Angkatan-Belia-Islam-sa-Malaysia (ABIM), the Islamic Youth Organization of Malaysia. Afghan instructors were seen in some of the RSO camps along the Bangladesh-Burma border, while

nearly 100 RSO rebels were reported to be undergoing training in the Afghan province of Khost with Hizb-e-Islami Mujahideen (Lintner 1991).

The RSO's main military camp was located near the hospital that the Rabitat had built at Ukhia. At the same time, the RSO acquired a substantial number of Chinese-made RPG-2 rocket launchers, light machine guns, Ak-47 assault rifles, claymore mines and explosives from private arms dealers in the Thai town of Aranyaprathet near Thailand's border with Cambodia, which in the 1980s emerged as a major arms bazaar for guerrilla movements in the region. These weapons were siphoned off from Chinese arms shipments to the resistance battling the Vietnamese army in Cambodia, and sold to any one who wanted, and could afford, to buy them. The Bangladeshi media gave quite extensive coverage to the RSO buildup along the border, but it soon became clear that it was not only Rohingyas who underwent training in its camps. Many, it turned out, were members of ICS and came from the University of Chittagong, where a "campus war" was being fought between Islamic militants and more moderate student groups (Lintner 1991). The RSO was, in fact, engaged in little or no fighting inside Burma.

There was also a more moderate faction among the Rohingyas in Bangladesh, the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF), which was set up in 1986, uniting the remnants of the old RPF and a handful of defectors from the RSO. It was led by Nurul Islam, a Rangoon-educated lawyer. But it never had more than a few dozen soldiers, mostly equipped with elderly, UK-made 9mm Sterling L2A3 sub-machine guns, bolt action .303 rifles and a few M-16 assault rifles (JDW 1991). In 1998, it became the Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO), maintaining its moderate stance and barely surviving in exile in Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar. The expansion of the RSO in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the unprecedented publicity the group attracted in the local and international media, prompted the Burmese government to launch massive counter-offensive measures to "clear up" the border area. In December 1991, Burmese troops crossed the border and attacked a Bangladeshi military outpost. The incident developed into a major crisis in Bangladesh-Burma relations, and by April 1992 more than 250,000 Rohingya civilians had been forced out of Arakan. Hardly by coincidence, had this second massive exodus of Rohingyas occurred at a time when Burma was engulfed in a major political crisis. The pro-democracy National League for Democracy (NLD) had won a landslide victory in a

general election in May 1990, but the country's military government refused to convene the elected assembly. There were anti-government demonstrations in the northern city of Mandalay, and the ruling Burmese junta was condemned internationally.

The Rohingya refugees were housed in a string of makeshift camps south of Cox's Bazaar, prompting the Bangladeshi government to appeal for help from the international community. The United Nation's High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, came in to run the camps and to negotiate with the Burmese government for the return of the Rohingyas. In April 1992, prince Khaled Sultan Abdul Aziz, commander of the Saudi contingent in the 1991 Gulf War, visited Dhaka and recommended a Desert Storm-like action against Burma, "just what (the UN) did to liberate Kuwait" (Lintner 2002). As a result, the Burmese government, under pressure from the United Nations, eventually agreed to take most of the refugees back. But an estimated 20,000 destitute refugees remain in two camps between Cox's Bazaar and the border. In addition, an undisclosed number of Rohingyas, perhaps as many as 100,000-150,000 continue to live outside the UNHCR supervised camps. The extremists groups have taken advantage of the disenfranchised Rohingyas, including recruiting them as cannon fodder for Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and elsewhere. In an interview with the Karachi based newspaper, Ummat on September 28, 2001, Bin Laden said: "there are areas in all parts of the world where strong Jihadi forces are present, from Bosnia to Sudan, and from Burma to Kashmir".³² Most probably he was referring to a small group of Rohingyas on the Bangladesh-Burma border. Many of the Rohingya recruits were given the most dangerous task in the battlefield, clearing mines and portering. According to Asian intelligence sources, Rohingya recruits were paid 30,000 Bangladeshi taka (\$525) on joining and then 10,000 (\$175) per month. The families of recruits killed in action were offered 100,000 taka (\$1,750). (JIR 2002). Recruits were taken mostly via Nepal to Pakistan, where they were trained and send on to military camps in Afghanistan. Others went to Kashmir and even Chechnya to join forces with Islamic militants there (Bhaumik 2002).

³² Jim Garamone, "Bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda Network", American Forces Press Service, September 21, 2001, also observes that Al-Qaeda has cells in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Turkey, Jordan, Tazikistan, Uzbekistan, Syria, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi-Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, Tunisia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Dagestan, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Azerbaijan, Eritrea, Uganda, Ethiopia and in the West Bank and Gaza

In an interview with the CNN in December 2001, American “Taliban” fighter, John Walker Lindh, relate that the Al-Qaeda directed ‘Ansar’ (companions of the prophet) brigades, to which he had belonged in Afghanistan, were divided along linguistic lines: “ Bengali, Pakistani (Urdu) and Arabic,” which suggests that the Bengali speaking component – Bangladeshi and Rohingya – must have been significant. In early 2002, Afghanistan’s Foreign Minister, Dr. Abdullah, told to a Western journalist that “we have captured one Malaysian and one or two supporters from Burma” (Lintner 2002). In January 2001, Bangladesh clamped down on Rohingya activists and offices in Chittagong and Cox’s Bazaar in an attempt to improve relations with Burma. Hundreds were rounded up, and the local press was full of reports of their alleged involvement in gun- and drug-running. Rohingya leaders vehemently deny such accusations, and blame local Bangladeshi gangs with high-level connections for the violence in the area. But the Rohingyas were forced to evacuate their military camps, which had always been located on the Bangladeshi Islamic groups have taken over these camps, with the main bus being the one the RSO used to maintain near the Rabitat built hospital in Ukhia (Lintner 2002) Thus the presence of Rohingyas has been one of the important factors in paving the way for Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh and more importantly, they are aided by external forces to fulfill their vested interests.

