Muslims’ Perception of Hindus in Bangladesh
Md. Asadur Rahman
PhD in Comparative Religion, International Islamic University, Malaysia
Corresponding Author: Md. Asadur Rahman, E-mail: imnobody135@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT
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.

1. INTRODUCTION
Many of the cultural practices of Bangladeshi Muslims are in direct opposition to the religious practices of Muslims elsewhere. For example, many Bangladeshi women wear a traditional accessory known as a tilak. The tilak is a decorative dot placed on the forehead. Although the wearing of such an accessory is frowned upon in Islam, the practice of wearing this tilak is pervasive in Bangladesh. The tilak’s origin lies in the Hindu practice of wearing a red dot on the forehead to signify that a woman is married, and thus ‘off limits’. As mentioned in the introduction of chapter three that socially there is a good Hindu-Muslim friendship out of which Muslims go to Hindu shadhu for seeking his blessings or having traditional treatment for illness, visit their pujas, receive their hospitality that seemingly goes against the norm of Islam, but in the mean time, these are the culture of Bangladeshi people prevalent from time immemorial, so, this study tried to know, from the religious angle, how Muslims take these socio-cultural aspects; in addition to that, since in the recent past, many atrocities against minority community especially Hindu community have been committed by the Muslims which can obviously lead to develop a cleavage and fission in their long prevailing friendship, if they think it is fragile then what these Muslims suggest to maintain
their friendship which is a salient element for stability and security in any country, comprising all these aspects questions were asked to the respondents that reflected the following themes:

1.1 Religious Perspective

A set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs is called religion but among the Muslims there is a great debate on whether Hinduism could be called a religion or not, since it does not have any revealed book like Torah, Injeel (Bible) or Qur’an it has no merit to be called a revealed religion. Therefore, these selected Muslim respondents were asked this question of whether they think that Hindu religion was also another religion like Islam. In addition to that, I would like to know whether they like to separate themselves from Hindus or minimize their gap by adapting in the aspects of visiting Hindus’ puja and enduring their ‘Kirton’. Furthermore, under this religious theme it was also tried to know whether these Muslims have been motivated by religious zeal to invite Hindus to Islam. The core idea reflected from the respondents’ statement is that Hindu religion cannot be a religion like Islam; all of the respondents have this view except the respondent number 1, 2, 15 and 17 who are of the opinion that Hindu religion is also a religion like Islam.

However, we take here the widely accepted definition of religion which is defined as “it is the way of life”, i.e. religion tells us how to lead one’s life in this earth, and it is very obvious and rational that the creator of something knows better what this created thing is and what its function is, for instance, an inventor of a vehicle knows better what is this vehicle, what is its function and how to run it, what are the do’s and are the don’t’s for this vehicle, as such any manual or catalogue given by him should be followed to run the vehicle properly, but if we find an opposition to this common sensual position, like one has invented something and someone else gave a manual for it who does not have any idea for the invented thing, then there is much possibility of a malfunction to happen. Similarly the Creator of human being knows better what a human being is and what his function is, consequently this Creator can give him any manual or catalogue to follow it to run his life smoothly and properly, as such the religion is the way of life, the manual or catalogue given to him by his Creator, now if we take into account this assumption we can see that it goes very much in line with the core idea provided by the respondent number 7 has stated, quoted below:

Religion is actually called which Allah termed as religion; but if any human being makes something as religion then it can be a religion to him/her, (not to Allah). In collaboration of many a human being internalizes some ism; then it is called religion, but if you want to make something as faith, then it requires authorization or sanction from Allah, so, what could be my answer you can guess.

What the respondent number 3 has expressed in this regard simply supports this core idea and has merit to mention here that says no way Hindu religion can be a religion like Islam as stated below:

“…..I do not suppose it like the religion of Muslims, because, Muslim has to follow Islam in every single moment (in life) and if it is not done then ultimately religion is not followed up, therefore, Hindu religion and Islam is no way the same”.

The argument forwarded by the respondent number 18 in support of this core idea was so much fervent to deny the similarity of these two religions or to be called this Hindu religion a religion at all, in addition to that he tried to say obliquely that following Hindu religion is actually a rebellion against the religion itself; furthermore, he has strongly refuted with very rational arguments the significant idea about this issue provided by the respondents number 1 and 17 who tried to establish Hindu religion a religion like Islam; even for the sake of argument if one agrees to the

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significant idea then too, we can say, this current respondent has robustly invalidated it with his undeniable rationale, the researcher cannot mitigate without quoting here the statement of the respondent as given below:

“No, definitely it cannot be, as I said before also, it is a beautiful word that we have to think about that Allah swt. whenever sent one messenger after another, so, there the religion that the previous messenger brought becomes with held, postponed, and the one comes after gets currency of his new religion, simply like what we can say that once upon a time this country was Pakistan, now, so, during Pakistan period there were rules and regulations of Pakistan, now after becoming Bangladesh if someone says that, no, I will still follow the rule and regulations of Pakistan, then definitely he will be an insurgent”.

So, the core idea about the aforesaid question is that Hindu religion is not like the religion of Islam and it cannot be a religion like Islam; however, the significant idea about this question we find from the statements of the respondents, in general, is that if we go into the deep of the issue and analyze different facts and data then we are compelled to believe that this Hindu religion is too a revealed religion and therefore it is also a religion like Islam because we cannot deny the facts, such as the composition of their holy books like Veda and Upanishada, their wording, philosophical terminologies used in them –dated at least 1500 years before the birth of Jesus Christ-seemed to be impossible if there were not any divine power behind them, which impresses any rational mind to believe that these are revealed texts and the readers of these texts cannot rule out the possibility of being revealed as we can see in the statement of the respondent number 17 given below:

“….. number one is those who think that the Veda is the oldest book, and among these who believe it as the least ancient book, who want to term it as least ancient, those too believe that it was at least 1500 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, and if it is of at least 1500 years then the art of sentencing of this Veda, word choosing, and the religious words that we currently use, the philosophical words that we use, many of these words are so nicely and in such a way, compiled in this book, seeing of what many pundits believe that human being did not compose this book”.

