God in politics : Islamism and democracy in Bangladesh

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God in Politics: Islam, Islamism and democracy in Bangladesh

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor
of Philosophy in Sociology

By

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God in Politics: Islam, Islamism and democracy in Bangladesh

Islam Md Nazrul

Dedicated to

My Parents

Md Fazlul Haq Howlader

Lal Banu

My In-Laws

Md Asadul Hoque

Jahanara Begum

My Wife

Nahid Sultana Lucky

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List of Acronyms

ABT	Ansarullah Bangla Team
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi
AL	Awami League
ASK	Ain O Salish Kendra
BIC	Bangladesh Islami Chhatrashibir
BIF	Bangladesh Islami Front
BISS	Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies
BIIT	Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought
BJI	Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami
BKA	Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan
BML	Bangladesh Muslim League
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BTF	Bangladesh Tariqat Federation
BUET	Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology
COP	Combined Opposition Parties
CP	Central President
CPB	Communist Party of Bangladesh
DAC	Democratic Action Committee
DUCSU	Dhaka University Central Students' Union
DUJ	Dhaka Union of Journalist
EPJI	East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami
HTB	Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh
HuJi	Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami
IAB	Islami Andolan Bangladesh
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
IDD	Islamic Democratic Discourse
IDL	Islamic Democratic League
IFB	Islamic Front Bangladesh

IJOF	Islami Jatiya Oikya Front
IMB	Islami Morcha Bangladesh
IOJ	Islami Oikya Jote
IS	Islamic State
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JIB	Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh
JIH	Jamaat-e-Islami Hind
JIP	Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan
JMB	Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh
JMJB	Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh
JP	Jatiya Party
JSD	Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal
JUIB	Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh
JUIP	Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Pakistan
KM	Khelafat Majlis
NAP	National Awami Party
NDF	National Democratic Front
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NIP	Nezam-e-Islam Party
NTU	Nanyang Technological University
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
PAS	Malaysian Islamic Party
PDM	Pakistan Democratic Movement
PDP	Pakistan Democratic Party
PKS	Partai Keadilan Sejahtera
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
PPR	Political Parties Regulation
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
WAMY	World Assembly of Muslim Youth
ZP	Zaker Party

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Technical Note

Unless otherwise noted, translations from Bengali into English are by the author.

Abstract

Religion remains a dominant social institution and a topic of sociological inquiry. This research has explored the complex interplay among Islam, Islamism and democracy in Bangladesh, addressing some pressing questions: What is the relationship between Islamic tradition and democracy? What is the origin and development of Islamic tradition in Bangladesh? What are the key social and historical trajectories through which Islamism has developed in Bangladesh, and what specific roles, if any, did state and non-state actors play in that promotion? Who are the Islamists and what is their role in the politics of Bangladesh? How is secularism understood and practiced in Bangladesh? How do the Bangladeshi Islamists see secularism and democracy? Drawing on the theories of secularism and Weberian sociology of religion (along with conceptual threads such as polyarchy and hybridity of democracy), this study addresses these research questions. A triangulation of methods comprised of in-depth interviews, content analysis, and focus group discussions has been employed in this research. The study has found that Islam and democracy are not necessarily incompatible. Islam was spread in Bangladesh largely through peaceful missionary activities with both state and non-state actors making contributions to Islamism through Islamization in Bangladesh. While the Islamic parties in general are characterized by factionalism, disintegration and dynastic politics, the mainstream Islamic parties have little or no tension with democracy in Bangladesh. Secularism was imposed, not established based on the consensus of the people, and both militant Islamism and militant secularism are equally fundamentalist in nature and contradictory to the sociopolitical and cultural landscape of Bangladesh.

Keywords: Islam; Islamism; Democracy; Secularism; Bangladesh

Chapter One

Introduction

The question of Islam as a political force is a vital question of our times, and will be for several years to come. The precondition for its treatment with a minimum of intelligence is probably not to start from a platform of hatred.

— **Michel Foucault** (1996:708), *Dits et Ecrits 1954-1988, Tome III*

Of all the great religions of Western Asia, Islam has generally been regarded as the most worldly and least ascetic.

— **H.A.R. Gibb** (1962:129), *Mohammedanism*

He who says that democracy is disbelief; neither understands Islam nor democracy.

— **Yusuf al-Qaradawi**¹

1.1 Background

Religion and politics have been inextricably interrelated since the dawn of human civilization (Weber 1964; Aronoff 1984). Throughout the ancient and medieval ages, religion played a dominant role in politics and society. However, sometime in the late-fifteenth century and at the end of the medieval age, scholars, such as Machiavelli (2009) advocated for a secular political and social thought and a separation of religion from state and politics. Since then, the influence of religion in the European political and social landscapes started to diminish. Seminal social thinkers of the nineteenth century—

¹ Quoted in Rahman (2002:6); Khan (2006:xi).

Auguste Comte (1858), Herbert Spencer (2005a, 2005b), Emile Durkheim (1995), Max Weber (1964, 2003), Karl Marx (1964)—all believed that religion would gradually fade in importance and cease to be significant with the advent of the industrial society (Norris and Inglehart 2011). The European Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, borrowing from secular ideas and philosophy in political and social thoughts, influenced these scholars to make such predictions. However, empirical evidences paint a different picture. Religion continued to remain a dominant social institution, even in the industrialized societies such as the United States in generating, for instance, social justice movements. The emergence of various socioreligious phenomena in recent years has reawakened scholarly interest in religious-based political and social conflict. These phenomena include Solidarity Poland; the dissolution of the Soviet Empire; various South American, South African, and South Asian liberation movements; the Christian Right in the United States; Al Qaeda; and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as also referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or simply Islamic State (IS) (Gill 2008). Between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, most of the nation-states that embraced liberal democracy evolved, through Western secular ideas and thoughts, not only as a political system but also as social discourse. From the early nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, the waves and reverse waves of democratization had been witnessed (Huntington 1991). Following World War II, and particularly since the 1970s, the newly independent countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which emerged largely as a result of nationalist movements, stepped towards democratic systems of governance. Huntington (1991) called these movements ‘the third wave of democratization.’

A number of these newly-born independent nation-states are embedded in Muslim religious ideology, and their societies are predominantly influenced by religious precepts and practices. Throughout the ages, Islamic religious traditions seem to have become a powerful factor not only in the private sphere but also in the public domain in these societies. Many Muslim countries have adopted Western secular democracy, but at the same time, they have constitutionally recognized the preference of Islam: Islam has been declared the state religion in a number of Muslim countries, such as Bangladesh (Riaz 2004; Ghosh 1993) and Malaysia (Means 1978; Bakar 1981). Several aspects of Islamic laws about family, marriage and inheritance exist as per religious doctrines. Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Sudan are strictly following Islamic *Shari'ah* law, while countries such as Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt, and Tunisia which are following Western democracy, still have religious undercurrent in their politics and societies. In many Muslim countries, religious political parties, such as Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) in Malaysia, *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Prosperous Justice Party, PKS) in Indonesia, Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh and Pakistan are both politically and socially strong. Therefore, since the second half of the twentieth century, religion, Islam in particular, has caught the attention of the international community especially amongst scholars of social sciences. Islamic theory, practice and its relationship with the Western discourses particularly with regard to democracy and human rights have come to the fore in debates and discussions among both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars of the world (Roy 1994, 2004; Tibi 1990; Esposito and Voll 1996; Esposito 1991; Fish 2002; Wright 1992, 1996; Esposito and Piscatori 1991; Lewis 1996; Ghannouchi 1998; Nadwi 1966; Mawdudi 1976; al-Turabi

1983). More importantly, after the events of 9/11, Islam as a religion has received renewed attention from social scientists. In this sociopolitical context, this research has examined the complex intersection of Islam, Islamism and democracy in the world today. Bangladesh has been used as an empirical case for this sociological investigation.

Bangladesh, a South Asian country, is the third largest Muslim country (in terms of population) after Indonesia and Pakistan, with a population of one hundred and sixty million (Islam 2013:116). The country came into existence through a bloody war of independence with Pakistan in 1971. Bangladesh, established as a democracy, has since been plagued with illiberal practices. The country has experienced intermittent periods of military rule and 'democratic tyranny' (Lavelle 2005; Schall 1996). One such example is the fourth amendment of the constitution through which the elected government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 made the power of the President absolute and unchallenging (Maniruzzaman 1980; Ahmed 1991). During much of the 1980s, Bangladesh was under military dictatorship. The 1990's, however, saw the country experience parliamentary democracy. Nevertheless, the democratic governance has been routinely constrained by several political factors, such as, the lack of democratic practices within the political parties, confrontational politics and intra- and inter-party feuds, hereditary political leadership in the political parties, the highly personalized nature of political institutions and power-centric politics, institutional weaknesses and failures, an unhealthy and uncompromising relationship between the ruling and the opposition parties, the pro- and anti-liberation forces debate, corruption scandals, bad governance, and so forth. All these have made Bangladesh a politically unstable country (Wood 1994; Kochanek 2000; Murshid 1995; Schaffer 2002; Islam and Islam 2011; Rahaman 2007).

Bangladesh is ethnically and linguistically homogenous to a large extent (Phadnis and Ganguly 2001). There is hardly any significant ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural diversity in its society. The dominant ethnic group, the Bengali constitutes about 99 percent of the total population who speak Bangla (Phadnis and Ganguly 2001:70). Other small ethnic groups, such as Chakma, Marma, Tippera, Tongchengya, Mru, Mrung/Riang, Bawm, Khumi, Sak, Pangkhua, Khyang, Lushai, Garo, Santal, and Monipuri constitute only one percent of the overall population (Phadnis and Ganguly 2001:70). These various ethnic groups largely communicate in Bangla as well.

According to a population census in 2001, the country's major religious group is Muslims constituting 89.6 percent while Hindus are 9.3 percent, Buddhists 0.6 percent, and Christians are 0.3 percent of the total population (Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh-2008 2009:xix). Historically, Bangladesh has been hailed as a country of communal harmony and peaceful religious coexistence (Ahamed 1999) with no major communal conflicts/riots to speak of. However, that is not to say that there is a total absence of communal or religious tension in its society. Minority communities, particularly the Hindus residing in specific areas in the country, often come under attack especially during pre- and post-elections periods. Aniruddha Das Anjan, a central leader of CPB (Communist Party of Bangladesh), in an interview with the author, notes that communal harmony is a remarkable feature of the Bangladesh's society. Nonetheless, the religious minorities are now and then persecuted by the members of the majority community, who are, in most cases, driven by their political and economic interests rather than their religious commitments, adds Anjan. Professor Sukomal Barua, former head of Pali and Buddhist Studies at the Dhaka University who was also interviewed by the

author, argues that the powerful groups regardless of their religious and political identity suppress the powerless people. The rights and interests of the minority communities in Bangladesh, Barua continues, are sometimes violated by these powerful groups who are both politically and economically powerful, no matter which political party they belong to or which faith they subscribe to.

However, after independence in 1971, the country's first constitution, adopted in November 1972, embraced secularism as a major state policy along with democracy, nationalism and socialism. Defining secularism, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the supreme leader of the Liberation War and the founding President of Bangladesh, proclaimed: "Secularism does not mean the absence of religion. Hindus will observe their religion; Muslims will observe their own; Christians and Buddhists will observe their religions. No one will be allowed to interfere in the others' religions. The people of Bengal do not want any interference in religious matters. Religion cannot be used for political ends" (Cited in Mohsin 2004:470). However, several years later, through the fifth amendment of the constitution in 1977, the principle of secularism became replaced by the principle of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah. The amendment also includes the incorporation of Islamic ideals. For example, *bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim* (In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful), a Qur'anic phrase that the Muslims usually invoke while starting any lawful deeds for the pleasure of God, was inserted into the beginning of the constitution above the Preamble (Ahamed 1983; Hakim 1998; Riaz 2004). In 1988, through the eighth amendment of the constitution, Islam was declared the state religion of Bangladesh with the provision that the other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the republic (Hakim 1998; Riaz 2004; Rahim 2007). Thus, religion,

particularly Islam, becomes officially dominant in the politics and society of Bangladesh. However, the 15th amendment of the constitution in 2011 restored the principle of secularism, replacing the ‘absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah.’ Simultaneously, the state religion and its signifier *bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim* (In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful) have been retained in this amendment (Salehin 2013; Pattanaik 2013; Jahan and Shahan 2014). These sporadic revisions have exposed the political contradictions in which Islam as a religion continues to shape the politics and society of Bangladesh. The following passage reflects this view:

The people of Bangladesh have strong attachments to Islam, and no one among the rulers and the ruled would risk retribution by opposing or criticizing religious customs, practices, and beliefs. A large number of Bangladeshis do not perform the mandatory religious practices, but most display their devotions to Islam in public. The slightest aspersion on Islam results in hostile public reaction, which is why neither the government nor the opposition political parties of Bangladesh speak out against Islam. Even the leftist secular political parties, which consider religion to be an instrument of exploitation, do not make anti-Islamic statements in public. Government announcements are often sprinkled with references to the establishment of Islamic values, and policies are determined in such a way as not to disturb this sensitive issue. The rulers may or may not be inclined actually to establish Islam in Bangladesh, but they have displayed a tendency to strengthen their base of power by exploiting the people’s attachment to Islam (Huque and Akhter 1987:200-201).

People’s attachment to Islam is deeply rooted in the society. The reference of Islam at the political and societal levels is widely made. The aforementioned quotation is a true reflection of the sociopolitical and cultural reality of Bangladesh.

Secularism, in post-independence Bangladesh, practically referred to a democratic ideal that propagates and advocates for religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence of all religious groups and communities. However, the recent practice of secularism (in Bangladesh) has been largely viewed as the emergence of an “ultra-secularism” and sometimes “neo-fascism” that is solely intended to emasculate and exterminate Islamic visibility and influence from the socio-political and cultural landscapes of the country (Islam 2011a:127). Secularism, as a political ideology, is not monolithic; it has many versions and interpretations with societies around the world practicing secularism in a variety of ways. Recently, since 2009 to be precise, the practice of secularism in Bangladesh seems to reflect the negation of democratic norms and practices, and gross human rights violations in which the religious people and institutions, more specifically, the Islamic political parties and their people, people with religious (Islamic) visibility and symbols, such as keeping a beard, wearing *hijab*, reciting Qur’an and performing Islamic prayers (*salat*) continue to become targeted and constantly harassed and persecuted (Islam 2011a; Jalil and Rahman 2011). In the post-9/11 world where opposing Islam and particularly political Islam seems to have become a valuable market currency to gain the dominant powers’ blessings and support, the ultra-secularists occupying state power in Bangladesh have become desperate to oppose and decimate Islamic political forces and institutions (Islam 2011a). In the name of secularism and combating the so-called “Islamic terrorism” or “Islamic militancy,” the Western powers intimidate public expression of Islam; their surrogates, the ruling parties in Bangladesh continually threaten Bangladeshi Muslims to hide their visibility in public spaces; thus creating a political order that is inconsistent with democracy and pluralism, fundamental human rights, and

the “liberal strand of secularism” (Mahmood 2006:325). Is there any linkage between the post-9/11 world order and the violent secularism in Bangladesh? What are the political and social forces that sustain political contradictions and presumably the unfair trial of democracy and human rights in Bangladesh? In this research, I have conducted an in-depth study on democracy and Islam in Bangladesh that seeks to address these questions.

The claim that Islam is a monolithic religion is highly questionable and contested because there are different interpretations or versions of the religion, such as *Sunni*, *Shiite*, *Sufi*, *Wahhabi*, and so forth. There is virtually no Shiite-Sunni debate in Bangladesh. Almost all Muslims follow the Sunni version of Islam, and hence, Sunni Islam is overwhelmingly dominant in Bangladesh. However, in interpreting the Qur’an and the *Hadith* of the Prophet, most Islamic scholars are not found holding identical views or giving similar opinions (Mawdudi 1976, 1982; Iqbal 2012; Asad 1961; al-Turabi² 1983; Ghannouchi³ 1998; Esposito and Piscatori 1991; Esposito 1991; Ramadan 2009, 2012).

1.2 Review of the literature

Democracy is a form of governance based on some degree of popular sovereignty and collective decision making (Landman 2005). Indeed, the word ‘democracy’ lacks unanimity as to its definition and meaning. It is an “essentially contested concept” (Gallie 1956:167). Schumpeter (1943), Dahl (1971, 1999), Huntington (1991), Diamond (1992, 1999), Zakaria (1997), Landman (2009, 2013), and others have defined democracy in different ways and measures. Holden (1993), Holmes (1995), Bollen (1993), Mann

² See Burr and Collins (2003) for more on al-Turabi.

³ See Tamimi (2001) for more on Ghannouchi.

(1970), Dunleavy and O’Leary (1987), and Macpherson (1977) have dealt with liberal democracy in great detail. These works have helped to illustrate the concept of democracy with its various dimensions and nuances. I have largely focused on liberal democracy in this research.

From the early nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, as Huntington (1991) notes, humanity had witnessed the waves and reverse waves of democratization in different parts of the world. Following World War II, and particularly since the 1970s, the newly independent countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America opted for democratic governance. Many of these countries preferred the liberal democracy to the traditional authoritarian or feudal forms of governance in order to achieve socioeconomic and political development. Most of the democracies of the present world follow either the British-style parliamentary democracy, or the American-style presidential democracy, both of which fall in the category of liberal democracy. Similarly, Bangladesh, from the very outset of its journey as an independent state since 1971, has practiced liberal democracy. It regularly follows the British parliamentary style while occasionally adhering to the American presidential system. In order to understand the relationship between Islam and democracy in Bangladesh, the emphasis on liberal democracy is significant.

Scholars throughout the world have carried out extensive works on Islam and democracy. Some have engaged in the philosophical and theoretical debate concerning the relationship between Islam and democracy (Khan 2002; Gulen 2001; Ahmad 2003; Khatab and Bouma 2007; Iqbal 2012), while others have focused on the practice of

democracy within Islamism⁴ in the context of a particular Muslim country or region beyond Bangladesh (Mernissi 1992; Esposito and Voll 1996; Yavuz 1997; Toprak 2005; Ibrahim 1996). Esposito and Voll (1996) have presented the critical conceptual analysis of Islam's relationship with democracy by studying several Muslim countries and examining the religion's roles in democratic political order. They have discussed Islamic movements and their interplay with democracy in six Muslim countries—Iran, Sudan, Pakistan, Malaysia, Algeria and Egypt. In their discussion, Esposito and Voll (1996) have shown how Islam has played a political role in these countries, how Islamic parties and organizations have emerged and pressed resurgent Islam, and how the incumbent ruling elites ensconced in the Western secular democratic norms and values have reacted to their actions within the socio-political landscapes. In their book, the authors have argued that Islamic beliefs and democratic values are not incompatible. This argument has been strongly contested by their peers, Huntington (1993), Lewis (1996), and Fukuyama (1992). Challenging the view of Islamic extremists and critics of Islam, Khatab and Bouma (2007) have explored the very topical issue of Islam's compatibility with democracy. The authors have examined the principles of Islam's political theory and the notion of democracy therein, the notion of democracy in medieval and in modern Muslim thought, Islam and human rights, and the contribution of Islamic legal ideas to European legal philosophy and law. The authors have addressed the pressing need for a systematic show of an Islamic politics of human rights and democracy grounded in the Qur'an. They argue that the West wonders about Islam and human rights and its own ability to

⁴ The term 'Islamism' is simply referred to as the amalgamation of politics with Islam as a religion. Islamism is also used as a synonym of 'political Islam.' The term is used and understood by scholars in a varied manner. See the detailed discussion of political Islam or Islamism in chapter six of this dissertation.

incorporate Muslim minority communities. Many Muslims also seek to find within Islam, a source for democratic governance and human rights, the authors added. Azra and Hudson (2008) challenge the conclusions of the Orientalists, such as Weber (1964), Wittfogel (1967), and more recently Huntington (1984) and Lewis (1994), who have condemned Islamic societies as inherently anti-modern and anti-democratic. The authors have argued in their volume, that most literatures on Islam and democracy have focused on developments in the Middle East and North Africa. Yet Indonesia, for instance, has a pluralist religious tradition very different from that found in most of the Middle Eastern countries, and its religious life is open to relatively high levels of accommodation and dialogue. In seeking to address this neglect, the authors have claimed that democratic nation-building in multi-ethnic Indonesia can benefit from strategic assimilations of concepts from Western political theory, especially if those concepts are approached from a basis within Islam. Mernissi (1992) has examined Islam's compatibility with democracy. Focusing on the politics of the Middle East, her volume raises provocative questions about the possibilities for democracy in the Muslim world. Ibrahim (1996) provides a sociological perspective on the political, religious, economic, and social issues of contemporary Egypt. The author acknowledges the prospects for democratization in Egypt and the surrounding region. However, the recent political development in Egypt (military takeover) and the region suggests that this prospect is dim for now. Bhutto (2009) argues that democracy and Islam are not incompatible, and the clash between Islam and the West is not inevitable. Focusing on the politics, democracy and Islamic radicalism in Pakistan, the author has opined that the fanatics in the Islamic faith, with extremist Islam on the rise throughout the world, has exploited and manipulated the

peaceful pluralistic message of Islam. In the book, she provides a sharp criticism of the Western powers particularly the United States and Britain on the grounds that they are helping radicalization by supporting groups that only serve their short-term interests. She argues that, by enabling dictators, the West is actually contributing to the frustration and extremism that leads to terrorism. Iqtidar (2011) provides an in-depth analysis of two significant Islamist parties in Pakistan—Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamaat-ud-Dawa. Iqtidar argues that these Islamist parties are involuntarily facilitating secularization within Muslim societies even though they vehemently oppose secularism. Toprak (2005) has analyzed the relationship between Islam, politics and democracy in the Turkish context. Elaborating on Turkey's secular political experiences and development, and focusing on the transformation and accommodating role and policies of the Welfare Party (the major Islamist party in Turkey, now in power and renamed as Justice and Development Party or *Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*, AKP), the author argues that the Turkish experience shows that Islam and democracy has not been incompatible; the AKP led by President Erdogan has reconciled much of the conflict between the secularist and the Islamist blocs and initiated a number of constitutional and legal reforms to extend civil liberties, recognize minority rights and curtail the power of the military in politics. Yavuz (1997) also studied the Turkish model of Islam's relationship with democracy. He suggests:

Turkey sets an example of what is possible in integrating Islamic movements into its relatively democratic political system. By accommodating Islamic voices and expanding the boundaries of participation, Turkey has preserved and consolidated its democracy and civil society. Moreover, this accommodation has created the possibility of reimagining Islamic tradition and has thus created a new synthesis. It has

advanced the debate on the relationship between democracy and Islam, on the one hand, and modernity and tradition, on the other (Yavuz 1997:63).

AKP came to power by espousing good democratic governance; their ethos, however, is rooted in Islamic values. They are a different breed of the Islamists, unlike some other Islamic political groups that have in their manifesto the establishment or restoration of the Islamic mode of governance. Turkey under AKP has demonstrated that Islam as a religion is not necessarily incompatible with democracy and pluralism.

Aras and Caha (2000) have explained the congruence between Islam and modernity in the context of Turkish democracy and Islam with a focus on the liberal Islamist thinking of Fethullah Gulen of Turkey. The authors argue that Gulen and his followers have exemplified the liberal Islamic pluralism which does not seem to be conflicting with a secular democratic order. Gulen and his followers have attempted to produce a religious-political movement favoring modernism, Turkish nationalism, tolerance, and democracy without sacrificing religious precepts. The main premise of Turkish Islam, as the authors argue, is moderation which is compatible with democracy and pluralism, and that has been developed and spearheaded by the liberal Islamists in Turkey with Gulen at the center. Thirkell-White (2006) examines the relationship between the complex social structures and Islamic discourses in Malaysia and argues that Malaysia remains some way from being a Western-style liberal democracy. Liow (2009) studied Islamism in contemporary Malaysia and argues that apart from the PAS, the main Islamist party in Malaysia, UMNO (United Malays National Organization), the leading partner of the ruling coalition—National Front, over the years has promoted Islamism in Malaysia. Muzaffar (1987) also examines the rise of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia and argues that Islam and democracy in Malaysia go hand in hand. The State, and particularly the

government, has become part of the Islamic resurgence in Malaysia, he opines. Wright (1996) has argued that neither Islam nor Muslim culture has been a major obstacle to modernization and development, specifically democratic norms and practices. She underscored that the Islamic concepts of *shura*, *ijma*, and *ijtihad* which, according to her, form a basis for Islamic tradition to be compatible with democracy and pluralism. Bukay (2007) argues that Islam may be compatible with democracy, but it depends on what is understood as Islam. This view is not, he notes, universally agreed on and is based on hope, not reality. He cited both Turkey and the West African country of Mali as democracies even though the vast majority of their citizens are Muslims. But, political Islam, he argues, espoused by Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists, is incompatible with liberal democracy.

Voll (2007) argues that both Islam and democracy are concepts with many definitions, and it is possible, depending on the definitions employed, to prove the compatibility or incompatibility of Islam and democracy. He opines that in the twenty-first century dominant interpretations of Islam opened the way for political visions in which Islam and democracy are mutually supportive. Ahmad (2003) challenged the popular perception that Islam and democracy are incompatible, arguing that the lack of democracy in some Muslim countries is not because of Islam but in spite of it. He has developed this argument in two stages. First, it considered the legal-ethical order embedded in the two main sources of Islam—the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition as to consider the democratic implications inherent in that construction. Second, it explored three long periods of Islamic rule to consider their progressive, inclusive and democratic tendencies. The author suggests that the current problems of democracy experienced by

many Muslim countries are not necessarily caused by factors intrinsic to Islam, but by forces external to those areas. Howeidy (2010) reviews how the civilizational discourse of Islam differs from that of democracy but does not necessarily mean that the former contradicts the latter. Howeidy argues that in many areas Islam and democracy are compatible. However, there are several areas in which democracy and Islam are in tension. The author, indeed, feels disinterested in comparing democracy with Islam: “Islam is wronged twice: once when it is compared with democracy, and once when it is said that it is against democracy. Comparison between the two is erroneous, but so are claims of incompatibility; and this is the matter which is in need of an extrication in the first instance and clarification in the second” (Howeidy 2010:297). The author has outlined several characteristics of Islamic state, and offered a discussion on the importance of “*shura*” or consultation with regard to understanding the relationship between Islam and democracy.

Ahmad (2000) argues that ‘democracy’ as it has been developed in the context of Western civilization and polity is neither a monolithic concept nor an uncontested one. He contends that democracy remains a multi-faceted phenomenon, both at the conceptual as well as operational levels. It is, therefore, intellectually unacceptable and culturally untenable to assume that a particular Western model of democracy must be accepted as an ideal form of polity for the entirety of mankind, particularly for Muslims, who have their own distinct moral and ideological identity and historico-cultural personality. The author argues that Islamic political order is based on the concept of *Tawhid* meaning oneness of God and seeks its flowering in the form of popular vicegerency (*Khilafa*) operating through a mechanism of *shura* meaning consultation, supported by the

principles of equality of humankind, rule of law, protection of human rights including those of minorities, accountability of rulers, transparency of political processes, and an overriding concern for justice in all its dimensions: legal, political, social, economic and international. The author also argues that the Islamic model has the potential for establishing authentic sociopolitical pluralism. Sarmazdeh (2012) defies the argument of some scholars that secularism is the core foundation of democracy and thus no religious government can be democratic. He contends that such a problem is quite non-scientific and artificial. He argues that secularism is not the basis of democracy, nor is religion incompatible with democracy. Scholars, such as Huntington (1991), Lipset (1994), Lewis (1996), Pipes (1995), and Kedourie (1994) argue that authoritarianism is intrinsic to Islam and thus there is no compatibility between Islam and democracy. These scholars used the terms Islam and democracy in an essentialist and monolithic manner rather than considering their flexibility and diversity.

The dominant debate on Islam and democracy continues to operate in the realm of normativity (Ahmad 2011). The present research aims at shifting the debate from textual normativity to social praxis requiring for an in-depth sociological analysis. Since both Islam as a religion and way of life, and democracy as a social and political system are concepts with no monolithic definitions, their growth and development and their implications for men and societies are deeply connected with the social and cultural processes of the societies in which they develop and work. Thereby, the socio-economic and cultural trajectories are of paramount significance with regard to comprehensively understanding the sociopolitical and religious discourses, such as Islamic tradition and democratic pluralism.

Beyond the literature on Islam and democracy reviewed earlier, several scholars have worked on the relevance and impact of Islam on the socioeconomic development and political culture in Bangladesh, and have also produced voluminous literature on Islamism in Bangladesh. Banu (1992) studied religion and social change in Bangladesh. In her volume, she gives a sociological analysis of Islamic religious beliefs and practices in contemporary Bangladesh. She has also studied the impact of the Islamic religious beliefs on the socioeconomic development and political culture in present-day Bangladesh. Riaz (2004) gave a comprehensive account of the workings and influence of political Islam, and the eroding trend of secularism replaced by the emergence of Islamic radicalism in Bangladesh. Riaz's (2004) volume has mainly contributed to the description of events, constitutional measures, and political processes which are viewed to become reflective of the Islamization⁵ process and the rise of Islamism in Bangladesh. However, an in-depth sociological study focusing on socio-cultural processes along with political perspectives is significant to understand why such events and constitutional measures have taken place, why and how the Islamic forces have gained a fertile ground and consolidated their spaces in a so-called secular society in Bangladesh. Scholars have also worked on Islam, politics and democracy in Bangladesh (Ahmed 1991, 1995; Maniruzzaman 1980; Ahamed 1983; Ahmed 2004; Hakim 1993, 1998; Jahan 1980; Huque and Akhter 1987; Ghosh 1993; Ziring 1992; Murshid 1995; Zafarullah 1996, 2003; Hashmi 2000; Shehabuddin 2008; Salehin 2013; Griffiths and Hasan 2015).

⁵ Islamization is a process by which a society is organized in accordance with the doctrinal philosophy of Islam. Islamization carried out by the Islamist political parties is included, in this dissertation, Islamism or political Islam. Both secular political parties and groups and non-secular/socioreligious and cultural organizations can promote Islamization of the society. For Islamization in Bangladesh, see detailed discussion in chapter seven of this dissertation.

Ahmed (1991) examines the political and constitutional development and their impacts on the society during the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman regime. Maniruzzaman (1980) explains the social, political and historical trajectories and their interplay in the politics of Bangladesh. Jahan (1980) analyzes the critical problems and issues in the sociopolitical landscape of Bangladesh. Ahamed (1983) focuses the trends of Islam, in particular, the increasingly active role of various stakeholders regarding the Islamization in Bangladesh. Huque and Akhter (1987) show that Islam as a religion has played a dominant role in the politics and society of Bangladesh. Hakim (1998) elaborates how the successive rulers used Islam as a political legitimization tool in Bangladesh. Zafarullah (2003) examines the state of politics and direction of democratic governance in Bangladesh.

However, there has hardly been any robust study on democracy linking Islamic tradition in Bangladesh. This study, representing a robust sociological analysis of Islam and democracy in Bangladesh, aims at filling this gap.

Furthermore, the dominant studies on Islam and democracy show that the Bengali nationalist movement, which culminated in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971, was based on the doctrine of secularism (Riaz 2004, 2005; Pattanaik 2009, 2013; Khondker 2010a). These studies also claim that de-secularization in Bangladesh began to take place with the advent of the military regime in the mid-1970s. These literatures further claim that the military rulers promoted the Islamization process to obtain support from the masses. The question then arises: If the masses were driven by the spirit of secularism to embark on the liberation war, why, after merely three and a half years of the independent Bangladesh, did these very masses reject secularism and support state-sponsored Islamization carried out by the armed forces ruling elites? This research shows

that, although a section of the national liberation movement leaders were embedded in secularism, the masses took part in the war of independence in the quest for economic opportunities, cultural and political rights, and democracy. This research will show that following the attainment of independence, Bangladesh was constitutionally made a secular state, but the Bengali Muslims had hardly any attachment to secularism. The dominant literatures have lacked distinguishing secular people from the secular state. This research will also show that both civil and military ruling elites have had contributions to Islamization of Bangladesh.

1.3 Research questions and hypotheses

1.3.1 Questions

The main question is: How do Islam, Islamism and democracy intersect and interplay in shaping the social and political landscape of Bangladesh?

In order to fully examine and explore this question, this research seeks to address the following five sub-questions:

1. What is the relationship between Islam and democracy?
2. What is the origin and development of Islamic traditions in Bangladesh?
3. How is political Islam defined? How has political Islam developed in Bangladesh?
4. What are the roles of state and non-state actors in promoting (and contesting) Islamization in Bangladesh?
5. How do Islam, Islamism and democracy work in practice in Bangladesh?

1.3.2 Hypotheses

This research has undertaken the following critical hypotheses and projections which have been philosophically examined and empirically tested in this research.

1. Islam and democracy are not necessarily incompatible, and Islam as a religion has a contributory role in the development of democracy.
2. Islam in Bangladesh was originated and developed by Sufis and saints largely through peaceful means, and thereby moderate Islam is deeply rooted in its society.
3. The suppression of democracy is highly likely to lead to the strengthening of Islamism, orthodox Islam and, to some extent, “Islamic” terrorism, and the fair trial of democracy is likely to result in the decline of political Islam.

Sociologists earlier predicted that religion would gradually fade in importance and cease to be significant with the advent of modernization and industrialization in society. However, this prediction has been proven wrong; religion has emerged as a powerful force in the sociopolitical and cultural landscapes of the modern nation-states, particularly of the Muslim countries including Bangladesh. The role of religion in politics, especially the relationship between Islam and democracy has been a topic of serious discussion among the scholars of political Islam or Islamism over the years. This debate has been further advanced due to the emergence of violent Islamist groups in recent years throughout various parts of the Muslim world. Bangladesh, an overwhelmingly Muslim-majority country, has also witnessed a powerful resurgence of Islamism and an emergence of Islamist militancy and terrorism. In this context, the

critical study of the intersection and interplay of Islam, Islamism and democracy in a secular Muslim country like Bangladesh takes on renewed significance.

1.4 Organization of the chapters

This study deals with five specific questions. By first addressing these five questions, I will aim to explore and answer the main research question. Each of the five questions will be answered in its particular chapter. In addition, there are four other chapters—an introductory chapter, a framework chapter, a method chapter, and a concluding chapter. Altogether, this dissertation has been organized into nine distinct chapters. Following this first chapter, which deals with the background information, literature review, and research questions and hypotheses, the second chapter will cover the theoretical and conceptual framework. The third chapter discusses the method of data collection and analysis. The relationship between Islam and democracy will be theoretically and philosophically examined in chapter four. The fifth chapter explores the advent of Islam and the growth of Muslim society in Bangladesh, followed by the rise of political Islam and its development in Bangladesh in chapter six. The seventh chapter outlines the role of state and non-state actors in the promotion and contesting of Islamization in Bangladesh. The critical intersection and interplay of Islam, Islamism and democracy in the making of Bangladesh society is analyzed in chapter eight. The final chapter, chapter nine, concludes with the main arguments and findings of each chapter, the broader sociological implications of this study on Bangladesh and beyond, and policy recommendations.

Chapter Two

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The idea that modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individual, has turned out to be wrong. To be sure, modernization has had some secularizing effects, more in some places than in others. But it has also provoked powerful movements of counter-secularization. Also, secularization on the societal level is not necessarily linked to secularization on the level of individual consciousness. Certain religious institutions have lost power and influence in many societies, but both old and new religious beliefs and practices have nevertheless continued in the lives of individuals, sometimes taking new institutional forms and sometimes leading to great explosions of religious fervor. Conversely, religiously identified institutions can play social or political roles even when very few people believe or practice the religion that the institutions represent. To say the least, the relation between religion and modernity is rather complicated.

— **Peter Berger** (1999:2-3), *The Desecularization of the World*

2.1 Theoretical Underpinnings

This study draws on several sociological theories, such as secularization theory and its paradigms, modalities of secularism, and Weberian sociology of religion. Secularization theory and modalities (multiple types) of secularism are significant in grasping the sociopolitical and cultural dynamics of Bangladesh. Bangladesh as an independent country started out by practicing secularism. However, within a short space of time, secularism was eroded and Islamization gradually took its place. Both state and non-state

actors contributed to the erosion of secularism and the preponderance of Islamization in the country. Secularization theory is relevant to explain this phenomenon. Modalities of secularism have helped us understand the type of secularism Bangladesh has been practicing over the years. To understand the practice of Islamism alongside secularism in Bangladesh's democracy, the theory of secularism has been deemed extraordinarily pertinent. Weberian sociology of religion is also deemed important in the case of explaining the role of Islamic traditions in promoting democracy and pluralism in Bangladesh.

2.1.1 The 'Secularization Theory'

Some scholars, such as Martin (1965), have criticized the secularization theory as a 'counter religious' ideology. However, other scholars, such as Wilson (1969), are not interested in employing secularization in any ideological sense. For Wilson, secularization explains the fact that religion—which is understood as a way of thinking, as the performance of certain practices, and as the institutionalization and organization of these patterns of thinking and performance—has lost influence in Western societies in general and in both England and the United States in particular. The loss of religious influence takes place over a long historical process, and this process does not necessarily play out in similar ways in different societies. Secularization, according to him, is a universal, long-term, evolutionary process that leads to the decline of the significance of religious institutions, actions or consciousness, and thus, the influence of religion in social life diminishes. Secularization, from Wilson's point of view, is not linear; rather it is an uneven process (Wilson 1969).

In the sub-sections below, I will bring the critical discussion of the secularization theory that predicted that modernization necessarily leads to the decline of religion, and the ‘old paradigm’ – ‘new paradigm’ debate within.

2.1.1.1 The decline of religion thesis

The classical sociologists, such as Marx (1964), Durkheim (1995) and Weber (1964) predicted that the role of religion would cease to be significant in the public sphere with the advent of modernization and industrialization in society. Sociologists in the early second-half of the twentieth century also supported the classical sociologists’ prediction and asserted that religion would eventually collapse and that most of humanity would be either atheists or agnostics (Riaz 2011; Cox 1965). However, religion is increasingly receiving a wider acceptance in the public domain around the world, leaving or refusing to accept its assigned place in the private sphere (Haynes 1998). Since the 1980s, religion has gradually emerged in the social and political landscapes of the nation-states powerfully. Scholars, such as Casanova (1992, 2008, 2011), Hadden (1980, 1987, 1995), Berger (1967, 1974, 1999, 2011, 2011a), and others have written extensively on secularization theory and the breakthrough of religion in politics and society. Using empirical data, Casanova (1992, 2011) has argued that in the 1980s, religion was ‘deprivatized’ in many countries around the world.⁶ Hadden (1987) refutes the claim that religion is supposed to decline and argues that this claim stems from a doctrinal explanation rather than from scientific inquiry. Berger (1999:2) labeled the secularization

⁶ This argument has challenged the proponents of the secularization theory (McCloskey 1980; Shils 1966; Moore Jr. 1984; Luckmann 1967, 1990) who predicted that modernity would essentially result in the privatization of religion.

theory as mistaken and candidly opined that “the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false.” He elaborates this in this way: “the world today, with some exceptions to which I will come presently, is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken” (Berger 1999:2).⁷

Although ‘secularization theory’ largely appeared in the scholarly works from the 1950s and 1960s, its roots trace back to the European Enlightenment. Scholars; ranging from the classical social theorists, such as Marx, Comte, Durkheim and Weber to the contemporary sociologists like Peter Berger, Frank Lechner and James Hunter; were convinced that modernization (resulting from Enlightenment) would necessarily lead to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals (Berger 1999; Heyking 1999). To quote Giddens (2006:536):

These sociologists believed that religion is in a fundamental sense an illusion.

The advocates of different faiths may be wholly persuaded of the validity of the beliefs they hold and the rituals in which they participate, yet the very diversity of religions and their obvious connections to different types of society, the sociologists held, make this claims inherently implausible.

Modernization has brought a broad spectrum of changes in lives of individuals. It has, in fact, had some secularizing effects, more so in some places than in others. However, it

⁷ It is important to note that early Peter Berger (in the 1960s) was one of the most well-known proponents of the thesis that religion will have very little, if any, role in public life (Riaz 2011). But later Peter Berger has been found markedly changed about his earlier opinions. He (1986:226-227) himself has acknowledged that his early work erred in supposing that modernity must lead to an erosion of religion. But it is his earlier work that is still influential in the field (Warner 1993).

has also provoked powerful movements of counter-secularization (Berger 1999). In many countries of today's world, religious groups have powerfully emerged and challenged the secularization theory and its main thesis that religion would gradually take a back seat and cease to remain significant in the public domain of the state. As mentioned earlier, the New Christian Right Movement in the United States, the Free Theological Movement in Latin America, the Islamic Brotherhood Movement in Middle East and North Africa, the Catholic Movement in Eastern Europe, the Orthodox Movement in the former Soviet Union countries, and the Hindu Nationalist Movement in India have powerful bases in respective societies. It is no exaggeration, to note Berger (1999:3), that—

Certain religious institutions have lost power and influence in many societies, but both old and new religious beliefs and practices have nevertheless continued in the lives of individuals, sometimes taking new institutional forms and sometimes leading to great explosions of religious fervor. Conversely, religiously identified institutions can play social and political roles even when very few people believe or practice the religion that the institutions represent.

In other words, the influence of religion has significantly increased in the sociopolitical landscape of the different countries of the modern world.

The emergence of the influence of religion in the public domain in Bangladesh can be explained according to these critical theoretical insights. This will be elaborately discussed in chapter seven.

2.1.1.2 “Old paradigm” and “new paradigm”

Secularization theory has suffered a major setback with religion coming to the fore of public space in the state. However, it does not mean that secularization theory is dead,

because, secularization, to quote Riaz (2011:14), “is a complex multi-faceted process that involves various dimensions of individual and social life.” Secularization theory, although not dead, but has undergone several revisions (Riaz 2011), which has culminated in various theoretical paradigms. Mainly, two competing conceptualizations or paradigms have emerged—the “old paradigm” and the “new paradigm” as identified by Warner (1993). The old paradigm is largely attributed to the early work of Berger (2011 *first published in 1967*, 2011a *first published in 1969*) [Warner 1993]⁸, and other sociologists of religion, such as Lechner (1985, 1985a, 1991, 1996), Tschannen (1991, 1998), Hunter (1983, 1987), and Roof (1978, 1993). The new paradigm which is also called “post-secularization paradigm” or “neo-secularization paradigm” (Yamane 1997:109-110) has largely been developed by Hadden (1987), Warner (1993), Butler (1990), Hatch (1989), Stark (1996), Stark and Iannaccone (1994), Swatos Jr. and Christiano (1999), and others. Secularization theorists of each paradigm have not come up with a single, all agreed upon theory of secularization. Both intra- and inter-paradigm debate which is clearly existent, has indeed made the secularization theory more complex.⁹ However, the two paradigms are in fundamental disagreement with regard to secularization. Old paradigm treats religion as an all-inclusive worldview, while the new paradigm accentuates the adoption of religious beliefs as individual choices (Tepe 2002).

⁸ However, it should be noted that the ‘old paradigm’ of secularization theory goes far back to the works of the classical sociologists, such as Marx, Durkheim and Weber. In the recent past, sociologists among others Parsons (1937, 1960, 1971, 1971a), Bellah (1957, 1970, 1975), Luhmann (1985, 1995, 2013), Berger (2011, 2011a), Luckmann (1967, 1979, 1990), Wilson (1969, 1976a, 1976b, 1982, 1990), Martin (1969, 1978, 1991, 1995, 2005), and Fenn (1970, 1972, 1978, 2001) defended, buttressed and revised the old paradigm.

⁹ For understanding the intra-paradigm debate within the old paradigm, see in detail, Goldstein (2009), and within the new paradigm, see Warner (1993).

Old paradigm follows strict separation between the religiosity and the secularity, and expects either a decline of the religiosity from the public domain or a limited role of religion in the political sphere (Tepe 2002). Within this binary conceptual framework, the ascendancy of religion has been perceived as ‘a resurgence of tradition’ or as ‘a reaction to radical social changes and authoritarian secular policies’, and assessed as ‘a regressive’ and ‘a reactionary’ therefore, a temporary phenomenon (Tepe 2002).

In contrast, the new paradigm “highlights the continued vitality of religion in modern societies” (Yamane 1997:109). Unlike the ‘old paradigm’, the emerging ‘new paradigm’ acknowledges the various forms of co-existence of religious and secular values and accentuates the voluntary and pluralistic aspects of religion at the individual level. New paradigm is accommodative and inclusive. It emphasizes that interaction between the religious and secular ideologies is not unavoidably a zero-sum game. Therefore, it opens a new research agenda by explaining how individuals choose between the religious and secular and how religious beliefs in turn affect their action (Tepe 2002). The table (adapted from Berger 2011; Lechner 1985; Hadden 1987; and Warner 1993) below shows the distinguishing traits between old paradigm and new paradigm of secularization theory:

Table 2.1: Taxonomy of the ‘old paradigm’ and ‘new paradigm’ of the secularization theory

Old paradigm	New paradigm
1. Old paradigm is traced back to the classical sociologists, such as Marx, Durkheim and Weber. However, it is largely attributed to the early works of eminent sociologist of religion Peter Berger.	1. New paradigm has largely been developed by the sociologists of the 1980s and 1990s, such as Jeffrey Hadden, Stephen Warner, Jon Butler, and others. The new paradigm is also referred to as ‘post secularization paradigm’ or ‘neo-secularization paradigm.’
2. Treats religion as an all-inclusive worldview.	2. Accentuates the adoption of religious beliefs as individual choices.
	3. Highlights continued vitality of religion in

3. Follows strict separation between the religiosity and the secularity, and expects either a decline of the religiosity from the public domain or a limited role of religion in the political sphere.	modern societies. It acknowledges the various forms of co-existence of religious and secular values and accentuates the voluntary and pluralistic aspects of religion at the individual level.
4. Emphasizes that interaction between the religious and secular ideologies is necessarily a zero-sum game.	4. Asserts that interaction of religious traditions with secular ideologies is not unavoidably a zero-sum game, and thus opens a new research agenda by explaining how individuals choose between the religious and secular and how religious beliefs in turn affect their action.
5. Suggests that there is implausibility of peaceful co-existence between the secular and the religious forces.	5. Advocates that there is plausibility of peaceful co-existence between the secular and the religious forces.

The secularization discourse of both the old and new paradigm has helped immensely in the understanding of the role of the Islamic tradition in politics and especially in the contours of the development or underdevelopment of democracy and pluralism in Bangladesh. Given the aforesaid brief description of the contours of the conceptual approaches in studies of religion and politics, the analysis rendered in this dissertation has extensively borrowed from the new paradigm to understand the diverse religious and secular views.

2.1.1.3 Modalities of secularism

The term ‘secularism’ was introduced by the utilitarian freethinker George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906) in the mid-nineteenth century (Bangstad 2009; Khondker 2010b). Holyoake and other European freethinkers introduced the designation ‘secularism’ as a political and governmental doctrine to avoid the charge of being atheists in a still largely Christian society (Asad 2003). According to Holyoake (1871:11): “Secularism relates to the present existence of man, and to action, the issues of which can be tested by the

experience of this life—having for its objects the development of the physical, moral, and intellectual nature of man to the highest perceivable point, as the immediate duty of society.”

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, Europe underwent a series of civilizational changes; the sixteenth century was marked by the Christian Reformation, the seventeenth century by the age of reason, and the eighteenth century was marked by the European Enlightenment. Secularism emerged as a successor of the Enlightenment in the nineteenth century and was broadly represented in the writings of the Enlightenment thinkers, such as Nietzsche, Marx and Freud (Khondker 2010b). It is argued that “even before the advent of the term ‘secularism’ formally in Europe or the United States, in the Christian world, the Protestant Reformation had laid the foundations for both modernity and secularism”(Khondker 2010b:219).

In tracing the etymology of the term ‘secular’, Keddie (2003:14) notes that the word is “derived in Middle English from the Old French word *seculer* (itself from the Latin *saecularis*), the word ‘secular’ originally referred to clergy who were not bound by the religious rules of a monastic order.” Keddie (2003:14) adds: “In Middle English, it could also refer to the realm of the ‘this-worldly’ as opposed to the divine or the sacred and ‘other-worldly’ realms historically monopolized in Western Europe by the Roman Catholic Church.” From the nineteenth century onwards, the word ‘secular’ began to be associated with ‘secularists’ who espoused the doctrine of ‘secularism’—that is, Keddie (2003:14-15) continues, “the belief that religious institutions and values should play no role in the temporal affairs of the nation-state.” Dr. Johnson’s *Dictionary* (published in 1755), defined ‘secularity’ as “Worldliness; attention to the things of the present life”,

‘secularize’ as “to convert from spiritual appropriations to common use” and “to make worldly”, and ‘secularization’ as the “Act of secularizing” (Quoted in Keane 2000:6). Maclure and Taylor (2011:3) consider secularism as “a political and legal system whose function is to establish a certain distance between the state and religion.” Yinger (1967:19) refers it to as “beliefs and practices related to the ‘non-ultimate’ aspects of human life.”

Like democracy, secularism is “an essentially contested concept” (Bader 2012:22). The complexity and contestation in defining secularism arises due to its different perceptions in different disciplines in the school of social sciences. Borrowing from Assyaukanie, Hashemi (2010:326-327) figured out three major dimensions of secularism as understood in three core disciplines—philosophy, sociology, and political science:

- (i) Philosophically, secularism refers to a rejection of the transcendental and the metaphysical with a focus on the existential and the empirical.
- (ii) Sociologically, secularism correlates with modernization in terms of a gradual process that leads to the declining influence of religion in social institutions, communal life, and human relationships.
- (iii) Politically, secularism entails a separation of the public and private spheres and, more broadly, a form of separation, which can vary, between the institutions of the state and the forces of religion.

Cox’s *The Secular City*, which defines secularism as “the liberation of man from religious and metaphysical tutelage, the turning of his attention away from other worlds and toward this one” (Cox 1965:17), represents the philosophical dimension. While Berger’s *The Sacred Canopy* that perceives secularism as a “process by which sectors of

society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols” (Berger 2011:107) represents the sociological dimension of secularism (Hashemi 2010). The political dimension of secularism, Casanova (2009:1057) notes, offers a “positive view of religion as a moral good, or as an ethical communitarian reservoir of human solidarity and republican virtue.” However, it would, he continues, “like to contain religion within its own differentiated ‘religious’ sphere and would like to maintain a secular public democratic sphere free from religion.”

These three dimensions of secularism are similarly addressed in the writings of other leading scholars of secularism studies. Keddie (2003:16) offers three main ways in which secularization is commonly perceived today: (i) an increase in the number of people with secular beliefs and practices; (ii) a lessening of religious control or influence over major spheres of life; and (iii) a growth in state separation from religion and in secular regulation of formerly religious institutions and customs. Similarly, Casanova (2011:211) offers three different propositions of secularization: (i) secularization as differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms; (ii) secularization as decline of religious beliefs and practices; and (iii) secularization as marginalization of religion to a private sphere.

Taylor (2007:1-22) analyzes three distinct but related categorization of secularism:

- (i) Secularity 1 is the retreat of religion from the public sphere, the diminution of religion in people’s lives or the separation of Church and state in public spaces.
- (ii) Secularity 2 is the decline of religious beliefs and practices that can be seen in Western liberal democracies in terms of church attendance. It is related to Secularity 1 but it is different in scope.

- (iii) Secularity 3 is the place of our self-understanding toward religion and the recognition that something has eclipsed it in terms of an alternative belief system. It is the problematization in Latin Christendom on this topic between 1500-2000 that looks at background conditions and the development of secularism from the *longue duree*.

Multiple histories of secularism have led to the emergence of a wide variety of secularisms. Within the discourse of secularism developed in the Western tradition, scholars have referred to two different political models of secularism—Anglo-American secularism and French secularism or *Laicite* (Hashemi 2010; Khondker 2010b). Anglo-American secularism is argued to be more tolerant and religion-friendly with regard to religion's role in the public domain (Kuru 2009; Hashemi 2010). Kuru (2009:41) has dubbed the American model as “passive secularism” perhaps due to its tolerant approach towards religion. The bedrock of Anglo-American secularism is claimed to be the separation of the Church from the state. The philosophy that ‘Give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s’ models the Anglo-American secularism. The demarcation between the institutions of state and religion is made in order for state’s autonomy and free exercise of power. It simultaneously ensures the autonomy of the religious institutions (Khondker 2010b). Anglo-American model of secularism thus suggests that state and religion are compartmentalized in which religion is neither marginalized, nor denied, nor is it the case of Nietzsche’s death of God (Keane 2000); rather this distinction is a truce that offers each sphere its boundary markets (Khondker 2010b).

The French model, however, is argued to be hostile to the manifestation of religious symbols in the public sphere and state institutions (Kuru 2009; Hashemi 2010).

Kuru (2009:103) has designated the French model as “assertive secularism” perhaps considering its intolerant approach toward religion. During the Third Republic founded in 1870, the French Republicans began to use the term *Laïcité* (secularism) widely to denote severe enmity with clericalism (Kuru 2008). Unlike Anglo-American secularism, *Laïcité*, which was the product of the severe conflict between the anti-clerical secularists and anti-secularist clergy, does not only propose a separation of the church from the state, it also seeks state’s control of the religious domain which in reality means the marginalization of religion (Khondker 2010b). In the Anglo-American tradition, the symbolic presence of religion in the public sphere does not bring about any problems with the secular state identity. In the French tradition, the symbolic expression and appearance of religion in both public and social domain is suppressed. In the late nineteenth century, religious instruction in public schools was abolished. One statistics suggests that between 1879 and 1885, thousands of clerical teachers were excluded from educational institutions in addition to closing about fifteen thousand Catholic schools (Kuru 2008:6). The 1905 law that made a clear-cut separation of church and state was, according to Kuru (2008:6), “a final wave of secularization” in France. The 2004 law that prohibited the wearing of religious symbols or clothing in public schools and consequently provoked a vibrant debate mostly concerned with Muslim headscarf or veil (Lyon and Spini 2004) is a legacy of the 1905 law and broadly, the confrontational history of French secularism. Previously, to quote Roy (2007:2), “the enemy was the Catholic Church (“clericalism, that’s the enemy!”), and Islam has now taken the place of Catholicism.” Quoting from Roy (2007:13), Khondker (2010b:220) notes that “veiled women—Catholic nuns—were chased from public places in 1905”, however, “today, the caste has changed and public

schools chase the veiled Muslim girls and women.” France bans Muslim headscarf in its schools arguing that this attire violates secularism (Mahmood 2005).

Beyond the Anglo-American and French model, multiple versions of political secularism are said to have developed even in non-Western societies. These include but are not confined to Indian secularism (Madan 1993; Bhargava 2002), Turkish secularism (Keyman 2007, 2010; Yavuz 2009; Kuru 2009), and Arab secularism (Najjar 1996; Salem 1996). The table below shows the modalities of secularism:

Table 2.2: Taxonomy of the modalities of secularism

Modalities	Distinguishing traits
Anglo-American Model	More tolerant and religion-friendly with regard to religion’s role in the public domain. The bedrock of this model is the separation of the Church from the state. Demarcation between the institutions of state and religion is made in order for state’s autonomy and free exercise of power. It simultaneously ensures the autonomy of the religious institutions. Suggests that state and religion is compartmentalized in which religion is neither marginalized, nor denied; rather this distinction is a truce that offers each sphere its boundary markets. This model is also referred to as ‘passive secularism.’
French Model/Laicite	Hostile to the manifestation of religious symbols in the public sphere and in state institutions. Does not only propose separation of the church from the state, it also seeks state’s control of the religious domain which in reality means the marginalization of religion. The symbolic expression and appearance of religion in both public and social domain is suppressed. This model is also referred to as ‘assertive secularism.’
Indian Model	Unlike the Anglo-American and the French models, the Indian model implies a role of the state in religious affairs. Secularism is treated as the opposite of communalism implying a tolerance of all religions equally. The state does not interfere in religious domain and make any discrimination on religious grounds. The constitution refers to the idea of religious tolerance as <i>sarbadharma samabhava</i> , meaning the equality of all religions before the state.
Turkish Model	Separates the state and political affairs from religious institutions and symbols. More similar to French model that suppresses the religious domain. State not only eliminates the public visibility of religion, it also interferes in the private domain of religion. Removes religious beliefs and symbols from the process of state-building. It not only suggests the total removal of religion from the state affairs but also involves the absolute institutional and constitutional control of religious activities by the state.

Source: Adapted from Hashemi (2010), Khondker (2010b), Madan (1993), and Keyman (2007).

2.1.2 Weberian Sociology of Religion

To the sociologists of religion, explaining the merits of different religious beliefs and practices is not a matter of concern. Scholars of the sociology of religion are also not interested in the legitimacy of belief in the hereafter (Banu 1992). The sociological studies of religion do not simply describe religious beliefs and practices (Freund 1968), but are primarily concerned with at least three basic aspects: firstly, to understand the conditions under which the different religious beliefs grow; secondly, to explain the variations of religious beliefs among societies, groups and individuals; and finally, to examine the consequences of religious beliefs on society (Banu 1992). This study has been framed in the light of the third aspect of the sociological study of religion—the impact of religion on social change.

Scholars, such as Marx and Weber have greatly analyzed the consequences of religion in the process of social change. Marx (1964) views religion as a form of ideology—an important part of superstructure of society—that helps to sustain the class society and obstruct the process of social change. Analyzing the nature of the capitalist society, he regards religion as a status-quo-preserving force that stands against any rebellion or revolution, and remains a problem for social change, but coexists with the existing conditions of exploitation and injustice which are caused by capitalism. In contrast, Weber's sociology of religion interprets religion as an agent for social change as religion is an independent variable capable of affecting society. Weber explains religion as an influential factor for growing modernity and development of capitalism in Europe and America. Weber (2003) argues that the Protestant work ethic is a causal factor in the growth and development of capitalism. He, in particular, relates Calvinism to the

devotion to hard work which results in business success and the accumulation of wealth, a precondition for the flourishing of capitalism. Weber also borrowed Martin Luther's idea of 'the calling' or 'vocation' to support his argument that modern Western capitalism developed in the wake of the prevalence of Protestant work ethic in Europe. In Weber's (2003:40) words, "The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. This is his calling." Calvinism, which involved the doctrine of predestination, vocation, calculative and methodical lifestyle and asceticism, matched with the capitalistic work ethic, and thus helped nourish the modern European capitalism. By studying other religions, such as ancient Judaism, Catholicism, Indian and Chinese religions, Weber also pointed out that these belief systems were inherently incongruent to the kind of capitalism that grew and spread in modern Europe and America. Weberian sociology of religion differs from Marx's, which considers religion to be a status quo representing a problem for social change.