Here, it is very important to have a bird’s eye view over the policies taken by the government recently i.e., to see whether there are any political ties to these fundamentalist organisations. Beside these above mentioned extremist organisations, the other active organisations are Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), and Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). Bangladeshi opposition, analysts and media observers have alleged that the presence in the former ruling Bangladesh National Party (BNP) coalition government of two Islamist parties, the Islamiya Okiyya Jote (IOJ) and the Jamaat-e- Islami, had expanded Islamist influence in Bangladesh and created space within which terrorist and extremist groups could operate. Islami Okiyya Jote is thought to have ties to the radical Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI) so as Jamaat and as it is known that this organisation (HUJI) has ties to Al-Qaeda (Buerk 2005). JMB seeks the imposition of Sharia law for Bangladesh and is thought responsible for the widespread and co-ordinated August 2005 bombings.

Awami league sources claimed that fundamentalist leader 'Bangla Bhai' had ties to Jamaat-e- Islami. Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina has accused the government of "letting loose communal extremist forces" (Buerk 2005). Some news sources have reported that international extremists are using Bangladeshi passports and that some are obtaining them with the assistance of sympathetic officials at various Bangladesh embassies.

Two senior members of IOJ have reportedly connected been with the reemergence of Harkat Ul Jihad (HuJi) under the name "Conscious Islamic People" (CRS Report 2007). It has also been reported that the political wing of HuJi will seek to enter politics under the name Islami Gono Andolan. The former BNP government had denied the presence of significant terrorist elements in the country and reportedly had even expelled BNP lawmaker Abu Hena from the BNP for speaking out against extremist activities at a time when the official view was that such extremists did not exist. The former BNP government eventually moved to suppress the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JMB) and the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) terrorist groups in Bangladesh. The government sentenced to death JMB leaders Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Siddiq ul Islam, also known as "Bangla Bhai", as well as five other JMB members, in May 2006. They were subsequently executed for their role in the bombings. The two Islamist militant leaders received their sentences for the murder of two judges in November of 2005. They are also thought to have been behind widespread bombings in Bangladesh and to have sought to replace the secular legal system with Sharia law through such attacks. The government also reportedly has arrested some 900 lower level militants, seven known senior leaders, four out of 11 commanders, and some 20 district leaders on terrorism charges. Despite this, the opposition Awami League (AL) party leader Sheikh Hasina stated "militants are partners of the government... the government catches a few militants whenever foreign guests visit Bangladesh". She has also alleged that Jamaat has 15,000 guerillas and its own training camps. Hassina has also stated that the arrest of JMB operatives is "only the tip of the iceberg" (HT 2006).

It appears that the government shifted its position on the necessity of acknowledging and addressing Islamist militants in August of 2005. In response, JMB leader Rahman reportedly has stated, "masks will fall and you [implying the authorities] will be exposed". Such an allegation is consistent with allegations by the AL opposition,

which has accused the government, or more likely elements within the government, of allowing Islamist militancy to rise in Bangladesh. Selig Harrison, a prominent South Asian analyst, noted in early August 2006 that, “a growing Islamic fundamentalist movement linked to Al-Qaeda and Pakistani intelligence agencies is steadily converting the strategically located nation of Bangladesh into a new regional hub for terrorist operations that reach into India and Southeast Asia” (Reference). Harrison points out that former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia’s Bangladesh National Party’s coalition alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami party of Bangladesh led to a “Faustian bargain” that brought Jamaat officials into the government. These officials, he argued, in turn have allowed Taliban-style squads to operate with increasing impunity. Jamaat’s entry into the former BNP government also reportedly led to fundamentalist control over large parts of the Bangladesh economy, Islamist madrassa schools that act as fronts for terrorist activity, fundamentalist inroads into the armed forces, and rigging (by manipulating voter lists) of the elections that were originally scheduled for January 2007 (Harrison 2006).

Thus it’s quite clear that political leaders are not serious about their commitment towards maintaining the secular ethos of the country and are only concerned for their vested political interests and so they are taking the shelter of political opportunism and in a way tarnishing their image.

Beside, the list of Al-Qaeda camps/ safe places provided by Bertil Lintner and Alex Perry by making cursory references to Chittagong, Ukhia, and even Dhaka; Jaideep Saikia has also given a list of such places along with the number of cadres which can be mentioned as follows:

- Thirty to thirty-five Al-Qaeda cadres are staying at Mona Tola Qaumi Madrassa, P.S. Madhabpur, and District Habiganj.
- Thirty to thirty-five Al-Qaeda cadres are staying at Panchori and Manikchora Madrassa complex, District Khagrachari, CHT, Bangladesh.
- Five members under the instructor Md. Zainuddin Khan are staying at Chunarughat Qaumi Madrassa, P.S. Chunarughat, District Habiganj.
- Ten to twelve cadres are staying at Islampur mosque, Companyganj, P.S. Byani Bazaar, District Sylhet.

- Twenty to twenty-five cadres are staying at Lakertala T.E. Masjid Complex, District Sylhet.
- Fifteen to sixteen cadres are staying at Robir Bazaar Tilagram Madrassa Complex, P.S. Kolaura, District maūlvi Bazaar (Saikia 2004).

The government of India has also submitted a list of about 194 anti- India militant camps that are situated in Bangladesh. Not only has Dhaka denied the presence of any such camps, but has instead given New Delhi a list of 39 camps in India, which purportedly house anti- Bangladesh militants (Assam Tribune 2004). This is a clear attempt to not only brush the problem of anti- India militancy under the carpet, but also to indirectly aid and abet the problem in furtherance of the fundamentalist agenda that is on the anvil in the erstwhile East Pakistan. Moreover, one major factor which has been responsible for this increasing menace is the ‘Islamisation of Bangladesh’s Armed Forces’. This can be depicted in the following points: (Saikia 2004).