There is a saying in Bangla that Baro mashey tero puja means the Bangladeshi Hindu community celebrates thirteen religious festivals in twelve months like Durga puja, Kali Puja, Laxmi puja, Sarashwati puja and Jannamastami among others. It indicates that Hinduism is a ritual based religion. It is worthy to mention that unlike other religious traditions for their adherents, Hindu religious rituals are not fixed and common to all Hindus. Religious rituals and festivals, commonly called puja, are different between Bengali and non-Bengali Hindus according to their ethnic, linguistic, and regional identities. Bengali Hindus celebrate their goddess, Durga as the major religious festival by following Bengali traditions and customs which is considered the grand fiesta of Hindu community in the context of Bangladesh that attracts and brings many visitors from the majority community, Muslim. So, referring to this, Muslim respondents were asked a question concerning the puja visiting, the core idea we find from the statements of the respondents is that there is no obstruction or proscription to visit Hindus’ puja, almost all, 2 out of 18 respondents have only negative answer for the question of visiting Hindu’s puja and the rest have expressed their opinion positively, it should be noted here that in the context of Bangladesh generally an Imam of a Masjid is deemed by the modernists and secularists a fanatic, sometime even they do not hesitate to term them ‘zealots’ or ‘bigots’, because these secularists think that those Ulema are utterly intolerant of other faith and culture, however, the researcher had selected for the interview six of those Ulema out of 18 respondents who are professionally Imams whom the secularists regard orthodox and bigots, but to their astonishment we found that all of these Imams are so mild in their attitude, in this sensitive question of visiting Hindu’s puja even we did not find any bigotry or orthodoxy in their responses, solely their answers went in line with ‘Wasatiyyah’ mode’ or in a moderate fashion, though the norm of their answers reflect that they are not very much comfortable to visit puja, none of them disapproved this either as was in accordance with the assumption of those secularists who label them ‘zealots or bigots’ which proves that the Bangladeshis are, naturally, religious, not bigots as attested by some. We can refer to the statement given by the respondent number 13 in this regard as quoted below:

It’s a bit difficult, but still I want to say that in Islam, there is no question of participating in puja, because the puja is for them (Hindus), those who believe in Hindu religion, who practice Hindu religion, who have trust on Hindu religion, and very similarly to participate in solat is also for them those who believe in Islam; but yes, visiting puja is a different subject, as far as I know, Hajrat Omar (ra) once went to visit a church but I did not get anything that (he) participated to any festival.

So, according to his opinion there is no problem in visiting puja for Muslims which can be seen more elaborately in the response given by the respondent number 17 where he made it very clear what their puja is and why participation to that puja cannot be supported but visiting to that puja does not go against any Islamic ruling:

“….you will find that those who come to visit Saraswati puja at Jagannath Hall, (Dhaka University), 25% of them are Hindus, and the rest 75% are Muslims, they came simply to see what are happening here, they came to enjoy the beauty, I do not think that in this there is any problem”.

However, there is a significant idea as well in this ongoing issue of visiting puja, we find strongly disagreement from two respondents who are of the opinion that Muslims should never do it, Islam does not support to visit Hindu’s puja which sounds that these respondents are from amongst those whom Majlan Ibrahim et al described this way that the “principle of Islam is often being misunderstood by most people”, and thereby despite having room for peace they lead to chaos and disharmony with their misunderstanding, like these two respondents, the statement of the respondent number 11 and 12 pertaining to this question of visiting puja is quoted below respectively:

“Definitely there is, (objection), my religion does never support to participate to this culture of Hindus; I do not suppose it is relevant.
The place where asocial and indecent affairs take place Islam does never allow to go there, passage to those places are not legal for Muslims”.

However, according to the everyday socio-cultural phenomenon in Bangladesh their opinion is too much incongruent with the existing scenario as readers can have an idea from what was said by the respondent number 17 in this regard.

Kirton, a regular evening chanting session to Vogoban with devotional songs –Harey Krishna, Harey Raamo- is a religious ritual of Hindus in Bangladesh usually they perform it evening time, especially starting from sunset time which concurrently falls at the Maghrib time of Muslim community, this kirton is usually a noisy event having its integral part consisting of drumming, singing, belling and dinning which is naturally a bit unpleasant sound that annoys Muslims in general and that is a very common phenomenon in Bangladesh, therefore, to the Muslim respondents this question was asked whether they feel disturbed by their kirton or not. The core idea we get from the respondents’ statement is that they have very good mutual understanding leading to mutual toleration and respect as such they are not disturbed. We may quote here the statement of the respondent number 13 to justify this core idea as given below:

“Not at all, because it is in the holy Qur’Èn: LÈ ikrÈha fi al-DÈn, and in another Surah has another verse […].. in Sura Kafirun, Lakum dÈnukum wa liya dÈn, their religion is to them and our religion is to us, and Islam has confirmed the freedom of each and every religion”.

Their good understanding is reflected in the statement of the respondent number 10 too that confirms of not feeling disturbed by their kirton as stated below:

“No, I am not annoyed that much, let them do since (it is) their duty in their ‘mandir’, actually there is no ‘mandir’ within the vicinity of my place, it might happen that they are doing in their mandir and we in the Masjid are praying, so, it does not have anything for objection, everyone will observe everyone’s religion”.

5 Mazlan Ibrahim and et al. opcit.
The researcher feels impressed to quote here the statement of the respondent number 7 too to show his good mutual understanding that leads them to be tolerant as shown below:

“As a Muslim when I worship, I go to pray, when it is having for long time (kirton), then it is very natural that it brings a bit chagrin, on the other hand, for the religious freedom, everyone will have their religious affairs”.

Muslims not only feel undisturbed by their kirton but rather there are many ones who even take part in their kirton when there is a chance for them as attested by the respondent number 1 and 2 respectively, their statement shows that they are appreciating this kirton instead let alone feeling disturbed by it, as shown below:

“Why should I be disturbed? Rather I enjoy it when it is with a nice melody, it happened many time to me that when a cultural program takes place, or like other many Muslim singers when I attend their program, many a time they request me to entertain them with a ‘kirton’ which duly I do, so, there is nothing to be disturbed or bothered by their ‘kirton’.”

“And ‘kirton’ is the king of Bangla song, it is usual that ‘kirton’ will be there in the ‘pujas’, it simply a part of music. Through music also it is possible to get/reach God”.

The respondent number 9 told us one step further that this kirton is not only a nice thing but there are many things for him to learn from this kirton since his profession is related to music industry as we can see from his own statement below:

“No, does not come, because I am related to music, and many things I do learn from them, their ‘kirtons’ are inclusive of rhythms; they chant their ‘kirton’ in different time with different rhythms, their rhythms vary in different time, morning, noon, or at night they have their ‘kirton’ with different rhythms, I try to listen carefully and try to master on it”.

However, in this ongoing issue of kirton, we have some significant ideas as well, like what has been stated by the respondent number 6 in the appendix 2, though apparently it sounds antagonistic to Hindus’ kirton, in the ultimate sense actually there is an urge for mutual understanding which usually is found current in Hindu community in Bangladesh, there might be some exceptions, but definitely that do not represent regular phenomena of not showing respect for the religious event of others, especially that of Muslims in Bangladesh, it can be verified even by the statements of the Hindu respondents numbering 2, 4 and 8 who stated that to show their respect for Azaan, for instance, they postpone or give a pause for a while in their ritual that goes with high volume, so, this significant idea actually does not bear that significance in the practical sense, the statement of the current respondent is quoted below:

“Yes, sure, in a second largest Muslim country, where azaan is going up, solat is going to be held, in that situation, drumming loudly, making enjoyment – this can no way be right; and rather they cannot be assaulted too, they should be made to understand this in a gentle manner”.

