Hindus’ Perception of Muslims in Bangladesh
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ABSTRACT
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This study investigates the present condition of Hindu-Muslim relations in Bangladesh, a multi religious country in South Asia with Muslim majority. It is based on in-depth interview with 18 Hindu and 18 Muslim respondents in Dhaka, the capital city. Among these 18 from each category, the type of the respondents the researcher has selected is religious scholars, cultural activists, and educationists cum community representatives. The study aims to justify the propagations and sense of Hindu-Muslim confrontation as reflected in many narratives and literatures where an attempt to portray the felt absence of interreligious harmony. The in-depth interviews emphasize religious issues, includes religio-cultural and socio-political matters which manifested in the relationships. As such, the study explores the current scenario of relations between these two communities which opposes present-day literatures and narratives which depict friendship and intimacy among those who are living peacefully and harmoniously. In the study, special attention is given to issues relating to commonly held causes for the decline of the Hindus in Bangladesh as widely believed by Hindu and Muslim alike. Both Hindu and Muslim respondents are asked to describe what they think are causes for the decrease of their number. Surprisingly the data analyzed, nullifies the common supposition that torture of Hindu is reason for the decrease. It is therefore found to be a myth or a mere speculation. Denying this, the study shows that the widely believed assumption of Hindu decline has been challenged. Most importantly, it indicates that the Bangla language, spoken by both Hindu and Muslims in their daily lives, -as the study has examined- has played a fundamental role in the process of Islamization to its speakers irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. And last but not least, it is found through their narratives that religion is an inevitable element for peace and stability for in the context of Bangladesh, religion, as such, significantly contributes to the making of good citizens, an essential element for co-existence and interreligious harmony.

KEYWORDS
Cow-slaughter, Hindu-Muslim friendship, Hindu-Muslim religious encounter, Kirton, Love-marriage doctrine, Mandir, Masjid, Narendra Modi, Pahela Boishakh, Puja, Proselytization, superstition

1. INTRODUCTION
Bangladesh has a long history of inter-community friendship and intimacy especially between Hindus and Muslims; and throughout the history the level of their friendship remains always striking on the individual and grassroots level but in terms of state-craft enterprise the scenario varies and changes from time to time according to the situation of state apparatus when and where the issue of religion, politics and security become an intertwined one. The more manipulating the more intelligent-that is the common phenomenon of political parties in Bangladesh in general and with this theme Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) is champion and second to none as known commonly to the masses, their secularism affiliation made it easy for them to harbor into fraudulency comparing to their arch rival Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) whose party affiliation is nationalism and patriotism that clash with ensnaring theme; with this virtue of political intelligence the secularist party BAL can obtain certitude of minority people of Hindu community easily bamboozling the outer world, when the outer world, the USA and the

West, see the label of secularism in the body of that BAL they are simply convinced to extend their support to this particular party to stay in power, with the virtue of which they do all the wrong-doings and wrath-generating acts including the atrocities on minorities, attack on the religious sentiment and forcible occupation of land and properties and very efficiently can impute others for their misdeeds and wrong-doings: while, with the virtue of their secular ideology can portray themselves to the world as an umbrella giving best shelter to the minority people in Bangladesh, but the unknown story of that shelter-giving umbrella is that it can turn into a shock-waving hell to those taking shelter under that BAL umbrella, as actions speak louder than words, the Bishwajit murder case and the Buddhist temple attack in Ramu in September 2012 tell us better for instance, as the first is the self-evident replica of their atrocities and the latter is believed to be an inside job of the government too. An umbrella usually protects someone from sun-shine and rain which is generally understood but the unknown story is that the umbrella can turn into a hell for the ones taking shelter under it which is somewhat unimaginable to many ones and which is the common phenomenon in the context of Bangladesh; with the virtue of their secular brand this BAL easily can convince and obtain the confidence of the minority people, especially during the general election, and later on by hook or by crook, having power they start their dictatorship ignoring their promise of goodliness to the masses; bearing this phenomenon in mind, interview was taken from the both distinguished Hindu and Muslim personalities in Dhaka to obtain the current situation of Hindu-Muslim relation while this secularist party was in power, questions asked were pertaining to social, cultural, religious and political to know whether the minority people are tolerated in the current Bangladesh context or not, if tolerated then to what extent as the secularist party is in power since 2008 and supposedly this minority people should feel more comfortable comparing to other regimes.

This chapter will focus on and analyze the opinions obtained from the distinguished Hindu personalities during the interviews with them in Dhaka from January to April 2015 while BAL, after their five years regime, was retained to power through a most controversial election in January 2014 which was not recognized by the world community and was termed merely a farce election not only in the history of Bangladesh but rather, in terms of its absurdity, in the history of the world perhaps. It should be noted here that though the researcher is a Muslim, from the majority people of Bangladesh, he brings in and talks about Hindus first throughout the whole work of this current research just to show his respect for other faith and people, therefore, he puts “Hindu-Muslim religious encounters” for instance in line with that respect, he gives priority to Hindus even in the arrangement of chapterization, as such this chapter deals with the Hindu respondents and will be followed by the Muslim respondents in the following chapter. In this current chapter the following themes will be discussed:

1.1 Religious Perspective

Since the secularist party is in power considerably for a longer time their religious freedom is supposed to be more than that of usual, how is the situation of religious freedom during these five years from 2010 to 2015, can Hindus perform their religious rituals freely and tranquilly without any fear and intimidation? Is there any proselytization cases anywhere or all parties abide by the Qur’anic theme “Lakum dEnukum wa liya dEn”, (for you is your religion and for me is my religion) are issues among others for findings. On the other side, do the Hindus try to separate themselves from their counterpart, Muslims, in regard to mingling with them that requires permitting them to visiting their house, will be sought since there is a myth, or according to many Hindus a superstition that Muslim entry to Hindu house makes the house profane, do Hindus still maintain this supposedly religious injunction or not because in an ultimate sense this should be regarded as an element of separation from one another though meagerly, and how do they take cow slaughtering en masse in Bangladesh when religious intolerance took place over there in India concerning this sensitive issue of cow slaughtering after Narendra Modi came to power who is a big and unique ally of Sheikh Hasina and the sole backup for her, the prime minister of Bangladesh, and in contrast, do they

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8 The prime minister of India from Hindu right wing party BJP came to power early in 2014.
find any fascinating element in Islam that enchant them to Islam and subsequently leads them get closer to the Muslims. This entire theme is narrated in the following:

The core idea regarding the Muslim entry to the Hindu house obtained from the respondents’ response is that it is actually an established superstition prevailed in the Hindu community for long time and still prevailing in remote areas but the educated Hindu people seem to stand against it and caring more for humanity instead of their religious dogma, out of 18 respondents not a single one talked in favor of this superstition though some of them tried to justify and rationalize why this superstition came to existence; saying that it was actually fit for that time when there was no preventive measure for touchy-viruses that we have preventive medication in this modern days, as the respondent number 2 nicely compared the superstition-climate with the current time Ebola case of West African region as shown below:

“These are superstitions of ancient time, that time people have no antibiotic or preventive measure from different type of disease, tension of being affected by touchy-virus kept them always worried”.