- The armed forces of Bangladesh are the most important “political party” in the country.
- Bangladesh has been ruled by military dictators for almost fifteen years-about half of its existence as an independent country.
- Two important political parties, the Bangladesh National Party and the Jatiyo Party, were formed by General Zia-ur-Rahman and Lt. Gen. H.M.Ershad, respectively.
- The Bangladesh armed forces – as is also the case with politico-bureaucratic, professional, and student constituents – continue to be divided on pro-liberation and pro-Pakistani lines. Today, the pro- Pakistani lobby has gained an upper hand.
- The initial manpower of the Bangladesh armed forces consisted of repatriated personnel of the Pakistani army – the erstwhile East Bengal Regiments – and freedom fighters of the Mukti Bahini.³³ The formative years of the Bangladesh armed forces must have been one which witnessed great personal and group tension as a result of the divide.

³³ The Mukti Bahini was a East Pakistani guerrilla organization which fought alongside the Indian armed forces in the war of Liberation of Bangladesh

- The senior Bangladesh armed forces personnel had – until 1971 – served the Pakistani army under Ayub Khan, and, therefore, their formative years were accustomed to the doctrinaire of military rule in Pakistan.
- The bulk of the rank and file of the Bangladesh armed forces are drawn from the economically backward and rural areas of the country. Consequently they are susceptible to the influences of Islamist fundamentalism that are prevalent in such areas. The systematic subversion of the Pakistan armed forces and the ISI by Islamist fundamentalism is an important pointer in this direction.
- Both Gen. Zia-ur-Rahman and Lt. Gen. H.M.Ershad – as has been seen – have leaned towards Islam in their quest to seek political legitimacy. Indeed, Islam is an important political weapon.
- The Bangladesh armed forces views the Pakistani armed forces as co-religionists, and many senior Bangladeshi officer have shared inter- personal relationships with the Pakistan armed forces officer cadre. The pan-Islamism factor also draws heavily on the relationship, which thrives despite the genocide and atrocities that were committed by the Pakistani armed forces in Bangladesh.
- The Bangladesh armed forces are anti-Indian armed forces and they view Islamist fundamentalist terror as a good weapon against India. Commenting on the anti-Indian forces sentiment among the Bangladesh armed forces, an observer writes, “the Bangladesh army has been incensed by the poor treatment it had received from the Indians during the liberation war; it felt that the Indian army deprived it of victory by intervening in the conflict; it resented the expropriation of captured Pakistani military equipment by the Indian army and saw the Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini as an Indian inspired force to ensure Indian domination of post-liberation Bangladesh” (Chopra 2002:46).

Islamic Fundamentalism in Bangladesh and its External Ramifications:

Here, an attempt will be made to show the impact of growing Islamic fundamentalism on the bilateral relation of Bangladesh focusing on India and US.

Indian Context:

The present situation obtaining in Bangladesh is an outcome of historical and geopolitical processes. So, before shedding light on the present situation, it's important to reflect light on the geopolitical backyard to get a holistic picture of it.

Geopolitical Backyard:

Before its emergence as a separate country in 1971, the area, which now constitutes Bangladesh, was historically the geopolitical backyard of the region. Although always a part of the pan-Indian framework, its peripheral position meant relative neglect and discordant evolutionary processes. Buddhism in the eastern part of Bengal, now Bangladesh, had persisted for many years compared to most other parts of India before being again supplanted by Hinduism. The process of Islamization beginning in the early 13th century was more rapid as compared to other parts of the Indian subcontinent. The conversion of Islam was a mass movement as a reaction to the reassertion of caste ideology of Hinduism in the 12th century. However, the embracing of Islam did not manifest in repudiation of Bangla language and culture, which remained a vital force. Probably, the Pakistani rulers, who were basically from West Pakistan, underestimated the inherent strength and sway of Bangla heritage including language. It was because of the language and cultural factors that the 'Monsoon Islam'³⁴ of the erstwhile East Pakistan could not reconcile with the 'Desert Islam'³⁵ of West Pakistan (Singh 2006).

Even under an able ruler like Akbar (1556-1605), who assimilated present day Bangladesh into the folds of Mughal Empire in 1576, the area, which was bedeviled by political disunity and piracy, was neglected. The region's agricultural and textile wealth was used to maintain a vast Mughal Army without any corresponding returns in terms of good governance and development. The Mughals did very little to extend protection to the people of the eastern part of Bengal and as per some sources, in one year as many as 40,000 Bengalis were seized by Portuguese and Arakanese pirates to be sold as slaves. During the British East India Company rule, West Bengal had emerged as the nerve centre of trade and commerce with the concomitant benefits of

³⁴ Monsoon Islam refers to the Islam followed by Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan mostly influenced by their language and culture.

³⁵ Desert Islam of West Pakistan connotes mostly the religious influence on which there is West Asian countries' influence.

development, employment opportunities and shared proximity with the dispensation. This again resulted in the extremely lopsided and different evolutionary processes between East Bengal and West Bengal in favor of the latter. It was therefore not surprising that a large populace in East Bengal favored the partition of Bengal in 1905 (annulled in 1912). Of course, religion also was a strong factor. Islamic nationalism actually had its ferment in East Bengal. It was here (Dhaka) in 1906 that the first meeting of the All India Muslim League was held.

However, after partition in 1947, Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) was a case of neglect and discriminatory treatment in many areas including the armed forces. The high defense expenditure and its collateral benefits bypassed East Pakistan, as most of the military establishments were located in West Pakistan. The British mindset, with regard to Bengalis being less martially inclined as compared to Punjabis and Pathans, persisted in matters of recruitment. In 1956, the Pakistani Army had a total of approximately 890 officers (Major to Lieutenant General), out of which only 14 were from East Pakistan. Of these, only one was of Brigadier rank. Out of 53 officers in the Pakistani navy, only seven were from East Pakistan. The situation had marginally improved in the 1960s. The dichotomy between East Pakistan and West Pakistan resulted in their separation in 1971 due to events that spiraled beyond the control of Pakistani rulers (Singh 2006:3).

However, the geo-strategic location has been one of the significant factors in the Indian context that it always fall in the grip of any developments in its neighborhood and the impact is felt.

