

## INTRODUCTION

In the preface of one of his own collections of essays titled *Nirbachita Prabandha* (Published 2000), Badruddin Umar himself wrote: “The process of selecting items for such a volume out of more than forty compilation of essays and a large number of writings not yet included in any anthology, can never be satisfying for an author. The reason for this is, many writings considered important by the author have to be left out while many subjects cannot possibly be taken into account.”

The logic behind such a statement is obvious and is also eminently true for the current compilation. However, the handful of essays included in the limited space of this very short volume are certainly representative of Badruddin Umar’s highly individualistic style of analysing various facets of socio-political scenario and reflect the irrefutable logic underlying his objective vision of what is happening and is likely to happen in Bangladesh now and in the foreseeable future.

Badruddin Umar is a staunch adherent of the fundamental principles of communism and has always been highly respected, even by those who do not subscribe to his views, both at home and abroad, for his relentless criticism of what he perceives as right-wing institutional aggression into the values sacred to individuals. The essays in this volume bear ample testimony to that uncompromising philosophy inherent in his writings.

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## COMMUNALISM

Although religion and communalism are linked together, communalism and religionism, or religiousness, are two different things. Not only that, unless communalism and communal predisposition are examined separately its true nature cannot be perceived. Where there is devotion to religious practices and doctrines, we call that religiousness. But communalism is something different. A person’s mental attitude is described as communal only when he/she is prepared to oppose and harm another religious community and the persons within that community on the basis of their subscribing to a specific religious faith. In this case, the mental preparedness to harm a particular person does not arise from personal acquaintance with or opposition to that person. The person is secondary here, the community is the primary catalyst. Religiousness is related to religious doctrines and customs and practices. That is to say, someone’s personal conduct and religious faith is more important on the premise of religiousness. One’s special loyalty towards his/her own religious community is more important in the case of communalism, apart from that true religiousness is concerned with afterlife. A person’s real salvation lies in afterlife, whereas communalism offers the bait of material gain in this earthly life. Religiousness does not require opposition to others, but communalism thrives and seeks to achieve its ultimate goal by opposing and harming others. So there is no necessary doctrinal relation between religion and communalism, the latter is born out of the worldly interests of a society and community built on religious doctrines and customs and practices. Thus religiousness is not a requirement for communalism and, in this sense, communalism is totally secular, irrespective of creed.

Two

In spite of this difference between religionism (religiousness) and communalism, in the perception of many they are inseparable. This perception may be regarded as a stock notion.

But by analysing this problem it will be seen that this is the origin of perverted social ideas on the one hand and a sinister political design on the other. Inability to look upon the social and economic interests of Muslims or Hindus from a secular point of view is considered natural by the people of our country, because this perversion of ideas has taken root among us for various historical reasons. This perversion has shaped our mental make-up in such a way that instead of looking upon our countrymen as rich-poor, repressor-repressed, persecutor-persecuted human beings, we have learnt to regard them as creatures belonging to various religious communities. Thus as a result of this perversion, unhealthy class consciousness is much stronger than healthy class consciousness in our society. For this reason our political life and thoughts are so backward and old fashioned.

### Three

The distance between the religious and social thoughts of the Hindus and the Muslims in our country is great. Because of this distance, the degree of exchange that should have taken place between the two communities on a social level never materialised. Social exchanges and considerations are a path leading to the establishment of friendship, affection and alliance between individuals and communities. One of the reasons why mutual relation between the Hindus and the Muslims never developed in a natural way in spite of their living side by side for hundreds of years is that various circumstances prevented the satisfactory opening of that path. Although dissension between the Hindus and the Muslims did not turn into active antagonism at the very beginning, an unhealthy awareness of this dissension existed within both communities even before the English appeared on the scene. So this dissension cannot be called entirely a creation of the English. The English of course never lost an opportunity to intensify this dissension and significantly diminish the humanness of both communities. Not only that, they actively attempted to turn the religious and social distance between the Hindus and the Muslims into political antagonism in order to fulfill their own imperialistic needs. The outcome of this process is communalism.

### Four

The speed and agitation generated in the larger sphere of Indian life by the arrival of the English resulted in the elimination of many old problems and gave rise to many more new problems. India had been defeated many times by foreign powers before the English. They had invaded the country irrespective of religion, class and race. Their arrival had hurt the interests of the rulers and kings in the upper levels of the society but the larger sphere of life in India had not been touched by them. The way life in India had been flowing for thousands of years had not been subjected to any changes by the appearance of any foreigners before the English.

In the pre-English age, the self-sufficient villages of India were the centre of the country's social and economic life. These villages were like islands and the whole of India was a huge archipelago. With regard to food, clothes and all other requirements of life, they were not particularly dependent on anything from outside the village. Their needs were very moderate and they were able to satisfy those needs by means of joint rural initiatives instead of a widespread exchange system. There might have been slight differences in the situation in various parts of India, but this was the overall economic lifestyle in the whole country. Not only that, their social and cultural life organised on the basis of economic life also had the same traditional self-sufficiency. In spite of there being very close similarity in the rural lifestyles prevailing all over India, the villages did not have any give-and-take relationship based on their particular needs. This self-sufficiency was one of the main characteristics of the Indian lifestyle and it is by virtue of this characteristic the traditional way of life in India was able to continue ignoring the rise and fall of kingdoms and dynasties.

The continuation of that way of life was thwarted by the arrival of the English. The changes came not in one day but slowly, over nearly two centuries. Two centuries of English rule almost radically changed the foundation of economic and social life in India. The India that had been made up of innumerable isolated rural units or villages now became the sub-continent where national consciousness began to thrive, national movement was organised. These changes are doubtlessly beneficial for India, but since the rise of nationalism is controlled by a number of specific circumstances in this country, some complexities were also created in our national life. Communalism is the most important of these complexities. So in order to look at communal problems in their true perspective, analysis and review of the rise and development of nationalism in India are necessary.

#### Five

Before the arrival of the English, there used to be a give and take relationship between the common people of India and their native or foreign rulers based on payment of taxes and collection of revenue. To the people, therefore, the significance of the rise and fall of kingdoms and dynasties was no more than change of the revenue collector. But upon the arrival of the English the relationship between the rulers and the ruled did not remain limited to payment of taxes and collection of revenue. The new breed of rulers were not satisfied merely with the establishment of a new empire and a new monarchy in India – they brought with them a new way of life, set up hitherto absent economic links in the life of the people. By marketing commodities produced by themselves in every nook and corner of India, they transformed the region into the Indian sub-continent. The unity and indivisibility brought in India by the far-reaching empires of Ashoke and Akbar were a manifestation of outward governance only. But the unity introduced by the English through their own products became much more an integral part of life than mere governance.

In the pre-English era, division of labour in India was birth-based. By sowing the seeds of Capitalism in this country, the English made division of labour birth-neutral. This is the most important revolution so far in the economic and social life of India. It is through this revolution that the staggered, broken stream of life in this country slowly turned into a fast, uninterrupted flow. Social stagnancy gradually gave way to hugely widespread mobility of people and commodities.

#### Six

The new system initiated by the English in India, however, did not actually result in equality for all regardless of race and religion. The establishment of the new empire significantly reduced the power and influence the Muslim community used to enjoy before. The English did not look favourably upon the traditional Hindus and especially the Muslim noblemen and nawabs as their predecessors. So signs of decadence began to appear among the Muslim aristocracy. That decadence gained momentum and became permanent because of their own fault. At the same time, a large section of the Muslims regarded the fall of the Mughal and Muslim empire as their own downfall and made themselves socially ostracized.

On the other hand, the non-Muslim population of India enthusiastically embraced this new system of communication and mobility. They had no reason to mistake the fall of the Mughal empire as their own downfall. Rather, they visualised in that downfall very clear indications of their own rise and advancement, and by faithfully pursuing these indications they fell in with the new struggle of life. Over a whole century they securely established themselves in the spheres of trade and commerce, employment, education as well as various other fields of activity.

#### Seven

Next came the Sepoy Mutiny. At the end of the rebellion, the urge to progress was born among the Muslim middle class. This was the first time that they began to feel the need for co-operation with the English. The English also did not hold back, and both sides prepared to co-operate with each other.

On the other hand, after the Hindu middle class had succeeded to a large extent to establish themselves in the spheres of wealth, influence and education, their eagerness to co-operate significantly declined after the Sepoy Mutiny. They had already progressed much farther than the Muslims. Now after gradually withdrawing themselves from the path of complete co-operation with the English, they began to enter a phase of competition – and this competition gave birth to a sense of nationalism. This competition led to a national movement, initiated in the year 1885.

#### Eight

This progressiveness among the Hindus and inherent backwardness among the Muslims were instrumental in building the economic foundation of communalism. During a national movement, all sectors within a country never progress at equal pace. Distribution of income and wealth are also not the same for all. In every country there is always a class going forward and another falling back. This inequality in the prosperity of the people of country is never a hindrance. In that context, the social set-up in India was not unique, although it still had certain special features, since those enjoying the fruits of progress were Hindus and those remaining backward were generally Muslims. In this way communal division began to appear in the larger framework of class division in India. Thus, as in other countries, national movement in India was more or less middle class-centric but the middle class itself was divided into two separate communities.

At their point of rise the Hindu middle class had no rivalry with anyone else. The English were far above them, the Muslims far behind. So for nearly a century they continued to progress smoothly. But the same thing did not happen with the Muslims. The rise of the Muslim middle class through co-operation with the English was hindered at every step by the Hindu middle class. Thus began the rivalry between the two communities.

Since then the social and political movements of the Hindus and the Muslims were more or less controlled by this rivalry. At one point the Hindus sought the patronization of the English, but after the Sepoy Mutiny a section of the Hindu society became anti-English. The Muslims in general kept themselves at a distance for a century, but after the Sepoy Mutiny these very Muslims came forward to co-operate with the English. And the English did not ignore this conflict of interest between the Hindus and the Muslims, rather they played the clever trick of acknowledging the difference between them so as to place the two communities at opposing ends. The English made no mistake in assessing their gain from this policy of dissension. The communal awareness that became a characteristic of the Indian social life created a lot of confusion in the area of national awareness. Along with British imperialisms, two separate Indias confronted each other in the battle of calculating gains and losses.