This study has examined the role of religion, Islam in this case, in the development/underdevelopment of democracy in Bangladesh. Weber's (2003) thesis that the Protestant ethic contributes to the growth and development of capitalism in Europe has been contextualized in the case of examining the relationship between Islam and democracy in Bangladesh. Does Islam have any contributions to the growth and development or underdevelopment of democracy in Bangladesh? Does Islamic tradition stunt Bangladesh democracy or is Islam inherently in conflict or congruence with the Western notion of democracy? Can Islamic religion be a source of social justice and

societal integration in Bangladesh? These questions will be addressed using insights from the Weberian religion thesis.

2.2. Conceptual Threads

Apart from the theoretical frameworks noted above, this study also requires employing several conceptual threads. The study involves a deep and complex political concept—democracy. In order to garner a deeper understanding of the concept of democracy, this study has employed the conceptual threads that include ‘polyarchy’ and ‘hybridity of democracy.’

2.2.1 ‘Polyarchy’ by Dahl’s (1971, 1999) and post-Dahl authors

It is already noted that democracy is a contested concept and has multiple dimensions. Dahl’s ‘polyarchy’ concept of democracy encompasses two fundamental dimensions of democracy—the ‘process dimension’ emphasizing electoral democracy and the ‘content dimension’ accentuating liberal democracy (See Diamond 1999).

Polyarchy is referred to “a system in which a small group actually rules and mass participation in decision-making is confined to leadership choice in elections carefully managed by competing elites. The pluralist assumption is that elites will respond to the general interests of majorities, through polyarchy’s ‘twin dimensions’ of ‘political contestation’ and ‘political inclusiveness’, as a result of the need of those who govern to win a majority of votes” (Robinson 1996:623-624). Dahl (1999) characterizes democracy as a system of government that—

helps prevent rule by cruel and vicious autocrats, guarantees citizens a set of fundamental rights, ensures a broader range of personal freedoms, helps people

protect their own fundamental interests, provides the maximum opportunity for self-determination—the freedom to live under laws of one’s own choosing—provides the maximum opportunity for the exercise of moral responsibility, encourages human development, fosters a relatively high degree of political equality, promotes peace—as modern representative democracies do not fight each other—and generates prosperity (McFaul 2004:148-149).

Quoting from Dahl (1982), Schmitter and Karl (1991) have pointed out seven main conditions required for a polity to be a polyarchy. These are: (1) Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials; (2) Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon; (3) Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials; (4) Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government; (5) Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined; (6) Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by law; and (7) Citizens also have the right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups (Dahl 1982:11; cited in Schmitter and Karl 1991:81).

However, Schmitter and Karl (1991) proposed two more conditions to complement Dahl’s seven conditions. These include: (1) Popularly elected officials must be able to exercise their constitutional powers without being subjected to overriding (albeit informal) opposition from unelected officials; and (2) The polity must be self-governing; it must be able to act independently of constraints imposed by some other overarching political system (Schmitter and Karl 1991:81).

Schmitter and Karl (1991) have provided justifications for their proposals. Justifying the first condition, they argue that “democracy is in jeopardy if military officers, entrenched civil servants, or state managers retain the capacity to act independently of elected civilians or even veto decisions made by the people’s representatives” (Schmitter and Karl 1991:81). For the second condition, they maintain that—

Dahl and other contemporary democratic theorists probably took this condition for granted since they referred to formally sovereign nation-states. However, with the developments of blocs, alliances, spheres of influence, and a variety of “neocolonial” arrangements, the question of autonomy has been a salient one. Is a system really democratic if its elected officials are unable to make binding decisions without the approval of actors outside their territorial domain? This is significant even if the outsiders are themselves democratically constituted and if the insiders are relatively free to alter or even end the encompassing arrangement ... but it becomes especially critical if neither condition obtains ... (Schmitter and Karl 1991:81-82).

Hashemi (2009) has provided a variant list that identified eight conditions of Dahl’s polyarchy. These are: (1) Freedom to form and join organizations; (2) Freedom of expression; (3) The right to vote; (4) The eligibility of all citizens for public office; (5) The right of political leaders to compete for support and votes; (6) Availability of alternative sources of information; (7) Free and fair elections; and (8) The existence of institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions preference (Hashemi 2009:124).

In addition to Dahl's above mentioned eight conditions, Linz and Stepan (1996) have proposed three other conditions for a polity to be considered as democratic: (1) The existence of an effective environment to organize elections; (2) The ability of the elected government to formulate major public policies and to recruit the most politically powerful officers; and (3) The polity must not engage in the systematic violation of the democratic constitution, rule of law, and citizens' fundamental human rights.

2.2.2 Hybridity of democracy

The concept of democracy can be traced back to the political ideas developed in ancient Greece. It was, in fact, first formulated in the work of Aristotle, whose notion of 'polity' most closely resembles the modern conception of democracy (Landman 2009). "While Aristotle's notion of polity refers to the 'good' form of *rule by the many*, modern conceptions of democracy are based on the fundamental ideas of *popular sovereignty* and *collective decision-making*, in which rulers are in some way held accountable by those they rule" (Landman 2009:4). Beyond this fundamental consensus, international community and development experts commonly use the term 'democracy' with so many variations that is sometimes called "democracy with adjectives" (Collier and Levitsky 1999:430). The multiple definitions of modern democracy "can be grouped broadly into procedural democracy, liberal democracy and substantive democracy, the delineation of which largely rests on the variable incorporation of different rights and protections alongside the general commitment to popular sovereignty and collective decision-making" (Landman 2009:5).

A. Procedural democracy

Definitions of procedural democracy are largely drawn from Dahl’s polyarchic concept of democracy (Landman 2009, 2013) and include two dimensions: (i) contestation, and (ii) participation (Dahl 1971). Contestation dimension “captures the uncertain peaceful competition necessary for democratic rule—a principle which presumes the legitimacy of a significant and organized opposition, the right to challenge incumbents, protection of the twin freedoms of expression and association, the existence of free and fair elections, and a consolidated political party system” (Landman 2009:5, 2013:27). Participation dimension, on the other hand, “captures the idea of popular sovereignty, which presumes the protection of the right to vote as well as the existence of universal suffrage (Landman 2009:5, 2013:27).

Table 2.3: Procedural democracy

Contestation (uncertain peaceful competition)		Participation (popular sovereignty)	
Legitimacy of opposition	Right to challenge incumbents	Universal suffrage	Right to vote
Freedom of expression	Free and fair elections		
Freedom of association	Consolidated party system		

Source: Adapted by Landman (2009:5, 2013:27) from Dahl (1971).

B. Liberal democracy

Definitions of liberal democracy include an ‘institutional’ dimension and a ‘rights’ dimension (Foweraker and Krznaric 2000). The institutional dimension encapsulates “the idea of popular sovereignty, and includes notions of accountability, constraint of leaders, representation of citizens, and universal participation” (Landman 2009:5, 2013:28). “The

rights dimension is upheld by the rule of law, and includes civil, political, property, and minority rights. The protection of these rights provides a particular set of guarantees that guard against the threat of a ‘tyranny of the majority’ and have their provenance in the 1776 US Declaration of Independence and the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen” (Landman 2009:6, 2013:28).

Table 2.4: Liberal democracy

Institutional dimension (popular sovereignty)		Rights dimension (the rule of law)	
Accountability	Restraint	Civil rights	Property rights
Representation	Participation	Political rights	Minority rights

Source: Adapted by Landman (2009:6, 2013:28) from Foweraker and Krznaric (2000).

C. Substantive democracy

Definitions of substantive or social democracy encapsulate the institutional and rights dimensions found in liberal models of democracy, but expand the types of rights that ought to be protected, including social, economic, and cultural rights, such as right to education, right to health, right to employment, right to housing, right to practice one’s own culture, and so forth (Landman 2009:6, 2013:29). “Such an expanded form of democracy includes the provision of social and economic welfare and the progressive realization of economic and social rights” (Landman 2009:6). Substantive democracy also includes the protection of cultural rights (Landman 2013:29).

Table 2.5: Substantive Democracy

Institutional dimension (popular sovereignty)		Rights dimension (the rule of law)	
Accountability	Restraint	Civil rights	Property rights
Representation	Participation	Political rights	Minority rights
		Economic rights	Social rights

Source: Adapted and expanded by Landman (2009:6, 2013:29) from Foweraker and Krznaric (2000).

In this current study, the conceptual frame under hybridity of democracy as illustrated above will be employed. Hybridity of democracy informs various dimensions of the concept, thereby providing for a clearer appreciation of the concept.

The secularization theory, promoted by the scholars in the 1960s and 1970s, postulated that modernization and industrialization would necessarily lead to the decline of religion and that most of humanity would be either atheists or agnostics. However, since the 1980s, religion gradually emerged as a powerful force in society and thus the secularization theory has encountered vehement criticisms. The secularization theory in the 1960s and 1970s, which is called the old paradigm, began to lose its significance in the early 1980s. The old paradigm that treats religion as an all-inclusive worldview follows strict separation between the religiosity and the secularity and expects either a decline of the religiosity from the public sphere or a limited role of religion in the political sphere. In contrast, the new paradigm of the secularization theory that rose in the 1980s accentuates the adoption of religious beliefs as individual choices. The new paradigm emphasizes the continued vitality of religion in modern societies and acknowledges the various forms of co-existence of both religious and secular values.

Different societies practice secularism differently. The French model of secularism is akin to the old paradigm of the secularization theory, while the Anglo-American model resembles the new paradigm. The Turkish model is close to the French model, while the Indian model of secularism differs from that of both the French and American models. The Indian model sees secularism as the opposite of communalism, implying a peaceful co-existence of all religions in the society. According to this model, the state treats all religions equally.

Dahl's polyarchy concept of democracy encapsulates two fundamental dimensions of democracy—process dimension emphasizing electoral democracy, and content dimension accentuating liberal democracy. Scholars have presented several characteristics of Dahl's polyarchy. This chapter concludes by presenting multiple definitions of democracy, such as procedural democracy, liberal democracy and substantive or social democracy.

The next chapter discusses the methods of data collection and analysis for this study.

Chapter Three

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative researchers are concerned with the individual's point of view. However, qualitative investigators think they can get closer to the actor's perspective through detailed interviewing and observation. They argue that quantitative researchers are seldom able to capture their subjects' perspectives because they have to rely on more remote, inferential empirical methods and materials.

— **Denzin and Lincoln** (2011:9), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*

I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?

— **James Spradley** (1979:34), *The Ethnographic Interview*

3.1 Method of data collection and analysis

Lofland and Lofland (1995:16) have said:

Your overall goal is to collect the *richest possible data*. Rich data mean, ideally, a wide and diverse range of information collected over a relatively prolonged period of time. Again, ideally, you achieve this through direct, face-to-face contact with, and prolonged immersion in, some social location or circumstance.

You wish, that is, to earn “intimate familiarity” with the sector of social life that has tickled your interest.

This chapter is intended to elaborate upon the methods used to collect and analyze data for this study including a description of the sample, data collection procedure, research obstacles, and the location in which the data were collected. The primary sources of data gathered and used in the research include face-to-face intensive interviews with different categories of informed people— politicians, journalists, human rights activists, Islamic scholars, Islamic party leaders, and academics,—and focus group discussion. Along with the primary data, secondary data, especially from books, journal articles, newspapers, periodicals and occasional papers have also been obtained and analyzed for this study. Together, these sources work to offer an exhaustive and authentic illustration of religion and politics, particularly Islam and democracy in Bangladesh. To present a comprehensive understanding of the methodology used in this research, I have divided this chapter into several sections, such as triangulation of methods, sampling, data collection and analysis, and research obstacles.

3.1.1 Triangulation of methods

This research is a qualitative one, and a triangulation of methods has been employed in it. Triangulation is broadly defined by Denzin (2009:297) as “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon.” In other words, triangulation entails mixing of data or methods so that diverse viewpoints or standpoints cast light upon a topic (Olsen 2004). In this research, triangulation of methods includes content analysis, intensive qualitative interviews and focus group discussions along with the historical and philosophical method. Using a robust sociological research methodology,

this researcher has focused on a myriad of social issues pertaining to philosophical, historical, legal, political-cultural and doctrinal aspects.

One and two questions that are conceptual, philosophical and historical in nature have been addressed with a critical analysis of the credible secondary sources. In order to understand the relationship between Islam and democracy in Bangladesh, understanding the origin and development of Islam in its society is vital. Therefore, a sociological interpretation of the origin and development of Islam in Bengal has been provided by using historical and literary works on Bengal (now Bangladesh).

Sub-questions three to five are largely practical in the sense that these questions have explored the working and practice of democracy and Islam, and their interplay in the complex social, political and cultural trajectories of the society of Bangladesh. Primary sources, such as in-depth interviews and focus discussions along with credible secondary sources have been used to respond to these questions. To understand the sociocultural and political practice of sociopolitical and cultural facts in a given society, perceiving the historical and cultural dynamics and conditions of those social facts are very urgent. In what conditions those facts have arisen, which social class/classes or category/categories have played a role in their emergence, what the sociocultural backgrounds are behind these facts—these are crucial to learn the existence and working of such facts. For example, I have studied how democracy is practiced, how political Islam or Islamism has gained ground and affected democratic practices, what Islam means in the society and how it interplays in the social, political and cultural life of the people of Bangladesh. How and why political Islam has attracted a large number of people, under what circumstances the country got independence, what was the role of the

Islamists and how religion was an overarching factor during the birth of independent Bangladesh, particularly for the Islamist parties, are significant questions. I have addressed these questions using data from both secondary and primary sources. Thus, for questions three to five, a content analysis approach along with intensive interviews and focus group discussions have been applied. Content analysis is useful for any research approach that yields textual data, such as transcripts, field notes etc. (Bachiochi and Weiner 2002). Contents of related books, journal articles, newspaper reports, and so forth have been extensively examined. The data collection subsection has dealt with this broadly. Interviews and focus group discussions are elaborated in great detail also in interviews and focus group discussions sections.

3.1.2 Sampling

This study has applied purposive or judgmental sampling of in-depth interviews. Purposive sampling techniques are primarily used in qualitative studies. Teddlie and Yu (2007:77) have defined purposive sampling “as selecting units (e.g., individuals, groups of individuals, institutions) based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study’s questions.” According to Maxwell (2009:235), purposive sampling is a type of sampling in which, “particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices.” Purposive sampling is, in other words, called expert sampling, meaning that the researcher looks for individuals who have particular expertise that is most likely to be able to advance the researcher’s interests and potentially open new doors. This

research focusing on democracy, religion and politics required extracting knowledge from individuals who have expertise on such issues.

I interviewed 28 (twenty-eight) esteemed and informed individuals from different professions and social backgrounds; they include politicians, academics, Islamic scholars and party leaders, journalists and human rights activists. I also interviewed several non-political but socially and culturally influential—in the sense that they have a great influence in the society— Islamic and public figures as the Bangladeshi masses used to be immensely influenced by these religious personalities. Although they are not visibly active in politics, they are involved in “Islamic issues” that often come to the table of discussion. These personalities, such as the *pirs* who are thought to have spiritual powers or saintly ethos, are highly respected in the society. Many eminent politicians and most notably the secular politicians, often visit them to get their blessings, which eventually work as a currency for their popularity and future political career. The spiritual figures who were interviewed for this research include Maulana Shah Muhammad Muhibbullah, pir of Sarsina Darbar Sharif (on his behalf, Dr. Syed Sharafat Ali, Principal, Sarsina Madrasa, Pirojpur has given an in-depth interview with me); Maulana Khalilur Rahman, pir of Nesarabad Darbar Sharif, and principal, Nesarabad Madrasa, Jhalakati; Mufti Muhammad Rezaul Karim, pir of Charmonai, commonly called “pir saheb Charmonai” (he is also the Ameer of Islami Andolan Bangladesh, one of the major Islamic political party in Bangladesh; he has been, in fact, represented by his political secretary and a central leader of the party—Ashraf Ali Akan). I have also visited the offices of some other pirs but failed to interview them, this will be elaborated on in a later section. The total sample size according to social category is outlined in the following table.

Table 3.1: Research participants

Social Category	Sample Size
Human rights activists	2
Politicians	4
Academics/social scientists	8
Journalists	4
Religious scholars/political leaders	10
Total sample size	28

Table 3.2: Names and designations of participants, and date and place of interviews

Social Category	Participant Name	Designation	Interviews Conducted	Interviews Place
Human rights activists	Dr. Kamal Hossain	Renowned jurist, a senior lawyer of the Supreme Court, and the principal author of the Constitution of Bangladesh	15 July 2014	Home and office
	Dr. Mizanur Rahman	Chairman, Bangladesh Human Rights Commission and Law Professor, University of Dhaka	22 July 2014	Office
Politicians	Habibun Nabi Khan Sohel	Central Leader, and Member-Secretary, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Dhaka City Unit	8 August 2014	Home
	Mujahidul Islam Selim	President, Communist Party of Bangladesh	9 July 2014	Office

		(CPB). Selim referred to Aniruddha Das Anjan, a central leader of CPB to talk to me on his behalf.		
	A.S.M. Rab	President, <i>Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal</i> (JSD-Rab) and Former Minister	6 August 2014	Home
	Maenuddin Khan Badal	Executive Vice President, <i>Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal</i> -JSD and Member of Parliament	20 July 2014	Home
Academics	Dr. Akbar Ali Khan	Social Scientist, BRAC University Professor and former Adviser, Caretaker Government. He is also former Cabinet Secretary	24 July 2014	Home
	Dr. Asif Nazrul	Law Professor, University of Dhaka, and also a Civil Society representative	14 June 2014	Office
	Ferdous Hossain	Professor, Political Science, University of Dhaka	10 May 2014	Home
	Dr. Tareq S. Rahman	Professor of International Relations, Jahangirnagar University	7 May 2014	Home
	Dr. M. Abdur Rab	Professor and Chairman, Geography and Environmental Science, University of Dhaka, and a Jamaat-aligned	16 July 2014	Office

		intellectual		
	Dr. Amena Mohsin	Professor, International Relations, University of Dhaka	23 July 2014	Home
	Dr. Hasan Mohammad	Professor, Political Science, University of Chittagong	11 July 2014	Hotel
	Dr. Sukomal Barua	Professor, Pali and Buddhist Studies and Director, Research Center for Buddhist Heritage and Culture, University of Dhaka	21 July 2014	Pro-VC office, Dhaka University
Journalists	Nurul Kabir	Editor, The Daily New Age	7 August 2014	Office
	Alomgir Mohiuddin	Editor, The Daily Naya Diganta	12 July 2014	Office
	Abul Asad	Editor, The Daily Sangram	20 July 2014	Office
	Abdul Hye Sikder	President, Dhaka Union of Journalist (DUJ)	10 July 2014	National Press Club
Islamic scholars/political leaders	Shah Abdul Hannan	Economist, Islamic Philosopher and Chairman, Islamic Economics Research Bureau	11 May 2014	Home
	Dr. Abdullah Jahangir	Professor of Al-Hadith and Islamic Studies, Islamic University, Bangladesh, Kushtia	2 April 2014	Home
	Dr. Ataur Rahman Miazi	Professor, Islamic History and Culture, University of Dhaka	15 May 2014	Office

	Dr. Syed Sharafat Ali (for <i>pir saheb Sarsina</i>)	Principal, <i>Sarsina Darus-Sunnah Kamil Madrasa</i> , Pirojpur and Secretary General, <i>Bangladesh Jamyiate Hizbullah</i>	10 April 2014	Office
	Ashraf Ali Akan	Political Secretary to Ameer of Islami Andolan Bangladesh—Mufti Syed Rezaul Karim, and President Islami Labor Movement, Central Committee	9 July 2014	Office
	Mufti Dr. M. Abu Yusuf	Vice Principal, <i>Tamirul Millat Kamil Madrasa</i> , Dhaka	7 August 2014	Office
	Maulana Khalilur Rahman	Pir of Nesarabad Darbar Sharif, and Principal, Jhalakati N. S. Kamil Madrasa	27 March 2014	Office
	Mufti Fayzullah	Secretary General, <i>Islami Oikko Jote</i> , and Joint Secretary, <i>Hefazat-e-Islam</i>	17 July 2014	Office
	Muzaffar Bin Mohsin	President, Ahl-i-Hadith Youth Movement, and a Rajshahi University Professor	8 August 2014	Mohammadpur Al-Amin Mosque
	Maulana Asim Kamal (pseudonym)	A senior leader, Tablighi Jamaat Bangladesh, Kakrail, Dhaka	10 July 2014	Kakrail Mosque

3.1.3 Intensive interviews

Sociologists have considered in-depth interviews as a robust tool for generating description and interpretation of people's social worlds, and as such intensive interviews have become a core qualitative research method. Brenner (1985:147) has described the process of intensive interview as a "psychologically more sensitive employment of interviewing methods" in which notion of "intensive" is an attempt to describe the heightened charge of thoughts and emotions that can be triggered in the interview process. Classic ethnographers, such as Malinowski emphasized the importance of talking to people to grasp their viewpoint (Burgess 1982; Legard et al. 2003). Rubin and Rubin (2012:3) have highlighted the power of intensive interviews to illuminate research topics in the following way: "when using in-depth qualitative interviewing ... researchers talk to those who have knowledge of or experience with the problem of interest. Through such interviews, researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own."

Similarly, I have conducted 28 intensive interviews to obtain primary data for this research. Interviews with experts in their respective study areas have formed relevant data which have helped explore the research questions.

3.1.3.1 Recording, questions and interview techniques

As a research method, recorded conversations in intensive interviews have a long history (Lofland and Lofland 1995; Brenner 1985; Kelly 1955; Harre and Secord 1972; Spradley 1979). Mishler (1986:36) has opined that "if the analysis of speech is central to the use of interviews as research data, then an accurate record is needed of the questions that

interviewers ask and the responses the interviewees give.” In this study, interviewees’ perceptions and opinions have been significant. In order to grasp their perceptions accurately, the tape recording method which was employed has proven to be incredibly useful. The content of the interviews were subsequently transcribed. The interviewees were notified on the recording of the interview and their permission was duly sought prior to the interview. Most interviewees acceded to the request while those who declined, permitted instead to written notes being taken. Other standard principles regarding intensive interviews developed by social science researchers were practiced, for example, what Gilb (1957:340-343) suggests to:

Tell the interviewee in advance and preferably in writing exactly what the procedure is and what will be expected of him. Give him the right to edit all material and to stipulate in writing the uses to which it will be put, and follow scrupulously all the terms of the agreement... Never violate a confidence. Never talk about another interviewee in any but polite general terms.

Secondly, most people feel comfortable and respond best when they are sent in advance an outline of the questions to be covered (Gilb 1957). Thirdly, it is important to choose a quiet place to record, where there will be no distractions; but also let it be the most convenient place for him/her. The interview should be a *tete-a-tete* between two persons (Gilb 1957). Fourthly, it is crucial to approach the interview in a relaxed and friendly manner. Also trying to work with an environment of informality so that the narrative seems to unfold of its own accord is significant. At the same time, it is suggested not to let the interview degenerate into conversation (Gilb 1957). Fifthly, the interviewer must be a good listener (Gilb 1957). Seidman (2013:81) espouses to “Listen more, talk less.” Gilb (1957:342) has also suggested: “Indicate by your concentrated attention and your

manner that the interviewee and what he has to say are of great interest to you. Do not try to inject your personality or beliefs into the record. The focus should be entirely on the other person.” Sixthly, Gilb (1957) further says that if you think the interviewee will be reluctant to answer a certain question, wait until rapport is good.

I had forwarded via email, a copy of the interview questions in advance to several interviewees who requested sight of the questions prior to the interview. Most interviews were conducted at the interviewees’ home which was often their preference while others were conducted at the offices of the respective participants. Interviews were carried in a highly sophisticated manner and each session was often a positive experience that served to provide insights in the conducting of subsequent interviews. Interviewees were given complete freedom with respect to answering/skipping any questions, however most chose to respond to the given questions. Those who declined to answer certain questions often asked to remain anonymous.

In addition, I was aware of and cautious about other interview techniques as prescribed by the widely accepted social science research literatures, such as following up with what the participants articulated; posing real questions that correspond to research questions; asking participants to reconstruct, not remember; limiting interviewer’s interaction, and tolerating silence (Seidman 2013).

3.1.3.2 Transcription

Transcription is a pivotal aspect of qualitative inquiry (Oliver et al. 2005). It, in fact, largely emerged and has been used in linguistics (Ochs 1979) and linguistic anthropology (Duranti 1997). However, scholars from diverse disciplines (Lapadat and Lindsay 1999; Mishler 1984; Sandelowski 1994; Tilley 1998) have recognized the centrality of

transcription in qualitative research (Poland 2002). Transcription practices have been done in two dominant modalities—naturalism and denaturalism (Oliver et al. 2005; Bucholtz 2000). In the “naturalism mode”, “every utterance is transcribed in as much detail as possible,” and in the “denaturalism mode,” “idiosyncratic elements of speech, such as stutters, pauses, nonverbals, involuntary vocalizations are removed” (Oliver et al. 2005:1273-1274). In this research, while transcribing, I resorted to “denaturalism” modality because denaturalized transcriptions emphasize the informational content (MacLean et al. 2004) or information of the speech, rather than the conversation. For this research, informational content was highly regarded, no matter the conversational and linguistic value it carries. Denaturalized transcription has less to do with depicting accents or involuntary vocalization. Instead, accuracy concerns the substance of the interview, that is, the meanings and perceptions created and shared during a conversation (Oliver et al. 2005). Cameron (2001:33) is of the opinion that denaturalism mode of transcription continues to work as a “full and faithful transcription” in qualitative research.

Following each interview session, I immediately transcribed the contents of the interview. Here I should mention that the participants in this research were Bengali speaking people. During the interview sessions, interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee was in Bengali, the *lingua franca* in Bangladesh. Translation to English was carried out simultaneously when I transcribed. I paid close attention during this process to ensure that the essence of the interview was not lost in translation and the ideas/views shared by the interviewees were not subtly influenced by my views as translation work was carried out in order to maintain the accuracy of the interviews.

3.1.4 Focus group discussion

As a qualitative social research method, group interviews are a common practice among the researchers, particularly in market research. Although sociologists in general have paid little attention to group interview, it has great potential for social research (Frey and Fontana 1991). Group interview can be defined as a social investigation technique in which several participants in a social context are interviewed simultaneously (Frey and Fontana 1991). Group interview provides “data on group interaction, on realities as defined in a group context and on interpretations of events that reflect group input” (Frey and Fontana 1991:175). There are many types of group interviews, such as focus group, brainstorming, nominal and Delphi groups, and natural and formal field interview (Frey and Fontana 1991). Focus group is defined as “a way of collecting qualitative data which essentially involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions), ‘focused’ around a particular topic or set of issues” (Wilkinson 1997:177). Focus groups help explore people’s experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns, and thus enable researchers to examine people’s diverse perspectives as they operate within a social network (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999). As a qualitative method for gathering data, focus groups bring together research participants to discuss a topic of mutual interest to themselves and the researcher (Morgan and Spanish 1984).

For this research, I conducted three focus group discussions. The participants were the graduate and undergraduate students from Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Govt. B. M. College under National University, and Tamirul Millat Kamil Madrasa. As religion and politics have been examined in this study, learning the perspectives of both madrasa students and university students who are commonly

categorized in Bangladesh as “madrasa educated” (referring to pious people) and “general- or English-educated” (referring to secular people who are not literally pious) respectively were significant. The following table demonstrates the composition of focus groups:

Table 3.3: Focus group discussions

No.	Conducting Date	Venue	Participants	Size
Focus Group 1	31 March 2014	Govt. B. M. College, Barisal	Students	15
Focus Group 2	22 June 2014	Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet	Students	13
Focus Group 3	7 August 2014	Tamirul Millat Kamil Madrasa, Dhaka	Students	16

Through the above intensive interviews and focus group discussions, I have collected the primary data analyzed in this project. Apart from interviews and focus groups, social researchers have suggested for other methodological approaches, such as structured/systematic observation or unstructured/less structured observation for gathering primary data (Foster 2006; Fontana and Frey 1994; Qu and Dumay 2011). Participant observation has become a commonly used method in qualitative research in various disciplines including sociology (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). As such I have also engaged myself in unstructured observation in collecting primary data.

3.1.5 Other data collection and analysis

To complement data from the intensive interviews and focus discussions, I have collected data from some secondary sources that include books, journals, national and international newspapers, occasional papers, internet search, national and international government

reports, publications and reports by national and international NGOs like Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch.

Local non-government human rights bodies like '*Odhikar*' and '*Ain O Salish Kendra*' (ASK) as well as government organizations like Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission are working for the promotion of democracy and human rights in Bangladesh. These organizations continuously follow politics, governance, human rights, and the interplay of religion and politics, and on a regular basis they release annual reports on these issues. These are available in their respective websites. I proceeded to collect the relevant data from their reports.

Another important secondary source of data is the national and international press. Data from newspapers' articles, news and reports have been collected and used for this research. Among the local newspapers, Bangladesh's leading national dailies, such as The Daily Star, The Independent, The New Age (these are English dailies), and The Daily *Prothom Alo*, The Daily *Amardesh*, The Daily *Janakantha*, and The Daily *Jugantor* (these are Bengali newspapers) have been an important source of secondary data for this study. Before using them, data from newspapers have been carefully examined.

I have visited several research institutes and collected their booklets, brochures and reports. This literature mainly includes books, journals and periodicals. Of the institutes that I have visited are Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought (BIIT), Islamic Foundation (Bangladesh), Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, and Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS).

I also visited some Islamic shrines and Darbars of pirs and collected relevant books, booklets, and other literatures published by them. The Darbars I visited are

Sarsina Darbar Sharif, Nesarabad Darbar Sharif, Khaza Baba Faridpuri Darbar Sharif, and Dewanbag Darbar Sharif. The literatures collected from these places have helped me understand their ideas and understandings of Islam and politics.

Collecting data from books and journals is a very common practice for researchers to conduct particularly qualitative research. Data collection from books and journals began prior to my other modes of data collection and the formal start of my research, which is often the case for all researchers. In the data collection phase, many books used were often in Bengali and not available in the NTU libraries.

Data has been analyzed throughout this research. After collecting the data, the work of transcription, codification, finding patterns, juxtaposing with theories and concepts, and so forth was carried out. When faced with any conflicting information, I verified them on the basis of the reliability of the individual sources. Articles published in the internationally recognized blind-reviewed journals, and books published by internationally renowned publishers have been considered most reliable sources. However, the primary source of data and information has been treated as more reliable than the data from secondary sources, such as newspapers, books and journals etc.

3.2 Research obstacles

The research area of this study is Bangladesh. I encountered several difficulties during this research: First, the participants of this research were often from the elite class and scheduling appointments with them was often a challenge. Second, the politicians in Bangladesh often showed disinterested in voluntary and academic activities. Third, it was difficult to reach out to the traditional religious personalities, such as pirs, due to the

sheer volume of requests that these pirs received on a daily basis. The pirs do not employ a formal appointment mechanism. In one instance, I visited the Darbar of Dewanbag pir in Dhaka. After passing a tight security check, I met a gentleman who claimed to be a senior official of Darbar who subsequently informed me that Sufi Samrat (the pir of Dewanbag) did not meet anybody. When asked to elaborate, he responded:

Official: *He is Allah's friend, he is not an ordinary man, so he does not give anyone appointment.*

Myself: *Ok, thank you so much, but don't you think Prophet Muhammad was closer to Allah than Sufi Samrat, and Sufi Samrat is not as best a friend of Allah as the Prophet was? Still, many people used to visit the Prophet regularly, and he would talk to them with respect, listen to them with patience, and treat them as his guests*

Official: *(With a puzzled look) Ok, you can meet him but you may have to wait from the morning to the evening. Still not sure if you would be able to talk to him, it is uncertain.*

As I waited to meet Sufi Samrat, I collected some booklets authored by him and published by his Sufi Foundation Bangladesh. These booklets have been used in this study. Nevertheless, the research participants in this study have been very helpful, cooperative and sincere.

In this chapter, I have elaborated the methods used to collect and analyze data for this study. I have used a triangulation of methods comprised of intensive qualitative interviews, focus group discussions, and content analysis in this research. I have conducted 28 in-depth interviews and three focus group discussions from which I have

collected primary data for this research. For gathering secondary data, secondary sources, which included journal articles, books, national and international newspapers, occasional papers, internet search, government reports, publications and reports by national and international NGOs have been used for this project. Relevant contents of these sources have been analyzed. Beyond this, I have visited some Islamic shrines and Darbars of pirs and collected relevant literature which has been used in this research. I have also visited several research institutes for gathering the secondary sources of data. Both the primary and secondary data have been used for this qualitative study.

The next chapter is devoted to the critical discussion about the relationship between Islam and democracy.

Chapter Four

Islam and Democracy: A philosophical debate

It is true that Islam constitutes a systematic and coherent ideology, just like liberalism and communism, with its own code of morality and doctrine of political and social justice ... And Islam has indeed defeated liberal democracy in many parts of the Islamic world, posing a grave threat to liberal practices even in countries where it has not achieved political power directly.

—**Francis Fukuyama** (1992:45), *The End of History and the Last Man*

The threat of authoritarianism comes less from religious doctrine than politics and power, history and culture. Identifying governments as regimes committed either to implementing religious law or Westernization provides no prediction as to whether or not the regime will be authoritarian or democratic. Commitment to Westernization is no guarantee of democracy, nor is application of Islamic law a proof of an inherent authoritarianism in Islam.

—**John Esposito and John Voll** (1996:198), *Islam and Democracy*

The question of the compatibility of Islam and democracy has become one of the main topics of contemporary Islamic political and social thought (Tamimi 2007). The debate on the compatibility between the two has been a major issue and a popular topic of serious discussion that has swept through media and political and scholarly circles worldwide in general and the West in particular (Toprak 2005; Tamimi 2007; Voll 2007). Moreover, at least two major events in the recent world history have made the debate

more crucial and critical: First, the fall of communism and the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet Union in the early 1990s, and subsequent transition to democracy of socialist states in Eastern Europe and other authoritarian states in Asia and Latin America, which attracted worldwide attention. Second, in the mid-1990s, the publication of *The Clash of Civilizations* thesis by American political scientist and Harvard professor Samuel P. Huntington in which he presented a controversial argument about the cultural divide between the West and the Islamic world has popularized the perception that Islamic tradition and values are incompatible with democratic norms and practices (Huntington 1993; Toprak 2005). Huntington's argument further triggered scholars and political and social scientists to get engaged in a critical and comprehensive debate on the relationship between Islam and democracy throughout the world. In this chapter, I will examine the relationship between Islam and democracy from Islam's normative and philosophical viewpoints. The ideas of the early Islamic scholars and reformers as well as the modernist thinkers will be explored. The views on the compatibility of Islam and democracy made by the Western scholars from without the Islamic faith will also be investigated.

4.2 Islam and democracy in Western scholarship

Some scholars have argued that Islam acts as a hindrance to democratic forms of government and/or democratic values and ideals (Fukuyama 1992; Huntington 1984, 1991, 1996a, 1996b; Lipset 1994; Lewis 1994, 1996, 1997, 2002, 2005; Pipes 1995, 2002; Kedourie 1994). These scholars argue about Islam's incompatibility with democracy on the ground that democracy requires openness, competition, pluralism, and tolerance of diversity whereas Islam encourages intellectual conformity and an uncritical

acceptance of authority. They also stress that Islamic tradition does not match with democratic ideals because it vests sovereignty in God, who is the sole source of political power and from whose divine law must emanate all regulations governing the community of believers (Tessler 2002). These scholars' views, therefore, reflect that an Islamic political order must culminate in totalitarianism (Choueiri 1996; Lewis 1994). Kedourie (1994:5-6) asserts:

The notion of popular sovereignty as the foundation of governmental legitimacy, the idea of representation, or elections, of popular suffrage, of political institutions being regulated by laws laid down by a parliamentary assembly, of these laws being guarded and upheld by an independent judiciary, the ideas of the secularity of the state, of society being composed of a multitude of self-activating groups and associations—all of these are profoundly alien to the Muslim political tradition.

Lewis (1954:7-8) argues that “the political history of Islam is one of almost unrelieved autocracy ... For the last thousand years, the political thinking of Islam has been dominated by such maxims as ‘tyranny is better than anarchy’ and ‘whose power is established, obedience to him is incumbent.’” Pipes (1994:63) argues that the Muslims have challenged the West more profoundly than the communists had ever done, for “while the communists disagree with our policies, the fundamentalist Muslims despise our whole way of life.” Perlmutter (1992) asks: “Is Islam, fundamentalist or otherwise, compatible with human-rights oriented Western-style representative democracy? The answer is an emphatic NO” (Cited in Ahmad 2003:21).

In contrast, many other scholars argue that Islam and democracy should not be considered mutually exclusive, and thus they are not conflicting with one another (Beinin

and Stork 1997; Entelis 1997; Esposito and Voll 1996; Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Salame 1994; Kramer 1993; Hofmann 2004). They suggest that within the fold of Islam there are many trajectories, facets and tendencies that make one-dimensional characterizations of the religion highly problematic (Halliday 1996; Esposito and Piscatori 1991). They also assert that there are considerable variations in the interpretations of Muslim religious law advanced by scholars and theologians in Islam and that among these interpretations are positive reflections of democracy, including some by mainstream Islamic theorists (Abed 1995). These scholars insist that openness, tolerance, competition, participation, and progressive innovation are well represented among traditions associated with the religion, and thus entirely compatible with Islam (Esposito and Voll 1996; Tessler 2002). Kramer (1993) has concluded that Islam has been projected to be congruent with the crucial elements of political democracy, for example, pluralism (within the framework of Islam), political participation, government accountability, the rule of law and the protection of human rights. However, Islamic mainstream has not adopted liberalism, if that includes religious indifference. Esposito and Voll (1996:196) argue that an incompatibility between Islam and democracy becomes obvious when the terms Islam and democracy are used “in an essentialist or monolithic manner rather than acknowledging their flexibility and adaptability and the diversity of actual experience.” Referring to the Sudanese experience of Islam and democracy, Esposito and Voll (1996) have stepped further and opined that even if the ideology of the National Islamic Front are not democratic in the Western sense of the word, they may still be precisely described as ‘democratic’ in an Islamic sense, as ‘Islamic democracy’ in other words. Eickelman and Piscatori (1996) examined Islamic

perspectives on modernization and democracy and found the diversity of the contemporary Islamic experience, suggesting general trends and challenging popular Western notions of Islam as a monolithic ideology and movement.

4.3 Debate between the contemporary Islamic scholars

Debate on the compatibility of Islam with democracy also permeates works by the present-day Muslim Islamic scholars. There is a diversity of views within the Islamic community, mainly to mention amongst the modernist thinkers and the conservative and traditional scholars (Abed 1995). The traditional Muslim scholars contest Western democracy in the face of the interpretations of Islamic social, political, and cultural system. These researchers include Sayyid Qutb, the Egyptian Brotherhood ideologue who was executed in 1966 during General Nasser's military regime in Egypt and Syed Abul A'la Mawdudi, the founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami, the most vibrant revivalist Islamic political organization in the Indian subcontinent.

For Qutb, democracy is an anathema to Islam (Goddard 2002). Qutb's following statement best represents this idea: "After the decay of democracy, to the extent of bankruptcy, the West has nothing to give to humanity ... The leadership of Western man has vanished ... It is time to take over and lead" (Quoted in Tibi 1998:187; Goddard 2002:4). Denial of Western democracy by Qutb is rooted in his absolutist understanding of the concept of sovereignty. According to Qutb, democracy is fundamentally hostile to Islam since the cornerstone of the idea is the sovereignty of the masses, a philosophical foundation that is diametrically opposed to the philosophy of Islam, which is based on the

concept of *hakimiyyat* Allah (the sovereignty of God). Human society, Qutb insists, needs to be governed only by God, and not by itself (Goddard 2002).

Mawdudi seems to be less radical than Qutb (Voll 2007). Still his perspective suggests that there is no compatibility between Western democracy and Islam. Mawdudi asserts:

I tell you, my fellow Muslims, frankly: Democracy is in contradiction with your belief ... Islam, in which you believe ... is utterly different from this dreadful system ... There can be no reconciliation between Islam and democracy, not even in minor issues, because they contradict one another in all terms. Where this system [of democracy] exists we consider Islam to be absent. When Islam comes to power there is no place for this system (Mawdudi 1978; cited in Tibi 2008:73, 2009:226).

In another instance, Mawdudi argues that the problem with democracy is that any principle or set of values can be passed on, under collective consciousness, as valid and correct (Ali 2012). He further goes on to say, although democracy may be largely about the national sovereignty of the people (neither democracy of nation-states nor democratic international relations), powerful democracies impose their will on other peoples; that means democracy does not guarantee autonomy in a world where inequality exists between the countries, and no such international institution is existent that can oversee and determine the conduct of nations in a democratic manner (Ali 2012). Nonetheless, Mawdudi (1976) in *Political Theory of Islam* tries to reconcile democracy with Islamic political philosophy: one section of the book he entitled as 'The Theory of the Caliphate and the *Nature of Democracy in Islam*.' In this book, he argues that if democracy is conceived as a limited form of popular sovereignty, restricted and directed by God's law,

there is no incompatibility with Islam. However, Mawdudi (1976, 2007) concludes that Islam is the very antithesis of secular Western democracy based solely on the sovereignty of the people. In another occasion, Mawdudi says, “Islam and democracy are not contradictory to each other. Democracy is the form of government based on the will of the people as well as run and changed with their consent only. This is also the form of Islamic government. But the values of Western democracy are not identical with those of Islam” (Mawdudi 1982:198).

However, the modernist Islamic scholars (al-Aqqad 1952; Iqbal 2012; Gulen 2001; Khan 2005, 2006; Ramadan 2009; Ghannouchi 1990, 1998; Asad 1961; Zafar 1998; Bazargan 1998; Khatab and Bouma 2007; Ahmad 1995, 2000; Rahman 1966, 1980; al-Qaradawi 1993, 1997, 2007; Hamdi 1996; Mernissi 1992) have not rejected the essence of Western democracy; rather, they have invested their efforts to reconcile Islam with Western modernity. These scholars stress the diversity of the Muslim societies and cultures and argue that the supposed idea that Islam is a monolithic religion largely hinders to come to a deduction that the Islamic and Western civilizations are not hostile to one other. Moosa (2002:7) has presented this in his way: “there are many ‘islams’ with a small ‘i’, and many Muslims with differences in terms of their practices and their understandings, since each person or Muslim community appropriates the discursive tradition differently.”¹⁰ However, although modernist scholars do not reject the fundamental principles of democracy, and advocate for the reconstruction of religious and political thought in Islam, they do not suggest emulating Western modernity without any further scrutiny.

¹⁰ For more details on the diverse understandings of Islam within the Islamic faith, also see Dangor (2004).

The Pakistani poet, philosopher and political thinker Iqbal (2012) reconciles Islam and democracy by developing a concept of ‘spiritual democracy.’ Iqbal (2012:142) writes that contemporary Muslims should be allowed to “appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life” in the light of ultimate principles and evolve that “spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam.” Iqbal considers Islam an egalitarian faith in which there is no place of clergy or aristocracy, and recognizes the importance of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and emphasizes on its democratic and institutional arrangement through an effective legislative assembly to bridge the theoretical gap between divine and popular sovereignty (Khan 2006; Parray 2010). He envisions an Islamic democracy that does not conflict with freedom, tolerance, equality, fraternity and unity, all of which are the prime ingredients of a modern liberal democracy. Stressing upon the philosophy of equality, fraternity and unity, this twenty first century’s eminent modernist Islamic scholar has concluded that democracy is Islam’s most important political ideal (Esposito 1983; Parray 2010). However, although Iqbal has admired Western modernity, marked by its pluralistic and intellectual tradition as well as technological advances, he has condemned European colonialism, capitalist exploitation, Marxist atheism, and moral bankruptcy of secularism and Western democracy which is reflected in his following poetic verses:

The democratic system of the West is same old instrument

Whose chords contain no notes other than the voice of Kaiser,

The demon of despotism is dancing in his democratic robes

Yet you consider it to be the Nilam Peri [goddess] of Liberty (Beg 1939:298).

Some scholars argue that Iqbal turned down democracy, because he had high vision of a ‘perfect man’ (*mard-i-kamil*) who might be compared with Plato’s supposed *philosopher*

king, and also he had less confidence on the masses. The following poetic verses of Iqbal are quoted by such scholars to illustrate this point:

Keep away from Democracy: Follow the perfect man,

For the intellect of two thousand asses cannot bring forth a single man's thought

(Beg 1939:398)

Esposito (1983:180) while commenting on Iqbal's understanding of democracy says:

He (Iqbal) believed that the success of a democratic system was contingent upon the preparedness of its members. A democratic system might be less than ideal given the constituents of the society. Thus, Iqbal did not accept the absolute democracy of undeveloped individuals. This is at the heart of his criticism of modern Western democracy: 'democracy is a system where people are counted but not weighed.'

Turkish Muslim thinker Gulen (2001) argues that when religion or Islam is compared with democracy, one must remember that democracy is a system that undergoes continual development and revision, a system that varies according to the places and circumstances in which it is practiced. In contrast, Gulen goes on, religion has established immutable principles related to faith, worship and morality, and thus, only the worldly aspects of Islam should be compared with democracy. Describing Islam's political philosophy, he asserts that Islam neither proposes a certain unchallengeable political order nor attempts to shape one. Instead, it establishes the fundamental principles that orient a government's general character, thereby leaving it to the people to choose the most appropriate type and form according to their own times and circumstances (Gulen 2001). Gulen argues that Islamic principles, such as equality,

tolerance and justice are at the same time the core principles of democracy, and he opines that democracy could reach its peak of perfection and bring even more happiness to humanity if people would only consider the spiritual dimension of their existence without forgetting that human life is not limited to this mortal life and that all people have a great craving for eternity. According to Gulen (2001), Islamic principles, as noted earlier, equality, tolerance and justice can help obtain this goal.

Khurshid Ahmad (2000) maintains that democracy is both, a set of ideals and principles and a political system, a mechanism for governance and a legal political culture. As a form of government, democracy is in contradiction with aristocracy, monarchy, dictatorship or authoritarianism, since only in democracy, people are regarded as the real source of power and legitimacy of the government, and also as the real source of values, principles, ideals and policies. The other dimension of democracy, Ahmad (2000) notes, relates to a variety of forms of self-government and popular participation in political decision-making. The operational dimension of democracy entails the principles of liberty and equality, constitutionalism and the rule of law, principle of separation of power, fundamental rights including the rights of minorities, freedom of belief, opinion, expression, association, press and communication. Upon considering these facts, Ahmad (2000) argues that there is no incompatibility between Islam and a truly democratic system based on people's participation and power-sharing; rather there is a conflict between people's Islamic aspirations and the secular and westernizing ideals and policies of the ruling elite. He further says that Islam and democratization in the sense of freedom of the people, fundamental rights and people's participation are intertwined. Democratic

processes pave the way for Islamization. Islamic aspirations can be fulfilled only through the promotion of democratic processes (Parray 2011).

Khatab and Bouma (2007) argue that the Qur'an has clearly exemplified the democratic ideals and human values. They also assert that the life of the Prophet and his Sunnah demonstrate that Islam provides resourceful philosophical and intellectual inputs that promote the good of all, that are diverse, that recognize the need for consultation, and that respect the human dignity and rights of all members and groups in society. However, these modernist writers suggest that it is not Islam but societal traditions and cultures which may have incompatibility with democratic norms and practices. The difference between culture and religion has to be comprehended. Citing examples of the past and present with regard to governance within Muslim societies, Khatab and Bouma (2007) argue that there have been societies in Islamic history in which democratic governance was existent. However, they acknowledge that there are also instances that societies misapplied Islamic rules or moved away from the Islamic ideals towards repressing, patriarchal and non-democratic polity.

Muqtedar Khan (2001) argues that there is nothing in Islam and in Muslim practices that is fundamentally opposed to democracy—justice, freedom, fairness, equality or tolerance. He further argues that there are two extremely different groups, one from the West and one from the Muslim world, who have been arguing that Islam and democracy are incompatible:

Some Western scholars and ideologues have tried to present Islam as anti-democratic and inherently authoritarian. By misrepresenting Islam in this way they seek to prove that Islam has a set of values inferior to Western liberalism and is a barrier to the global progress of civilization. This misconception also

promotes Israel's claim to be the sole democracy in the Middle East. On the other hand, many Muslim activists, using broad and sometimes crude notions of secularism and sovereignty, consider democracy to be the rule of humans as opposed to Islam, which is rule of God. Those who reject democracy falsely assume that secularism and democracy are necessarily connected. But secularism is not a prerequisite for democracy (Khan 2002:4).

Other modernist scholars, such as Bennabi (1991), al-Turabi (1983), Ghannouchi (1990), al-Qaradawi (2002), Masmoudi (1999), and Safi (1991) have acknowledged the compatibility and even desirability of democracy. Bennabi (1991) believed that democracy should be considered an educational enterprise for the whole community, administered through the implementation of a comprehensive curriculum that encompasses psychological, ethical, social and political aspects. He thinks that an Islamic model of democracy that is attainable, endows man with a superior value that surpasses every political or social value which are the prime essence of Western model of democracy. 'Islamic democratic model', according to Bennabi, can be a superior model of democracy (Tamimi 2007).

Ghannouchi conceives democracy as a political system that derives legitimacy from the masses. In a democracy, he maintains, the people elect, audit and, when necessary, replace the ruler by means of mechanisms that may vary regime to regime. However, all democratic models share in common the mechanism of a free election. Therefore, the democratic procedures (such as peaceful power transfer) and principles (such as the recognition of fundamental rights, for instance, freedom of speech and association, freedom of expression, separation of power) empower people over the government and shield them against injustice and tyranny, notes Ghannouchi (Tamimi

2001, 2007). Ghannouchi believes that democracy and Islam are not inherently contradictory; rather Western democracy's mechanisms are good although they are subjected to further improvement. The real problem with liberal democracy, Ghannouchi argues, lies not in the mechanisms but in the fuel that feeds them: the materialist philosophy that eventually transformed these mechanisms, through the finance and media's role, into ploys, ultimately producing choices that represent not the people but powerful financial and political centers (Tamimi 2007). He further asserts that modern Western democracy lacks any ethical and transcendental morality which has eventually turned it into the rule of the people by the rich and powerful for the interest of the rich and the powerful. Thus, this modernist scholar opines and hopes that Islamic ideals in the form of a code of ethics and transcendent morality cum positive aspects of modern democracy would make an Islamic model of democracy that would eventually fill the vacuum and deficiency of Western democracy and thereby benefit the entirety of humanity (Tamimi 2007).

Al-Turabi (1983) believes that democracy is not the goal of the Islamic state but only a means. It is a just and moral and virtuous order that is the goal (Khan 1995). Underlining the need for democratic values, Turabi (1983:241) says that in "circumstances where Islam is allowed free expression, social change takes place peacefully and gradually, and the Islamic movement develops programs of Islamization before it takes over the destiny of the state because Islamic thought—like all thought—only flourishes in a social environment of freedom and public consultation (*shura*).” He further opines that the form of an Islamic government is determined by the foregoing principles of *tawhid*, which encapsulates freedom, equality, and the unity of the *ummah*

(nation)—the core principles of democracy. Since *shari'ah* rules out usurpation and succession as grounds of political legitimacy, one can call an Islamic state a republic, argues al-Turabi (1983). Citing examples of the classical Islamic political practices, al-Turabi points out that beyond the Prophet who was appointed by God, the caliph, during the early caliphate, was freely elected by the people who thereby have precedence over him as a legal authority. Although the Prophet, Turabi goes on, used to consult his companions systematically, and normally would follow their consensus, he had the divine right to an overriding authority. The caliph, however, or any ruler of similar kind, is subjected both to the *shari'ah* and to the will of his electorates. As reflected in Islamic jurisprudence, Turabi adds, this implies that, save for the express provision of the *shari'ah*, a process of consultation that eventually leads to consensus (*ijma*) is mandatory for the resolution of all important public matters (al-Turabi 1983). Turabi further says that the caliphate began as an elected consultative institution. Later it degenerated into a hereditary, or usurpatory, authoritarian regime which was largely condemned by jurists, albeit many excused its acts on the grounds of necessity or tolerated them in the interest of stability (al-Turabi 1983). Thus, an Islamic order of government through the practice of the processes of *shura* (consultation) and *ijma* (consensus) becomes a reflection of modern representative democracy, notes al-Turabi (1983). Al-Turabi's religious and political ideas compliment with Western modernity and democracy what Ibrahim (1999:195) called "theology of modernity."

Al-Qaradawi notes: "what a strange is that some people judge democracy to be a blatant evil, and yet they do not know it well, do not dive into its essence or aspire to its rationale, with the exception of the consideration of form and themes" (Cited in Howeidy

2010:322). He further contends that “he who says democracy is disbelief; neither understands Islam, nor democracy” (Cited in Rahman 2002:6; Khan 2006:xi). Discarding authoritarianism, al-Qaradawi argues that the Qur’an has denounced the tyrants, such as Nimrudh, Pharoah, Haman and others, and thus he summons the Islamic movements to stand firm against the totalitarian and dictatorial rules, political despotism and usurpation of people’s right (al-Qaradawi 2002). He further proffers that the Islamic movement should always stand by political freedom, as represented by a true, not false, democracy (al-Qaradawi 2002). Explaining democracy’s positive sides, al-Qaradawi (2002) maintains that the Islamic ideology, movement and awakening have never flourished or borne fruits unless in an atmosphere of democracy and freedom, and have withered and become barren only at the times of oppression and tyranny that trod over the will of the people which clung to Islam. Therefore, he asserts, “I would not imagine that the Islamic movement could support anything other than political freedom and democracy” (al-Qaradawi 2002:32-33). Pointing to the fear and reservations of some Islamists about democracy, this scholar says that Islam is not democracy and vice versa. Islam is not attributed to any principle or system. Islam is unique in its means, ends and methodologies. The evils of Western democracy are not recommended for adding to the comprehensive code of ethics and philosophy in Islam, adds al-Qaradawi (2002).

Masmoudi (1999) writes that the principles of elected rulers, consultative bodies, accountability, tolerance, justice, equality, freedom, human rights and the rule of law are not alien or new to Islam but are embedded in the very primary sources of Islam (Islamic *Shari’ah*)—the Qur’an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. He also suggests that democracy is the only solution to the ongoing crisis in the Muslim world (Masmoudi 2007). He

denounces both secular extremism and religious extremism both of which, according to Masmoudi, are obstacle to peace, harmony and prosperity. Instead, he advocates for Islamic liberalism or liberal Islam which is, in his opinion, based on liberty (*hurriya*), justice (*adl*), consultation (*shura*), and rational interpretation (*ijtihad*)—all of which are very essence of democracy and pluralism. He argues that liberal Islam that combines both faith and reason is the only alternative, in the long run, and the solution to the current crisis and the future development in the Islamic world.

Safi (1991, 2003) finds Islam and democracy to be compatible. In his opinion, democracy as a system of self-governance, accountability of holders of public office, and the rule of law is fully compatible with Islam. In an interview with *National Geographic News* in 2003, Safi says, “I think that Islam as a set of norms and ideals that emphasizes the quality of people, the accountability of leaders to community, and the respect of diversity and other faiths, is fully compatible with democracy. I don’t see how it could be compatible with a government that would take away those values.”¹¹ Pointing out the roots of self government in the Islamic world, he argues that historic Muslim societies were more representative than their modern counterparts because the central state was not as powerful. A Muslim society, Safi (2003) goes on, provided a framework where communities had some control of their affairs. There was more decentralization of power. The central government was mainly focusing on issues of law and order or security.

¹¹ See Louay Safi, “Can Islam and Democracy Co-exist?” *National Geographic News*, 24 October 2003 (accessed 5 March 2015).

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/10/1021_031021_islamicrodemocracy.html

There was a lot of liberty for individuals to negotiate many of the norms and rules within their communities, adds Safi (2003).

4.4 The 18th-Century Islamic revivalism efforts

Scholars argue that modern global revivalist Islamic activism in the form of political movements is rooted in the 18th-century Islamic revivalism (Dallal 1993; Tamimi 2007; Esposito 2002). Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1791) of Najd in the Arabian Peninsula, who initially campaigned for a ‘religious purification movement’ and then embarked on a *jihad* aiming to cleanse Islamic faith and practice from impurities and *bida*’ (pl. of *bid’ah*—an illicit accretion to *aqeedah*, faith, or *ibadah*, worship, the word also widely translated into English as ‘innovation’) is considered to be the pioneer in this effort (Tamimi 2007). Although Abd al-Wahhab’s movement started as purely social and religious and aimed to broadly remove the superstitious beliefs, un-Islamic customs and sinful innovations which had crept into the contemporary Muslim society (Khan 1968), it turned to be more political than social when it encountered resistance by the then political authority. After a long struggle in his mission, Abd al-Wahhab came to the touch of Muhammad Ibn Saud, the tribal chief of al-Diriyyah (a town near modern-day Riyadh) and founder of modern-day Saudi dynasty at the invitation of the latter (Tamimi 2007; Dallal 1993). Ibn Saud became extremely influenced by the philosophy and ideas of al-Wahhab and “took him under his (Saud) patronage, becoming one of his first and most obedient disciples” (Nevo 1998:37). Abd al-Wahhab then appealed, through letters, to the rulers of neighboring regions to join his movement, and after a couple of years in 1746 he decided to wage *jihad* in alliance with his shelter giver Ibn Saud against those who

opposed the Wahhabi teachings (Tamimi 2007) what is later called “Wahhabism”¹², the revivalist Islamic ideology, which is assumed by many critics of political Islam and Islamism to be a major source of contemporary Islamic radicalism (Ayoob 2004; Allen 2005; Esposito 2002). Wahhabism is also branded as a “strict puritanical Islamic faith and movement” (Stoddard 1921:58; Esposito 2002:6; Dallal 1993:341; Nevo 1998:41; Al-Fahad 2004:486) that “emphasizes literal interpretation of the Qur’an and *Sunnah* (example) of the Prophet Muhammad and the absolute oneness of God [*tawhid*]” (Esposito 2002:6). Toynbee (1948:189) referred it to as “Wahhabis’ Zealotism” as opposed to “Herodianism.”