So, he tries to validate this superstition for that time-span since there was no other way out for safety therefore it was okay for that time, but now in these modern days it is quite outdated, because humanity is first and foremost before anything, as such that superstition is no more valid for our time. Expressing similar attitude, all the respondents are of the opinion that definitely it is a superstition beyond doubt since no statute is found in Geeta, Purana, Veda or in any holy scriptures pertaining to becoming profane of Hindu house by Muslim entry\(^9\) but they differ from one another in terms of how this superstition came to existence; one says to maintain the cleanliness this superstition was adopted, some other says to remain alert or vigilant against any mischievous person they harbored into this superstition, however the central idea is that mainly cleanliness and purification was their main target for adopting this criterion and all these ideas are close to each other; and in our astonishment, the respondent number 14 has provided us a significant idea behind this superstition which actually goes back to the Hindu caste system, and it makes sense actually, that Indian subcontinent was, once upon a time, a strong-hold for Hinduism, which was dominant religion over the region and Hindus were the rulers but after the advent of Islam when Islam reached to that Indian subcontinent many Hindus converted to Islam mostly were from lower caste Hindus whose social status was very menial to them and were despised by the upper class Hindus like Brahmins etc. as usually happens according to their caste system; so, to maintain their ruler-ship mind and to show off their despise and negligence they introduced this new policy barring the entry of these Muslims who converted from lower caste Hindus; because when they changed their religion they are no more lower caste Hindus, they are now different people like guests who are supposed to be respected by the local custom even, therefore there should not be any restriction or barrier for them to mingle with them but those upper caste Hindus found that oh! these are the same people from whom always we maintained a distance, now how come we treat the same guys as our guests? How come we show our respect for someone always we neglected to? Such was the phenomenon, and therefore, they harbored into this policy in the name of religion just to show off their supremacy over them and negligence for lower caste Hindus converted to Islam; as described in his own statement by the respondent below:

“Actually once upon a time, in this Indian subcontinent, Hinduism was very strong, though contradictory definitely you will find that today’s Muslims are those who were lower caste Hindus and converted to Islam”

This significant idea is supported by another respondent, number 12 that religion does not have any relation with this superstition; it is merely their innovation simply for the sake of their advantage as mentioned in his statement below:

“One is religious ritual, and the other one is the social culture in the name of religion……, in fact, religion does not have any edict of such kind”

Furthermore, the respondent number 3 gives some curious fact behind the innovation of this superstition; his argument was very sharp and fervent in terms of rationality and that is it is obvious that the position of a Mandir is higher than that of a house pertaining to the question of sacredness or holiness, usually a Mandir is regarded a sacred place to the Hindus, now if some burqa clade Muslim woman can enter to that Mandir, as happened in the very moment when this interview was being conducted with this respondent in that very Mandir, then far better can enter

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\(^9\) Respondent number 6, appendix 1
to a Hindu house which is very rational and it means there is no religious barrier to enter a Mandir even, let alone the house, but then why did they invent this superstition? He says, it is on the basis of suspicion of the person that he might be doing a rehearsal for his night job, i.e. he might have intention to steal at night for what he is inspecting the house now, so, to prevent any untoward incident they invented this superstition of becoming a house profane by the Muslim entry as is mentioned in his own statement below which, among others, can be one reason for harboring into this superstition:

“You might have seen today that in our Mandir some burqa clad women came, that means we do not have any problem in entering of a Muslim in our house”

Here the statement of the respondent number 4 in the appendix 1 bears no less importance than what has been mentioned above in this regard, because he himself allowed interviewer into his house who came to ask the interviewee whether the Muslim entry to Hindu house makes the house profane or not, so, it is obvious that allowing the Muslim interviewer into his house was a heavy blow to that superstition as we can see in his own statement below:

“Simply entering to a house can profane a house – such type of culture we do not have….besides that just suppose yourselves that you came to take my interview at my house, we sat together, does not it prove that actually it does not make profane?”

And referring to the proselytization issue where the core idea is that there is no such case of proselytization in these current times, out of all the respondents none has faced ever this proselytization attempt though few of them reported to have heard about this but not sure whether really it happened or not, for example what we find in the statement of the respondents number 10 and 11 respectively shown below:

“No, no one did. Furthermore, I do not have information of proselytization but sometimes we see in the newspaper such type of news, but do not know how true or false are that news”.

So, it should be clear to the readers that in the recent decades there were no cases of proselytization in Bangladesh which, among others, helped it earned the certificate of a moderate Muslim country from the world community.10 But the significant idea about this issue is that this proselytization takes place mostly in the love affair between Muslim boys and Hindu girls which many Hindus term as a love-trap of converting them into Islam, most of the respondents actually are invalidating this conversion issue but some others though few are accusing that though in the first sight it is not realized, in the deeper sense it is understood that Muslims are actually duping using this technique of love-marriage to convert Hindus into Islam as sounded in the statement of the respondent number 16 while answering to the question of whether he faced ever any proselytization attempt or not as shown below:

“Suppose many a time easily they trap in love affairs, then tell the girl that if you remain Hindu I will not marry you, you must convert to Islam”.

This significant idea of love-trap theory is supported by another respondent number 15 who had no experience of proselytization attempt from the Muslims but he believes that Hindu girls are always being converted through the love-trap marriage as we find in his response to that particular question of proselytization attempt, excerpted below:

“Especially the female folks, whether in the trap of love or with real love, whatever way, they are continuously converting them”.

Another significant idea about this proselytization is that there are some Hindus who are either socially weak, or have no educational power, have no shelter, no housing, have no financial backup, so, this type of people might change their religion for worldly gains, since a new Muslim is treated differently with special care for him in the Muslim community and all out support is provided to him for his survival, considering these facts some weak Hindu can convert to Islam, which is normal and no way can be termed as an alarming situation, as is found the statement of the respondent number 14 who says in this regard:

“Either he is socially weak, poor, there might be no backing for him, or he does not have any housing or shelter”.

However, regarding the proselytization attempt, as reflected in statement of the respondents it is clear that proselytization is not needed to bring Hindu people to Islam, it is natural, when someone finds good in something he/she is automatically motivated to accept the good, so, most of the conversion cases are actually self motivated and self-mind change, unless it is a love affair between the persons of these two communities, so, there is no compulsion for changing their religion, it was decided by themselves who came to Islam, like what happened in Tangail recently, a family of eight members embraced Islam spontaneously without having any da'wah from Muslim neighbors, but yet there is little clue behind this conversion, that is the eldest son of the family was in Dubai for couple of years where he was fascinated by Islamic culture and he is the one who initiated and motivated his whole family to embrace Islam. All the respondents have the same answer to the question of proselytization that they did never have witnessed such thing, and they know well that it does not happen but yes there was such cases before independence i.e. when this land was under Pakistani dominance, but during Independent Bangladesh, it never happened, though friendly and warmly invitation to accept Islam is still on among those who have intimacy and proximity between them like what was expressed by the respondent number 6 in the appendix 1, during his boyhood he was an intimate friend to his Muslim class mates, freely mingled with them as the same scenario still prevails to the most of the land where Hindu-Muslim live side by side.

Religious freedom is considered a human right worldwide and a very essential issue all over the world and there is no room for denying it, the right that Islam has established as early as the time of Madina constitution and guaranteed the freedom of religious minorities in its every nook and corner; the core idea about this religious freedom we find from the interviews is that almost all the respondents unanimously think that religious freedom is absolutely there in Bangladesh, people of different religions are cooperative to each other, tolerant and respectful for other faith and people, even the religious events and festivals of one community is attended by another community especially that of Hindu people are participated largely by the Muslims which indicates their inclination towards adapting and minimizing the gap between these two communities, in this regard, as an example, we can ruminate the expression of the respondent 1 of appendix 1 whose conversation bears the testimony of Hindu-Muslim intimacy who had ended his interview session with the sentence “amar jonno duÑÉ’ korben” make duÑÉ’ for me, which sounded un-usual, because though Hindu and Muslims use the same language for everyday life there are some vocabularies that are used by Muslims only and generally Hindus do not use that same word which is deemed a natural trend of having some Hindunized vocabularies, though very few, among the Muslims, meaning that there are some vocabularies for Muslims and some other of that for Hindus; as Afia Dil says this way:

Scholars have been aware of communal dialects of Bengali for a long time though a systematic study of these dialects was never taken up as a subject of scholarly investigation. As early as 1853, Rev. James Long spoke of the speech of the Muslims as being appreciably different from that of the Hindus: “They speak Bengali but with a considerable admixture of Persian and Urdu terms”.