#### Nine

The backward Muslim community had little prospect of rapid development in the face of competition with the Hindu community. So they demanded special privileges from the British and led by the Aga Khan submitted a petition before Lord Minto in 1906. The Governor General did not disappoint them and even assured them of separate representation of Muslims and Hindus in the new constitutional amendments. This was not merely a verbal assurance. In the constitutional amendments of 1909, separate elections on communal basis were introduced in India. After this there was little scope for Hindus and Muslims playing a united

role in India's struggle for independence. The spirit of co-operation between the two sides gained through the Lucknow Agreement and the Khilafat Movement was barely enough.

The introduction of separate elections was the cleverest instrument in the hands of the British for creating dissension. The possibility of removing to a large extent the difference between the Hindus and the Muslims in their social and economic lives was totally eliminated by this system of separate elections. The National Movement in India was conducted along a narrow constitutional corridor and separate elections ensured that Hindus and Muslims would never travel together along the same path towards their future.

If it had been possible for the Indian freedom movement to be conducted along a greater revolutionary route instead of a constitutional path led by the bourgeoisie, the separate election system would not be able to poison the country's political climate so widely. But the leaders of the Congress Party as well as those of the Muslim League were all representatives of the middle class. They lacked the ability or the vision to discard the all too simple constitutional path and follow another, more pragmatic path. So the Indian freedom movement gathered its strength through the constitutional path and at the same time the communal interests of middle class Hindus and Muslims were busy downgrading each other.

#### Ten

Although the Congress Party was an organisation of both Hindus and Muslims, the leadership of the Muslims in the long run passed into the hands of the Muslim League. Not only that, all the well-known Muslim leaders in the Congress Party joined the Muslim League one by one. On the other hand, cracks began to appear within the nationalistic non-communal leadership of the Congress Party. Although a number of Congress leaders remained above communalism, the age-old character of the Party changed a lot. In the Nineteen-Thirties, communalism and reactionism became especially marked within it.

Because of the separate election system, largely Hindu votes for Hindu candidates and Muslim votes for Muslim candidates became the deciding factor in winning or losing elections. As a result of this, communalism came to play a constantly active role not only in fighting elections but also in post-election political climate. Thus communalism practically obscured the true nature of class struggle in the wider economic life of India.

#### Eleven

After the introduction of the separate election system, the Hindu community and the Muslim community each became totally dependent on specific communal vote banks. As such, the path of middle-class Hindu-Muslim opportunism became much more defined. For each community, criticising and opposing the other community while ignoring the greater interests of the country as a whole was a more acceptable practice. This negative attitude in the minds of the common people grew so strong that popular revolution on a wider scale was indefinitely set back.

Not only that, it also changed the character of the Indian National Movement. Although this movement had a progressive role to play within the framework of the British empire, because of communal influences it failed to acquire the form of a language-based National Movement and was reduced to the level of a reactionary entity only. As the communal electorates were allowed no opportunity for healthy thinking greater emphasis was placed in political spheres on the antagonism and difference between the two communities. Instead of trying to eliminate this antagonism and difference, they deliberately steered the peace-loving people in many areas on the road to communal riots. After this riots became a dependable tool for both sides in the political struggle of the sub-continent. Both Hindus and Muslims, and especially the British, continued to use this tool whenever and however they wanted to. Clashes between the two sides were escalated by communal riots and conflicts, murder and mayhem and by

the beginning of the Nineteen-Forties no way was left open for a united national movement. This resulted in a situation that the common Hindu and Muslim people of India, even the leaders of the Congress party and the Muslim League, had never apprehended a few years ago. The Lahore Proposals were passed in 1940 and only seven years after that India was partitioned.

As the only possible solution of the communal problem in the Indian National Movement, two separate States were created by partitioning India. But the bitterness and dispute accompanying this decision ruled out any solution of the basic problem. On the other hand, communalism acquired a new lease of life in the sphere of international relation between the two countries.

#### Twelve

Following the history of communalism in India it can be seen that in the period immediately after the Muslims had set foot in this country, the differences between the common Hindus and Muslims in all matters except for religious matters were merely social. In spite of the Muslims living in this country side by side with the Hindus for centuries, these differences were restricted principally within social circles. The main reason for this was that before the arrival of the British, there had been no such fundamental changes in the social strata of India that could have created mutual rivalry and competition in the lives of the people. That change occurred with the arrival of the British who planted the seeds of capitalism in the soil of this country. This gradually brought about revolutionary changes in India's social and economic life and competition became an integral part of the wider areas of life. For many reasons, this competition gave rise to disputes, conflicts and rivalries in the economic life of the Hindus and the Muslims. This hostility in their economic life developed further into extreme political hostility by the beginning of the twentieth century. It grew sharper and sharper till it led to the partition of the country and instead of eliminating communalism allowed its flames to remain burning till today in the national life of the two countries and in the area of international relation between them.

#### Thirteen

In order to eradicate communalism from the life of the sub-continent, we need to focus on the fundamental reasons which are responsible for its origin, development and proliferation. So we need to establish not only our social life but the larger social life of the Pak-Indian sub-continent as a whole on a fresh economic foundation. As long as the development of the country is not steered along the path of protecting the larger interests of the peasants, workers and the middle-class, the economic and sociological foundation of the problem of communalism will remain unshaken. To quench the inexorably spreading flames of communalism is therefore needed a revolutionary metamorphosis of the economic life of the country.

### ON THE CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CHARACTER OF THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT

Whatever the honourable members do inside the National Parliament is directly broadcast over radio and television now-a days. As a result, hundreds of thousand people in our country can listen to and see everything while a session is running. It is through this seeing and listening they become familiar with the acts and deeds of the representatives they have elected by democratic means to the National Parliament. Whatever may be the objective of

the government in power in arranging to broadcast the programmes of the Parliament in this way, they surely deserve to be praised for providing the people of the country with the opportunity to be directly acquainted with the process by which the elected Parliamentarians discharge their responsibilities and perform their duties in the National Parliament and how far does the work of the government and the Opposition serve the interests of the people.

While watching a session of the Parliament on television, the first thing that comes to notice is the very low cultural level of the members of the Parliament starting from the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition down to the other ministers and opposition members. Keeping aside what they do or don't do in their political roles, if only the manner of their presentation of various topics, their language and physical gestures and postures during debates and their practice of loudly banging on tables, throwing sheets of paper and files at one another etc is noted, it is not difficult to get a correct idea about the poor level of their intellectual and behavioral character.

The biggest indicator of the low cultural level of the members of the National Parliament of Bangladesh is their habit of using personally abusive language at one another during debates, attempting to unnecessarily demean others while projecting their own selves as very important or magnanimous and the deplorable practice of the leadership to glorify their own families with or without reason. It is true that the leadership status enjoyed by the current leaders has not been earned by themselves, they have the privilege to occupy the seat of leadership by virtue of the assassination of their father or husband. So the survival of their political existence is intimately and irrevocably linked to the glorification of the ideology and the achievements of their father and husband. For this reason, the way the present Prime Minister uses the name and memory of her father is in particularly poor taste. But the cultural level of not only the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition but that of almost the entire section of the members of the Parliament being extremely poor, what they say or how they behave in the Parliament is naturally consistent with that, in other words extremely poor. What is to be noted in this context is that those among the Parliamentarians who have some education or whose cultural level in general is not that low, also follow the others out of political considerations to behave in a way that is no exception at all.

This culturally poor level has two sides. First, general cultural low level, and second, poverty of political culture. The basic reason for the poor level of what the persons who are supposed to have some education, as mentioned above, say, their manner of speaking and their conduct is the poverty of their political culture.

If we look at the process of organizing the National Parliament we can see that it is being set up or shaped in stages in such a way as to remove politician members one after another and elect wealthy people and military officers and civilian bureaucrats nominated by the big political parties to fill the vacant seats. As these persons are amassing wealth by means of reckless misappropriation of public funds, corruption etc and in an improbably short span of time too, so it has not been possible for them to attain a high political or general cultural level. A major difference between becoming wealthy and attaining a high cultural level is that although it may be possible to suddenly become rich it is never possible to suddenly attain a high cultural level. To do the latter takes time. There may be exceptions in this case but for the majority it takes two or three generations. Even more important than this, it is impossible for those who earn wealth by grossly corrupt means simply because of their low cultural level. If we remember this it will not be difficult to understand the cause of the miserable state of the National Parliament.

What the members of the National Parliament do reflects only their extremely reactionary character. First it is seen that discussions or debates about political, economic, international issues are not very important in this National Parliament. Whatever they may choose to do in

these areas are done quite indifferently only in unavoidable circumstances. Most of their time is spent in mutual mud slinging and adorning themselves with pretended glory. The way they do all these is nothing but an indicator of the poverty of their political culture.

On winning their seats by the votes of the people, these elected representatives sit in the air-conditioned chambers of the National Parliament at a cost of many thousands of takas of public money per hour but get no time to deal with any of the problems of the people. Their own statements and counter-statements, debates and disputes in the National Parliament are glaring proof of the heaps of false promises they make to the public at election times. Despite all their promises, in reality they never do anything to serve the interests of the people. Not only that, all sorts of anti-people acts contrary to the interest of the country take place within the National Parliament. In this respect there is no difference between those Parliamentarian who are in power at the moment and those who are out of power. But in spite of that, the various policies of the party currently in power, including budgetary policies and laws and by-laws promulgated by them, are criticised by the leader of the Opposition as well as others in such a way as though they did something different when they were in power and they are much closer to the people than the current government!