Contemporary Islamic movements have, to a lesser extent, been influenced by two other major 18th-century revivalism efforts; the first in the Indian subcontinent led by Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi (1703-1762) and the second in Western Africa led by Uthman Ibn Fudi (known also as Osman dan Fodio) (1754-1817) (Tamimi 2007; Dallal 1993). Dahlawi’s concern was to shield India’s Islam against a rising tide of Hindu influence and polytheist practices, and Ibn Fudi’s struggle was intended to salvage Africa’s Islam from the encroachment of an animism that had already appealed to the ruler and ruled alike (Tamimi 2007; Ahmad 1962). Dahlawi’s thought was in some measure a response to his perception of the crisis of the time (Dallal 1993; Ahmad 1962). His movement of purification of Islam from *shirk* (polytheism) is “parallel to Wahhabism, although it avoids its extremism by a process of sublimation which is monistic in origin, and which condones such minor deviation as belief in the intercession of the Prophet, or visiting

¹² For details on Wahhabism, see Khan (1968), Voll (1982), Kechichian (1986), Dallal (1993), and Nevo (1998).

saints' tombs provided there is no danger of tomb-worship which in India he regarded to be an evil parallel to Hindu idolatry, and to have been borrowed by Muslims because of their contact with the Hindus" (Ahmad 1962:30).

Uthman Ibn Fudi pioneered a social and religious reform movement in mid-eighteenth century in West Africa since he visualized that the communities of Muslims were plagued by two sets of problems: improper practice of Islam and social injustice (Dallal 1993). In other words, his movement aimed to cleanse of Muslims of West Africa from paganism, polytheism, superstitions and heresies on the one hand, and bring socioeconomic and political transformation in the region on the other (Okene and Ahmad 2011; Schacht 1957; Martin 1976).

4.5 The 19th-Century reformist movements

The contemporary Islamic movements and the urge for an Islamic democratic discourse have also been influenced by some 19th-century Islamic thinkers, such as Muhammad Ali al-Sanusi (1787-1859), Rifa'ah al-Tahtabi (1801-1873), Khayr al-din al-Tunisi (1810-1899), Jamal al-din al-Afghani (1838-1897), Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), Abdurrahman al-Kawakibi (1849-1903) and Rashid Rida (1865-1935), and also the subcontinental modernist intellectuals, such as Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) and Syed Ameer Ali (1849-1928).

Al-Sanusi (1787-1859) was much liberal in his thinking and approach. Unlike Abd al-Wahhab, the central characteristic of the religion that he preached was mercy (*rahma*). He opposed zealotry of its any form. The zealotry of the traditionalists, he argues, is in their claim of monopoly over truth; that of the *Sufis* is in their scorn for the

law; and that of the masses is in their blind imitation (*taqlid*) of fallible men (Dallal 1993). The final manifestation of zealotry, Sanusi notes, concerns the accusation of unbelief. Quoting Ibn Taymiyyah, the eminent 13th-century Islamic philosopher, he says, Ibn Taymiyyah warns that the error involved in sparing the life of an unbeliever is far less than the error of spilling the blood of an innocent Muslim. A ruling of *takfir*, Sanusi adds, is only applicable to someone who professes *kufr*, unambiguously chooses it as a religion, and apostatizes from the religion of Islam altogether (Dallal 1993). Thus, Sanusi's ideas reflect his liberal and tolerant interpretation of Islam which has influenced many modern-day Islamic scholars.

Al-Tahtawi (1801-1873), beyond his education on Islamic sciences, learned Western sciences including French history, Greek philosophy and mythology, geography, arithmetic and logic, and most importantly, as Hourani (1983) notes, the French thought of the 18th century—Voltaire, Rousseau and others while he was on a sojourn for almost five years in France. Al-Tahtawi became extremely influenced by the liberal political philosophy of the West that includes tolerance, freedom and democracy. In his analysis, the cause of the crisis of the Islamic Ummah was the lack of freedom in their society, and he, thereby, suggested multi-party democracy as a remedy. The later-day Arab democrats recognized him as the father of Egyptian democracy (Tamimi 2007). Tahtawi is said to have been the first Islamic scholar who stressed on dialogue with the European civilization and promoted the idea to borrow from it that which did not conflict with the established values and principles of the Islamic *shari'ah*. He advocated introducing democracy into the Middle East, and criticized those who opposed the idea of taking knowledge from Europe, saying: "Such people are deluded; for civilizations are turns and

phases. These sciences were once Islamic when we were at the zenith of our civilization. Europe took them from us and developed them further. It is now our duty to learn from them just as they learned from our ancestors” (Quoted in Hourani 1983:34; Ahmad 1989:34; Tamimi 2007:43).

In 1834, shortly after return to Cairo from Paris, he published his first book *Takhliṣ al-Ibriz Ila Talkhis Bariz* (Extracting Gold in Telling the News from Paris) in which he summarized his observations of the manners and customs of the modern French, and praised the concept of democracy as he observed it in France. He tried to show that the democratic concept he was explaining to his readers was compatible with Islam (Tamimi 2007). In his words, “what is called freedom in Europe is exactly what is defined in our religion [Islam] as justice [*adl*], right [*haqq*], consultation [*shura*], and equality [*musawat*] ... This is because the rule of freedom and democracy consists of imparting justice and right to the people, and the nation’s participation in determining its destiny” (Cited in Abed 1995:119; Enayat 1988:131).

Al-Tunisi’s (1810-1899) *Aqwam al-Masalik Fi Ma’rifat Ahwal al-Mamalik* (The Most Straight Path to Knowing the Conditions of Nations) authored in 1867 attracted unprecedented scholarly attention from both the East and the West equally (Wasti 2000; Kedourie 1980). The main objective of the book was to promote reforms in the Islamic world. “While appealing to politicians and scholars of his time to seek all possible means to improve the status of the community [Muslim Ummah] and develop its civility, al-Tunisi warned the general Muslim public against shunning the experiences of other nations on the basis of the misconception that the writings, inventions, experiences or attitudes of non-Muslims should just be rejected or disregarded” (Tamimi 2007:44).

Arguing that Europe's current status was an outgrowth of the accomplishments of the medieval Islamic thinkers, he called upon the Muslim Ummah that "there is no reason to reject or ignore something which is correct and demonstrable simply because it comes from others, especially if we had formerly possessed it and it had been taken from us, on the contrary, there is an obligation to restore it and put it to use" (al-Tunisi 2002:42). He further says that civilization knows no frontiers, and though the value systems and cultures of Islam and Europe are different, there is no reason for them not to benefit from each other. Europe has been able to achieve its power by broadening the base of education, which is why education should be the start of any reform in the Islamic countries, adds Tunisi (Wasti 2000).

The most significant modernist reformer in the 19th century Islam was none but Jamal al-din al-Afghani (1838-1897). Afghani was one of the first influential figures who tried to reorient the Islamic tradition in ways that might fit into the state of growing challenges in the Islamic world emanating from the Islam's encounter with Western modernity (Kaloti 1974). Neither rejecting completely nor following blindly of the Western ideas, had his efforts provided a clear sense of pragmatism that could bridge the gap between Islam and the West. Al-Afghani suggests that the cause of the decline of the Muslim world was due to the absence of the core values and principles of Islam, such as justice (*adl*) and consultation (*shura*), and arbitrary rule of the political masters (Tamimi 2007). Al-Afghani promoted the democratic ideas of tolerance, equality and justice, and stressed on the need for democratic governance based on equality, justice and people's participation.

Unlike other reformers of his age, al-Afghani “did not confine his activities to one country; the whole world of Islam and even Western Europe and Russia, which held political sway over Muslim lands, became the theatre of his unceasing and revolutionary activity” (Kaloti 1974:43). He traveled across the world and particularly the Muslim lands restlessly, and presented his ideas that were opposed to prejudice, conservatism, *taqlid* (blind following), autocracy and foreign penetration and intervention. His notion of pan-Islamism was a “leading precursor of contemporary Islamist activists. He was a pioneer in terms of using the vocabulary of Islam to mobilize Muslim populations against colonial domination” (Ayooob 2007:631). However, Afghani’s liberal ideas both in religion and politics brought him in conflict with, and earned the hostility of, both conservative and authoritarian circles around the Muslim world. Several governments both in the Muslim East and in Europe dreaded his revolutionary ideas and audacious preaching (Kaloti 1974). Browne (1910:3) has commented that al-Afghani was “a man of enormous force of character, prodigious learning, untiring activity, extraordinary eloquence both in speech and writing, and with an appearance equally striking and majestic.” He was the leader of a new age and prime mover and father of liberationist, constitutionalist and intellectual movements in several centuries (Kohn 1929:179).

Al-Afghani’s disciple and later colleague Abduh (1849-1905) played a significant role in the 19th century Islamic revivalism. Abduh felt a pressing need for the reorientation of the Muslim society to meet the challenges of the time. Influenced by al-Afghani’s ideas, Abduh’s strategy involved a bottom up approach, and he stressed the need for educational reform first to reorganize the society, and reconcile Islamic principles with modern ideas. He continued to invest his maximum efforts to establish a

modern Islamic education in place of a traditional mere job-oriented parochial education system in Egypt right till his death. His bad experience of schooling in Egypt motivated him to learn, apart from Islamic sciences, Western scholarship on sociology, ethics, history, philosophy and education. Abduh became impressed with the liberal philosophy of modern Western scholars. He visited the English philosopher Herbert Spencer in England¹³ and translated Spencer's work on Education from French into Arabic in order to benefit from his views in drafting his plans for the reform of Muslim schools¹⁴ (Kaloti 1974). However, Abduh's interest in Western knowledge was vehemently criticized by the contemporary traditional ulama (scholars) at al-Azhar. The ulama objected:

What kind of a sheikh is this who translates their writings and quotes from their philosophers and disputes with their learned men, who gives *fatwas* of a kind that no one of his predecessors even did, and takes part in benevolent societies and collects money for the poor and unfortunates? (Cited in Kaloti 1974:139).

However, Abduh was nonchalant to his critics. For him, Western ideas are compatible with Islamic sciences. He suggests that *maslaha* (public interest) in Islamic thought corresponds to *manfa'ah* (utility) in the Western thought. In the same vein, he equated *shura* with democracy and *ijma* with consensus. In terms of authority, there is no place of theocracy in Islam according to Abduh. He insists that the authority of the *hakim* (governor) or that of the *qadi* (judge) or that of the *mufti* is civil. He strongly argues that *ijtihad* should be revived because emerging priorities and problems, new to Islamic

¹³ Although Spencer was at that time an old man and had given up meeting people, he was induced by Wilfred Blunt, the English poet and writer, to consent to a meeting with Abduh who went to England for that purpose.

¹⁴ Earlier Muhammad Abduh learned French with a view to having firsthand knowledge on Western sciences published in French.

thought, need to be addressed (Ahmad 1989; Tamimi 2007). Abduh rejected authoritarianism and championed parliamentary democracy. He defended pluralism and refuted the claims that it would undermine the unity of the *ummah*. He argues that pluralism didn't divide the European nations. 'The reason, he has concluded, 'is that their objective is the same. What varies is only the method they pursue toward accomplishing it' (Abd al-Salam 1978:28; Tamimi 2007:46).

Like his predecessors Afghani and Abduh, Rashid Rida (1865-1935) believed in the compatibility of Islam and reason, science, and modernity. He was a strong advocate who stressed on returning to the original sources of Islam and the reinterpretation of the Qur'an to meet modern demands (Rida 2002). Rida constituted a bridge between the reformist ideas of Afghani and Abduh and the revivalist thought of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab of Arabia. In his opinion, the reason for the backwardness of the Muslim Ummah lies in the loss of the truth of Islam by the Muslims. The autocratic rulers, he contends, have encouraged such loss. True Islam, Rida argues, involves two things—*tawhid* (the creed of monotheism) and *shura* (council) in matters of governance. But the autocratic rulers, he laments, tried to make Muslims forget the second by encouraging them to abandon the first (Hourani 1983; Tamimi 2007). However, unlike Abd al-Wahhab, he was very conscious of the impact of the European modernity upon his fellow Muslims. Mostly influenced by his teacher Abduh, Rida did not suggest to blindly rejecting the West, nor did he propose to blindly following it. He equated *shura* in Islam with democracy in the West. He added that "learning how government should operate and replacing tyranny with a *shura* regime was the greatest benefit the people of the East gained from their interactions with Europeans, a benefit that might not had been achieved were it not for

these interactions ...” (Shavit 2010:351). Rida vehemently opposed the tyrannical rule. He edited a periodical named *al-Manar* which was extremely critical of the tyrannical regime of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the then Ottoman sultan, and advocated for democratization. In 1907, he wrote in *al-Manar*: “Was not it the secret political societies which cleansed Europe of the tyranny of kings and popes, eliminated the governments of the nobility, and replaced them with republican and monarchic governments limited by laws and the supremacy of the members of the nation council [*shura*, i.e. parliament]?” (Cited in Tauber 1994:196).

The nineteenth-century Islamic reformers suggested that Western democracy had not been necessarily in conflict with Islamic ideals. The Muslim countries had no reason to reject Western science and modernity just because they were Western. These reformist thinkers argued that the reason for the underdevelopment of the Muslim countries had been largely the absence of the practice of democratic ideals, such as tolerance, the rule of law, equality and justice, and people’s participation in their social and political affairs. Instead of authoritarianism which, according to them, contradicts with Islam, the Muslim countries should opt for establishing a participatory democratic order to attain prosperity in their societies, the scholars suggested.

4.6 The compatibility between democracy and Islam

When Islam is understood as a monolithic religion, it becomes incompatible with modern democracy. In the same vein, when democracy is conceived to be uncontested, it becomes unmatchable with Islam. The fact is that neither Islam nor democracy is monolithic and uncontested in their meaning and understanding. Islam’s fundamental

concepts, such as *tawhid* (monotheism), *khilafah* (vicegerency), and *akhirah* (hereafter) do not necessarily contradict with democracy. Islam's established values and principles, such as *shura* (consultation), *ijma* (consensus), *adl* (justice), tolerance, and accountability are attributed to the concept of democracy. Many scholars have pointed out that the Qur'an and the *Shari'ah* have provided an elaborate socio-moral framework rather than a detailed blueprint for an economic or political order (Ahmad 2003). The Qur'an envisions a society rather than a state (Engineer 1996). The Qur'an is concerned with morality rather than polity (Engineer 2003). Islam is a faith which, Muslims claim, encompasses all aspects of human existence including politics. Democracy is a form of government that has nothing to do with faith. While Islam is compared with democracy, it takes the latter as a means, not an end. Democracy itself is a way, not an object. From this viewpoint, democracy is not antithetical to Islam.

Unlike democracy, the Qur'an does not confer sovereignty upon people. Even in absolute sense, human beings cannot be sovereign because they are inflicted with plenty of shortcomings. People are politically sovereign meaning that a government will be constituted on people's consent, and will sustain as long as that consent sustains. Parliament being sovereign does not permit it free reign. There is a common saying about the British Parliament that "the British parliament can do everything but make a woman a man, and a man a woman" (Bingham 2011:46). But in practice, the British parliament is not beyond its limit. This represents a kind of restricted sovereignty, one that does not resemble the sovereignty of God. Professor Abdullah Jahangir of Islamic University, in an interview with the author, argues:

Sovereignty means ownership. This is simple that sovereign means owner. I am the owner of this land which is true. I can erect building here, I can demolish it, I

can make partition, and I can sell it. I have this ownership. Again, this land belongs to Allah. This is also true. And the fact is, according to Islam, with this land I can do many things, but I cannot make a brothel here. People's ownership is limited; Allah's ownership is supreme over all other sovereigns. My ownership is worldly, and if I put it over Allah's ownership I will be offender to Allah. In the same vein, people are the owner of the country, it is a simple word. Those who say it is anti-Islamic to say people are sovereign and they are the source of all powers, I do not agree with them. Here by power, it does not mean power regarding storm-rain, or disease, it means the power of ministers, prime minister and above all state power. This power actually belongs to people. In Islam, power will be attained by the consent of the people. If in a society the chiefs of tribes consent and the mass people agree to it, it is ok, this is democracy. People's participation and share is mandatory in Islam which is democracy. Therefore, people are the owner of the state, and people are the source of power is not contradictory to Islam. However, if anyone thinks this ownership means that anyone can do anything; can make a *haram* (prohibited) a *halal* (legitimate), and a *halal* a *haram*, then obviously it is anti-Islamic.

Therefore, people have limited sovereignty that is subject to the sovereignty of God. God's sovereignty is absolute and unlimited. In reality, in a democratic society where Muslims are majority, it is very unlikely for any law contrary to the fundamentals of Islam to be enacted. Furthermore, the authority of the state is as a trust (*amanah/wilayah*). The government is a trustee (*al-amin/al-wali*), not a sovereign over people. Muhammad Yusuf Musa, a prominent scholar of the *usul* (fundamental source principle of religion) writes: the source of sovereignty is the *ummah* alone and not the caliph, because he is a trustee over matters of religion and in directing their affairs

according to the *Shari'ah*. Thus he derives his authority from them, and they have the duty to advise him and counsel him in case he errs. They also have the duty to remove him from the office to which he has been entrusted by their choice should they consider it to be necessary (Howeidy 2010). Eminent jurist Uthman Khalil also opines that Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence) does not consider the trustee (*al-wali*) as possessing a right to sovereignty, rather he sees that sovereignty is the right of the *ummah* alone which the *wali* exercises as an employee or a trustee of it, so it can remove him if it finds what necessitates that (Howeidy 2010).

Apart from the issue of sovereignty, the established values and principles in Islam, such as competition and consultation, openness, tolerance, equality, rule of law and justice, accountability and transparency, and consensus are congruent with democracy and pluralism. The classical Islam suggests that the Prophet did not appoint his successor. After the death of the Prophet, the companions (of the Prophet) chose Abu Bakr as his successor. The choice was approved by the people of Medina through a system of allegiance (*bay'a*) (Husain 2002). Before his death, Abu Bakr had nominated Umar as his successor in the vicegerency and the appointment was accepted by the universality of the people, including the House of the Prophet (Ali 2010). While Umar was suffering mortal injury inflicted on him by a Christian fanatic, he appointed an electoral committee consisting of six eminent companions of the Prophet to select his successor. Their choice fell on Uthman, a descendent of Umayyad and son-in-law of the Prophet who was installed as caliph with the suffrage of the people (Husain 2002).

Accountability of the ruler to the masses is deeply reflected in the inaugural address of Abu Bakr. While assuming the charges of caliph, he is reported to have said:

O people! Behold me charged with the cares of government, I am not the best among you; I need all your advice and all your help. If I do well support me; if I mistake, counsel me. To tell the truth to a person commissioned to rule is faithful allegiance; to conceal it, is treason. In my sight, the powerful and the weak are alike; and to both I wish to render justice. As I obey God and his Prophet obey me; if I neglect the laws of God and the Prophet, I have no more right to your obedience (Husain 2002:19; Engineer 1996:40).

Democratic implications are underscored in the Qur'an. One of its chapters is attributed to as consultation (*Shura*). The Qur'an proclaims that the only people close to God are those who, among other things, "conduct their affairs by mutual consultation (*shura*)" (42:38). Sometimes this phrase is interpreted as referring to consultation only among a select group of learned individuals (*ulama*), advisors, or cabinet members. But the verse itself contains no such limitations (Ahmad 2003). In another verse, God has instructed: "And consult them (i.e. those around you) in (important) affairs. Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah" (3:159). This verse suggests that the Prophet Muhammad did not establish a theocratic state as he has been commanded to consult people around him in important matters. Scholars, considering this verse, argue that nothing can be more misleading than the concept that the state founded by the Prophet was a theocratic state (Islam 2012). Asad (1961) says that the Qur'anic injunctions of exerting to consultation imply the government by consent and council. Islamic *shura*, according to al-Qaradawi, "approaches the spirit of democracy, or if you will, the spirit of democracy approaches the spirit of Islamic *shura*" (Cited in Yakub 2004:285). Al-Qaradawi also notes that the *Shari'ah* protects against abuses of power and prevents arbitrary rule by effectively institutionalizing the process of consultation (Yakub

2004). Celebrated Islamic jurist al-Ghazali opines that consensus is necessary for the passage and enactment of new legislation. New legislation, he continues, agreed upon by the majority of society, in turn, permits an Islamic state to adapt and respond to changes in the modern world in absence of specific Qur'anic injunctions (Moussalli 2001; Yakub 2004). Al-Ghazali also maintains that “despotic, non-consultative, decision-making, even if from a wise and learned person, is objectionable and unacceptable” (El Fadl 2001:86; Yakub 2004:285).

Ijma or consensus has not only a Qur'anic basis, but it is also sanctified by the *Sunnah*. The Prophet practiced this principle in his private life and instituted it in the public sphere. He frequently sought the advice of his companions and family, occasionally followed their suggestions, and apologized for any mistake he may have made (Ahmad 2003). After migrating to Medina, one of the Prophet's first acts was to venture into a consensual agreement, a written charter commonly called the Charter of Medina (sometimes referred to as the Constitution of Medina) “in an attempt to establish a transtribal and suprareligious ‘corporatist structure’” (Ayubi 1991:6). “Even though the arrangements with the Jewish tribes became strained later on, the very attempt to institutionalize a political order through a written agreement allowing diverse entities to function with some degree of cooperation and autonomy displayed high political maturity and democratic tendencies” (Ahmad 2003:26). The Charter of Medina, consisting of forty-seven clauses out of which twenty-three clauses governed the relationship between Muslims, between Ansar and Muhajirin, while the remaining twenty-four clauses governed the relations of Muslims with non-Muslims, the Jews and others, was drafted almost six centuries before the documentation of Magna Carta in 1215, showing the

Prophet's profound statesmanship and inclination to democratic pluralism. Some clauses included: (i) in case of war with anybody, the Muhajirin will redeem their prisoners with kindness and justice common among believers; (ii) believers are all friends to each other to the exclusion of all others; (iii) no Jew will be wronged for being a Jew; (iv) the Jews will contribute towards the war when fighting alongside the believers; (v) if anyone attacks anyone who is a party to this pact, the other must come to his help; (vi) a woman will be given protection only with the consent of her family; and (vii) this document will not (be employed to) protect one who is unjust or commits a crime (against other parties of the pact) (Efsthadiadis 2013). In an interview with the author, Shah Abdul Hannan, a Bangladeshi Islamic philosopher contends that the Medina Charter is the world's first ever written constitution and a document to draw peace, harmony and progress to combine and create a pluralistic community. The obligation to strive for consensus in administering affairs of the state is found from the fact that the Prophet did not select his successor. Instead, he deliberately left the choice (of leadership) to the community at large.

With regard to tolerance, the Qur'an says, "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (2:256). Once the Prophet said to a man, "You have two qualities which God likes and loves: one is mildness and the other is toleration" (Islam 2012). From the Qur'anic viewpoint, the mission of the prophets and messengers of God was not to forcefully impose their teachings on the people but to guide them and ask them to accept God with their will. God says to Prophet Muhammad: "If then they turn away, We have not sent you as a guard over them. Your duty is but to convey (the Message)" (Qur'an 42:48). The Qur'an further proclaims: "And had your Lord willed, those on earth would

have believed—all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people, against their will, to believe?” (10:99). The Qur’an has also prohibited abusing the religiosity of others: “And insult not those whom they worship besides Allah, lest they insult Allah wrongfully without knowledge” (6:108). Thus, the Qur’an is quite explicit about religious tolerance or freedom of religion: “[Say, O disbelievers] for you is your religion, and for me is my religion (109:6). However, freedom of religion also includes the right to change one’s religion. The *Shari’ah* encourages conversion to but disallows conversion from Islam. In interviews with the author, Bangladeshi scholars—Syed Sharafat Ali of Sarsina Madrasa and Muhammad Abu Yusuf of Tamirul Millat Madrasa—argue that from Islamic viewpoint, an individual’s salvation is guaranteed only in Islam. Therefore, Islam does not want an individual to be ruined by leaving it. Nevertheless, they claim, if any Muslim leaves his/her faith, he/she will be counseled, and still if he/she apostates, he/she is free to do so as long as his/her acts do not threaten the community or the *ummah*.¹⁵ In terms of inter-religious marriage, Islam has put sanctions in two categories: a Muslim man can marry a Jewish or Christian (*ahl al-kitab*) woman, but no Muslim woman is allowed to marry a Jewish or Christian man. With the husband as the head of the family, this provision ensured that children of mixed parentage were raised as Muslims. Secondly, marriages between Muslims and polytheists, such as Hindus are generally prohibited (Bielefeldt 1995). Farrag (1990) justifies *Shari’ah*’s restrictions on inter-religious marriage arguing that a Muslim woman would not receive due respect for her religious beliefs by a non-Muslim husband. Again,

¹⁵ Noted jurist Yakub (2004) also notes that when apostasy causes social discord, impinges on the rights of Muslims to practice their religion, and threatens their unity of the *ummah*, then it is treated as an act of sedition to be dealt with by the severest penalties.

a marriage, he continues, between persons of completely different faiths, such as Islam and polytheism, would eventually break down.

Equality, the rule of law and justice are central to Islamic philosophy. The Qur'an has eliminated all sorts of human distinctions: "O humankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (s/he who is) the most righteous of you" (49:13). The Prophet in his farewell address delivered on his last pilgrimage to Mecca in 632 A.D. declared: "An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor does a black have any superiority over white except by piety and good action" (Mazrui 1997:128). When a woman of high rank was brought for trial for being involved in a theft, and it was recommended that she be treated leniently because of her rank, the Prophet replied: "The nations that lived before you were destroyed by Allah because they punished the common man for their offences and let their dignitaries go unpunished for their crimes; I swear by Him (Allah) who holds my life in His hand that even if Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, had committed this crime, then I would have amputated her hand" (Williams and Zinkin 2010:525). In numerous verses, the Qur'an has enjoined to render justice (5:8; 4:58,135; 16:90; 57:25; 7:29; 11:85). Ruthven (2005) while comparing Christianity with Islam observes that while the former is primarily the religion of love; Islam is the religion of justice.

It is often argued that women in Islam are not treated equally with men as far as marriage, dissolution of marriage and inheritance are concerned. Although forced

marriages are occasionally practiced in Muslim societies, Islamic social laws require the consent of both bride and bridegroom to validate a marriage (Hannan 2010). However, Islamic laws do not allow a wife to repudiate her husband unilaterally unless it is contended in the marriage contract. The wife can only demand a divorce, and if not met, she can go to the court to conclude the marriage (Anderson 1976). In an interview with the author, Professor Ataur Rahman Miazi of the Dhaka University provided the following:

The *Shari'ah* is primarily concerned about the order and stability of the society.

From the Islamic perspective, men are the guardians of women, the heads of families. The women are a motherly nation; by nature, they are generally more compassionate, tender-hearted and emotional than their male counterparts. Revolving around a trivial issue in the conjugal life, these qualities may contribute to the disintegration of marriage leading to a multitude of broken-families which would eventually adversely affect the society.

According to the Islamic law of inheritance, a male heir receives twice the share a female heir (Schacht 1964). This exhibits gender discrimination. But, if the whole system of Islam is considered, Professor Abdullah Jahangir (interviewed by this author) opined, the law is perceived as just, not discriminatory towards women. He elaborated:

Islam has assigned male with all kinds of responsibility to take care of family. In the Islamic economic system, a woman has no financial responsibility. Even if she is a millionaire, her clothing will be provided by her husband. If her husband is dead, she is responsible for taking care of herself. The man is responsible for all matters—looking after and taking care of parents, wives and children, maintaining social relationship, and so forth. On the other hand, a woman has the right to property of her parents and husband, and she also receives bride price

from her husband, but she shoulders no responsibility to spend a single penny.

Thus, if we make a balance sheet of this responsibility and right, we will see Islam has given a woman more share than that of a man. Islam is, in fact, more concerned about equity than mere equality.

Islam is a faith whereas democracy is a political system. The philosophy of Islam based on divine origin contradicts with Western democratic discourse based on secular doctrinal philosophy. However, Islamic political philosophy is not necessarily in conflict with Western democracy. The basic elements of Islamic governance, such as *bay'a* (obligation of public allegiance), *adl* (the principle of equality and justice), *shura* (consultative rule), and *ijma* (consensus) are congruent with Western democratic discourse. However, it does not mean that these two philosophical doctrines do not have differences. With their differences, they are compatible with each other. The Islamic vision of democracy has been conceptualized by scholars in varied terms: 'theo-democracy' (Mawdudi 1976), 'Islamic democracy' (Esposito and Voll 1996) or 'spiritual democracy' (Iqbal 2012). Democracy rather than authoritarianism is intrinsic to Islam. The establishment of democracy, of course without costing the fundamentals of Islam, can bring about peace, progress and stability in Muslim societies around the world.

Chapter Five

The Advent of Islam and Growth of Muslim Society in Bengal

... It [a missionary religion] is the spirit of truth in the hearts of believers which cannot rest, unless it manifests itself in thought, word and deed, which is not satisfied till it has carried its message to every human soul.

— **Professor Max Muller**¹⁶

We undoubtedly find that Islam has gained its greatest and most lasting missionary triumphs in times and places in which its political power has been weakest, as in Southern India and Eastern Bengal.

— **T.W. Arnold** (1913:263), *The Preaching of Islam*

Bangladesh is a South Asian country with an overwhelmingly Muslim majority population; in fact it represents the third largest Muslim population inhabiting a single Muslim country following Indonesia and Pakistan today. During the British colonial and Pakistani period—before the inception of the country as an independent nation in 1971—Bangladesh was identified as East Bengal and East Pakistan respectively. Thus, in this chapter, Bengal, East Bengal, East Pakistan and Bangladesh have been interchangeably used and understood.

Bangladesh is geographically, a territory isolated from the rest of the Muslim world: isolated from Pakistan and the Middle East to the west by the non-Muslim areas of

¹⁶ Max Muller defined a missionary religion while he was delivering a lecture in Westminster Abbey in December 1873 (Quoted in Arnold 1913:10).

India and from the Malay world to the east by Myanmar and Thailand (Al-Ahsan 1994). The territory is indeed surrounded from three sides (the north, east and the west) by India, and the rest—the south by the Bay of Bengal.

Map 5.1: The Map of Asia (Source: <http://www.mapsofworld.com/asia-political-map.htm>)

Map 5.2: The Map of Bangladesh
(Source: www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/bangladesh_map.htm)

Scholars of the South Asian history have delved into when and how Islam entered Bengal and the territory became transformed to a majority Muslim land while the rest of northern and southern India have remained non-Islamic zones. Several theories regarding Islamic religious conversion in East Bengal have also been developed and promoted. In this chapter, I investigate the processes of Islamization and growth of Muslim society in Bengal which is now Bangladesh. Alongside I present a sociological analysis of the much talked about conversion of the Bengali indigenous population to seventh-century Arabian Islam.

Eaton (1993) extensively studied the Indian Islam and its role in the subcontinental including Bengal society, economy and culture. Eaton (1993) investigated the rise of Islam in East Bengal during the Sultanate and Mughal period. Eaton (1985) examined various theories on the Bengal Muslims' conversion to Islam. He argues that mass Islamization in Bengal took place not because of a single factor but through a gradual process involving two discernible aspects—accretion and reform. Muir (1963) argues that the rise of Islam in seventh-century Arabia lies in its inherently militant nature. The common phrase that the Orientalists, in fact, habitually use over the centuries regarding the expansion of Islam is that 'Islam has been spread at the point of the sword.' Wise (1894) argues that both the sword and the social liberation in Islam played a key part in the extensive range of conversion to Islam in Bengal. Chatterji (1963) emphasizes the 'religion of the sword' thesis regarding the spread of Islam in Bengal. Majumdar (1973) also stresses the role of forced conversion. All these assertions, however, often lack credible historical evidence.

By contrast, Muslim historians and thinkers have rejected the notion of ‘sword thesis’ and forced conversion though they lack consensus as to the explanation of Muslims’ growth in Bengal. Rahim (1963) points the migration of Muslims from other parts of the world, along with the conversion of lower-caste and underprivileged Hindus, as the primary methods of Islamization in Bengal. Karim (1959) opines that various forces in the society, such as the Sultans, the scholars (ulama) and the Sufis played a significant role in the development of a vibrant Muslim society in Bengal. Erection of mosques, construction of *madrasas*, promotion of Islamic spirit, and patronizing Muslim scholars and Sufis were some of the rulers’ conscious acts which played most part in the rise and consolidation of Islam in the Bengal (Karim 1959). He figured out two major factors which “were mainly responsible in swelling the ranks of the Muslims in Bengal: (i) the immigration of the foreign Muslim populace, and (ii) merging of the local populace in the Muslim society after their conversion” (Karim 1959:140). Haq (1975) argues that Islam entered to Bengal under the garb of Sufistic movements, and it underwent many momentous changes in the hands of the Bengali Sufis. Habibullah (1945) argues that the Sufi mysticism furnished Islam’s philosophical point of contact with Hinduism, and through such contacts, fostered by the simplicity and broad humanism of the Sufi, that Islam obtained its largest number of free converts. Qureshi (1962) dismisses the forced conversion thesis and presents a comprehensive study of the peaceful conversion what Hardy (1977:195) calls “the most sophisticated and sustained exposition” until now. Yasin (1958) proffers the social, cultural and religious history of the Indian Muslims, and contested the use of force in the spread of Islam in the subcontinent. Contemporary Muslim scholars, among others, Ahmad (1964), Tarafdar

(1965), Nizami (1966), Mujeeb (1967), Rashid (1969) and Talib (1980) advanced the argument that the Sufis were largely responsible for peaceful conversion of a large segment of India's Hindu population, especially Hindus of lower castes to Islam.

However, Ghuznavi, a Muslim elite in the 1870s, argues that the majority of the modern Mahomedans are not the descendants of lower-caste Hindus, such as Chandals and Kaibartas as claimed by Beverley (1872), but are of foreign extraction, though in many cases it may be of more or less remote degree (Eaton 1993). Ghuznavi asserted that there had been some conversions and insisted that they had not been among lower-caste Hindus. He, instead, identified the Muslim/Arab migration before the Turkish conquest, Bengali Muslim rulers' welcoming attitudes to foreigners particularly land grants by Sultan Alauddin Husain Shah (1493-1519) to them, the dispersion of Afghans 'in every hamlet' after the Mughal conquest, the greater fertility of Muslims owing to their practices of polygamy and widow remarriage, their greater longevity, and the absence among Muslims of a caste system or institutionalized celibacy as reasons for the legion of Bengali Muslims (Eaton 1993). Similarly, Rubbee (1895) rejected the argument that the natives of Bengal, either from compulsion or free will, were converted to Islam, in any appreciable number at a time. Rubbee argues that "the ancestors of the present Musalmans [Muslims] of this country were certainly those Musalmans who came here from foreign parts during the rule of the former sovereigns" (Quoted in Eaton 1993:124).

5.2 Islamization theories in Bengal

Theories regarding Islamization in Bengal include Religion of the Sword Theory, Immigration Theory, Religion of Patronage Theory, and Religion of Social Liberation Theory.

The religion of the sword theory stresses the role of the military force in the rise and expansion of Islam. It promotes the idea of forced conversion. Many European and Western writers, such as Elliot (1853), Hunter (1881), Wise (1883), and Muir (1963) as well as Hindu scholars, such as Chatterji (1963) and Majumdar (1973) have emphasized this theory. Hunter (1881:18) writes that “the whole conception of Islam is that of a church either actively militant or conclusively triumphant—forcibly converting the world, or ruling the stiff-necked unbeliever with a rod of iron.” Although Wise (1883) suggested a ‘social liberation’ or ‘free will’ thesis, he equally stressed the ‘religion of the sword’ theory. Chatterji (1963) and Majumdar (1973) also referred to the military conquest and forced conversion by the Muslim conquerors behind Islamization in Bengal. However, the ‘sword theory’ has come under difficult challenges according to historical facts and figures. Historians unanimously hold that the first Muslim conquest of Bengal was accomplished in the beginning of the thirteenth century (most refers the year as 1203-04 A.D.) by Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtyar Khalji, a Turkish commander and fortune seeker in the eastern lands (Minhaj al-Din 1881; Karim 1959; Sarkar 1972). On the other hand, Bengal’s contact with the Muslims, to quote Sarkar (1972:20), “began much earlier than its conquest in the thirteenth century.” The Arab merchants established commercial relations with the sea ports of Bangladesh and had their settlement in the locality of the port of Chittagong in the ninth century (Rahim 1995). “Many Sufi saints or

scholars are believed to have come even before the Muslim conquest ... Thus sometimes the missionary preceded the soldier, and the activity of the former was no less significant than that of the latter” (Sarkar 1972:20). The sword theory also reveals its infirmity in terms of the religious geography of South Asia (Eaton 1993). Hunter (1888) informs that in the centers of the Muhammadan power, such as Delhi and Agra, the Muhammadans in the former district hardly exceeded one-tenth, and in the latter they did not form one-fourth of the population in the 1880s. Similarly, the centers of the Muslim rule in Bengal are reported to have less proportion of Islamization than the far remote areas. Sarkar (1972) informs that in Eastern Bengal Islam spread mostly in the villages. Arnold (1913) reports that it is not in the ancient centers of the Muhammadan government that the Muslims of Bengal are found in large numbers, but in the countryside where there are no traces of settlers from the West, and in places where lower-caste Hindus and outcasts most abound. Roy (1983:20), referring to 1872 Bengal census, states that “the Muslim preponderance was not even found within or about the centers of Muslim power. None of the districts containing a very high proportion of Muslims in the population held any of the important centers of Muslim power in Bengal.” The 1901 Census of India also revealed that the headquarters of the Muslim rulers in Bengal, such as Dhaka which was the residence of the Nawab for about a hundred years, and Malda and Murshidabad, the center of Muslim rule for nearly four and a half centuries had had a little Muslim preponderance than the adjacent districts of Dinajpur, Rajshahi, and Nadia (Eaton 1993). The ‘religion of the sword’ or ‘forced conversion’ thesis is said to have failed to delve into the deep and complex sociocultural and religious trajectories of, at least, the Bengal

society. Hardy (1977) has remarked that those who argued that Indian Muslims were forcibly converted have failed to define either ‘force’ or ‘conversion.’

The social liberation theory emphasizes the ‘conversion at free will’ and postulates that the rigid caste system in Hinduism which bred grave inequality in Hindu society and the egalitarian philosophy inherent in Islam were mainly responsible for mass conversion to Islamic faith and the growth of Muslim society. The contemporary Hindu society, to quote Hardy (1977:187-188), “was seen as essentially a hierarchy of social aggregates, each endogamous, each with its own rules of commensality, its own hereditary occupations and common ritual practices, and divided, the one higher from the other lower, by walls at best mild distaste and at worst of brutally-expressed contempt.” Muslim historians and many Western writers as well as the British administrators who served colonial administration in India have placed substantial emphasis on this theory. Beverley (1872:132), the census commissioner for the 1872 census in Bengal, recorded that “the exclusive caste system of Hinduism, again, naturally encouraged the conversion of the lower orders from a religion under which they were no better than despised outcasts to one which recognized all men as equal.” Cornish (1874:109), the superintendent for the 1871 census in Madras, reported that “to this day proselytism is going on among the lower orders of society. It is especially active in Malabar where the slave castes of Hindus are numerous and treated with the utmost contumely by the superior castes. Conversion to Mahomedanism in their case means a distinct advance in the social scale.” Crooke (1897) maintains that Islam, for converts, provides guarantee of ‘freedom from the bondage of caste.’ Crooke further says that conversions occur in the Muslim community due largely to social causes—

The outcast groups of Hindus, popularly known as the ‘Untouchables’, have begun to realize that as objects of contempt to all who follow the strict rule of Brahmanism, their position is intolerable. To such people Islam offers full franchise after conversion, and the number of converts is increased by those who, on account of the breach of Hindu social observances, such as the eating of forbidden food, association with people considered to be impure, violation of some rule of marriage or sexual connection, have been expelled from the community, or to use the popular phrase, have been deprived of the right of smoking tobacco or drinking water with their co-religionists (Crooke 1921:4).

Arnold (1913:270) also reports that the Muslim population was “fast increasing through conversion from these lower castes, who thereby free themselves from such degrading oppression and raise themselves and their descendants in the social scale.” However, as noted earlier, some nineteenth-century Muslim writers, such as Ghuznavi¹⁷ and Rubbee (1895) discarded the ‘social liberation thesis’ and lower-caste Hindus’ conversion to Islam though the twentieth-century Muslim historians have, by and large, stressed it. Presumably Ghuznavi, Rubbee, and the like who belonged to the *ashraf* (upper) class in the contemporary Muslim society had found difficulty to share common Muslim identity with the converted Muslims and their descendants originating from the lower and despised [Hindu] social class. Ghuznavi’s claim of the little number of converts, who were also drawn from the upper orders of Hindu society along with his emphasis of the immigration theory of Islamization was, as Eaton (1993) opines, such a

¹⁷ See Abu A Ghuznavi, “Notes on the Origin, Social and Religious Divisions and Other Matters Touching on the Mahomedans of Bengal and Having Special Reference to the District of Maimensing” (India Office Library, London, European MSS., E 295., vol. 17 [n.d.]).

general view favored and conscious effort pursued by the Muslim upper classes throughout India.

However, Eaton (1993) has been critical of the 'religion of social liberation' thesis on several grounds. First, he attempts to falsify this theory by pointing that it attributes present-day values to the peoples of the past what is, in historical and literary analysis, called "presentism." He contends that "before their contact with Muslims, India's lower castes are thought to have possessed, almost as though familiar with the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Thomas Jefferson, some innate notion of the fundamental equality of all humankind denied them by an oppressive Brahmanic tyranny" (Eaton 1993:117). Quoting Friedmann (1975), Eaton (1993:117) also argues that "premodern Muslim intellectuals did not stress their religion's ideal of social equality as opposed to Hindu inequality, but rather Islamic monotheism as opposed to Hindu polytheism." The idea that Islam fosters social equality, he continues, seems to be a recent conception that has developed only from the period of the Enlightenment, and more precisely from the legacy of the French Revolution among nineteenth-century Muslim reformers (Hourani 1983; Lewis 1953). However, it is highly unlikely that India's lower castes were acquainted with the thought of Rousseau, Voltaire or Jefferson, and even familiar with the terms "equality" or "inequality", but, common sense dictates, these people encountered social and cultural repression in their real life, no matter whether they would know modern social, cultural or political theories.

Second, Eaton argues, even upon Islamization, Indian communities failed to improve their status in the social hierarchy. Joining the Muslim society, he quotes Ahmad (1978), the converts and their descendants still carried the same birth-ascribed rank that

they had formerly known in Hindu society. Especially in Bengal, this is a common phenomenon: he quotes Wise (1883:40) who in 1883 observed: “In other parts of India menial work is performed by outcast Hindus; but in Bengal any repulsive or offensive occupation devolves on the Muhammadan. The Beldar [scavenger and remover of carcasses] is to the Muhammadan village what the Bhuinmali is to the Hindu, and it is not improbable that his ancestors belonged to this vile caste” (Quoted by Eaton 1993:118). Nonetheless, available empirical studies suggest that social stratification in Indian Muslim society including Bengal presents a highly complex picture (Ahmad 1966; Mandelbaum 1970; Mines 1972). Abundant demographic studies on India’s rural and urban areas in which Muslims constitute a substantial proportion of population propose that an overemphasis on *ashraf-ajlaf* (upper-lower) dichotomy has produced “a wrong and distorted picture of the nature and complexity of Indian Muslim social stratification” (Ahmad 1966:273). Thus, the conception of a mere binary stratification of Muslim society—*ashraf-ajlaf*—is, what Ahmad (1966:273) calls, “a gross over-simplification of the existing reality.” Although Hindu caste system is contradictory to Islam, it is not foreign to Indian Muslim society. However, scholars opine that unlike Hindu caste-ridden society, social mobility associated with Muslim social stratification is relatively easy and speedy, because, Muslim caste organization is baggier, less rigid, and more acquiescent than the Hindu caste system (Mines 1972; Beech et al. 1966; Mandelbaum 1970). An often quoted Muslim axiom corroborates this argument: “We used to be butchers and now we are Shaikhs. Next year, if the harvest prices are good for us, we shall be Sayyeds” (Mandelbaum 1970:555).

Eaton (1993) finally argues that in Bengal, Muslim converts were drawn mainly from Rajbansi, Pod, Chandal, Kuch, and other indigenous groups that had been only lightly exposed to Brahmanical culture. However, Beverley (1872), Arnold (1913), Roy (1983), and others notably Muslim scholars, such as Habibullah (1945), Karim (1959), Qureshi (1962), Rahim (1963), and Mujeeb (1967) have found that most converts were drawn from lower caste Hindus who had been persecuted under Brahmanical social order. Moreover, Edward Dalton, a colonial administrator in Bengal, wrote in 1872 that by the time Muhammadans strode across Bengal, the great masses of the aborigines inhabiting there were Hindus. Masses of the “Hinduised aborigines” were converted to Muhammadan religion (Dalton 1872). Mukherjee (1972) notes that after the caste organization was imported and developed by the immigrant Brahmins in Bengal, the indigenous people of Bengal were labelled as *sudra*, *antyaja*, *mlechha*, and *yabana*, and they went under the Brahmanical way of life because of the accompanying economic domination and privileges. Brahmanical order alienated them, and “when in the wake of Muslim conquest the zeal for conversion to Islam was felt in Bengal society, the people of East Bengal were converted in great majority” (Mukherjee 1972:266). Sarkar (1972:23) also observes—

Those who embraced Islam came from different ranks in society, mainly the lower classes and occasionally from the higher. The lower classes adopted Islam to escape from social injustice or secure social status. To the poor aborigines of eastern and deltaic Bengal,—fishermen, hunters, pirates and peasants,—the impure or unclean outcastes, popularly called the untouchables, spurned and neglected by the caste-proud Brahmanical Hindu society, Islam came as a revelation with its message of monotheism and social equality and offered ‘full

franchise', an escape from the social disabilities and humiliations and opened avenues of progress. So they readily responded to the preachings or persuasions of the *mullahs*, often backed by varying degree of compulsion.

The religion of patronage theory suggests that conversion to Islam takes place due to the motivation of material interests rather than doctrinal forces—the premodern people of the Indian subcontinent “converted to Islam to receive some non-religious favor from the ruling class—relief from taxes, promotion in the bureaucracy, and so forth” (Eaton 1993:116). This theory is said to have always found favor with Western-trained secular social thinkers who consider any religion a dependent variable of some non-religious agency, particularly an assumed aspiration for social upgradation or status (Eaton 1993). Instances from Indian history are given to support this theory. In the early fourteenth century, Ibn Battuta (1976) reported that the Khalji sultans in Bengal “offered some encouragement to conversion by making it a custom to have the new convert presented to the sultan, who clad him in a robe of honor and gave him a collar and bracelets of gold, of a value proportionate to his rank” (Cited in Arnold 1913:258). Elliot (1871:386) quoted from the autobiography of Delhi’s Sultan Firuz Shah Tughlaq (reigned 1351-1388), who, in the late fourteenth century, wrote:

I encouraged my infidel subjects to embrace the religion of the Prophet, and I proclaimed that everyone who repeated the creed and became a Musalman should be exempt from the *jizyah*, or poll tax. Information of this came to the ears of the people at large and great numbers of Hindus presented themselves, and were admitted to the honor of Islam. Thus they came forward day by day from every quarter, and, adopting the faith, were exonerated from the *jizyah*, and were favored with presents and honors.

The nineteenth-century census reports, such as Ricketts' census report of 1865 in the North-Western Provinces and Ibbetson's census report of 1881 in the Punjab, revealed that "many landholding families of Upper India had declared themselves Muslims in order to escape imprisonment for nonpayment of revenue or to keep ancestral lands in the family" (Eaton 1993:116; Hardy 1977:186-187). During the reign of the Mughal emperors, being motivated by self-interest, many Rajputs and their descendants among the landed aristocracy are reported to have accepted Islam (Arnold 1913:258-260).

However, although the 'religion of patronage' thesis "might help explain the relatively low incidence of Islamization in India's political heartland, it cannot explain the massive conversions that took place along the political fringe—as in Punjab or Bengal. Political patronage, like the influence of the sword, would have decreased rather than increased as one moved away from the centers of that patronage" (Eaton 1993:116).

The immigration theory postulates that foreign settlements made a significant contribution to the vast multitude of Muslims in this region. Muslim scholars throughout history have given considerable emphasis to this theory. Muslims from outside and inside (upper part of India) India are said to have settled in Bengal. Karim (1959:140) has pointed out that "the foreigners migrated into Bengal on several occasions—some came in the wake of conquest, some joined later in the services, some followed the appointment of new Governors from Delhi, some trekked in as peaceful settlers in search of livelihood, some ventured as traders and businessmen, and some were fired with missionary zeal." The contemporary international phenomena is said to have been a crucial factor for huge Muslim immigration to Bengal and other parts of Muslim India.

The devastating flood of Mongol eruption from their homeland north of China set afoot the hoard of migration from the then known Muslim world, especially the Arabian Peninsula and Central Asia. As Karim (1959:141) notes, “many uprooted families from Central Asia sought refuge in this subcontinent; many of the crowned heads thrown out of their *masnads* [throne] took the garb of royal saints, and moved on to a new missionary life; many craftsmen, architects, poets and painters flew away from the raging scourge and found shelter in the plains of this subcontinent.” Elphinston reported in 1841 that Muslims, in the east of the Ganges of Bengal, were more than one-half of the population, and in India, the number did not exceed one-eighth of the total population. The vast number of Muslims, according to him, was the result of “the great and long continued immigration and the natural increase during eight centuries” of the Muslim rule (Elphinston 1841:239). Arnold wrote that the foreign settlement consisted of the immigrants from across the northwest frontier, the descendants of the court and armies of the various Muhammadan dynasties, and the Arab descent. He further illustrated that “more than half the Muslim population of India has indeed assumed appellations of distinctly foreign races, such as Shaykh, Beg, Khan, and even Sayyid” (Arnold 1913:255). Scrafton (1763:21), a member of Lord Clive’s Council, informs that immigrant Muslims had intermarried with “the women of the country.” Sarkar (1972:22) reports that immigrant Muslims “married Hindu wives and there were children of mixed marriages.” Arnold (1913) suggests that from very early times, Arab traders had their visits on towns, and in the tenth century the Arabs had large settlements there, having intermarried with the woman of the country and living under their laws and religion. Crooke (1897) attributes the large constitution of the Muslims to the practice of widow

remarriage as well as the greater prevalence of polygamy among Muslims. Arnold (1913) asserts that in nineteenth-century India, the number of Muslims had increased greatly for reasons other than a relatively higher Muslim birth rate. This argument had, in fact, been advanced earlier (in the 1870s) by the early Muslim scholars of Indian Islam.

The social liberation, immigration and patronage theories were significant in the spread of Islam and consolidation of the Muslim society in Bangladesh. A large number of conversions from Hinduism and Buddhism to Islam occurred through the centuries. Muslim religious figures and traders played a phenomenal role in those conversions. The Muslim rulers and administrators also patronized them generously in their efforts. The Muslim immigration also had a significant contribution to the rise and consolidation of Muslim society in the country.

5.3 Bengal during the advent of Islam

In order to grasp a better understanding of the reasons for the successful penetration, integration and consolidation of Islam into Bengal society, it is deemed necessary to have an appraisal of the circumstances prevailing in undivided Bengal at the time of the advent of this missionary and revolutionary religion. In the early seventh century, Islam emerged in the deserted Arabia through Prophet Muhammad, and afterwards within a brief time span, the Arabs founded a great world civilization by adopting Islamic philosophy with pure monotheism as its bedrock (Esposito 1988). Around that time, the Indian subcontinent including Bengal was in discord and strife in political, social and religious life. The dominant religions—Brahmanism and Buddhism—were in historical conflict, as Ambedkar (1948) points out that the history of India before the Muslim conquests was

the history of conflict between Brahmanism and Buddhism. Buddhism denounced the Brahmanical “doctrine of caste and sacrifice” which triggered conflict with Brahmanism and produced Untouchables (Ambedkar 1948). The adherents of Buddhism suffered persecution under Brahmanical Hinduism (Rahim 1995). Yet, the Buddhist tradition continued longest in areas like Bengal and Bihar (Kabir 2004). However, the Buddhist dynasties fell in the twelfth century and, in its place, the Brahmanical Hindu dynasties rose and sustained before the Muslim conquest in the early thirteenth century. During the Hindu dynasties, Brahmanism, which was deeply ingrained in rigid caste organization, swept over Bengal, and the lower caste Hindus and Buddhists were subjected to social inequalities and injustices (Khan 2013; Chakma 2011; Islam, Kazi Nurul 2011) what Rasul (1986:101) calls “a systematic policy of persecution” pursued by the Brahmins.

In the seventh century, three major religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism existed in Bengal. However, although Jainism later almost disappeared from Bengal (Mandal 2011), the interplay of the other two religions—Hinduism and Buddhism—shaped the social, cultural and political history of Bengal until the Muslim conquest. Buddhism thrived throughout India and especially in Bengal due largely to royal patronage at different times by the reigning monarchs, the most notable ones being Bimbisara and Ajatasatru of Magadha, Ashoka of the Maurya dynasty, Kanishka of the Kushanas, Harsavardhana of Thaneswar and in Bengal the Palas and Chandras as late as the twelfth century. The royal patronage included building monasteries, erecting *stupas* and *caityas* (votive monuments), rock-edicts and pillar-edicts, establishment of religious schools and patronizing Buddhist writers and teachers, and so forth. Apart from this, some rulers, such as Ashoka sent Buddhist missions abroad (Chakma 2011). During the

Pala dynasty, Buddhism experienced its golden age in Bengal. However, the internal division and ritualistic modification influenced by the Hindu beliefs and practices as well as the absence of royal patronage paved the way for the virtual collapse of Buddhism in the subcontinent (Chakma 2011; Rahim 1995). Tantric Buddhism, what Eliot (1998) branded as degenerate, decadent and corrupt, “emphasizing mystic syllables (*mantras*), magical diagrams (*yantras*), ritualistic circles (*mandalas*), physical gestures (*mudras*), spells (*dharanis*) and other strange and sexo-yogic practices” (for the attainment of eternal bliss—*mahasukha*) drifted away from the original form and purity of Buddhism and “the Buddhists were degraded into the lower strata of the society” (Rahim 1995:5; Chakma 2011:41). Buddhism’s inherent weakness was partly responsible for its loss of ground. Buddhism renounced worldly life and took to seclusion and monastic life. It had no focus on developing a social system, nor did it have a through system of domestic rituals to satisfy the aspirations of the common people (Rasul 1986; Chakma 2011). Renouncing the world while taking a secluded monastic life, as Rasul (1986) opines, is not suitable for all and sundry. Moreover, persecution of its adherents by the Brahmanical Hindu kings notably Emperor Sasanka and later on the Sena dynasties also contributed to the fall of Buddhism in Bengal. Chakma (2011:39) writes that “the atrocities that Sasanka carried out against Buddhism, as Hiuen Tsang’s account tell us, included the king’s standing order to exterminate the Buddhist monks, cutting down the holy Bodhi-tree at Gaya, removing the Buddha image there and replacing it with the image of Siva [a Hindu god]” (See in great details Havell 1891). Islam, Kazi Nurul (2011:26) notes that “the Sena kings suppressed and oppressed the Buddhists.” Sen (1911:6) confirms Brahman’s persecution of the Buddhists referring to a Sanskrit poem which reads: “Many of the

chief princes, professing the wicked doctrines of the Buddhist and the Jain religions, were vanquished in various scholarly controversies. Their heads were then cut off with axes, thrown into mortars, and broken to pieces [reduced to powder] by means of pestles. So these wicked doctrines were thoroughly annihilated, and the country made free from danger.”

On the eve of the Muslim conquest of Bengal, historians suggest, the Hindu society was divided and demoralized. There was not only the tyranny of the Brahmans over the non-Brahmans, corruption and immorality also prevailed in the social life (Rahim 1995). The sexuality of the society and particularly of the upper class people including the members of the royal families was so vulgar and immoral that the people outside Bengal held a very low opinion of the moral standard of the Bengal’s aristocratic class. The vivid description of the fashionable young men’s and women’s amorous activities in Vatsayana’s *Kamasutra* and Lakshmana Sena’s court poet Dhoyi’s *Pavana-duta* witness the immoral sexual behavior of the society. The Tantric doctrine and practices of sexo-yogic relations as well as the Devadasi culture in which young girls were dedicated to the service of gods in temples, popularly known as Devadasi, dancing, singing, and so on and thereby the upper class and influential Hindus would find an element of enjoyment, were also responsible for the demoralization of the Hindu society (Rahim 1995). Thus, the society of Bengal prior to the Muslim conquest is reported to have been marked by inequality, injustice, immorality, persecution, and so forth. The lower class Hindus and the Buddhists were subjected to the Brahmanical tyranny and injustice. The Buddhists were in such a dangerous situation that, as some historians note, “when the Muslim rulers came to Bengal, the Buddhists not only welcomed them, but felt

as if the Muslims were sent by the gods and goddesses to save them” (Islam, Kazi Nurul 2011:26).

5.4 Islam’s entry to Bengal and the rise of Muslim society

Islam is said to have been a great missionary religion. Whenever and wherever Muslims go, they take their faith with them. They do not practice their faith in solitude, because, as Chowdhury (1928), a prominent Christian leader in Bengal of his time, holds in 1928 that every Muslim is a zealous preacher of his faith. He further says that “the permanent result of Islam has not depended so much on the sword as on the peaceful penetration by shopkeepers and camel-drivers, merchants and beggars, rich and poor all alike” (Chowdhury 1928:147-148). Islam has been spread in the different parts of the world through the peaceful voluntary preaching by its followers. Its simple creed has easily won the hearts of people: “Islam is very definite in its creed and simple too. It is the shortest creed in the world ... and this is one of the reasons, which has contributed much to its success among Bengalis” (Chowdhury 1928:148).

The advent of Islam and the growth of Muslim society in Bengal was caused not by a single actor but the responsible role played by various parties since the early years of Islam onwards. Of them, the Arab merchants, the Muslim conquerors and rulers, and the Sufis and saints were the principal agents who brought Islam to Bengal and laid down a solid foundation that gradually through a long process culminated in an overwhelming Muslim majority society.