We all have to invite Hindus towards Islam, we have to convey the message of Islam to them but without any form of any compulsion or coercion – the core idea found from the statements of the respondents concerning the question of whether or not Muslim should make ‘da‘wah’ to Hindu people to convince them for accepting Islam, however, though 16 respondents out of 18 agreed upon or have the same opinion of conveying the message of Islam to Hindus they differ on the way of conveying the message or making ‘da‘wah’, they have different suggestions according to their own understanding but they have consensus in terms of understanding the Qur’ānic injunction that says: “There is no compulsion in religion: truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error.”6, as mostly they are emphasizing this that they should convey the message of Islam to Hindus but no one should be coerced or compelled, because there is no compulsion in Islam. However, their way of conveying the message varies according to their background, those who are Ulema think one way and those who are general educated are distinct in their opinion, for instance we refer here to the statement of the respondent number 10, one of the Ulema, who has described it shortly but in precise direction, as stated below:

6 Al-Qur’ān, 2:256
“This ‘da’wah’ can be made in different ways, in our everyday dealings, customs, treating, etc. – if they are attracted after observing our daily affairs then they can embrace Islam, but there is no compulsion in Islam”.

On the other hand if we look at the statement given by the respondent number 1 in this regard, who is a general educated person, we notice that his outlook is comparatively sophisticated and he urges for a scientific method for the purpose of da’wah to the non-Muslim in general and to the Hindus in particular as shown below:

“…..What we want to say is – like what we see in the Peace TV that Dr. Zakir Nayek talks in big gathering where attend both Muslim and non-Muslims, many Hindus are seen there, he invites non-Muslims in a very good way”

But what mentioned the respondent number 7 in reply to this question, who is also one of the Ulema, is really appealing and that reflects his humanistic vision that deserves to be mentioned here as quoted below:

Sure, because he is a brother, same like he is the creation of Allah of myself. If I do have faith in Allah, if I have fear of Allah, and if I am expectant to go to Jannah following His rules and decrees, then the brother of me who went astray from the path of Allah, him also I have to cuddle, embrace, – this longing is very important for every Muslim.

About this ongoing core idea of making da’wah but no compulsion – what are said by the respondent number 17 should be considered the gist of the subject matter, those who seek for in-depth knowledge for making da’wah or proselytization could be benefited by the statement made by this current respondent in this regard as stated below:

“…..but to Jain his religion is so much beloved..how dear is it to him.. my mother, looks black, illiterate, despite that my mother is my mother, to the extent that I love my mother, your mother – no matter whether she is a beauty queen, possessor of billions of money- but in regard to show respect to your mother, the love to my mother that spontaneously comes in me, that one will never come in regard to your mother”.

The researcher feels impressed to quote here the statement given by the respondent number 16 in this regard where he mentioned what is the duty of Muslims concerning this da’wah and what is the beauty of Islam against compulsion, coercion, cheating and deceiving and what was the role of Muslims in the past pertaining to the people of this region as quoted below:

“…..comprehending the activities of Muslims the people of other religions, Hindus, Buddhists, accepted the religion of Islam, so, in these ways, the real message of Islam should be presented, if he accepts then it is good, if not, then there is no coercion to him”.

The researcher does not find any significantly different idea pertaining to this ongoing issue of inviting Hindus to Islam because in the replies of all the respondents, only one theme, the core idea, is reflected which tells the readers that Muslims have to invite not only Hindus but rather all non-Muslims to Islam with Íikmah or wisdom as stated by the respondent number 13, and he feels to quote here the statement of the respondent number 3 as concluding remark for this theme, as shown below:

“Nowhere in the rules of Islam is found compulsion or coercion, yes but there are initiatives leading to motivation, not coercion, and I, not only Hindus but any non-Muslims, think inviting them is a basic thing, and that is the duty of a mu’min”.

1.1.1 Summary

After going through the narrations mentioned above, the picture appears to the spectrum is that the Muslims in Bangladesh are quite mild to their fellow Hindu neighbors in terms of different religious aspects, whether the Hindu religion itself or observing their different rituals – Muslims are very much tolerant to them, instead of being annoyed by their “Kirton” they take it like any other general accustomed aspect of the society where simply a sense of empathy is reflected on the average, and most remarkably, the idea that Hindu religion too could be a religion like Islam as has been stated by the respondent is perhaps, to some Muslims would be considered, an eyebrow raising issue to say the least.
1.2 Social Perspective

People in the society choose to share with one another and this sharing varies according to the relationship and intimacy as has been stated in chapter three, normally people like to share their food among them and invite their friend and families in different festivals; in the interview of the Muslim respondents two questions concerning this theme were asked to know whether they invite their Hindu friends in their festivals and what is their opinion of taking Hindu food—which helps generate idea about whether they try to adapt and minimize the gap between them or they like to separate one another, in addition to that their suggestions to maintain and strengthen the friendship between them were also sought. Regarding the invitation of their Hindu friends, the core idea reflected in the respondents’ statement is that it is their pleasure to invite them in different social events, especially to the two main gala days of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adhāī, they share their rejoice not only with their Hindu friends but rather with all non-Muslim friends whether Christian, Buddhist or other which increases their delight. It is noteworthy here to mention that this inviting friend happens from their simply friendship relation—is not the case, rather, in addition to that their Muslim background too encourages them to do so, they feel an urgency to invite their friends in their social events because they are Muslims and they want to follow and actualize the legacy the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) left behind him for his followers as has been reflected in the response made by the respondent number 1 quoted below:

“Yes, definitely I invite them, because if a Hindu friend attends my festival it becomes more joyful and it increases the festivity…… what I want to say is Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself always liked to have guests at his home and he would invite everyone irrespective of their religion”.

And what the respondent number 7 has expressed in response to this question simply and similarly reflects his humanist attitude, his concern for the consequences of after-life of the non-Muslim and his all out struggle of how to bring back those who went astray from the right path, therefore, he finds these social events an opportunity to mingle with them and to inculcate slowly the seed of right understanding in their mind, and that should be the intention and responsibility of all Muslims all over the world, as we can see his passion for our Hindu brothers in his statement below:

“That sobriety, love, empathy, orders Islam always for Muslims; Islam does encourage for that rapport and solidarity, Muslims, we believe that everything of this whole universe is the creation of Allah, and since the Creator of all is Allah, in that sense we all are one human being, …. if I am in the right path, then my brother who run away from the path of Allah, I have to bring him closer to me, I have to cuddle him, that sobriety and affinity Islam teaches us”.