The whole of the National Parliament is so accustomed to such deception or hoaxes that its members feel no shame or have no scruples in resorting to any kind of falsehood for proclaiming their own importance and concealing their own nefarious activities. Not only that, they are equally shameless and unscrupulous in blatantly grabbing opportunities for their own gain by exploiting the common people. The government or the National Parliament have no time to worry about the problems of proper housing, healthy living conditions, scarcity of water etc faced by the common people and sum dwellers of Dhaka city. They have now declared in the National Parliament the distribution of plots in a huge area next to the airport under a scheme of building houses for the members of the current and previous Parliaments. They do not even have the cultural and political conscience to realise the enormity of the political crime this declaration by the Finance Minister reflects. So they have no problem in expressing gratification at the Finance Minister's declaration and pounding on tables in support of this criminal act. In the previous Parliaments too, the unity they displayed among themselves inside the National Parliament regardless of differences in parties and opinions by pounding on tables to support various provisions like tax-free cars, diplomatic red passports, supply of teak-wood from the Chittagong Hill Tracts etc for the members, bears evidence to their disgustingly bad taste and deplorably low cultural level.

Many people enjoy listening to the speeches and remarks made by the Parliamentarians and watching their antics when sessions of the National Parliament are broadcast over radio and television. These people have some kind of affinity with the members of the Parliament in respect of cultural consciousness, that is why they regularly watch such programmes. But most people are not only mortified by these activities of the elected members of the National Parliament, they also become disgusted with Parliamentary politics itself and its extremely reactionary and anti-people character becomes clear to them.

It is not at all surprising that because of this character of the elected National Parliament it makes no difference the government formed by which particular party is in power. In the same way, in pursuance of the same rules and regulations, the economic, cultural, political and foreign relation policies of our country are executed in practice. It is also not surprising that the native bureaucrats and foreign imperialist forces will have nearly absolute control over the kind of people who form the National Parliament and the government. Expecting anything more than this from the Parliamentary democracy as conducted by the ruling class of our country is nothing but sheer ignorance. This Parliamentary system is a banal and



effective tool for permanently imposing the rule and control by the exploiting ruling class on the people of the country.

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11.07.1997

Ajker Kagoj / 17.07.1997

## THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY FOR BENGALEE MUSLIMS

*Since it is not for us to create a plan for the future that will hold good for all time, all the more surely what we contemporaries have to do is the uncompromising critical evaluation of all that exists, uncompromising in the sense that our criticism fears neither its own results nor the conflict with the powers that be.*

– Karl Marx

The problem of identity for Bengalee Muslims is by nature something that does not exist among Bengalee Hindus. As a matter of fact, this problem, which should actually be termed a crisis, is not a characteristic of Bengalee Muslims alone. This problem and crisis more or less affect all Muslims of the whole Indian sub-continent. But be that as may be, here we will restrict our discussion mainly to the context of Bengalee Muslims.

In the 1960's I wrote at length about this identity crisis of Bengalee Muslims. Three of my books, 'Communalism' (*Samprodayikota*), 'Crisis of Culture' (*Sonskritir Sonkot*) and 'Cultural Communalism' (*Sanskritik Samprodayikota*), all published in that decade, that is, during Pakistani regime, led to much debate, dispute and cultural movement which also exercised some influence on the political agitation of those days.

The matter which needs to be mentioned in this context is, none of those who are at present adored, highly praised and regularly rewarded as venerable intellectuals, patriots, even exceptionally gifted persons in Bangladesh, had ever been in practice seen in the spheres of cultural and political movement in the past. Moreover, many of them had been then associated with various agencies of Pakistani Information and Culture Department, even played principal or leading roles in different capacities. A few among them<sup>1</sup> occasionally appeared to support the aforesaid movement by doing no more than taking part in private and subdued discussions, or even remaining silent, thus playing it safe.

Such comments about 'venerable' intellectuals are not being made out of malice, grudge or hostility against anyone. The reason for this is that the contradiction between the past and present activities of these intellectuals is also indicative of the identity crisis of Bengalee Muslims. In the case of these intellectuals, a particular aspect of this crisis is defining their own roles regarding such matters as national oppression, communalism, fundamentalism etc as instigated by opportunism without the backing of any well-thought arguments and conclusions. During the Pakistani regime when transparent and open debates on the identity of Bengalee Muslims were extremely necessary, albeit dangerous as well, the most these "learned" and "venerable" intellectuals did was sitting in their safe drawing rooms and wagging their tongues, but they had never been noticed to make any public statements or publicly oppose the ideological stance of the Pakistanis.

Almost all of these "venerable" intellectuals have emerged only after Bangladesh has been established as an independent State, when there is no possibility of getting into trouble for making statements whatever may be the colour of the Government or party in power. So they have taken to the field to play their "heroic" roles in the safe political environment of Bangladesh and in order to camouflage their past cowardice are now constantly making many

types of rash and irresponsible statements, in which the proportion of reactionary elements is much greater than that of the progressive elements.

“Are we Bengalee, or are we Muslim?” or “Are we basically Bengalee, or are we basically Muslim?” – this self-introspective question can throw light on the fundamental aspect of the identity crisis of Bengalee Muslims. In an article named ‘Crisis of Bengalee Culture’ (*Bangalee Sonskritir Sankat*) published in 1967 I tried to explain the nature of this crisis. In another article entitled ‘Muslim Culture’ (*Muslim Sonskriti*) included in the collection of essays named ‘Crisis of Culture’ published around the same time I wrote in greater details about the identity crisis of Bengalee Muslims.

It would be natural to assume that the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent State would do away with this identity crisis and there would no longer be any problem, debate or dispute about whether the Bengalees of Bangladesh were Bengalee or Muslim, just as there would be no debate or dispute about whether the Bengalee Hindus were Bengalee or Hindu, or the Iranian Muslims were Iranian or Muslim, the English were Protestant Christians or just English, or the French were Catholic Christians or just French. But even after the end of the Pakistani regime, this crisis in the lives of the Muslims of Bangladesh has not ended. Indeed, this crisis has now become even deeper.

On the subject of how and by means of what strategy this crisis was given a new lease of life I wrote an article named ‘The Foundation of Bangladeshi Nationalism’ (*Bangladeshi Jatiotabader Bhitti*) which was published on 20 December, 1972.<sup>2</sup> In this article I said, “There are those who at present declare Bangladesh to be a National State by defining the inhabitants of Bangladesh, that is, East Bengal, as a Nation, but what will be the basis for their nationalism? Whatever may be the basis they opt for, there is something they must do. They will have to distinctly indicate their difference as a ‘Nation’ with the people of West Bengal.”

I further said in that article, “What changes may have taken place in the cultural life of East Bengal in the last 24 years, as a result of which the inhabitants of East Bengal have been able to overcome the cultural heritage of one thousand years to become the owners of a national entity that is different from the national entity of the people of West Bengal? By paying a little attention to this, properly analysing this question, it can be clearly understood that no such changes have taken place during the Pakistani regime. No cultural advancement worth mention has happened that is capable of overwhelmingly surpassing the common cultural tradition of a thousand years<sup>3</sup> to establish itself on a totally separate basis. Now we can come to the question of changes in social life. The significant difference that can be noticed here is that since the creation of Pakistan, Muslims have come to replace Hindus as the dominant community in the social hierarchy, in all spheres of administration, exploitation etc. Although there has been no fundamental changes in economic life, the communalist character of those who used to control the economic life of the people, governed the society in the wider sense, has changed. Only in the sphere of this communalist change the changes that have taken place over the last twenty-four years are highly significant and in this case a clear distinction is perceived between the respective situations in West Bengal and East Bengal.

“So taking into account the changes that have taken place in the economic, cultural and social spheres of East Bengal over twenty-four years it is seen that these changes have been significant in one area only and that area is the change in the communalist character of the social administrators and economic exploiters in East Bengal.

“So is it not this communalist change itself the foundation of Bangladeshi nationalism? Is it not this nationalistic foundation actually the cornerstone of Mujib-ism? Is it not on this basis alone the inhabitants of today’s Bangladesh are different from the inhabitants of West Bengal?

“If that is so, can all these slogan-shouting about Bangladeshi nationalism, clamoring about a National State, then be anything but a renewed attempt to establish nationalism on a communal foundation?”

“In spite of Germany, Korea, Vietnam breaking up into two parts and forming separate States, the people of these countries have not felt the need to raise the question of separate national identities. But the ruling party in Bangladesh has felt this need and a simple analysis of this urge will make it easily understandable that the basis of this Bangladeshi nationalism cannot be anything but mainly communal bi-nationalism. Thus the 1940 Lahore Proposal of establishing ‘two Muslim States’ in the two Muslim-dominated regions of India has actually been translated into reality in Bangladesh in the name of Mujib-ism.”

The communalist basis of Bangladeshi nationalism of the Awami League as mentioned here was very much a reality no doubt, but not quite pronounced either. Yet on that unpronounced foundation, standing on the same premise, Ziaur Rahman raised the banner of Bangladeshi nationalism. In this regard there is no fundamental difference between the Awami League and the BNP or the other communal parties and organisations. Like in many other areas, in this area as well many unpronounced statements of the Awami League were pronounced and many of their unfinished works were finished during the BNP regime. This continuity in the thoughts and policies of more than one political parties, components of the the same ruling class, is neither surprising nor unnatural.

In the same context, in an article named ‘Nationalism and the Politics of Bangladesh’ (*Jatiotabad O Bangladesher Rajneeti*) written in December 1981, I said, “We have no clue as to what exactly is Bangladeshi nationalism. The staunchest advocate of this tenet, Ziaur Rahman himself, did not know this either. The few words or phrases he occasionally used in order to explain Bangladeshi Nationalism had no substance at all, they were nothing but hyperbole. Such hyperbole is only a documented public expression of the moral bankruptcy of a quickly degenerating class. It must be their responsibility to give the people a proper idea of the doctrine on which the fortune of a country and its people depends, as claimed by them. But bankrupt representatives of the bankrupt servile class of this country are simply incapable of discharging that responsibility. It is not possible for them even to pretend to come up with a clear-cut and detailed explanation or proof of Bangladeshi nationalism. For this reason, the technique that Ziaur Rahman used to adopt in order to add strength to whatever he wanted to declare before the common people everywhere was very loud gestures and even louder vocal exercise. But dramatic gestures and vociferousness are poor substitutes for reason. Very short-lived results may be achieved by means of such substitutes, but they can never secure any lasting gain.”<sup>4</sup>

Actually, this ideological base of Bangladeshi Nationalism as propagated by Ziaur Rahman had been built during the regime of his predecessors, the Awami League, and the communal and vested interests of the Bengalee Muslims of Bangladesh as a class was that base. In this case, a distinction can be made between the Awami League and the BNP by saying that in what is generally understood by Bengalee Muslims, the Awami League ascribes comparatively greater emphasis on ‘Bengalee’, whereas the BNP tends to lay more emphasis on ‘Muslim’. For this reason the communalist stand of the BNP in this case is relatively more pronounced. But in spite of this difference in laying emphasis on one or the other, so far as national awareness is concerned, ‘Bengalee-ness’ and ‘Muslim-ness’ are inseparable in the perception of both.