5.4.1 The Arab merchants: Early contacts with Bengal

Although the exact date of the advent of Islam in Bengal is not recorded, it is widely argued that Islam reached Bengal long before Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtyar Khalji's conquest of Bengal in the beginning of the thirteenth century (Khan 2013). Some scholars believe that Bengal's contact with Islam started in the eighth century (Talib 1980; Burman 2005; Khan 2013). It is also said that the Arab merchants around that time had already become famous for maritime commerce. The accounts of the Arab geographers, such as Khurdadbeh, Idrisi, Masudi and others suggest that the Arabs established voluminous trade relations with the regions of the East including Hindustan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Bengal, and Arakan up to the Malay islands including Indonesia and some other parts of Southeast and Far East Asia around the eighth century (Rahim 1995). The Bay of Bengal played a vital role in that course of sea trade. The Chittagong port in East Bengal situated on the Bay of Bengal was of high importance in trade operation. Scholars argue that the Arabs' relations with Chittagong are traced far back, and some scholars even claim that the name Chittagong was given by the Arabs. The Arab merchants who went there referred to it in Arabic as *Shati al-Ganga* (the bank of the Ganges) or later *Shati-Jam*. The expression gradually assumed the local form (of Bengali dialect) Sadkawan, Chitagang or Chatgaon (Rahim 1963; Talib 1980; Siddique 2008). Ibn Battuta while visiting Chittagong, during the reign of Fakhr al-Din Mubarak Shah (1338-1349), described it as a port near the mouth of the Ganges. The fifteenth-century Chinese accounts as well as Abul-Fadl's *Ain-i-Akbari* have also given the same description (Siddique 2008). These accounts denote the early contact of the Arabs with the region. Scholars also make mention of several Arakanese chronicles which confirm

the Arab settlement in the Chittagong area in the early centuries of Islam (Talib 1980; Rahim 1995; Karim 1980).

The mixture of Arabic words, idioms, and phrases in the local dialects as well as the prevalence of Arabic names of persons and places of Chittagong and its vicinity, are thought to have been an indicative of the close contacts between the Arabs and the local population through the ages. Scholars hold that contacts with Muslims in other parts of Bengal were overland and mainly Turko-Persian; however, the coastal areas were influenced more by Arab connections. “The first Muslim conquest of Chittagong did not occur until the fourteenth century, in the time of Fakhr al-Din Mubarak Shah of Sonargaon (Dhaka), and effective control of the area was not achieved until the early sixteenth century” (Siddique 2008:13). European travelers, such as Varthema and Barbosa visited Bengal in the early sixteenth century and saw many Arab and Persian settlements there (Rahim 1995). Barbosa found the Chittagong port, which he describes as the prosperous city of “Bengala”, inhabited mainly by rich Muslim merchants from Arabia, Persia and Abyssinia. His accounts tell us that these merchants had large ships in their possession and used to export fine cotton cloth, sugar and other valuable commodities to places, such as Coromondal, Malabar, Cambay, Pegu, Tennasserin, Sumatra, Malacca, and Ceylon (Siddique 2008). Bengal’s name and fame for commerce and industry are very old. Tenth century Arab geographer Ibn Khurdadbeh introduces Rahmi¹⁸ as the place producing cotton cloths and aloewood. Thirteenth century Chinese traveler Chao-Ju-Kua has recorded that Ping-Kalo (Bengala) produced superior double-

¹⁸ Elliot (1871) traces this place near Dhaka. English traveler Fitch, who visited Bengal in the late sixteenth century, mentions this place as the kingdom of Rame whose capital was Ramu that still exists in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, not far from the town of Cox’s Bazar (Siddique 2008).

edged sword-blades, cotton and other cloth (Gandhi 1928). Especially, East Bengal's cotton industry had been enormously celebrated. In the mid-seventeenth century, French traveler Bernier visited East Bengal and noted:

I have sometime stood amazed at the vast quantity of cotton-cloth of all sorts, fine and others, tinged and white, which the Hollanders alone draw from thence and transport into many places, especially into Japan and Europe; not to mention what the English, Portingal and Indian merchants carry away from those ports. The like may be said of the silks and silk-stuffs of all sorts: one would not imagine the quantity that is hence transported every year (Quoted in Pinkerton 1811:227).

There was a world-wide and an unrivalled reputation of the Dhaka muslins (exquisite fine cotton cloth) as has been described by Arab Muslim traveler Sulaiman who visited Bengal in the ninth century (Renaudot translated his accounts from Arabic into English in 1733): "They [the manufacturers of East Bengal] make cotton garments in so extraordinary a manner that nowhere else are the like to be seen. These garments are for the most part round and woven to that degree of fineness that they may be drawn through a ring of middling size" (Renaudot 1733:17). French traveler Tavernier who traveled East Bengal simultaneously with Bernier's relates—"A turban sixty cubits (thirty yards) in length, of a muslin so fine that you would scarcely know what it was that you had in your hand, was contained in a coconut about the size of an ostrich's egg" (Cited in Gandhi 1928:15-16).¹⁹

¹⁹ Some amazing stories that illustrate the delicacy of the texture of the muslins have been told: "The Emperor Aurangzeb (so runs one of the stories) was once angry with his daughter for showing her skin through her cloths [muslin]; the young princess remonstrated in her justification that she had seven Jamahs (suits) on" (Gandhi 1928:14-15). Another story runs that during the reign of Nawab Ali Vardi Khan, "one

Early Muslims' contact with Bengal is also suggested by archaeological facts. Several coins of Abbasid Caliphs were discovered during excavations carried out in Paharpur (Rajshahi) and Mainamati (Comilla) in the 1930s. The coin found in Paharpur is dated 788 and was released at the time of Harun al-Rashid, the famous Abbasid Caliph who reigned from 786-809; coins unearthed in Mainamati was commissioned during the Caliph al-Muntasir Billah, who ruled from 861-862 (Dikshit 1938; Khan 1955; Karim 1959; Rahim 1995; Khan 2013). The discovery of these coins, as scholars note, shows that the Arab Muslims visited East Bengal either as merchants or preachers right from the eighth century (Karim 1959; Rahim 1995; Khan 2013). Haq (1948) proposed that the coin found in Paharpur Buddhist monastery was brought by Islamic preachers. It is possible, Haq noted, that the preacher was in Bengal to preach Islam. He might have been killed by the Buddhists, and his coin thus came to the possession of the Buddhist monks there, adds Haq.

Karim (1959) observes that it is possible that the Muslim merchants created by their honesty a favorable environment for the reception of Islam in Bengal. Quoting from Minhaj al-Din Siraj, Karim (1959) reports that when Bakhtyar Khalji appeared before the gates of Nudia, the capital of Lakshmana Sena—the then king of Bengal, with merely eighteen horsemen and his following behind, the people guarding the gates of the city thought them to be a party of Muslim horse traders, and thus, instead of preventing them from proceeding, they opened the gates.

of the weavers spread the piece [of muslin] he had just finished on the grass to dry in the cool of the evening, and, carelessly leaving it unguarded, let it be eaten up by a cow which was grazing near at hand” (Gandhi 1928:15).

Local traditions also suggest that many Arabian and Persian Sufis and saints had arrived in Bengal to propagate Islam even before the Muslim conquered the land. They made Bengal the center of their missionary activities and settled down there. There are families which trace their descent from these early Sufi preachers across the country. Historians claim that both the Arab merchants and preachers had made early settlements and introduced Islam in Bengal and laid down the basis of the Muslim society and culture in this land (Rahim 1995).

5.4.2 The Muslim conquest: Beginning of Islamic consolidation in Bengal

Islam emerged as a political force in Bengal through the military victory of Bakhtiyar Khalji in the beginning of the thirteenth century. The victory, in fact, resulted in the opening of doors to the Muslims to establish a solidified society of their own. The number of Muslims gradually continued to increase day by day because of immigration. A large body of the Muslim Turks accompanied Bakhtiyar Khalji in his Bengal expedition. These conquerors, soldiers or fortune seekers were also accompanied by their wives and children (Minhaj al-Din 1881; Rahim 1995). Bakhtiyar Khalji distributed the occupied territory among the nobles of his tribe. These new Khalji oligarchs consolidated the defense of their territories on the one hand, and further expanded their territories engaging constant war with the neighboring Hindu rajas on the other. There was a continued influx of foreigners mainly the Turks and Afghans into Bengal under every governor of the Khalji dynasty. Even after them, Muslim migration to Bengal continued under the subsequent rulers even in the midst of mutual rivalry between them (Karim 1959).

Another dimension of the Muslim immigration to Bengal was the grant of Jagirs and allowances to the foreign Muslims by the rulers. Being ousted from Northern India by Emperor Babur, Mahmud Ludi, brother of Sultan Ibrahim Ludi, and his family and followers took refuge with Bengal. These people received the grant of Jagirs and allowances from Sultan Nusrat Shah and settled down in Bengal. Sultan Nusrat Shah is also reported to have married a daughter of the late Sultan Ibrahim Ludi. After Northern India fell to the Mughals and at the time of the Karrani Afghan rule, the Afghans made large settlements in Bengal (Rahim 1995).

The grant of land and Jagirs happened in a large proportion during the Mughal period. Many officers and soldiers settled in Bengal. Abul-Fadl's *Akbarnama*, a chronicle of Akbar, illustrates that Emperor Akbar liberally granted Jagirs to the officers and soldiers who served there. Abul-Fadl also informs that the Emperor once assigned several hundred Jagirs to the soldiers in Bengal. The subsequent Mughal rulers followed suit. Nathan's accounts recorded that Emperor Jahangir continued to follow his father's policy of making liberal grant to the Mughal officers and soldiers in this province. Many of the Jagir holders made permanent settlements in Bengal (Rahim 1995). It is also reported that many Persian religious and professional groups, such as Sufis, teachers, administrative officers and soldiers arrived in Bengal during the Muslim rule. Especially, during the Mughal rule, there was huge influx of Persian officers, teachers, physicians and traders into this province. They received royal support, and many of them eventually settled down here.

The Muslim rulers played a vital role in the growth of the Muslim society in Bengal. Right from the beginning they established institutions and initiated such works

that helped grow Muslim culture in the society. These included the erection of mosques, the founding of *madrasas*, the promotion of Islamic spirit, the patronization of Muslim scholars and Sufis, the cultivation of learning, and pursuing benevolent activities (Karim 1959). The construction of mosques began with the triumph up of Bakhtiyar Khalji. Minhaj al-Din (1881) informs that after making Lakhnawti the center of his government, Bakhtiyar Khalji built mosques, *madrasas* and the *Khanqahs*. He admires Sultan Ghiyath al-Din Iwad Khalji for the construction of a number of *Jami* (congregational) and other mosques. Available and authentic evidences suggest that the post-Khalji period, especially from the time of Sultan Rukn al-Din Kayka'us to the last of the independent Sultans, witnessed the construction of a bulk number of mosques in Bengal (Karim 1959). A large number of inscriptions recording the erection or repairing of mosques have been discovered from across the country (Dani 1957). The inscriptions are reported to generally begin with a verse from the Qur'an or tradition of the Prophet or both indicating the dividends in the Hereafter await those who establish such religious institutions (Karim 1959; Hasan 2007).²⁰ Historians have reported that the Muslim rulers in Bengal were in conscious mind to construct mosques “not only for mere pomp and show but also in full realization of their performance of a religious duty” (Karim 1959:41). Thus, the mosque, what is regarded by Eaton (1993:230) as the “physical embodiment of the social reality of Islam”, played an overriding role in evolving social and cultural edifice of the Bengal Muslim society.

²⁰ This perception is still predominant in the present-day Bangladesh society. The perception basically derives from a *hadith* of the Prophet narrated in the *Sahih al-Bukhari* that reads: “Whoever built a mosque, Allah will build for him a similar place in Paradise” (Cited in Hasan 2007:60).

The Bengal Sultans and their officers were used to building religious schools or *madrasas* for imparting Islamic education. According to the accounts of Minhaj al-Din (1881), this effort was also started with the reign of Bakhtiyar Khalji. The subsequent rulers continued to advance this task. The Muslim inscriptions of Bengal confirm this. One *madrasa* was built at Triveni in 1298 during the reign of Sultan Rukn al-Din Kayka'us. In the same area, another *madrasa* was constructed in the year 1313 at the time of Sultan Shams al-Din Firuz Shah. During the reign of Sultan Ala al-Din Husayn Shah, the third *madrasa* was established in 1502 in the same locality (Karim 1959). Historians from the epigraphic evidences make a note of other instances of the construction of Islamic religious schools or *madrasas* in the reign of various Bengal Muslim rulers. Ellis (2007) maintains that from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the Muslim rulers of Bengal built *maktabs* (a place where usually elementary schooling of religion is provided with an informal manner) and *madrasas* alongside mosques to teach both religion and science. One important fact is that these *madrasas*, by and large, were built by the side of the mosques or mosques were invariably built in the compound of the *madrasas*. The mosques which were built relatively far away from the locality and were not attached to any *madrasa*, typically served both the purposes of mosque and *maktab* (Karim 1959). This trend continues in Bangladesh to the present-day.

The Sultans of Bengal made enormous contributions to the promotion of Islamic spirit. In this respect they deliberately carried out such Islamic practices that translated to the caring and concord of the Muslim Ummah and strengthened the spiritual fabric of the society. For example, they recognized the Caliphs as *ameer al-mu'minin* by putting their names on the coins since the beginning of the Muslim coinage in Bengal. Sultan Ghiyath

al-Din Iwad Khalji is said to have been the first to initiate this practice (Thomas 1873). Reciprocally, the Sultans sometimes sought recognition from the Caliphs. In this case an explicit reference is made to Sultan Jalal al-Din Muhammad Shah, a convert and son of Raja Ganesa. The Sultans were used to sending presents to the Caliphs. They are also reported to have constructed charitable buildings and educational institutions at the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and sent lavish presents there. Sultans Ghiyath al-Din Azam Shah and Jalal al-Din Muhammad Shah are commonly referred to have built and maintained *madrasas* in Mecca and Medina (Karim 1959). These two Bengal rulers are especially credited for their generous supports for education and other charitable activities for the people in Mecca and Medina. The Sultans of Bengal also used to provide royal support to the financially incapable common Muslims as well as Sufis and dervishes so that they could perform their hajj and visit the holy cities of Mecca and Medina (Karim 1959).

The Muslim rulers of Bengal invariably provided considerable patronage towards the Sufis, saints and the learned individuals of the society. This trend of patronage continued from Bakhtiyar Khalji's conquest of Bengal up to the end of the period. The Sufis, saints and the learned Muslims, with royal patronage, made a great contribution to the spread of Islam and consolidation of Muslim society and culture in Bengal. Karim (1959:56-57) has categorized such patronage in the following terms:

- (a) Granting of stipend or making presents of money or dress or edibles.
- (b) Exemption of the Sufis from the payment of conveyance charges.
- (c) Encouragement to the poets and scholars for writing books.
- (d) Building of *siqayah* or excavation of tanks near the shrine of Sufis.
- (e) Granting of lands for the maintenance of shrines.

(f) Building of tombs or other sacred buildings like mosques attached to the shrine of the Sufis.

(g) Giving facilities to the Sufis or *Alims* or others for visiting holy places.

Historians have taken important notes of the benevolent activities carried out by the Muslim rulers of Bengal. These activities included, inter alia, the construction of dykes and bunds to prevent flood waters, the construction of roads and highways to facilitate communication, the construction of well and excavation of tanks to promote water supply, the building and maintaining of alms-houses, and bestowing vast treasures to the poor and destitute. These benevolent and pro-people activities were meant to support the people and popularized the Muslim administration in Bengal and also indirectly popularized the religion of the rulers—Islam (Karim 1959).

5.4.3 The Sufis, saints and spiritual figures: Islam wins Bengal

Of all the great religions of the world, Islam has generally been regarded as the most worldly and least ascetic (Gibb 1962). Yet, Sufi tradition of Islam what is commonly called Sufism tends to be regarded as the least worldly and most ascetic. Sufism is defined as a mystical Islamic belief and practice in which Muslims seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God (Encyclopedia Britannica 2014).

In the course of the growth and spread of Islam in Bengal, the enormous role and contributions of the Sufis and saints have been well noted (Karim 1959; Rahim 1963; Haq 1975; Talib 1980). Coming from various parts of the world, especially from Western and Central Asia, and Northern India, these spiritual figures, by their religious fervor, missionary zeal, exemplary character and humanitarian activities, greatly influenced the

minds of the masses and attracted them to Islam (Rahim 1995). They founded their seminaries in every nook and corner of Bengal and made them centers of excellence for intellectual, spiritual and philanthropic movement that eventually led to the emergence and consolidation of the Muslim society in Bengal.

Many Sufis and saints arrived in Bengal much earlier than the political conquest of the land by Muslims: they began to arrive in the eleventh century (Haq 1975; Talib 1980). They arrived mostly with the Arab merchants by sea. Gradually a large number of Sufis began to take root in Bengal. The Sufis and saints are reported to have performed many miracles in their mission.

5.4.3.1 The coming of Sufis in pre-Muslim Bengal

Baba Adam Shahid came to the area of Rampal during the reign of Ballal Sena (1158-1179). Tradition relates that when he was living at Mecca, a Muslim from an adjacent area of Rampal on pilgrimage told him that he (the Muslim) had fled away from the persecution of the king Ballal Sena for his offence of sacrificing a cow on the occasion of his son's birthday. Hearing the persecution of Muslims in the hand of a Hindu king, the saint was moved and approached to Bengal with several thousand of his followers. He decided to settle near Rampal and started sacrificing cows. This made the king angry and eventually led to his fight with the saint. The saint was killed, but by a curious stroke of fate the king and his family lost their lives by throwing themselves into *agnikunda* or a pit of fire (Karim 1959). Baba Adam Shahid's heroic and spiritual acts exerted great influence upon the people of the area and Islam won their hearts.

Leaving the throne and luxurious life of Balkh, Shah Sultan Balkhi Mahisawar came in touch with the great saint Shaikh Tawfiq of Damescus and became his disciple. Upon his teacher's order, Shah Sultan Balkhi arrived at Hariram Nagar, a populous kingdom (near Dhaka) via Sandip of Noakhali district to preach Islam. There he confronted with a Hindu king named Balarama who used to worship Hindu goddess Kali (Karim 1959). The saint defeated the king and then advanced to Mahasthan in Bogra district where a Kshatriya king named Parasurama is said to repress his subjects. Parasurama used to perform human sacrifice in a certain temple. Upon hearing the news of the saint, he tried to resist by the help of his sister Shila Devi who was a magician and used to worship goddess Kali and practice tantricism. But her magic could not affect the saint and eventually the king died in battle. Shila Devi committed suicide by jumping into the river Karatoya. The point of the river in which Shila Devi drowned herself is still known as "*Shila Devir Ghat*" (the ghat of Shila Devi). Following which, a large number of people of that region, including the commander of the king who escaped death, converted to Islam. The saint married the daughter of the deceased king Ratnamoni off to the commander. He founded a mosque and *astanah* (center for missionary activities) there for preaching Islam (Talib 1980). His *mazar* (grave) still exists at Mahasthan in Bogra and people regularly visit there.

Shah Muhammad Sultan Rumi is said to have arrived in Bengal in the middle of the eleventh century and preached Islam in the current Netrokona district (Haq 1935). He made Madanpur the center of his missionary activities. His *dargah* still exists there. It is mentioned in a Persian document (*sanad*), issued by Shah Suja, the *subadar* of Bengal and the son of Emperor Shah Jahan, in 1671 that to test the spiritual power of Shah Sultan

Rumi, the local Koch King offered him poison. The saint drank it by invoking *Bismillah* (the name of Allah) and it made no harm to him. Being overwhelmed by the dervish's spirituality, the king accepted Islam and donated the entire village to the dervish to the service of Islam (Talib 1980; Karim 1959; Rahim 1995). Historians confirm the authenticity of this description by alluding to the fact that in 1829 when the Government tried to confiscate the property attached to the *dargah*, the *Khadim* (caretaker) produced the aforementioned Persian document and thus saved the property.

Makhdum Shah Dawlah Shahid is said to be the descent of Mu'az ibn Jabal, a renowned companion of the Prophet, and was a disciple of Shaikh Shams al-Din Tabrizi who also happened to be the teacher of Persian mystic poet Jalal al-Din Rumi, the author of *Masnawi*. Tradition relates that he came to Bengal from Yemen with a large number of followers, some of whom were his close relatives (Karim 1959). After coming to Shahzadpur in Pabna he built a mosque and continued to preach Islam. Many people converted to Islam in his efforts. When the local king came to know this proselytizing activities and mass conversion to Islam, he fought the saint who eventually lost. The saint and twenty one of his followers also became martyred. The followers who survived continued to preach Islam with more inspiration, and within a short span of time, Islam was spread in the districts of Pabna and Bogra (Talib 1980:92).

Ni'matullah Butshikan is reported to have arrived and preached Islam in the area of Dhaka. According to tradition, he initiated to preach Islam in the heart of the city, but the local influential Hindus continued to oppose him. It is related that once, while he was worshipping, the Hindus were parading with idols and beating drums. When they reached near the saint's *astanah*, they made a lot of noise to disturb him. The saint became

annoyed by this behavior, and giving an angry look, he pointed his fingers at those idols which at once got broken into pieces and the people in the procession became feared and fled away. The spiritual power of the saint tremendously influenced the Hindus and later they rolled in the *astanah* and accepted Islam (Talib 1980). His grave still exists at Dilkusha Bagh in the New Paltan area of Dhaka city.

Sufi Makhdum Shah Mahmud Ghaznawi, commonly known as *Raha Pir* is said to have come to Mangalkot in the district of Burdwan in pre-Muslim Bengal (Haq 1935). According to tradition, he settled down there and preached Islam. The local Hindu king Vikram Kesari persecuted him and his followers. However, the dervish fought and defeated the king and continued his mission of preaching Islam. Among other early Sufis, Bayazid Bistami (died 874 A.D.) is related to have arrived in Chittagong and preached Islam (Rahim 1995).

5.4.3.2 The coming of Sufis in Bengal during the early Muslim period

Hagiological literatures suggest that after the Muslim conquest of Bengal by Bakhtiyar Khalji in the beginning of the thirteenth century, many Sufis and saints poured into Bengal and found the ground fertile for preaching Islam. Some of them even had great influence on the authority. The Sultans held high esteem about them and occasionally visited their shrines. Building *Khanqahs*, tombs and mosques as a token of honor to the saints was a common practice by the Sultans. Some of them even granted lands for these spiritual figures (Karim 1959).

Shaikh Jalal al-Din Tabrizi was one of the earlier saints to come to Bengal under the Muslim rule. He attained his spiritual perfection as a disciple of Shaikh Shahab al-Din

Suhrawardy (Karim 1959; Talib 1980). Being instructed by his teacher, Shaikh Tabrizi came to Hindustan to serve the cause of Islam. When he reached Delhi, Sultan Shams al-Din Iltutmish (1210-1236) received him. There he met his contemporary Sufis, Shaikh Qutb al-Din Bakhtyar Kaki and Shaikh Baha al-Din Zakariya. Afterwards he left for Bengal and settled down in Pandwah from which he operated his missionary activities. His great spiritual personality, missionary zeal and humanitarian services accounted for the speedy spread of Islam in Bengal. Shaikh Tabrizi established *Khanqah* and *Langarkhana* which served as spiritual, intellectual and humanitarian centers, developed the moral and cultural life of the Bengal society and helped the poor and distressed people in various ways (Rahim 1995).

Shah Makhdum Ruposh preached Islam in the Rajshahi region. He lies buried at Dargahpara in Rajshahi town and on the northern bank of the river Padma. According to the official description of the Shah Makhdum Dargah Sharif, this great saint's lineage is traced back to Hazrat Ali, the fourth caliph of Islam to Imam Hasan to all the way down to Abdul Qadir Jilani. He is said to have arrived in Rajshahi from Baghdad in the end of the thirteenth century. There are many legends surrounding this Sufi. One popular tradition relates that once a group of fishermen while fishing in the river saw Shah Makhdum Ruposh crossing over the river on foot. The fishermen became overwhelmed seeing the spiritual power of the saint and turned his followers. The saint made his *astanah* at what is now called Dargahpara. He continued to preach Islam and succeeded in bringing a large number of people of Rajshahi and adjacent areas into the fold of Islam by his extraordinary character, manner and spiritual personality (Talib 1980).

Shaikh Jalal al-Din popularly known as Shah Jalal preached Islam in East Bengal and Assam. Ibn Battuta's accounts suggest that most of the people of this country accepted Islam in his hands. People from Sylhet, Mymensingh, Tripura, Noakhali and various districts of Western Assam flocked to him and embraced Islam. His mazar is situated in the heart of Sylhet city. Hundreds of people from across the country every day visit it. Shah Jalal is said to have arrived in Sylhet in 1303. His place of origin is said to be Turkistan or Yemen (Rahim 1995). It is reported in *Suhl-i-Yemen*, a nineteenth century work, that a Muslim named Shaikh Borhan al-Din in Sylhet sacrificed a cow on his son's birth. This was taken as offence, and, as penalty, the Hindu king Gaur Govind ordered his men to kill the new-born baby and amputate the right hand of Shaikh Borhan. After the execution of the order, the oppressed Shaikh managed to reach the court of Sultan Shams al-Din Firuz Shah of Gaur and apprised him of this injustice. The Sultan ordered Sikandar Khan and later on Nasir al-Din to invade Sylhet. Shah Jalal Muzarrad with his 360 followers joined them and finally Gaur Govind lost and fled away. Thus, the Hindu oppressive rule in Sylhet ended in 1303, and the region attached to Gaur came under the Muslim rule (Rahim 1995). Shah Jalal settled in Sylhet and devoted himself to the cause of Islam and philanthropic activities. Ibn Battuta visited Sylhet in 1346. He met Shah Jalal Muzarrad and stayed at the latter's *Khanqah* for a few days. Battuta (1976) reports that it was by the labors of this saint that the people of the locality were converted to Islam and for that reason he settled among them. His *Khanqah* was the resort of the hermits, travelers and the distressed. People regardless of faith venerated him. Battuta (1976) also recorded many miraculous stories of this terrific spiritual figure. Many companions of Shaikh Shah Jalal Muzarrad were spread over Bengal and Assam and

preached and served to the cause of Islam. The word “Muzarrad” is added to his name because he was a confirmed bachelor. In 1347, this great man is reported to have passed away (Rahim 1995).

Khan Jahan Ali, also known as Ulugh Khan-i-Jahan and Khan-i-Azam, preached Islam in Khulna, Jessore, Barisal and Bagerhat. Traditions as well as inscriptions found in Bagerhat relate that he was a commander of Sultan Nasir al-Din Mahmud Shah (1437-1459). He is said to have laid the foundation of Muslim rule in these areas. He was a saint-ruler who, by virtue of his extraordinary character, spiritual personality, missionary zeal and humanitarian services, attracted non-Muslim communities to the fold of Islam. He carried out a series of benevolent activities, such as clearing up the dense forests for human settlements, construction of roads, high ways and bridges, excavation of a large number of *dighis* (water reservoirs), and building mosques, *madrasas* and *sarais* (Talib 1980). The combination of his moral and spiritual personality as well as benevolent activities not only made him personally popular, it also made Islam a popular religion among the great masses. According to a local tradition in Jessore, Khan Jahan Ali first arrived in Barobazar, a place that was historically significant for being a center of the Buddhist and Hindu civilizations. He implemented various projects which greatly benefited the local people while preaching Islam and because of his tremendous efforts, many Buddhists and Hindus rolled in to Islam. This ruler-saint sent many of his followers to other areas of the district of Jessore in order to spread the message of Islam. Especially, Pir Ali, who was a Hindu convert taking his name as Mohammad Tasir after conversion to Islam, made many Brahmanical Hindus convert to Islam. These people are still known as “Pirali Brahmins” in these localities. Pir Joyanti who was also a Hindu

convert also made a large number of Hindus convert to Islam (Talib 1980). This great saint is said to have arrived in Bengal from Turkey in the beginning of the fifteenth century. In 1458, he is reported to have left this world. He is lying buried at the premise of historical *Shat Gunbad* mosque which he built in Bagerhat. The mosque is considered a unique heritage in Bangladesh. Roofed over seventy-seven squat domes, including seven *chauchala* or four-sided domes in the middle row, this stately fabric monument stands on the eastern bank of a vast sweet-water tank, clustered around by the heavy foliage of a low-lying countryside characteristic of a seacoast landscape. The prayer hall of the mosque has eleven arched doorways on its east side and seven each on the north and south side for ventilation and lighting. This historical multidomed mosque is regularly visited by hundreds of people.

Sufi Shaikh Sharf al-Din Abu Tawwamah is said to have come to Bengal from Bukhara passing through Delhi. He was a Hanafi jurist and a great scholar of the Hadith. He was highly regarded for his expertise in chemistry and the natural sciences. He is thought to have arrived in Sonargaon near Dhaka in the second half of the thirteenth century. He settled down there and attracted a large number of people to Islam by his personal character, spiritual excellence and educational services. He established a large *madrasa* at Sonargaon. It is related that students from other parts of Bengal and beyond continued to be crowded in his *madrasa* and within a short time Sonargaon became a center of excellence for Islamic learning and knowledge. This *madrasa* made remarkable contributions to the spread of Islamic education and the building of the Bengal Muslim society. Shaikh Sharf al-Din Abu Tawwamah's reputation was well renowned in Bengal and beyond. He is reported to have died in 1300 and buried at Sonargaon (Rahim 1995).

Sahikh Sharf al-Din Yahya Maneri came to Sonargaon with his teacher Shaikh Sharf al-Din Abu Tawwamah and played a vital role in the spread of Islam and the growth of Muslim society in Bengal. He joined his teacher while the latter was on sojourn at Maner in Bihar on the way from Delhi to Sonargaon. He excelled in all the branches of Islamic learning vis-a-vis the commentary on the Qur'an, Tradition, Jurisprudence, Theology, Logic, Philosophy, and Mathematics (Karim 1959). His thirst for knowledge has been highly appreciated. While in Sonargaon, he was so engrossed in studies that after completion his education, he only came to learn his father's death from a letter from home which he received much earlier (Karim 1959).

Many other celebrated Sufis and saints were spread across Bengal and served the cause of Islam and growth of the Muslim society. Shah Turqan Shahid preached Islam in the district of Bogra. He became martyred while fighting a Hindu king there. Taqi al-Din Arabi promoted Islam in Mahisun, currently Mahisontosh in Rajshahi. Pir Badr al-Din, Sayyid Nasir al-Din Shah Nekmardan and Maulana Ata attracted a large number of Hindus and Buddhists to Islam in Dinajpur. Shah Badr al-Din Allama, Qattal Pir and Shah Muhsin Awlia made immense contributions in spreading Islam in the Southeastern Bengal particularly Chittagong. Disciples of Shah Jalal Muzarrad Shah Kamal, Sayyid Ahmad Kolla Shahid, Shah Malek Yemeni and others preached Islam in Dhaka, Mymensingh, Sunamganj, Comilla, Noakhali and other areas. Sayyid Hafez Maulana Ahmad Tannuri and Shaikh Bakhtyar Maisur served the cause of Islam in Noakhali. Sufi Sayyid al-Arefin preached Islam in Barisal. He is reported to have arrived in Patuakhali from Central Asia during the second part of the fourteenth century and traveled across Bakerganj (Barisal) and finally made his *astanah* at Kalishuri, Bauphal under Patuakhali

district where he found no Muslim at that time. He attracted a large number of non-Muslims of Barisal and Patuakhali to the fold of Islam (Talib 1980; Karim 1959).

By the middle of the fifteenth century, the entire Bengal came under the Muslim rule (Karim 1959). Thousands of Sufis and saints made contributions to the spread of Islam in East Bengal. They included among others Shah Sharif Jindani in Pabna, Baba Adam in Bogra, Shah Mannan at Sonargaon, Shah Jalal Dakshini in Dhaka, Hazi Baba Saleh in Dhaka and adjacent areas, Mubarak Gazi in Sundarban areas, Shah Afzal Mahmud and Gazi Shaikh Muhammad Bahadur in Pabna and Sirajganj, Shah Muazzam Danish Mand in Rajshahi, Shah Ali Baghdadi in Dhaka, Shaikh Jalal Halbi at Hathazari and adjoining areas in Chittagong, Shah Adam Kashmiri in Tangail, Shah Jamal in Jamalpur, Shah Chand Awlia at Patiya, Chittagong, Khwaja Sharf al-Din alias Khwaja Chisti Beheshti in Dhaka, Shah Pir at Satkania, Chittagong, Kazi Muwaqqil at Mirsharai, Chittagong, Sayyid Abdul Khaleq Bukhari at Ghatail, Tangail, and Maulana Shah Abdur Rahim Shahid in Dhaka (Talib 1980).

The pre-Muslim Bengal was marked by inequality, exploitation and moral degeneracy. The weaker class of the society was subject to such sociopolitical injustices. When Islam was brought to Bengal by the Muslim traders and Sufis and saints, this class of people found a relief from sociopolitical subjectivity and entered to the fold of Islam. The historical evidences suggest that sword had no place in transforming the dominant Hindu Bengal into a gradually consolidated Muslim one. The peaceful missionary activities by the Islamic spiritual personalities over the centuries made the country an overwhelmingly Muslim land. Hundreds of shrines and mazars stand across Bangladesh as witness to this historical fact.

Chapter Six

Political Islam in Pre-Independent Bangladesh: Puritanism, Muslim nationalism and ethno-nationalism

The Islamist sphere of influence spans the entire spectrum of activist groups who, in the second half of the twentieth century, see their actions as an extension of the concepts elaborated by the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), and by Abul-Ala Maududi (1903-1978), the creator of the Jamaat-i-Islami party on the Indian subcontinent. Revolutionary Shiite political thought shares many elements with the Muslim Brotherhood but remains distinct (both more leftist and more clerical): it has drawn inspiration from the Ayatollahs Khomeini, Baqir al-Sadr, and Taliqani, as well as from the secular Ali Shariati.

— **Olivier Roy** (1994:1-2), *The Failure of Political Islam*

Islamic fundamentalism—or Islamism—should not be equated with Islam, but it would be eyewash to deny the fact that political Islam is a major stream within contemporary Islamic civilization. Overlooking this fact is not only misleading, but also results in two opposed extremes: either one fully decouples Islamism from Islam in all terms or one identifies fundamentalism with Islam and ends up spreading Islamophobia.

— **Bassam Tibi** (1998:ix), *The Challenge of Fundamentalism*

The focus on ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ as a global threat has reinforced a tendency to equate violence with Islam [and] fails to distinguish between illegitimate use of religion by individuals and the faith and practice of the majority of the world’s Muslims who, like believers in other religious traditions, wish to live in peace. To uncritically equate Islam and Islamic fundamentalism with extremism is to judge Islam only by those who wreck havoc—a standard not applied to Judaism or Christianity.

— **John Esposito** (1995:250), *The Islamic Threat*

Western (in fact, neo-conservative) discourses argue that political Islam or Islamic fundamentalism is a threat to modern Western civilization, and it is often conflated with terrorism. This kind of perception has led to growing Islamophobia, prejudices and stereotypes over the years and particularly since the incident of 9/11 in the United States. The U.S. attacks of September 11, 2001 and the war on global terrorism have brought the issue of political Islam into intense debate and discussion. However, it is fair to say that Islamism has, in all epochs, been a vital part of Muslim societies since Islam and politics are viewed as largely intertwined and interwoven. Scholars, such as Ayubi (1995) see Islam as a political religion due to the attempts of many of its followers to control public morality.

Esposito (2000) argues that political Islam has been rooted in a contemporary religious resurgence in both private and public life. On the one hand, many Muslims have turned to be more practicing to their religious faith (prayer, fasting, dress, and family). On the other, Islam has reemerged as a viable alternative to the perceived failure of secular ideologies, such as nationalism, capitalism, and socialism. Esposito (2000:50) further says that “Islamic movements span the religious and political spectrum from moderate to extremist.” Ayooob (2008) postulates that three major assumptions regarding political Islam have developed over the last decade and a half and especially since 9/11: first, that the intermingling of religion and politics is unique to Islam; second, that political Islam, like Islam itself, is monolithic; and third, that political Islam is inherently violent. Ayooob (2008) argues that none of these assertions captures the reality of the multifaceted phenomenon fashionably called “political Islam” or “Islamism.”

In the previous chapter, I discussed the entry of Islam and its growth in Bengal. In this chapter, I intend to elaborate on the historical development of political Islam in Bangladesh. The chapter is, in fact, intended to limit the discussion of the colonial leading to the independence of Bangladesh. The discussion of political Islam in post-independent Bangladesh will be made in the subsequent chapters. The following section attempts to define the concept of political Islam. The third section deals with political Islam in colonial Bengal. The fourth section outlines political Islam in East Pakistan. Thus, this chapter answers the third sub-question: How is political Islam defined, and how has political Islam developed in Bangladesh?

Political Islam in Bangladesh has its root in the global Islamic revivalist movements. Since the late twentieth-century, political Islam has been a significant factor in the politics of predominantly Muslim countries as well as the primary language of political discourse and mobilization across the Muslim world. Islamic governments or governments which are largely sympathetic to Islamic precepts were variably formed in countries like Sudan, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and these ruling elites have appealed to Islam to enhance their legitimacy, rule and policies, while the mainstream movements and political parties have appealed to Islam for legitimacy and to mobilize popular support (Esposito 2006). Although the Iranian revolution in 1979, viewed as a victory of political Islam, drew enormous attention worldwide, the establishment of Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna of Egypt and the founding of Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941 by Abul A'la Mawdudi of Pakistan played a pioneering role in promoting political Islam in the twentieth century Muslim societies. In fact, the religious ideas and interpretations of Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Mawdudi have had a major role in

the steady growth and promotion of Islamism in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in Bangladesh.

6.2 Defining political Islam

Defining political Islam is difficult. Similar to Islam, political Islam or Islamism has a wide range of understanding. It is viewed as a multidimensional force. For example, groups, such as Al-Qaeda, Islamic Jihad and al-Gamaa al-Islamiya (Egypt), Laskar Jihad and Jemaah Islamiyah (Southeast Asia), Laskar-e-Taeeba and Jaish-i-Muhammad (Pakistan), Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami and Jamaatul Mujahedeen (Bangladesh) and currently the most talked about IS or ISIS (Middle East) conjure images of irrational, religious fanatics with a thirst for vengeance and a penchant for violence (Hasan 2012). By contrast, there are mainstream Islamist organizations (such as, Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh and Pakistan, Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Islam in Pakistan, Nahdat al-Ulama in Indonesia, the Parti Islam se-Malaysia, and the Turkish Islamist parties) that reject violence and engage in democratic competition. In the Muslim countries around the world, Islamists have won seats in national assembly, participated in cabinets and emerged as significant political actors in countries as diverse as Turkey, Lebanon, Sudan, Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan, Yemen, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt, and Afghanistan, and even Bangladesh (Esposito 1997, 2006).

Fuller (2003:xi) argues that at the most ordinary level, adherents of political Islam believe that “Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim world and implemented in some fashion.” Denoeux (2002:61) observes that political Islam or Islamism is “a form of

instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives.” The adherents of political Islam are called Islamists. Ghadbian (2000:78) thus defines Islamist and political Islam in the following way:

An Islamist is someone who calls for the implementation of Islamic law (*shari'ah*) in all aspects of life including the public domain. Islamists have formed movements and organizations in most Muslim countries to pursue their goal of changing their societies by deriving their programs and ideas from the texts of Islam... Political Islam refers to those Islamist individuals and movements who actively seek to implement Islam in the public as well as private realm.

Hirschkind (1997:12) defines political Islam as “using Islam to a political end.” Zubaida (2000) provides distinguished definition of conservative, radical and political Islam. He argues that conservative Islam primarily seeks moral and social control of its citizens: Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States best represent this type. Radical Islam is best exemplified by the Egyptian Islamic groups what Zubaida (2000:62) terms “Qutbic groups” founding on the ideology of Qutb that primarily seek to overthrow unjust rulers. Finally, political Islam, according to Zubaida (2000), distinguishes from the two others and seeks to reform society and politics, to attain a socio-political transformation based on Islam. This type, Zubaida notes, is best exemplified by some of the Iranian revolutionaries, such as Shari’ati, Talaghani, Bani Sadr and Mujahidin, and the modernist elements of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Political Islam, Zubaida (2000) continues, represents continuity with nationalist and leftist projects.

Martin and Barzegar (2010:2) have noted that Islamism usually refers to “those Muslim social movements and attitudes that advocate the search for more purely Islamic

solutions (however ambiguous this may be) to the political, economic, and cultural stresses of contemporary life.” Piscatori (2000:2) asserts that “Islamists are Muslims who are committed to political action to implement what they regard as an Islamic agenda.” By amending and extending Piscatori’s definition, Emmerson (2010:27) posits that “Islamism is a commitment to, and the content of, that agenda.”

Ismail (2011) refers the term ‘Islamism’ to both Islamist politics and the process of re-Islamization. According to Roy (2004:58), “Islamism is the brand of modern political Islamic fundamentalism that claims to re-create a true Islamic society, not simply by imposing *shari’ah*, but by establishing first an Islamic state through political action. Islamists see Islam not as a mere religion, but as a political ideology that should reshape all aspects of society (politics, law, economy, social justice, foreign policy and so on).”

Political Islam or Islamism thus encapsulates a variety of contents, such as religious, political, ideological, economic, and cultural. However, it primarily informs the “role of the historical tradition of Islam in the diverse contemporary political practices of Muslims” (Martin and Barzegar 2010:11). “Politics lies at the heart of Islamism, which ultimately has far more to do with power than with religion. To Islamists, Islam is more a political blueprint than faith, and the Islamist discourse is to a large extent a political discourse in religious garb” (Denoeux 2002:63). So, political Islam is the amalgamation of Islamic faith with politics. Nonetheless, it may be worth clarifying that in the Western scholarship, the activities of the extremist groups that operate as Islamists and the political movements rooted in a revival of interest in Islamic polity are not the same. It is a mistake in the national or Western scholarship to lump them together.

6.3 Political Islam in colonial Bengal: Less political, more Puritanical

The powerful manifestation of political Islam in Bengal was seen for the first time during the British colonial regimes. The British East India Company took over Bengal by defeating Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula in the battle of Palassey in 1757 (Bandyopadhyay 2004:44). The Company ruled a large part of India including Bengal for a century up to the incident of the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 (Stokes 1973:158), what Chandra et al. (1989:31) call “the first major challenge”, while for many Indians, the “first national revolt” (Tinker 1958:57) against the British colonial rule in India. Following the abortive Mutiny, the British Raj directly established its rule in India which lasted until prior to the creation of two independent states in the subcontinent—India and Pakistan in 1947 (Riddick 2006). During nearly two hundred years of the British rule, political Islam seemed to be an Islamic response to the British policies which are said to have affected the religiosity of the Indian Muslims. The man who was the nucleus of the Indian political Islam and whose ideas had influenced the Muslims, during his time and even subsequently equally, most across Muslim India including Bengal was Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi (1703-1762), “often described as the greatest Islamic scholar India ever produced” (Geaves 1996:34).²¹ Dahlawi’s intellectuality and thought processes were enormously influenced by the philosophy and activism of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, who is better known as *Mujaddid-i-Alf-i-Thani* (1564-1624). Indeed, Dahlawi adopted the major strands of Alf-i-Thani’s ideas and developed them into a coherent ideology that formed the basis of Islamic revival in the subcontinent right through the present day (Geaves 1996). Like Alf-i-Thani before him, Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi attributed the reasons for

²¹ Allama Iqbal (2012:122) referred to Shah Wali Allah as “the last great theologian of Islam” (Cited in Metcalf 1982:36; Sevea 2007:578).

the decline of the Muslim power and the moral decay of the Muslim society in India to *shirk* (polytheism) and *bid'ah* (sinful innovations), which, according to him, crept into the Muslim society from contact with the Hindus and the predominantly Hindu environment and eventually weakened the faith and practice of the local Muslims (Karandikar 1968; Banerjee 1981). So, the revival of Islam and the regaining of the lost glory of the Muslims in India, as per Dahlawi's suggestions, lied in their turning back to Islam's classical teachings and practices (Abbott 1962). Following the death of Wali Allah Dahlawi just after four years of the Mutiny, his three sons—Shah Abd al-Aziz (1746-1824), Shah Rafi al-Din (1748-1817) and Shah Abd al-Qadir (1753-1827)—adopted their father's path and served the revivalist cause of Islam in India (Mujeeb 1967). Shah Abd al-Aziz, the eldest son of Dahlawi, succeeded his father and continued his father's vision of reform. The charismatic Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly (1782-1831) who fought the Sikhs in Punjab happened to be closely connected to the family of Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi.²² Dahlawi school of thought as well as Sayyid Ahmad's tradition commanded great influence on the political Islam in British India and Bengal and even to the present time.

The growth of political Islam in Bengal during the colonial period is largely associated with three historical movements—the *Fara'idi* movement and the *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* movement both in the 1820s led by Haji Shari'at Allah (1781-1840) and

²² Sayyid Ahmad fought the Sikhs and established a small kingdom in the North-West Frontier. At a stage, he traveled to Mecca for pilgrimage and came to contact with the Wahhabi movement, which strengthened his zeal for political Islam further. Returning home, he began to establish Islamic rule and formed a government in line with his ideas of a pristine Islamic state in the areas he controlled. However, in 1831, Sayyid Ahmad along with his several hundred followers, in a battle with the Sikhs at Balakot, became martyred (Geaves 1996:37).

Mir Nisar Ali alias Titu Mir (1782-1831) respectively, and the Khilafat movement between the late 1910s and early 1920s (1918-1924) by the Indian ulama.

A contemporary of Shah Abd al-Aziz, Shari'at Allah came from Faridpur district in East Bengal. In 1818, he visited Mecca for pilgrimage and was influenced by Wahhabism (Geaves 1996). Returning home, Shari'at Allah launched a movement known as the *Fara'idi*, deriving from the word *fara'id* (obligatory duties laid down in the Qur'an), since the movement insisted on every Muslim observing the fundamental obligation of Islam (or *fara'id*). The movement was intended to remove all un-Islamic and corrupt practices (emanating from predominantly Hindu social-religious beliefs, customs and practices) from the Muslim society and establish a pure and pristine form of classical Islamic society what Khan (1985:840) called "a return to a more fundamentalist Islam, shorn of ritualistic appendages." Soon after the movement started from Faridpur, it spread with extraordinary rapidity in other districts, such as Dhaka, Mymensingh, Bakerganj, Tippera (Comilla), Chittagong and Noakhali as well as to the province of Assam (Sylhet and now a part of India). The movement, however, gained added momentum in those areas where the Muslim peasantries were depressed under the oppressive domination of Hindu zamindars (landlords) and European indigo planters (Islam 1997; Khan 2003).

The sociopolitical ramifications of the *Fara'idi* movement were diverse. Khan (2009:840) has pointed out—

Shari'at Allah vowed to bring the Bengal Muslims to the true path of Islam. He laid utmost emphasis on the five fundamental pillars of Islam [such as, faith (*kalimah*), five daily obligatory prayers (*namaz*), fasting during the month of Ramadan (*roza*), paying the poor-due (*zakat*), and the pilgrimage to Mecca for

those who could afford it (*hajj*)], insisted on the complete acceptance and strict observation of pure monotheism and condemned all deviations from the original doctrines as *shirk* (polytheism) and *bidah* (sinful innovation). Numerous rites and ceremonies connected with birth, marriage and death, such as *chuttee*, *puttee*, *chilla*, *shabgasht* procession, *fatiha*, *milad* and *urs* were forbidden. Saint-worship (*pir*²³), showing undue reverence to *pir*, making of *tazia* during Muharram was also declared *shirk*. He gave stress on justice, social equality, and the universal brotherhood of Muslims.

Like Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi's progeny, Shari'at Allah also believed that India was no longer *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam); it was now *dar al-harb* (abode of war) since it was ruled by the British, and thus he issued a *fatwa* that under *dar al-harb*, Muslims were no longer mandated to perform community prayers, such as Friday prayer (*jum'a*), prayers on the occasions of *Eid al-fitr* and *Eid al-adha* (Khan 1985). The *Fara'idi* movement was purely a religious reform movement, and according to Metcalf (1982:69), the leaders of the movement never intended to wage struggle against the government, rather "the sect as a whole in fact cooperated with the British to secure their interests. Particularly, under Shari'at Allah's son and successor Dudu Miyan (1819-1862), the sect accepted the framework of British rule and encapsulated itself, as best it could, religiously and socially." Dudu Miyan established a community *khilafa* system in which the sect had members under a locally based *khalifah* who taught, levied subscriptions, and protected the interests of the members. After Dudu Miyan's death, the movement was concluded. However, the "contributions of Haji Shari'atullah and the *Fara'idi*

²³ The adherents of the movement eliminated the terms *pir* and *murid* for the Sufi leader and his disciple, calling them instead merely *ustad* and *shagrid*, teacher and pupil (Metcalf 1982).

movement to the revival of Islam in Bengal in general and in East Bengal in particular were nothing short of remarkable” (Khan 2013:87).

A similar revivalist movement based on socioeconomic grievances was launched in West Bengal in the 1820s by Mir Nisar Ali, commonly known as Titu Mir. A disciple of Sayyid Ahmad Bareilwi, who already started the *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* movement in northern India aiming to, according to Jones (1989), return to classical Islamic purity and wage an open struggle against the non-Muslims, Titu Mir also aimed to bring socio-religious reforms, eliminate the practice of *shirk* (polytheism) and *bid'ah* (sinful innovations) in the Bengali Muslim society and inspire the Muslims to follow Islamic principles in their daily life. While he was in Mecca for pilgrimage in 1822, he came into close contact with Sayyid Ahmad Bareilwi who galvanized him to free his fellow countrymen from un-Islamic practices and foreign domination (Khan 2003a). Returning home, as Jones (1989:23) argues, “Titu Mir expounded a fundamentalist doctrine that condemned elements of popular Islam as errors, called upon his followers to practice equality among their coreligionists, and to adopt a unique form of dress as an outward sign of their religious commitment.” Based on content analysis of several works, Hasan (2012) identified three basic characteristics of Titu Mir’s peasant movement in Bengal: (i) the movement managed to mobilize thousands of masses across Bengal and formidably challenged the oppressive and unjust authority of the Hindu zamindars and the British rulers; (ii) the movement set up informal cells to raise funds from its adherents; and (iii) the movement pursued for violent conflict with the ruling elites. Titu

Mir's movement was initially directed against the oppression of the Hindu zamindars²⁴; however, when the British East India Company took the side of the zamindars and stood against the cause of the movement, both parties (the zamindars and the Company) eventually became the target of attack by the adherents of the movement. In the final round of battle at Narkelbaria in 1831, Titu Mir's *Basherkella* (fort with bamboo poles) collapsed by the powerful attack of the Company army, and Titu Mir along with many of his followers fell in it (Khan 2003a). The movement was effectively suppressed. Nevertheless, Titu Mir turned to be a political Islamic hero and his spirit survived (Khan 2010) and Islamic reform movement continued throughout Bengal. Among others, Maulana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, another disciple of Sayyid Ahmad Bareilwi, spent most of his life in preaching and reforming the Muslim society of Bengal where, there is a saying: "at the time of his death there did not remain a single village without disciples of his" (Metcalf 1982:70).

Both Shari'at Allah and Titu Mir demonstrated their religious zeal against cultural accretions and local superstitions. They engaged in, though with variation, violent conflict with the dominant ruling class. These movements eventually failed; nonetheless, they had profound implications with regard to the growth of political Islam in Bengal. The future of Indian Muslims was extraordinarily affected by the apparently unsuccessful movements undertaken by the nineteenth century Indian Islamists. The failure of Sayyid Ahmad's military campaign and Sipoy Mutiny turned Muslims away from the use of military means to restore Islam to its proper place and from attempts to uplift the entire

²⁴ The Hindu zamindars used to oppress the Bengali Muslims to such an extent that once Krishna Deb Rai, the Zamindar of Purnia imposed a tax on some of Titu Mir's followers for growing their beards, which they refused to pay (Khan 2013:92).

community (Jones 1989). Both Islamists and modernists turned their attention to educational trajectory. The Islamists founded the historic Dar al-Ulum Deoband near Delhi in 1857. Two major figures—Muhammad Qasim Nanawtawi (1833-1877) and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829-1905), both of them were the disciples of Haji Imdadullah Muhajir Makki (1817-1899), played a pioneering role in that effort. While Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), a pioneer of Muslim modernism in India, established Aligarh Muslim University (earlier known as Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College) at Aligarh in 1875, and launched an “intellectual-cultural movement” to reform the Muslim society in order for the survival and future progress of Indian Muslims what Jones (1989:62) called “the first Muslim acculturative movement” in India. He envisioned the future Muslim, to be produced by the new institution, as that of a man who would have “the Qur’an in one hand, modern science in the other, and on his head the crown “there is no God but Allah” (the Muslim profession of faith) (Rahman 1958:82-83).

Similar to the *Fara’idi* and *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* movements, the Khilafat (caliphate) Movement had a major contribution to the revival of political Islam in India and Bengal. The Muslims in India were in a major crisis during World War I (1914-1918) since the Turkish Empire allied with the Germany-Austro-Hungarian alliance against the British coalition forces. The Ottoman Turkish Empire, by then the only surviving Islamic Empire, was the symbol of Islam’s worldly power that still carried the legacy of Islamic Caliphate. The Muslims in India used to have a loyalty to this symbolic caliphate system mostly as a demonstration of the universal solidarity of the Muslim Ummah.²⁵ For them,

²⁵ Also, the Indian Muslims’ overriding concern was that the Turkish Sultan was the custodian and defender of the Holy places (such as, Mecca and Medina) in the area known as *Jazirat al-Arab* (Hasan 1986).

the collapse of the Ottoman Empire meant the decline of power of the entire Muslim Ummah, them inclusive. Their apprehensions were vividly reflected in the words of A.K. Fazlul Haq, better known as “*Sher-e-Bangla*” (the tiger of Bengal) who was presiding over the annual session of the Muslim League held in Delhi in December 1918: “To me, the future of Islam in India seems to be wrapped in gloom and anxiety. Every instance of a collapse of the Muslim powers of the world is bound to have an adverse influence on the political importance of our community in India” (Cited in Krishna 1968:38). Lloyd George, the then British Prime Minister, assured them that even in the event of their victory, the Ottoman Empire would not be dismembered, and the caliphate would be intact. The British won the War. The Ottoman Empire had been dismantled²⁶, that led the Indian Muslims be deeply shocked a sense of alienation from British rule soon followed. The Indian Muslims held the British government responsible for dismantling the Ottoman Empire (Krishna 1968). In order to restore Ottoman Caliphate, the ulama called for Khilafat movement. The first Khilafat Conference held at Delhi in November 1919 passed several resolutions that invited people for non-cooperation with the British government and boycotting British goods until their demands were met. Beyond the Muslim leaders, Hindu leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi joined that Conference, and he was even made President of it. On the same day, under the leadership of Maulana Mahmud al-Hasan of Dar al-Ulum Deoband, the ulama (also from Deoband school), such as Maulana Syed Hussain Ahmad Madani, Maulana Ahmed Saeed Dahlawi, and Mufti Kifayatullah Dahlawi, to name a few, founded Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind (The Indian

²⁶ Earlier in 1915, secret treaties were concluded between Britain, France, Russia, and Italy in which they all agreed, on their victory, to partition the Ottoman Empire into four spheres of influence, apart from the direct annexation of some Turkish territories by each of the signatory parties (Krishna 1968).

Association of Muslim Theologians), a purely Islamist organization, with the following objectives:

- (i) to protect Islam and Islamic centers (Hijaz and the Jazirat-ul-Arab), to defend Islamic customs and way of life, to propagate Islam through missionary activities in India and abroad;
- (ii) to provide a common platform for the Ulama, to organize the Muslim community and launch a program for its moral and social reform, to guide it in political and non-political matters from a religious point of view, to protect Muslim religious and civic rights and to establish religious courts; and
- (iii) to work for the complete independence of India, to establish good relations with other communities and promote their rights and interests (Krishna 1968:44).

The Ulama of the Firangi Mahal (a renowned theological seminary at Lucknow) led by Maulana Muhammad Abd al-Bari (1879-1926) supported the organization. However, the most important event of the Khilafat movement was the formation of the Central Khilafat Committee in Bombay as its headquarters and with H.M. Chhotani, a Bombay merchant, and Maulana Shaukat Ali as its president and secretary respectively. Leaders from religious seminaries, modern institutions, business and middle-class organizations flocked together around this Committee to serve the Khilafat cause. Some names included Maulana Abd al-Bari, Maulana Mahmud al-Hasan, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Akram Khan, Dr. M.A. Ansari, Dr. Saif al-Din Kitchlew, Dr. Syed Mahmud, Maulana Mohammad Ali Jouhar, Umar Sobhani, H.M. Chottani, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Mazharul Haq, and A.K. Fazlul Haq.

The Khilafat-Non-Cooperation movement in Bengal turned into a mass movement in which both Muslims and Hindus took part in, leading to at least a short-

lasting rapprochement between them what Khan (2012:135) calls “a brief honeymoon of the two communities.” The Bengal movement benefited from coordinated and concerted efforts of both central and provincial Muslim leaders (Ahmed 2003). In 1920, most of the districts of Bengal witnessed a mushroom growth of Khilafat Committees alongside existing Congress Committees, often with common membership what Ahmed (2003:337) terms “the first significant anti-British mass movement in which Hindus and Muslims participated with equal conviction.” The positive role of the contemporary Bengali media (newspapers), such as *Mohammadi*, *Al-Eslam*, and *The Mussalman* toward this movement has also been acknowledged. Originated as a Pan-Islamic movement (Qureshi 1978, 1999; Tejani 2007; Hasan 1986)²⁷, the Khilafat movement eventually provided a solid foundation for an anti-colonial and anti-imperial resurgence driven by timely mixture of Indian nationalism with Pan-Islamism. The pan-Islamic sentiments and hypes aroused the Indian Muslims to such an extent that all sections of the community, regardless of class, education, religious orientation, religiosity, and regionalism, voluntarily took part in the movement: “money and ornaments poured into the Khilafat fund, thousands flocked to the Khilafat meetings, and some even left the fields and factories to migrate to the *Dar al-Islam* in response to a call for *hijrat* (migration for Islamic cause). Students quit their studies and joined the swelling ranks of non-cooperators while many of their elders gave up their lucrative jobs and high-sounding titles” (Hasan 1986:1074). However, Khilafat movement lost its zeal when Gandhi called off the non-cooperation movement, and it eventually met with failure when Kemal

²⁷ Qureshi (1978:153) has argued that “the Indian Khilafat movement (1918-1924) was apparently the result of strong pan-Islamic sentiments and propaganda, reinforced by a century of political developments and sociocultural consciousness among British-Indian Muslims.”

Ataturk came to power in Turkey in 1924 and abolished the Caliphate system (Nafi 2012; Hartung 2014; Yapp 1992).