And duÑÉ’ is one of them which is solely used by Muslims and usually Hindus are not heard to use this word, instead they use ‘ashirbad’ or ‘prarthona’, though the latter words mean the same, i.e. are synonyms, Muslims are not that comfortable to use them in their conversation of daily life, similarly it sounds odd when a Hindu pronounces duÑÉ’ in his conversation instead of ‘ashirbad’ or ‘prarthona’, now the noteworthy point here is that it indicates their intimacy that how close these two communities are that they – Hindus- very comfortably, without hesitation, use their counter parts word instead of their own, they do not mind at all to say ‘Allah’ the Muslims’ vocabulary instead of ‘Vogoban’ that usually Hindus take for God.

This mutual respect and tolerance of Bangladeshi people is supported by the statement of the respondent 2 who is of the opinion that the people of this region is actually influenced by Lalan-philosophy, and Lalan Shah or Lalan Fakir was a famous mystic poet and is venerated widely in Bangladesh and West Bengal of India who is, in Bangladeshi culture, considered as an icon of religious tolerance and whose songs inspired many poets, social and religious thinkers including Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam and Allen Ginsberg and who is called a mystic and

15 [http://www.amardeshonline.com/pages/details/2015/03/15/275458#.VXgulvmqdkp]
17 Respondent 3, 6, 7, 8, and 13 appendix 1.
metaphysical saint. It should be mentioned here that this Lalan Fakir was a Bengali philosopher, poet, folk singer and humanist. His poetry articulated in songs are considered classics of the Bangla language, he was nothing but a simple realistic man who had passionate love for mankind and preferred to help and make them aware and conscious of their destiny- almost all of his songs reveal these facts. The melodies, tunes and themes of his Baul songs\(^{17}\) in Bangla reflect the metaphysical philosophy as well as the natural beauty, social reality and the facts of common people of Bangladesh\(^{18}\). However, the current respondent was saying that the people of this region is actually influenced by the Lalan trend of philosophy which teaches for mutual love and respect for others therefore people of different communities here are tolerant and respectful for others, as reflected in his statement regarding religious freedom quoted below:

“and the special character of the people of this region is to tolerate others’ opinion, and when Sufis came in this region, the Lalan trend of Sufism is the combination of Hindu Buddhist and Muslim philosophy, the philosophy of Lalan is concise version of these three that reflect the blended tenet of them”.

However, religious freedom is prevailing absolutely there in Bangladesh- this theme is categorically challenged or has disagreement with by some quarters who are of the opinion that this freedom of religion is actually conditional, they argue that when the religious rituals like puja orchona are held without any administrative support or police cordon then only we can say that freedom of religion is enjoyed there as it means literally, but instead he mentioned Malaysia and Indonesia which are not Hindu Majority countries; now question is as a Hindu majority country, the Hindus in India can conduct their Puja Orchona without police cordon or external security? Different documents and report say they cannot, in every religious festivals special security and police are provided to let the occasion go trouble free\(^{19}\). So, if the Hindu majority country can deploy police to control any untoward incident without defaming the status of their religious freedom then why the same thing should taint that of a Hindu minority country, Bangladesh? Secondly, as he mentioned Malaysia and Indonesia as example of religiously harmonious countries, did not there happen any attack on the minorities? There are many evidences tell us that minorities have been attacked there\(^{20}\) though the world acknowledges that those two countries are religiously harmonious and peaceful, where attack on minorities was not that accountable, it was just itsy-bitsy matter which is very typical, so, for these incidents one cannot say that Malaysia does not have religious freedom, definitely Malaysia has very good religious freedom, now, despite having the record of attacking minorities, if Malaysia can be termed as a religiously harmonious country then, for the same background, why cannot Bangladesh be the same? So, police cordon does not mean that there is no religious harmony in Bangladesh. Furthermore, this police cordon is seen not for Hindus only, but rather for the majority people Muslims too, in their different religious events, therefore, the researcher cannot agree with the view of the aforesaid respondent who believes that if there is any room to raise a question of religious freedom then it should be the Muslims because the current government has imposed different restrictions on them and curtailed their religious freedom in various ways\(^{21}\).

\(^{17}\) A kind of folk song that reflects the fusion of both Hindu bhakti movements as well as the Sufi songs.


\(^{21}\) Daily news papers during the BAL government bear myriads of evidences of curtailing religious freedom for the Muslims where Islamic books, literature, even possessing the holy Qur’En is often considered an offence.
Finally what we can say about this religious freedom is that we get mixed reaction on this issue and if we go for percentage of the respondents of both sides, negative and positive, then 90% or more than that of the respondents we find spoke positively showing their satisfaction and intimacy with their counterpart, while the rest of the respondents expressed their anger against a handful quarter of fanatics and fundamentalists whom they blame for breaking harmony. Using the word ‘fundamentalist’ actually they point to the Islamic parties and especially the ‘Jamate Islami Bangladesh’22 but if someone goes or tries to dig out who those fundamentalists are who break peace, then usually it is found that they actually belong to leftist political party instead, but because of their weakness to that particular political party they vent their wrath in that way using the word ‘fundamentalist’, knowing very well that those criminals and miscreants belong to the party they themselves are loyal to, as expressed by the respondents number 3, 17 and 18 in the appendix 1 they are blaming the miscreants without indicating the identity of those miscreants because of these respondents’ loyalty to a political party to which those miscreants belong to, like what a Senior Minister of the current government of Bangladesh, who hails from Hindu community, vented his wrath softly in a speech on 11th May 2014 stated that Awami League needs self purification instead of blaming BNP and Jamate Islami23, though he holds a high position in the government cannot do anything or cannot take proper action against them because of miscreants’ loyalty to the same party he belongs to. Evidently, these Hindu respondents are not blaming Muslims and thereby ultimately the religion for breaking serenity and bringing chaos some time especially during the Durga puja, the grand annual religious event of Hindu community in Bangladesh; they are actually blaming the mischievous muscle men of their own.

Qurbani or sacrificial slaughtering though means to slaughter any animal during Eid al-Adha, in the context of Bangladesh the word “Qurbani” brings in anyone’s spectrum the scenario of slaughtering cows, though it is not limited to cow only to serve the purpose of pleasing the Creator or following the religious ritual, in the Bangladeshi phenomenon it is felt that this Qurbani is limited to cow slaughtering only because of the scale that so large in number, tens of millions of cows are slaughtered during this religious festival once a year; and coincidently this same cow slaughtering is a sensitive issue to the largest minority community, Hindu in Bangladesh, so, the core idea we find from the respondents’ statements is that this Qurbani ritual should not be so much public and visible since it has both psychological affect for children, sometimes for adults too, and religious sensibility for minority people; almost all the respondents have talked on this issue in same tune not to make it so obvious but rather to accomplish this ritual in restricted area instead, in addition to this core idea it should be noteworthy here to mention that this Qurbani or slaughtering animal is not a strange thing to the Hindus too, they are familiar with this Qurbani since they also have some puja that include sacrificial animal slaughtering, locally known as Pathaboli, slaughtering of billy goat in Kali puja and Monosha puja for instance, as stated by the respondent number 6 given below:

“No, it does not hurt our religious feeling actually, but in our Shonaton religion we take this cow as the “Vishnu”, therefore, [...] blood-shedding [...] even among Muslims also there are many ones who do not dare to see that slaughtering and blood-shedding, it involves heartbeat, psychological factors function there, in our religion too has a sacrificial ‘billy goat slaughtering’.