During Pakistani regime, or even during British regime before that, a large proportion of Bengalee Muslims were constantly driven by the question ‘Are we Bengalee, or are we Muslim?’ This question was just a reflection of the identity crisis of Bengalee Muslims. After

the birth of Bangladesh, this question has acquired a new lease of life to emerge as ‘Are we Bengalee, or are we Bangladeshi?’

In an article named ‘Bangalee versus Bangladeshi’ (*Bangalee bonam Bangladeshi*) written in 1986, I said in this context, “What surreptitious design Ziaur Rahman and his military government did have behind declaring the inhabitants of Bangladesh as Bangladeshi and their propaganda regarding Bangladeshi nationalism is a separate question. But whatever might have been their purpose, there is no doubt that those who were even more die-hard Bengalees than Ziaur Rahman himself played a much more active role in ascribing a communal connotation upon the common Bengali word ‘Bangladeshi’. In fact, there is nothing intrinsically blamable about using the sobriquet ‘Bangladeshi’ to describe the inhabitants of Bangladesh. Rather, it is natural and proper to thus describe the inhabitants of Bangladesh.

“In spite of that, however, it is perceived that people subscribing to the doctrines of the Awami League, CPB, JSD etc are strongly against calling the inhabitants of Bangladesh ‘Bangladeshi’. In their opinion, the people of Bangladesh are Bengalee and that is how they should be described. They assume and declare that those who call the people of this country ‘Bangladeshi’, are being influenced by communalist thoughts and ideas.

“There is no reason to doubt that such thoughts, statements and propaganda are nothing but a heinous attempt by the Bourgeoisie surviving by exploiting concepts like ‘Freedom’, ‘Liberation War’ etc to confuse the people.

“Those who are in favour of describing the citizens of Bangladesh as ‘Bengalee’ and intensely oppose calling them Bangladeshi are all totally ‘inspired’ by extreme nationalism. Driven by this extreme nationalistic idea, after the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign State the then Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, called upon such racial communities as Chakma, Murong, Garo, Santal etc as well as the Urdu-speaking non-Bengalees to become Bengalee. He instructed them to give up their own languages and learn Bengali because no national community or language other than Bengalees and the Bengali language was supposed to have a place in Bangladesh.

“.... In the year 1952, the students, intellectuals and the common people as a whole in erstwhile East Bengal, started an agitation for acquiring State language status for Bengali. But the agitators repeatedly declared that their movement was not against any other language and the most advanced and progressive elements among them demanded equal rights for all languages in Pakistan.

“But in spite of this democratic precedence and even after Bangladesh had been founded as an independent sovereign State, the Awami-BKSAL (i.e., Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League) rulers of the country declared a policy in the name of national and linguistic issues that had no connection with democracy as clearly evident from their aforementioned statement.

“Bengalees are the majority in the State of Bangladesh. But there are people having many other national identities and speakers of many other languages living in this country and from that account the right for their own national and linguistic development is one of their democratic rights. This right must be preserved within the territorial framework of Bangladesh because the aforementioned minority population live within the boundaries of this State.

“And, for this reason exactly, this disgraceful move to place the citizens of the State of Bangladesh under the general category of ‘Bengalee’ is like imposing an oppressive system by the majority national community upon the others. But the extreme nationalistic section of the Bengalees has no quarrel with that. Rather, they are themselves the makers, initiators and executors of this extreme nationalistic policy.

“Some of those who are in favour of describing the inhabitants of Bangladesh as ‘Bengalee’ may have adopted this point of view because they have not properly understood the undemocratic and Fascist nature of this matter. But this non-conscious attitude of these people definitely throws them into an anti-people and reactionary camp.

“There exist many political and cultural malpractices in today’s Bangladesh in the name of ‘Liberation War’, ‘Freedom’ etc. One of these is giving a communal colour to the practice of referring to the inhabitants of Bangladesh as ‘Bangladeshi’ while following an extreme nationalistic policy under the cover of imaginary ‘non-communalism’ as well as attempting and demanding to generally describe all citizens of Bangladesh as ‘Bengalee’.

“The vast majority of the people of Bangladesh are Bengalee. So naturally no one else can create any obstacle ‘nationalistically’ in the path of the preservation of the national interest, rights etc of Bengalees and their development. Similarly, Bengalees too do not have the democratic right to obstruct the national development of other minority communities.<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned before, such elements as communal and nationalistic extremism both exist on the ‘Are we Bengalee, or are we Muslim?’ or Bengalee-Muslim question. Subject to specific situations or the difference among factions, the degree of importance attributed to one or the other of these elements depends on a variety of circumstances.

Mention may be made in this context of the agreement about to be executed between the Chittagong Hill Tracts People’s Co-ordination Committee and the Awami League government. The BNP have undertaken a powerful agenda of communal propaganda on the one hand and extreme nationalistic propaganda on the other against the people of the Hill Tracts. Although the Muslim identity of the Bengalees of Bangladesh is their major concern on the Bengalee-Bangladeshi question, in the propaganda against the Hill Tracts people they have taken to the stage as ‘primordial (or absolute) Bengalees’. In this case they are much more Bengalee nationalists than the Awami League.

For a clear idea about the hypocritical character of the BNP, their statement regarding the question of transit should be noted. Their argument is, India’s request for transit facility is actually a pretext for smuggling plain clothes Indian army personnel and military equipment through Bangladesh for the purpose of armed repression and persecution of tribes like Naga, Mizo, Boro etc in the North-Eastern regions of India. In fact, although this is anti-Indian argument from a communal point of view, the BNP is taking an obvious anti-Indian position by shedding tears for the oppression of the minority communities by India! But in their own country they are shouting at the top of their voice to protest against the proposal to withdraw from the Chittagong Hill Tracts not just the cantonment but also the hundreds of isolated military camps. This is a very familiar characteristic of Bourgeois hypocrisy. But it is not the BNP alone, the Jamaet-e-Islami’s self-declared ‘love for Bengalees’ is also highly significant in this regard!!!

It is quite clear from from the BNP’s propaganda and vile invectives against the hill people of Chittagong that to the BNP Bangladeshi nationalism involves only the Bengalee Muslims. Generally the term Bangladeshi stands for all citizens of Bangladesh irrespective of their race, religion or region. But, while speaking of Bangladeshi nationalism, the BNP mean no other race or tribe than Muslim Bengalees. In their own definition of nationalism there is no place for Hindu Bengalees.

On the other hand, in the ‘National State’ of Bangladesh, as defined by the Awami League, there is also no place for non-Bengalee races or communities. Although the Hindu Bengalees have not been directly kept outside this version of nationalism, the way the Awami League separated the Bengalee race of Bangladesh from the Bengalees of West Bengal and erected Nationalism as one of the national pillars of the Constitution of 1972, the Hindus were

indirectly left out of their definition. Instead of revoking the 'Enemy Property Act', giving it the new name of 'Vested Property Act' was nothing but a clever trick of misappropriating the property belonging to the so-called 'alien' Hindus. Therefore, by the term Bangladeshi Bengalee they too in actual fact meant the Bangladeshi Muslims of this country. The Awami League did this as one of a certain class of political parties, and in later years more than one of the other political parties in power belonging to the same class have also identified Bangladeshi Bengalees with only the Bengalee Muslims. From this premise there is no difference in the fundamental position of the Awami League with that of parties like the BNP, Jatiyo Party (JP) etc. The Awami League's so called nationalistic theory was further elaborated upon by its successors.

Of course, after noticing this elaborated version of their own theory and position, a section of the Awami League and their supporter intellectuals tried – and even now tries – to adopt a position that would indicate that their stand was, and is, fundamentally different from that of the BNP and JP. The reason for this is that although the Awami League presented the various steps of their premises or arguments in a certain way, they did not by themselves irrevocably declare their decision to abandon those premises. This declaration first came from Ziaur Rahman. It was he and his coterie who spoke of Bangladeshi nationalism in a manner that left no scope of doubt about its communal components and character. Since then the JP, even the present Awami League, are in effect working on the basis of that decision, although a large section of their supporter intellectuals still deny the communal character of Bangladeshi nationalism. But in spite of their denial this communal component of nationalism has now become sufficiently public through various actions and official policies of the Awami League. Religion, that is, Islam, is not only not unacceptable now to the Awami League's political line of thinking, rather it is one of its important components. The emphasis on religion and religious propaganda during election campaigns and by means of publicity through various media like radio, television etc, expansion and patronization of Madrasa-based education, extensive training schemes for Imams are all important proofs of this policy. But the surprising thing is that the intellectuals supporting the Awami League and enjoying patronization by the Awami League have never been found till today to put up any significant, organised and effective opposition against this, although they are found on many occasions to give statements against communal forces, fundamentalism, the Jamaat-e-Islami etc. Such statements and their friendly relation with the Awami League and eagerness to curry favour with that party very clearly point out the opportunistic character of these intellectuals. This also shows the large and important role played by them as social props for the exploiting the idea of class in consolidating the position of the ruling class as a whole.