The Khilafat movement failed to reach its designated goals—the preservation of the Ottoman Empire and the institution of the Khilafat. However, it made profound impacts on the sociopolitical trajectories of the Indian society in general and the Indian Muslim society in particular. The Khilafat movement reinforced the ideals of political Islam implanted by early Islamists from Mujaddid-i-Alf-i-Thani to Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi to Syed Ahmad Bareilwi. However, it differed from *Fara’idi* and *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* movements on several grounds: Firstly, *Fara’idi* and *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* movements were mainly reformative ones within the Indian Muslim societies and they aimed to purify Islamic beliefs and practices allegedly corrupted by the predominance of Hindu culture and traditions. The principal motto of these movements was to uproot *shirk* (polytheism) and *bid’ah* (sinful innovations) from Muslim social, cultural and religious life. Whereas the Khilafat movement was the result of Pan-Islamic ideas and sentiments that aimed to preclude the victorious alliance in the World War I from the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and preserve the position of the Caliph as the temporal head of the Muslim world.

Secondly, *Fara’idi* and *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* movements were sectarian and regional in nature and character, and even they could not attract the whole body of Muslim society in India, let alone the members of other faiths. Haji Shariat Allah began the *Fara’idi* movement and it was limited within eastern Bengal, while Syed Ahmad Bareilwi launched the *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* movement in northeastern India and it was administered by Titu Mir in western Bengal. Shariat Allah’s and Titu Mir’s

movements were mainly largely supported and joined by the Bengal Muslim peasantry. By contrast, the Khilafat movement was, as mentioned earlier, Pan-Islamic in nature and all sections of Indian Muslim society voluntarily participated in it. The movement grossly influenced almost all strands of Muslims representing, for example, the Deoband, Firangi Mahal, Aligarh, and the Muslim League. It also succeeded to accommodate the Hindu leaders and masses mainly from Congress which paved the way for forging Hindu-Muslim unity, though short-lived, in Indian society. There was no issue of unity between the distinct religious communities with regard to the previous two movements.

Thirdly, *Fara'idi* and *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* movements in Bengal encountered clashes primarily with the oppressive Hindu zamindars, and secondarily with the colonizers—the British East India Company. However, those movements seemed to have not organized a clear-cut anti-colonization movement and had not pursued India's independence. On the other hand, the Khilafat movement was launched with the sole object to preserve the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Caliphate turned into an anti-British, anti-colonial movement, and eventually called for India's independence. The colonial administration suppressed the leaders and activists of the movement.

6.4 Political Islam in East Pakistan: Bengali nationalism superseded Muslim nationalism

During the 1930s, the idea of a separate, independent Muslim state began to take shape in the subcontinent. Poet-philosopher and modernist Islamic scholar Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1875-1938) was credited with this idea that soon became popular amongst Indian Muslims as well as the Muslim League leadership. Islam (1981:55) maintains that “Iqbal,

like most other Muslim scholars, believed in the unity of an Islamic society and state, maintaining that an Islamic society could only be preserved by creating an Islamic state. This Islamic polity would unite the Muslims in India and preserve the Islamic way of life.” Iqbal’s idea of a separate homeland for Indian Muslims was formulated by Mohammad Ali Jinnah what is called “two-nation theory”²⁸ which he summarized during the famous Lahore session of Muslim League in March 1940:

The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literatures. They neither intermarry, nor interdine together, and, indeed, they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Their aspects on life and of life are different. It is quite clear that Hindus and Musalmans derive their inspiration from different sources of history. They have different epics, their heroes are different, and they have different episodes. Very often, the hero of one is a foe of the other, and likewise, their victories and defeats overlap (Ahmad 1970:380).

Iqbal’s idea eventually became translated into a historic reality: The British colonization was over in 1947. Two separate nations—India and Pakistan were founded on the historic “two-nation theory” (Moore 1983; Jaffrelot 2002). The territory of Bangladesh became the eastern part of Pakistan called East Pakistan. To understand political Islam in East Pakistan, we need to focus on the process of the formation of Bengali nationalism which has been, over the centuries, based on Islam and Bengali linguistic tradition. Bertocci (1981:76) argues that Bengali Muslims bear “a composite cultural identity, uniting both ‘Muslim-ness’ and ‘Bengaliness.’” The majority of the

²⁸ ‘Two-nation theory’ refers to as “the idea that India’s Muslims and Hindus constituted two ‘nations’, each deserving their own state” (Cohen 2004:28).

people in East Bengal were Muslims, and their religious identity has always been forefront in the formation of their sociopolitical and cultural life. When the Muslim League was founded in 1906, Bengali Muslims by and large subscribed to it. Historical events, such as the partition of Bengal in 1905 and its subsequent annulment in 1911 by the colonial administration in the wake of fierce movement against and violent opposition to the partition, and ‘political terrorism by the Bengali Hindu community led by Bengal Congress and the Hindu elites’ (Johnson 1973; Ray 1977) had provoked the Bengali Muslims to believe that Bengali Hindus’ and Muslims’ identity and interests were different. The Calcutta-based upper class English-educated Hindus, widely termed as “*bhadralok* [gentlemen] of Calcutta” (Broomfield 1968; Acharya 1995; Iqbal 2009), as well as the East Bengali Hindu zamindars and *bhadralok* (gentlemen) not only vehemently opposed the partition, they also pursued “a policy of intimidation and suppression towards their Muslim tenants” (Nair 1990:8). These dominant social groups went even further and zealously stood against any move by the British government to establish a university in East Bengal (Chakravarti 2013).²⁹

These historical phenomena followed by continual Hindu-Muslim tensions that on many occasions led to communal violence (Das 1990; Nair 1990) created a widening crack on Bengali ethnic identity was eclipsed by religious identity. The Bengali Muslims continued to quest for a separate identity (Latif 2013) based on a strong Muslim sense that matched with the spirit of ‘two-nation theory.’ This was evident in the event of East Bengal’s joining Pakistan in 1947 (Bhattacharya 2004). Indeed, the fear of Hindu

²⁹ Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali literary genius from a zamindar familial background and Nobel laureate, also joined those *bhadralok* to campaign against the establishment of the Dhaka University, the first ever university founded in East Bengal in 1921 (Hashmi 2006).

domination stimulated religious identity among the Bengali Muslims and galvanized them to support Pakistan (Dixit 1999). The triumph of religious identity over ethnic identity, however, never meant that ethnic identity was to be discarded. British foreign colonialism was replaced by “internal colonialism” (Jahan 1973), in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan that resulted in the energetic growth and development of Bengali nationalism that eventually led to the creation of Bangladesh from East Pakistan. Pakistan came into existence based on religious nationalism. However, the policy of internal colonialism that was first evident in the suppression of the Bengalis’ demand for incorporating Bengali as one of the state languages and forced the Bengalis to build a cultural nation exhibiting a strong sense of ethno-nationalism based on Bengali linguistic tradition and culture in which religious nationalism took the back-seat.³⁰ The ‘closed-door policy’ of the Muslim League in Pakistan alienated the Bengali Muslims and eventually led to the formation of East Pakistan Awami Muslim League in 1949 by the Bengali leaders, who were once attached with the Muslim League, notably Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, Abul Mansur Ahmad, Aatur Rahman Khan, Shamsul Huq, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Maniruzzaman 1980; Nair 1990; Rashiduzzaman 1970). In 1955, the name of the organization was changed to East Pakistan Awami League, implying that the word ‘Muslim’ was dropped from its name to shape the organization as non-communal, and open it to all communities (Rashiduzzaman 1970; Ghosh 1990). However, some scholars’ argument that Islam as an ideology ceased to play a significant role in the political process in East Pakistan (Alam 1993) does not entirely match with the reality. The emergence of ethno-cultural nationalism in East Pakistan was a result of the

³⁰ See detailed discussion on the language and culture-based Bengali nationalism and its development in Pakistan, Umar (2000, 2006), Islam (1978), Alam (2007), and Kabir (1987).

exploitative policies³¹ of the West Pakistani urban military industrial bureaucratic elites. In order to derive legitimacy, the ruling elites continued to invoke Islam (Malik 2008), and to generate a tremendous Islamic fervor among the masses “by projecting the romantic goal of building an Islamic State” (Maniruzzaman 1980:11). The ruling elites’ appeal to Islam was, to note Khan (1999a:175-176), “a tactical Islam” which they strategically deployed to legitimize their misconduct and to cover their failures. Malik (2008) has noted that Allama Iqbal had earlier invited Muhammad Asad, a contemporary Islamic scholar, to contribute to the establishment of the new state. As such, Asad made a proposal, which was published as “Islamic-Constitution Making” in 1948. However, it was not implemented.

Bengali nationalism had no conflict with Islamic ideology. The expression of Bengali nationalism in Pakistan was first reflected in the formation of East Pakistan Awami Muslim League in 1949. The aims and objectives of the organization were declared as—

- (i) The abolition of Zamindari system without compensation;
- (ii) The nationalization of the Jute industry;
- (iii) The withdrawal of all internal restrictions on the movement of food-grains and vigilance on the border areas;

³¹ See Jahan (1972), Ahmad (1969), Haq (2005), Maniruzzaman (1971), Quddus (1976), and Lambert (1959) for details about the exploitation toward the people of East Pakistan by the West Pakistani ruling elites. The East Pakistani leaders were, from the very beginning, extremely vocal against this exploitation and demanded for regional autonomy. For example, Maulana Bhasani, in the historic Kagmari (Tangail) Conference held on 7 February 1957 organized by the Awami League, warned the central ruling coterie in these words: “If you carry on with your exploitation in East Pakistan, if you do not accept for full autonomy for East Pakistan, the ruling class of Pakistan should know one thing—*assalamu alaikum*—you go in your own way and we will go in our own” (Cited in Ahmed 2004a:148). Earlier on 17 June 1955, at a meeting in Dhaka, Bhasani cautioned that if the central government continued exploitation, East Pakistan would be forced to say *assalamua alaikum* meaning East Pakistan would be separated (Ahad 2012).

- (iv) The holding of immediate general election in the province through universal adult franchise;
- (v) The abolition of burdensome taxes like the sales tax;
- (vi) The release of political prisoners;
- (vii) The recognition of Bengali as a State language (Afzal 1976:100; Nair 1990:60).

This declaration plus subsequently, the East Pakistan Awami League's manifesto containing 42 points as well as the manifesto for the United Front Election 1954 entailing 21 points, both of which were drafted by Abul Mansur Ahmad, were not reflective of any conflict between Islamic ideology and Bengali nationalism. The United Front manifesto outlined its principle: "No legislation shall be enacted repugnant to the Qur'an and Sunnah, and steps shall be taken to enable citizens to order their lives in accordance with the principle of equality and brotherhood in Islam" (Ahad 2012:182). The middle class English-educated Bengali leaders were conscious of the Bengali Muslim consciousness (Ahmad 1979). The electoral alliance between the Islamists and the nationalists in the United Front Election in 1954³² corroborates the argument that Bengali nationalism had no conflict with Islam from the very beginning. Nezam-e-Islam, the largest Islamist party in East Pakistan in the 1950s mainly dominated by the ulama or the religious teachers,

³² During the East Pakistan provincial legislative elections 1954, the major political parties of East Pakistan, such as East Pakistan Awami Muslim League led by Maulana Bhasani and Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, Krishok Shromik Party by Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq, Nezam-e-Islami by Maulana Atahar Ali, and Ganatantri Dal led by Haji Mohammad Danesh forged an electoral alliance called *Jukta* Front (United Front) aiming to defeat the ruling Muslim League. In the elections, the United Front won 223 seats out of 237 Muslim seats and secured 57 percent of the total votes cast (Maniruzzaman 1980:23). The ruling Muslim League faced a crushing defeat to United Front. It was able to bag just 9 out of total 309 seats (Ahad 2012:184). Nurul Amin, the chief minister and president of Bengal Muslim League, lost to a young student leader (Khaleq Newaz) of the United Front (Ahmad 1979). East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami did not take part in that election (Azam 2004).

was one of the major partners of the United Front (Choudhury 1958) and had a share of 19 of 223 seats captured by the Front exhibiting the third largest party in East Pakistan³³ (Molla 2004:218). The United Front was also joined by the Islamist ‘Khilafat-e-Rabbani Party.’ The Islamists-nationalists alliance corroborates the argument that Bengali ethno-cultural nationalism had no tension with Islam.

However, while in the 1940s and 1950s, the major Bengali nationalist parties, such as East Pakistan Awami League, the National Awami Party (NAP)³⁴, and Krishok Shromik Party were intensely active in mass mobilization toward the major issues of East Pakistan, such as regional autonomy and language movement, and highly vocal against the exploitative policies of the West Pakistani civil-military ruling elites; Maulana Mawdudi’s Jamaat-e-Islami was indifferent to these issues. Bahadur (1994) observes that the Jamaat program made no mention of the important political issues of East Pakistan, such as regional autonomy and language movement. As early as 1952, Mawdudi’s publication *Tarjuman al-Qur’an* was against recognizing Bengali as a national language in the logic that the recognition of Bengali as a state language would ensure that Bengalis never learn Urdu and would make East Bengal Muslims “remain ignorant of Islam” and thus “keep them away from West Pakistan and close to Hindus” (Islam 2015:193). Hasan (2012:5) has attributed Ghulam Azam’s role in the Language Movement in 1952 to East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami: “Ghulam Azam, head of East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami, was

³³ Out of 223 United Front-won Muslim seats, East Pakistan Awami Muslim League shared 143, Krishok Shromik Party 48, Nezam-e-Islami 19, and Ganatantri Dal shared 13 seats (Molla 2004:218).

³⁴ National Awami Party (NAP) was formed by the former left-oriented leaders in the Awami League led by Maulana Bhasani in July 1957.

imprisoned in 1952 for his role in the language movement.” Ghulam Azam³⁵ played a significant role in the language movement and as a result suffered imprisonment several times. It is also important to note that Ghulam Azam, as the General Secretary of the Dhaka University Central Students’ Union (DUCSU), on 27 November 1948 submitted a memorandum on the union’s behalf to the then prime minister of Pakistan Liaquat Ali Khan, demanding that Bengali be made a state language alongside Urdu (Ahad 2012; Ahmad 2013).³⁶ But, Azam’s role in the language movement cannot be attributed to Jamaat-e-Islami, because he was not representing Jamaat-e-Islami then. Azam (2004) in his memoirs *Jibone Ja Dekhlam* (My Journey Through Life) has noted that he had joined Jamaat-e-Islami in April 1954 while he was teaching at Carmichael College, Rangpur.

However, Jamaat leader Mawdudi changed his earlier position and supported the cause of the language movement while he was on a visit to Dhaka in 1955-56 to attend an all-party Islamic constitutional conference. Mawdudi conceded that Bengalis had some ‘genuine grievances’ and demanded the recognition of Bengali as a state language along with Urdu without delay (Bahadur 1994; Islam 2015). He also pleaded for government jobs for the Bengalis and pointed to the general neglect of the socioeconomic problems, such as repeated food shortages, frequent natural disasters and lack of effective relief measures by the ruling elites in West Pakistan (Bahadur 1994; Islam 2015). By then, it was too late to boost his and his party Jamaat-e-Islami’s images. Mawdudi’s plea came as

³⁵ Ghulam Azam was the chief of East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami. Later he became the chief of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest Islamist party in Bangladesh.

³⁶ It is important to note that the Vice-President of the DUCSU (Arvind Bose) was a Hindu. Therefore, its General Secretary (Ghulam Azam), who happened to be a Muslim, was selected for presenting the memorandum. The reason was that the Muslim League government had already started to confuse the public saying that the demand for Bangla was mainly the demand of the Hindus (See Azam 2004).

a posteriori that Bengalis had already paid the blood price in the Language Movement in 1952 and the Muslim League government suffered a crushing defeat to the United Front in the East Pakistan provincial legislative assembly election in 1954. Moreover, in the same tour, Mawdudi echoed the Pakistani establishment's propaganda that Hindus and communists made an 'unholy alliance' as part of a conspiracy to break up Pakistan (Rahman 1997; Bahadur 1994; Islam 2015). He also advocated that the Bengalis or East Pakistanis learn Urdu as, saying it was "the only source" of Islamic knowledge (Bahadur 1994; Islam 2015). By 1956, Mawdudi's organization "condemned the East Pakistani decision to opt for a joint electorate system under the 1956 Constitution on the ground that it was against the very concept of Pakistani nationhood and would facilitate the champions of Bengali nationalism to capture power" (Islam 2015:193; Bahadur 1994). Mawdudi's position on East Pakistan's issues, such as Bangla or Bengali (the Bengali language), regional autonomy, political and economic disparity, and social and cultural vulnerability or what may be conceptualized as "the Bengali Question" was quite paradoxical. On the one hand, he, though rather late, demanded for Bengali to be recognized as a national language while on the other, he regarded Urdu as the only means in which to get to Islamic knowledge and emphasized the learning of Urdu which served to demonstrate his intention to impose an assertive Urdu superiority over Bengali language. He spoke of the grievances of the Bengalis while he went against the Bengalis' demand for regional autonomy by projecting it as the Hindus' and communists' agenda. Mawdudi's argument that 'Urdu was the only source that could have access to Islamic knowledge' was also misleading. Islamic knowledge has never been a monopoly of any

linguistic tradition at least after the spread of Islam from Morocco to Indonesia, and from Iran to Sudan.

It should be noted that the legitimization of Urdu as the only official language had sociopolitical and historical roots. During the colonial period, in the subcontinent, Urdu emerged as the language of the Muslims and began to be associated with Muslim identity in contrast to Hindu identity associated with Hindi. Urdu was also meant a social status symbol for the Indian Muslim elites (the *ashraf* class)³⁷ who consciously promoted it driven by the idea that it could flourish Muslim nationalism in India (See in detail Brass 2000, 2004; Veer 1994). The Pakistani ruling elites, who belonged to the Muslim *ashraf* class, were exceedingly mindful of the minority Muslim nationalism rooted in Islam as a religion and Urdu as a language in colonial India. Along with the Muslim nationalist and *ashraf* class consciousness, they were also mindful of the historical Hindu-Muslim rancorous relations, which altogether had driven them to oppose the official recognition of Bengali and the regional autonomy of the Bengali people.

However, Jamaat appeared to be active in the democratic movement against the despotic military regimes in Pakistan. During the Ayub regime, while Jamaat was banned, leaders of five major opposition parties in Pakistan, such as Awami League, Muslim League (Council), Nezam-e-Islam, National Awami Party and banned Jamaat-e-Islami formed an alliance known as the Combined Opposition Parties (COP) in July 1964 and declared nine points (al-Mujahid 1965a, 1965b; Sayeed 1966; Moten 2003; Ahad 2012) to rescue the country from the tyranny of Ayub Khan. COP unanimously agreed on

³⁷ Rahman (1997:836) maintains that in the colonial Muslim India, “the *ashraf* considered Bengali identity to be basically Hindu, and Muslim peasants who could speak only Bengali were despised and learned to despise themselves.”

the proposal of Maulana Bhasani with regard to the nomination of Fatema Jinnah, the sister of M.A. Jinnah, as the presidential candidate against Ayub Khan in the presidential elections in 1965 under the Basic Democracy system earlier introduced by Ayub Khan (al-Mujahid 1965a; Sayeed 1966; Haq 1996; Baxter 1995). “Fatema Jinnah’s candidacy generated the controversy over whether a woman can be the head of a Muslim state.” Leading ulama including Maulana Mawdudi and Mufti Muhammad Shafi supported her candidacy, while another group of ulama declared her candidacy as un-Islamic (Haq 1996:165). In April 1967, in Dhaka, leaders of five parties, such as Pakistan Awami League, Pakistan Muslim League (Council), Pakistan Nezam-e-Islam Party, Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, and National Democratic Front (NDF) again formed a coalition named the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) and declared eight points to fight the Ayub regime and restore freedom and democracy (Rashiduzzaman 1970; Ahad 2012; Akhtar 1989; Hossain 2010). In January 1969, in Dhaka, at the height of anti-Ayub movement, leaders of eight major opposition parties, such as East Pakistan Awami League (six-pointers), Pakistan Awami League, Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, Pakistan Jamiat-e-ulama-e-Islam, National Democratic Front, Pakistan Nezam-e-Islami Party, Pakistan Muslim League, and Pakistan National Awami Party formed Democratic Action Committee (DAC) and declared eight points which demanded the restoration of parliamentary democracy and a direct franchise (Rashiduzzaman 1970; Ahmed 1979).

However, although Jamaat played an active role in the democratic movement against the military regime of Ayub Khan to restore freedom and democracy, it was quite nonchalant to the hopes and aspirations of the Bengali people. Jamaat gave more focus on the campaign for the Islamization of Pakistan (Moten 2003) than any regional issues.

Unlike the Bengali nationalists, Jamaat leaders were preoccupied with the idea of the unity of the greater 'Islamic Ummah' in Pakistan rather than addressing the grievances of the peripheral Bengali Muslims. Jamaat found Bengali nationalism to be dangerous for 'Islamic Pakistan', and thus made consistent political attacks on the nationalist leaders, such as Maulana Bhasani, while denouncing his political activities as 'un-Islamic' and labeled him as a '*kafir*' (infidel) (Umar 2004; Islam 2015). Mawdudi declared that Awami League aims to 'split Pakistan' (Bahadur 1994; Islam 2015), and hence, Sheikh Mujib's call for provincial autonomy for East Pakistan was rejected by Jamaat as 'a separatist design' (Rahim 2001; Islam 2015). This argument against Bengali nationalism was put forth by the Pakistani ruling elites throughout the life of United Pakistan that Jamaat also subscribed to.

The ruling elites continued to thwart Bengali nationalism and ensure their perceived unity and integrity of the Islamic nationhood in Pakistan. The ruling elites "looked upon the Bengali language and culture as too 'Hindu-leaning' and made repeated attempts to cleanse it of Hindu influence" (Jahan 1980:66). In the early 1950s, as recourse to a strategy of Islamicization of Bangla, they proposed replacing Bengali script with Arabic, which further alienated the Bengali people, still smarting from the ruling elites' design to make Urdu the only official language. In the face of the tougher movement by the Bengali nationalists, the ruling elites agreed to accord Bangla equal status with Urdu as one of two national languages. However, their earlier decisions and actions had made them look exploitative, authoritative, and untrustworthy in the eyes of the Bengali Muslims (Khan 1985). Ayub regime's attempt to Islamicize Bengali culture by banning the broadcasting of the songs of Rabindranath Tagore, a leading Bengali poet

who was a Hindu by religion, and by imposing serious restrictions on the import of printed materials from West Bengal, a province of India inhabited largely by the Bengali Hindus, also backfired (Khan 1985; Kabir 1987; Jahan 1980). The Bengali students went on the streets to protest against the ban and staged demonstrations in support of the poet's songs. According to Kabir (1987:482), "it was nothing but an indication of increasing salience of language as the primary focus of community identity for the Bengali Muslims."

The Bengali middle class continued to be organized under the Awami League with the spirit of Bengali nationalism against the Pakistani authoritarian regimes backed by civil and military bureaucracy as well as landed aristocracy. The Bengali nationalism gained rapid momentum due to the absence of democracy as well as the exploitative policies of the ruling elites. Jahan (1972) has observed that the lack of political participation and exclusion from state power drove the Bengalis gradually from demanding participation, to demanding autonomy, and finally to demanding self-determination. Quddus (1976) has summarized this in three points—the lack of effective participation in the decision-making process, the absence of reasonably equitable distribution of the economic resources, and the lack of the representation of the Bengalis' hopes and aspirations in the national life of the country—that eventually led to the disintegration of Pakistan nearly two and a half decades after its inception.

Islam and politics have been interwoven through the ages. The development of political Islam or Islamism in the pre-independent Bangladesh was connected to two significant aspects—the global Islamic resurgence and the socioeconomic and political and historical trajectories of the Indian Muslim society. The colonial administration

played a vital part in the growth of political Islam in Bengal. Political Islam in the colonial period was marked by a puritanical movement in Bengal Muslim society. The ideas of Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi and Sayyid Ahmad Bareilwi contributed enormously to the development of political Islam in Bengal. The reform movements, such as *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* and *Fara'idi* led by Mir Nisar Ali alias Titu Mir and Haji Shariat Allah respectively and the Khilafat Movement by the Indian ulama had a major role in the growth of political Islam in the colonial Bengal. Both Shariat Allah and Titu Mir identified the un-Islamic corrupt practices (*shirk* and *bid'ah*) as the major problem and launched their movements to remove them from the Bengal Muslim society. The Khilafat Movement was launched to preserve the Ottoman Caliphate. All these movements eventually turned into an anti-British and anti-colonial movement. The colonial rulers successfully suppressed these movements. Nonetheless, these movements had remarkable contributions to the development of political Islam in Bengal.

Political Islam in East Pakistan gradually lost its significance; Muslim nationalism on which Pakistan was founded began to decline and the appeal of Bengali nationalism gradually grew. The Pakistani ruling elites emphasized Muslim nationalism and considered Bengali ethnic nationalism as a threat to the integrity of Pakistan. Through the Language Movement in 1952, Bengali nationalism strongly emerged and Muslim nationalism began to take a back seat in East Pakistan. However, Bengali nationalism was not in contradiction with Islam as a religion. The Bengali nationalist parties had no antagonism with Islam. The ideologies and programs of these parties were not marked by any anti-Islamic sentiments. Rather, the leaders of the nationalist parties showed their commitment to Islam throughout the entire course of the Bengali nationalist movement in

East Pakistan. They were critical of the ruling elites' appeal to Islam which was said to be "a tactical Islam" that the ruling elites strategically used to legitimize their exploitation of the Bengalis. The Bengali nationalist parties and Islamist parties made political alliances at different times in the course of the movement for the fall of military dictatorship and the restoration of democracy in United Pakistan.

The East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest Islamist party in East Pakistan, actively participated in the democratic movements in United Pakistan. However, it opposed Bengali nationalism and regional autonomy for East Pakistan considering them as antithetical to the integrity of Pakistan. Jamaat leader Maulana Mawdudi accused the Bengali nationalist parties, particularly the Awami League, of splitting Pakistan. Jamaat was found preoccupied with the idea of Muslim nationalism, and it thus rejected Awami League's call for autonomy for East Pakistan as a 'separatist design.'

In East Pakistan, Bengali nationalism superseded Muslim nationalism and political Islam remained insignificant. However, people's attachment to Islam never lessened. Sub-question 4—the roles of state and non-state actors in the promotion of and contesting Islamization in Bangladesh will be addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven

Piety and Politics: Secularization and Islamization in Bangladesh

Our secularism is not against religion. Our secularism stands for harmony among members of all religions. Indeed, in the opening of the Qur'an, Allah is described as *Rabbil-Alamin*, the head of all creation and not of *Rabbil-Muslimin*, the head only of Muslims. This is the spirit which underlines our secularism.

— **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**³⁸

Sheikh Mujib slowly reintroduced religious symbols. Islamic greetings and other symbols were reintroduced in the government broadcasting network right after his assumption of power. Not only this, he categorically declared that he was a proud Muslim and his nation was the second biggest Muslim nation. After a few months of independence, he started to use Islamic symbols and expressions in the speeches which were remarkably absent in his pre-liberation speeches.

— **M.G. Kabir** (1987:484), *Religion, Language and Nationalism in Bangladesh*

The Pakistani ruling elites' Muslim nationalist ideological discourse embraced eventual failure. The Bengali nationalist movement for regional and cultural autonomy for the Bengali Muslims culminated in the landslide victory of the Bengali nationalists in the first ever nationwide democratic elections in Pakistan in 1970. Awami League, the major nationalist party in East Pakistan led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman appeared to be

³⁸ At the Non-Aligned Summit in Algiers in 1973, Sheikh Mujib presented his reason for Bangladesh's insertion of secularism in its constitution (Cited in Hossain 2013:142).

the sole majority party in the National Assembly of Pakistan. Out of total 162 National Assembly seats (excluding women seats) allocated to East Pakistan, Awami League captured 160³⁹, garnering 72.57 percent of the votes cast (Maniruzzaman 1980:69; Baxter 1971:212; LaPorte, Jr. 1972:100). Pakistan People's Party (PPP) led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto appeared to be the largest party in West Pakistan which bagged 81 seats out of total 138 allocated to West Pakistan (LaPorte, Jr. 1972:100), garnering 42.2 percent of the votes cast (Maniruzzaman 1980:70). As a whole, out of 313 National Assembly seats (including women seats), Awami League captured 167, while PPP bagged 85 seats (Ahmed 1979:203). On national account, PPP secured 19.5 percent of the total votes cast as opposed to 38.3 percent of the Awami League (Ahmed 1979:204). A striking feature of the 1970 elections was that no political party in Pakistan could demonstrate its nationwide support. West Pakistan-based PPP could not field a single candidate in East Pakistan (Ahmed 1979:204). East Pakistan-based Awami League set up nine candidates in West Pakistan, but lost all of them. Not only this, they lost so heavily that their security deposits were forfeited (Maniruzzaman 1980:70). The election results clearly indicated that there was nothing much in common to share even politically between the two wings. The ruling elites' appeal to Islam could no more establish the bondage between the two parts of Pakistan (Ahmed 1979). As Maniruzzaman (1980:71) remarks, "Pakistan's first general election proved that it was going to be the last general election in a united Pakistan." It is important to highlight that the Islamist parties could not capture a single

³⁹ Of the other two seats, one was won by Nurul Amin, the leader of Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP). The remaining one was captured by Raja Tridiv Roy, an independent candidate in a tribal constituency of Chittagong Hill Tracts (Baxter 1971:212; Khan 1972:304; Hossain 2013:65).

seat in East Pakistan. However, Jamaat-e-Islami appeared to be the largest Islamist party in terms of securing votes.⁴⁰

The massive victory of the Awami League created new hopes for discontented Bengalis (Maniruzzaman 1980). On the other hand, it torpedoed all the calculations of the ruling elite⁴¹ (Ahmed 1979). Although the ruling elite successfully completed what some scholars considered “the critical first step in the restoration of electorally-based civilian government” (LaPorte, Jr. 1972:100; Baxter 1971:217), the process of transfer was not made effective according to the electoral outcomes. Following a failed tripartite negotiation between Mujib, Bhutto and Yahya with regard to power transfer to the elected representatives, the regime eventually launched a military crackdown called “Operation Searchlight” on 25 March 1971 on East Pakistan (Linton 2010; Bose 2005) which triggered the declaration of independence of Bangladesh on 26 March 1971, and the start of a national liberation war that received logistical support from India. The liberation war culminated in a full-scale conventional war between Pakistan and the joint forces of India and Bangladesh. Eventually, the Pakistani military surrendered to the joint forces on 16 December 1971 and Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation-state

⁴⁰ In East Pakistan, Jamaat-e-Islami secured 6.25 percent of the total votes cast, while Pakistan Muslim League (Convention) garnered 2.72 percent, Nezam-e-Islam 2.45 percent, Muslim League (Council) 1.61 percent, Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam 0.92 percent, and Islami Ganatantri Dal captured 0.07 percent votes (Ahmed 1979:203).

⁴¹ Hossain (2013:65) has pointed out that the military dictator General Yahya Khan “had obviously banked on fragmented representation in East Pakistan, so that he would be free to manipulate and manoeuvre.” Kissinger (1979:850) writes about Yahya: “He expected a multiplicity of parties to emerge in both West and East Pakistan, which would continually fight each other in each wing of the country and between the two wings; the President would therefore remain the arbiter of Pakistan’s politics.”

(Jahan 2013). East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami opposed the liberation war (See detailed discussion in chapter eight).

Soon after its independence, Bangladesh which had already been ravaged by war began nation-building tasks. A constitutional framework for the new state demanded urgent attention (Hossain 2013). A Constituent Assembly was constituted by the members who were elected from Bangladesh to the then Pakistan National Assembly and the East Pakistan Provincial Assembly in the elections held in 1970 and 1971⁴² (Huq 1973; Hossain 2013). The constitution-makers succeeded in presenting the nation with a constitution within less than one year of their official work (Jahan 1973). The constitution characterized the state with four fundamental principles—democracy, nationalism, secularism, and socialism (Jahan 1973; Murshid 1997; Riaz 2004; Khondker 2010a; Hossain 2013), which Mujib claimed to be his ideals, and were widely called as *Mujibbad* (Mujibism) (Jahan 1973; Huq 1973; Huque and Akhter 1987; Alam 1993; Riaz 2004). However, Sheikh Mujib gradually emphasized the religious identity and slowly reintroduced religious symbols (Kabir 1987).

Mujib's regime was removed by a group of army officers followed by a series of coups and counter-coups between August and November 1975 (Huque and Akhter 1987; Maniruzzaman 1976). On 7 November 1975, within the turbulent political milieu, General Ziaur Rahman (popularly known as Zia), who was earlier kept under house arrest by a section of military officers, was freed by the Sepoys (*jawans*), the event which was marked as the "Sepoy Revolution" (Maniruzzaman 1976; Tayyeb 1978). Following the

⁴² "General elections to the National Assembly of Pakistan and Provincial Assembly of East Pakistan were held respectively on December 7 and 17, 1970, but in some Constituencies of former East Pakistan polls could not be held due to cyclone devastation. These were completed on January 17, 1971" (Huq 1973:60).

Sepoy Revolution, Zia emerged as the Chief of Staff of the army (Islam 1984), and eventually as the most powerful leader of Bangladesh (Huque and Akhter 1987). It is important to note that Zia was very popular and well known in the army for, according to some observers, two main reasons—his war hero image and charismatic personality and honesty (Baxter and Rahman 1991).

Ziaur Rahman made several changes to the constitution that restored Islam as the basis of national ideology (Brasted 2005): secularism was replaced by “absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah”, the Qur’anic phrase “*bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim*” (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) was inserted in the Preamble, Article 12 which had provided for the adoption and interpretation of secularism was omitted (Ahamed 1983; Huque and Akhter 1987; Hakim 1998; Riaz 2004), Article 38 that had forbidden the operation of religion-based political parties was also deleted from the constitution, thus allowing the Islam-based political parties to return to the political landscape in Bangladesh (Huque and Akhter 1987; Hakim 1998). Jamaat-e-Islami which opposed the liberation war and championed the integration of Pakistan gradually reemerged as a potent political Islamic force (Riaz 2004; Khondker 2010a, 2010b) with its prime slogan “*Allah’r ain chai, sot loker shasan chai*” (we want God’s laws, we want honest people’s rule). Other Islamic parties, which also played an anti-liberation role and hence were banned by the Mujib regime, were also revived (Hakim 1998; Rahim 2007; Khondker 2010a). Zia also pursued a pro-Islamic foreign policy (Rashiduzzaman 1978; Kabir 1987; Ghosh 1993; Hakim 1998; Rahim 2007).

Zia’s regime came to an end with the assassination of Zia in an abortive coup in May 1981 (Khan 1982a; Alam 1993a). Justice Abdus Sattar succeeded Zia through a

democratic election in November 1981 (Khan 1982a; Alam 1993a). However, after a few months of Sattar's civilian rule, General H.M. Ershad, the then army chief, usurped power through a bloodless coup in March 1982 (Rahman 1983; Khan 1985; Hakim 1998). Ershad continued his predecessor's policy of Islamization in Bangladesh (Ahamed and Nazneen 1990; Murshid 1997). He even went one step further than Ziaur Rahman; he incorporated Islam as the state religion in the constitution (Ahamed and Nazneen 1990; Ghosh 1993; Alam 1993; Hakim 1998; Riaz 2004; Rahim 2007). Ershad constantly emphasized the Islamic symbols, and endeavored to project himself as a devout Muslim (Hakim 1998). He used to deliver Friday-sermons in the *jumma* congregation in mosques, pay frequent visits to religious shrines and *pirs* (spiritual figures), perform repeated *hajj* (pilgrimage) in Mecca and issue emotionally-charged message to the nation on Islamic religious occasions, and so on (Hakim 1998; Hasan 2011; Ahamed and Nazneen 1990; Alam 1993).

In December 1990, Ershad's regime collapsed in the wake of strong and popular mass movements (Baxter 1991; Maniruzzaman 1992; Hakim 1998), and Bangladesh entered into a new phase of democratic/constitutional governance (Baxter and Rahman 1991a; Maniruzzaman 1992; Baxter 1992; Murshid 1995; Hossain 2000). Since the reemergence of democracy in the early 1990s, Bangladesh has been governed by two main parties—Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by Begum Khaleda Zia, the widow of Ziaur Rahman, and Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman—except a short military-backed caretaker administration. Khaleda's regime (mainly two terms, one from 1991 to 1996, and the other from 2001 to 2006) demonstrated the pale imitation of Zia's policy, the tactic of adherence to Islamic

values and the frequent stress of the Islamic symbolism (Riaz 2004; Shehabuddin 2008). The first term of Hasina's regime (1996-2001) hardly showed any inclination for secularism or tangible opposition to Islamization that had already been done. However, the second term of her regime (2009-2014) in coalition with the leftist parties witnessed a major shift from its earlier toleration of Islamization toward the secularization of the state. The regime restored secularism as a state ideology in the constitution, and simultaneously it retained "*bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim*" (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) and the provision of the state religion (Salehin 2013:106; Pattanaik 2013:421; Jahan and Shahan 2014:427), which have been described by scholars and civil society members; such as Dr. Kamal Hossain, Dr. Akbar Ali Khan, Dr. Asif Nazrul, Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Nurul Kabir and A.S.M. Rab who were interviewed by the author; as the "political and ideological contradictions of the ruling Awami League." However, Maeenuddin Khan Badal, Executive Vice President of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (National Socialist Party-JSD) which is a coalition partner of ruling Awami League, who was also interviewed by the author describes the event as a "political compromise of Awami League." Driven by the ideology of secularism, the regime is reported to have been so desperate to "de-Islamize Bangladesh" that some scholars have marked it as an emergence of "ultra-secularism" or "violent secularism" (Islam 2011a, 2011b). Nevertheless, the regime continued to invoke Islamic symbolism and expressions (Shehabuddin 2008; Hashmi 2011), and Sheikh Hasina even declared that the country, under her premiership, would be governed as per the 'Medina Charter' and last sermons

and directives of Prophet Muhammad. She also reaffirmed that there would be no law against the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet in Bangladesh ever.⁴³

Against this brief sociopolitical and historical background, this chapter is intended to examine secularization and Islamization in Bangladesh. In the previous chapter, I have argued that there was no viable contradiction between Bengali nationalism and Islamic ideology. In this chapter, I argue that the basis of the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 was democratic aspiration, non-communalism, economic emancipation, and freedom from exploitation. The Bengali masses who opposed the Pakistani civil-military bureaucratic hegemony were not driven by secularism. In the entire course of the Bengali nationalist movement which culminated in the war of independence, there was hardly any reference to and reflection of secularism. So, the argument that the basis of Bangladesh's war of independence was secularism (Riaz 2004, 2005; Pattanaik 2009, 2013; Khondker 2010a) will be contested. I also argue that the military rulers did not launch Islamization; rather they institutionalized the process which was initiated by the ruling elite that assumed power right after the attainment of independence. Both civil and military regimes made contributions to the promotion of Islamization and Islamism in Bangladesh. The next section focuses on the state-sponsored Islamization in Bangladesh followed by the discussion of the role of non-state actors or non-political institutions and organizations in Islamization in the final section.

⁴³ On 22 March 2014, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made this declaration in a meeting at Dhaka organized by the Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh. See "Country to Be Run as per Madinah Charter: PM." *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 22 March 2014. <http://www.thedailystar.net/country-to-be-run-as-per-madinah-charter-pm-16759> (accessed 26 November 2015).

7.2 State-sponsored Islamization in Bangladesh

The constitution of 1972 underlined secularism as one of the cardinal state principles of Bangladesh. Commonly called *dharma nirapekkhata* (religious neutrality) in Bengali, secularism of Mujib's version was akin to Anglo-American secularism that reinforced the neutrality of religions and elimination of communal politics as opposed to French version of secularism or what scholars called 'assertive secularism' (Kuru 2007, 2009; Keyman 2010) emphasizing the religious elimination or atheism. Mujib reinforced:

Secularism does not mean the absence of religion. You are a Muslim; you perform your religious rites. The Hindus, Christians, Buddhists all will freely perform their religious rites. There is no irreligiousness on the soil of Bangladesh but there is secularism. This sentence has a meaning and the meaning is that none would be allowed to exploit the people in the name of religion ... No communal politics will be allowed in the country (Cited in O'Connell 1976:69; Alam 1993:97).

Mujib's secularism was characterized by the recognition rather than the rejection of all religions what Maniruzzaman (1990:70) called the adoption of "multi-theocracy." Dr. Kamal Hossain, in an interview with the author, argues that the acrimonious experience of the abuse of religion in politics in United Pakistan "forced us to adopt secularism in the constitution which was intended not for the rejection of religion itself but that of communalism and the abuse of religion in the political realm." Maenuddin Khan Badal, interviewed by the author, argues that "secularism in Bangladesh means nothing but the absence of communalism and religious neutrality." This secularism is not similar to Western model of secularism that denies any transcendental authority, Badal opines. However, there was growing criticisms against the doctrine of secularism; the

critics were successful in propagating the notion of secularism as the absence of religion. Such propagation was so deep that Mujib had to repeatedly clarify that he was not against religion and his notion of secularism was not anti-religious (Hakim 1998).

Some scholars who had participated in this study argue that secularization efforts under Mujib regime, such as the elimination of the Qur'anic inscription *ikra' bismi rabbi-kallaji khalak* (Read! In the name of your Lord Who created everything; Qur'an 96:1) from the Dhaka University monogram in 1972 (See Miah 2009), the deletion of the word 'Muslim' from the name of a Dhaka University students' hall (Salimullah Muslim Hall) in 1972⁴⁴, the abolishment of the Islamic Academy in 1972⁴⁵, the cancellation of recitation from religious texts in the inaugural session of state-owned radio and television, the reduction of financial allotment in *madrasa* education, the removal of Islamic stories in the primary and secondary school textbooks, the withdrawal of Islamiyat (Islamic studies) from the secondary school syllabus (Also see Islam 2001), and most importantly the banning of Islamic politics made the people suspicious of Mujib's commitment to religion. Even people began to feel that in the name of secularism, the regime was particularly hostile to Islam rather than to all religions in the state (Islam 2001). What appears clear is that Bangladesh, after the attainment of independence, became a secular state though its people had hardly any orientation or attachment to secularism. The gap between a secular state and a secular people was evident. Maniruzzaman (1990:69) argues that "secularism in Bangladesh did not reflect

⁴⁴ See "Salimullah Muslim Hall 85 Years of History." SM Hall Alumni Association DU.

<https://smhallalumniassociation.wordpress.com/about/> (accessed 21 December 2015).

⁴⁵ See "History." Islamic Foundation, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh. http://www.islamicfoundation.org.bd/pages/home_details (accessed 22 December 2015).

Bangladesh's societal spirit and history. It arose as a utilitarian expediency in the political field." Religion and particularly Islam has been deeply ingrained in the social, political and cultural fabric of Bangladesh. Dropping the word 'Muslim' from the party's name in 1955, Awami League attempted to appear as a non-communal party; however, as Hakim (1998:102) notes:

During the "Pakistani days", secularism never became prominent in the ideological discourse of the Awami League. All popular political campaigns spearheaded by the party avoided the demand for a secular state. It indicated that the party was reluctant to risk the support of a vast majority of the population who demonstrated a craving for Islamic statehood in the movement for independence from Pakistan.

Awami League's 42-point party manifesto, United Front's 21-point election manifesto, Sheikh Mujib's historical 6-point program, students' 11-point demand, Awami League's 1970 election manifesto, and the Proclamation of Independence Order issued by the AL government in exile on 10 April 1971 have had no reflection of secularism. Rather the opposite is witnessed. The United Front election manifesto in 1954 clearly outlined: "No legislation shall be enacted repugnant to the Qur'an and Sunnah, and steps shall be taken to enable citizens to order their lives in accordance with the principle of equality and brotherhood in Islam" (Ahad 2012:182). The election manifesto of Awami League in 1970 unambiguously stated:

The favored religion of the vast majority of the population is Islam. On this matter the Awami League has decided that there will be in the Constitution very clear guarantees that no law will be formulated or enforced in Pakistan contrary to the laws of Islam well established in the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah. There

will be guarantees firmly established in the Constitution for preserving the purity of the numerous religious institutions. Adequate arrangements will be made for extending religious instructions at all levels (Cited in Alam 1993:96; Hakim 1998:102).

The most significant document of the war of independence of Bangladesh is the Proclamation of Independence Order in which “secularism was not even mentioned, let alone emphasized” (Hakim 1998:102). Dr. Asif Nazrul, a law professor of the Dhaka University and a prominent civil society member, in an interview with the author, argues that the spirit of liberation war is reflected in the classical documents of Bangladesh, such as the 6-point program in 1966, the Election Manifesto of Awami League in 1970, Sheikh Mujib’s address on 7 March 1971, the Proclamation of Independence Order, and the provisional constitution. There were precisely two main spirits of the liberation war: (1) the establishment of a true or real democracy; and (2) the establishment of a welfare state where there will be no poor-rich discrimination, where the working people will not be exploited or in other words, the establishment of an exploitation-free society or economic system, adds Nazrul. Among other issues, there was a spirit of non-communalism instead of secularism, he also asserts. This eminent educationist further stresses: “in no documents that I have referred to you—6-point program, 1970 Election Manifesto of Awami League, the Address of 7 March, and the Proclamation of Independence Order—the word “secularism” is found. From where it has derived, only God knows.”

Similarly, Habibun Nabi Khan Sohel, a central leader of BNP, who was also interviewed by the author, asserts that the fundamental spirit of the war of liberation of Bangladesh was to establish an exploitation-free democratic society in which people’s hopes and aspirations were to be reflected. The leftist group linked with Awami League

had a vision of a secular state though still it was implicit; the masses had no acquaintance with, let alone interest in, secularism prior to the independence of Bangladesh. Griffiths and Hasan (2015:233) have noted that “the vast majority of Bangladeshi Muslims consider themselves as pious and God-fearing. Secularism as a value was not based on a consensus of the population but was imposed from above by the ruling party, the Awami League whose constituency was urban and middle class.” Hakim (1998:103) similarly observes:

Bangladesh adopted secularism in principle without ever considering seriously whether its civil society was mature enough in its outlook to sustain this predominantly Western modernist value. The atrocities committed by the Pakistani soldiers during the nine months of liberation war did not weaken the Islamic sentiment of the people of Bangladesh. They, as ever before, remained firmly devoted to the practices of their Islamic faith.

Consequently, partly due to fear of being alienated from the masses and partly due to pragmatic reasons, Sheikh Mujib gradually turned to exhibit himself as the champion of Islamic tradition and culture despite the secular character of the constitution.⁴⁶ In 1973, Sheikh Mujib declared a general amnesty for and released the leaders of Islamic parties who collaborated with the Pakistani army during the liberation war (Ghosh 1993; Islam 2001; Riaz 2004) to expand the AL’s support base (Alam 1993). The recitation from religious texts in state-run radio and television was resumed (Islam 2001; Huq 2014). The

⁴⁶ Article 12 of the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh reads (Khan 1985:846; Hakim 1998:103):

The principle of secularism shall be realized by the elimination of —

- (a) communalism in all its forms;
- (b) the granting by the State of political status in favor of any religion;
- (c) the abuse of religion for political purposes; and
- (d) discrimination against, or persecution of, persons practicing a particular religion.

government grants for *madrasas* were increased: according to a statistics, the government increased allocation for *madrasa* education to taka 7.2 million in 1973 from taka 2.5 million in 1971 (Islam 2001:172; Riaz 2008:118). The study of Islamiyat and Arabic was made compulsory in secondary schools (Islam 2001). Public sale and consumption of alcohol and gambling were banned (Chakravarty 2015). The government formed *Sirat* Committees (committees for celebrating the Prophet's birthday) for the observance of *Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi* (Prophet Muhammad's birthday) throughout the country (Islam 2001). In 1974, Daud Haider published a poem in the pro-socialist *Dainik Sangbad*, which allegedly derides the Prophet Muhammad. Owing to huge public uproar, Mujib sent him into exile (Hasan 2010), and he never returned to Bangladesh. The Islamic Academy that Mujib had earlier abolished was revived in 1975, and it was upgraded to a foundation and renamed as Islamic Foundation (Ghosh 1993; Alam 1993; Husain 1997). Addressing the inaugural ceremony of the Foundation, Yusuf Ali, a member of the Mujib Cabinet, affirmed that "Bangladesh is committed to the ideals and teachings of Islam and she would continue her efforts for the establishment of peace and universal brotherhood—the most important tenets of Islam" (Cited in Hakim 1998:106).

Realizing the economic importance of Middle Eastern countries, Mujib began to promote Islamic cooperation with Middle Eastern Muslim leaders. In 1973, Bangladesh under Mujib regime extended its support to the Arab nations in their war with Israel and even sent a medical team to help the Arabs (Maniruzzaman 1975; Hakim 1998). In February 1974, Mujib joined the OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference) meeting held in Lahore, Pakistan (Hakim 1998; Maniruzzaman 1975). Soon after being a member of the OIC, Bangladesh joined the Islamic Foreign Minister's Conference held at Kuala

Lumpur, Malaysia and became one of the founding-members of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) established at the Islamic Finance Ministers' Conference held at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in August 1974 (Maniruzzaman 1975).

Sheikh Mujib also continued to make frequent references to Islam in his speeches and public articulation by using common Islamic terms and idioms, such as *Allah* (God), *insha-Allah* (God willing), *bismillah* (in the name of God), *tawaba* (penitence), *imam* (religious leader), and so forth (Maniruzzaman 1990; Islam 1997). He categorically declared that he was proud to be Muslim and proud that his country was the second largest Muslim nation in the world (Riaz 2004). In his later days, Mujib even dropped his symbolic valedictory expression *joy bangla* (glory to Bengal) (Maniruzzaman 1990; Husain 1997) and ended his speeches with *khuda hafez* (God protect you), the traditional Indo-Islamic phrase for bidding farewell (Maniruzzaman 1990; Islam 1997). In his later day speeches, Mujib also highlighted his efforts to establish a cozy relationship with the Muslim countries in the Arab world (Maniruzzaman 1990). On 4 November 1972, during the parliamentary session after the passage of the Constitution Bill, Mujib led the *munajaat* (Islamic prayer) (Riaz 2004). Mujib thus made a major shift from his earlier 'secular project' toward the Islamization process in Bangladesh. Griffiths and Hasan (2015) have noted that the process of promoting Islam as a basis for national identity had already begun with the Awami League before the military coup in 1975. It was expedited during military rule over the next fifteen years.

The evils of the Mujib regime, such as corruption, inefficiency, and dictatorial disposition eventually led to the emergence of a fertile ground for military intervention and further Islamization of the polity (Ghosh 1993; Hashmi 2004). Zia's military regime

gradually pursued to consolidate its power-base and derive legitimacy from the existing political calamities. After building a strong civil-military bureaucratic support-base, Zia requested for the building of a civilian support-base and to that end, Zia took a number of measures, most of which were geared towards the exploitation of the religious sentiments of the Muslim masses (Hakim 1998). The measures he took clearly revealed his intent that he was to make Islam the focal point of the regime's ideology (Brasted 2005; Riaz 2008). The Islamization efforts under Zia regime can be summarized in the following: The regime—

- (i) dismantled secular principle of the state and in its place incorporated “absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah” (Ahamed 1983; Ghosh 1993; Hakim 1998; Islam 2001; Riaz 2004).
- (ii) introduced ‘Bangladeshi nationalism’ instead of ‘Bengali nationalism’ that provided an idea of nationalism in independent Bangladesh with an Islamic character by distinguishing the Bengali Muslims from the Bengali Hindus of neighboring West Bengal (Alam 1993).
- (iii) incorporated the Qur’anic phrase *bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) in the above of the preamble of the constitution (Ahamed 1983; Ghosh 1993; Hakim 1998; Islam 2001; Riaz 2004).
- (iv) deleted Article 12 of the constitution that pledged to eliminate all kinds of communalism, state’s patronization of any religion, discrimination against persons practicing a particular religion, and abuse of religion for political purposes (Ahamed 1983; Riaz 2004; Hakim 1998; Huque and Akhter 1987).

- (v) omitted Article 38 of the constitution that had imposed a ban on the formation and operation of religion-based political parties. This allowed Islam-based parties and groups to return to the political arena in Bangladesh (Huque and Akhter 1987; Hakim 1998). The Islamic parties, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, Muslim League, Nezam-e-Islam, and Jamiat-e-Ulam-e-Islam which opposed the liberation war and championed the integration of Pakistan were banned in the Mujib regime; they were now revived (Hakim 1998; Rahim 2007; Khondker 2010a).
- (vi) made a constitutional recognition of pro-Islamic foreign policy (Rashiduzzaman 1978; Kabir 1987). Article 25(2) was included in the constitution that reads: “The State shall endeavor to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity” (Cited in Ahamed 1983:1114; Ghosh 1993:700-701; Hakim 1998:107).
- (vii) generously provided patronization and support to the spread of Islamic education and cultural practices (Islam 2001; Riaz 2004). Riaz (2004:36, 2008:140) describes—

The government established a separate directorate within the education ministry and set up the Madrasa Education Board to oversee *madrasa* education. The board’s responsibilities included standardization of *madrasa* curricula and tests. The board was entrusted with the task of making *madrasa* education equivalent to secular education. This entailed creating opportunities for *madrasa*-educated students to enter university. [The government also introduced] *Islamiat*—a course on Islamic studies—at primary and secondary levels (that is, grades one to eight). This course was made mandatory for all Muslim students. The

government established a new Ministry of Religious Affairs. Soon afterward, Eid-e-miladunnabi—Prophet Muhammad’s birthday—was declared a national holiday. The state-controlled electronic media began broadcasting Azan—the call to prayers—five times a day and to carry programs on Islam’s role in daily life.

Zia’s pro-Islamic symbolic measures also included the display of Qur’anic verses and Prophetic traditions in government offices, public places, and the state messages on religious occasions, such as *eid-al-fitr*, *eid-al-adha*, *shab-e-barat*, *shab-e-qadr*, and *eid-e-miladunnabi* (Ahamed 1983; Islam 1997; Hakim 1998). In his personal style, Zia reflected an explicit Islamic commitment and orientation: He declared the expression *joy Bangla* (glory to Bengal) to be un-Islamic and popularized in its place *Bangladesh zindabad* (long live Bangladesh) (Ghosh 1993; Islam 2001). He used to begin his speeches with the Qur’anic term *bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful), and made it almost mandatory for all public servants to also preface their speeches with this term (Ghosh 1993). In order to expand the horizon of Islamic education and culture, Zia’s government established an Islamic University with an Islamic Research Center attached to it (Ahamed 1983; Islam 2001).

Usurping power from a civilian government (led by Justice Abdus Sattar), General Ershad also found handy to emphasize and continue the Islamization process (Husain 1997) to minimize his regime’s legitimacy crisis. Like Zia, he was also determined to posit Islam as the basis of state ideology (Islam 1997). From the very beginning of his autocratic rule, he made it clear in his speeches. In one occasion, the General declared:

Islam is our ideal and it is the only way to our emancipation. The existence of the country will be at stake if we fail to establish Islam in Bangladesh. We, the nine

crore [ninety million] Muslims (of Bangladesh) will certainly speak about Islam, think about Islam and dream about Islam. This is our only way for emancipation (Cited in Rahman 1985:2).

In a speech delivered before the bureaucrats, he asserted: “We will have to give Islam its rightful place in our constitution. Why should there be any fear if it [Islam] is made the state religion? After all Islam is a religion of tolerance and accommodation” (Quoted in Husain 1988:125-126; Hakim 1998:110). On another instance, he maintained: “Islam being the religion of the majority of the population will be given the highest place in the country’s future constitution and Islamic provisions will be included wherever necessary” (Quoted in Husain 1988:126; Hakim 1998:110). Islamization by Ershad regime can be summarized in the below:

- (i) Through the eighth amendment of the constitution, the regime officially declared Islam as the state religion of Bangladesh (Ahamed and Nazneen 1990; Islam 1997; Hakim 1998; Riaz 2004). However, the amendment also includes that “other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the Republic” (Shehabuddin 2008:73; Huq 2014:87).
- (ii) It established a Zakat fund to be headed by the President (Ahamed 1983; Ahamed and Nazneen 1990; Islam 1997; Hakim 1998).
- (iii) The Ershad government formulated a new education policy that intended to introduce Arabic and Islamic Studies in the both elementary and secondary schools. The President frequently asserted that the cultural life of the Bangladeshis would be firmly based on Islamic principles and ideologies (Ahamed and Nazneen 1990; Riaz 2004).

- (iv) State-run electronic media aired Islamic programs in increasing numbers (Hakim 1998). The broadcasting of *azan* (call for prayer) five times a day was made compulsory in this media (Ahmed 2004a). Verses from the Qur'an were recited before the national carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines soared high in the air and on the ground, trains rolled on the railway tracks (Ahmed 2004a).
- (v) Ershad attempted to turn the *Shaheed dibas* (Martyrs' Day/21 February), which was/is observed nationally to commemorate the sacrifices of the language martyrs, into a religious occasion through prayers and recitations from the Qur'an instead of the barefoot procession at dawn and the traditional colorful paintings known as *alpana*, which he treated as 'un-Islamic' (Hakim 1998).
- (vi) The regime established a separate directorate under the Ministry of Education for *madrasa* education, and it also made a remarkable contribution to the mushrooming growth of religious institutions including *madrasas* (Ahmed and Nazneen 1990).
- (vii) It sanctioned liberal grants to shrines and mosques, especially in order for their repairs, reconstruction, and beautification (Ahmed and Nazneen 1990; Islam 2001). Ershad made Friday, instead of Sunday, the weekly holiday (Ahmad 2008; Lintner 2015). He changed the name of Red Cross to Red Crescent (Mohsin 2004).

In the public rallies, Ershad used to project himself as a devout Muslim and a defender of Islam though he, in personal life, cared very little about the Islamic principles and practices (Hakim 1998). He frequently visited religious shrines and pirs, especially the pir of Atroshi, Faridpur (Husain 1997; Mills 1998), where he addressed many

massive gatherings of the religious devotees (Hakim 1998; Islam 2001). The pir was considered, among his following, spiritually powerful: Mills (1998) has reported that the disciples of the pir claim that everything that does happen in Atroshi is by the power of the pir. Ershad's visits to pirs and mosques were called by observers as part of his political stunt.⁴⁷ His story of 'dream prayer'⁴⁸ was a source of a kind of entertainment for people particularly in the political circle in the 1980s in Bangladesh. Hussain (2006) notes: Once after a Friday prayer in Kakrail Mosque, Ershad told a gathering that the previous night he had a dream that he was performing his Friday prayer in the mosque. The imam and the *musallis* (mosque goers) were shocked because for the last one month, security people in the intelligence service had been scanning the *musallis* saying the President was going to visit the place. Ershad used to deliver sermons in mosques before the Friday congregation and invite people to follow the true path of Islam. He performed multiple hajj and would refer to it frequently in public speeches aiming to exploit the religious sentiment of the masses. On different religious occasions, he also used to issue emotionally-charged messages to the nation (Ahamed and Nazneen 1990; Hakim 1998).