However, two significant ideas we can extract from the respondents’ statements, one is, for the purpose of Qurbani, Muslims should choose any four footed animal instead of solely a cow, because it hurts them to see the cows are being tied up and slaughtered which is very much revered to them and since there is flexibility in Islam that tells to take any four footed animal for Qurbani, it is not limited to cow only rather camel, buffalo, goat or sheep, anyone can serve the purpose. What the respondent number 9 has expressed in this regard is worthy of mention here as quoted below:

“...for the purpose of Qurbani it should be any four footed animal, so, four footed is not limited to the cow only, there are lot of four footed animals, like camel, goat and sheep etc, these can serve for the Qurbani”.

Whatever he narrated about this issue of Qurbani simply reflects his human attitude which is really appreciable, he likes to uphold this attitude above all, therefore, it should be a good suggestion for the government of Bangladesh to think for ways that what else way can accomplish this grand ritual of Qurbani without hurting anyone of the land.

The second significant idea regarding this Qurbani is to find scientific way of slaughtering cows; it is very natural that when we love someone or something we feel very sad when we find our loved one is in adverse situation and since this cow is very much revered animal, in fact their mother god, so, simply they feel sad when they see it is being slaughtered, so, if this can be done in a scientific way at least reduces the pathetic scene, therefore the idea of scientific way has the merit to take into account and though Bangladesh is not that advanced in terms of scientific and technological utilities, fortunately there is an initiation recently made already by a private company, Bengal Meat\(^{24}\), that fits the suggestion and we can hope that in the future Bangladesh the expected scenario will be prevailing when people will rush to the Qurbani service providing industries that initiated Bengal Meat and thereby the scenario of cow slaughtering en masse will be disappearing gradually.

Respondents were asked whether or not they find any positive side of Islam or valuable religious practice in Islam that attracts them to Islam; almost all of the respondents unanimously expressed their positive feelings and enthusiasm for Islam especially they appreciate the stand of Islam on equality- treating everyone equally without any discrimination between poor and rich, elite and proletariat- and they strongly applaud its stand against racism which was and still is a problem among Hindus. The core idea about this theme provided by the maximum respondents is the equality that Islam has brought about, they all praise and commend the position of Islam on this equivalence that Islam has raised the human being far beyond any form of discriminations leading to the equality which is the most remarkable thing in Islam; as we can find in the statement of the respondent number 4 given below:

> Three aspects of Islam are felt distinguished and highly valuable to me, these three are peace, equality and empathy, because in different region the discrimination that we find like caste and creed system, Islam has raised the human being far beyond these discriminations.

What the respondent number 5 has expressed in this regard is really worthy of mention, he aspires if all the religions could hold up this equality that Islam has brought about as mentioned in his statement:

> Definitely I find, and all religions should bear this. In Islam we find that during prayer, during other rituals, during meal (iftar) they all do together which bears the testimony of equivalence, considering all these one is to say that these are the positive side of Islam.

> I cannot but to quote what the respondent number 8 has expressed in this regard given below:

> “……definitely they are numerous, especially what I like is the equivalence that Islam has, where there is no discrimination among human being, all are seen equally, and the thing I like most is that when they pray solat, they all stand in the same line irrespective of junior, senior, rich and poor, without any discrimination”.

And I feel forced to mention here what the respondent number 2 has said in line with this equality of Islam, as stated below:

> “….. all the lower caste Hindus warmly welcomed him with Uludhoni\(^{25}\) who were the victims of discrimination and injustice for long time, they thought that finally they got release from the oppression, equality which is the most remarkable thing in Islam”.

However, the significant idea about this current theme we find from the respondents’ statement is the system of Zakat in Islam; they laud this system of zakat in Islam which is incredibly a wonderful system to bring financial equality in the society as nicely stated the respondent number 14 given below:

> “And definitely I can see in Islam some aspects that are very positive, like the provision of Zakat, it is the unbalanced distribution of financial affairs, it brings a balance among the two extreme sides”.


\(^{25}\)It is an ululation which is a long, wavering, high-pitched vocal sound resembling a howl with a thrilling quality. It is produced by emitting a high pitched loud voice accompanied with a rapid movement of the tongue and the uvula. The term ululation is an onomatopoetic word derived from Latin. It is produced by moving the tongue, rapidly, back and forth repetitively in the mouth while producing a sharp sound.
Almost similar opinion we find in the statement of the respondent number 2 that Zakat system could be the proper apparatus for poverty alleviation and bringing economic equality- which is very much befitting to Bangladeshi context- according to him, it is really a remarkable element to remove the disproportion of financial imbalance and to bring equivalence as is in his statement below:

“….. here the idea came in mind about Zakat the injunction of Zakat in Islam, if maintained, [...] then the inequality of wealth among men, the disproportion of wealth among men shall vanish mostly, so, it is a remarkable issue (to my understanding), [...] and this is the fundamental cause of Islam”.

The second significant idea can be obtained from the statements of the respondents is the custom or rituals in Islam they like, as expressed by many respondents, the ḥalāt and the ‘wuṭūʾ’ Muslims make before ḥalāt; they appreciate these because they play a good role to cleanliness and to brotherhood, in ḥalāt they find people from different strata in the same line without any discrimination or inequity; senior-junior, rich-poor and elite-laymen is totally disregarded there, this point of Islam they find so amazing as stated by the respondent number 7 given below:

“In the Islamic rituals what I observed like solat, if regularly it is maintained by someone, he/she definitely will be a good person”.

The third significant idea is that the Hindu people certifies this fasting of Islam a good element for physical fitness and is not peculiar or strange to them, they too have the same thing performed in different ways; the respondent number16 provides us this significant idea as quoted below:

“The good side of Islam that I observed is that they fast once a year, this fasting is good for physical fitness, bodily fitness, and interestingly this ritual of fasting is available in our Hindu society too, I think this fasting is appropriate for all”.

1.1.1 Summary

It is an unanimous and undisputed opinion of all Hindus that the myth of Muslim entry to Hindu house makes the house profane –is a sheer superstition which has no religious base, during the interview of this study allowing interviewer into their house, and most significantly, into their Mandir, they have proved it practically which bears the strongest evidence that it is merely a superstition and no more they comply with this baseless legendary story, therefore, we can assume that this superstition is faded away. Secondly, the proselytization is not the nature of Muslims in Bangladesh as has been reflected in the interview though some Hindu respondents tried to counter it showing the love-marriage doctrine which can no way stand to its opponent when counter evidence is forwarded because this love-marriage is not one sided, i.e. not the monopoly of Muslim boy and Hindu girl only, records of its reverse side also prevalent in the society, for example we may refer to Avijit Roy, a Bangladeshi US citizen who was a Hindu and married to Rafida Ahmed Banya, a Muslim girl for instance26, so, the love marriage is not limited to Hindu girl and Muslim boy anyway as those respondents tried to claim rather it takes both side as well, so the love-marriage doctrine as a means of proselytization cannot get the currency in Bangladesh anyway. Thirdly, the religious freedom in Bangladesh, especially for minorities, is in its height and far beyond any question, and if there is any room to counter this phenomenon then it is the Muslims who can raise question against religious freedom because during the stipulated period of this research (2010-2015) Muslims are, in fact, experiencing restrictions in their religious freedom in various ways 27. Fourthly, the suggestion made by these Hindu respondents concerning the cow slaughtering en masse should be welcomed by the government of Bangladesh since all parties would be, hopefully, benefited from it if can be actualized, their suggestion to perform the ibadah of Qurbani in restricted area has really the value to consider. And finally, Hindu community in Bangladesh really deserves due appreciation from the majority community, Muslims, for having good understanding about Islam and frankly admitting different aspects of Islam as very much humanistic and as such having merits to be the role models28 as stated by some Hindu respondents in the appendix 1.