The self-query 'Are Bengalee, or are we Bangladeshi?' arises basically from the concepts of communalism and extreme nationalism. There is actually no problem with this. As citizens of the State of Bangladesh all are Bangladeshi. Bengalee Hindus and Muslims, Urdu-speaking communities, tribal people like Chakma, Tripura, Murong, Garo, Santal etc are all Bangladeshi in this sense. So the answer to a question like 'Are we Chakma, or are we Bangladeshi?' should be in the same vein as the answer to the question 'Are Bengalee, or are we Bangladeshi?' The former are Chakma as a race and their national identity is Bangladeshi, whereas the latter are Bengalee as a race and Bangladeshi as a nation. There is in fact no riddle in this, no real scope or opportunity for any 'self-query'. Yet opportunists with vested interests have brought this simple matter to such a complex level that now it feels like a life and death question for the people of the country! This problem seems like a major problem in our educational and cultural life!! As if it is an extremely important measuring stick for determining our social status!!!

This so called self-query 'Are we Bengalee, or are we Bangladeshi?' has no connection with the common working people, peasants and labourers. It is no more than a completely personal

issue with the ruling class. The root of this 'self-query' is deeply implanted in vested interests.

From this premise there is no difference between the British regime and the Pakistani regime or the Bangladeshi regime. From the very beginning, the answer to the question 'Who are we?' is determined by one's class position and vested interests. For that reason this question never arises in the mind of a rural peasant, farm worker or any other labourer and worker toiling in a factory, at least not from their own class position. But although that may not be so, the ruling class, taking advantage of particular circumstances, manages to persuade various sections of the working class to be linked with this problem and makes use of them to serve their own vested interests. This is how during the British regime religious communal ideas were infiltrated from outside within the ranks of poor peasants and workers of Bengal, but that did not do anything to help these labourers and workers. Exactly in the same way during Pakistani regime, attempts were made to inject Bengalee nationalistic ideas into the brains of the common people and in the year 1971 the relentless assaults by the Pakistani rulers upon the people of Bangladesh also helped those attempts to succeed. But this kind of nationalism did nothing for the working people of Bangladesh – be they Bengalee or Urdu-speaking, Chakma, Tripura, Garo, Santal or Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian or followers of any other religious order or doctrine.

A certain kind of 'conflict' will of course exist within the question of self-identity. One human being or one community can possess different personal credentials. The problem of self-examination is actually the 'problem' of determining which of these credentials is principal or fundamental. For instance, let us consider here the case of an individual of Bangladesh. Let us assume he/she is Bengalee, Muslim, fish-eater, advocate of world peace, a member of the middle class. If anything like race, religion, food habits, political outlook, class etc is separately taken as a clue to this individual's identity, he/she may be respectively termed Bengalee, Muslim, fish-eater, advocate of world peace, a member of the middle class. From this point of view, none of these credentials is in conflict with the others, although there is difference in the case of distinguishing among them. So in specific circumstances, this individual may be identified on the basis of any of these. Therefore, if someone comes up with the question whether this individual is Bengalee or Muslim or fish-eater or advocate of world peace or a member of the middle class, that question will not be proper. Because here the question is being presented in a such way as to indicate that one identity is so different from another identity that once this individual is given a certain identity any other identity becomes invalid. What is actually happening here is that each of the various aspects of the identity of an individual is assumed to be a 'conflict' that has no resolution. So if something happens, something else can never happen.

That this is a mistake can be understood if we look at the matter in a different way. If we try to determine one's identity on the basis of religion, he/she can be a Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian etc. But one cannot be Hindu and Muslim or Hindu and Buddhist or Muslim and Christian at the same time, because each of these is a different religious faith and if a person has belief in one of these it is not possible for that person to believe in another at the same time. An individual must be a believer in no more than one of these.

Again, we can consider other bases of identity too. If we try to determine one's identity on the basis of race, he/she can be Bengalee, Punjabi, Tamil, Pathan, Chakma, Tripura or Garo or something else. But one cannot be Bengalee and Punjabi, Tamil and Chakma or Pathan and Tripura. That is to say, one national identity excludes all other national identities.

In so far as the manner in which the question of self-examination is raised in our country, instead of thinking along these lines racial and religious credentials are presented in such a way as to suggest that just as a Hindu and a Muslim exclude each other with regard to

religious identity, as a Bengalee and a Tamil exclude each other with regard to racial identity, so does a Bengalee and a Muslim exclude each other. This logical blunder creates the delusion of confusing religion and race with each other. This results in the practice of this type of outlandish self-examination.

But here this logical blunder is not without reason. Class interests and vested interests are inseparably involved with this blunder. In fact, class interests and vested interests can be said to be the originator of this 'blunder'.

It has been said before that the so called self-query like 'Are we Bengalee or Muslim?' or 'Are we Bengalee or Bangladeshi?' is not the self-query of the common peasants, workers and labourers. They are not in the least bothered about these things. Such questions are irrelevant in their lives. Those among them who are religiously inclined perform *namaz*, fast during the Holy month, practise religion and lead their lives as common rural Bengalees. Life as led by them has little to do with the culture, customs and practices and way of life of urban middle or upper class Muslims. Moreover, it is found that among the peasants in villages or factory workers in towns, Hindus and Muslims alike, their way of earning a living and leading their lives have much more in common than do their religious differences. This is exactly the same among the urban middle and upper classes too. Therefore, the degree of contentment persons of educated urban middle or upper class may feel in social intercourse with people of their own class but of a different religion, the level of rapport between them, will be much greater than what they may feel in the company of peasants and workers of their own religion. Because of this class unity the cultural unity in their way of life is also much more pronounced.

For this reason it is not very difficult to understand that the problem of identity as mentioned above is not really any fundamental problem and crisis. This problem and crisis are a kind of artificial problem and crisis born out of class differences and vested interests.

During the 'Tebhaga Movement', or the sharecroppers' uprising on the issue of three-way distribution of crops, in the year 1946-47 conflict and hostility between the Congress Party and the Muslim League were most acute and at their peak. But in spite of that the level of unity based on class and vested interests among pro-Congress and pro-League landlords in most cases may apparently seem quite surprising in the light of Congress-League relation at the time. But if it is realised that this Congress-League conflict and hostility were actually conflict and hostility in respect of communal interests within the class framework of middle and upper class people, the class based unity among the landlords against the class struggle of sharecroppers will not appear surprising at all. Rather, it will seem very natural, because communal conflict within the same class framework is not a fundamental conflict. Compared to that, conflict between opposing classes is much more important and fundamental. So, although, as a result of mutual rivalry and tug-of-war for grabbing communalist opportunities within a class framework, there may be conflict on a question like 'Are we Bengalee or Muslim?' or 'Will the country remain undivided or be partitioned?', this conflict becomes relatively unimportant when clash of class interests occurs. Then communal conflict gives way to class unity.

In order to divert attention from this truth, an example of the confusions that are created by people belonging to the exploiter ruling class is this question or query relating to identity. So the logical blunder mentioned before is a blunder that is one of the disgraceful tricks used by the exploiter ruling class to deliberately create different kinds of confusion in order to serve their own interests.

In our country, starting from the British regime a number of ideas and disputes related to the development and escalation of communal interests within a general class framework were created in a planned way. The issue of Muslim identity is one of these and sufficiently



influential in cultural and political spheres. How the middle and upper classes have created the same confusion by many multifarious means during the Pakistani and Bangladeshi regime too, has been mentioned before.

As long as the root cause of this confusion exists, it will succeed in keeping alive the exploiter ruling class in various new situations and guises. The recent incidents in Bangladesh bear evidence of how they are making use of this confusion in the spheres of economy, culture and politics by blending communalism with extreme nationalism.

In conclusion it is necessary to state with sufficient importance that as long as governance based on class exploitation exists in this country, at least exists in an intense form, so long will the ruling class also be able to keep this confusion alive and use it. For that reason, this confusion can only be brought to an end by getting rid of the oppressive rule of the exploiting or extortionist class in the country. So if those who sincerely desire an end to the artificial problems and crises of this type try to achieve that end by remaining within the framework of the ruling class, they will never succeed. In order to make this possible, it is necessary to totally eradicate the rule of the extortionist classes.

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1. Dr Shamsujjoha Memorial Lecture, 8 November 1997. Rajshahi University
  2. *Dainik Azad* (The Daily Azad) 20.12.1972. Post-War Bangladesh, Fourth Edition, Pp. 44-46 Afsar Brothers, Banglabazar, Dhaka
  3. Here 'thousand years' should not be taken literally but mean 'a long period of time'.
  4. *Sanskriti* (Culture), December 1981
  5. *Bangladesher Modhyabitto O Sanskritic Paristhiti* (The Middle Class and Cultural Scene in Bangladesh) Pp. 65-67 Pallab Publishers 28.10.1997

### On Edward Said's *ORIENTALISM*

Edward Said's two books *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* can be described as complimentary to each other, although the second of these books was written sometime later than the other. In *Orientalism*, which is relatively better-known or perhaps more famous, Said has presented a considerable number of examples and instances in order to explain the true objectives of the practices prevailing in the West in the spheres of science and culture, literature and research, which beyond any doubt reflect the vested interests of imperialism, especially British, French and American imperialism. He has gone into great details to specifically identify these interests, but has given no clear explanation of the reasons which may have persuaded the imperialistic researchers or writers to act the way they have acted in these spheres. His book *Culture and Imperialism* provides this explanation. In an interview with David Barsamian he says: "Orientalism did something fairly limited, although it covered a lot of ground. I was interested in the Western perceptions of the Orient and in the transformation of those aims into Western rule over the Orient." (*David Barsamian: The Pen and the Sword, Common Congress press, 1994. P. 63*) About the other book he says: "Culture and Imperialism is in a certain sense a sequel to that...." (*ibid*). Following this his important comment is: "I think one of the main flaws in the enormous literature in economics and political science and history about imperialism is that very little attention has been paid to the role of culture in keeping an empire maintained." (*ibid: P. 65-66*)

Looking at this role of culture, what he says about his own realisation of this subject deserves to be quoted in detail at this point: "But what we need to understand is how very often the force of, say, the British army in India was very minimal in a way, considering the

vast amount of territory that they administered and held. What you have instead is a programme of ideological purification whereby, for example, in India the system of education, which was promulgated in the 1830's, was really addressing the fact that the education of Indians under the British should teach the Indian the superiority of English culture over Indian culture. And of course when there was a revolt, as in the case of the famous so-called Indian Mutiny – 1857, then it was dealt with force, mercilessly, brutally, definitively. Then the facade could be re-erected and you could say, 'we're here for your sake and this is beneficial for you.' So it was force, but much more important in my opinion, than force, which was administered selectively, was the idea inculcated in the minds of the people being colonized that it was their destiny to be ruled by the West." (*ibid*: P. 67-68)

The role of culture, in the sphere of governance, that Edward Said has spoken of here, is not limited only to the sphere of imperialistic rule. In a society divided by class system, wherever minority property owners are in charge of governing power they always resort to cultural domination in order to keep the ruled majority under control. In ancient times religious subdual was the principal form of cultural domination. For this reason, in the ancient and middle ages Hindu priests, the Christian clergy and Islamic *mullahs*, and in modern times mainly the intellectuals, have always played a very important role historically in this type of governing system. At all times it is not at all possible to force the vast majority of the working class people to remain obedient and thoroughly subdued merely by means of weapons or military strength. The use of weapons, that is, force, becomes necessary in special circumstances when people revolt against cultural domination or intellectual slavery. However successfully may culture be used in the sphere of governance, unless the ruling class possess this power to apply force they become unfit to govern, they are ousted from the seat of power. For this reason, armed institutions such as the police, the military who are able to apply force as and when required, are an inseparable part of the ruling class and the State.