Respect for other faith and people is the teaching of Islam, despite having a strong bond of friendship between Muslim and non-Muslim, especially Hindu-Muslim, this friendship does not lead them cross the border and exceed the limitation in terms of indulging into something that religiously have some reservations, from either side –Hindu or Muslim, for example offering beef to a Hindu friend or taking pork from a Hindu friend when invited to his house, readers can find this respect for other religion and faith in the statement of the respondent number 15 quoted below:

“…. went I to their puja, but not that way that I will do ‘puja’ , not that, just went to their events, made much fun, enjoyed it, ‘Nadu’7 I ate, and similarly they too came during our Eid, but yes, there are some ones, who personally have some restrictions, I even respect these restrictions”.

So, there is no disagreement among the Muslim respondents on inviting Hindu friends to different social events of Muslim as such we find only solely one core idea that they invite their Hindu friends in their events, so, there is no significant idea regarding this issue.

And regarding the consuming Hindu food the core idea we find from the statements of the respondents is that subtly it tells us that Muslims actually do not feel comfortable to take Hindu food especially the solid food and the liquid one like curry since there is some religious sensibility where Muslims are generally cautious in this particular issue, reflection of which we can find in the statement made by the respondent number 8 quoted below:

7 A kind of typical dried food made of mainly coconut and sugar.
…. whatever Islam has permitted to, have to try to the extent that we can avoid from liquid items, to avoid liquid items from their hand, since Hindus are called ‘najis’.

The same opinion is echoed in the statement given by the respondent number 3 in reply to this question discloses his feeling of unease at taking Hindu food but he allows someone to take it only when he is in a dilemma or in a ‘do or die’ situation as quoted below:

“….I do not take their food unless I am in a dilemma or trouble. When we are in trouble or dilemma, even taking pork is also, (just to save life) allowed in Islam when it is ‘do or die’ situation”.

This core idea is further supported by the statement given by the respondent number 10 who as quoted below:

“….but if they do it like ‘patha boli’, since they do not pronounce the name of Allah, so, we have objection to take their food. But in special case, and if unintentionally Muslims also do not pronounce (forget) the name of Allah then it can be eaten”.

However, the significant idea readers will find in this on going issue is that taking or not taking Hindu foods depends actually on its cleanliness, if the food is cooked maintaining cleanliness then no matter whether it is cooked by Hindu or Muslim, there should not be any hesitation to consume that food as the respondent number 17 has expressed his own experience concerning this issue of Hindu food quoted below for the readers:

“….so, to challenge this phenomenon I have brought, appointed to the surprise of many, a Hindu woman in my house, understand? And her name was ‘Kushum’, understand? And kept telling all my kith and kin whoever came to visit my house, that look.. all these foods that you are taking are cooked by Kushum”.

Going ahead one step further, the respondent number 2 tells us that, not religious precept, it is the taste of food that should be considered the hallmark to decide whether we should take the food cooked by Hindu or not, if it is tasty we should not have any hesitation to take it as he does, quoted below:

Food is food, I do not see any difference whether it cooked by Hindus or Muslims, yet there can be a difference in the taste of their food. Simply could it be liked, in fact, I like it.

Nevertheless, according to the researcher, the opinion given by the respondent number 2 does not reflect the opinion of the majority people of Bangladesh, because his statement tells us that if the food is tasty simply they take – is contrary to the common phenomena of the land, because if we say ‘food’ in general it includes solid food and liquid one like rice and curry including mutton, chicken etc. that usually avoided by the Muslims in any Hindu restaurant or food court or even when invited to Hindu house or in their puja, generally they do not take whatever they like indiscriminately rather they usually choose light food like roti, sweets and other dried food etc. following the Islamic dietary guideline, therefore, what he said does not reflect the common practice of the Muslim in Bangladesh.

Suggestions were sought from the respondents on how to maintain friendship between these two communities, Hindu and Muslim, and what steps should be taken to maintain and strengthen their friendship, the core idea we find from the statements of the respondents in this regard is that, not by name, but rather if all the Muslims remain Muslims practically, in a true sense, then there must not be anything worrying, Hindu-Muslim friendship will remain forever intact as happened in the past during the rule of Khilafah which was commenced as early as from the Madina constitution, early in the Islamic period; but problem is that, in the context of Bangladesh, the scenario is completely the opposite, i.e. people are generally Muslim by name, in their practical life, in their everyday affairs, dealings, treatment in everything they are doing exactly what they are not supposed to, in the majority cases – through their everyday activity- it does not reflect that they are Muslims, their daily affairs clash with the sense of what “being a Muslim” conveys, for example, no one will be hurt by a Muslim, neither by his word nor by his hand – that is called a Muslim, but in this Muslim majority country –Bangladesh, the scenario is exactly the opposite, and what could be the grave concern for anyone is that instead of learning what ought-to-be-done from the top of the state apparatus, people are learning how to cheat and deceive others leading them to be corrupted, so, suggesting for being a true Muslim in this regard is really hitting the nail on the head, as we can see this theme in the statement given by the respondent number 18 quoted below:
“To maintain this friendship Islam has already given a wonderful prescription, if we follow that prescription which describes everything like how do we have to treat them, what duties do we have for them, if we can fulfill those duties ……here he mentioned ‘neighbor’ not Muslim, so, this neighbor can be a Muslim and can be a people of other religion, so, it is said here clearly that if someone is not safe from the hand and mouth of Muslim then this Muslim is not a Muslim”.

This core idea is supported by the statement made by the respondent number 10 in this regard who suggests Muslims to hold and cherish in them the ‘Musalmanism’ if they want to maintain the friendship with their Hindu neighbors as quoted belwo:

“This one what I believe, I think, if every Muslim hold properly the ‘mussalmanism’ in them, cherish it in them, then by a Muslim by the another Muslim, then by that Muslim no Hindu can be devastated, guaranteed”.

The respondent number 17 has the same tune in replying the question asked to him of what steps should be taken to maintain friendship between Hindu and Muslim, he is also suggesting Muslims to be true Muslims as we can see in his statement given below:

“….it is available in the al-Qur’Én, it is available in the Hadith that the neighbor who is not safe from one’s hand and mouth, then he is no way a Muslim, so, we have to take care of them”.

The respondent number 3, though expressing different way, in an ultimate sense he too is suggesting the Muslims to be true Muslims that can help maintaining and strengthening friendship and cooperation between not only Hindu and Muslim but rather between Muslim and all non-Muslim alike, as seen in his statement given to the reply of this ongoing issue of Hindu-Muslim friendship, stated below:

“Excluding the solely religious affairs, and show whole-hearted support in every worldly affairs and extending helping hands to not only Hindus but to all non-Muslims can lead to the increase of cooperation between each other”.

However, the significant idea about this issue is that the government has the responsibility to rescue Hindus from the suffering of their depression, from their psychological agony, from the injustice done to them if they really want to maintain friendship and strengthen it, when it will be clear to them that Muslims are honestly empathetic for them only then this friendship can grow between them, so, government should take all out measures to achieve their trust through its attitudes that the government as well as the majority community are really empathetic to the minority community, only then this can strengthen their friendship and cooperation as has been reflected in the statement of the respondent number 17, quoted below:

“My suggestion in this regard is, Hindus that are suffering the panic in them that they are feeling psychologically depressed, from that psychologically depressed situation, they should be rescued”.