28Respondent number 2, appendix 1.
1.2 Social Perspective

Social aspect is the relationship developed by the individuals through interactions with other people in the society; and society includes all aspects of life that people choose to share with one another and this sharing varies according to the relationship and intimacy between them, if we take a scale to measure this sharing we may say that exchange of greetings is the lowest level of sharing, for instance, and the marriage or inter-marriage should be regarded as the culminating aspect of societal norms, mores and sharing; normally people like to share foods among them when there is good friendship and intimacy prevalent, so, to know the social mores between these two communities - Hindu and Muslim - these two questions related to food-sharing and intermarriage were asked in the interview to know the inter-community societal bond of Hindu and Muslim in Bangladesh that helps to have idea about their closeness and affinity that subsequently discloses whether they try to adapt and minimize the gap between them or otherwise. Though the question was related to whether they eat or take Muslim food, not directly share their food with Muslim, there was a connotation of food sharing between them in an ultimate sense. However, the core idea about this theme is that no one has any objection to take their counter part’s food unless it is any particular item that considered religiously sensitive like beef or cow-meat, other than this there is no hesitation of Hindu people of Bangladesh in taking food cooked by Muslims which is regular and a common phenomenon all over the land, Hindus are eating in Muslim restaurant and Muslims also doing the same though mostly the dried food, like sweetmeat, parata, etc. not the solid food like rice, curry, biryani, etc. for the same reason the Hindus have too, the religious sensitivity. So, generally they do not have any restriction in this regard unless it has any religious sensibility as reflected in the statements of the respondents; here we may quote the respondent number 9 to assume their opinion in this issue as given below:

“There is no such religious edict that Muslim’s food cannot be taken, no such religious decree, but there are some foods that Hindu religion has prohibition on them,…….like cow meat or beef and onion”

And we find that both the communities have mutual understanding too concerning to what type of foods they can take and what not as reflected in the statement of the respondent number 10 and 5 quoted below respectively:

“Yes, definitely can, I do not have any objection, must do eat I, I can eat at his house and he too can eat at my house, he is a man and me too a man”.

“.….they might have some limitations, but it is not an obstacle for the common men like us”.

To show their mutual understanding in this ongoing issue I feel impressed to quote here the statement given by the respondent number 4 given below:

“The way that I do not insist my Muslim friends to take the food that religiously forbidden similarly I myself also do not take the food that Hindu religion forbids”.

However, we find two significant ideas too in the statements of their response; one is that in this particular issue their concern about hygienic and scientific orientation is more than that of religious concern, i.e. if the food is clean and scientifically okay then forget about religion, no problem to take this food and no matter whether it is Muslim food or others’, but if the food is prepared without maintaining the cleanliness and hygienic manner then there is problem to take that food even though prepared by Hindus, no relation to religion as stated by the respondent number 11 given below:

“.….but if we find it scientifically polluted cooked by whether Hindus or Muslims or any other race, no matter, to take that food definitely has problem”.

The other significant idea is that other than cleanliness it is actually a matter of trust and confidence, religion does not matter that much, if you have friendship and confidence on the person with good character then there is no problem taking their food, there is no question of whether the person is Muslim or Hindus, as stated by the respondent number 3 quoted below:

29 Question number 5 and 8 in the appendix 1.
Actually the thing is, the foremost and first thing is the cleanliness and purification, now if it is given from love and affection, like Dr. Marufi Khan himself in the occasion of Eid, cooking food sends for us, we take it, why we take it? Because we have intimacy”.

And concerning the question of intermarriage what we find is that though religiously there is no objection from them in Hindu-Muslim intermarriage but that is not their choice too and they do not feel comfortable despite having been it current in Bangladesh, even the record of intermarriage between Hindu boy and Muslim girl is quite considerable\(^3\), so, the core idea concerning this issue is that religion is not a barrier for Hindu-Muslim intermarriage, their religion does not impose any restriction but the problem is that the society that currently they have is not ready yet to accept this Hindu-Muslim intermarriage, and according to the respondent number 3, the one and only reason for this un-acceptance is the lack of education, so, when the society will be educated, it is expected that, this intermarriage issue will be like any other general aspects in the society and consequently this current phenomenon will disappear from Bangladesh since people are getting educated gradually as has been reflected in his statement quoted below:

“Actually the marriage affair is a social affair, if our society is highly educated, when this type of problem will no longer prevail, then can it be, but society is currently not that advanced because, when a Hindu boy get married to a Muslim girl or vice versa, parents still cannot take it easily, so, when there will be no social obstacle, then, [...] it is a social affair, it is not related to religion”.

This idea, i.e. when the society will be educated this intermarriage will be accepted to the society is supported by another respondent, number 7 who personally feels not that comfortable with this issue but admits that such intermarriage is prevalent among the elites in Bangladesh who are well cope with the society; meaning that when people will be educated, care for religion, particularly in this issue, will be disregarded as reflected in his statement below:

“…and we found that those who get inter-religiously married many of them are not that much careful about religion or they are reckoned from elite class or in high position in cultural arena, so, for them do not have that problem”.

Though not directly, the respondent number 1 too subtly supports this core idea saying that the days of rigidity are gone already and the equality, equality among men, has taken place instead after the Hindu religious icon, Ishwar Chandra, has transcended Hinduism into a moderate form in this modern days, therefore, this intermarriage has been condoned by the society and acknowledged as we can see in his statement below:

“…but now it is not that rigid, nowadays does not count that much, now it is moderated, after Ishwar Chandra’s modification, after the widow-marriage enactment”.

And the respondent number 2 clearly states that religion does not impose any prohibition in intermarriage saying that this marriage, actually in an ultimate sense, is a natural affair between persons where religion is, or could be, least an obstacle but practically what happens of un-comfortableness is from our cultural differences, culturally we are not that advanced yet to concede it, however, according to him Hindu religion allows for intermarriage as reflected in his statement below:

…if we consider this summary then a young man and a young woman will get married where religion cannot be a hindrance, personally I think religion does not impose any prohibitions, but in fact what happens is the culture…..

This core idea is further supported by the respondent number 6 according to whom religion does not interfere in this issue as such no problem according to Hindu religion but what should be the worry of us is concerning the bond that causes for intermarriage, i.e. love affair in most cases, so, if this love of each other lasts for ever, is maintained lifelong then religion has least place to be involved in this regard as readers may see in his statement below:

…this is world of love where race, religion, caste and creed – nothing matters, this love is like the wave of Atlantic Ocean, if this wave remains lifelong the wave of Atlantic Ocean then there is no problem, but if his fascination ends and that wave of Atlantic Ocean turns into the wave of Burigongya31, for which we are afraid of, for which we do not dare to let such cases take place, otherwise, if there true love can be maintained lifelong then there is no problem from religious side.