What is true in this regard for the administrative system of any country is also true, for the same reason, for imperialism as well. Rather, it is even more so. Because in the case of indigenous governance, although the ruling class may belong to the minority they have some sort of social base within the country, they always have a network of various links or associations with the society. But external imperialists lack this base. So, those who instead of just plundering or looting and then leaving are more interested in firmly establishing their own form of exploitative administration in another country, must pay attention to cultural issues. A comparison between Sultan Mahmud's pillage and Mughal rule in India will make this clear. Not only the Mughals, the other Muslim invaders who after conquering India sought to establish themselves as the rulers, all engaged in spreading their own cultural and religious influence among the people of the country. This process indeed assumed a mature form in the Mughal era. In order to do this, Akbar the Great even tried to introduce a new religious order called *Din Elahi*. Also, significant cultural influence was exercised through Persian language over the educated class among the Indian public, whether they be Hindus or Muslims. For this reason, for a long time after the advent of British rule, even in the 1830's, considerable influence of Persian language as well as Islamic culture is perceived among the educated Hindus in Bengal, starting from Ram Mohan Roy up to Dewan Kartikeya Chandra Roy.

Apart from those invaders who were nothing more than plunderers, like Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, Nadir Shah or Ahmad Shah Abdali, others who endeavored to establish stable, long-lasting governance, all made use of culture as an essential instrument and the role of religion in the wider sense always remained a part of that use. Akbar's attempts to introduce a new religious order is a significant example of this.

In his two important books, *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said has given a detailed account of the imperialist policy of the West towards the East and explained how they tried to effectively apply this policy in the spheres of education, literature, culture and idealism, and this account is definitely an eye-opener for all with regard to imperialism. But in doing this, the clarity of his concept of the role of imperialist administration when he was writing *Culture and Imperialism* does not seem to be as clear when he was writing *Orientalism*. Because of this lack of clarity quite a few of the comments he made in *Orientalism* as well as his point of view as expressed in that book somewhat damages the acceptability of his overall statement. But more of this later.

Starting from the 1960's, I myself have frequently written about the use and role of culture in governance. I have discussed in detail the obstacles created by people's cultural and judgmental backwardness in the sphere of progressive and political agitation, and have also written about how far and in how many ways the ruling class tries to nurture this backwardness. The relevance of mentioning this here is that, this disadvantage not only impedes the fight against imperialism, but also keeps the people downtrodden even under the governance of the native ruling class at the end of the colonial era by imposing various kinds of cultural control aided by imperialism over them. People receive more or less the same treatment from the native ruling class as they used to receive from their colonial rulers. The emergence of native masters replacing foreign masters has been seen all over the world at the end of a colonial era. This situation is inseparably linked with people's lack of political education and cultural backwardness.

With reference to the possibility of the emergence of native rulers of this category in the name of a national State, Edward Said says: "One of the great tragedies is what happened in the Third World, the onset of nationalism... What interests me a great deal is that when nationalism is triumphant and independence is achieved, too often nationalism can sink back down into a kind of tribalism, atavism, Statism, and along with that becomes, for example, in many parts of the Arab world today, a neo-imperialist state, still controlled by outside powers and in which the ruling elite are in effect agents and clients of one of the dominant powers" (*ibid*: P. 79).

Many have indeed given warnings against such a situation evolving. One of them is Frantz Fanon. Quoting from him Said comments: "For example, Fanon says, We aren't going to fight this revolution against the French in order to replace the French policeman with an Algerian policeman. That's not the point. We are looking for liberation, liberation is much more than becoming a mirror image of the white man whom we've thrown out and just replacing him and using his authority. So I am very interested in that distinction, between liberation and a kind of mindless nationalism" (*ibid*: P. 79-80).

Although Said here calls the nationalism of the liberated native bourgeoisie "mindless nationalism", no nationalism is actually mindless. This nationalism is the nationalism of the native bourgeoisie who are subservient stooges of imperialism, which has a specific class base. Since Edward Said does not attempt class analysis and says, "I can't really generalize in terms of class" (*ibid*: P. 77), he can only classify this as "mindless nationalism" which is no more than an obscure idea. The protagonists of this type of nationalism must have a class base, moreover they also have a cultural and idealistic status supported by this base.

It is not that Edward Said entirely repudiates this status, but he says nothing about its real character, class character. So, commenting on this subject in a different way, he says: "In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others just as certain ideas are more influential than others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as hegemony, an indispensable concept for any understanding of

cultural life in the industrial West” (*Edward W Said, Orientalism, Penguin Books, 1995, P. 7*).

One thought process influences another thought process and it is this influential thought process or cultural leadership that Antonio Gramsci calls ‘hegemony’ or ‘dominance’. Here Gramsci does not say as clearly as Lenin does that this dominance is basically class dominance, those who impose this dominance are in practice owners of State power and they are the ruling class. Lenin has clearly stated that in any society or State the culture of the ruling class enjoys supremacy, it dominates the others. This supremacy or dominance is established by means of education, religion, propaganda etc. So in a bourgeois State the true nature of a national culture is that the culture of the ruling class will be dominant in it. While talking about his ‘hegemony’, since Gramsci keeps its class character unclear, he makes a distinction between Civil Society and Political Society in such a way that they appear to be far apart from each other. In this respect Marx’s concept of Civil Society is quite a lot different from Gramsci’s concept of Civil Society. In Gramsci’s opinion, culture is a matter for Civil Society while a Political Society’s major function is ruling directly. But Gramsci’s theory does not focus on the important matter that in real life these direct rulers do exercise and maintain their cultural dominance while adhering to their own class status. Since Edward Said does not go for class analysis, he is more attracted towards such obscure theory as propagated by Gramsci rather than the much clearer theorisation of Lenin. Not only that, for the same reason Gramsci’s views of this nature are much acclaimed by Western intellectuals as well as the bourgeois intelligentsia.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said applies his extraordinary erudition to correctly show how the Western imperialists, in order to exploit the East to further their own vested interests, have presented and depicted the people of that region in a highly distorted manner and have corrupted Oriental culture in various ways. He says: “For Orientalism brings one up directly against that question – that is – to realizing that political imperialism governs an entire field of study, imagination and scholarly institutions – in such a way as to make its avoidance an intellectual and historical impossibility” (*Orientalism, P. 13-14*).

By not only emphasising this aspect in *Orientalism*, but also not quite taking note of any other aspect while writing this book, Said has viewed this as a subject that can be said to have enabled Western intellectuals to crudely realise only their own imperialistic interests.

Although Edward Said’s main premise may be correct in this case, the role of imperialism in the field of culture he has clearly observed in *Culture and Imperialism* has escaped his attention in *Orientalism*. That is why following up what he says above he goes on to say: “Yet there will always remain the perennial escape mechanism or saying that a literary writer and a philosopher, for example, are trained in literature and philosophy respectively, not in politics or ideological analysis. In other words, the specialist argument can work quite effectively to block the larger and, in my opinion, the more intellectually serious perspective” (*Orientalism, P. 14*).

Two things should be taken note of here. First, Said says that whatever they engage in, be it literature, philosophy etc, or research on any subject, it will not be reasonable to assume that they practise it for any purpose other than securing imperialistic interests. Moreover, assuming that will simply obfuscate the true intellectual perspective of these practices.

Although this may be broadly true, there is no reason to accept as correct Said’s generalisation of this subject because evaluating each and every Western litterateur, philosopher, historian in this manner will mean that none of them ever had or has anything like intellectual honesty, everyone of them was or is a scheming agent. From this point of view everyone has to be considered in the same light as Macaulay and Kipling. Besides, that

will mean disputing the conception that a human being is capable of doing something for honest cultivation of knowledge and genuine research. But reality shows that all Orientalists do not belong to the same genre as Macaulay and Kipling. Many of them have indeed been guided by a spontaneous urge to delve into Oriental knowledge and philosophy, they have not only retrieved by their research long-lost ancient Oriental books and scriptures but have translated them into modern languages, taken pains to prepare annotations and glossaries. One of the four *Vedas*, the *Rig Veda*, had become almost incomprehensible even by the time of Panini. In 14<sup>th</sup> century AD, Sayanacharya had prepared an annotated edition (Sayan Version) of this book. But it was the European, especially the German, scholars who later managed to collect and bring to light the complete *Vedas* and attempted to interpret their incomprehensible parts. It can be rightly said that ancient Indian philosophy has been brought within reach of Indians as well as others through the painstaking work and exercise of the European Orientalists. So in this respect it would not be at all proper to describe a person like the German scholar Max Muller as a researcher engaged in serving imperialistic interests. The contribution of the British and other Europeans is vast not only in the field of philosophy but also in the area of historical research. It is they who by means of their own efforts have familiarised us with the history of India, with ancient and medieval history. But for such endeavor on their part, we would remain backward for a long time in the field of cultivation of Indian history. It is true that in their work with history they have distorted historical facts in many ways and, like James Mill, have also created confusion. But even taking into account all this, the contribution of Western scholars, philosophers, historians in the sphere of cultivation of knowledge and culture in our country is invaluable.