And what the respondent number 1 has expressed in this regard suggesting for Hindu-Muslim friendship sounds reciprocal to the statement of the respondent mentioned above and as such his statement supports this significant idea of government’s responsibility to wipe out the discrimination done to them as shown below in his statement:

“State must do, not in black and white, there is equal opportunity in the black and white, all citizens have the same right, not to do any discrimination to any particular religious community”.

Furthermore, the respondent number 15, in reply to this question of Hindu-Muslim friendship, stimulates for another significant idea leading to the idea of nationalism, thinking for one united nation irrespective of race and religion, rich and poor –that is a Bengali nation regardless of whether it comprises of Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist or Christian or whatever, no matter whether he/she is rich or poor, a weaver or engineer –that all are Bengalis, that is one and only identity of this nation; only then will be no discrimination among its inhabitants and as such no question of strengthening friendship, as has been reflected in the statement given by the respondent quoted below:
“.....my call upon all will be harmony of man with a man, for example, “ami noi Hindu, noi Muslim, noi Khristan – ami Bangali” (I am not a Hindu, neither I am a Muslim, nor a Christian, rather I am a Bengali)’.

1.2.1 Summary
The viewpoint assessed from the above narrations is that there is no disagreement among the Muslims on inviting Hindu friends into different social events of Muslim which helps them get closer to each other and in the mean time they are cautious too not to hurt one another by any means of social interactions that religiously deemed unacceptable to the respective party. Secondly, the government should come forward to rescue Hindus from their suffering, from their psychological agony and compensate for the injustice done to them to prove that Muslims are really empathetic to them. Finally, towards maintaining friendship between Hindu and Muslim it is very much in line with the Qur’Ènic instruction as well when a non-Muslim is given hospitality he must be paid much care, extra care, like a guest is given extra treatment to anyone’s house. Similarly, if we are really Muslims then we should bear in mind that these Hindus are actually our guests who received our hospitality therefore we should always take care of them – that should be the treatment of Muslim to the non-Muslims; meaning that if the duty of Muslim is accomplished accordingly then the friendship between Hindu and Muslim is automatically maintained, no extra element is needed there –these are the aspects that have been reflected through the narrations above.

3.3 Cultural Perspective
Bangladesh has a Hindu past and a Muslim present. Almost seven decades after the separation of India and Bangladesh, many cultural practices still remain the same for both. It should be mentioned here that India has its share of Bengalis; part of India’s eastern side is known as the state of West Bengal. The people who live in this area are Bengali as far as their ethnicity is concerned, but they are not Bangladesh by nationality. Indian Bengalis are mostly Hindu, while Bangladeshi Bengalis are predominantly Muslim. Today, Bangladeshis still engage in behaviors that are contradictory when viewed from an Islamic and Bengali cultural standpoints, and many a time, their cultural practices are in direct opposition with each other. So, under this cultural theme respondents were asked two questions concerning mainly the Muslim women who draw ‘tilak’ on their forehead originated from Hindu culture and going to Hindu ‘Shadhu’ for treatment or healing purpose, in addition to that it was also asked whether they like anything (culture) usually practiced by Hindus; so, the core idea concerning this tilak is that it does not go in line with the Islamic norm but rather it is considered antagonistic to Islamic culture therefore, they are recommending to avoid this as tells the statement of the respondent number 3 in this regard, quoted below:

 Yet, there are many virtues current in (Hindu) society – like telling the truth- is current in Hindu religion and in Islam also has the same, but something came from Hindu religion, and (in the mean time) I also like it, and Islam also supports it- such things are not available. Here I would like to strongly comment that Muslim women must not wear it in their forehead”.

Though the respondents number 4, 5, 6 and 7 have expressed the similar opinion concerning this ongoing issue, the statement of the respondent 7 is quoted here to show why they do not support this Bengali culture to follow, since his statement prettily covers up the other three respondents’ statement, their ones are not quoted to avoid the repetition of the same thing, however, this current respondent has rationalized his negative answer to the question this way:

“Anything derived from Hindu religion, a real Muslim, those claim to be real Muslim, have devotion to Allah, have Islam (in them) do never acquiesce anything came from Hindu religion, to them the customs of Islam, fard, wajib, sunnah, Sunnah in attire, Sunnah in everyday life, Sunnah in social life – these only are ventures, with these he/she wishes to live, with these he/she wishes to die, he/she does not care much about other aspects, in fact, those are, from the sight of Islam, from the religious angle, for a Muslim avoidable I think”.

The argument raised by the respondent number 13 to defend his negative stand against the Hindu culture sounds a bit worth to be mentioned here where the attributes and good characteristics he tries to relate to humanity, not to Hinduism as reader can see in his statement below:

“… someone after becoming a saint refrains from lusts and sensuality, that one I like but came from Hindu religion – I do not say, rather it is a characteristics of humanity, it can come from anywhere,
and on the other hand, from Hindu religion, some other customs also came which we do not like. Drawing a ‘tilak’ in the forehead, that one, Islam does not support it”.

The researcher feels urged to quote here the argument presented by the respondent number 18 in this regard saying that Islam is a complete code of life and therefore it does not fall short of any foreign culture, he explains why Muslim should not accept those Hindu cultures as stated below:

“This, all Muslims have to take it into account, if that is conflicting with Islam then no way can it be acceptable, especially if that is from among the religious rituals of them, then definitely not, Islam has prohibited it, Islam said that it is a complete code, Islam is called a complete code of life, it is complete thing nothing deficits, beside this, if further there is any custom that is not conflicting with Islam, that could be accepted”.

The researcher feels impressed to quote here the statement of the respondent number 9 in the appendix 2 because all the statements quoted above related to this Hindu culture were from the Ulema and this current respondent is one of those who are opposed by those Ulema because he is related to the profession of music which is generally not only disliked by the Ulema but rather strongly opposed by them, and coincidently he has the same opinion that the Ulema have concerning the current theme of Hindu culture adopted by the Muslims, therefore his opinion bears a special significance in this regard, as quoted below:

“There are some aspects that I like since I am teacher of music; and in our religion of Islam matter of music is less, but in Hindu religion it is more, many ones say that music also reckoned among the worships of Hindus; but in the religion of Islam it is not reckoned in ‘ibadah’, there are some Islamic songs but there is no place for musical instruments”.

Furthermore, the opinion given by the respondent number 16 simply strengthens this ongoing core idea of unacceptability of tilak for Muslim women, and the significance of quoting his statement here is that this current respondent too is a general educated person, an academician, not an Ulema but he also bears the same opinion that the Ulema bear, though they have different stands on other matters, therefore, his statement is worth mentioning here as quoted below:

“…..some aspect migrated and intruded into Muslim (culture), for example, the “gaye holud” i.e. turmeric event of wedding is no way a Muslim event, it is Hindus’ event, ……..every religion has its own identity, Hindus should lead their life according to their creed, Muslims’ identity […] Muslims should lead their life according to their ideology”.