The statement of the respondent number 13 overly deserves to be mentioned here which merely supports this core idea, in addition to that, the analysis he makes about human being should really sound very much pleasant to anyone where, based on religion, he does not differentiate among men since, according to him, Creator did not make any differentiation among us we should not make any difference among human being, rather if there is anything that makes us different from one another then it is our sheer deeds, not religion at all, therefore, there is no problem in Hindu-Muslim intermarriage as understood from his statement given below:

….He did not make any division with skin, rather he made division according to their deeds, into four groups where no division as Hindu Buddhist Muslim Christian there if someone from one color gets married to another color or the son of Hindu gets married to the daughter of a Muslim, then I do not think that there is any restriction or prohibition.

Some of the respondents have provided us few significant ideas as well in this issue of Hindu-Muslim intermarriage, to the contrary of the respondent number 2, the respondent number 9 has utterly a reverse opinion in this regard, according to him their religion is in direct opposition to this intermarriage which leads to various problems in the society therefore he is of the opinion that there is no room for Hindu-Muslim intermarriage as his statement tells the readers quoted below:

Of course there are scripture and prohibitions, my religious scripture does not support the marriage between Hindu and Muslim, it does not support, it is anti religious edict and conflicting….

The respondent number 4 too substantiates this significant idea mentioned above saying that Hindu religion does not believe in conversion and as such Hindu-Muslim intermarriage should not be acknowledged any way but this statement seemingly provokes to challenge it since there are many documents and reports of converting non-Hindus to Hinduism countering his statement, even there are many reports tell us that after the Modi government took office in India in 2014, Hindu fanatics became desperate in their actions and systematically converting many non-Hindus to Hinduism, and most remarkably, the Muslims; RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and Bajrang Dal are among the hard-line Hindu groups in India who are declaring publicly their planned conversion program, and out of which, in Agra alone, they have converted more than 350 Muslim in December 2014 in the name of Ghar Wapsi 32(returning home) program, so, it is really hard to believe if some Hindu says that his religion does not believe in conversion as stated by the aforesaid respondent mentioned below:

In our religion, there is religious objection in this regard, because the Shonaton (Hindu) religion never believes in conversion.

However, apart from that conversion, the respondent number 5 has provided us a reasonable idea in this issue of intermarriage saying that not based on religion but rather those are the biological factors that unite them from different religions, though religion has no role there they simply try to fold them with a religion, practically religion is non-essential in intermarriage mostly as reflected in his statement below:

These marriages are actually not happening from the religious angle, or based on their faith, these are taking place because of physical and biological factors, they just tinge some religiosity, and ultimately they cannot establish the religio-sense…..

Finally the respondent number 15 goes one step further than the respondent number 4 in this regard who says that because of this intermarriage –which is not acceptable- not only the person, got internarried, the whole family too is

31 A river in Bangladesh beside the capital city, Dhaka
boycotted in their society let alone accept it, therefore, it has a severe consequences and as such leaves no room for intermarriage at all as has been revealed in his statement below:

….because she is getting converted automatically, and if she gets converted to Islam, then, since we have to live in the society, so, if a girl shuns his religion, then her family and she both fall in problem, they are boycotted from the society, since society cannot accept this one, so, we have to follow societal rule.

1.2.1 Summary
The account of social aspects concerning food-sharing and intermarriage that the Hindu respondents provided us is that generally they do not have any objection in taking Muslim food unless it has any religious sensibility as reflected in the statements of the respondents; and concerning the question of intermarriage what we find is that though religiously there is no objection in Hindu-Muslim intermarriage and though it is current in Bangladesh they do not like it happen to them as well, so, religion is not a barrier for this intermarriage, their religion does not impose any restriction but the problem is that the society, currently they are living in, is not ready yet to acknowledge this Hindu-Muslim intermarriage, therefore, this intermarriage is disliked by them.

1.3 Cultural Perspective
Culturally the history of Bangladesh cannot be separated from the area in which the majority of the people speak the Bangla language. Bengal was invaded at various times for imperialistic, trading, and proselytizing purposes. In the midst of these varied extraneous influences, various indigenous cultural practices continued in there\textsuperscript{33}, thus, local elements have mingled with Islam creating a distinct Bengali culture drawing from Bengal’s multicultural and syncretic past. So, it has a long history of its culture and customs. Its daily life is replete with traditions and festivals that reflect the unique culture and tradition of Bangladeshis. Some of the tradition and customs are as ancient as prehistoric days, while others are relatively recent. The indigenous customs and festivals that has been preserved and nurtured through the ages are principally center around agricultural practices which include Nobanno\textsuperscript{34} and Pohela Boishakh\textsuperscript{35}. Religion has also played a distinct role in shaping the mores and traditions of Bangladeshi life.

Now, as a Bangladeshi nation, Hindu or Muslim, speaking the same language, do they have any uniting culture? What is the cultural event that binds them together and brings them closer?-was intended to know from the interview through this cultural question “whether their religion encourages celebrating ’Nobo Borsho’ or not?”

Nobo Borsho is the celebration of New Year of Bangla calendar which is celebrated nationally with huge enthusiasm attended by the all walks of life irrespective of race, religion, and ethnic differences; it is an occasion to welcome the New Year with a new hope of peace, prosperity and goodwill. It is a national holiday celebrated around mid April of the Gregorian calendar and its celebrations and festivities simply reflect the life in rural Bangladesh and this is the cultural event that unite them- Hindu Muslim- together and bring them closer; however this question “whether their religion encourage celebrating ‘Nobo Borsho’ or not” was asked in the interview to know whether religiously they have any restriction or not, since Muslim religious leaders or the Ulema feel uncomfortable, keep silence or talk against this issue, Muslim scholars do not recommend to celebrate this in the manner that usually it takes place, because they find many un-Islamic elements\textsuperscript{36} – like the masks of different animals for instance-prevaling in the manner this nobo borsho is celebrated; however, the core idea found from the respondents’ answers clearly says that religiously Hindus do not have any restriction celebrating this nobo borsho, rather their religion encourages to celebrate it, not only that but they have some religious functions related to this Pohela Boishakh too, as stated by the respondent number 3 in the appendix 1 that they conduct congregational worship including Japmala, praising Ishwar, and devotional songs or hymns, and thereby pass the day with all good deeds expecting that the rest of the days of the year will be good as well, as given in his statement below:

Bangla nobo borsho is actually a cultural affair, not religious, but on that day since many people gather here, so, we congregationally conduct jopmala, praising Ishwar, praying, and devotional songs are staged, so, in that special occasion, we can perform extra religious rituals, so, we look at that cultural occasion from religious angle…

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\textsuperscript{33} Karim, Abdul, 1959. Social history of the Muslims in Bengal (down to AD 1538), Dacca: The Asiatic Society of Pakistan, pp. 84-139.

\textsuperscript{34} The festival of the new harvest

\textsuperscript{35} The Bengali New Year

\textsuperscript{36} http://www.al-ihsan.net/fulltext.aspx?subid=4&textid=8671, accessed on 20\textsuperscript{th} November 2015.
The respondent number 6 goes further saying that many Hindus perform Ganesha Puja on that particular day and some others perform Laxmi puja; Laxmi in Sanskrit or Bangla means good omen, in fact it is a Hindu deity which they worship, so, performing this Laxmi puja on this day they expect that they will be having the grace of Laxmi over the year coming; those who perform Ganesha puja are usually business men who run their business on credit, and on the first day of Bangla calendar they open their new record book (Halkhata) for their clients who visit them to pay the dues for the whole year passed and get entertained by the business men with refreshments including sweetmeat and light snacks, subsequently a festive mode is felt in this Nobo borsho day, as such the respondent confirms that the celebration of this Pohela Boishak is part of their religion, as we can find these in his statement below:

...it is in our religion solely a legal practice, and accordingly this nobo borsho is celebrated in our religion.