Geo-Strategic Location:

Except for Myanmar with which Bangladesh shares a 193 Km long land boundary, its remaining land boundary of 4096 Km is shared with India. The country is ringed by massive Indian landmass from all sides barring south, wherein the Bay of Bengal lies. This is a geo-strategic truism and therefore it would be logical to infer that till Bangladesh emerges as a stable, prosperous and confident nation, it will continue to consider India as its perennial and pervasive adversary.

There is a section within the Indian strategic analyst community which is of the view that the emergence of Bangladesh as a separate country was not in India's strategic interest. They contend that volatile Bangladesh, as East Pakistan would have

continued to consume the concern and energy of the West Pakistani rulers, thus considerably diluting their focus on Jammu and Kashmir. Moreover, for Pakistan, East Pakistan by virtue of its geo-strategic setting vis-à-vis India would have remained vulnerability – a sort underbelly of sorts. Soon after Bangladesh gained independence, the Chinese leader Chou-en-Lai is attributed to have remarked that ‘India has created a rock which will fall on its own feet’. Nevertheless, the biggest strategic gain that accrued to India from the creation of Bangladesh was that Pakistan became bereft of a naval pressure in the Bay of Bengal i.e., in the vicinity of India’s eastern seaboard and thereby also ceased to have a geographical interface of South-East Asia.

The big brother syndrome with respect to India looms very large on Bangladesh’s security horizon and therefore its threat perceptions are perhaps more imagined than real. While, to India, Bangladesh is one of the seven neighbouring countries; for Bangladesh, India is the only major neighbor. Therefore, there is a tendency to exaggerate apprehensions or fabricate threats from India. This has given rise to an anti-India lobby within the Bangla populace and polity, which has severely impaired and inhibited some mutually very beneficial cooperative proposals and ventures between two countries. One such proposal that has fallen victim to the imagined Indian threat is the Bangladesh’s ambivalence over granting transit route to India (North East) through its territory. The India-fear has also led Bangladesh to forge close relationship with China and Pakistan, the two countries, which it perceives India is disconcerted with. However, there is a segment in Bangladesh, which is of the opinion that such strategic ploy of countervailing India could prove to be self-defeating in the long run.

In most of its military training institutions and military exercises, India is referred to as enemy. Bangladesh is conscious of the fact that it is not capable of undertaking any offensive against India, given the huge mismatch in the size and military capabilities of the two countries. It has therefore adopted a wholly defensive strategy. Its military strategy devolves around debilitating an Indian offensive by use of numerous rivers and other obstacles, and preventing the fall of Dhaka for a sufficient period to allow the international community to intervene. It also factors the use of guerilla warfare in its strategy against an Indian offensive.

Bangladesh's security interface with India is on multitude of planes. It has the geographical luxury to impact on five Indian states i.e., West Bengal (2216 km), Assam (263 km), Meghalaya (443 km), Tripura (856 km), and Mizoram (399 km). It is nearly impossible to completely seal the 4096 km border and as such its porosity can be reduced but not eliminated, even as about 3000 km out sanctioned 3287 km of border fence has already been erected by India. The threat emanating from Bangladesh to India is probably more insidious and therefore less discernible as compared to threat from Pakistan or China (Singh 2006).

Some of the security related facets upon which Bangladesh impacts in its strategic interface with India are:

Demographic Assault on India:

As per an estimate, the annual illegal immigration from Bangladesh is approximately 300,000 and the total number of Bangladeshi nationals in India is approximately 15 to 17 millions. There is hardly any state in India, where Bangladeshi nationals are not residing. This is time and again posing before the Indian government to reach some solution as it may have implications on the demographic composition of India and might pose a grave problem in the future. This phenomenon (immigration) has gained momentum with the increasing assault on the secular and religious minorities by fundamentalist elements in Bangladesh and the lack of strong action in the form of policy on the part of government of Bangladesh.

Sanctuary to Indian Insurgent Groups:

Though consistently denied by Bangladesh, there are a number of camps of Indian insurgent groups, which include ULFA and NSCN (IM) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) of Bangladesh. Some of the top leaders of ULFA have been operating with impunity from Bangladesh's capital Dhaka. Probably, the clandestine support to Indian insurgents is a matter of strategic leverage for Bangladesh. Further, the Bangladesh territory has become a conduit for weapon smuggling for Indian insurgents as well as Myanmarese insurgents, which Bangladesh has been unable to contain, despite vigilance and several crackdowns by Bangladesh's security forces. The Cox's Bazaar coast offers convenient landing points for arms smugglers. As per a number of media reports, these smugglers obtain their consignments from Ranong and Phuket (on Thailand's Western coast) and move it by boats to Cox's Bazaar from

where it is further transported by land route along the India-Bangladesh border and India- Myanmar border. The International Maritime Bureau because of high incidence of piracy and armed robberies has declared the Chittagong port as the second most dangerous port in the world. Further, the situation is complicated by the presence of Islamic fundamentalist elements like Jamiat-i-Islami, Islamic Chhatra Shibir, and Harkat-ul-Jihad-ul- Islami etc.

All these activities are posing a grave situation before the Indian government. Ever since independence from Pakistan in December 1971, Bangladesh and India have had a love-hate relationship. India has never ever viewed Bangladesh in an adversarial perspective. Not even when for reasons of domestic politics, a section of the Bangladesh polity has made anti-Indian stances as a plank to gain political mileage (Kapila 2004). However, when the rise of political influence of Islamic fundamentalist parties have begun to influence Bangladesh's politics and policies in a manner significant to erode Bangladesh-India friendship or in activities which start impinging on India's national security interests, then it does become a serious concern for India. This situation has also provided an opportunity to other external powers more significantly Pakistan to exploit this situation to its advantage. The nexus between Pakistani and Bangladeshi intelligence is old. To cite, several cadres of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) arrested in India admitted that batches of their cadres were flown to Pakistan from Dhaka for training by the ISI. Before the creation of Bangladesh, Mizo and Naga rebels were trained and sheltered in erstwhile East Pakistan by the Pakistan Army (Chaudhary 2007).