However, the significant idea, opposed to the above mentioned core idea, is too as strong as the core idea itself, since there are 8 out of 18 respondents opposing that core idea saying that this is solely a Bengali culture and it does not have any religious symbolism, and it is simply a beautification of women therefore there should not be any objection in following the culture of a nation or the culture of a geographical setting, as reflected in the statement given by respondent number 1 quoted below:

“…..so it is a regional culture, nothing to do with religion. But yes, in Hindu religion, the way they greet others is definitely an attractive way, reflects their mildness through their ‘Namste or Namoskar’. On the other hand, Buddhists bow their head to greet others, and we Muslim give Salam, so, we can say that neither one is bad; all are considered good manner hence anything good came from any religion should not be disliked”.

The respondent number 2 also has the same opinion for this issue as quoted below his statement;

“Muslim girls also wear ‘Nulok’ (an ornament of nose) in their nose, and draw ‘tip’ or ‘tilak’ on their forehead, which is current in our Muslim society for time immemorial. For the purpose of beautification, women usually like to beautify themselves, bearing that concept in mind, it is okay”.

What the respondent number 8 has presented in his argument to defend his position of tilak-culture has really had the merit to draw the attention of the readers, according to him, the Bangladeshi Muslims are practicing the mutual
culture after Islam has already excluded the prohibitionable cultures that were prevalent to the region during its
arrival in this then Hindu dominant area, so, the mutual culture that we practice is our local custom with no
antagonism to Islam, as we can see in his statement below:

“….before Muslims all of them were Hindus, and you know every country has its own cultures, but
the one Islam has excluded, Islam has prohibited, except those, the rest we practice mutually, we
have many events which match with Hindus which we term as local/ regional customs”.

But the preview given by the respondent number 15 simply tells us that she likes to be strongly careless of its
religious background, her philosophy tells that only thing we need to be is the ability, being capable of
distinguishing between good and bad, so, we must take every good and pleasant aspect or idea no matter it comes
from whatever religion, no matter whether it is produced by Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist or Christian, the thing to
consider here is whether it is good or bad, if it is good simply we will adopt it and since this tilak is good in terms of
beautification so there should not be any objection in its practice, as reflected from her statement given below:

“Me, would like to grasp all the beatified and blessed things, since I am a teacher, I say to my
students too that take anything good, no matter it came from wherever”.

We can consider the argument given by the respondent number 17 as a complement to the opinion of the respondent
number 15 above, it seems that he has unearthed the profound mystery behind this culture of tilak which is
surprisingly a significant symbol that any rational mind should support, as if he tried to tell everyone that one should
look at what this ‘tilak’ itself is, not where it is originated form, just look what significance this ‘tilak’ bears then
justify it whether is good or bad, then let a rational mind to decide whether to adopt it or reject, as has been reflected
in his statement below:

“Hindu married women wear Shidur on their forehead wishing for the happiness of her husband,
the husband that beats his wife, she wishes even for that husband too, and to wish long life for
those (beating) husbands they perform many rituals even, you do not take that Shidur, but the
wishing she makes, all the happiness she aspires for husband, ceaselessly, this one at least you can
take”.

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wishing she makes, all the happiness she aspires for husband, ceaselessly, this one at least you can
take”.

“Unless and until a Muslim offers votive donations to the supernatural powers he does not commit a shirk….only
small percentage of rural people (6.5) actually make votive donations to Hindu pirs”.

This excerption above is quoted from U.A.B. Razia Akter Banu’s work Islam in Bangladesh which, like many
others, tells us that Bangladeshi Muslims go to Hindu Shadhus too to have their blessings and for other purposes,
pir, shadhu, baba and rishi these all are synonyms of saint, but the word ‘pir’ originated from Persian langage
meaning to an old man, mostly used to indicate a Muslim saint, and to indicate a Hindu saint people usually use
Shadhu, rishi or Baba in Bangladeshi context, those who refer to these shadhus for their intended healing or
blessings believe that these shadhus have some supernatural power with what they can fulfill the desire of their
visitors, since Bangladeshi Muslims still adhear to many custom and culture deemed to be Hindu ones, as
mentioned earlier so, question was asked to the respondents whether they go to Hindu shadhu for healing purpose or
not: however, we find majority of the respondents, 14 out of 18, have disagreement about this, so the core idea
reflected from the statements of the respondents is that firstly they are aware of committing shirk by going to any
Shadhu, no matter whether a Hindu shadhu or a Muslim, secondly, for healing purpose if someone needs to go
anywhere then it is a doctor, physician, not to a Shadhu –that is the succinct of the statement they have made in
reply to this question, for instance we may refer to the statement of the respondent number 1 to know how they take
this issue, as quoted below:

“I have some reservation in this regard, for the purpose of treatment or medication I like neither
Hindu ‘Shadhu’ nor Muslim ‘Shadhu’, rather for treatment one should go to a medical doctor only,
there are many ones who think that Shadhu or saints can heal them, I do not think so”.

8 Razia Akter Banu, opcit, p.106.
And what the respondent number 3 has expressed in this regard simply reflects his sturdy disagreement on this issue, not only Hindu shadhu, but rather to Muslim shadhu too have their serious objection terming it to be an act of sheer shirk to Allah swt. as reader can see in his own statement given below:

“Actually if the physician is a Hindu doctor, then no problem is there, but if it is Hindu ‘Shadhu’ ‘Rishi’, ‘Baba’ then seriously I disagree; if he treats with spiritual way by blowing in water, charming, giving amulets, knots in the thread etc. then, if it is done even by Muslim, also said to have committing ‘shirk’.

Like the respondent mentioned above prescribing for Muslims what to do while feeling for going to a shadhu, the respondent number 7 is justifying why Muslims should not go to any shadhu while they have better treatment with themselves if they feel for the type of treatment usually shadhus provide, and that is the treatment of the al-Qur’Én proved many a times by many ones having desired results, the statement is as quoted below:

“Current time, in the medical science, in the medical doctrine, the progress achieved, I feel, it is not okay for Muslims to go to a ‘shadhu’, if you talk about solemn blowing, then, with the mantra those ‘shadhus’ are performing healing, much stronger mantras are there in the al-Qur’Én”.

The respondent number 16 terms it a stupidity to go to a shadhu in this age of scientific boom and, he says, only the stupid people go to those shadhus and very rationally he presented his argument in accordance with his profession of being an academician, however, since we are talking about Hindu-Muslim religious encounter in this study, the researcher feels to quote here the statement given by the respondent number 18 who made it much clear why Muslims should not go to any Shadhus, no matter whether Muslim or Hindu shadhu because the type of their treatment usually they undertake is not only acceptable in Islam but rather very much repugnant to it, therefore, no way Muslim should pay any visit to any shadhus as reflected in his statement below:

“Evidently it is haram, it is forbidden in Islam, no way any kind of exorcise, … the messenger of Allah (pbuh) whenever fell sick, he went for treatment, and many ones after getting sick when came to him he advised them to go for treatment, and therefore it is Sunnah to go for treatment first after falling sick”.