In the early 1990s, Bangladesh returned to the track of democracy. Khaleda Zia followed Zia's policy of Islamization and stressed Islamic symbolism (Riaz 2004; Shehabuddin 2008). Sheikh Hasina also demonstrated her inclination to Islamic identity and symbolism. She began using Islamic idioms, such as *bismillah*, *khuda hafez*, and *insha-Allah* in her public speeches (Riaz 2004). Party political posters displayed these idioms including Hasina's portrait with *hijab* and prayer beads in hands (Riaz 2004;

⁴⁷ See "The Stuntmen in Politics." *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 17 January 2014.

<http://www.thedailystar.net/the-stuntmen-in-politics-7013> (accessed 29 December 2015).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Shehabuddin 2008; Bennett 2010). Mainstream secular and non-secular parties regardless of their ideologies and programs equally employ Islamic idioms and phrases, particularly during the election time. For example, the most popular slogans of three parties—Awami League’s *La ilaha illallah, naukar malik tui Allah* (There is no god but Allah, the ‘boat’ belongs to Allah), BNP’s *La ilaha illallah, dhaner shishe bismillah* (There is no god but Allah, vote for the ‘sheaf of paddy’ in the name of Allah), and Jamaat’s *Vote dile pallay, khushi hobe Allahay* (Allah will be pleased with you if you vote for the ‘scale’)⁴⁹ shake every electoral constituencies (Riaz 2004; Yasmin 2010). Both Hasina and Khaleda regularly visit shrines and conventionally start their election campaign from those perceived sacred places. Governments use to take special care of the *bishwa ijtema* (the grand assembly of Tablighi Jamaat) (Sikand 1999). Both the leaders regularly join the *bishwa ijtema* (Rozario 2006). Awami League and BNP, two main parties alternate power since the 1990s, have allied with Islamic parties and groups and competed between themselves to exhibit their religious zeal to get to power what Riaz (2004:41) called “the politics of expediency.”

However, Hasina’s second term (2009-2014) opened up a new chapter of her governance that served to bring back the old secular ideology to the state. Through the fifteenth amendment of the constitution, the regime omitted the constitutional principle ‘absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah’, and in its place restored secularism; Article 12 of the 1972 constitution was reestablished (Salehin 2013; Pattanaik 2013; Jahan and Shahan 2014). Paradoxically it retained *bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) and the provision of the state religion (Salehin 2013;

⁴⁹ The election symbols of these parties are boat (Awami League), sheaf of paddy (BNP), and scale (Jamaat).

Pattanaik 2013; Jahan and Shahan 2014). Nevertheless, it has endeavored to give non-Islamic people a sense of belonging by rephrasing the Islamic provisions of the constitution: Second translation of *bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) was added that reads: “In the name of the Creator, the Merciful.”⁵⁰ In place of the Article 2A that reads: “The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the Republic”, the amended constitution reads: “The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but the State shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions.”⁵¹ The regime also omitted Article 25(2) that underlined the consolidation, preservation and strengthening of fraternal relations among the Muslim countries.⁵²

In the post-9/11 geopolitical context, Islam (2011b) argues, Hasina’s regime (2009-2014) adopted comprehensive strategies to ‘de-Islamize’ the nation, primarily to obtain the uncontested support of certain Western countries perceived as hostile to Islamism. Principally in two ways the regime sought to execute those strategies: first, by demonizing the mainstream Islamic parties, groups and institutions, and second, by threatening and limiting Islamic visibility in the public square. The Islamists, Islamic symbols and institutions are argued to have become the prime target of the secularization project of the ruling elite (Haider 2008). The project is said to be traced back to the *Harvard International Review*’s essay “Stemming the Rise of Islamic Extremism in

⁵⁰ See The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, printed with latest amendment October 2011, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, p. 1.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 2.

⁵² Ibid. p. 7.

Bangladesh” authored by Sheikh Hasina’s son Sajeeb Wazed Joy and former American military officer Carl J. Ciovacco published in November 2008 just before the ninth general elections of Bangladesh. The authors vociferously argue that the influence of Islamic politics, what they call “Islamism”, coupled with the Islamic elements within the army and Islamic education systems (madrasa education) are the major impediments to the secularization of Bangladesh (Islam 2011b).⁵³ In order to make a secular Bangladesh, they proposed a secularization project what they termed “a secular plan” entailing the secularization of the *madrasas*, the military, and the entire administration, and to implement the proposed plan, they argue secular Awami League must occupy the state power. The authors, without presenting any empirical or factual evidence, claim that the Islamists including the Jamaat-e-Islami “tend to support reunification with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.”⁵⁴ In the same token, they also claim that the militant outfits, such as Jamaatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh (JMB), Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and Harkatul Jihad (HuJi) are the militant arm of Jamaat-e-Islami.⁵⁵ These outlawed organizations “overtly denounce the Constitution and seek to replace democracy and secularism with a governing construct based on Sharia Law”, the authors add.⁵⁶ Islam (2011b) sees the essay as the blueprint for the regime that intends to transform the religiously motivated nation into a secularized one. He (2011b:7) asserts:

⁵³ Also see Carl Ciovacco and Sajeeb Wazed, “Stemming the Rise of Islamic Extremism in Bangladesh.” *Harvard International Review*, 19 November 2008.

<http://hir.harvard.edu/stemming-the-rise-of-islamic-extremism-in-bangladesh/> (accessed 1 January 2016).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Following this blueprint for its secular plan, the AL [Awami League] is now seeking to gain the support of both Muslim and non-Muslim nations by creating a discourse that attempts to portray Bangladesh as a country at risk of being overtaken by “Islamic terrorist forces.” The regime’s utilization of international trends and narratives—and willingness to play the terrorism card—is indispensable to its long-held and systematic objective of eliminating Islam from the country’s political and social landscape.

Deviating from her father’s later approach, Sheikh Hasina in her second term of premiership began to shrink the religious (Islam’s) space in the Majoritarian Muslim state—a situation Islam (2011a:125) phrased as “‘minority Islam’ in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.” Apart from the replacement of secularism in the Islamic provisions of the constitution, the regime consciously adopted political measures to pave the way for a secular Bangladesh. These include, according to Islam (2011a:128-137), the *jongification* (arbitrarily linking to militancy) of the Islamic political parties; creating a discourse of War-criminals; embarking on massive crackdown on Islamic parties; controlling Islamic institutions; secularizing education; banning religious gatherings; and changing the Muslim family law.⁵⁷ The ruling coterie began to vehemently attack Islamic institutions and symbols, and tried to associate them with terrorism. For example, addressing at a workshop in Dhaka on 1 April 2009, the then Law Minister Barrister Shafique Ahmed, showing no evidence, asserts: “Qawmi madrasas are turning into breeding grounds of religion-based terrorism.”⁵⁸ Participating at a roundtable discussion in Dhaka on 16 July 2010, the then Deputy Speaker of the parliament Colonel (Rtd) Shawkat Ali spoke out

⁵⁷ For detailed discussion, see Islam (2011a).

⁵⁸ See “122 Outfits Involved in Terrorism, Says Law Minister.” *The Daily Star*, 2 April 2009, Dhaka. <http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=82385> (accessed 31 December 2015).

against the *burka* (Muslim veil) stating “only those who have ugly faces use religion to cover them.”⁵⁹ Sajeeb Wazed Joy earlier observed that the sale of *burkas* had risen to nearly 500 percent over a period of five years (presumably he referred to the BNP regime, 2001-2006) and saw it as an indication of the growing tide of Islamism, and thus offered policy suggestions to stop it.⁶⁰ Consequently, a number of educational institutions including BRAC University⁶¹ Chittagong Nursing College⁶², and Sociology Department of Rajshahi University (Islam 2011a) moved to ban *hijab* (headscarf) and *niqab* (face veil). Chittagong Nursing College even went one step further than others; speaking to a television channel, the students wearing *hijab* alleged that the principal of the college even prevented them from performing their prayer: “Hosne Ara [principal of the college] madam has said, if we [students] do nurse well, serve people, we will not require *namaz* [prayer]. [She further adds] who sees your *namaz*? But, everyone will see your nursing.”⁶³ A number of scholars interviewed by the author have noted that religious symbols are not merely symbols; they have a great deal to do with identity, Muslim identity in this case. Interviewees have suggested that the attack on this identity is highly likely to be counter-productive.

⁵⁹ See *Daily Naya Diganta*, 17 July 2010, Dhaka; *Daily Amar Desh*, 17 July 2010, Dhaka.

⁶⁰ See Carl Ciovacco and Sajeeb Wazed, op. cit.

⁶¹ See Mastura Tasnim, “The Niqab Debate.” *The Daily Star*, 3 October 2013, Dhaka. <http://archive.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/the-niqab-debate/> (accessed 3 January 2016).

⁶² See “Chittagong Nursing College: Attire Restriction Sparks Student Protest.” *The Daily Star*, 3 July 2012, Dhaka. <http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=240693> (accessed 3 January 2016).

⁶³ See the report: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qniBZOV3tWM> (accessed 3 January 2016).

7.3 Islamization promoted by non-state actors/non-political institutions and groups

Bangladesh is home to a large body of Islamic institutions and organizations which continue to serve the Islamic cause. These organizations include both political and non-political or in other words, social, cultural and educational institutions and groups. This section focuses on the non-political organizations and institutions which have made great contributions to the promotion of Islamization in Bangladesh. The role of the organized Islam-based political parties in promoting both Islamization and Islamism will be analyzed in the next chapter.

Ahamed (1983) has classified non-political social, cultural and educational organizations, which play a major role in the process of Islamization in Bangladesh, into three groups:

The first group includes such institutions as madrasas, mosques, and Tablighi Jamaat. The centers formed around the *mazars* (tombs) of the famous *sufis* and saints and widely used for prayer and meditation belong to the second group. The third group consists of the numerous socio-religious and cultural organizations which function not only for social welfare and relief but also for the cause of Islam (Ahamed 1983:1115).

The first group should also include two other important religious movements—the recently emerged Hefazat-e-Islam and the Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan.

7.3.1 Madrasas and mosques

Madrasas have been in existence in Bangladesh for ages (Riaz 2008). As discussed in chapter four, Islamic educational institutions began to flourish with the advent of Islam in Bengal in the hands of the Sufis and saints, as early as the eighth century, but the

conquest of Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtyar Khalji in the beginning of the thirteenth century paved the way for institutionalization of *madrasas*. Since then, *madrasas* have become a part of mainstream education. Even during the colonial era, many members of aristocratic Muslim families and Muslim political elites received their education in these *madrasas* (Ahamed 1983). Both the Pakistan and Bangladesh epochs have witnessed a steady upward growth of *madrasas* in the current Bangladesh territory. According to Riaz (2008:116), “Over the last sixty years, socioeconomic conditions, government policies, and political dynamics all have played parts in the proliferation and transformation of madrassahs in Bangladesh.” One statistics shows that in 1975-1976, there were 1,830 *madrasas*, with 18728 teachers and 291,191 students of both sexes; in 1988 there were more than 2,700 *madrasas*, with 26,500 teachers and 541,500 students (Ahamed and Nazneen 1990:798). Another statistics shows that between 1972 and 2004 the number of *madrasa* has grown 731 percent, and the number of students attending these institutions has also increased phenomenally (Riaz 2008:116).

After the partition in 1947, there were at least five kinds of *madrasas* in East Pakistan: the old-scheme *madrasas*, the new-scheme *madrasas*, the *madrasas* of the Deoband tradition, Hafizia *madrasas*, and the *maktabs* or preprimary *madrasas*. At independence, Bangladesh inherited four types of *madrasas*: Aliya *madrasas*, which were government-supported and modeled after the Calcutta Madrasa (and later the Dhaka Aliya Madrasa); Qawmi *madrasas*, which were privately managed *madrasas* and modeled after the Deoband Madrasa; Furkania/Hafizia *madrasas*, which were intended for offering pre-primary education for about four years—the basic Islamic education—and exclusively meant for memorizing the Holy Qur’an; and Nurani *madrasas/maktabs*,

which offered pre-primary education—literacy and basic knowledge of Islam (Riaz 2008). To date, all these types of *madrasas* exist and continue to rise in both rural and urban settings in the country. While the government-funded *madrasas* (*Aliya madrasas*) impart both modern and Islamic education, the Qawmi *madrasas* mainly teach the traditional Islamic knowledge. Imam for mosques and teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies for schools and colleges are trained in these institutions. Only a few of the meritorious students from these schools make headway for higher study in the universities (Ahamed 1983).

Like *madrasas*, the building of mosques in Bangladesh is also traced back to the early Muslim settlements. The Muslim rulers and preachers, especially of the early period, established numerous mosques as noted in chapter five. The country's capital Dhaka is known as a "city of mosques." In fact, Bangladesh has earned the moniker of a "country of mosques." At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there were an estimated 190,000 mosques in the country (Kershen 2005:93). Another statistics suggests that there are over 200,000 mosques spread over approximately 55,126 square miles of territory (Huque and Akhter 1987:210). Mosques are central to the Muslim way of life. The imams and preachers of these mosques regularly preach and adjudicate Islamic laws and the rules established by the Prophet (Chowdhury 1993). Beyond religious purposes, mosques in Bangladesh also work as a center of sociocultural activities and a symbol of identity in a locality (Islam and Noble 1998). A number of large-scale mosque-centered organizations have been established. They include among others Bangladesh Masjid Mission, Masjid Samaj, and Baitush Sharaf. These organizations coordinate the activities of a large segment of mosques and outline programs for religious-cultural activities

including the propagation of Islam, the spread of Islamic education, and social service and reform in line with the principles of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Ahamed 1983). Inspired by Prophet Muhammad's declaration that the building of and donation of funds to mosques is a virtuous work (Hasan 2007), the Bangladeshi Muslims generously come up with funds for the construction of new mosques and the extension, repair and beautification of old ones. The government also grants funds for mosques including other non-Islamic religious institutions.

7.3.2 The Hefazat-e-Islam and the Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan

The Hefazat-e-Islam (Protection of Islam) is a Qawmi *madrasa*-based religious organization which emerged in 2010 in response to the then government's secular education policy. However, it came into prominence in 2013 after the launch of the "Shahbag Movement" (under the banner of Ganojagoron Mancha) that demanded the death penalty for the Islamist leaders who were accused of committing war crimes during Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971. The Shahbag Movement was spearheaded by a group of online activists who were accused of being atheists and writing commentaries derogatory of Islam and its Prophet Muhammad. The Hefazat burst onto the scene in February 2013 following the mass media publicity of these writings (Hasan 2015) and launched a 13-point charter of demands. These included reinstatement of the constitutional provision of absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah, and cancellation of all laws repugnant of the Quran and Sunnah; enactment of an anti-blasphemy law with provision for the death penalty (for anyone found guilty of "insulting" Islam or the Prophet); making Islamic education mandatory from primary to higher secondary levels,

and cancelling the women, and education policies which they termed anti-religious; a ban on free mixing of men and women in public and on candlelit vigils what they called an anti-national culture; an end to mock Islamic symbols and culture, and an attempt to create hatred in the young minds against Islam by portraying villain and negative character of Muslims in the mass media including radio and television; an end to erect sculptures in public places; and declaring members of the Ahmadiyya community non-Muslims.⁶⁴

In April 2013, the Hefazat presented the government this charter of demands in a huge public rally. It also gave the government a thirty-day ultimatum to take measures to implement their demands. The period for the ultimatum passed without any government action. On 5 May 2013, Hefazat organized a blockade and rally at Matijheel, Dhaka in which hundreds of thousands of people mostly the students and teachers of the Qawmi Madrasas across the country attended. Prior to this, the permission to hold the program was given on the condition that it would be over by dusk. However, the siege continued even after dusk and eventually came to an end before the dawn of the following day as the security forces cracked down on the blockaders which cost, as the Hefazat claimed, thousands of lives of their activists. The government, however, initially claimed that no one had been killed (Riaz 2014a:126) though later acknowledged that eleven people were dead in that incident.⁶⁵ London-based *The Economist*, attributing the figure to European

⁶⁴ See “Hefazater 13 Dabi” (13-Point Demand of Hefazat), *bdnews24.com*, Dhaka, 7 April 2013. <http://bangla.bdnews24.com/bangladesh/article610788.bdnews> (accessed 22 January 2016).

⁶⁵ See “Bangladesh: Independent Body Should Investigate Protest Deaths.” *Human Rights Watch*, 10 May 2013. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/10/bangladesh-independent-body-should-investigate-protest-deaths> (accessed 24 January 2016).

diplomats in Dhaka, put it at fifty (Riaz 2014a:126). *The Economist* also described the incident as “like a massacre.”⁶⁶ Local human rights body *Odhikar* reported the death toll being “some hundreds”⁶⁷, while Human Rights Watch’s report said “large numbers”⁶⁸ and Asian Human Rights Commission’s report suggested that “the number of deaths could be as high as 2,500 or more.”⁶⁹ The local media remained silent about that incident for understandable reasons. Two television stations—Diganta TV and Islamic TV—that were live telecasting the incident were immediately closed down by the government.⁷⁰ These stations are still shut down. Habibun Nabi Khan Sohel, a BNP leader who was interviewed by the author, criticizes the Awami League government’s regulation of free mass media; “the Awami League government is a regressive government which always regresses and takes the country to regression. Although there has been a remarkable development of mass media in our country, the Awami League government always tries to control the positive role of the media.” The Mujib regime in the 1970s, Sohel continues, started regulating mass media by banning all the newspapers except four state-

⁶⁶ See “Political Violence in Bangladesh: In Hot Blood: The Killings of Islamist Hardliners Promise Further Instability.” *The Economist*, 11 May 2013.

<http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21577418-killings-islamist-hardliners-promise-further-instability-hot-blood> (accessed 23 January 2016).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ See “Bangladesh: Independent Body Should Investigate Protest Deaths.” *Human Rights Watch*, 10 May 2013.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/10/bangladesh-independent-body-should-investigate-protest-deaths> (accessed 24 January 2016).

⁶⁹ See “Bangladesh: A Massacre of Demonstrators.” *Asian Human Rights Commission*, 6 May 2013.

<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-088-2013/?searchterm=Hefazat-e-islam> (accessed 24 January 2016).

⁷⁰ Ibid. Also see “Bangladesh: Independent Body Should Investigate Protest Deaths.” *Human Rights Watch*, 10 May 2013. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/10/bangladesh-independent-body-should-investigate-protest-deaths> (accessed 24 January 2016).

owned dailies, such as Bangladesh Times, Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Daily Ittefaq. The author's observation, however, suggests that both military and civilian governments, throughout the history of independent Bangladesh, have tended to control mass media more or less by employing various political and legal mechanisms. Mohammad Jasim, a graduate student from Govt. B.M. College who participated in a focus discussion, observes that there is a tendency of every government in Bangladesh, no matter whether it is constituted by the Awami League or BNP or the military to control the mass media. The control just varies in terms of degree, adds Jasim.

The Hefazat-e-Islam's movement was successfully subdued by the government. However, Hefazat has not retreated from its 13-point charter of demands. In an interview with the author, Mufti Fayzullah, Hefazat's Joint-Secretary, told that Hefazat had just adopted a "strategy" to avert confrontations with the government. The movement for their 13-point demand would continue until they were eventually met, he added.

The Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan (Ahl-i-Hadith Movement) aims at reviving the spirit of the classical pristine Islam by following only the Qur'an and the authentic sayings of the Prophet. Although the term "*ahl-i-hadith*" literally refers to the followers of the Prophetic traditions, the creed of this movement consists of the teachings of Qur'an and the authoritative traditions of the Prophet. In terms of *aqeeda*, the Ahl-i-Hadith emphasized the doctrine of the absolute unity of God, the eradication of all innovations, and, above all, the rejection of the four recognized Sunni Schools of thought (Titus 1930; al-Quraishi 1992; Ahmad 1967; Mohsin 1990; al-Ghalib 2005). The ulama of these four schools have thus been critical of the Ahl-i-Hadith and entitled them as *ghair muqallid* (non-conformist) or *la madhabi* (followers of no *madhab* or *imam*). However, the proponents

of this movement claim that their imam is the Prophet himself, and the *Sahabas* (companions of the Prophet), the *Tabi'is* (companions of the Prophet's companions) and their followers all were Ahl-i-Hadith (al-Ghalib 2005). The Ahl-i-Hadith opposes the *ahl-i-ray* who are said to follow *taqlid* (blind imitation) of the *faqih*s (Islamic jurists). According to al-Ghalib (2005), the Ahl-i-Hadith is referred to as *ahlul-hadith*, *ashabul-hadith*, *ahlus-sunnate-wal-jamaat*, *ahlul-asar*, and *ahlul-haq muhaddisin* in various authoritative books of *Hadith* and *Fiqh*. They are also known as *Salafi* (the followers of the people of righteous path). In different parts of the world, al-Ghalib (2005) continues, the Ahl-i-Hadith is introduced in a variety of names: in Egypt, Sudan and Sri Lanka, they are called as *ansarus-sunnah*; in the Middle East as *salafi*; in Indonesia as *jamaat-i-muhammadiyah*; and in the Indian Subcontinent, they are known as *muhammadi* and *ahl-i-hadith*.

Historically, the Ahl-i-Hadith appeared as a significant religious and social reform movement in the Indian subcontinent in the early nineteenth century (Mohsin 1990). It was related to the reform movement launched by Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi (1703-1762). Siddiq Hasan Khan (1832-1890) and Syed Nazir Hossain (1805-1902) are credited to have played a pioneering role in spreading the Ahl-i-Hadith movement in the subcontinent. In Bengal, the same was done by Maulana Abu Abdullah Mansur Rahman Ansari in the sixties of the nineteenth century. Ansari's sons Maulana Abdul Jabbar Ansari and Abdul Hakim Ansari greatly helped spread their father's cause. About the same time, two other personalities—Maulana Wilayet Ali and Maulana Inayet Ali—played a leading role in widening the sphere of the movement in Bengal. After the partition of India in 1947, the movement was spearheaded prominently among others by

Maulana Abdullahil Baqi and his brother Maulana Abdullahil Kafi al-Quraishi and son Professor Muhammad Abdul Bari (former vice chancellor of Rajshahi University and National University). During this time, the organization founded its printing and publishing house which paved the way for easy publication of the movement-oriented books, journals and magazines that eventually led to the extension of the activities of the movement (Mohsin 1990).

The aims and objects of the Ahl-i-Hadith movement are as follows:

- (i) the reorganization of the Muslim community (the *Jamat-i-Muhammadi*) through concerted efforts and the implementation of the principle of *Kalima Tayeba* in all spheres of life;
- (ii) to bring the community under a single banner irrespective of political and other rivalries and differences;
- (iii) to eradicate all innovations and oppressions from the society;
- (iv) to expose the ideologies propagated by the imperialist, expansionist, and communist powers;
- (v) to invite the educated people of Bangladesh to make realistic comparisons between the Islamic way of life and the other systems;
- (vi) to find out ways to eradicate poverty, corruption, and other social evils; and
- (vii) to render social and humanitarian services to the people (Mohsin 1990:182).

The Ahl-i-Hadith movement in Bangladesh is not directly involved in any organized politics; however, unlike the Tablighi Jamaat, its followers are not devoid of political consciousness. They are highly zealous of the religious, social and political role of the Indian and Bengali Muslim reformers, such as Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi, Shah Ismail Shaheed, Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly, Haji Shari'at Allah, and Titu Mir (the author

interviewed Muzaffar Bin Mohsin, the then President of Ahl-i-Hadith Youth Movement). The Ahl-i-Hadith considers modern political and economic philosophy, such as democracy, socialism, capitalism, nationalism, and secularism as “*kuffari matabad*” (the doctrine of unbelief) (al-Ghalib 2005:36). Through building mosques and *madrasas*, publishing journals and books, and regularly organizing seminars and conferences, the Ahl-i-Hadith has emerged as a strong religious movement in Bangladesh.

7.3.3 The Tablighi Jamaat

The Tablighi Jamaat is a popular Islamic movement in contemporary Bangladesh. Originating from Northern India in the 1920s, the Tablighi Jamaat emerged as a response to the sociopolitical, cultural and religious developments of the time, such as the Hindu-Muslim conflict, the dismemberment of the Ottoman Caliphate and subsequently the Khilafat movement, the declining of colonization, and a growing Muslim nationalist movement for creating a separate Muslim state in contemporary India (Ahmad 1991). These developments, according to Ahmad (1991:511), were also facilitated by the “emergence of right-wing Hindu revivalist movements, especially the *shuddhi* (purification) and *sangathan* (consolidation) movements that were founded to reclaim those fallen-away Hindus who had converted to Islam in the past.” More importantly, the emergence of Tablighi Jamaat can be seen as a direct response to the social, cultural, moral, and religious decadence of the contemporary Muslims in India and particularly in Mewat, the hometown of the founder of the Jamaat Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944), a Deoband educated Islamic scholar. Nadwi (1978:24-25), a close associate and

biographer of Maulana Ilyas, has depicted the religious ignorance and decadence of the then Indian Muslims. Quoting from Powlett, he informs that—

All the Meos [people of Mewat] are now Muslims, but only in name. Their village deities are the same as those of the Hindu landlords, and they celebrate several Hindu festivals ... Meos are largely ignorant of their faith (Islam). Very few of them know the *kalima*, and fewer still observe *namaz* regularly. About the hours and rules of *namaz*, their ignorance is complete.

The Tablighi Jamaat has turned into a global Islamic movement in the contemporary world. The organization has vibrant activities all across the planet earth (Haq 1972). Nonetheless, there body of literature on the topic remains scarce. The prime reason, according to Sikand (1999), might be the fact that the Tablighi authorities themselves discourage writing about their movement having a worldview of Islam that involves a ‘practical activity’ and not something to be simply written or read about. Maulana Manzoor Nomani, a prominent spiritual guide of the Tablighi Jamaat, is reported to have said that “Tablighi work is not a book, it is action” (Cited in Ahmad 1991:516). The Tablighi authorities exclusively focus on the spiritual development of individuals and tend to shun the exposition of the organization. Metcalf (1996:110) thus describes Tablighi Jamaat as “a quietist movement of spiritual renewal.”

The Tablighi Jamaat believes in spreading the message of Islam (*tabligh*) first among the Muslims themselves to make them better Muslims, strictly observant of the Shari’ah in every aspect of their private life (Sikand 1999). The movement does not stipulate the preaching of the faith of Islam among the non-Muslims, at least in the beginning; rather it suggests that if Muslims faithfully follow Islam in their personal lives, non-Muslims would be so impressed that they themselves would offer to embrace

the faith (Sikand 1999). The Jamaat is run by the voluntary contributions made by its members and isolates itself from politics.

The Tablighi movement gained its foothold in East Bengal before the partition of India in 1947 however, only began to rise in the region after partition. Several professional individuals most of whom hailed from India were responsible for the early spread of the movement in the place now called Bangladesh. Haji Mohsin Ahmad, an emigrant from Calcutta and later on a teacher of the then Dhaka Engineering College (later BUET), made a great contribution in this regard (Sikand 1999). In fact, he is considered the pioneer of this puritanical movement in Bangladesh. Among others, Maulana Abdul Aziz from Khulna, Maulana Akbar Ali from Brahmanbaria, Maulana Munir and Maulana Lutfur Rahman from Noakhali, Maulana Ambar Ali from Dhaka, Maulana Ashraf Ali from Mymensingh, and Engineer Abdul Muqid spread the movement across the country (Sikand 1999). Today, Tablighi Jamaat in Bangladesh has become one of the largest Islamic movements that is actively working in almost every nook and corner of the country. It has a *markaz* (a central mosque from where activities are coordinated) in every district and most sub-district or *Thana* headquarters (Sikand 1999). The movement has attracted people from all walks of life, from the urban educated middle class to rural unlettered poorer class. A substantial number of college-university teachers, doctors, engineers, government and non-government employees, peasants, and laborers all flock together to the path of spiritual awakening under the umbrella of the Tablighi Jamaat. The biggest congregation of the Jamaat called *bishwa ijtema* is held on the bank of the river Turag at Tongi, some fifteen kilometers north of Dhaka city, and joined by hundreds of thousands of devotees. The *akheri munajat* (concluding prayer) of

the congregation is attended by millions of people including the local political elites, such as the President, Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition of the Republic. The local media highlights the occasion with special significance. The *bishwa ijtema* is said to be the second largest Muslim congregation after the Hajj (Husain 1997).

The Tablighi Jamaat works under six basic principles which were earlier developed by Maulana Ilyas. These include *kalimah* (the profession of faith), *salaat* (ritual prayer), *ilm* and *dhikr* (knowledge and remembrance of Allah), *ikram-i-Muslim* (respect for Muslim), *ikhlas-i-niyat* (emendation of intention and sincerity), and *tafrigh-i-waqt* (to spare time) (Ali 2003). The *kalimah* or the article of faith relates to the assertion that there is no god worthy of worship but Allah and that the Prophet Muhammad is His messenger. This *kalimah* that expresses the existence and supremacy of the one and only God and the recognition of the Prophet as God's messenger who alone deserves obedience is in fact the basic foundation of the Islamic tradition. The second principle—*salaat*—underlines the ritual prayer for five times a day. This is considered most crucial to a practical life, spiritual elevation, piety in actions, and an act of salvation from the trials and tribulations of this world and the Hereafter. The third principle—*ilm* and *dhikr*—emphasizes the investment of a little time regularly after the morning and evening *salaat*. During these sessions, apart from listening to *bayan* (the preaching) by the *ameer* (leader) or the *murabbi* (elder), the congregation performs *nafl* (additional) prayers, recites the religious texts, and invokes prescribed *dhikr* and *tasbih*. One of the unique features of the Jamaat is that they, being divided into groups, dine together literally from the same dish which they consider as the Sunnah of the Prophet and his companions. The fourth principle—*ikram-i-Muslim*—stipulates that the demonstration of honor and

deference toward fellow Muslims is crucial to the Islamic way of life. The younger Muslims should be treated with kindness and affection by the elder Muslims, and the elder Muslims should be shown due deference by the younger Muslims. The fifth principle—*ikhlas-i-niyat*—highlights the sincerity of actions. The real meaning of the worshipping of Allah is underlined in this principle that requires every Muslim to perform his/her every single action only for the sake of Allah and for self-reformation (Ali 2003). The final principle—*tafrigh-i-waqt*—suggests that one needs to spare time in the way of Allah in order for renewing and purifying one's *iman* (faith) and *amal* (actions). The sparing of time is considered most significant in the Tablighi Jamaat. One has to leave home and make voluntary tour what is called *khuruj* for the sake of *da'wah* (preaching) as well as for self-reformation and spiritual uplift.

The Tablighi Jamaat does not follow any formal bureaucratic organizational structure and procedure. Despite being in existence for nearly a century, it still demonstrates a free-floating and informal organization with no full-time workers, no elaborate office records, no division of labor, and no institutional procedures (Ahmad 1991). Despite this fact, the *tabligh* work has expanded to more than two hundred countries. The organization has an *Ameer* (leader) who is elected for life by its elders, and there is a *shura* (consultative body) that counsels the *Ameer*. Nevertheless, the decisions are made not by maintaining any formal procedures but very often by basing on dreams and *basharat* (inspirations) (Ahmad 1991). A strict order of religious discipline fills the vacuum created by the absence of a formal bureaucratic procedural organization.

The Tablighi Jamaat is argued to have become a closed system. There is no change in its methodology adopted by its founder nearly a century ago. The leaders of the

Jamaat argue that the methodology they follow is based on the Sunnah of the Prophet, and hence there can be no change in it (Ahmad 1991). On the other hand, the Jamaat discourages its workers and followers reading Islamic literature written by any scholars other than those who are involved in it. In fact, the literature produced by two of the Jamaat's major ideologues—Maulana Muhammad Zakariya and Maulana Manzoor Nomani—are the prescribed readings for all Tablighi workers. A Tablighi worker reads very little outside the prescribed Tablighi curriculum which mainly consists of several essays authored and compiled in a volume entitled *Tablighi Nisab* (Tablighi curriculum) by Maulana Zakariya (Ahmad 1991). The essays deal with the life stories of *sahaabah* (the companions of the Prophet) and the virtues of the Qur'an, *salaat* (prayer), *dhikr* (remembrance of God), charity, hajj, *tabligh* and salutation (*durud*) to the Prophet. "Written in a simple and lucid Urdu and based mostly on inspirational but historically suspect traditions, *Tablighi Nisab* is probably the only book that the majority of the Tablighi workers would consider worth reading" (Ahmad 1991:516). These essays are the basic source material for the conventional speech made by the Tablighi preachers before the assemblies throughout the world.

The Tablighi Jamaat stays aloof from politics. Its leaders believe that true religious faith can be practiced only in freedom from politics. Their worldview of politics constitutes a realm infested with negative externalities. Ahmad (1991:519) has quoted from a senior Tablighi worker from Pakistan which reveals Jamaat's attitude toward politics:

In order to be successful in politics, one has to tell lies, to cheat and deceive others. One has to indulge in double-dealing and dishonesty. Those who are engaged in politics, whether they call themselves Islamic or secular, are always

ready to compromise on their principles and values in the name of pragmatism, political strategy, tactics, or whatever. The truth is that one cannot remain in politics for long without compromising on the moral values that are so dear to Islam.

A similar view was made by a senior Tablighi leader from Bangladesh while talking to the author at Kakrail Mosque, Dhaka preferring anonymity. With regard to Islamization, Tablighi Islam and political Islam remain in congruence but differ in methodology. The Tablighi movement believes in the bottom-up approach in which reformation and spiritual awakening of individuals guarantee social transformation and collective wellbeing. While Islamists emphasize the top-down approach in which political transformation precedes reformation in other aspects of life and leads to social transformation and collective wellbeing. Maulana Mawdudi's Jamaat-e-Islami and Maulana Ilyas' Tablighi Jamaat have historically been in dispute on this methodological posture. Although both leaders came from the Deoband tradition and were equally concerned about Islam and the contemporary Muslims, they split over the path toward Islamization. When Mawdudi formed the Jamaat-e-Islami in the early 1940s, Maulana Manzoor Nomani and Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (both later became prominent ideologues of the Tablighi Jamaat) joined it. Maulana Nomani was even elected the senior vice-president of the party (second to Maulana Mawdudi). However, due to Mawdudi's methodology, both Nomani and Nadwi left the Jamaat-e-Islami soon after. Similarly, Maulana Wahiduddin (later joined the Tablighi Jamaat) resigned from a prominent position in the Jamaat-e-Islami of India in the 1960s. Nomani, Nadwi and Wahiduddin accused Maulana Mawdudi of being excessively concerned with worldly

power and politics and of belittling the fundamental object of Islamic *dawah* which is to bring people closer to God and to elevate their religious consciousness (Ahmad 1991).

However, the Tablighi Jamaat, during its formative years, did not demonstrate the intense antipathy toward politics that became, what Ahmad (1991:521) calls, “its trademark in the post-partition period.”

Although Maulana Ilyas kept himself completely aloof from politics and focused his program of action exclusively on making Muslims aware of their religious obligations, he never criticized Islamic groups actively engaged in politics. On the contrary, he maintained extremely cordial relations with Maulana Husain Ahmad Madni and other ulama of the Deoband School whose political organization, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, an aggressively anti-British and pro-Indian National Congress group, was active in politics. Maulana Ilyas had equally warm relations with the pro-Pakistan faction of the Deoband School led by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi ... Maulana Ilyas was of the view that the Tabligh movement and politically oriented Islamic groups, although operating in two different spheres, were complementing each other’s work. Hence there should be no competition and rivalry between them (Ahmad 1991:521).

The shift from an apolitical to an explicitly antipolitical stance of the Tablighi Jamaat is said to have resulted from three major developments in the social, political and cultural landscape of the subcontinent: “the traumatic experience of the partition of India which lead to death and misery for millions, the post-partition Indian situation in which Muslim politics came to be seen as a lingering remnant of Muslim separatism, and the increasing popularity of the politically oriented Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan among the refugees from India, especially during its vigorous and popular campaign for an Islamic

constitution in the 1950s” (Ahmad 1991:521). Another context that accompanied this shift included the spread of the Jamaat’s activities beyond the subcontinent, particularly to Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America. Jamaat’s estrangement from politics was believed to facilitate its missionary work in those areas, dispel the plausible apprehensions of the host governments about its mission and thus comprehensively serve the basic purpose of Islam (Sikand 2006). The Tablighi workers, however, are not completely isolated from politics. They regularly exercise their voting rights and often contest in elections, though by their choice, as was acknowledged by the anonymous Tablighi leader at Kakrail Mosque in Dhaka.

All in all, the Tablighi Jamaat has become one of the most influential religious movements for twenty-first century Islam in general, and Bangladeshi Islam in particular.

7.3.4 The Sufis and saints/pirs, and their shrines

Islam was spread in Bangladesh largely by the Sufis and saints who came from other parts of the world especially the Arabian Peninsula as has been elaborated in chapter four. These Sufis and saints or in other words called pirs were highly revered in the society. Their *mazars* (tombs) and shrines are regularly visited by a large number of people in the hope for peace of mind and spiritual wellbeing till this day. Among hundreds of such shrines, the Shah Jalal and Shah Paran Dargah of Sylhet, Shah Makhdum Dargah of Rajshahi, Shah Niyamat and Bayazid Bistami Shrine of Chittagong, Shah Ali Mazar of Mirpur (Dhaka), and the Khan Jahan Ali Dargah of Bagerhat are most renowned (Ahamed and Nazneen 1990; Islam 1997). The visitors often offer monetary and other donations (*dan*) to these shrines, thinking it an act of the fulfillment of religious

duty. Many do *manat* (intention for donation) to shrines to gain prosperity and get rid of difficulty in personal life.⁷¹ *Urs* (celebration of the death anniversary of the saint) is regularly organized in shrines and tens of hundreds of devotees of the deceased saint join it. However, this syncretistic Islam which is often branded as *pir puja* (worshipping saints) and *mazar puja* (worshipping the graves) is vehemently opposed by a large section of ulama, who regard these practices as *shirk* (polytheism) and *bid'ah* (sinful innovations) in the religion (al-Ghalib 2005).

According to the government statistics released in 1981, there were at least 298,000 pirs in Bangladesh (al-Ghalib 2005:45). These pirs have their respective traditions which do not necessarily agree with one another even in both Islamic *aqeeda* (doctrinal beliefs) and practices. For example, many of the religious beliefs and practices of the Atroshi and Dewanbagi traditions do not resemble the traditions followed by the pirs of Charmonai, Sarsina and Nesarabad. The latter groups accuse the former groups of having deviated from authentic Islamic *aqeeda*, teachings and practices.⁷² Furthermore, unlike the Tablighi Jamaat, the Charmonai and Atroshi traditions are not isolated from direct political involvement with them even having their own political platforms—Islami Andolan Bangladesh (established by the late Charmonai pir Maulana Syed Fazlul Karim) and Zaker Party (formed by the late Atroshi pir Maulana Hashmatullah, commonly known in Atroshi's circle as Khwjababa Faridpuri). These Islamic parties are active in politics. Although Sarsina, Nesarabad and Dewanbagi traditions are not directly involved in politics, they have their respective Islamic organizations.

⁷¹ A number of visitors while visiting some of these shrines acknowledged this fact with the author.

⁷² Ashraf Ali Akan (Chormonai tradition), Maulana Syed Sharafat Ali (Sarsina tradition) and Maulana Khalilur Rahman (Nesarabad tradition) shared this view with the author.

The pir traditions in Bangladesh are rooted in the practice of Sufi orders, such as the *Naqshbandiyah*, *Mujaddidiya*, *Qaderiyah* and *Chishtiyah* in India. The Atroshi tradition is an offshoot of these Sufi orders. Maulana Hashmatullah (1910-2001) was a disciple of Maulana Yunus Ali Enayetpuri (1886-1952), a follower of the *Naqshbandiyah-Mujaddidiya* order and the pir of Enayetpur, who was an active supporter of Muslim League politics (Mills 1998). However, the Atroshi tradition is highly critical of the *Wahhabism* and *Salafism*, and it, in fact, denounces these movements as a modern *fitna* (chaos and discord in religion) in Islam (Hye 2014). It also virulently criticizes the Deoband tradition (Hye 2014) as well as political Islam especially advanced by Maulana Mawdudi. Atroshi's political platform Zaker Party does not see secularism as contradictory to Islam, and it supports the incorporation of secularism (as a state ideology) in the constitution (Kabir 2015). The pir of Atroshi enjoyed enormous power and influence particularly during the Ershad regime. Ershad himself was his *murid* (disciple); 12 ministers, 62 members of parliament, and at least 3 generals were also *murids* (Husain 1997:92). The pir amassed wealth, and constructed a 600-bed hospital, entered into the textile business, built a spinning mill and resorted to a machinery import business (Mills 1998). This tradition claims to have millions of followers who play an important role in Islamization.

The pir of Dewanbag Mahbub-e-Khoda Dewanbagi is a self-proclaimed freedom fighter, great reformer, reviver of Muhammadi Islam, the father of modern Sufism, and the emperor of the Sufis (*Sufi Samrat*). According to several booklets published by the Sufi Foundation Bangladesh (founded by the Dewanbagi pir), the Dewanbagi has introduced the *Sultania-Mujaddadiya Tariqa* by reforming the system of *tasauf* befitting

the times. He also claims that he has upheld the real ideals of the Prophet, what he calls “Muhammadi Islam”, for mankind with the esoteric as well as the exoteric reforms.⁷³ The Dewanbagi further claims that at the blessed hours on 16 December 1983, God assigned him with the responsibility of a great reformer.⁷⁴ Subsequently, at the blessed hours on 5 April 1989, the Prophet Muhammad entitled him as “the reviver of Islam”, he adds.⁷⁵ In his book *Allah Kon Pothe?* (God to Which Path?), the Dewanbagi proclaims that he has seen God Who is an adolescent of twenty-one and has no beard and mustache.⁷⁶ Proclamations like this are however viewed by scholars of Islam (Ulama) as a mere distortion of Islam as God cannot be seen with human eyes, even in dreams.

The Dewanbagi pir has established a *madrassa*, a school, a hospital, an orphanage, and several research organizations, such as Sultania-Mujaddadiya Research Center, Sufi Foundation, and Al Qur’an Research Center for Islamic research. He claims to have founded hundreds of mosques and *Khankahs* in different parts of Bangladesh and beyond. Apart from writing books, he has published a number of journals and magazines, such as *The Atmar Bani* (dictum of the soul), *The Message*, and *The Dewanbagi*.⁷⁷ The Dewanbagi has thousands of followers and *murids* who are contributing to the advancement of his teachings and doctrinal beliefs (*aqeeda*).

⁷³ The booklets published by the Sufi Foundation include inter alia *Wazifa* (A Sufi’s practice of chanting), *Mukti Kon Pothe?* (Salvation to Which Path?), *Shanti Kon Pothe?* (Peace to Which Path?), and *Manater Nirdeshika* (Guideline for Economic Vows), and *Yazider Chokhrante Muhammadi Islam* (Muhammadi Islam in Yazid’s Plot).

⁷⁴ See *Mukti Kon Pothe?*, p. 9; *Shanti Kon Pothe?*, p. 9; *Manater Nirdeshika*, p. 13; and *Wazifa*, p. 11.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ See *Allah Kon Pothe?*, p. 21.

⁷⁷ See *Mukti Kon Pothe?*, pp. 9-10; *Shanti Kon Pothe?*, pp. 9-10; *Manater Nirdeshika*, pp. 13-14; and *Wazifa*, pp. 11-12.

The Sarsina-Nesarabad tradition, which is critical of the Atroshi-Dewanbag tradition, is an offshoot of the Furfura tradition of Calcutta. Maulana Nesaruddin Ahmed and Maulana Azizur Rahman Nesarabadi (commonly known as Quaid Saheb Huzur) were founders of Sarsina and Nesarabad traditions respectively. However, Sarsina became prominent during the late pir Maulana Shah Abu Jafar Muhammad Abu Saleh, who was also the pir of Quaid Saheb Huzur. During the Pakistan period, President Ayub Khan visited Sarsina several times and sought blessings of the pir. Bangladesh's Presidents Zia and Ershad also sought blessings from Sarsina (Husain 1997; Hashmi 2004). I interviewed Maulana Syed Sharafat Ali, Principal of Sarsina Madrasa and a leading figure of the Sarsina tradition, who asserted that in response to the call of the late pir Maulana Abu Saleh, Ayub Khan had changed the uniform of Pakistan's defense force: from half-pant to full-pant, Ershad had made Islam as the state religion, Islamic education compulsory in schools, Friday as a public holiday, and also changed the name of Red Cross to Red Crescent. Declarations of all these changes were made from the podium of Sarsina, Ali adds.

The Sarsina tradition does not believe in the involvement of active politics. Ali maintains that "our politics is to correct self, society and state. We do not have any political activity to attain power. Power politics is not our goal. We try to influence the rulers to act in favor of Islam." However, the leaders of this tradition do not completely isolate themselves from political affairs. During the Bangladesh's war of independence, the pir of Sarsina favored the Jamaat-e-Islami's and other Islamist parties' position on the integrity of undivided Pakistan (Husain 1997; Mills 1998). Although this pir tradition lacks any organized political activity, it has a vibrant Islamic organization called

Bangladesh Jamyiate Hizbullah through which the act of Islamization is done. The organization is conventionally headed by the pir of Sarsina. It is actively working throughout Bangladesh.

Nesarabad tradition upholds the doctrinal beliefs and methodology of Furfura and Sarsina traditions. It emphasizes the unity of the Muslim Ummah. Quaid Saheb Huzur propounded a doctrine called “*al-ittihad ma’al ikhtelaf*” (unity with disunity) to make the ulama and the ummah united. A large number of people are connected through this tradition. Like Sarsina, Nesarabad also disdains party-politics, but favors Islamic politics that is isolated from power politics. Citing the examples of Mujaddid-i-Alf-i-Thani, Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti and Imam Abu Hanifa, Maulana Khalilur Rahman Nesarabadi, the central figure of this tradition and the Principal of Nesarabad Madrasa, whom I interviewed, told that these great Islamic personalities had worked in politics and served people without resort to party politics. The power-centric Islamic parties do more harm than good for Islam and the Muslims, he adds. The Nesarabad tradition denounced, in its term, the “radical ideas” (*ifrat*) of Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and Mawdudi (Nesarabadi 2011). Former *Nazim-i-A’la* (General Secretary) of Sarsina’s *Jamyiate Hizbullah*, Quaid Saheb Huzur subsequently founded *Bangladesh Hizbullah Jamyiatul Muslehin*. This organization is working throughout the country to serve the cause of Islam.

Beyond these, there are many other Sufi traditions spread over Bangladesh which continue to be followed and practiced by millions of Bangladeshi Muslims.

7.3.5 Socioreligious and cultural organizations

In Bangladesh, there are plenty of socioreligious and cultural organizations which also work towards Islamization. Among these organizations, the prominent ones are the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Bangladesh Masjid Mission, Islam Prachar Samity, Quranic School Society, Bangladesh Islamic Center, Bangladesh Jamiatul Mudarreseen, World Islam Mission (Quran and Sunnah), Ittehadul Ummah, Council for Islamic Socio-Cultural Organizations (Ahamed 1983; Islam 1997; Khanna and Sudarshan 1998), Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought (BIIT), Bangladesh Quran Shikhya Board, Islamic Research Society-Bangladesh, World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY)-Bangladesh, Mercy Mission, Saimum Shilpi Gosthi, and the Phulkuri Ashar.

Islamic Foundation Bangladesh is the largest umbrella organization under the Ministry of Religious Affairs working to disseminate values and ideals of Islam and carry out activities related to those values and ideals.⁷⁸ One of the major contributions of the Islamic Foundation to the process of Islamization was the translation of the Qur'an from Arabic into Bengali, making the Qur'an cheaply and readily available to the readers (Griffiths and Hasan 2015; Riaz and Naser 2011). Currently, the Islamic Foundation has offices in all sixty-four districts. It also has six divisional offices as well as seven Imam Training Academy Centers and twenty-nine Islamic Mission Centers.⁷⁹ Through the Imam Training Academy Centers, the Foundation trains the imams of mosques as community leaders (Islam 1997). This autonomous institution has five major objectives: to propagate Islamic values, to promote research underlining the contribution of Islamic

⁷⁸ See "History." Islamic Foundation, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh. http://www.islamicfoundation.org.bd/pages/home_details (accessed 22 December 2015).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

culture, to propagate Islamic concepts of tolerance and justice, to provide grants for Islamic projects, and to promote collaboration with and between organizations and groups whose philosophy aligns with the Foundation (Griffiths and Hasan 2015; Hossain 2006).

Bangladesh Masjid Mission (Bangladesh Mosque Mission) works to turn the country's mosques into centers of socioreligious life of people through conducting mosque-based programs (Ahamed 1983; Islam 1997; Khanna and Sudarshan 1998). The Islam Prachar Samity (Association for Preaching Islam) is engaged in preaching Islam among the non-Muslims through its *dawah* (to invite to Islam) activities which include the finding of new converts through social services, providence of education and shelter to the needy converts, the imparting of vocational training to the newly converts, and the implementation of mass education program to eradicate illiteracy and the undertaking of charity works, such as the building of medical centers for the poor people.⁸⁰ The Quranic School Society pursues character building programs for the school children from Muslim families to inculcate in them Quranic values and morality. Bangladesh Islamic Center conducts research on the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet and translates Islamic literatures from Arabic, English and other languages into Bengali. It organizes Islamic seminars and symposia to propagate the message of Islam and nurtures Islamic research scholars and authors. The Center also cooperates with other organizations working along its line.⁸¹ Bangladesh Jamiatul Mudarreseen (Bangladesh Madrasa Teachers'

⁸⁰ See "Association for Preaching Islam." <http://www.apibangladesh.org/about-api> (accessed 21 January 2016).

⁸¹ See "Bangladesh Islamic Center." <http://www.bicdhaka.com/23-bic/1-bangladesh-islamic-center> (accessed 21 January 2016).

Association) is the single and largest organization of *madrasa* teachers and employees having more than a hundred thousand members (Ahamed 1983:1116; Khanna and Sudarshan 1998:125). It mainly works in the development of the *madrasa* education and promotes the ideal of the Islamic way of life.⁸² The World Islam Mission is a charitable organization rendering services to orphans and the disabled; Ittehadul Ummah (The Unity of the Muslim Nation), guided by several religious leaders, endeavors to forge unity among the Islamic forces to better serve the cause of Islam; and the Council for Islamic Socio-Cultural Organizations renders effort to coordinate diverse sociocultural and missionary activities of various Islamic groups in Bangladesh (Ahamed 1983; Islam 1997; Khanna and Sudarshan 1998).

Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought (BIIT) undertakes research and educational programs, such as publishing Islamic books and journals, translating Arabic and English books into Bengali, organizing Islamic workshops, seminars and symposia.⁸³ Bangladesh Quran Shikhya Board (Bangladesh Quran Education Board) aims at promoting Islamic education throughout the country by establishing at least sixty-eight thousand *madrasas* in sixty-eight thousand villages.⁸⁴ The Islamic Research Society, Bangladesh is engaged in propagating Islam, spreading the teachings of Quran, facilitating inter-faith dialogue to ensure peace and harmony in society, and organizing seminars and conferences for advancing the Islamic cause.⁸⁵ The World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY)-Bangladesh works to promote *dawah* activities; support

⁸² See “Bangladesh Jamiatul Mudarreseen.” <http://bjm.org.bd/about-jamiat/history-of-the-establishment> (accessed 21 January 2016).

⁸³ See “BIIT.” <http://www.iiitbd.org/biit/> (accessed 21 January 2016).

⁸⁴ See “Bangladesh Quran Shikhya Board.” <http://quranshikhaboard.com/> (accessed 21 January 2016).

⁸⁵ See “The Islamic Research Society, Bangladesh.” <http://irsb.net/aims/> (accessed 21 January 2016).

orphans in education, health and livelihood; and to impart education for youth—both male and female. It also supports the construction of mosques and religious institutions, publishes books, and provides opportunities, particularly to the youth, to work together by conducting youth development programs, workshops, counseling and awareness programs, and sports.⁸⁶ The Mercy Mission works with people of all races, religions and nationalities to achieve a shared vision. It imparts education and builds collaboration to promote Islamic faith to the community by especially focusing on emphasizing comprehensive knowledge and facilitating proactive action.⁸⁷ The Saimum Shilpi Gosthi (Saimum Singer Group) has made a silent revolution in the field of Islamic culture and entertainment in Bangladesh. It has produced Islamic singers, artists and cultural personalities who continue to serve the cause of Islamization of culture in the country.⁸⁸ Finally, the Phulkuri Ashar (Gathering of Flower Buds), a larger national Islam-oriented children organization, works with school children to build moral character, develop performing quality and good physique with versatile caliber. With the slogan “Build thyself to build the world”, this organization aims at molding the children into intelligent, patriotic, religious and overall decent human beings. To that end, it implements several human-building programs, such as education and literary activities; morality-awakening cultural activities; sports and physical exercise; agricultural, art and science-oriented programs; and social welfare activities.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ See “WAMY-Bangladesh Office.” <http://wamy.org.bd/v2/> (accessed 21 January 2016).

⁸⁷ See “Mercy Mission.” <http://www.mercymissionworld.org/> (accessed 21 January 2016).

⁸⁸ See “Welcome To Saimum.net.” <http://saimum.saimum.net/> (accessed 21 January 2016).

⁸⁹ See “Phulkuri Ashar.” <http://www.phulkuriashar.org/index.html> (accessed 21 January 2016).

The spirit of the Bangladesh's war of liberation in 1971 was to establish a democratic society in which there would be no sociopolitical and economic discrimination and non-communalism rather than secularism. According to Dr. Asif Nazrul (the author interviewed him):

There was no conflict between real Islam and this spirit. The real Islam advocates for non-communalism, freedom of other religions, and so on. So, the spirit of liberation war had no conflict with real Islam. However, those who do politics in the name of Islam, there is a conflict between their politics and this spirit. There is a conflict between some Islamic political parties and the spirit of the liberation war. Those who violate minority community rights, be it Awami League or Jamaat, they have conflicts with both Islam and the spirit of the liberation war. Those who kill people, commit corruption, they have genuine conflicts with both Islam and the spirit of the liberation war.

The secularism practiced by the newly independent Bangladesh state was more of an American rather than French model of secularism. However, the recent trend suggests that Bangladesh has intended to adopt more of a French rather than American version of secularism as noted in chapter two. The secularism in Bangladesh was imposed but adopted by the consensus of the people. After independence, a secular state was established where people had no orientation with an interest in secularism. This social reality largely compelled Mujib to initiate Islamization process which was later institutionalized by the military rulers. The incumbent ruling elites, for their political benefits, and the plenty of nonpolitical social and cultural organizations made significant contributions to Islamization in Bangladesh. The recent rise of the French version of

secularism that ignores the social reality of people's religious commitment has led to an acute polarization and sociopolitical conflict in contemporary Bangladesh.

Chapter Eight
Allah'r Ain Chai, Sot Loker Shasan Chai (We Want God's Laws, We
Want Honest People's Rule): Islam, Islamism and democracy in
Bangladesh

If the ruling party continues to marginalize the opposition, deny it the space for peaceful protest, and disregard the need for a political roadmap for moving forward, it will encourage extremists to take over.

— **Ali Riaz** (2014b:156), *A Crisis of Democracy in Bangladesh*

The use of the new term Islamism to refer to militancy done ostensibly in the name of Islam is a particularly pernicious use of language. It merges the faith of Islam with modern political movements in such a way as to make non-Muslims think that Islam itself is the source of the militancy.

— **Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf** (2004:116), *What's Right with Islam*

In the preceding chapter, I have elaborated on how the political regimes as well as non-political institutions and organizations have engaged in the Islamization of Bangladesh. This Islamization process has largely sowed the seeds for the emergence of Islamism in the society. The Bangladeshi Muslims have always been religious, and religion has always been a significant part of their daily life. This is why, in the political domain, Islam continues to have a prominent place. Both secular and non-secular political parties have to give references to Islam to garner public support. The Awami League, which is the major secular party, still has to pledge before the electorate that it would not make any law which would be repugnant of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Although it has restored secularism, it has not dared to abrogate the provision of state religion from the constitution. In October 2014, Abdul Latif Siddique, an influential minister of Sheikh Hasina's Cabinet, was sacked from his cabinet position and even expelled from the party due to what was considered derogatory comments against Islam and Hajj.⁹⁰ Later, he was arrested⁹¹ and also forced to resign as a lawmaker.⁹²

The previous chapter has also outlined that the birth of Bangladesh was largely based on the popular aspiration of building a democratic polity in which, according to the Preamble of the Constitution, there would be a socialist society, free from exploitation—a society that would guarantee its citizens the rule of law, fundamental human rights and political, economic and social equality, freedom and justice. Accordingly, after independence in 1971, Awami League which led the war of independence formed the first democratic government under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. However, the political and economic failure of the regime eventually led to the adoption of a one-party system supplanting parliamentary democracy. Amending the constitution in January 1975, Sheikh Mujib became President and the supreme authority over all executive, legislative and judicial organs of the state (Ahmed 1991). But, within half a year, the one-party system collapsed; Mujib along with his family members was assassinated by a group of military officers in mid-August 1975 (Maniruzzaman 1976;

⁹⁰ See “Bangladesh Minister Fired for Hajj Remarks: Abdul Latif Siddique Who Called Hajj a ‘Waste of Manpower’ Dropped from Cabinet after Protests from Opposition Parties.” *Aljazeera*, 2 October 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2014/10/bangladesh-minister-fired-hajj-remarks-20141028365136253.html> (accessed 27 January 2016).

⁹¹ See “Bangladesh ‘Hajj Critic’ AL Siddique Is Arrested.” *BBC News*, 25 November 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30195714> (accessed 27 January 2016).

⁹² See “Latif Siddique Resigns as Lawmaker.” *NEWAGE*, 2 September 2015. <http://newagebd.net/153820/latif-siddique-resigns-as-lawmaker/> (accessed 27 January 2016).