Besides, there is another side to the cultivation of knowledge and culture on the part of the British rulers in a colonised country like India, which Edward Said discusses in his book *Culture and Imperialism* and has been mentioned earlier in this article. The premise of that side is, spread of education and practice of culture among the people of an occupied land must be arranged and developed in such a way as to ensure that they begin to accept the alien imperialist ruling power as useful for their life, livelihood, education and culture and voluntarily remain subservient to that power, so that they never attempt to rebel against their rulers. Macaulay's object was to provide the Indians with the kind of education that in course of time, in spite of their Indian physical identities, they would no longer remain Indians in respect of thoughts, ideas and culture, and would become more or less similar to their Western rulers.

However, while thinking of and discussing the Western imperialists' efforts to exploit the East in many ways and distort the Eastern way of life in order to effectively apply their imperialistic policies, Edward Said has crossed the limit in a way that has no true explanation in his apparent anti-imperialism stance. It boils down simply to the Occident's anti-Orient attitude that seems to be some kind of racial issue. In this regard Said's own idea or definition of Orientalism is also significant. In the very beginning of the book *Orientalism*, he gives three definitions successively of Orientalism which on examination appear to be self-contradictory.

First definition : 'Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism' (*Orientalism*, P. 2).

Second definition : 'Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident"'. Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction

between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind”, destiny, and so on. This Orientalism can accommodate Aeschylus, say, and Victor Hugo, Dante and Karl Marx’ (*Orientalism*, P. 2-3).

Third definition : ‘Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it : in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient’ (*Orientalism*, P. 3).

The work Said initiated with the eighteenth century as a starting point, is the most important and valuable premise of his book *Orientalism*, in spite of all its limitations. But while elaborating on his own concept of Orientalism, he has expressed a number of views in which he has failed to maintain any consistency. Not only that, trying to do this he has himself occasionally distorted highly valuable works by many others. His view of Karl Marx can be cited as an example here.

In his ‘second definition’ of Orientalism, Said says that a large number of writers, theorists, philosophers, economists etc “have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories...” That is to say, they assumed at the very beginning that there was a basic distinction between the Occident and the Orient. It is a matter of great surprise how Said identifies this “basic distinction” amongst all ontological works of Marx!

In this context, the part of Marx’s statement that Said uses as the main basis of sky-high generalisation of what he says is the following part of one of his famous essays on British rule in India: “England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan, was attracted only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can England fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution” (*Marx-Engels Selected Works*, vol. one, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1969, P. 493).

It is certainly true that the pace of history would not have come to a halt if Britain had not occupied India. Besides, now our conception of the obstacles created in later years by British rule in the development of India’s socio-economic area is much clearer than before. But in spite of this there is no doubt that at the time when Marx wrote these words British rule had initiated a trend of social development by creating a rift in ancient India society. The limitation of this statement by Marx in this regard has been criticised even by a number of Marxists. That is one side of the matter, but it is difficult to understand the role of the historical argument behind placing Marx on the same level as British imperialist administrators and daubing him Orientalist.

Much detailed debates about are perhaps possible about the three separate definitions of Orientalism mentioned earlier. However, leaving that aside this much must be said in this context that while continuing with his highly useful and educative discussions about the Oriental policies of Anglo-French imperialism starting from the eighteenth century and their Orientalist poets, writers, economists, historians etc, the extent to which Edward Said has propagated his own concept of Orientalism has not been possible for him to contain fully. In this case, by bringing Aeschylus, Dante and others within the purview of this discussion he has made such a perceptual East-West distinction instead of imperialism that has no historical basis.

The Greeks called all foreigners ‘barbarians’. The ancient Indians, in the same vein even up to Bankimchandra, ascribed such terms as *jaban* to foreigners and Muslims. All such terms are examples of antagonism, even hatred, towards foreigners or anyone else. But the sense in which Edward Said has spoken of the Orientalism of European imperialists from the eighteenth century onward, has nothing to do with ascribing such terms to foreigners. This has no connection with the Orientalist character of imperialist science and knowledge, literature, politics, economics etc described by Said. In the book *Divine Comedy*, although Dante has placed the Prophet Muhammad in the eighth circle of the nine circles of Inferno, he has thrown Muslims like Ibn Sina, Abu Rushid and Salahuddin, and together with them Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, into the the first circle, the lowest level of hell. There is no question of East and West here, why Dante did this has a different explanation.

In this case, the basic premise of Edward Said’s weakness is, the attempt to establish each and everyone of the West as ‘Orientalist’, regardless of time and person. There is no way to deny the fact that because of certain specific historical reasons the West is also an important representative of human civilisation. This is true despite innumerable misdeeds of the imperialist European powers including Britain and France. So, starting from the ancient ages right up to the present time, if all of them are regarded as imperialistic anti-Orient scheming persons like James Mill, Macaulay or Kipling, what will be true nature of civilisation then? What will be its value? It then becomes the kind of Occidentalism that is as open to criticism as Orientalism. In a new ‘Afterword’ added to the 1995 edition of his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said has given his response to this criticism. There is scope for further discussion about this, because it is not that this response is really satisfactory.

Anyway, Aijaz Ahmad’s comment on this is correct. He has said: “These ways of dismissing entire civilizations as diseased formations are unfortunately far too familiar to us, who live on the other side of the divide, from the history of imperialism itself” (*Aijaz Ahmad, In Theory, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1996, P. 182*).

The aim of these criticisms of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is by no means an attempt to diminish the importance of this highly valuable book. The evidence of his voracious perusal of literature and his scholarship as found in this book is truly a matter of wonder. Because of his familiarity with European literature he has not kept his discussion limited only to the subject of Orientalism, as a literary critic he has taken his discourses beyond this circle. If the subject of this book had been merely the antagonism of the imperialists towards the East, it would not have been so widely read and admired among the students and general readers in Europe and America. For this reason Eqbal Ahmad has truly remarked that “Orientalism is virtually a classic” (*The Pen and the Sword, P. 7*).

Edward Said was very intimately associated with the liberation struggle of the people of Palestine. Not only that, he had been a member of the Palestinian National Congress for a long time. Owing to his difference of opinion and chosen path with Yasser Arafat, especially because of Arafat’s several damaging discussions and agreements with Israel and the United States of America, the relation between them deteriorated greatly. *Question of Palestine* is one of Said’s important books, in which he has discussed at length his way of thinking and how he preferred to work in real life.

In view of the ongoing terrorist activities and resistance struggle in the Arab states of the Middle East, the increasingly influential role played by religion in those countries, Edward Said’s statement is very significant. In this context he says: “Last and most important, the Islamic revival in the Arab world largely occurs in countries where democracy had been abrogated by virtue of the priorities of the national security state. Here Israel plays a very important role. This is often forgotten. The presence of Israel, a theocratic, military state, a Sparta, that is imposed upon the region – I’m not talking just about the Palestinians,

whose sanctity it destroys, its country, its land, it's been in occupation for over twenty-five years – but also its invasions in Lebanon, in Jordan, in Syria, in Tunisia. It has overflowed Saudi Arabia many times. It has attacked Iraq. Israel is a regional superpower. This sense of Israel and the United States victimising at will the Arab heartland has forced people to go back to nourishing roots in native culture, which is Islamic” (*The Pen and the Sword*, P. 86).

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## REIGN OF TERRORISTS IN THE MEDIA

During Viswanath Pratap Singh's all too brief Premiership in India (2 December 1989 – 10 November 1990), a widespread movement was launched against the Central Government's plans to introduce a quota system for the reservation of government jobs for Scheduled castes and tribes – the so called economically backward classes. It was a movement led mainly by upper class Hindus and the majority of participants were students of schools, colleges and universities. At one stage of this movement, it began to be marked by incidents of young persons, even school and college students, trying to drive home their protest by self-immolation, pouring kerosene or petrol on their bodies and setting fire to them. Some of the reports published in the media at that time claimed that not all of these protesters volunteered to thus sacrifice their lives for their cause. They were persuaded or instigated by others who assured them that the flames about to devour their bodies would be quickly quenched and they would certainly escape suffering any serious injury. Not only that, they would be established as 'heroes' before the eyes of the nation.

One such report, accompanied by pictures, was then published in the English weekly, *Sunday*. The principal subject of the report was a teenage girl who had thus set fire to her own body, suffering 90% burn. She had little chance of surviving her injuries, but after she had been rescued and brought to a hospital, her first question to her mother was, "Mummy, have my pictures appeared in the newspapers?" The *Sunday* magazine had indeed printed a picture of the girl's severely injured body and added the comment that quite a few young people like her were thus drenching their bodies in kerosene or petrol and then setting themselves on fire just for the sake of getting some publicity in the media. This obsession with and attraction for publicity is so terribly irresistible that people do not hesitate even to endanger their own lives.

The reason for referring to this incident here is that, in Bangladesh the time has now come to seriously consider the origin and the consequences of such obsessive addiction toward publicity. Most of the light of this publicity is now being shed on the criminals, miscreants and terrorists in Bangladesh. The reason why something needs to be written on this subject at this moment is the furore that has been covering the pages of various daily newspapers and journals over the arrest of an erstwhile student leader belonging to the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party). Yesterday, September 12, the front page of a leading English daily carried a huge picture of this terrorist youth. This picture is at least as large as, or even larger than, all the pictures of Menon printed in the paper on 18<sup>th</sup> August, following the gunfire attack on him. Most of the daily papers have printed pictures of this youth on their front pages accompanied by sizeable reports. A few papers have also printed his statement as the lead news on their front pages under prominent headlines. These items contain accounts that have nothing to do with politics, they cater only to a kind of sensationalism and are merely an attempt to incite excitement, clearly with a view to boosting the sale of these papers.



The youth in question is not a solitary example, the media in general regularly publicize terrorists of this type. And the amount and the level of publicity they receive, even from front-ranking English and vernacular newspapers and magazines, tends to project them as the true leaders of our times.