This view, mentioned above, is shared by both respondent number 4 and 5; according to respondent number 4 this nobo borsho celebration has two aspects one is religious that includes performing Ganesha puja or Laxmi puja and the other one is social aspect that includes stage songs, road march with masks of different animals, feast of Pantha Elish, visiting friends; here only religious part is celebrated by Hindus alone but rest of the events are participated by both Hindus and Muslims alike, as stated in his statement below:

...it has two aspects, means Hindus celebrate this Pohela boishakh through some religious rituals which is a part of it...

And the respondent number 5 in the appendix 1 affirms that no religion should discourage the celebration of new year, according to him since all the Bangla speaking people have the same culture and and same deliberation they have a nexus and a uniting bond and this very Bangla nobo borsho inculcate within themselves the sympathy, harmony, mutual affection and love and as such it has become an inevitable event for all Bangladeshis as we find in his own statement given below:

In celebrating Bangla nobo borsho, Hindu religion does not discourage, in fact, no religion should have done it, because, in this particular issue we the Bangla speaking people, who because of being of the same culture and same deliberation, have a uniting bond and nexus, thus, this Bangla nobo borsho cultivates among us the sympathy, harmony, mutual affection.

However, the significant idea about this theme is what the respondent number 10 expressed that this nobo borsho can be a day of reflection of the interreligious harmony for all Bangladeshis, because in this occasion attend with great enthusiasm all walks of life irrespective of their color, race, religion and ethnic differences, as we can see in his statement given below:

Of course, it encourages celebrating, this can be a day of interreligious harmony, we all gather in Dhaka city irrespective of our color, race, religion, caste and creed.

Another significant idea about this nobo borsho is that naturally we do not like Western culture though our culture encounters the Western culture intermittently we love to be with our own culture defying all the illusions and fascinations of Western culture, so, this nobo borsho or Pohela Boishakh is a reminder for all Bangladeshis that we have our own culture which is very pleasant and we do not like Western culture, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist alike, as stated by the responded number 13 given below:

...we feel more comfortable to celebrate that day in Bengali manner, because we ourselves are Bengalees, in this Bengali society we do not like that Western mores interferes....

1.3.1 Summary:
Various indigenous cultural practices mingling with Islamic culture created a distinct Bengali culture that has a long history and its daily life is replete with traditions and festivals that reflect the unique culture and tradition of Bangladeshis, Hindus and Muslims alike. However, throughout the narrations above the picture reflected is that religiously Hindus do not have any restriction celebrating this nobo borsho, rather their religion encourages to celebrate it, in addition to that they have some religious functions related to this Pohela Boishak too, let alone
having any dispute; they conduct congregational worship including Japmala, praising Ishwar, and devotional songs or hymns, and thereby pass the day with all good deeds instead, so, they are of the opinion that no religion should discourage the celebration of new year, let alone disagreement with it which inculcate sympathy, harmony and mutual love and affection for one another as such it has become an inevitable event for all Bangladeshis.

1.4 Political Perspective:
In the context of Bangladesh, politics is an integral aspect of social life, it is so much ingrained to them that almost all people are related to politics in either way, no matter whether he/she is adult or minor, literate or illiterate, rich or poor for their involvement in politics; the very environment where they grow up is very much fertile for being politically oriented, there are many political leaders in the contemporary political parties who joined politics as early as at the age of 15 years old\(^{37}\), so, people of Bangladesh always are very much concerned of politics. It is such a country where one will find none or least aspects that are devoid of politics even the collapse of Rana Plaza, a garment factory, is not spared from the political stunts\(^{38}\). If that is the situation then no one can expect that a sensitive issue like decrease of the number of Hindus can be spared from the clutch of politics, therefore, in the interview of this research the question “What is the reason, you think, for gradually decreasing the number of Hindus in Bangladesh?” was asked to know to what extent they do relate this issue with politics since there is a connotation of politics in this question itself and it was most sensitive question asked to the respondents. However, the core idea about this theme found from the statements of the respondents is that the reason for the decrease of their number is mostly political, either he/she is a victim of political retribution, or a victim of revenge taken against them for opposing any influential person in the community or elsewhere; in addition to that the feeling of insecurity also leads them migrate to other countries and thereby decreases their number. To support this idea we can quote here the statement given by the respondent number 6 given below:

The reason for this, if you think deeply then it is completely a political reason, fully it is for political reason….

The respondent number 16 also has the same opinion for the decrease of their number that prior to general election when the political environment becomes very much tumultuous Hindus face various adverse situations including torture on them; he mentioned clearly that the perpetrators are the Muslim extremists who causes their desperation, however, subtly he left a clue in his statement saying that “those who bear the humanity no matter whether he is a Hindu or he is a Muslim, they actually never commit this”, and in the context of current Bangladesh if a systematic inquiry is carried out to investigate and identify who those culprits are usually it shows that all those culprits are backed up by the ruling party\(^{39}\), however, this is the core idea that the reason for the decrease of their number in Bangladesh is political as reflected in the statement of the above mentioned respondent quoted below:

….generally we the Hindus are tortured, actually I do not blame any party, this is actually done by some extremist Muslims, they actually do this, these are the people who perpetrate torture on Hindus for their material gain, but those who bear the humanity no matter whether he is a Hindu or he is a Muslim, they actually never commit this…

It is felt that Hindus in Bangladesh are currently in a dilemma since the party, they have trusted is in government despite that they are being tortured in different ways, their voices are not heard, their concerns are not paid any heed, all the injustices done to them, all the attacks perpetrated against them, not a single case of those attacks and atrocities on minorities in the country had ever faced any trial -a ruling party MP from Hindu community Mr. Suranjit Sen Gupta was heard complaining this to the Government he himself is a part of-\(^{40}\), and obliquely they are actually blaming the government of not employing its due justice to them; they are in dilemma because neither they can oppose publicly their beloved government of BAL, the solitary party that the majority of Hindus have trusted, neither can bear the agonies they are facing day by day, as reflected in the statement of the respondent number 8, though not obviously but rather subtly, shown below:


\(^{38}\) http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/epaper/2013/05/04/files/fe%2004%20may%202013.pdf  see also,http://bangladeshchronicle.net/2013/05/05/remove-alamgir-from-cabinet/ accessed on 23rd November 2015.


The reason for decreasing this number [...] Hindus who are leaving this country, for whatever reason, they feel inadequacy of security, in this regard what I would like to say is that government has a responsibility to find out why Hindus are leaving this country....

The same desperation, disappointment and the same urgence of Hindu community, as mentioned above, is reflected in the statement of the respondent number 9 mentioned below:

.....therefore, I think the government should be watchful about these cases, and since there is no law to protect the minorities, they are being tortured every now and then....

Some other respondents pointed their finger to the local opportunists for causing the decrease of the number of Hindus in Bangladesh which is in another way manifests the political reason, because this local opportunists are those who take the advantage of their loyalty to a political party which is influential i.e. in government; meaning that they have political back up that leads them dare in indulging different misdemeanors easily, in other words those opportunists and thugs easily harbor into illegal acts and engage into corrupt activities because of their sheer political back up, as the respondent number 7 informs us in his statement below:

Reasons for it [...] multifarious reasons are there, some are of related to local opportunists who suppose [...] for land and properties or material gain, suppose different way terrifying them, threatening them, or some other way they swindle them, and forcefully buy their land and properties and compel them to leave the country..