Huque and Akhter 1987). This was followed by a series of coups and counter-coups that eventually brought General Ziaur Rahman to power. General Rahman governed the country first as a military leader and later as a civilian President. In May 1981, Zia was also assassinated by a group of army officers and subsequently General Ershad captured power in a bloodless coup in March 1982 (Rahman 1983; Khan 1985; Hakim 1998) and ruled the country under military and civilianization rubric for nine years (Ehsan 2010; Lewis 2011). In December 1990, Ershad's regime collapsed in the face of popular mass upsurge (Baxter 1991; Maniruzzaman 1992).

Since the 1990s, Bangladesh has entered a new phase of democratic rule (Baxter and Rahman 1991a; Hossain 2000) and has been alternately governed by Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, leaders of BNP and Awami League respectively. However, in January 2007, a military-backed caretaker government took over and ruled the country until December 2008. Although democracy was brought back through the parliamentary elections in 2008, it suffered a serious setback in 2014. The ruling Awami League arbitrarily abolished the system of caretaker government under which credible elections were held facilitating the peaceful change of governments. The opposition parties boycotted the 2014 elections in what is called by Riaz (2014a:119) a "failed election" which the incumbent Awami League and its allies controlled nearly all 300 elected seats. Most notably, more than half of the members of parliament—154 to be exact—were elected unopposed (Riaz 2014a:119). The Awami League continues to rule the country under a shroud of illegitimacy. Bangladesh continues to suffer a facade of democracy what Feldman (2015:67) called an "illusive democracy."

In chapter four, it is elaborated that Islam and democracy are not necessarily incompatible. The essence of democracy does not contradict with the teachings of Islam. Rather, according to Professor Abdullah Jahangir, who was interviewed by the author, Islam can be practiced more sincerely in a truly democratic polity. Shahin Alam, a graduate student from Shahjalal University of Science and Technology who participated in a focus discussion opines that Bangladeshi Muslims are religious, but they are not blind to religion. They never endorse violence in the name of religion, adds Alam. Violence is violence; it has nothing to do with religion, Alam asserts; and other participants agree. The Islamists in Bangladesh, as appears in my investigation, strongly support democracy and condemn violence. The mainstream Islamic political parties, such as the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), Khelafat Majlis, and Zaker Party engage themselves in democratic competition, mobilize people, and contest in elections. However, there are a few fringe militant Islamist groups, the deviated tiny fractions from the mainstream, such as the Jamaatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh (JMB), Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJi), and Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT). These groups have virtually no popular support. They are outlawed by the government. The mainstream Islamist parties have been overtly critical of and condemning of the violent activities perpetrated by these groups. Beyond these local militant groups, the rise of Islamic State (IS), a Middle East-based international jihadist organization which emerged in June 2014, in Bangladesh adds another dimension to the study of Islamism in Bangladesh. In July 2016, a group of Islamist militants attacked a Dhaka café, held hostage and killed innocent civilians, most of whom were foreigners. The incident resulted in the deaths of several police officers as

well as the militants themselves. The IS was quick to claim responsibility for the attack and published the pictures of the attackers and their victims in its website.⁹³ Local authorities however had denied IS's involvement in the act, instead, placing the blame on homegrown militants.⁹⁴

Against this backdrop, this chapter is intended to examine Islam, Islamism and democracy in Bangladesh. It focuses the role of the organized Islam-based political parties, and particularly the role of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest Islamist party in Bangladesh having its prime slogan—*Allah'r ain chai, sot loker shasan chai* (we want God's laws, we want honest people's rule), in the interplay of Islamism and democracy in Bangladesh. The next section discusses the Islamic tradition in the people's everyday life. The third section analyses the role of the Islamist parties in Islamism and democracy. The final section concludes with a discussion of "democratic Islamism" and "militant Islamism."

8.2 Islam: An issue of the people's everyday life

"Islam" is an Arabic word which means submission, surrender and obedience. The other literal meaning of the word "Islam" is peace. As a religion, Islam, therefore, refers to as the achievement of peace through submission and obedience to God (Ahmad 2010). The Oxford Dictionary of English defines Islam as "the religion of the Muslims, a

⁹³ See "IS Claims Gulshan Attack: Report", *The Daily Star*, 2 July 2016.

<http://www.thedailystar.net/country/claims-gulshan-attack-report-1249180> (accessed 13 July 2016).

⁹⁴ See "Dhaka Attack: Hostage-takers were from Bangladesh Group, Not IS, Says Minister", *The Indian Express*, 3 July 2016. <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/world-news/dhaka-attack-hostage-takers-were-from-bangladesh-group-not-is-says-minister-2890882/> (accessed 13 July 2016).

monotheistic faith regarded as revealed through Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah” (Stevenson 2010:926).

The advent of Islam in the territory of Bangladesh has brought a revolutionary change in the life of its people. In all the realms of life—social, cultural and political—of the people, the influence of Islam is clearly evident. Today, according to the report of the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, “the entire life of a Bangladeshi Muslim from cradle to grave is marked by the acceptance of Islam as the fundamental philosophy of his life.”⁹⁵ For the Muslims of Bangladesh, the report continues, Islam is not a question of following but it is a question of living. They live in Islam just as a fish lives in water.⁹⁶

In Bangladesh, the birth of a Muslim child is proclaimed through *adhan* (call to prayer). *Adhan* is often performed into the baby’s ear. This signifies that the baby hears *Allahu Akbar* (God is the greatest) as the first word in his/her life. His/her *aqiqah* (an Islamic celebration of shaving the baby’s head, naming the baby and sacrificing cattle) is performed through *milad* (praising the Prophet in chorus), recitation of the Qur’an, sacrificing cattle and distribution of sweets. *Milad* is very often performed especially on any good occasion, such as on start a business, building a new house, and on attainment of any success. The arrangement of *milad* is also common on the death anniversaries of parents or family members. Activities, such as recitation from the Qur’an, discussion on the life of the Prophet, praising the Prophet in chorus, and so forth are done in a *milad*. The *milad* is led by an *alim* (a person who has religious education), and the attendees especially do *doah* (supplication) for the *saheb-e-dawah* (one who arranges *milad*) and his family. Apart from this, a Muslim farmer organizes *milad* at his house prior to both

⁹⁵ See *Islam in Bangladesh*, published by Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2005, p. 15.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

tilling his land for the first time in the season and the start of harvesting. When there is a draught, Muslim farmers assemble in the field and perform *salatul istisqa* (prayer for rain) for happy showers of rain for their thirsty crops.⁹⁷

During the time of *aqiqah*, a child is given a meaningful Arabic name. The name is invariably related to one of the attributive names of God or the name of the Prophet or of a member of his family. Often time, the names are related to the Muslim heroes, scholars, or saints, and the companions of the Prophet and the Caliphs of Islam. To give the child a meaningful Arabic name, the parents often go to an *alim* for his suggestion. Traditionally, the name of the Prophet (Muhammad) is given to the male child as his first name.

Circumcision of Muslim boys is a compulsory religious practice performed by the parents. On this occasion, *milad* is arranged in the house and relatives, neighbors (both Muslims and non-Muslims) and friends of the family are invited to a feast. The circumcised child is gifted with new dresses, particularly *lungi* and *jama* (shirt) or *punjabi*, a dress item commonly worn by men. The circumcision ceremony thus brings a lot of joy and happiness in the family.

A Muslim child starts his/her education, what is in Bengali called *hatekhori*, with a religious person. His/her learning begins with the introduction of the Arabic alphabets. He/she is given the elementary religious education at home prior to his/her enrolment in the school of secular education. He/she is introduced to the concept of Allah, the Prophet, the *kalimah* and other articles of Islamic faith. He/she is also taught the recitation of the Qur'an and the rules of prayer, fasting, charity and pilgrimage, including lessons in

⁹⁷ Ibid, pp. 16-17.

Islamic etiquettes and manners. The mosque-based *maktabs* which are run by public charity teach Muslim children how to perform prayer and observe the fasting of Ramadan. Muslim etiquettes are taught with meticulous care.⁹⁸

In hundreds of Hafizia Madrasas, Muslim boys and girls memorize the whole Qur'an and learn the basic teachings of Islam. The Qur'an is held in such esteemed regard that a Muslim considers it a great blessing to have one of his/her children memorize the whole Qur'an and become a Hafiz of the Qur'an. Muslims without children of their own often provide the poor or the orphans with full financial support so that they could become Hafiz-al-Qur'an. Every year thousands of Hafizes graduate from Hafizia Madrasas.

In every Muslim house in Bangladesh, there is at least a copy of the Qur'an in Arabic. Although most people do not understand the Qur'anic language, they consider the possession of a copy of Qur'an as the most sacred heritage. The day of a Muslim begins with the recitation of the Qur'an, and thus the sweet melody of the recitation of the Qur'an in the morning is heard in almost every Muslim house. The Qur'an is recited, kissed and touched with chest by the Muslims of Bangladesh.

When a Muslim meets another Muslim, he greets him with the Islamic greetings *assalamu alaikum* (may peace be upon you). He begins every lawful deed with the Qur'anic phrase *bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful). When he rises from bed, starts his meals, begins his journey, and so on, he remembers the name of God. After the accomplishment of the work, he expresses his gratitude to God by uttering *alhamdulillah* (all praises to God). When he intends to

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 16.

perform an act in future, he depends on God and says *insha-Allah* (God willing). If anything wonders him, he says *subhan-Allah* (glory to God); if anything hurts him, he says *innalillah* (truly we belong to God); when he appreciates someone or something, he says *masha-Allah* (God has willed it). He prays five times a day. His daily life, in fact, revolves around God's consciousness.

Marriage and dissolution of marriage (of Muslims) are regulated by Qur'anic laws. Marriage is commonly arranged by the family, homosexual marriages are not allowed and "honor killings" are not practiced in Bangladesh. Marriage of a Muslim boy and girl is performed with a religious ceremony, and solemnized with recitations from the Qur'an by a registered Qadhi. *Mohar* (bride-payment) is fixed upon mutual agreement. A prayer ceremony is done for the new couple. Though allowed in Islam, dissolution of marriage is not widely practiced. Islamic law of inheritance is followed and strictly practiced.

Muslims, in times of difficulties and sufferings, commonly organize the ceremony of reciting the Qur'an from cover to cover (*khatme Qur'an*) or reciting a certain portion of Qur'anic verses, invoking a name of God or blessings on the Prophet (*darud*) for a fixed number of times. Often they invite the ulama to their houses for the recitation of the *doah-e-Yunus* in a group to get rid of difficulties. To organize a ceremony of *khatme Qur'an* for recovery from illness is a common practice in a Muslim family. Muslims also take *tabiz* (amulet) from what they consider as religious persons to escape difficulties in life. The Qur'an is also recited at the death-bed as well as the grave of a Muslim man or woman.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 18.

During the month of Ramadan, the Muslims, simultaneously, take *sahur* before dawn (early morning meal), fast and break the fast at dusk. *Taraweeh* prayers are performed throughout the month in congregation in every mosque and *mohalla* (neighborhood). In most mosques, the recitation of Qur'an from cover to cover in *taraweeh* is done. The end of Ramadan brings *Eid-al-Fitr*, the most significant Muslim celebration, which is celebrated by the Muslims in Bangladesh with great fanfare and religiosity. The *Eid-al-Adha* is also observed in due solemnity. The solvent Muslims sacrifice cattle and distribute a certain portion of meat to the poor, the relatives and the neighbors. In each year, a large number of Muslims from Bangladesh go to Mecca and Medina for Hajj. Beyond the *Eid-al-Fitr* and *Eid-al-Adha*, Muslims also celebrate other religious occasions, such as *shab-e-barat*, *shab-e-qadr*, *shab-e-miraj*, *Muharram*, and *eid-e-miladunnabi*. Mosques, *madrasas* and shrines organize *waz-mahfils* (religious gatherings) and religious conferences regularly. Particularly, during the winter season, there does not remain a single village in Bangladesh where a *waz-mahfil* is not held. These *waz-mahfils* are organized by public charity. The imams and scholars of Islam deliver eloquent sermons in these gatherings that serve the purpose of spiritual awakening of the Muslims. Five times every day, the sky and air of Bangladesh is filled with the sonorous music of *adhan* from approximately three hundred thousand mosques calling for prayer.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the life of a Bangladeshi Muslim is reorganized each day in accordance with the essence of the call of *adhan*—God is the greatest; there is no god but God and Prophet Muhammad is His Messenger.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

8.3 Islamism and democracy: Do they necessarily conflict each other in Bangladesh?

The Islamists, for the first time in the history of Bangladesh, became the part of the government constituted after the 2001 elections in which BNP-led four-party alliance won a landslide victory. The major Islamist partner of the alliance—Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh [later Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI); henceforth BJI]—had two ministerial portfolios in that government. Since then, Islamism in Bangladesh has been an issue of profound discussion at all levels—societal, political, and intellectual. The issue had gained added attention, because BJI opposed the emergence of Bangladesh and collaborated with the Pakistani army during the war of liberation.

BJI and other Islamist parties, which were banned after Bangladesh became independent, were allowed to operate during Zia's regime as noted in the previous chapter. Since the 1970s, there has been a steady growth of Islamist parties. The number of Islamist parties in Bangladesh rose from 11 in 1970 to 100 in 2006.¹⁰¹ Islamist parties participating in the elections have also grown over the years. After the ban was lifted in 1976, there were only two Islamist parties which participated in 1979 elections. In the 1986 elections, the number remained the same, but increased to 17 in 1991 and subsequently to 18 in 1996. The number declined slightly in 2001, to 11¹⁰² and stayed the same in 2008.¹⁰³ The Islamist parties that participated in the 2008 elections include BJI, Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB), Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh (JUIB), Zaker Party (ZP), Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), Bangladesh Islami Front (BIF), Khelafat Majlis

¹⁰¹ See Shakhawat Liton, "Islamic Parties Boom after 1976 Ban Lifting." *The Daily Star*, 29 August 2006, Dhaka. <http://archive.thedailystar.net/2006/08/29/d6082901022.htm> (accessed 2 February 2016).

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ See "Statistical Report: The 9th Parliamentary Elections 2008", *Election Commission Bangladesh*, p. 15. <http://www.ec.org.bd/MenuExternalFilesEng/304.pdf> (accessed 2 February 2016).

(KM), Bangladesh Tariqat Federation (BTF), Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan (BKA), Bangladesh Muslim League, and Islamic Front Bangladesh (IFB).¹⁰⁴ Election Commission records show that around three dozen political parties professing and preaching Islamism participated in elections between 1979 and 2008.

Like the non-political Islamic parties and groups, Islamist political parties oppose each other though their ideology, aims and objectives hardly differ one another. All of them cherish the same basic agenda that is to establish an Islamic state system. Riaz and Raji (2011) have classified these Islamist parties into five categories and made a taxonomy based on their origins and policies. However, these scholars have not included the non-political Islamist groups, such as the Tablighi Jamaat, pir traditions, and Hefazat-e-Islam (may be Hefazat did not emerge until their writing) in their taxonomy. Although these groups claim to be non-political, their movements have widespread political ramifications. In order to get a broader understanding of Islamists—both political and non-political or social—in Bangladesh, the taxonomy developed by Riaz and Raji (2011) can be enlarged. Accordingly, I propose to categorize the Bangladeshi Islamists into six major groups—pragmatist/opportunist, idealist and orthodox, pir (saint)/mazar (shrine)-centric, urban elite-centric, apolitical pir/mazar-based/Sufi traditions, and jihadists/militant orthodox.

The BJI, the largest and strongest Islamist political party, occupies the first category of the taxonomy. BJI's policy is referred to as pragmatic (Riaz and Raji 2011). In spite of its controversial role in 1971, BJI has consolidated its position in the political realm. Particularly, since the 1990s, it has emerged as a considerable political force by

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

adopting political pragmatism in its policy formulation. A large number of young and talented individuals have been attracted to its ideology especially through its student-wing Bangladesh Islami Chhatrashibir (BIC). However, some of the Islamist parties describe the phenomenal rise of BJI and its success in becoming the part of power within two decades as an opportunistic tendency (Riaz and Raji 2011). The second category belongs to the organizations and parties led by orthodox ulama mostly based in the Deoband-oriented Qawmi Madrasas. This group is further divided into two types: one is political which includes IOJ, JUIB, KM, BKA, and Nezam-e-Islam; and the other is non-political which includes Hefazat-e-Islam, the Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan, and the Tablighi Jamaat. The third category is represented by the Islamist political parties based in pir or mazar institutions. This category includes IAB, ZP, BTF, BIF, and IFB. The fourth category includes Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh (HTB) which is an urban elite-centric Islamist group dedicated to the restoration of an Islamic Caliphate. The fifth category belongs to apolitical or Sufi-centric pir/mazar organizations or movements which include Dewanbagi, Sarsina, Nesarabad, and other Sufi traditions. Bangladesh Jamyiate Hizbullah and Bangladesh Hizbullah Jamyiatul Muslehin represent this group. The sixth category is represented by the militant orthodox Islamist groups which aim at dismantling the current state system through violent activities and establishing what they call the “the law of Allah.” This group includes JMB, JMJB, HuJi, and ABT (IS is said to have connections with these groups). These categories are demonstrated in the following table:

Table 8.1: Taxonomy of Islamist parties and movements in Bangladesh

Categories	Distinguishable Traits	Name of Islamist Parties and Movements
1. Pragmatic/ opportunistic	Want to establish an Islamic society through the transformation of the secular state system into an Islamic one; believe in “Islamic revolution” to be brought about through electoral process; believe in democracy and pluralism, and contest elections; support-base is wide-ranging	Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI)
2.a Idealist and orthodox (political)	Want to establish a pure Islamic state; believe in democracy, and contest elections; support-base is largely within Qawmi Madrasas	Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh (JUIB), Khelafat Majlis (KM), Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan (BKA), Nezam-e-Islam Party (NIP)
2.b Idealist and orthodox (non- political)	Want to reform society through the Qur’anic and Prophetic teachings; do not participate in politics at organizational level; more focused on Islamic <i>dawah</i> programs and active to uphold Islamic spirit; some of them are overly critical of what they call non-Islamic practices and modern secular ideas; Deoband-centric Qawmi Madrasa-based and Salafi-oriented groups	Hefazat-e-Islam, the Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan, the Tablighi Jamaat
3. Pir (saint)/ mazar (shrine)- based	Want to establish a shari’ah-based Islamic state; emphasize the early Islamic Caliphate and classical Islamic teachings; party is organized around individuals and hereditary leadership is followed; contest elections; weak support-base	Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB), Zaker Party (ZP), Bangladesh Tariqat Federation (BTF), Islamic Front Bangladesh (IFB), Bangladesh Islami Front (BIF)
4. Urban elite- centric	Want to establish Caliphate; internationally connected, organized in urban centers, highly educated middle-class leadership, do not take part in elections; restricted support-base	Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh (HTB)
5. Apolitical/ Sufi/pir/mazar- centric	Want to change the society through Sufi practices; organized around pir/mazar traditions; isolate from politics but try to influence political decisions; large support-base within commoners	The Dewanbagi, Sarsina, Nesarabad and other pir traditions, Bangladesh Jamiyate Hizbullah and Bangladesh Hizbullah Jamiyatul Muslehini
6. Jihadists/ militant orthodox	Want to establish an Islamic state by waging “jihad”; militant extremists preferring literal interpretation of Qur’an and Hadith; claim that democracy and constitutionalism are sources of polytheism	Jamaatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh (JMB), Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJi), Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), and Islamic State (IS)

In the previous chapter, non-political Islamic organizations and movements, such as the Hefazat-e-Islam, the Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan and the Tablighi Jamaat (category 2b), and apolitical pir/mazar-based traditions (category 5) have been discussed. In this chapter, categories 1, 2a, 3, 4, and 6 which are directly related to Islamism are dealt with.

A major part of the discussion is devoted to BJI, because, it is the largest platform of the Islamists, which has had representation in the parliament since 1986. Among other Islamist parties, IAB, IOJ, ZP, KM, BKA, JUJB, BTF, BIF, IFB, NIP, and the militant jihadists, such as JMB, JMJB, HuJi, ABT, and Islamic State (IS) are examined.

8.3.1 Pragmatist cum opportunist

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami

The Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islam (BJI), in its entire political history, had attained its highest success in the 2001 general elections: out of 300 parliamentary seats, it captured 17 and emerged as the fourth largest political party in Bangladesh obtaining 4.28 percent of total vote cast,¹⁰⁵ and, as noted earlier, had two cabinet positions as a coalition partner in the government between 2001 and 2006. The party in the 2008 elections, however, declined sharply bagging only 2 seats out of 300.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, it still became the fourth largest party capturing 4.70 percent of total vote cast.¹⁰⁷ Most importantly, BJI, since the country's democratic journey in 1991, has become what many called the "kingmaker" of politics (Karim and Fair 2007).

In the context of the Hindu-Muslim socioeconomic and political rivalry in British India, Maulana Mawdudi and a handful like-minded people¹⁰⁸ founded the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH) in 1941. On the question of the partition of India, Mawdudi and his party JIH opposed the idea of partition and the movement for a separate homeland for

¹⁰⁵ See "Statistical Report: 8th Parliament Election 2001." *Bangladesh Election Commission*, p. 6.
<http://www.ec.org.bd/MenuExternalFilesEng/124.pdf> (accessed 4 February 2016).

¹⁰⁶ See "Statistical Report: The 9th Parliamentary Elections 2008." op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ It is reported that seventy-five people joined Mawdudi in the founding of the JIH (Ahmad 1991:467).

Muslims advanced by the Muslim League. However, after partition which created India and Pakistan in 1947, the JIH split itself into Indian and Pakistani wings and recognized Pakistan as a potential framework of an Islamic state (Kabir 2006). Mawdudi along with a section of JIH leaders migrated from India to Pakistan and began a massive campaign under the banner of the Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JIP) for the creation of a truly Islamic state in Pakistan (Ahmad 1991). JIP worked actively against the military rule throughout the time of united Pakistan and mobilized people in the restoration of democracy as elaborated in chapter six. However, it opposed the Bengali nationalist movement which aimed at realizing the demand for autonomy for East Pakistan, and eliminating economic and political exploitation inflicted upon East Pakistani people. JIP's East Pakistan wing called East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami (EPJI) actively opposed the Bangladesh's war of liberation in 1971, and collaborated with the Pakistani army by providing them with logistical and intelligence support (Kabir 2006; Riaz and Raji 2011). The EPJI organized several anti-liberation paramilitary forces, such as *Razakars* (volunteers), *Al-Badrs* (Badr brigade), *Al-Shams* (sun brigade), and *Shanti Committees* (peace committees) to fight for a united Pakistan (Ahmad 1991). Later the leaders of the EPJI attempted to justify their opposition to liberation war suggesting that "they were afraid of the new Bangladesh being subjugated by India if Pakistan were split. That prevented them, as the argument goes, despite their desire from joining the fight for Bangladesh's liberation. They were worried whether a weak, indo-dependent and surrounded Bangladesh would be viable and, thus, the Jamaat found it difficult to accept the concept of independent Bangladesh created with Indian help" (Kabir 2006:66). The EPJI, according to Kabir (2006), followed a two-fold policy during the war: it continued to oppose the "socialist" and

“secular” Bengali-nationalists and boasted that the *Swadhin Bangla* (independent Bengal) would never be earned, and it continued to criticize Bhutto’s PPP (Pakistan People’s Party) and other nationalist parties to make a projection of being the most loyal Pakistan-lover.

The boast of the EPJI leaders was shattered and Bangladesh became independent in December 1971. Some of the top leaders of the party were imprisoned on charges of collaboration with the Pakistani army while others went into hiding. A large number of leaders and workers fled and joined the Tablighi Jamaat to escape both public wrath and prosecution. The EPJI alongside other religion-based political parties were banned, and the citizenship of the EPJI’s chief Ghulam Azam was annulled. Earlier just before the end of the war, Azam left the country (East Pakistan) and continued to stay away. However, by the end of 1973, most of the imprisoned EPJI leaders and activists had been released under a general amnesty (Ghosh 1993; Riaz 2004).¹⁰⁹ After the promulgation of the Political Parties Regulation (PPR) in July 1976, the EPJI (henceforth Jamaat) along with other Islamist parties were revived. The Jamaat leaders and other Islamists agreed in principle to organizing under a single Islamist platform for what they called the greater interests of Islam and the changed circumstances of Bangladesh. Accordingly, the Islamists in new Bangladesh together formed Islamic Democratic League (IDL) under the leadership of Maulana Siddique Ahmed of the Nezam-e-Islam Party and Maulana Abdur

¹⁰⁹ Riaz and Raji (2011:67) also note that after the promulgation of the Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunals) Order 1972, the government, on 24 January 1972, set up 73 special tribunals, to try to Razakar, Al-Badr and Al-Shams forces, defined as collaborators in the order. However, these trials came to a halt after the government granted a general amnesty on 30 November 1973. Under the general amnesty, about 26,000 out of 35,000 people held or convicted under the act were released. Although the amnesty was not applicable to people charged with murder or rape or arson or abduction, a large number of individuals charged with these criminal offences including prominent collaborators were released.

Rahim of the Jamaat. The constituent partners of the IDL came to an agreement that they would dissolve their respective organizational identities upon its formation. However, the Jamaat retained its separate existence and even intended to implement its political programs using the platform of IDL. The Jamaat also tried to bring the IDL under its own control. Although the Jamaat, due to the resistance of other Islamists, apparently failed to impose complete control over the IDL, it succeeded in retaining its dominance over the latter through Maulana Abdur Rahim, the Chairman of the IDL and the former chief of the EPJI (Kabir 2006).

Ghulam Azam returned to Bangladesh in 1978, and then became elected as the chief of the then publicly defunct and clandestinely active Jamaat. Azam and a cohort of Jamaat leaders were keenly interested in reviving Jamaat as a distinct party while Maulana Rahim and another cohort of Jamaat leaders were in favor of using the IDL to implement Jamaat's programs. Within the Jamaat cohort, this debate continued and eventually led to a split in the party. On the other hand, apart from Jamaat, the other parties of the IDL were unhappy with the "Jamaatification of the IDL" and the revival of the Jamaat as a separate political entity which they saw as a violation of the Jamaat's earlier commitment to dissolve the party's political identity and work under the IDL (Kabir 2006). Within this crisis, the IDL made an electoral alliance with Bangladesh Muslim League (BML) and participated in the second parliamentary elections held in February 1979. The IDL-BML alliance captured 20 out of 300 seats and became the third largest contender obtaining 10.08 percent of total vote cast (Moten 1981:65). However, the revivalist faction of the Jamaat led by Ghulam Azam and Abbas Ali Khan left the

IDL and formed the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB) in May 1979. Since then, Jamaat has been the main Islamist party in the country.

General Zia's Islamization policy created a congenial environment for JIB (now BJI) to emerge as a potent political force. Zia tactfully played the "Islam card" and scored enormous points receiving both domestic and international supports especially from the Middle Eastern Islamic countries. BJI and other Islamists wholeheartedly championed Zia's regime and worked without any disturbance (Riaz 2004). During the Zia regime, the BJI "reportedly began receiving significant financial assistance from Saudi Arabia and Iran. It also derived significant financial benefit by controlling some Saudi-sponsored organizations in Bangladesh, such as the Ibn Sina Trust, Rabita al-Alam al-Islami, and other similar philanthropic and financial institutions" (Riaz and Raji 2011:49). The BJI concentrated on becoming economically empowered alongside politically influential. It took its first political initiative in early 1980 demanding the restoration of Ghulam Azam's citizenship. However, Azam's citizenship was restored only after the High Court's order in 1994 (Moniruzzaman 2009; Ahmad 2013). In the 1980s, another significant event within the circle of the Islamists was the formation of the Ittehadul Ummah, a platform to unite the ulama particularly the Islamic preachers. The BJI had a proactive role in its formation. However, the effort to turn the Ittehadul Ummah into another front organization of the BJI eventually led to its collapse.

The BJI had faced a serious internal crisis in the early 1980s. A reformist faction of the party raised questions regarding the party constitution, policy and strategy, and moral standard of the leadership. This led to another split of the party: Maulana Abdul Jabbar, a top-ranking and pro-reformist leader, left the party in 1983. The BJI's student-

wing Bangladesh Islami Chhatrashibir (BIC) also split. In 1982, as a result of conflict with the BJI, Ahmad Abdul Kader (known as Abdul Kader Bachhu), the Central President (CP) of the BIC resigned from the organization and formed a youth organization called Jubo Shibir (Kabir 2006). Later he completely cut off his relationship with the BJI circle. However, the BJI overcame its organizational crisis soon. When Ershad captured power and began to use the reference of Islam, the BJI found a favorable environment and supported his regime. But, when a mass movement began to grow against the Ershad regime, it immediately changed its strategy and joined the side of the opposition alliances which were formed for the restoration of democracy. It participated in the 1986 elections (third parliamentary elections) and captured 10 seats out of 300 (Islam 1987:166). The anti-Ershad movement reached the pinnacle in the late 1980s. The BJI legislators resigned from the parliament. In the end, the Ershad regime collapsed in December 1990 and a general election was held in early 1991 in which the BJI won 18 seats out of 300 and became the fourth largest political party garnering 12.13 percent of total vote cast.¹¹⁰ The BNP appeared to be the largest party capturing 140 seats out of 300¹¹¹ meaning that it was still unable to form the government unilaterally. The BJI supported the BNP to form the government and thus appeared as a key to power politics in Bangladesh. BJI's political position was further elevated when the Awami League formally sought the BJI's support for its (Awami League) Presidential candidate Justice Badrul Haider Chowdhury in 1991 (Hashmi 1994; Riaz and Raji 2011). Although the

¹¹⁰ See "Statistical Report: 5th Parliamentary Elections 1991." Bangladesh Election Commission, Dhaka, p. 48. <http://www.ec.org.bd/MenuExternalFilesEng/301.pdf> (accessed 7 February 2016).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

attempt turned failure, the BJI achieved political gains from it: the party which opposed the liberation war now became the kingmaker in the politics.

Within a short time, the BJI's relationship with BNP deteriorated and it began to criticize the BNP government. It took part in a popular movement demanding the caretaker government simultaneously with other opposition parties and boycotted the February 1996 elections. After the BNP government inserted the caretaker system in the constitution, the seventh parliamentary elections were held in June 1996 in which the BJI unilaterally contested and captured three seats out of 300. The party still appeared to be the fourth largest party in the country obtaining 8.61 percent of the total vote cast.¹¹² It later joined the BNP-led four-party alliance and actively took part in the anti-government movement. The four-party alliance in which the BJI was the second major party contested in the 2001 elections and won a marvelous victory. The BJI captured 17 seats out of 300 and appeared to be the fourth largest party securing 4.28 percent of the total vote cast.¹¹³ In the ninth parliamentary elections held in 2008, the BJI also contested in an alliance with the BNP and other parties. It bagged a total of 2 seats out of 300 securing 4.70 percent of the popular votes.¹¹⁴ From 1991 to 2008, the BJI's popular votes had been gradually decreased. The following table shows the BJI's electoral performance over the years:

¹¹² See "Statistical Report: 7th Parliamentary Election June 1996." Bangladesh Election Commission, p. 9. <http://www.ec.org.bd/MenuExternalFilesEng/125.pdf> (accessed 7 February 2016).

¹¹³ See "Statistical Report: 8th Parliament Election 2001." op. cit.

¹¹⁴ See "Statistical Report: 9th Parliamentary Election 2008." Bangladesh Election Commission, p. 15.

Table 8.2: The parliamentary elections performance of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI)

BJI	1973 1 st	1979 2 nd	1986 3 rd	1988 4 th	1991 5 th	1996 6 th	1996 7 th	2001 8 th	2008 9 th	2014 10 th
Seats Captured	Not allowed to contest	BML-IDL alliance 20 ¹¹⁵	10	Boycotted	18	Boycotted	3	17	2	Boycotted
Vote (%) Secured	-	10.08	4.61	-	12.13	-	8.61	4.28	4.70	-
Seats Contested	-	266	-	-	222	-	300	31	39	-
Total Seats	-	300	300	-	300	-	300	300	300	-

Source: Bangladesh Election Commission data; data from Islam (2015:213-222)

The BJI claims to be an “Islamic movement” rather than a political or religious party. The fundamental object of this movement, as they believe, is “the establishment of the Islamic way (*al-Deen*) so as to achieve God’s pleasure and seek salvation in the Hereafter.” In order to achieve this objective, the BJI has set out five programs for itself: (i) to construct human thought in the light of the ideals, values, and principles derived from divine guidance; (ii) to “reform and purify” individual members of society so as to enable them to develop a truly Islamic personality; (iii) to organize these individuals under the leadership of the Jamaat and to prepare and train them to invite humanity to the path of Islam; (iv) to take all possible steps to reform and reconstruct the society and all of its institutions in accordance with the teachings of Islam; and (v) to bring about a

¹¹⁵ The BJI was a part of the IDL and as nominees of the IDL, 6 BJI candidates were elected (Islam 2015:213).

revolution in the political leadership of society, reorganize political and socioeconomic life on Islamic lines, and finally, establish an Islamic state (Ahmad 1991:467).

The BJI believes in bringing about an Islamic revolution in society through “ethical, peaceful, constructive, democratic and constitutional” means. The party website says that “Jamaat is striving democratically to enforce God-fearing, honest and efficient leadership in all spheres of the ruling system instead of inefficient and dishonest leadership.”¹¹⁶ Maulana Matiur Rahman Nizami, the former chief of the party who was executed in 2016, asserts that “the Jamaat-e-Islami is a constructive and responsible Islamic organization that holds and preserves constitutional politics in a democratic process through a systematic and peaceful way. All of its activities are based on democratic values. Jamaat-e-Islami represents [a] constitutional and democratic system of political culture. We firmly believe that Islamic principles should be established through the democratic process” (Quoted in Riaz and Raji 2011:50). The BJI claims to be opposed to all forms of terrorism. Nizami maintains that “Islamic ideology, education, culture, history or traditions do not have the slightest connection with terrorism that we see today. Despite this ... as the potentiality of the rise of Islam flickers, some derailed and unscrupulous persons bearing Muslim names have chosen the path of terrorism for the establishment of Islam and thereby have pushed the probable rise of Islam and the Muslim ummah to a precarious situation.”¹¹⁷ Another prominent BJI leader and a popular Islamic preacher Maulana Delawar Hossain Sayedee (2006:20) writes:

¹¹⁶ See “Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami.” <http://jamaat-e-islami.org/en/aboutus.php> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹¹⁷ See “Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami’s Views on Terrorism.” Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, 29 February 2012. <http://jamaat-e-islami.org/en/details.php?artid=MTE0> (accessed 8 February 2016).

In Islam and Islamic way of life—from narrow to wider spheres and from the beginning to the end of Muslim life, that means, from this world to the other world—everywhere there is provision of wishing peace and putting efforts for establishment of peace. Under such systems and provisions, of Islam, to search for the trace of terrorism and militancy to kill people and create disaster and anarchy in the country in the name of introducing the rule of Allah can only be the work of the ignorant willful sinners and the enemies of Islam, Muslims and the country. Those who claim to be Muslims yet follow the path of terrorism and militancy and create disaster in the country are clearly misguided and this will lead them to hell.

The BJI is a cadre-based organization built upon, as Banu (1994:83) notes, “the pattern of revolutionary totalitarian parties working through concentric circles spreading out their influences.” The organizational structure is hierarchical and characterized by strict discipline and cohesiveness (Hossain and Siddiquee 2004). Accountability lies at every level. The chief of the organization is designated as “*Ameer*”, commonly called *Ameer-e-Jamaat* (the leader of the organization). Two central bodies— *kendriya karma parishad* (central working council) as well as *kendriya nirbahi parishad* (central executive council) and *kendriya majlis-e-shura* (central consultative council)—are responsible for decision making and execution within the party. While the former works as the cabinet, the latter serves as the parliament of the organization. The leaders including the central *Ameer* and the members of the *kendriya karma parishad* and *kendriya nirbahi parishad* and the *majlis-e-shura* are elected through secret ballots. The local level leaders are also elected in the same way. Abul Asad, Editor of the Daily Sangram and a BJI-aligned intellectual, in an interview with the author, is of the view

that the BJI is the only political party in Bangladesh which has been following most democratic practices and norms within the party.

The party's working force is categorized as supporter, worker, advance-worker, and *rukan* (member). However, the constitution of the party only acknowledges the *rukan*.¹¹⁸ Through a gradual process of training and indoctrination, a worker can become a *rukan*. According to the party constitution, a worker has to fulfill several conditions, such as a certain amount of Islamic knowledge, commitment to basic Islamic practices, and commitment to the party prior to taking the oath of a *rukan*.¹¹⁹ When an advance-worker fulfills these conditions, as prescribed by the constitution, he/she can apply for becoming a *rukan*. After his/her application, he/she is now identified as *rukan prarthi* (the candidate for *rukan*). At this stage, he/she has to wait for a period of time and demonstrate his/her qualification for the full membership (*rukan*). According to a statistics in 2006, there were 22,000 *rukan* and 30,000 advance-workers of the BJI (Riaz and Raji 2011:51).

The party fund is called *bait-al-mal* (public treasury). The principal source of *bait-al-mal* is the party's adherents include sympathizers, supporters, workers, and leaders and activists of all levels who are called in the party circle as *janashakti* (manpower). The manpower is supposed to pay monthly *iyanat* (regular monthly contribution), *zakat* and *ushr* (charity), and one-time donation to the *bait-al-mal* fund. Other sources of fund include stipulated monthly contribution from the lower-organizations and profit from party-publications. Every member (*rukan*) of the

¹¹⁸ See "The Constitution." *Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami*, pp. 14-16.

http://jamaat-e-islami.org/en/articlepdf/108_Jamaat%20Constitution-2008.pdf (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

organization has to mandatorily pay five percent of his/her monthly income. Beyond this ceiling, he/she has to contribute generously when the party demands. The supporters and workers who are not *rukan* make voluntary contributions. A regular audit is followed to maintain a transparent budgeting at all levels of the organization.

Like most other political parties in Bangladesh, the BJI has also placed importance upon the activities of the students. During the Pakistani years, it had its student wing called Islami Chhatra Sangh. After independence, Bangladesh Islami Chhatrashibir (BIC) was founded in 1977.¹²⁰ The aim and objective of the BIC was set along the line of the BJI: to seek the pleasure of God by molding entire human life in accordance with the code prescribed by God and exemplified by His messenger.¹²¹ Since its inception, the BIC has been the prime force for the organizational expansion of and the main channel of recruitment for the BJI (Banu 1994; Kabir 2006). It is claimed that the BIC has 130,000 regular workers and millions of supporters that makes it one of the largest student organizations in Bangladesh (Riaz and Raji 2011:52). In almost every educational institution be it *madrasa* or secular college or university, the vibrant activity of the BIC is present. A substantial number of the BIC members, after the completion of their education, are recruited in the BJI-dominated organizations and institutions.

The BJI is widely believed to have links with a number of financial institutions through which it has made investments in services, trade, education, transport and media. The critics argue that the party continues to derive immense financial benefits from these

¹²⁰ See “The Glorious History.” Bangladesh Islami Chhatrashibir. <http://english.shibir.org.bd/page/item-14/Glorious-History> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹²¹ See “Aim and Objective.” Bangladesh Islami Chhatrashibir. <http://english.shibir.org.bd/page/item-12/At-a-glance> (accessed 8 February 2016).

ventures. Abul Barkat, an economist at the Dhaka University and an outspoken critic of the Jamaat, informs that the BJI earns an annual profit of \$278 million from different business ventures, such as banks, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, NGOs, media corporations, and educational institutions.¹²² He further states that the Jamaat-run economy amounts to 8.62 percent of the nation's developmental budget.¹²³ However, the BJI leaders insist that the members might be involved in businesses but the party has no association with these businesses (Riaz and Raji 2011).

Since the beginning of the 2010s, the BJI has been in several crises that it had not previously faced. During the second term of the Hasina regime, all the frontline leaders of the party were accused of war crimes and tried in the International War Crimes Tribunal. Five of them including its Ameer (President) and Secretary-General have already been executed. A large number of leaders and activists throughout the country have been imprisoned. A section of people including students and youths who claim to be pro-liberation forces organized under the banner of *Gonojagoron Moncho* keeps pressing on their demands for the execution of the rest of the leaders. The Awami League and the left-leaning parties are invariably supportive of their demands.

Although the secularist parties and groups have been consistently vocal against the BJI and its role in 1971, their opposition has only multiplied since 2001 when the BJI became the part of the government by occupying a couple of ministerial positions. A group of orthodox ulama who have been highly critical of the religious interpretation of

¹²² See "Jamaat-e-Islami and Its Financial Resources." *Bangladesh Live News*.
<http://www.bangladeshlivenews.com/home/article-details/4560/column/Jamaat-e-Islami+and+its+financial+resources/> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹²³ Ibid.

Maulana Mawdudi, the ideologue of the BJI, have also been critical of Jamaat on both religious and political grounds. This factor seems to have helped the secularists strengthen their argument that the BJI does not represent an Islamic party; rather it uses religion only for power and self-interests.

8.3.2 Idealist and orthodox (political)

Islami Oikya Jote

Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) is an alliance of several like-minded Islamist parties represented by the Qawmi madrasa-based orthodox ulama. This alliance was formed in December 1990 in the build up to the 1991 parliamentary elections aiming at uniting the Islamist parties and contesting the elections together to achieve a good electoral outcome. At that time, six Islamist parties joined IOJ which included Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan, Nezam-e-Islam Party, Islami Shasantantra Andolan, Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh, and Fara'idi Andolan. Shaikh al-Hadith Allama Azizul Haque, Pir of Charmonai Maulana Fazlul Karim, Maulanas Abdul Karim, Ashraf Ali, Muhiuddin Khan, and Maulana Ahmadullah Ashraf had key roles in establishing this Islamist alliance. However, in the subsequent years, the unity of the IOJ was broken resulting in the split in the Jote by phases.¹²⁴ At present, there are several factions of IOJ, such as IOJ (Nezami-Fayzullah), IOJ (Rakib-Karim), and IOJ (Misbah). The founding partners, such as Khelafat Majlis, Khelafat Andolan, and Islami Shasantantra Andolan (now Islami Andolan Bangladesh) quit the alliance and continued to work in Islamism distinctively.

¹²⁴ See Munif Ammar, “Dui Jug Dhore Dofay Dofay Bhangche Islami Oikya Jote” (Islami Oikya Jote Splits by Phases over Two Eras). *newsbangladesh.com*, 13 January 2016.

In the late 1990s, Mufti Amini's Islami Morcha Bangladesh (Islamic Alliance of Bangladesh) joined the IOJ. Islami Morcha Bangladesh (IMB) earlier launched a vigorous campaign and agitation against the Bangladeshi controversial writer Taslima Nasreen for her allegedly blasphemous comments (Riaz 2004). Soon after joining the IOJ, Mufti Fazlul Haque Amini, commonly known as Mufti Amini became its Secretary-General. IOJ had begun to draw widespread attention by organizing several massive rallies and movements against what they called anti-Islamic activities including the High Court's declaration of *fatawa* as illegal (Riaz 2004). In 1998, the IOJ joined the then four-party alliance led by Begum Khaleda Zia (Chairperson of BNP). Soon after, Charmonai Pir's Islami Shasantantra Andolan left the Jote, declining to work under women leadership.¹²⁵ The IOJ which is said to represent two Islamist parties—Nezam-e-Islam and Khelafat Islami—once again disintegrated in January 2016 on the question of staying with the BNP-led twenty-party alliance (formerly four-party alliance).¹²⁶ Maulana Abdul Latif Nezami and Mufti Fayzullah, IOJ's Chairman and Secretary-General respectively declared to quit the BNP-led alliance though a faction headed by Senior Vice Chairman Maulana Abdur Rakib, declared that it would remain with the coalition.¹²⁷

A major promoter of the Hefazat-e-Islam, the IOJ furnishes its fundamental principle as the “establishment of social justice based on Qur'an and Sunnah, freedom from exploitation, anarchy, oppression and corruption based on political equality of

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ See “Islami Oikya Jote Still Stays with the 20-Party Alliance: Abdur Rakib.” *Naya Diganta*, 7 January 2016. <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/83355> (accessed 9 February 2016).

¹²⁷ See “Islami Oikya Jote Quits 20-Party Alliance: IOJ Faction to Stay with BNP-led Alliance.” *The Daily Star*, 7 January 2016. <http://www.thedailystar.net/politics/islami-oikya-jote-quits-20-party-alliance-198409> (accessed 9 February 2016).

citizens, and guarantee of the protection of social interests.”¹²⁸ After its inception, the IOJ had participated in the subsequent elections. It captured one seat out of 300 securing 0.79 percent of the popular votes in the 1991 elections, one seat out of 300 securing 1.09 percent popular votes in the June 1996 elections, and two seats out of 300 securing 0.68 percent popular votes in the 2001 elections (Islam 2015:213-221). However, in the 2008 elections, it failed to secure any parliamentary seat.

Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh and Nezam-e-Islam Party

In November 1919, in the beginning of the Khilafat Movement, the Deoband ulama, under the leadership of Maulana Mahmud al-Hasan of Dar al-Ulum Deoband, founded Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind (The Indian Association of Muslim Theologians) which was succeeded by the Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh (JUIB). By this account, the JUIB is the oldest Islamist party in Bangladesh. The party made a significant contribution to the advancement of the anti-colonial movement. While a faction of the party headed by Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani supported undivided India, the other faction led by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi championed the Pakistan movement. After partition in 1947, the party was identified in Pakistan as Jamiat Ulama-i-Pakistan. Like other Islamist parties in Pakistan, Jamiat actively worked for making an Islamic constitution for Pakistan. In the 1950s, it also had an important role in the *Khatme Nabuwat* (seal of Prophethood) movement or in other words, the anti-Qadiani movement.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ See “The Constitution.” *Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ)*, Central Office, Lalbag, Dhaka, p. 5.

¹²⁹ See “A Short Introduction of the Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh.” Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh. <http://aljamiatbd.com/?p=75> (accessed 9 February 2016).

After the attainment of independence of Bangladesh, the party emerged as Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh (JUIB). The support-base of the party is mainly the Deoband-aligned Qawmi madrasas and their teachers and students. The party has a strong hold in the eastern region particularly the greater Sylhet in Bangladesh. It is said to have two main factions—one led by Maulana Muhiuddin Khan, better known as the editor of the monthly *Medina*, a widely circulated Islamist magazine; the other led by Maulana Farid Uddin Masud, a former director of the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh (Riaz and Raji 2011). The latter is also better known as the imam of the country's largest congregation of Eid prayer organized at Sholakia in the District of Kishoreganj. In the past, the JUIB was accused of being associated with the local militant Islamist groups which the leaders categorically denied. In an international conference held in Dhaka in 2005, which was also joined by leaders of both Indian and Pakistani wings of Jamiat and organized by the JUIB, the leaders insisted that Islam had no connection with militancy and terrorism.¹³⁰ The leaders claim that they favor a moderate and peaceful voice of Islam in politics and promote toleration in society (Riaz and Raji 2011).

The JUIB's student-wing Chhatra Jamiat Bangladesh is actively working in educational institutions, particularly in the Deoband-oriented madrasas. The organization purposes to please God and achieve salvation in the Hereafter by establishing an Islamic way of life based on the teachings of the Prophet and his companions.¹³¹

¹³⁰ See "Islam Has No Relation with Terrorism: Ulama." *The Milli Gazette*, 16-30 April 2005. <http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/2005/16-30Apr05-Print-Edition/163004200545.htm> (accessed 10 February 2016).

¹³¹ See "Short Introduction: Chhatra Jamiat Bangladesh." Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh. <http://aljamiatbd.com/?p=179> (accessed 10 February 2016).

Farid Uddin Masud-led faction of the JUIB is highly critical of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, while the Muhiuddin Khan-led faction emphasizes the unity of the ulama of all strands. The latter faction had a significant role in the rise of the Hefazat-e-Islam. Although this Islamist party is politically active throughout the country, it has not had any mentionable achievement in electoral politics.

The Nezam-e-Islam Party (NIP) is an offshoot of the Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Pakistan (JUIP). It emerged in 1952 as a political front of the Jamiat.¹³² The party aimed at establishing Islamic rule in Pakistan. In the 1954 United Front elections, NIP led by Maulana Atahar Ali, being a partner of the United Front, captured 19 seats in the East Pakistan Provincial Assembly (Molla 2004:218). Afterwards, it has failed in reaping any notable political success. The party is a partner of the IOJ, though inflicted with a number of factions led by Mufti Izhar, Maulana Nezami, and Maulana Rakib. However, it actively serves the pro-Islamic causes and consistently opposes the acts of militancy.¹³³

Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan

“Muslims are my brethren in faith, while non-Muslims are my kin, since we are all children of Adam and Ebb (blessings of Allah be upon them)”—a famous statement made by Maulana Mohammadullah, popularly known as Hafezzi Huzur who established the Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan (BKA) in the early 1980s (Ahamed 1983). The BKA is also a Qawmi madrasa-based Islamist organization which aims at establishing Khilafat in Bangladesh and thus making a contribution to the global Islamist movement for Islamic

¹³² See “Condemnation and Protest of the Spurious Information by Abul Barkat.” *Qaomi News*, 15 December 2015.

¹³³ Ibid.

Caliphate (Riaz and Raji 2011). Its programs include the introduction of the principles of the Qur'an and Sunnah, reorientation of the judicial system along Islamic lines, reorganization of the education system in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah, and restructuring of *zakat* and *wakf* (Ahamed 1983).

The party website suggests that Hafezzi Huzur was a Sufi saint of Tariqa-i-Chistia-Saberia and a *khalifa* (viceroy) of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi of the Dar al-Ulum Deoband.¹³⁴ Hafezzi Huzur is reported to have founded hundreds of Qawmi madrasas in Bangladesh which later became the party's support-base.¹³⁵ Hafezzi Huzur had contested twice in Presidential elections—in 1981 and 1986. In the 1981 elections, he received the third highest vote securing 1.9 percent of the votes cast (Ahamed 1983:1116), and in the 1986 elections, he obtained the second highest vote securing 5.69 percent of the votes cast (Islam 1987:168). He is said to be the first religious figure in Bangladesh who contested in elections for the highest office of the state. The BKA is also said to be the first Islamist political party in the country founded by a pir.

The chief of the party called *Ameer-e-Shariah* who is simultaneously conceived as a spiritual figure. The party is operated by three central bodies—*majlis-e-shura* (consultative council), *majlis-e-amela* (executive council), and *majlis-e-umushi* (general council). The Ameer chooses the Secretary-General after consulting with the members of the *majlis-e-shura*. The members of the party have to take two oaths before the Ameer—an oath of allegiance and an oath of jihad (Riaz and Raji 2011).

¹³⁴ See "Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon." <http://bangladeshkhelafatandolan.blogspot.sg/> (accessed 10 February 2016).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

After the inception of the party in November 1981, a number of prominent ulama, such as Shaikh al-Hadith Allama Azizul Haque, Pir of Charmonai Maulana Fazlul Karim, and former leader of JIB Maulana Abdur Rahim, Maulana Muhiuddin Khan, and Mufti Amini became united in this platform under the leadership of Hafezzi Huzur. However, after Hafezzi Huzur became inactive in the party due to his old age, the internal weaknesses of the party began to emerge that eventually led to several splits in the party. All the prominent leaders quit the party, one after the other and soon formed their own organizations. The familial conflict and personality clashes rather than ideological differences paved the way for these splits.¹³⁶ The party continues to be ruled by the family members of Hafezzi Huzur.

Kelafat Majlis

In December 1989, the faction of Khelafat Andolan led by Shaikh al-Hadith Allama Azizul Haque and the Jubo Shibir headed by Ahmad Abdul Kader (known as Abdul Kader Bachhu) merged to form a new party—Khelafat Majlis (KM). The party's ideology and objectives are: (i) to emulate the examples of Qur'an, Sunnah and the rightly-guided Caliphs in all matters; (ii) to establish the leadership of true ulama and pious intellectuals and politicians in all strata of society instead of the leadership of iniquitous and corrupted persons; (iii) to struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed people and include them in the movement; (iv) to strive for moral and spiritual development; (v) to preserve and evolve the religious heritage; (vi) to coordinate between modern and traditional trends of Islamic movement illustrated by true spiritual saints,

¹³⁶ See "Islamic Politics Is Getting Detained under *Paribartantra* [dynastic politics]." *the report24.com*, 28 March 2015. <http://bangla.thereport24.com/article/96451/index.html> (accessed 10 February 2016).

religious teachers and scholars; (vii) to abandon all kinds of parochialism and conflict and to emphasize the unity of the Muslims; (viii) to continue struggle for the achievement of economic emancipation and the establishment of political rights of the people; (ix) to fight all hegemonic and aggressive forces tirelessly in order for the protection of sovereignty and independence of the country; (x) to take the side of the oppressed nations of the planet as opposed to American imperialism, Zionism and racism and to support movements of all freedom-aspiring and oppressed people of the globe including Palestine, Bosnia, Arakan, Algeria, Kosovo, Mindanao, Kashmir, Iraq and Afghanistan; (xi) to resort to an uncompromising path of struggle by relinquishing all kinds of opportunism and compromise in the way of the movement; and (xii) to strive for an Islamic revolution through mass upsurge and mass movements.¹³⁷

The party programs include *dawah* (preaching), organization, training of workforce, honest and ideal leadership, the unity of the ummah and service to humanity, establishment of the rights of minorities, anti-imperialist movement, and a mass movement for the establishment of Islamic Caliphate.¹³⁸

The head of the party is called *Ameer-e-Khelafat Majlis*. The party is organized by several authoritative bodies: *Ameer-e-Khelafat Majlis*, advisory council, general council, *majlis-e-shura* (consultative council), and executive council. The Ameer is elected for a period of two years by the members of the *majlis-e-shura* through secret ballots. The *majlis-e-shura* is the highest decision-making body of the party.

The party has two kinds of membership: primary member and member. Anyone who joins the party is regarded as a primary member. A member requires fulfilling

¹³⁷ See "Ideology and Objectives." Khelafat Majlis. <http://khelafatmajlis.org/> (accessed 11 February 2016).

¹³⁸ See "Basic Programs." Khelafat Majlis. <http://khelafatmajlis.org/> (accessed 11 February 2016).

certain conditions, such as an agreement to the party's ideology, aims and policies; conforming to the rules of Islam; active participation in party's programs; and financial contribution. The fund of the party is called *bait-al-mal* (public treasury). The sources of *bait-al-mal* are monthly contribution of the followers, *ushr* and zakat, lump sum donation, and profit from party's publications and assets.

Since its inception, the Khelafat Majlis has been active in the field of the Islamic movement. In the 1990s, it made a rigorous campaign against the demolishment of the Babri Mosque in India and organized a long-march demanding the reconstruction of the mosque. Around that time, it waged a tougher movement against the Bangladeshi controversial writer Taslima Nasreen whom they called *nastik-murtad* (atheist-apostate). The party has been vehemently opposing the restoration of secularism in and the deletion of the Islamic provision from the constitution. The organization is currently a member of the BNP-led twenty-party alliance.

8.3.3 Pir (saint)/mazar (shrine)-based

Islami Andolan Bangladesh

In March 1987, the Islami Shasantantra Andolan (Islamic Constitution Movement), perhaps the first well-organized pir-based Islamist political party in Bangladesh, was founded by the pir of Charmonai Maulana Syed Fazlul Karim who had earlier joined the Khelafat Andolan established by Hafezzi Huzur. In November 2008, the party was registered with the Election Commission as Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB-Islamic

Movement Bangladesh).¹³⁹ The IAB was formed with the aim of striving for an Islamic constitution and transforming Bangladesh into a full-fledged Islamic state in accordance with the experience of classical Islamic Caliphate (Riaz and Raji 2011). The party website outlines that the purpose of the organization is to secure the pleasure of Allah to achieve peace in this world and salvation in the Hereafter.¹⁴⁰ The aims of the organization, as is suggested, are to transform Bangladesh into a welfare state through the implementation of Islamic ideology along the examples of *Khulafa-e-Rasheda* (rightly-guided caliphs) by changing what it calls the existing “*jaheli*” (ignorant) social system.¹⁴¹

The roots of the pir of Charmonai are traced back to the Deoband Islamic seminary, and particularly Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829-1905), one of the founders of Dar al-Ulum Deoband. The Deoband-oriented Qawmi madrasas and ulama as well as a large number of *murids* and followers (of the pir) throughout the country form the support-base of the party.

The programs of the IAB include *dawah*, organization, garnering knowledge and training, unity of people, service to humanity, social and education reform and economic emancipation, development of Islamic culture, addressing the rights of minorities, and waging a mass movement for establishing a welfare state based on Islamic principles.¹⁴² The party’s main slogan is “*shudhu neta nay, nitir paribartan chai*” (we want change of policy, not only leader). The pir of Charmonai traditionally becomes the leader of the party called Ameer. The Ameer who has enormous power and authority within the party

¹³⁹ See “An Introduction to Islami Andolan Bangladesh.” <http://www.islamiandolanbd.org/> (accessed 11 February 2016).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

is entitled as *Ameer-e-Mujahidin*. The party has three decision-making bodies: *majlis-e-sadarat* (presidium council), *majlis-e-shura* (consultative council), and *majlis-e-amela* (executive council). The Ameer appoints the members of the presidium council. The local units are entitled to nominate the members of the consultative council. The Ameer appoints the members of the executive council in consultation with the members of the presidium council (Riaz and Raji 2011). The party also has a student-wing named Islami Shasantantra Chhatra Andolan (Student Movement for Islamic Constitution).

The IAB has contested in a number of parliamentary elections. However, it has not won a single seat in parliament. In the 2001 elections, it formed an alliance with the Ershad-led faction Jatiya Party (JP) and several other small parties. The alliance, called the Islami Jatiya Oikya Front (IJOF, Islamic National United Front) fielded 281 candidates and captured 14 out 300 parliamentary seats securing 7.25 percent of the popular vote.¹⁴³ None of the candidates from the IAB won. The pir of Charmonai had earlier declared that the IJOF, if voted to power, would form an Islamic government in the country. The pir was invariably opposed to women leadership. Even, while the IJOF alliance was in existence, he ordered that Ershad's wife, Raushan Ershad, a former member of parliament and a senior leader of the JP, should wear a veil if she joined any meetings of the alliance (Riaz 2004). In the 2008 elections, the IAB nominated 167 candidates, captured no seat, and secured less than one percent of the votes.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ See "Statistical Report: 8th Parliament Election 2001." op. cit.

¹⁴⁴ See "Statistical Report: 9th Parliamentary Election 2008." op. cit.