Bangladesh offers Pakistan an attractive alternative base for continuing its proxy war against India. Bangladesh has stood exploited by Pakistan as a springboard for anti-Indian operations of the ISI for decades. Pakistan's main target all along has been to keep India's North East states in a state of strategic destabilisation to reduce pressures along the India-Pakistan border. However, post-9/11, Pakistan's strategy of exploiting Bangladesh as an alternative base for proxy war against India stands comprehensively enhanced and expanded (Kapila 2004).

Viewing from the geo-strategic angle, Bangladesh's utility to Pakistan as a proxy war base arises from the following factors:

- The India Bangladesh border geographically is porous and difficult to keep under close surveillance due to its riverine configurations in the west and hilly terrain in the North East and East.
- Border fencing of the India-Bangladesh border is yet to commence.
- Bangladesh's border configuration rests on vulnerable Indian states like West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- Bangladesh territory provides ISI with multiple ingress routes to these sensitive Indian states.
- Bangladesh territory sits astride squarely on India's strategic "Siliguri Corridor" through which narrow corridors runs India's slender communication links with its seven North Eastern states. Pakistan's ISI can play havoc against this corridor from Bangladesh territory.
- The borders of Nepal and Bhutan, states which enjoy close links with India as non-Islamic states of South Asia, are within close reach of Bangladesh territory. Pakistani ISI is already said to be operating against these countries with linkages to anti- national groups.
- In a belt running parallel to the borders with Bangladesh and significantly deep, reside large sections of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, exploitable by Pak ISI.

Further, Bangladesh's politico-religious factors provide a force- multiplier effect in terms of Bangladesh's utility as an alternative base for Pakistan's proxy war. These factors are:

- Emerging political influences of Islamic parties in Bangladesh further reinforces.
- Bangladesh's Armed Forces are increasingly coming under Islamic fundamentalist forces and terrorism is a better weapon to keep India's might at bay.
- Bangladesh already provides safe havens and gun- running for many anti-Indian insurgent groups of India's North East.

- Pakistan's proxy war activities and ISI operations can be safely camouflaged under the umbrella of such organisations.
- Both Pakistan and Bangladesh are provided easy "deniability exists" by the above.
- Political fixations of the government in terms of its policies towards India and Pakistan make it easy for Pakistan to exploit Bangladesh as a proxy war base against India.

Thus, Bangladesh either by its own volition or in subtle exploitation by Pakistan is fast emerging as an alternative base for Pakistan's proxy war against India. There are a host of geo-strategic and politico-religious factors operating in favour of Pakistan in using Bangladesh as a proxy war base against India. According to Subhash Kapila, the media euphoria over India-Pakistan dialogue and possible peace should not lead India into a state of complacency that Pakistan would cease its proxy war against India. In fact Pakistan is not doing so; it is only shifting its base to Bangladesh to hoodwink the United States scrutiny and have a convenient deniability exit. To quote him:

"India's policy planning apparatus both civil and military are invariably caught on the back foot. Whether it is Kashmir, Kargil, or China, we do not anticipate events or trends in the making. Islamic fundamentalist threats are longer confined to sources from Pakistan and Afghanistan. They have started emanating from Bangladesh as a base too as would be evident from the proliferation of Islamic organizations in Assam" (Kapila 2004).

Now, the focus will be on the bilateral relation of Bangladesh with US in the aftermath of 9/11 and the impact felt on it.

U.S – Bangladesh Relations:

The United States' attitude towards Islamic groups and parties has always been determined by its specific foreign policy objectives. On the one hand, it has maintained an alliance with the fundamentalist Wahhabist regime in Saudi Arabia ever since World War II, and also with Islamist-influenced dictatorships in Pakistan. On the other hand, it has supported the suppression of particular Islamist parties in almost every Middle Eastern at some time or another (Macdonald 2002).

As far as its relation with Bangladesh is concerned, it is governed by its geo-economic interest and to an extent also geo-political. The United States has long-standing supportive relations with Bangladesh and has viewed Bangladesh as a moderate voice in the Islamic World. Major U.S. interests in Bangladesh include political stability and democratisation; continuation of economic reform and market-opening policies; social and economic development; environmental issues; counter-terrorism; and improvement of the human rights situation. Many in the United States would like to bolster Bangladesh's democracy, which is destabilised by political violence. In early 2003, Dhaka was the site of modestly-sized street demonstrations in opposition to the U.S led invasion of Iraq.

Bangladesh is a recipient of significant international aid. It has received more than \$30 billion from foreign donors since its independence in 1971. The State Department has requested a total of \$ 88,790,000 in assistance for Bangladesh in the Fy2008 budget request. U.S. assistance to Bangladesh supports health and economic development programs, the improvement of working conditions, including the elimination of child labor. P.L.480 funds provide food assistance for the poorest families and for disaster relief. International Military Education and Training programs strengthen the international peacekeeping force of Bangladesh, which is a leading contributor of U.N peacekeeping personnel (CRS Report 2007:6).

The United States is Bangladesh's largest export destination. Bangladesh's main import partners are India, China, Kuwait, Singapore, Japan, and Hong Kong. The United States exports wheat, fertilizer, cotton, communications equipment, and medical supplies, among other goods to Bangladesh. Readymade garments and jute carpet backing are two of Bangladesh's key exports to the U.S. The United States generally had a negative balance of trade with Bangladesh since 1986. (CRS Report 2007). Recently, the growing Islamic Fundamentalism in Bangladesh is attracting attention of United States which it did not give much importance earlier as it may mar its geo-economic interest. If the government of Bangladesh does not take stringent action against Islamic fundamentalists and extremists then it will not only affect the bilateral relation with U.S. but may also prove fatal for its own business prospects as MNCs are pulling out due to threat.