If these college and university students, or the youths who have just passed their exams or have left college without completing their courses, receive this kind of publicity through their association with terrorism, then they will almost certainly be “inspired” and “persuaded” to engage in acts of terrorism not simply because of easy access to money or the chance of being part of political conspiracy, but drawn by the temptation of basking in the glow of publicity, just as the teenage boys and girls had been inspired and persuaded during the anti-reservation movement in India.

And that is actually happening in practice. To many regular newspaper readers in this country, the names of notorious terrorist criminals are much more familiar than the names of many political and cultural leaders and organisers of various political movements. The names of these terrorists need not be mentioned here, they are well known to all those who regularly read newspapers and magazines.

Gaining such fame, or perhaps notoriety, is no small matter. There was a time when a political personality aiming for this kind of popular acclaim had to traverse a long path of struggle, pass through many sacrifices and forbearance. These are no longer needed today. The terrorists of our time are active in the political sphere in such a way, gaining such coverage in the media for whatever they are doing that only the foremost political leaders could gain or hope to gain.

Thus, it will not be an exaggeration to say that the terrorists are reigning over the media in Bangladesh today. Whenever the deeds, or misdeeds, of a terrorist or a criminal come to the knowledge of a newspaper or a magazine, it has now become standard policy to either ignore any news having political, cultural or international importance, or at best allocate very short space for such news, in order to accommodate sensational news about these anti-social elements.

It is true that terrorism has become a very urgent problem in Bangladesh today. Terrorist activities now appear to be more “fruitful” than normal political activities. Tackling this terrorism and their perpetrators is a serious political task and there is no denying the fact the media has an important role to play in this regard. But playing this important role does not mean that publishing large pictures of criminals engaged in terrorist activities and printing detailed accounts of their backgrounds following their arrest is an effective way of opposing terrorism. Moreover, as it has been mentioned before, this actually serves to encourage the terrorists to engage more in criminal pursuits. That also provides them with highly noticeable public image. And all this is accomplished through publicity in the media.

Another matter needs to be mentioned here. The BNP Government and that party itself have now started ordering police raids against the goons, ruffians and terrorists who have so far been under their own protection. They are said to be launching investigations and probes into the personal possessions of these terrorists. Although they are now being compelled to take such actions it is necessary to remember that, because of their association with the party in power, with the direct and indirect patronage of this party, these terrorists have been able to acquire vast wealth within a very short time. In this situation, even if the Government now begins to arrest or detain them, to what extent the terrorists can be subdued or controlled is a totally uncertain matter. Difference of opinion, disputes and divisions between the ruling BNP government and the party on this subject have already begun to surface. It will be no surprise if, after some noisy but empty furore for the benefit of the general public, these terrorists are allowed remissions in more ways than one.

After thus getting remissions these terrorists, enjoying considerable publicity, will no doubt become more powerful, as extortionists and dealers in unlawful trade licenses and permits their bargaining power and capacity to threaten common people will increase manifold. The “personality” they possessed before they were apprehended will turn into much greater “personality”. There can be no doubt that they will use their newly acquired “personality” to greatly escalate the existing terrifying situation in the country. Not only that, because of the publicity they are receiving and others have continued to receive before them there will be little risk of their getting caught for their crimes. Confiscating all their possessions now will hardly be any loss to them, they are young yet and their future as terrorists is “bright”. So there is likely to be no obstacle at all in their way to become owners of huge wealth in relatively short time.

Therefore, there is no reason to think that the patronage these terrorists are receiving from the media in Bangladesh today, is any less profitable or tempting than the patronage of the ruling political party. This kind of irresponsible presentation of news by the media, irresponsibly endowing the terrorists with undue importance, is resulting in an acute downgrading of the terrorist situation instead of improving it. Presenting sensational news accompanied by graphic pictorial details may lead to significant increase in the sale of newspapers, but that falls far short of performing their democratic duties and ensuring healthy journalism. It goes without saying that neither is possible if both newspaper owners and journalists thus work hand in hand to strengthen the reign of the terrorists.

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*Bhorer Kagoj / 15.09.1992*

## THE BASIS OF BANGLADESHI NATIONALISM

The final outcome of the politics that evolved in the sub-continent on the basis of the Two-Nation theory of the Muslim League was the partition of India – the emergence of two separate States, India and Pakistan. In East Bengal, which became the eastern part of Pakistan, the politics that had been organized till 1971 on the basis of opposition to this Two-Nation theory rejected since 1947, ultimately led to the separation of East Pakistan from West Pakistan resulting in the establishment of the new and sovereign State named Bangladesh in this region. The founders of this new State have stated that the Bangladeshis are a nation and consequently Bangladesh is a National State.

However, those who have made loud claims in public meetings, through radio-television and newspapers that the State of Bangladesh is a National State, are saying nothing about the basis of the nationality of the common people of the erstwhile East Bengal. They have assumed that by constantly repeating and proclaiming that the Bangladeshis, that is, the inhabitants of East Bengal, are a nation, their purpose will be served. The people of this region will be prepared to lay down their lives to identify themselves as a separate ‘nation’ in order to build up Bangladesh as a ‘National State’. But taking a little time to examine this issue it can be understood that it is not very easy or simple.

While opposing the Two-Nation theory in East Bengal, the language, the heritage and the history of this region were referred to. Speaking about these it was aimed to show that although the Muslims of Pakistan were all members of the same State, not all of them belonged to the same nation. Trying to point out the ‘national’ difference of the people of East Bengal from the inhabitants of different regions of West Pakistan the overall argument presented was that there was a separate nation (or national community) called Bengalee whose language was Bengali; whose heritage included Rammohun, Vidyasagar, Michael,

Bankimchandra, Mir Mosharaf Hosain, Rabindranath, Saratchandra, Nazrul Islam; the thousand years of Bengalee cultural heritage of the people of East Bengal was exactly the same as the people of West Bengal.

There are those who at present declare Bangladesh to be a National State by defining the inhabitants of Bangladesh, that is, East Bengal, as a nation, but what will be the basis for their nationalism? Whatever may be the basis they opt for, there is something they must do. They will have to distinctly indicate their difference as a 'nation' with the people of West Bengal.

In the year 1947, the basis on which the Bengalee Hindus and Muslims were divided into two separate nations was communal. So it is not possible to theoretically embrace it as the foundation of Bangladeshi nationalism. On the other hand, if someone said in 1947 that the inhabitants of the region within the geographical boundaries of what is now Bangladesh were a nation separate from the people of West Bengal, that would sound like a laughing matter then. What can be the reason for the theory that would seem ludicrous in 1947 to attain the status of national ideal of Bangladesh in the hands of the Awami League soon after the eviction of Pakistan from East Bengal?

Perhaps It can be said that the independent developments that have taken place over the last twenty-four years in various spheres of the economic life, social life, cultural life of the inhabitants of the region within the geographical boundaries of East Pakistan are the foundation of Bangladeshi nationalism. The question of development of economic and social life can be considered first in this context.

What could have been the changes that took place over twenty-four years in the spheres of economic life and caused a human community enriched with a thousand-year old heritage to become so different from one of its own component parts, as a result of which they have today attained the status of a nation? We know that during the Pakistani regime the economic development of East Bengal had suffered a serious setback, the remnants of feudalism remained, and still remains, fundamentally at the same level as before. Judging from this context, there has been no revolutionary disparity as such in the difference that existed between West Bengal and East Bengal in 1947.

Another point is worth mention in this context. We know, countries like Germany, Korea, Vietnam etc have broken into two parts as a result of imperialist warfare and conspiracy. Two types of mutually opposed economic systems have been established in the two parts of these countries. But in spite of that, none of West or East Germany, North or South Korea, North or South Vietnam has declared its inhabitants a separate 'nation'. So it is seen that in spite of huge disparities in economic life, fundamental differences, the question of separate national identity has not been raised in these countries split in two halves. But that question has risen in Bangladesh today.

Anyway, the question of culture can be considered now. What changes may have taken place over twenty-four years in the cultural life of East Bengal, as a result of which inhabitants of East Bengal have been able to overcome the cultural heritage of one thousand years to become the owners of a national entity that is different from the national entity of the people of West Bengal? By paying a little attention to this, properly analysing this question, it can be clearly understood that no such changes have taken place during the Pakistani regime. No cultural advancement worth mention has happened that is capable of overwhelmingly surpassing the common cultural heritage of a thousand years to establish itself on a totally separate basis. Now we can come to the question of changes in social life. The significant difference that can be noticed here is that since the creation of Pakistan, Muslims have come to replace Hindus as the dominant community in the social hierarchy, in all spheres of administration, exploitation etc. Although there has been no fundamental changes in economic life, the communalist character of those who used to control the economic life of

the people, governed the society in the wider sense, has changed. Only in the sphere of this communalist change the changes that have taken place over the last twenty-four years are highly significant and in this case a clear distinction is perceived between the respective situations in West Bengal and East Bengal.

So taking into account the changes that have taken place in the economic, cultural and social spheres of East Bengal over twenty-four years it is seen that these changes have been significant in one area only and that area is the change in the communalist character of the social administrators and economic exploiters in East Bengal.

So is it not this communalist change itself the foundation of Bangladeshi nationalism? Is it not this nationalistic foundation actually the cornerstone of Mujib-ism? Is it not on this basis alone the inhabitants of today's Bangladesh are different from the inhabitants of West Bengal?

If that is so, then are not all these slogan shouting about Bangladeshi nationalism, clamouring about a National State just a renewed attempt to establish the concept of nationalism on a communalist foundation?

In spite of the formation of separate States in the divided parts of Germany, Korea and Vietnam, these countries never felt the need to raise the question of separate national entities. But the ruling party of Bangladesh has felt that need, and a simple analysis of this urge will show that this foundation of Bangladeshi nationalism is fundamentally nothing more than communalist Two-Nation theory. So the argument presented in the Lahore Proposal of 1940 in favour of establishing two "Muslim States" in the two Muslim-dominated parts of India has in fact been turned into reality in today's Bangladesh in the name of Mujib-ism.

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*Dainik Azad* (The Daily Azad) / 20.12.1972