Zaker Party

In the previous chapter, the pir of Atroshi tradition has been discussed. The Zaker Party (ZP) was established by late Atroshi pir Maulana Hashmatullah Faridpuri in 1989 (Mills 1998). As mentioned earlier, the Atroshi Darbar came into prominence during the Ershad regime. President Ershad regularly visited the pir of Atroshi. The ZP has gained significant attention due to the pir of Atroshi and his association with the prominent individuals in the country. The party aims at establishing an Islamic state system whose support-base is largely the *murids* and followers of Atroshi spread out across the country. The party is highly critical of Wahhabism, Salafism, and the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and its founder Maulana Mawdudi. The current chief of the party (called Chairman) is Mostafa Amir Faisal, a businessperson by profession who had inherited his position on his father's death in 2001.

The ZP first contested in parliamentary elections in 1991. It fielded 251 candidates throughout the country but failed to win a single seat in parliament,¹⁴⁵ failing to even come close to victory in any of the constituencies. However, it appeared to be the sixth largest party in the country securing 1.22 percent of votes.¹⁴⁶ In the 2008 elections, the party nominated 37 candidates and none of them won instead, performing worse than before, garnering 0.19 percent of votes.¹⁴⁷ The ZP does not see secularism as incompatible with Islam, and favors the incorporation of secularism (as a state ideology) in the constitution (Kabir 2015). This pir and mazar-based Islamist party is currently a member of the Awami League-led 14 party alliance.

¹⁴⁵ See "Statistical Report: 5th Parliamentary Elections 1991." Bangladesh Election Commission, p. 48.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ See "Statistical Report: 9th Parliamentary Election 2008." op. cit.

Bangladesh Tariqat Federation, Bangladesh Islami Front and Islamic Front Bangladesh

The Bangladesh Tariqat Federation (BTF) is comparatively a new Islamist party based on shrines and mazars. The party is affiliated with the Maijbhandari Sufi Tariqa which is reported to have been established by Shah Sufi Syed Ahmad Ullah, known to his followers as Gausul Azam Maijbhandari (1826-1906) based in Chittagong in the early nineteenth century (Bertocci 2006). His mazar is located at Fatikchhari, Chittagong. The BTF's chief Syed Najibul Bashar Maijbhandari is a descendant of Gausul Azam Maijbhandari. The party came into being in 2005.

In 1991, Najibul Bashar Maijbhandari was elected as a lawmaker with Awami League nomination. In 1995, he joined BNP and was elected as lawmaker in the February 1996 elections with the BNP ticket. He was denied a party nomination for the June 1996 elections. In the BNP, he held the post of international affairs secretary, and simultaneously the chief of Jatiotabadi Ulama Dal (Nationalist Ulama Party), the religious wing of the party. In 2005, Maijbhandari left BNP, accusing Jamaat (second major party in BNP-led alliance) of being linked to bombings at shrines in the country, and formed his own party (Riaz and Raji 2011). It is noted that the Maijbhandari circle is so opposed to the Jamaat-e-Islami that it demands a ban on the Jamaat.¹⁴⁸ In the 2008 elections, the BTF nominated 31 candidates; none of them won and demonstrated a rather

¹⁴⁸ See "Tariqat Federation Demands Ban on Jamaat-e-Islami." *Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS)*, 24 February 2014.

<http://www.bssnews.net/newsDetails.php?cat=0&id=391896&date=2014-02-24&dateCurrent=2014-03-02>
(accessed 12 February 2016).

dismal performance securing 19905 votes in total (0.03 percent of votes).¹⁴⁹ Since the institution of his party, Majibhandari has been closely linked to the secularist parties.

The Bangladesh Islami Front (BIF) and the Islamic Front Bangladesh (IFB) believe in the same ideology, what they call *Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat* and follow the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence as well as Sufi orders. The latter is, in fact, a separate fraction of the former. These parties vehemently oppose the BJI and its student-wing BIC arguing that the “Jamaat-Shibir are ‘fooling’ Muslims by misusing and misrepresenting Islam.”¹⁵⁰ These pir/shrine-based groups have also urged the government to ban the two organizations.¹⁵¹ Currently aligned with the Awami League-led secular grand alliance, the BIF and IFB contested in a number of elections but failed to capture any seat in parliament. They have denounced Islamist militancy.

8.3.4 Urban elite-centric

Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh

The Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT, the Party of Liberation) is a transnational revolutionary Islamist movement founded by Sheikh Taqi Uddin an-Nabhani, a Palestinian Islamic scholar, and some of his close associates in 1953 (Karagiannis and McCauley 2006; Osman 2010). The movement aims to revive the classical Islamic Caliphate. The Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh (HTB) is a chapter of the larger HT organization.

¹⁴⁹ See “Statistical Report: 9th Parliamentary Election 2008.” op. cit.

¹⁵⁰ See “Islamic Front Demands Ban on Jamaat-Shibir.” *The Daily Star*, 9 March 2013. <http://archive.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/islamic-front-demands-ban-on-jamaat-shibir/> (accessed 16 February 2016).

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

The organization derives a strong base from the urban educated Muslim elites. The members, as Awdallah (2006) describes, “are the selected elite of the *ummah*, the beautiful mole that no eye can miss, the lamps of light boast in their mouths, their tongues speak of the evidences of the Book (Qur’an), they are the selected elite” (Quoted in Osman 2012:89). This elite-centric HT’s political doctrine is founded on two major principles—the need for the shari’ah law that justly regulates aspects of human life, and the need for an authentic Islamic state that can establish a just society (Karagiannis and McCauley 2006). In order to establish *Khilafah*, the party claims to have adopted the Prophet’s methodology which, it believes, included three stages: the first stage involves recruitment of party members, the second stage entails Islamization of society, and the third and final stage includes peaceful take-over of state and then embarking on jihad against the infidels to spread Islam (Karagiannis and McCauley 2006).

The HT launched its Bangladesh chapter (HTB) in 2001. The HTB published several books in Bengali regarding its organization and ideology including a draft constitution called “*Draft Constitution of Khilafah*” for its envisioned “Islamic state.”¹⁵² Published in 2010, this draft constitution, pertaining to 186 articles, outlines among others the organs of the state—the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary; social and economic system; education and foreign policy. Some articles as chalked out in the draft constitution can be noted: “the language of Islam is Arabic. Only Arabic language shall be used as state language” (Article 8); the administration shall be unitary (Article 16), and the head of the state must be a Muslim (Article 19); the Muslims shall have the right to form political parties and a party based on an ideology beyond Islam shall be banned

¹⁵² See “Draft Constitution of Khilafah.” *Hizb at-Tahrir Bangladesh*. 16 August 2010.

<http://www.ht-bangladesh.info/sites/default/files/books/Constitution-beng.pdf> (accessed 12 February 2016).

(Article 21); and there shall be a separation between male and female (Article 109), and a woman shall never be qualified as a ruler (Article 112).¹⁵³

It is reported that the HTB has 5000 members who are actively working in at least 17 districts (Riaz and Raji 2011:59). The educated middle class based in cities and universities are their targets for recruitment. Two university professors—Syed Golam Maula and Mohiuddin Ahmed—have been pioneers in spreading the ideas of the HTB. The government of Bangladesh banned the organization in October 2009, arguing that the latter was “against the interest of law and posed a threat to public security.”¹⁵⁴ The party denied its involvement in terrorist activities.

8.3.5 The jihadists/militant orthodox

On 17 August 2005, Bangladesh experienced a shockwave of terror due to the fact that a relatively unknown militant Islamist group called Jamaatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh (JMB) detonated five hundred bombs simultaneously in 63 out of 64 administrative districts in the country (Khan 2011:52; Hasan 2011:101). They also dropped pamphlets at every bombing spot demanding the establishment of the “law of Allah” in the country by dismantling the existing constitution and democratic order as those were, according to them, the sources of *shirk* (polytheism) and *kufri* (unbelief) (Hasan 2011). After that incident, Bangladesh started gaining widespread international attention and coverage in the global media. However, the religious extremist or *jihadist* groups, in the guise of

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ See “Bangladesh Islamist Group Banned.” *BBC News*, 23 October 2009.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8321329.stm (accessed 13 February 2016).

Islam, began to rise in Bangladesh in the 1990s.¹⁵⁵ According to a *Daily Janakantha* report, at least 70 militant organizations are active in the country. From January 1999 to November 2010, approximately 100 militant attacks took place in which 136 innocent people were killed and 2,488 were wounded.¹⁵⁶ These clandestine organizations are believed to be a part of a single network working in unison. Of these organizations, the Shahadat-e Al-Hikma, the JMB, the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJi), and the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) are reported to have been the most prominent. All these organizations have been banned by the government of Bangladesh.¹⁵⁷

In July 2016, a group of Islamist militants carried out a brutal attack on a Dhaka café triggering considerable international attention and media coverage once again on Bangladesh. The attack, which led to the deaths of foreigners and locals alike, was immediately claimed by the Islamic State (IS).¹⁵⁸ Although the local authority denies IS's involvement in this terrorist act, there is a growing perception that the IS has spread its network through the local militant groups in Bangladesh. Of these groups:

¹⁵⁵ See Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury, "Religious Extremism in Bangladesh." *The Daily Star*, 1 January 2014.

<http://www.thedailystar.net/religious-extremism-in-bangladesh-4677> (accessed 13 February 2016).

¹⁵⁶ See "Al Qaeda O IS'er Sompriktota Niye Rohosso: Bangladeshe Jongi Hamla" (Mystery over the Association of Al Qaeda with IS: The Militant-Attacks on Bangladesh). *The Daily Janakantha*, 25 December 2015, Dhaka.

¹⁵⁷ See "Bangladesh Bans Islamist Group for Anti-State Activities." *The Daily Star*, 25 May 2015.

<http://www.thedailystar.net/country/ansarullah-bangla-team-banned-87172> (accessed 13 February 2016).

¹⁵⁸ See Andrew Marszal and Chris Graham, "20 Hostages Killed in 'ISIL' Attack on Dhaka Restaurant Popular with Foreigners." *The Telegraph*, 2 July 2016.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/01/gunmen-attack-restaurant-in-diplomatic-quarter-of-bangladeshi-ca/> (accessed 14 July 2016).

The Shahadat-e Al-Hikma launched its operation in Rajshahi in 2003 under the leadership of Kawsar Hossain Siddique. The group was believed to be funded by mafia don Dawood Ibrahim.¹⁵⁹ The group renounced the country's constitution and aimed to capture state power through violent means. The group leader claimed to have 10 thousand commandos and 25 thousand fighters working in the country to bring about an Islamic revolution.¹⁶⁰ In February 2003, the government banned this militant outfit.¹⁶¹

The HuJi emerged in Bangladesh in 1992 being the fountainhead of the country's militant organizations. It is, in fact, a transnational group which originated in the early 1980s as part of a network of Pakistan-backed mujahedeen groups fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan.¹⁶² The HuJi leaders in Bangladesh, while launching the organization, expected to establish Islamic rule in the country and claimed that those who fought the then Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan were working with the organization. Abdur Rahman Faruqi and Shawkat Osman alias Sheikh Farid are reported to have had pioneered the organization in Bangladesh. In January 1999, the HuJi activists made a failed attempt on the life of eminent poet Shamsur Rahman which was reported to be its first open operation in the country. Other major terrorist acts which are reported to have been perpetrated by the HuJi included the planting of a massive bomb at the venue of a public

¹⁵⁹ See Bijan Sarkar, "The Emergence of Militancy in Bangladesh: A Review", *bdnews24.com*, 20 January 2015. <http://opinion.bdnews24.com/bangla/archives/24140> (accessed 13 February 2016).

¹⁶⁰ See "Shahdat-e-al-Hikma (SAH)." *GlobalSecurity.org* <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/sah.htm> (accessed 13 February 2016).

¹⁶¹ See "Dhaka Bans Dawood Terror Groups." *The Economic Times*, 18 February 2003. http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2003-02-18/news/27554804_1_dawood-ibrahim-bans-mumbai-blasts-case (accessed 13 February 2016).

¹⁶² See "Mapping Militant Organizations: Harkat-ul-Jihadi al-Islami." *Stanford University*. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/217> (accessed 13 February 2016).

meeting at Kotalipara, Gopalganj in July 2000 which was addressed by the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and a series of bomb blasts at a cultural program at Ramna Batamul in Dhaka on Bengali New Year in April 2001.¹⁶³ The organization was banned by the government in October 2005.¹⁶⁴

The JMB was formed in Jamalpur district in 1998 by Abdur Rahman. The organization was reported to be a co-organization of the HuJi. The JMB first came to the attention of the media, government authorities, and the public in May 2002, when eight members were nabbed while allegedly in possession of incendiary bombs (Ganguly 2006). The organization received most attention after its nationwide blasts on 17 August 2005. Further, it came as news headlines of several suicide attacks on the country's judiciary between October and November 2005 in which at least four judges were killed and many wounded (Hasan 2012:9). The group rejected the current state system and attempted to establish a shari'ah-based Islamic state (Datta 2007; Khan 2011). The JMJB has been described as a sister organization of the JMB. It also emerged in 1998, and came to public attention in 2004 when it began to target the left-wing extremists, particularly cadres of the outlawed Maoist Purba Banglar Communist Party (Ganguly 2006; Parvez 2016). The JMJB was led by Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai who also happened to be a leader of JMB. In February 2005, the government of Bangladesh banned both the JMB and the JMJB (Ganguly 2006; Datta 2007). In March 2006, JMB chief Abdur Rahman and JMJB commander Bangla Bhai were nabbed and later executed along with several other militant extremists (Parvez 2016).

¹⁶³ See "Harkatul Jihad Banned At Last: Govt. Terms It 'a Terrorist Outfit.'" *The Daily Star*, 18 October 2005. <http://archive.thedailystar.net/2005/10/18/d5101801033.htm> (accessed 13 February 2016).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

The Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), the most recently emerged militant extremist group led by Jasimuddin Rahmani, came into prominence in early 2013 when several students of a private university (North South University) were arrested for the murder of a blogger in Dhaka (Parvez 2016). The group reflects a new and young generation of jihadists in the country. The media reports suggest that like the Hizb ut-Tahrir, the ABT looks for the highly motivated and educated university students who are well introduced with the English language and technology as its target for recruitment. The group is reported to have 3,000 members, and more than 100 of them put their faith in armed jihad (Parvez 2016:430). The secular bloggers and writers and publishers have come under this group's attack. Several bloggers and publishers have allegedly been killed with several others being threatened by them.¹⁶⁵ Several activists allegedly connected to these criminal acts have been brought to book. The chief of the outfit Rahmani, with his several associates, was eventually captured and is now facing trial.¹⁶⁶ The group was banned in May 2015 by the government of Bangladesh.¹⁶⁷

Beyond these local militant groups, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as Islamic State (IS), an international militant organization from the Middle East, claims to have cells operating in Bangladesh. IS's claims were made soon after the

¹⁶⁵ See Kellan Howell, "Islamic Extremists in Bangladesh Publish Global Hit List of Bloggers; Two Americans Listed." *The Washington Times*, 24 September 2015.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/sep/24/ansarullah-bangla-team-publishes-global-hit-list-o/> (accessed 14 February 2016).

¹⁶⁶ See "Rajib Killing: Ansarullah Bangla Team Chief, 7 NSU Students Indicted." *The Daily Star*, 18 March 2015. <http://www.thedailystar.net/country/rajib-killing-ansarullah-bangla-team-chief-6-nsu-students-indicted-72314> (accessed 14 February 2016).

¹⁶⁷ See "Bangladesh Govt. Bans Islamist Outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team for Anti-State Activities." *The Daily Star*, 26 May 2015. <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/ansarullah-outfit-banned-87394> (accessed 14 February 2016).

killings of bloggers and online activists over the last couple of years was brought to light. A CNN report suggests that between 2014 and 2015, at least eight atheists and gay rights campaigners were killed in attacks carried out by the Islamist militants.¹⁶⁸ The IS had also claimed responsibility for the Dhaka café attack in July 2016, the first of its kind in Bangladesh. The attack resulted in the deaths of at least seventeen foreigners, several locals including a couple of security officers, and the attackers. However, the government of Bangladesh has consistently denied that militant groups such as IS operate in the country: Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal is reported to have asserted that the café attackers were “all Bangladeshi and had no foreign connections.”¹⁶⁹ Regardless, the Dhaka café attack hints at a connection between IS and the so-called homegrown militant groups, such as JMB, JMJB, HuJi and ABT.

Apart from the proscription of the militant organizations noted above, the government of Bangladesh, in 2009, blacklisted seven other Islamist extremist groups—Hizb ut-Tawhid, Islami Samaj, Ulama Anjuman al-Baiyinaat, Islamic Democratic Party, Tawhid Trust, Tamir ud-Deen, and Allah’r Dal—for their suspected involvement in militant activities.¹⁷⁰ A number of other Islamist groups have also come under government surveillance. These include: Al-Harat al-Islamia, Jamayatul Falaiya, Tawhidi Janata, Jummatul al-Sadat, Al Jihad Bangladesh, World Islamic Front for Jihad, Warat

¹⁶⁸ See “Bangladeshi Bloggers: What We Want the World to Know.” *CNN*, 29 April 2016. <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/04/28/opinions/bangladeshi-bloggers-opinion/> (accessed 14 July 2016).

¹⁶⁹ See Syed Zain Al-Mahmood, “Bangladesh Attacks Reveals Reach of Islamic State’s Radicalism.” *The Wall Street Journal*, 3 July 2016. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/bangladesh-attack-reveals-reach-of-islamic-states-radicalism-1467569861> (accessed 14 July 2016).

¹⁷⁰ See Kailash Sarkar, “Ten Islamist Outfits to Face Ban.” *Dhaka Tribune*, 21 August 2013. <http://www.dhakatribune.com/law-amp-rights/2013/aug/21/government-mulls-banning-10-islamist-outfits> (accessed 14 February 2016).

Islamic Front, Al-Khidmat Foundation, Muslim Millat Sariyah Council, Ahle Hadith Andolan Bangladesh, Hizbul Mahdi, Jamiatul Ehhia-ut-Turaj, Hayatul Igasa, Bangladesh Anjumane Talamije Islamia, Khidmat-e-Islam Foundation, Islami Jihad Group, Tanjeem Bangladesh, Iktadul Tulah al-Muslimin, Amanatul Forkan al-Khayriya, Ibtadatul al-Muslemin, Al-Sayeed Mujahid Bahini, and Ahsab Bahini.¹⁷¹

8.4 “Democratic Islamism” versus “militant Islamism”

From the late 1990s to the mid-2000s, Bangladesh experienced a number of militant terrorist attacks made by the local militant organizations which claimed to be Islamic. These attacks were carried out during both the Awami League and the BNP regimes. The major attacks during the Awami League regime (1996-2001) were: (i) on 6 March 1999, the bomb attack on the left-oriented cultural organization *Udichi Shilpi Gosthi* in Jessore left 10 people dead and over 100 injured; (ii) on 8 October 1999, bomb blasts at an Ahmadiya mosque in Khulna in which 8 people were killed and 30 others injured. It was followed by another bomb blast at Alai Pak Darbar Sharif in Faridpur killing 4 people; (iii) on 20 January 2001, the bomb blasts at the CPB’s (Communist Party of Bangladesh) rally at Paltan Maidan, Dhaka left 7 people dead; (iv) two months later on 14 April 2001, in an attack on a cultural celebration at Ramna Batamul, 10 people were killed and some 50 wounded; (v) on 3 June 2001, in a bomb attack on a church at Baniarchang in Gopalganj, 10 more people were killed and 30 others injured; (vi) on 15 June 2001, a bomb attack on the Awami League office in Narayanganj left 22 people dead and many others injured; (vii) on 23 September 2001, 8 people were killed and over 100 injured in a

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

bomb attack on an Awami League rally at Mollarhat in Bagerhat; and (viii) on 16 September 2001, 4 people were killed in a bomb blast near an Awami League rally in Sunamganj (Bammi 2010:227-228).

The notable militant attacks during the BNP regime (2001-2006) were: (i) on 28 September 2002, more than 100 people were injured in a series of blasts at a movie house and circus arena in Satkhira; (ii) on 6 December 2002, bomb blasts in four movie houses in Mymensingh town killed 27 and injured more than 200; (iii) on 17 January 2003, 7 people were killed and 20 others injured in a bomb blast at a fair in Tangail; (iv) on 21 May 2004, in a bomb blast at Hazrat Shahjalal Shrine in Sylhet, 3 people were killed and 70 others including the British High Commissioner in Bangladesh Anwar Chowdhury were injured; (v) on 21 August 2004, grenade attacks on an Awami League (AL) rally in Dhaka left 22 people including senior AL leader Ivy Rahman dead and over 100 injured. AL chief Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped the attack; (vi) on 27 January 2005, a powerful grenade attack on an AL rally in Habiganj left 4 people dead including senior AL leader and former Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria; (vii) on 17 August 2005, nationwide bomb explosions at some 500 spots in 63 out of total 64 districts left 2 persons dead and several injured; (viii) on 14 November 2005, bomb attacks on a vehicle in Jhalakati left 7 people dead including two judges of the district court; and (ix) on 29 November 2005, the first ever suicide-bomber in Bangladesh killed seven civilians. On the same day, suicide attacks on a police transport in court premises in Chittagong left 2 dead including one policeman and 20 injured (Bammi 2010:228-229).

In April 2002, the Hong Kong-based *Far Eastern Economic Review* published an article under the headline “Be Ware of Bangladesh.” The article, on the backdrop of the

militant attacks in the late 1990s and early 2000s, warned that Bangladesh was on its way to becoming a “cocoon of terror” (Lintner 2002:14). The Jamaat-e-Islami’s political rise and participation in the four-party alliance government (2001-2006) were also seen as signs towards a shift in such a direction. The party has invariably been accused by the secularist parties and groups of being linked to the militant outfits (Datta 2007) which it has categorically denied. Shah Abdul Hannan, an Islamic philosopher and a Jamaat-aligned intellectual, in an interview with the author, asserts:

Jamaat is not a clandestine party. Jamaat has been actively working in the country for more than six decades. Since 1979, the party has had representation in the parliament. It continues to mobilize people and wants to attain power through democratic competitions and constitutional means. Jamaat’s methodology of work in politics is clear; it has no even distant relationship with militancy and terrorism.

The Jamaat’s main ally, BNP, and other right-wing, especially the Islamist organizations, have also been accused by the same groups of being patronized and to some extent linked to these extremists (Datta 2007). However, the leaders of the BNP, which are rather accommodating to Islamist sentiment, continuously assert that their party does not believe in terrorism and militancy.¹⁷² Habibun Nabi Khan Sohel, a BNP leader, in an interview with the author, argues: “our position is that we honor people’s religious sentiment and we believe that the state should patronize all religions. No religion in the world supports terrorism. The empathy toward religion does not refer to the commitment to fundamentalism or religious terrorism.” Justifying the insertion of the

¹⁷² See “BNP for National Consensus to Deal with Militancy.” *New Age*, 9 October 2015.

<http://newagebd.net/164824/bnp-for-national-consensus-to-deal-with-militancy/> (accessed 15 February 2016).

Islamic provisions into the constitution by the BNP government, Sohail further argues: “the incorporation of *bismillah-ar-rahman-ar-rahim* in the constitution does not make the state fundamentalist. This was, in fact, a reflection of the aspirations of the majority people of the state who happened to be Muslims which is also a reflection of democracy.”

The mainstream Islamist political parties, such as the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, the Islami Oikya Jote, Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan, Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh, and the Zaker Party have categorically denounced militancy and terrorism. In December 2015, 100,000 Islamic leaders and scholars across the country connected to these parties were to issue a jointly signed fatwa condemning the activities of the Islamist militant groups as “un-Islamic.”¹⁷³ The head of the move, Maulana Farid Uddin Masud, a senior leader of the Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh, pointed out that the fatwa identified the militant Islamist activists and followers—who were killing people and indulging in terrorist activities in Bangladesh and elsewhere—as not just the “enemies of Islam” but also “enemies of the Muslims.”¹⁷⁴

These mainstream Islamist political parties are registered with the Bangladesh Election Commission, are constitutionally sound and operate in peaceful ways. They all aim to establish Islamic rule in the country through democratic means. They contest in elections and perceive democracy to be compatible with Islam. These parties see Islamic religious tradition as a viable alternative regarding the protection of the rights of the non-

¹⁷³ See Shaikh Azizur Rahman, “Bangladesh Muslim Leaders Move to Counter Islamist Militants.” *Voice of America*, 18 December 2015, Kolkata. <http://www.voanews.com/content/bangladesh-muslim-leaders-move-to-counter-islamist-militants/3109919.html> (accessed 15 February 2016).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Muslims or minorities.¹⁷⁵ The parties' programs have reflected this. For instance, one of the major programs of the Islami Andolan Bangladesh, according to the party website, is to struggle for "ensuring all civil rights including right to life and property, right to the security of honor and chastity, and right to religious freedom of the non-Muslims or minorities."¹⁷⁶ These Islamist parties represent "democratic Islamism."

By contrast, the militant Islamist parties denounce democracy and pluralism and aim to establish Islamic rule through violent means. They do not believe in elections. These radical Islamist groups represent "militant Islamism."

In Bangladesh, people are religious, but they are not fanatics or religiously blind. Islam entered the country through peaceful missionary activities undertaken by the Sufi preachers and merchants. The elements of religious tolerance and peacefulness are deeply rooted in the society. This could potentially be a major reason that prevents militant Islamism from taking its root in the sociopolitical and cultural fabric of the society.

The political parties—secular or Islamist—are invariably opposed to militancy and terrorism. They are committed to democracy and pluralism. Although both BNP and Awami League, two parties which have been alternating power for the the better parts of two decades, have indulged in blaming each other for the rise of militancy in the country, their regimes have equally experienced Islamist militant incursions. Both parties have shown a zero-tolerance approach to matters of militancy. Bangladesh has yet to be what Lintner (2002:14) called a "cocoon of terror." In the years to come, it is very unlikely to be so, at least if democracy can gain a strong foothold in its society. When democratic

¹⁷⁵ In interviews with the author, Ashraf Ali Akan, a central leader of the Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB), and Mufti Fayzullah, Secretary-General of the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) expressed this view.

¹⁷⁶ See "An Introduction to Islami Andolan Bangladesh", op. cit.

institutions failed, it was said, the military would find a fertile ground for intervention; today it can be said that when democracy fails, militants find a very fertile ground under which to thrive on. Furthermore, the lack of a fair trial of democracy and the suppression of the oppositions are highly likely to make a fertile ground for Islamism or political Islam to thrive on in the country.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion and Sociological Implications

On two historic occasions in the past, Islam has been the sign in which an Oriental society has risen up victoriously against an Occidental intruder. Under the first successors of the Prophet, Islam liberated Syria and Egypt from a Hellenic domination which had weighed on them for nearly a thousand years. Under Zangi and Nur-ad-Din and Saladin and the Mamluks, Islam held the fort against the assaults of Crusaders and Mongols. If the present situation of mankind were to precipitate a 'race war', Islam might be moved to play her historic role once again.

Absit omen.

— **Arnold J. Toynbee** (1948:212), *Civilization on Trial*

The notion of a super-Islamist structure or a super-jihadist structure is a myth that does not withstand the test of history.

— **Fawaz Gerges** (2005:110), *The Far Enemy*

9.1 Islam and democracy are not necessarily incompatible

As discussed in chapter four, Islam is not democracy, nor is democracy Islam. Islam is perceived by many neither just to be a religion, nor a fundamentalist political movement. It is perceived to be a civilization and a way of life that varies from one Muslim country to another but is animated by a common spirit which is essentially more humane than most Westerners realize (Mazrui 1997). Islamic doctrinal philosophy based on divine origin contrasts with Western discourses based on secular philosophical doctrine. Nevertheless, the basic ingredients of democracy as a methodology to strive for a

peaceful and harmonious society are in resemblance with Islamic doctrinal philosophy. The Islamic history has not always been marked by democratic ideals, such as openness, competition, tolerance, egalitarianism, and upholding the interests of the masses. Yet, Islamic political philosophy is conducive to democratic processes in many compelling ways. The obligation of public allegiance (*bay'a*), the insistence on the equality of all believers, the emphasis on individual responsibility, the encouragement of consultative rule (*shura*), the stress on consensus (*ijma*), the requirement of establishing justice and pursuing the public interest, and the persistence of tolerance toward other faiths are all strongly indicative of democracy and pluralism (Ahmad 2003).

Although the Qur'an has not prescribed a certain political order, its established values and principles along with the examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad and his immediate followers suggest a political system of the kind that we call democracy today. Without an essentialist and monolithic understanding of both Islam and democracy, it is evident that these two concepts are compatible with one another. But compatibility does not mean sameness. Islamic values and code of morality are not identical to Western values and ethics. Therefore, the scholars of political Islam have reconciled Islam and democracy with the evolving concept of "Islamic democracy" (Esposito and Voll 1996) or "spiritual democracy" (Iqbal 2012) or "theo-democracy" (Mawdudi 1976). Many Muslims may perceive democracy to be unbelief (*kufra*) and abhor the word 'democracy' itself. This perception is, in all likelihood, to be the outcome of Western colonial and imperialist policies, and to some extent the 'double standard of morality and ethics' typically practiced by the Western governments and institutions towards the oriental and especially the Muslim societies on the one hand, and perceiving

the notion of democracy itself as ‘Western’ on the other. However, the contemporary Muslims’ concern for an Islamic democratic discourse (IDD) based on their values and aspirations and their contempt towards transplantations from the Western world is increasingly gaining momentum in the context of the longstanding heated debate on the relationship between Islam and democracy. The voice for legitimate authority and justice defined by democratic norms is increasingly gaining strength in the contemporary Muslim societies (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996). Arbitrary and authoritarian rules are not intrinsic to Islam and the Muslim societies. Instead, Islam and true democracy are two sides of the same coin. Democratic processes and Islam go hand in hand. If democracy is exemplified through the rights of the people to self-determination and self-fulfillment, that is what Islam and the Muslims have been striving for (Ahmad 2000).

9.2 Islam was spread in Bengal through peaceful means

As elaborated in chapter five, the advent of Islam in the erstwhile Bengal has been recorded much before the political conquest of the Muslims of the country. The peaceful missionary activities by the Arab traders and Sufi saints were primarily responsible for the increase in the number of Muslims and the growth of Muslim society in Bengal. After the Muslim conquest of the territory, the Islamic preachers had been invariably patronized by the Sultans to carry on with their mission. In addition, Muslims from overseas and other parts of India began pouring into Bengal, eventually settling down. Peaceful conversion and immigration can be said to be the two main reasons for the growth of Muslim society in Bengal.

During the advent of Islam, Bengal was dominated by Hinduism, and the society was highly stratified and demoralized (Rahim 1995). In all walks of social life, inequality, injustice, immorality and persecution were rampant and the lower caste Hindus and the Buddhists were subjected to these injustices perpetrated by the dominant Brahman class. The appeal of Islam by the Muslim traders and Sufi preachers profoundly impacted on these oppressed people. Before the conquest of the country by Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji in the beginning of the thirteenth century, people in Bengal had been introduced to the ideals of Islam. After the conquest, it was consolidated and further expanded. The Sufis and saints from other parts of the world poured into Bengal and, with royal patronage, made great contributions to the spread of Islam. The Sufis who arrived in Bengal before the Muslim conquest included among others Baba Adam Shahid, Shah Sultan Balkhi Mahisawar, Shah Muhammad Sultan Rumi, and Makhdum Shah Dawlah Shahid. During the early Muslim period, the Sufis who traveled to Bengal, among others, were Shaikh Jalal al-Din Tabrizi, Shah Makhdum Ruposh, Shah Jalal Muzarrad, Khan Jahan Ali, and Shaikh Sharif al-Din Abu Tawwamah. Subsequently, numerous other Sufis and saints including Shah Turqan Shahid, Taqi al-Din Arabi, Shaikh Akhi Siraj al-Din, Shaikh Ala al-Haq, Shaikh Nur Qutb al-Alam, Mir Sayyid Ashraf Jahangir Simnani, Shaikh Husain Zulkar Nosh, and Shah Ismail Gazi made enormous contributions to the growth of Muslim society in Bengal. The Muslim rulers invariably provided these Sufis and saints with immense patronage. The works of patronage included the building of mosques and shrines, construction of madrasas, and promotion of Islamic spirit (Karim 1959). The rulers also

granted lands to immigrant Muslims who decided to settle in Bengal. This social patronage had a major role in evolving a strong Muslim society.

Among the theories of Islamization in Bengal—religion of the sword or force theory, religion of social liberation theory, religion of patronage theory, and immigration theory—social liberation theory and immigration theory have been found highly relevant. Force theory has had hardly any significance. Arnold (1913:279-280) observes that “compulsory conversions are occasionally recorded. But it was not to force that Islam owed its permanent success in Lower Bengal [East Bengal].” Arnold’s opinion that “Islam has gained its greatest and most lasting missionary triumphs in times and places in which its political power has been weakest, as in ... East Bengal” clearly shows that the argument of the proponents of the ‘force theory’, i.e. ‘Islam was spread by the sword’, is nothing but a well-propagated myth. Muslim scholars argue that there are many words for ‘sword’ in Arabic, such as *saif*, *hussam*, *muhannad*, and so on, and the Qur’an does not contain any of these words, not even for a single occasion. Eminent British historian De Lacy O’Leary in his *Islam at the Cross Roads* writes: “History makes it clear however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myth that historians have ever repeated” (O’Leary 1923:8). British philosopher and historian Thomas Carlyle in his *Heroes and Hero Worship* answers: “The sword indeed: but where will you get your sword! Every new opinion, at its starting, is precisely in a *minority of one*. In one man’s head alone, there it dwells as yet. One man alone of the whole world believes it; there is one man against all men. That *he* take a sword, and try to propagate with that, will do little for him. You must first get your sword! On the whole, a thing will

propagate itself as it can” (Carlyle 1899:84). It is the sword of intellect that conquers the hearts and minds of people. The Qur’an enjoins: “Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious” (16:125).

9.3 Political Islam emerged in Bengal as an anti-colonial nationalist movement

As shown in chapter six, Islam and politics have been intertwined throughout the ages. The expression of political Islam in the pre-independent Bangladesh was associated with the global Islamic revivalism as well as the socioeconomic and historical trajectories of the Indian Muslim society. The colonial policies had a major role in the growth of political Islam in Bengal. The ideas of Shah Wali Allah Dahlawi as well as Sayyid Ahmad Bareilwi influenced the Bengal political Islamists tremendously. The Islamic reform movements in Bengal launched by Haji Shariat Allah and Titu Mir were rooted in the Islamic puritanical ideas of both Shah Wali Allah of India and Abd al-Wahhab of Arabia. Shariat Allah’s *Fara’idi* movement was intended to remove all un-Islamic and corrupt practices (*shirk* and *bid’ah*), which were perceived to be crept into Muslim society from the predominantly Hindu culture and practices, from the Muslim society and establish a pure Islamic society based on pure monotheism in Islam. Titu Mir’s *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* movement also aimed to return to classical Islamic purity by bringing about socio-religious reforms in Bengal. Like Shariat Allah, Titu Mir also identified the practice of *shirk* and *bid’ah* as the major problem in the Bengali Muslim society, and hence he found the solution in their elimination. Both Shariat Allah’s and Titu Mir’s movements largely attracted the Bengal peasantry.

Similar to the *Fara'idi* and *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* movements, Khilafat movement enormously contributed to the growth of political Islam in Bengal. Khilafat movement had a link with Pan-Islamism that aimed to preserve the Ottoman Empire and the symbolic Turkish Caliphate following World War I. Khilafat movement was marked by the participation from both Muslims and Hindus, and unlike the *Fara'idi* and *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* movements, Khilafat movement eventually turned into an anti-British and anti-colonial movement. Although all these movements apparently turned into failure, they had huge implications with regard to the growth of political Islam in Bengal afterwards.

After the colonization was over in 1947, East Bengal fell into the territory of Pakistan and was renamed as East Pakistan. In East Pakistan, the role of political Islam diminished and instead Bengali ethno-nationalism strongly emerged. Pakistan came into existence on the basis of Muslim religious nationalism, and hence the Pakistani ruling elites emphasized the Islamic ideology for the unity and integrity of Pakistan. The ruling elites considered ethnic nationalism as dangerous for the Muslim nationalism as well as the integrity of Pakistan. They tried to suppress Bengali nationalism which was based on Bengali linguistic and cultural tradition. Through the Language Movement in 1952, Bengali nationalism strongly emerged in East Pakistan, and since then Muslim religious nationalism began to be of secondary importance. The suppression of the Bengali language and culture along with socioeconomic exploitation of the Bengalis by the Pakistani ruling elites had a remarkable contribution to the growth of Bengali nationalism in East Pakistan. However, as we have seen earlier, Islamic ideology and Bengali nationalism were not seen as contradictory to one other. The Bengali nationalist parties,

the torchbearer of Bengali nationalism, had no antagonism with Islam. The ideologies and programs of these parties were not reflective of any anti-Islamic sentiments. Rather, the leaders of these parties were conscious of the religious fervor of the Bengali Muslims. They were critical of the ruling elites' appeal to Islam which was argued as "a tactical Islam" that the ruling elites strategically deployed to legitimize their bad governance and failures (Khan 1999a). The Bengali nationalist parties and Islamist parties made political alliances at different point in time during the democratic movement against the undemocratic regimes of Pakistan.

The East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest and strongest Islamist party in the country, actively participated in the democratic movements aiming to restore freedom and democracy in Pakistan. However, Jamaat was found preoccupied with the idea that Bengali nationalism was antithetical to the integrity of Pakistan. Jamaat opposed Bengali nationalism and regional autonomy for East Pakistan, and made consistent political attacks on the nationalist leaders (Bahadur 1994; Umar 2004; Islam 2015). Jamaat leader Mawdudi accused Awami League of 'splitting Pakistan' (Bahadur 1994; Islam 2015), and hence, Sheikh Mujib's call for autonomy for East Pakistan was rejected by Jamaat as 'a separatist design' (Rahim 2001; Islam 2015). Jamaat's position against Bengali nationalism and provincial autonomy for East Pakistan can be seen as a considerable reason for the party's failure to attract mass support among the Bengali Muslims in East Pakistan. In the provincial elections of East Pakistan in 1954, Jamaat was absent in the electoral race (Azam 2004). Even, in the general elections of Pakistan in 1970, Islamist parties including Jamaat could not capture a single seat from East Pakistan (Ahmed 1979; Ahad 2012). Throughout the undivided-Pakistan years, politics in East Pakistan revolved

around the Bengali nationalist movement. Political Islam ceased to be significant in East Pakistan.

9.4 Both state and non-state actors made contributions to Islamization in Bangladesh

After independence in 1971, Bangladesh became a secular country. But its people had never been oriented with secularism. The dominant argument that secularism was the basis of the Bangladesh's war of independence is not substantiated by historical facts. The Bengali nationalist movement was not in contradiction with Islamic ideology. The Bengali Muslims opposed the Pakistani ruling elite's political appeal to Islam and became organized against their exploitative policies toward East Pakistan. They had no opposition to Islamic religious beliefs and practices. The idea of secularism was absent in the whole trajectory of the nationalist movement which eventually led to the birth of the nation. As shown in chapter seven, Awami League's 42-point party manifesto, United Front's 21-point election manifesto, historic 6-point program, 11-point demand of the student movement, 1970 election manifesto of the Awami League, and the Proclamation of Independence Order of 1971 (the most significant document of Bangladesh's war of independence) had no reflection of, and reference to secularism. Conversely, many of these documents have exhibited explicit commitment to Islamic ideology. The doctrine of secularism was not established in the state on a consensual basis of the population; it was imposed from the above by the ruling elite (Hakim 1998).

Secularism interpreted by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (the founding President of Bangladesh) was, however, the recognition rather than the rejection of all religions what

scholars called the establishment of “multi-theocracy” (Maniruzzaman 1990:70). Nevertheless, Mujib proceeded to secularize the society and to that end, he took several measures in practice. But the gap between a secular state and a non-secular people was clearly evident, which forced Mujib to launch Islamization of the polity despite the fact that the state was still secular in ideology, albeit in written form. Sheikh Mujib gradually began the process of Islamization which was later institutionalized by the military rulers. Both Zia and Ershad successfully used religion as a tool for political legitimization. Through a number of amendments to the constitution, these two rulers bore the brunt of the state-sponsored Islamization in Bangladesh. Subsequent rulers followed suit with the exception of Sheikh Hasina whose regime took the opportunity of the post-9/11 world and adopted strategies to emasculate the Islamic forces and their influence in the state. Secularism was restored in the constitution, again not on a consensual basis of the population, but as a ‘tactical guise’ to win the Western and Indian support. The evidence lies in the regime’s inability to remove the provision of state religion as well as the Qur’anic phrase from the constitution. The ruling Awami League continues to exhibit its ideological contradictions.

Beyond the state actor, non-state actors or non-political organizations and institutions have also made significant contributions to Islamization in Bangladesh. Non-political Islamic movements, such as the Tablighi Jamaat, the Ahl-i-Hadith Andolan, and the Hefazat-e-Islam have been actively working in promoting Islamization of the society. Hundreds of thousands of religious schools, mosques and shrines or pir traditions have engaged a bulk number of the population and have been serving the religious cause of their ways. A large number of socioreligious and cultural organizations continue to work

in spreading the sphere of power and influence of the Islamic tradition. The overwhelming majority of the Bangladeshi Muslims have been actively engaged in these organizations. It seems unlikely that secularization would gain a sturdy foothold in such a society. Rather, the Islamization done by the state and non-state parties has created fertile ground for an effective development of Islamism in the country. While the founding fathers of sociologists predicted a secularizing trend in the wake of modernity, the Bangladesh case, at least, does not support their prediction and Marx's judgment. Both state and non-state actors in Bangladesh have historically contributed to the process of Islamization. The current secularization process adopted by the Hasina regime through various forms of de-Islamization is clearly devoid of public support, and hence took on a violent form. This secularism is diametrically opposed to what democracy (and to some extent Western secularism) offers such as the rule of law, human rights, free and fair election, and people's choice.

9.5 Islamist parties are characterized by factionalism, disintegration and dynastic politics

The politics in Bangladesh is largely marked by intense factionalism and personality cult. Blood (2002:3) metaphorically puts that "if three Bengalis were stranded on a desert island, their first action would be to establish four political parties." Ziring (1992:216) has pointed that "politics in Bangladesh revolves around personalities, not ideas or institutions." Unlike the major secularist parties, the Islamist parties are believed to be driven by a strong ideological commitment. However, this commitment has been demonstrated only in doctrinal rather than practical terms. The leaders of these parties are

most vocal for unity and integration, but most impractical in terms of creating an environment in social, political and intellectual fields conducive for unity and integration. This has paved the way for increasing factionalism and further marginalization in political and electoral competition. According to a report in the *Daily Amardesh*—

The Islamist political parties in Bangladesh which aim to establish divine rule in the country have fallen into numerous splits. The exact number of these parties is unknown. However, the parties, factions and groups which claim to be Islamist are conceived to be no less than one hundred and fifty. In every year the country witnesses at least five to seven Islamist parties emerging from the split of a single party. The leaders of each of the hundred and fifty Islamist parties claim that only they stay on the true path and only they follow true Islam, and the rest stay misguided or on the wrong path.¹⁷⁷

Like secular Awami League (AL) and BNP, the Islamic political parties also suffer from “top-man’s dictatorship.” The AL and BNP are very often criticized, because within these parties there are hardly any democratic practices. The party chief of each of these parties are often to sole sites of power in the parties. They are criticized for preserving and practicing dynastic politics. Both Sheikh Hasina (the chief of the AL) and Khaleda Zia (the chief of the BNP) inherited their positions from their family members. The Islamist parties have also not been immune to this practice of dynastic politics. The Islami Andolan Bangladesh is currently headed by Mufti Syed Rezaul Karim, the pir of Charmonai who inherited his position from his father and the founder of the party Maulana Syed Fazlul Karim. After the death of Hafezzi Huzur, the founder of the

¹⁷⁷ See Jibbur Rahman, “The Islamist Parties in Bangladesh.” *Daily Amardesh*, 2 December 2013. <http://www.amardeshonline.com/pages/details/2013/12/03/226837#.VscUvvh97cs> (accessed 19 February 2016).

Khelafat Andolan, his son Maulana Shah Ahmadullah Ashraf became the chief of the party. Due to his illness, the party is now led by his brother and Hafezzi Huzur's other son Maulana Shah Ata Ullah. Najibul Bashar Maijbhandari, the chief of Bangladesh Tariqat Federation; Mostafa Amir Faisal, the chief of Zaker Party; and other Islamists are the products of dynastic politics in the Islamist parties. The Islami Oikya Jote has faced a number of splits mostly due to the conflict of power between the leaders and the powerful influence of dynastic politics within the party.¹⁷⁸ Despite the fact, the leaders of the Islamist parties do not acknowledge the influence of dynastic politics arguing that "there is nothing like dynastic politics. If there is anyone qualified in the family, he is automatically deserving of the leadership of the party. This trend exists not only in the Islamist political parties; it also exists in other [secular] political parties."¹⁷⁹ This research, however, suggests that the reasons for factionalism and disintegration in Islamist politics in Bangladesh are related to personality clashes, conflict of power and privilege, intellectual and spiritual arrogance, authoritative and unaccommodating attitude and exclusive mindset rather than philosophical or doctrinal differences amongst the Islamist leaders. These conditions have ultimately resulted in the decline of the popular support of the Islamists in electoral politics. Over the years, the Islamist leaders in Bangladesh have demonstrated a pursuit of a broader ideology with a narrower understanding.

¹⁷⁸ See in great details Munif Ammar, "Dui Jug Dhore Dofay Dofay Bhangche Islami Oikya Jote" (Islami Oikya Jote Splits by Phases over Two Eras), *newsbangladesh.com*, 13 January 2016.

¹⁷⁹ See "Islamic Politics Is Getting Detained under Dynastic Politics," *the report24.com*, 28 March 2015. <http://bangla.thereport24.com/article/96451/index.html> (accessed 10 February 2016).

The largest Islamic party Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI) is well-organized and disciplined compared to other Islamist parties. The BJI has also demonstrated its commitment to democratic practices within the party. Ghulam Azam left the top position of the party in December 2000 while he was still physically and mentally fit. None from his family but the party's secretary-general Matiur Rahman Nizami was elected as the party leader (Islam 2015). Although the party went through factionalism in the 1980s, it recovered soon and emerged as a significant factor in the country's politics in the early 1990s. However, the party has failed to provide a clear and strong explanation of its pro-Pakistan position in the Bangladesh war of independence in 1971, which can be attributed, according to political observers, to its inability to become a mass organization in an overwhelming Muslim majority society. The liberation war is the foundation of Bangladesh. It is very unlikely for a political party at least in a modern nation-state to rise and win a large-scale popular support by preserving even a slightest contradiction with this foundation either in doctrinal or practical terms. The secular parties and groups which fought the Pakistani occupational forces and defended the liberation war continued to project the BJI as an "anti-liberation force" and "enemy of the country." The BJI's response to this attack has not been at least politically effective. Kabir (2006:69-70) has noted:

Instead of admitting the mistakes made by the Jamaat in 1971, its leaders asserted that "they did nothing wrong in 1971" and "the concept of Bangladesh was not valid" and they continued to stick to that line of arguments. They stuck to the view that they were afraid of Indian domination as the War of Liberation was aided and, partially, controlled by the "Hindu" India. The Jamaat leadership suggested that the criticisms against the Jamaat were ill-motivated and by those

who did not believe in the “Muslimness” of East Bengal/East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Thus, the Jamaat leaders viewed their detractors’ criticisms as quite natural and nothing to worry about. They also suggested that then pro-Indian and pro-Soviet elements were in the forefront of the anti-Jamaat campaign. Such assertions of the Jamaat leaders agitated the freedom fighters, nationalists and secular forces in Bangladesh.

Evaluating the role of the BJI in the politics of Bangladesh, Professor Abdullah Jahangir of Islamic University, Kushtia, in an interview with the author, noted:

The Jamaat-e-Islami is the oldest Islamist political party in the sub-continent. The party has carried out several positive works. These include: (i) they have demonstrated that Islam is a complete code of life, it is a practical system, and it is the best way of life; (ii) they have enabled themselves in making the youths and the educated people understand these facts about Islam; (iii) they have largely motivated people for Islamic economy, education, and so on; (iv) they have succeeded in building awareness amongst the people on the existing superstitions in the society, such as worshipping persons, pirs, and grave.

Side by side, Jahangir continues,—

Several errors can be traced all along in the politics of the Jamaat-e-Islami: (i) they have designated politics as jihad. This was first done by Maulana Mawdudi; (ii) they have made a serious error by reducing the meaning of the concept of *ekamat-e-deen* (establishment of religion) to the establishment of an Islamic state; (iii) the party has compromised its ideology and concentrated more on power-politics and made alliances with the secular parties and people for power; and (iv) during the liberation war the Jamaat supported and took arms for what it

had earlier termed a “non-Muslim *tagudi* [tyrant] government.” This was their biggest mistake.

However, beyond the BJI, the other East Pakistan-based mainstream Islamic parties and ulama also opposed the Bangladesh’s war of independence and supported the cause of the Pakistani military ruling elite. Professor Jahangir argues (in the interview with the author)—

Yes, the ulama also supported Pakistan because they loved Pakistan. They were obsessed with the spirit of the creation of Pakistan in 1947. In 1971, still they remembered this glorious event. However, [during the liberation war] they did not organize people for Pakistan and actively take part in the military effort to preserve the integrity of the country. They just gave passive support.

Criticizing the BJI’s obsession with state power, Jahangir further maintains that—

The lust for power demonstrated by the Jamaat proves that they have deviated from their original ideological stance that the secularists will not promote Islam; instead, a group of highly Islamized people should attain power to properly serve the cause of Islam. But the party became the part of power by the help of the secularists. This is their ideological deviation. This trend still continues. What Jamaat considers development; it is, in fact, underdevelopment. In our society, merely 10-15 percent people are *namazi-deendar* [practicing Muslims]. But, the Jamaat, having shared power with the BNP, gives the world a message that the Islamists take over and Bangladesh is on the verge of becoming a Taliban state. So, at any cost, Jamaat will have to be crushed. For example, you have power of 10kgs, you showed 100kgs. Your opponent hit you with 60kgs, but you have only 10kgs. You will be definitely crushed. Because of this, it is better for the Islamists to influence and pressurize the secularists in power at least so long as

they do not attain power unilaterally. Jamaat did not raise voice against the alleged corruption during the four-party alliance government (2001-2006), rather they silently supported it. This is a clear deviation from their ideological standpoint. Those who do politics in the name of Islam, they have to take Islamic ideology into full consideration. Islamic politics is ideological politics. Islamic politics is not just a passport to power.

My investigation found the following critical accounts against the party:

Firstly, politically the Jamaat has always demonstrated a reactive role, instead of a pro-active one. The party has never been a pro-people party but followed its ideal frame of thinking devoid of political pragmatism. During two major political historical events—the creation of Pakistan in 1947 and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971—in which the Bangladeshi Muslims were major leaders and participants, the Jamaat stood against the aspirations of the people. Whatever explanation the party had, the reality is that it lacked political pragmatism and far-sightedness.

Secondly, the party has also been a closed system. There is no change in its methodology adopted by its founder nearly eight decades ago. During the foundation of the party, the Muslims were religiously a minority group and were under colonization or foreign occupation; the society was by and large Hindu-dominated. Therefore, the sociopolitical conditions of the Muslims in British-India were largely different from that of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Mawdudi's ideas were also influenced by these contemporary sociopolitical conditions. However, the party continued to adhere to the same methodology and organizational structure even in the changed circumstances. The party claims to be a mass organization but practices strict structural and bureaucratic stereotypes.

Thirdly, the organization has not succeeded in producing a scholarly workforce. Most of the local level leaders lack the intellectual ability to run an ideological movement in the twenty-first century world. With the exception of one or two members, most of the central leaders do not have the requisite scholarly grounding in political thought. The leaders and workers are confined to the study of Mawdudi's or Mawdudi-centered literature alone. They are ignorant of the broad range of ideas and thoughts that the contemporary global Islamic movements have developed in the recent decades. Consequently, the party's decision-making processes remain fossilized, unqualified.

Fourthly, the party has been more political than religious and social. Most of the party's strength is spent for political purposes, often ignoring the importance of other aspects of human life. The main focus of the party has been power and politics. This has conveyed an off-putting message to the people that like other traditional political parties, the BJI is equally a political organization that aims to capture power through religious appeal. However, establishing the Islamic *hukumat* is not the goal but a means to the goal, which is the welfare of people and society. More than ninety percent Islamic *ahkam* (rules and regulations) can be established without Islamic *hukumat* (state). The objective of establishing Islamic *hukumat* (which largely remains as an illusion; and once established, it is highly transitory) not only exhausts maximum resources, but also generates political enmity (with an existential threat).

Finally, the party continues to ignore the importance of developing a close relationship with other co-Islamist political parties and non-political groups. Almost all other Islamist parties and groups do not recognize the BJI even as a true Islamist party. The Islamist parties outside the current twenty-party alliance bear a negative conception

about the Jamaat. This is a major setback for the BJI which is the largest Islamist party in Bangladesh.

9.6 Mainstream Islamists represent democratic Islamism as opposed to militant Islamism

As shown in chapter eight, the mainstream Islamists in Bangladesh practice democracy, contest in elections and try to bring about change in society through peaceful and constitutional means. The assertion that Bangladesh is becoming another Afghanistan (Karlekar 2005) has not been proven right.

The rise of Islamism in Bangladesh represents the rise of mainstream Islamists who categorically oppose militant Islamism. The social landscape of Bangladesh is unwelcoming for the militants. Sociocultural and historical trajectories of the country suggest that they are highly unlikely to gain a foothold in the society. In Bangladesh, militant Islamism is, in fact, dead, democratic Islamism is on the rise. The lack of democratic practices by the secularist regimes makes a remarkable contribution to this rise. Bangladeshi Muslims are religious and notably their religious understanding is largely marked by tolerance, peace and tranquility. Hundreds of years, the Sufis and saints propagated the peaceful message of Islam and this is deeply seated in the society. Extremism is inconsistent with Bangladesh's social fabric. The Bangladeshi Muslims are equally opposed to both secular extremism and Islamist extremism. Moderation is central to Islamic ideology and Muslim life in Bangladesh. Therefore, a moderate political ideology is posited to have a bright future in this overwhelming Muslim majority society. Democracy speaks of moderation. The establishment of democracy is the foundation of

Bangladesh. Democracy and moderation rather than tyranny and extremism would define future Bangladesh.

9.7 Policy recommendations

In the age of globalization, Bangladesh is also not disconnected from the rest of the world. In the recent years, the incident of 9/11 in the United States, the so-called War on Terror, the Arab Awakening, the rise of Muslim Brotherhood and subsequently decline by the military in Egypt have clearly impacted the sociopolitical and cultural life of the people of Bangladesh. One hundred and sixty million Bangladeshi people are part of the global community. In order to build a peaceful society free from violence, extremism, and militancy, this research has put forward five major policy recommendations:

1. **The establishment of democracy**—one major problem in the politics of Bangladesh is the problem of peaceful transfer of power. Since 1990 up to 2001, elections under constitutionally designated caretaker governments were held in a peaceful and credible manner and the transfer of power occurred peacefully. The removal of the caretaker system reverted the country into an old crisis. Through free, fair and credible elections, power should be handed over and democracy should be established. A permanent arrangement for holding neutral elections is urgently needed. No political system other than democracy would work in Bangladesh since the country was founded through a liberation war based on democratic ideals. Development without democracy would not be sustainable. The international community should make positive contributions to the establishment of democracy in Bangladesh.

2. No ‘ism’ should be in the constitution— according to Justice Mustafa Kamal, former Chief Justice of Bangladesh, isms—such as secularism, socialism, capitalism, and communism should never be inserted in the constitution. “If these were in the constitution, political tension, deadlock and unnecessary debates would never end. [The] constitution is an operative document and democracy and democracy alone should be in it. Whichever party comes to office, with a mandate from the people, will run the country in accordance with its political ideology or ism.”¹⁸⁰ Abul Mansur Ahmad (1969), a noted writer, journalist and the founder senior vice-president of the Awami League shared the same opinion.

In addition, a referendum or plebiscite should be organized before making any major change in the constitution. This would help reflect the public opinion on such attempt of change, and derive more legitimacy for governance, and eventually avert unnecessary debates and discussion in the country’s political landscape.

3. Stop suppression of democratic Islamism—militant Islamists hardly have any support in the larger society. All mainstream political parties—secular or Islam-based—condemn violence and extremism. With regard to militancy, a zero-tolerance policy should be taken. However, in the name of secularism, the suppression of the mainstream Islamists who have been the part of democratic society and continued to oppose violence in the name of Islam would be counterproductive. ‘Assertive secularism’ (Kuru 2007; Keyman 2010) or ‘ultra secularism’ (Islam 2011a) would not work in an overwhelming Muslim religious society. Both secular extremists and religious extremists

¹⁸⁰ See Barrister Nazir Ahmed, “Justice Mustafa Kamal Remembered.” *East London News*, 3 January 2016. <http://eastlondonnews.co.uk/justice-mustafa-kamal-remembered/> (accessed 22 February 2016).

should be contained. The gap between a secular state and a secular society should be recognized, and a secular state built by secular ideals imposed from above rather than consensus among the people would not be viable. The suppression of democratic Islamism would alienate the larger Islamic people and derive justification of the appeal of militant Islamism. This policy could also compel some democratic Islamists to join the camp of militant Islamists, and thus militant Islamism would find fertile ground to thrive on.

4. Address the root causes of militancy and terrorism—militancy would not be contained only by bringing the militants to justice. The most effective ways could be to address the root causes of militancy and terrorism, and to simultaneously take a policy of deradicalization of the militants and extremists. Extremism and radicalization grow through the indoctrination of an ideology, and to fight this extremism and radicalization, a counter-indoctrination and deradicalization approach should be taken. Ideas cannot be fought by guns. Ideas should be fought by counter-ideas. Bangladesh can seek help from other states which are dealing with similar problems. The mainstream ulama should also be engaged in these efforts.

5. Pro-active Islamism and a reinterpretation of Islamist movement—the mainstream Islamists in Bangladesh should play a pro-active rather than reactive role. They need to broaden the scope of their movement and to undertake an inclusive policy so that the rights and interests of the people in other faiths and of the minorities are significantly addressed in their programs. The mainstream Islamists should also

reinterpret Islamic political theories and concepts and take pragmatic policies suitable for changed circumstances in the contemporary world. For example, the concept of *ekamat-e-deen* (establishment of religion) should not be reduced to the mere establishment of an Islamic state. Establishing *deen* in society should precede of the establishment of the *deen* in the state. Establishing *deen* in the state before establishing *deen* in society is neither viable nor sustainable.

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