However, we have significant idea regarding this issue as well, there are some respondents who feel it is obligatory to go to a shadhu when deemed necessary to, their focus and concentration is only for the reason they are referring to those shadhus, not on the byproduct or collateral issues, so, according to them priority should be given to the life-issue, if someone feels a shadhu can cure him from his sufferings then why should not he go to him? Such are the response of the respondents’ number 8, 10 and 15; we may quote here the statement given by the respondent number 8 for the readers, as below:

“For the treatment of a human being, to save a life is fard (obligatory), now whether it is a Shadhu or a Monk or whoever, if you have belief that his treatment can cure you, then you can go, why will you not go?”.

This view is supported by the statement given by the respondent number 10 giving priority to life-issue that goes in line with humanity which is the first and foremost agenda of all religions and especially that of Islam; the statement quoted below:

“Yes, for the sake of treatment, going to any ‘kobiraj’ is lawful, if needed to go to ‘Mantrist’ can go, there is no compromise for the sake of treatment”.

This foregoing significant idea is further supported by the statement of the respondent number 17 who has a humanistic vision and who does not discriminate among the people of different religious background, to him all the human beings are same, only the thing that makes them different from one another is the selfishness nature of man, when someone is unselfish and benevolent to others then no matter whether he is a Hindu, Buddhist or Christian or else, we can refer to him to seek his blessings and no problem to go to him for healing purpose as reflected in his statement below:
“Me, if a Hindu Shadhu, after worshipping standing before an idol, then come to heal me, that would not be acceptable to me, but if he simply prays to God for me, and let me be something, or prays for me, then I will not be unhappy”.

1.3.1 Summary
There are confronting opinions among the Bangladeshis concerning the tilak culture in Bangladesh as has been reflected in the statements of the respondents too, seemingly no one is weaker than others in their arguments for this issue, however, we may take it this way that since every religion has its own identity that makes it distinct from others and since this tilak is an intruded culture to Islamic custom and creed bringing about a confusion to its distinct identity, it should not be spared and ignored simply labeling it a local culture as has been reflected in the statements of the respondents leading to the core idea and thereby keeping the Islamic culture a distinct one. Secondly, the core idea pertaining to Hindu Shadhu whose treatment is based on mantra has reflected the current phenomenon in Bangladesh, because its Muslim populations though still approach to pir and Muslim shadhus, they do not go to any Hindu shadhus which once upon a time had had a currency during Lalan Shah\(^9\) whose philosophy was a combination of Hindu-Muslim-Buddhist philosophies, during that time people used to go to those Hindu Shadhus too.

1.4 Political Perspective
The question “what is the reason for gradually decreasing the number of Hindus in Bangladesh” was asked to the Hindu respondents as mentioned in the chapter three to know their views about this sensitive issue and here the same question was asked to the Muslim Respondents too to know what Muslim respondents identify as reasons, for the rationale of this question readers may refer to the semi-introduction under the sub-title ‘political’ in chapter three. However, though the core idea pertaining to this question matches with the core idea we found from the Hindu respondents for the same question in previous chapter that political reason and insecurity are the reasons behind the decrease of their number, here this core idea is not as strong as indicated by Hindu respondents there, majority with maximum number of the respondents from Hindus labeled the political reasons as causes for the decrease whereas from the Muslim respondents majority with minimal number of respondents took political reason as the cause for their decrease, leaving room for few significant ideas on the issue. However, evidently it is obvious that both Hindu and Muslim agree upon the political reason to be the main cause for their migration and thereby decreasing their number in Bangladesh, bearing this in mind we may refer to the statement made by the respondent number 1 in this regard quoted below:

“What happened to the Hindu community in the southern Bangladesh, Bhula after the general election of 2001, the atrocities, --cannot be denied. Who did and how did- I am not going to explain that, only thing (just bear in mind) is that they are the victim of political calamities”.

Respondent number 2 also has expressed the same view in reply to this question as stated below:

“….if the number decreased then this could be the reason, I think, yet we cannot rule out the possibility of political reason, and yes, for love of India also could be the reason for their migration”.

This core idea is supported by the statement made by the respondent number 13 who is of the opinion that, among other, some opportunists and selfish politicians too cause their migration to other countries and as such decreases their number in Bangladesh, as has been quoted below:

“…..there are some opportunists, selfish politicians, who many a time commit oppression on them, occupy their house and properties, unleash torture on them, after 1971 many ones occupied their house and properties, in different way, therefore, they migrate”.

Though the respondent number 14 did not mention directly, the reasons he was referring ultimately demonstrate to be the political reasons and thereby supports this core idea as shown below his statement in this regard:

\(^9\) Lalan, opcit.
“The reason, is that they suppose themselves very neglected and in different time and different places, the torture and oppression going on through terror activities, being scared of these terrorism, many ones think to leave the country, means being compelled”.

Finally it is the respondent number 17 who very elaborately states it how Hindus are the victim of sheer politics that some selfish and unscrupulous politicians indulge to this vicious action – supports this core idea of decreasing their number in Bangladesh for political reason, as has been stated below:

“Listen, the numbers of Hindus are decreased here, the big reasons are three: 1, historical, 2, political and 3, economic, there are many other reasons too, but these three are the main ones…..so, one is because of political reason”.

Nevertheless, we have few significant ideas concerning this foregoing issue of why decreasing the number of Hindus in Bangladesh; the respondent number 3 has provided us a fascinating significant idea in this regard that even if we, for the sake of argument, agree that there are some political and other reasons for the decrease, but their un-acceptance of this land as their own surpasses all, according to him Hindus generally do not think that it is their mother land, they feel like as if it were earning post or makeshift one for them and their mother land is somewhere else where finally they will travel to – as has been mentioned in the conclusion of chapter two- so, if such is the case then it is very rational that their number will not be increasing, such is the reflection of what the aforesaid respondent has expressed as stated below:

“……because, Hindus of our country, in a big scale, I must say that 99% of them feel that Bangladesh is not theirs’. They think that India is their real motherland and sacred place (for them)”.

This aforesaid significant idea is further supported by the statements of both the respondents number 8 and 9 who are of the opinion that through marriage and other ways they make relationship with people in India and as such they like to live with their near and dear ones, with their kith and kin beyond the border causing their number decrease here in Bangladesh as quoted below their statements respectively:

“In our country Muslims are majority, and our neighboring country India, Hindus are majority, that country they feel comfortable, the issue of feeling ease, feeling comfortable; it happened that many ones got married there, kith and kin are there, therefore, some Hindus migrate there”.