Table: U.S. Assistance to Bangladesh, 2003-2007

(Thousands of Dollars)

Account	FY2003	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007 ^c	FY2008 req.
CSH	27,600	35,500	33,412	31,509	—	39,615
DA	21,391	18,200	16,535	10,889	—	39,650
ESF	4,000	4,971	4,960	4,950	—	0
FMF	0	0	248	990	—	875
IMET	772	862	1,035	930	—	800
INCLE	0	0	0	0	—	1,500
NADR	0	0	893	5,094	—	6,350
Peace Corps	1,248	1,566	1,773	706	—	0
Totals	55,011	61,099	58,856	55,068	—	88,790
Food Aid						
P.L. 480 Title II Grant ^a	38,577	33,451	22,122	30,207	—	31,000
Section 416(b) ^b	49	53	3,257	3,833	—	—

Sources: CRS Report RL31362, *U.S. Foreign Aid to East and Southeast Asia*, by Thomas Lum. U.S. Department of State, USAID, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Note: Child Survival and Health (CSH), Development Assistance (DA), Economic Support Funds (ESF), Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Military Education and Training, (IMET), Non-proliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining and Related programs (NADR).

- a. USAID data — includes freight costs.
- b. USDA data — does not include freight costs.
- c. Support is expected to be close to FY2006 levels.

Concluding Observations:

It is in Bangladesh own domestic political interests to prevent “Talibanisation”³⁶ of the country and not create tigers which it cannot ride. Talibanisation of Bangladesh and its borders have a significant impact not only on the security of India, but also on Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan. It could also provide proximate assistance to the ‘Islamic Jihad’ currently on in Southeast Asian countries and a phenomenon, which is increasingly becoming a global concern and carrying the seeds of external intervention.

³⁶ The process of falling into the grip of fundamentalism.

CHAPTER: V

CONCLUSION

Though, it is difficult to go for any conclusion as Bangladesh is still going through transitional and transformational phase; I would like to go for some recommendations on the basis of my findings which I came across during my research work.

Islam is 'submission', a faith whose sacred duty is to construct a just society where everyone, including the weakest and the most vulnerable, is treated with absolute respect. However, recent years particularly after 9/11 have witnessed an understanding of Islam and consequently Islamic fundamentalism has been marred with confusion. In large measure due to the violence that has been perpetrated by groups whose primary affiliation is to Islam, the misunderstanding has been in part also due to the "Western media often (giving) the impression that the embattled and occasionally violent form of religiosity known as 'Fundamentalism' is a purely Islamic phenomenon

Islamic fundamentalism has become synonymous with modern terrorism, Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and with militant Muslim groups in Europe, East Africa, the Middle-East, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. However, in current scenario, the way the expression Islamic fundamentalism is used and the very negative connotations that go with it may prove to be counter-productive. The paradox which the Muslim societies are facing is that political and commercial elites use religion on one hand, and violate the Islamic religious principles, on the other. The battle for Islam will require the creation of liberal groups to retrieve Islam from the hijackers of religion. Islamic fundamentalism should be analysed in the proper context.

This Western paranoia regarding Islam has brought to the fore-front many Islamic countries, Bangladesh is one of them. But the way, the attempt is made to project it as the 'next-front of Islamic terror' or to show that 'Talibanisation process is going on' on account of certain negative developments in the country is not justifiable. Bangladesh presents a totally different and infact a very complex picture. Although these movements (Islamic) in the West Asian and Bangladesh embrace similar discourses, share some ideology, and get many of the same foreign financial supports, "they (are) specific products of circumstances" within their own countries – which

were sometimes created by government policies, other times local, cultural and socio-political contexts. Bangladesh has always been in a quest for its identity since its inception and even prior to that when it existed as the eastern part of Pakistan and prior to 1947 as East Bengal. The two identities i.e., secular (cultural) and Islamic identities have come to the forefront as per the demand of circumstances.

It is necessary to analyse the factors in the proper context that has led to the resurgence of Islam in Bangladesh Politics post-1975 and creating space for fundamentalist elements in the country and denigrating the religion i.e., Islam which is followed by majority population. In Bangladesh, secularism was introduced under special circumstances, and it was expected to succeed merely through being sanctioned by the constitution. But Islam has an ingrained and overwhelming influence on the values, norms and lifestyle of people in Bangladesh. In fact, most of the social forces operating within the country contribute, in some way or another, to the entrenchment of values whose origins may be traced to the tenets of Islam. The impact of Islam is felt in every sphere of life. Bangladeshis are gradually and systematically trained to grow up and live in a society where Islamic values predominate, and they contribute to its transmission from one generation to the next. Starting from birth the Bangladeshi receives overt and subtle guidance that inculcates habits which are in conformity with the practices of Islam.

Thus, considering the nature of Bangladeshi society and the various institutions and forces operating within it, the entrenchment and resurgence of Islam in the country are not surprising. The only attempt at secularising the country failed as the society and the overwhelming Muslim majority of its population did not undergo a change of lifestyle and outlook. The people of the country face frequent natural calamities as well as recurrent crises of poverty and sickness. In the absence of adequate government resources and facilities to cope with them, the people become more dependent on their faith in religion. Such attitudes receive regular nourishment from the various social forces and institutions which reiterate that the ultimate solution lies in Islam. Numerous factors persistently strengthen the ideals and appeal of Islam. These forces are so strong that the agents who, under other conditions, might be used to secularise the society are in fact harnessed to the cause of religion. The government too contributes to the process by using Islam to its advantage. Within a brief period, Bangladeshis became disillusioned with the ideal of secularism as the government

which sought to establish it failed to meet the high expectations of a country which had just won its war of liberation. The rulers failed to rise to the occasion, were accused of incompetence and various misdeeds, and were removed from office. Given a favourable opportunity, the forces in favour of Islam reemerged, and soon a definite bias towards Islam was evident in the policies and actions of subsequent governments. The ruling elite emphasised the Islamic way of life in order to retain its position and divert attention from the government's failures.