As mentioned earlier that the feeling of insecurity is also a reason for the decrease of their number but this feeling of insecurity is general, not for any particular community, Hindu-Muslims are alike, this insecurity grips those who are comparatively weak and have no political back up, so, after being the victim of insecurity among the Hindus who are well-to-do simply migrate to other countries consequently their number decreases as reflected in the statement of the respondent number 3 given below:

This actually not only in Bangladesh, in other countries also, where Muslims are minority, there actually the majority tortures the minority...

However, the significant idea about this issue is provided by the respondent number 11 who is of the opinion that neither religious nor political or torturing are reasons behind this but rather it is simply a “leaving spree” developed deeply in their mind to migrate to other side for a better life causes the decrease, he was asserting this from his good experience that those who left Bangladesh for India were lured by the rumore that they will be financially gainer if migrate to India which finally they realized was merely a baseless rumore as we can see in his statement below:

Me with my current experience, with the experience of my past, those who went there actually went with the flow or spree of leaving, just in spree....

The second significant idea provides us the respondent number 15 who finds the conversion from Hindu to Islam is the main reason behind this decrease, categorically he denied to have any proselytization attempt on him from Muslims but he firmly believes that this proselytization is the big reason for decreasing their number in Bangladesh as shown in his statement below though evidently this claim does not garner that much supports:

Definitely there are various reasons out of which one is like conversion is taking place different ways, but not targeted me to convince me for conversion....

But the third significant idea is opposed to the second significant idea, which is totally a different view on this issue, according to this position discrimination against Hindus in terms of their business and job oriented matters are the factors behind their migration that subsequently decreases their number in Bangladesh, it is not related to intermarriage, torture or any other religious factors as described by other respondents but rather it is a sheer discrimination against them as reflected in the statement of the respondent number 14 given below:

.....but the source of Hindus for business, job, and job oriented matters are left a bit cornered, for this reason day by day some Hindus are leaving....
However, the fourth significant idea on this issue is quite interesting provided by the respondent number 17 in the appendix 1 who centers the reason of the decrease to the polygamy of Muslims, though rationally not that strong since polygamy is, now a days in Bangladesh, not that much current rather frowned at those who go for polygamy, he is claiming that Muslims men marry up to four wives as such they get many children increasing their number geometrically, on the other hand Hindus stuck always to monogamy and no way can compete with Muslims reproducing their children as such decreasing their number in the final sense; this view was found from the aforementioned respondent after he was asked why the number of Hindus are decreasing day by day in Bangladesh, as quoted below his statement:

…and what we heard and learnt is that instead of one they marry four, they are increasing in number, and we are stuck always in one marriage……

1.4.1 Summary
But there are many rebuttals that counter the argument of the aforesaid respondent’s polygamy doctrine that this polygamy is no more a hidden but rather an open secret affair among Bangladeshi Hindus, therefore, this opinion is quite irrelevant to say the least; we may refer to a Bangladeshi Hindu woman who became frenzied to voice out against the Hindu social customs that are oppressing them, who vehemently criticizes the Hindu social order after being a victim of it, according to her Hindu women are oppressed and are living as sub-human in very disgraceful and deplorable condition within their own social tradition in Bangladesh where she frankly disclose the truth about the polygamy of Hindus in Bangladesh.

However, whatever reasons are provided by the respondents behind the decrease of Hindus in Bangladesh, whether it is political reason, insecurity, discrimination, Muslim’s polygamy or even Hindus’ migration spree, one thing is clear that on one is blaming religion and as such not caliming that communal factors are causing behind the decrease, so, thanks to the respondents for not pointing their fingers against religious harmony that prevails in Bangladesh, which is a role model as stated by Pankaj Saran.

1.5 Conclusion
As mentioned earlier in the introduction of this chapter that the Hindu-Muslim friendship is always remarkable at the individual and grassroot level; Muslims taking care of their Hindu neighbors in their bad times and in any crisis time is not a strange phenomenon but rather it was always and still is a usual practice of Bangladeshi Muslims, myriads of evidences tell us that at the grassroot-level all the minority groups are very friendly with their Muslim neighbors, especially Hindnu and Muslims have a continuous history of living together, cooperating with each other and of simply being together, the picture we find from the interviews of these distinguished Hindu personalities in all these religious, social, cultural and political aspects tell us that they also substantiate what are in different documents, their intimacy is so much so that in some remote areas we find that Hindus made a Muslim man the president of a puja committee! in the astonishment of many which can be a mind boggling issue to the outer world but that is the fact of Hindu Muslim friendship that prevails to the Bangla speaking people, perhaps it would be noteworthy to excerpt some portion of the report that the Daily Star, the widely circulated and most popular English daily in Bangladesh, has made recently on 23rd October 2015 quoted below:

“We organise the puja, eat and share the joy jointly,” said Basiruddin Bhuyan, President of the Puja Committee. “Even your question comes unusual to me, because I have never faced such query in my locality that how a Muslim could be a puja committee president,” he said.

So, simply what it means is that they feel that all of them are members of a big family, no matter whether their religious background is same or not. However, from the interview of these Hindu personalities concerning these religious, cultural, social and political aspects whatever scenario is reflected, we can say that Hindus do not want to separate themselves from their Muslim counterpart, the majority people of the country. They love this country, they

love to live in this country they like to die in this country too, because this is their birth place and as such their motherland.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that many Hindus, in the mean time, do not feel secure in Bangladesh as heard from some of the respondents’ statement too but their insecurity in present-day Bangladesh is, perhaps, mainly due to economic, not communal factors\textsuperscript{47}. Many Bangladeshi Muslims, in fact a lot more, are also victims of this economic oppression. The oppression occurs because these people are underprivileged and disadvantaged, making them easy prey for the privileged and the powerful ones, despite that it did not shake the bond of their communal harmony as testified even by the Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Pankaj Saran, in an event at Munshiganj, recently said Bangladesh is a role model in communal harmony\textsuperscript{48}. He has been in Bangladesh for over three years, and therefore must have spoken from a position of authority with the sort of access to intelligence reports.

On the other hand, it is also observed that some Hindus, particularly the well off ones, are an unmitigated opportunist class in Bangladesh and excessively pampered by the BAL government to secure their vote bank. These Hindus just use this country as their earning post and have least concern for this country. There are many Hindu government employees, retired secretaries and other serving bureaucrats maintain double establishments; one in Bangladesh and the other in India the former is a makeshift one and the latter is permanent which too is a reason for the decrease of their number in Bangladesh\textsuperscript{49}. These Hindu government employees are comparatively more corrupt than their Muslim counterparts because they need extra income for maintaining the Indian establishment. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Shekh Hasina knows it far better than anyone else for which she once told the representatives of Hindu community in London to stop keeping their legs on two boats simultaneously\textsuperscript{50}. They not only commit treachery to this country but put the poorer section of Hindu community in danger as they lack the financial capability to migrate to India and live there from the earnings from here. They have no option but to stay here and have to bear the full brunt of hatred of the majority community caused by the treachery of affluent opportunist Hindus, as these pictures have been reflected in the interviews of Hindu respondents who are blaming the fundamentalists instead for their insecurity.

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\textsuperscript{47} Respondent 16, appendix 1


\textsuperscript{49} Respondent 3, appendix 2.

\textsuperscript{50} Dhaka Tribune, opcit.

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