We find another significant idea from the respondent number 11 who provides us a bit amazing idea with new dimension for their migration to India and subsequently decreasing their number in Bangladesh; this significant idea is deemed to be out of their religious consciousness that those among Hindus who are religiously committed think that after the funeral if their ash (remnant) after being cremated in the pyre spread in the river Ganga they will be in peace in the hereafter, out of this thought many devoted Hindus like to migrate to India that is why their number decreases in Bangladesh as has been reflected in her statement below:

“….it is their assumption that if after death they get ‘Ganga’ if their ‘pindo’ is given to the ‘Ganga’ then they will be rest in peace, such a different religious impetus is the cause”.

The third significant idea should be considered a baffling reply to the researcher as well to all parties concerned since she does not agree with the decreasing phenomenon at all and if, for the sake of argument, even she agrees with it then, it seems, she tends to say that the number of Muslims too is decreasing in the same manner but since we are not saying that the number of Muslims is decreasing, for the same reason, we cannot say that the number of Hindus is decreasing because it is not only Hindus that leaving the country but rather Muslims too are leaving the country in the same fashion, in fact Muslims are leaving more, which is a very common phenomenon like many of us migrating to USA, Canada, Australia and other developed countries, so, why should we look only to the migration of Hindus? Therefore, if we say the number of Hindus is decreasing then the number of Muslim too is decreasing in the same way, so, this should not be any concern for anyone as has been portrayed in the statement of the respondent number 15 given below:

“No, not decreasing […] I do not see, I do not think, rather many ones were in overseas who are coming back, and those who are going is going, like among us there are many who are getting settled in Canada, is not it? Migrating to USA, is not it? Though from Muslim”.
The respondent number 16 provides us the last significant idea on this issue that the Hindu religion itself is responsible for the decrease of the numbers of Hindus in Bangladesh; like the respondent number 7, this current respondent too is of the opinion that if there is any power in the ideology of a religion, then no one can destroy it, human being the ideology that he disseminates if does not have the power, then together with whole human being of the whole universe even cannot make it last long, and to the contrary if there is power in the ideology itself then a handful weak persons also can advance it to the farthest; it is because of the ideology of Islam many ones are being attracted to it, in the same way, because of the ideology of Hindu religion many ones are being detached from it, therefore their number is decreasing in Bangladesh as has been reflected in his statement given below:

“…..those having higher education, they are not following their religion, it is seen in the religion of Hindus, basically here the ones to be blamed are themselves, neither Muslims are responsible, Buddhists responsible, English are responsible, nor Jews are responsible, rather responsible are themselves”.

1.4.1 Summary: It was up to now a widely believed fact that Hindus are decreasing in Bangladesh because of torture and for other political reasons but here, after conducting this interview, one of the respondent has helped us and opened our eyes to a totally new dimension far beyond our hackneyed sensibility of lopsided reasons of tortures and discrimination for their decrease which is diminished by the statement of this aforesaid respondent; thanks to the respondent number 15 in the appendix 2 who thoroughly disagrees with this issue forwarding very rational argument which really makes sense, so, based on this, to the surprise of many of us –Hindus and Muslims- we can say that the number of Hindus is not decreasing in Bangladesh which needs to be substantiated by empirical research. Perhaps, the widely accepted assumption, now, could be challenged by this intelligent observation.

1.5 Conclusion
Browsing through the narrations above, one will definitely notice that in all these aspects of socio-religious and cultural-political arena, there is no hostility against the minorities among the Muslims as has been reflected in the statements of the respondents; instead of arrogance and dominating tune among the Majority people as usually and supposedly happen, we find an empathetic mentality among them towards their fellow minority neighbors as Novak10 had also portrayed decades back the similar picture in his work which has been, recently on 9th September 2015, supported by the Press Statement of UN Human Rights high commissioner11 made after visiting the countryside in Bangladesh when he was very much impressed and enamored to see the friendship and interreligious harmony among the people of Bangladesh; as has been reflected in his own statement given below:

“…during one of my visits to an Islamic site, the neighboring Hindu population was celebrating a festival honoring Krishna’s birthday. While admiring the architecture of an Islamic building, I could at the same time enjoy the Hindu music played in the vicinity, in which Krishna’s flute was very noticeable. I take this as an example of the relaxed atmosphere of interreligious coexistence, which generally prevails in the country12”.

So, this empathetic mentality means these Muslims are friendly minded to their fellow Hindu minorities which reflects their friendship but not one sided, rather it is reciprocal, the reflection of which we have observed in the previous chapter from the Hindu respondents themselves, in addition to that, it should be noted here that, what we find in a recent publication titled “Atrocities on Minorities in Bangladesh” by Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, the sole purpose of which is to depict and bring into light the sheer atrocities on minorities by the majority community, Muslims –the document that produced to allege Muslims- that very document too bears the testimony of their friendship with Muslims, where in its editorial board that comprises all distinguished Hindu Professor, Barristers and Advocates conveyed special thanks to Prof. Dr. Syed Manjurul Islam13 who is a Muslim, merely reflects their closeness in the society and as such the friendship of these two communities, Hindu and Muslim.

12 Ibid.
So, simply we find the recognition and tolerance that are the key issues of religious harmonies without which people cannot live together peacefully are there in this multi-religious society in Bangladesh. When the majority of the respondents appraised these issues positively the findings of the study tell us that religious harmony in Bangladesh deserves a highly acclamation where Hindus and Muslims celebrate their religious programs and related festivals in a very peaceful and friendly manner even though there are so many Masjids and Mandirs are situated in the close vicinity they face no disturbance even if the festivals occur concurrently as it happened so many times and still happening that the Durga Puja\textsuperscript{14} is celebrated immediately after Eid al-Fitr of the Muslims when 20,000 Puja Mondops or more are erected in the country including 162 in Dhaka city alone\textsuperscript{15} which is called the city of Masjids – should bear the very notion of Hindu-Muslim interreligious harmony.

Another important point deserves to be mentioned here in this regard that the masses there customarily hear the sound of Azaan from Masjid and that of Shankha from the Mandir at the same time everywhere in the country. Hindus find the reason for this congenial atmosphere and friendly environment of not having any obstacle and facing any problem in observing their religious activities, despite being minority, is rooted in the long history of their forefathers who lived in this Bengal peacefully and very friendly with their fellow Muslim neighbors before independence; and finally, maintaining this brotherly relations was also a significant objective of the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971\textsuperscript{16}.

However, despite having mutual interactions and good understanding in all these socio-religio-cultural aspects there are ups and downs in their relationships too and evidently that is the political reason that causes dismay among the Hindu community –not religion or communal factor- leading to their migration to other countries, therefore, the government should come forward to rescue Hindus from their suffering, from their psychological agonies and compensate for the injustice committed against them to prove that Muslims are really empathetic for their fellow Hindu friends.

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