The ideals and values of Islam are deeply embedded in the Bangladesh society, entrenched through the persistent impact of a whole range of institutions. Outlooks and practices are blended into the lifestyle in such a way that even conscious and deliberate attempts to relegate Islam to the background can have little effect. On the other hand, the strong undercurrents of religious sentiments will surge again with renewed vigor, in the face of every threat to Islam, thus reaffirming its dominance in the society. However, this should not lead us to think that the solution lies in reckoning the Islam as religion. Islamic militancy in Bangladesh has been largely home-grown; has emanated from, and thrives on, domestic issues and agendas. Islamic fundamentalism has taken advantage of a regional milieu that has become increasingly embracing of Islamic values, and of an export-fuelled economic boom which has left a great many people, especially in rural areas, marginalised, desperate and angry. In turn, the spread of violence in the society has given militancy a political profile. It is now something that governments have to reckon with. The need is to trace the causes i.e., poverty, unemployment, corruption, failure of government policies etc. which are forcing them to take the shelter of religion and also giving space to fundamentalist elements who are taking advantage of this situation to fulfill their own vested interests. The gap between the political parties is widening and neither seems prepared to enter into meaningful dialogue over the problem of fundamentalism and ways to address it. The problem of Bangladesh is that at present its politics are polarised in such a way that the two major contending parties are equally capable of coming to power or losing it. A slight tilt in people's preference can change the situation. This reality together with the growing crisis of governability poses threats to the country's fledgling democratic institutions. The tide of fundamentalism in Bangladesh can be checked if the country embarks upon an economic development capable of providing the bare necessities of life to the

common people. Political forces which claim to be democratic shall have to leave slogans likely to hurt the sentiment of others; they shall have to call “spade a spade”. There cannot be any compromise on ideological issues.

Thus, the continual use of Islam as a political discourse by the ruling as well as non-ruling elites has mostly benefited the Islamists, in the sense that it has helped to create atmosphere wherein the ideals of the political aspects of Islam can thrive. Moreover, the relatively power position of the Islamists in the state and civil society is the outcome of the failure of the Bengali nationalist elites to establish hegemony over a civil society based on secular identity and politics. It is also due to the inability of the subaltern groups to create an independent political force based on secular identity and politics. This failure on their part opened up a wide avenue for the advancement of Islamic politics. The dichotomy between ‘Bengali’ and ‘Bangladeshi nationalisms’ is one symptom of this deeper malady (Ghosh 1993:710). Reflecting the same notion, Enayetullah Khan, editor of the Bangladesh weekly Holiday writes, “We’re having a bit of an identity crisis here, Are we Bengalis first and Muslims second, or Muslims first and Bengalis second? This is the problem and when Muslim identity becomes an Islamic identity we’re in trouble” (Lintner 2002:13). Thus drawing from these statements it is important to say that the context s’d be taken into account before going for any haste conclusions i.e., equating it with Islamic fundamentalism.

Towards the last but not the least, for the progress of the country and its overall development it is necessary to free it from the clutches of these fundamentalists and the political gambling and short-sightedness of the leaders to pursue their vested interests. All this can be overcome by ensuring the tenacity of secularism, the spirit of Bengali nationalism, liberation and tolerance in the society to pave way for the secularist and progressive forces. Bangladesh has tradition of progressive socio-cultural movements. That tradition needs to be restored.

APPENDIX I

Main Islamist Groups in Bangladesh

Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI)

The JeI is a political party that dates back to the British colonial era, and the (East) Pakistan period (1947-1971). It supported Pakistan against the Bengali nationalists during the liberation war, and most of its leaders fled to (West) Pakistan after Bangladesh's independence in 1971. Its then Amir (chief), Gholam Azam, fought against the freedom fighters in 1971, but returned to Bangladesh a few years later. In December 2000, Motiur Rahman Nizami, another former pro-Pakistani militant, took over as amir of the JeI. In the October 2001 election, the JeI emerged as the third largest party with 17 seats in Parliament and two ministers in the new coalition government. The Jamaat's final aim is an Islamic state in Bangladesh, although this will be implemented step by step.

Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS)

ICS is the youth wing of the JeI. Set up in 1941, it became a member of the International Islamic Federation of Student Organisations in 1979. The ICS is also a member of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth and has close contacts with other radical Muslim youth groups in Pakistan, the Middle East, Malaysia and Indonesia. One of its main strongholds in Bangladesh is at the university in Chittagong, and it dominates privately run madrassas all over the country. It has been involved in a number of bomb blasts and politically and religiously motivated assassinations. Nurul Islam Bulbul is its current president and Muhammed Nazrul Islam is the secretary general.

Islami Oikyo Jote (IOJ)

A smaller Islamist party that joined the four-party alliance led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which won the October 2001 election. The IOJ secured two seats in Parliament, but did not get any cabinet posts.

Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI)

The HuJI is Bangladesh's main militant organisation. Set up in 1992, it now has an estimated strength of 15,000 and is headed by Maulana Shawkat Osman alias Sheikh

Farid in Chittagong. Its members are recruited mainly from students of the country's many madrassas, and until year 2001, they called themselves the 'Bangladeshi Taliban'. The group is believed to have extensive contacts with Muslim organisations in the Indian States of West Bengal and Assam. Azizul Huq, Chairman of the IOJ is a member of the HuJI's advisory council.

'The Jihad Movement'

Osama bin Laden's February 23, 1998, fatwah (religious ruling) urging Jihad against the United States was co-signed by two Egyptian clerics, one from Pakistan, and Fazlur Rahman, "leader of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh". This is not believed to be a separate organisation but a common name for several Islamist groups in Bangladesh, of which HuJI is considered the biggest and most important.

Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)

The ARNO is a political group among Rohingya migrants from Myanmar, who live in the Chittagong-Cox's Bazaar area, and claim to be fighting for an autonomous Muslim region in Burma's Arakan (Rakhine) State. It was set up in 1998 through a merger of the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO). Within months, however, the front fell apart. The leader of what remains of ARNO, Nurul Islam, is considered a moderate. He also led the ARIF before the merger in 1998.

Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO)

Following the break-up of ARNO in 1999-2000, three new factions emerged, all of them re-claiming the old name RSO. Traditionally, the RSO has been very close to Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir in Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar. In the early 1990s, RSO had several military camps near the Burmese border, where cadres from the ICS were also trained in guerrilla warfare.

APPENDIX 2

Harkat-ul-Jihad-Al-Islami/Bangladesh

Central Executive Body

- a) Maulana Najrul Islam, Amir
- b) Mufti Maulana Safiur Rahman, Dy Amir
- c) Mufti Abdul Hye
- d) Mufti Manjurul Hossain
- e) Maulana Niamatullah Farid
- f) Maulana Baqi Billah
- g) Maulana Sayeed Abu Taher
- h) Maulana Samsuddin Kasimi
- i) Maulana Abu Nasir
- j) Maulana Fazlu Haq, Amini of Bangladesh Islamic Khelafat Andolan
- k) Maulana Aatur Rahman Khan, Ex-MP of Kishoreganj
- l) Abdul Zabbar of the Young Muslim League
- m) Maulana Mohiuddin of the Islamic Morcha

Advisory Council

- a) Maulana Mohiuddin Khan, Chief
- b) Mufti Abdul Hye, Dy Chief, arrested by Bangladesh police on November 8, 1998
- c) Maulana Manjur Ahmed, arrested by Bangladesh police on November 8, 1998
- d) Maulana Fazlul Karim, Peer of Charmonai, chief of the Islamic Shasantantra. Andolan
- e) Peer of Sharsina
- f) Peer of Fultali, Sylhet
- g) Mufti Shafi Ahmed, Hathazari madrassa, Chittagong
- h) Mufti Taherullah, Patiya madrassa, Chittagong

- i) Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad
- j) Maulana Karnaluddin Zafri
- k) Maulana Delawar Hossain Saidi
- l) Maulana Obaidullah
- m) Prof. Akhtar Farooq
- n) Maulana Saikul Haddis Allama
- o) Azizul Huq, Amir, Bangladesh Khilafat, Majlish and Chairman of the Islami Oikya Jote
- p) Mohd. Abdus Mannan, principal Gauhardanga madrassa, Gopalganj, secretary general of the Sarbodaya Olema Parishad

Khulna Branch

- a) Mohd. Sirajul Haque, Amir
- b) Mohd. Anisur Rahaman
- c) Mohd. Sattaruddin Khan
- d) Kasem Ali

Chittagong Branch

Office at Jameyat-ul-Ulurn madrassa, Lalkhanbazaar, Chittagong and Chief Maulavi is Maulana Azharul Islam

- a) Abdur Rouf, Amir
- b) Mufti Shaiqur Rahman, Dy Amir
- c) Abdul Baset
- d) Abdul Khaled
- e) Abu Tarek
- f) Abdul Hakim
- g) Amzad Belal
- h) Obaidur Rahman Khan
- i) Maulana Abdul Quddus

j) Maulana Mahbubul Alam, patron, based at 73, Kusumbagh, Dhoberpahar, near Chittagong

Cox's Bazaar Branch

Maulana Salahul Islam, 36 yrs old, works for an NGO called AlHaramain (a Mecca-based organisation) in Cox's Bazaar. Graduated from of Riyadh University, reportedly close to the chief of the Karachi branch of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen.

Sylhet Branch

a) Maulana Mohd. Abdul Karim, Patron, aka Sheikh-e-Kauria and president of the Sylhet branch of the Jamaat-e-Ulema-e-Islam, Sylhet

b) Peer of Fultali, Fultali, Sylhet

c) Juned Ahmed, Biyani Bazaar, Sylhet

d) Abdul Matin, Biyani Bazaar, Sylhet

Jessore Branch

a) Maulana Manirul Islam Madani, patron, Viana, Jessore Katwali PS

b) Mufti Aminul Huq, imam of Railway Station^o madrassa, Jessore

c) Maulana Abdul Hassan Muhaddis (BA from Calcutta University and FAREK [similar to an MA in religious studies] from Deoband madrassa, Sahranpur, UP, India. Presently employed as principal, Qaumi madrassa, Jessore. Gen. Scy. of the Jessore branch of the Nizami-e-Islami party in the East Pakistan era.

d) Maulana Abdur Rouf, 50 yrs old, originally from Bongaon, West Bengal. Ex org. scy. of the Nizami-e-Islami party in the East Pakistan era. Arrested in 1971 for his anti-Liberation movement activities. Now a resident of Barandipara, Jessore.

e) Mufti Aminul Islam

f) Abdur Jabbar (retired DSP, Bangladesh Police)

g) D.K. Baksh (retired subedar major, Bangladesh Army)

Brahmanbaria Branch

a) Maulana Sirajul Islam, head, Zamia Yunnsia madrassa, Brahmanbaria

b) Abdul Karim, leader of the Taliban Mujahids, trained in Afghanistan. There are 15 Bangladeshi Taliban Mujahids under his command, recruited from and based at Brahmanbaria

Comilla Branch

a) Imam of Ibne Tahmina High School, patron, Comilla

b) Mohd. Ali Akhtar, leader of Taliban Mujahids, Comilla. There are 15 Bangladeshi Taliban

MuJahids under his command, recruited from and based at Comilla

Training establishments

1. Mohiursunnals madrassa. Knila, Teknaf, Cox's Bazaar (near the Burmese border)
2. Hathazara madrassa, Chittagong Sadar
3. Patiya madrassa, Patiya, Chittagong Sadar
4. Jalpaitali and Tetultali, Bandarban District, Chittagong Hill Tracts
5. Maheshkhali and Garzania Hills in Nykhongchari PS, Bandarban District, Chittagong Hill Tracts
6. Raniping, Kazir Bazaar and Munshi Bazaar madrassas in Fultali PS, Sylhet District.
7. Baluchhera, Cox's Bazaar District (main camp)
8. Jameyat-ul-Ulum madrassa, Lalkhanbazaar, Chittagong
9. Brahmanbaria
10. Nayapara, Damudia Union, Teknaf, Cox's Bazaar District
11. Narichha Bazaar, Chittagong District
12. Rangamati Islamic Complex madrassa, Rangamati, Chittagong Hill Tracts
13. Mohmadpur Rahmiya Jamiatul madrassa, Dhaka
14. Lalmatia Kaumi madrassa, Dhaka
15. Malibagh Kaumi madrassa, Dhaka
16. Hajaripara Kaumi madrassa, Dhaka
17. Madani Kaumi madrassa, Dhaka

18. Farmgati Kaumi madrassa, Dhaka

19. Gazipur Bormi Kaumi madrassa

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