



Unholy Alliance: Nationalism, Communalism, and the 2024 Anti-Hindu Violence in Bangladesh

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Received: 22 May, 2025. Accepted: 22 October, 2025. Published: 22 October, 2025

ABSTRACT

Research Problem: Bangladesh's struggle with national identity has long been shaped by competing ideological forces between secular nationalism and religious conservatism. In recent years, this tension has manifested in sectarian violence targeting minority groups, particularly Hindus. The issue is compounded by media representations that amplify exclusionary nationalist discourses and normalize intolerance. The 2024 student–citizen protests, which escalated into widespread violence, exposed how nationalist rhetoric, cultural chauvinism, and political rivalry undermine the nation's pluralistic ideals. The central research problem lies in understanding how political discourse and media narratives interact to reinforce exclusionary nationalism and marginalize minority communities within the framework of Bangladesh's postcolonial identity.

Research Purposes: This study aims to examine the interplay between media narratives, nationalist ideologies, and sectarian violence in Bangladesh. Specifically, it seeks to: (1) analyze how exclusionary nationalism is constructed and legitimized through media and political discourse; (2) explore the ideological roots of minority marginalization in Bangladesh's post-independence history; and (3) contextualize Bangladesh's experience within broader global trends of religious nationalism. Ultimately, the study intends to offer a critical reflection on the paradox of nationalism—how the idea of unity and sovereignty can simultaneously generate exclusion and conflict.

Research Methods: The research employs a qualitative, interpretive approach, utilizing critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine media coverage, political speeches, and public statements during the 2024 protests. A historical and ideological review supports the analysis, tracing the evolution of nationalist narratives since independence and assessing how they intersect with religious identity politics. Comparative insights from other contexts of sectarian nationalism are incorporated to highlight transnational parallels and to situate Bangladesh's experience within a global framework of religious and political intolerance.

Results and Discussion: Findings reveal that media representations and political rhetoric jointly contribute to constructing exclusionary forms of nationalism that portray minorities as external to the national identity. The Awami League's secular project has been compromised by political pragmatism, while the BNP's reliance on Islamic symbolism has deepened sectarian divisions. The 2024 protests exemplify how nationalist fervor and media sensationalism can converge to justify or obscure violence against minorities. The discourse of "national unity" is paradoxically used to silence diversity, exposing a deep crisis in Bangladesh's vision of citizenship and belonging. The study highlights that religious nationalism, fueled by media narratives, perpetuates structural marginalization and undermines democratic pluralism.

Research Implications and Contributions: This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how media and politics shape exclusionary nationalism in postcolonial states. Theoretically, it enriches scholarship on discourse, nationalism, and identity politics by showing how nationalist rhetoric in Bangladesh mirrors global patterns of intolerance. Practically, it underscores the urgent need for media accountability, inclusive policy reform, and civic education to counter extremist narratives. By drawing

a parallel with post-Holocaust Germany's reconciliation and nation-building, the paper offers a hopeful vision: Bangladesh, too, can move toward a more inclusive and pluralistic national identity, provided it is guided by enlightened leadership and supported by international solidarity.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Nationalism, Student-Citizen Protest, Cultural Chauvinism, Minority Rights.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh's journey to self-discovery has been marked by turmoil and transformation. Emerging from the traumatic 1947 Partition and the brutal 1971 Liberation War, Bangladesh has been locked in a relentless battle to define itself, torn between its colonial past and its struggle for a post-colonial identity (Kumar, 2023). While the 1952 Language Movement and the secular-socialist vision of the 1972 Constitution set the stage for a progressive future, the rise of political Islam, solidified by the 1988 Eighth Amendment, plunged the nation into a profound identity crisis (Hashmi, 2024). Rampant corruption has only deepened this existential turmoil, fueling a bitter clash between calls for national self-expression and demands for genuine anti-corruption reform. The 2024 student-led protests, ignited by the demand for quota system reforms, became a flashpoint in this ongoing struggle, as the people sought to reclaim their nation's soul and challenge the Awami League's stranglehold on power (The Hindu, 2024). Yet, this surge of nationalism tragically devolved into toxic cultural chauvinism, sparking xenophobic hate and violent assaults on the Hindu minority (Ibelema, 2021).

Focusing on a student-citizen protest that devolved into sectarian violence, this study examines the perpetuation of atrocities against minorities, particularly Hindus, in Bangladesh, through an exclusionary national identity rooted in xenophobic and chauvinistic supremacism. Employing a media analysis approach, this research investigates how media representations contribute to marginalizing biases and interrogates the role of exclusionary nationalist ideology in fueling sectarian violence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hegel, Bourdieu and the Paradox of Nationalism:

This paper draws on G.W.F. Hegel's organicist perspective to understand the seemingly unnatural shift in the reformist motivations of the protest movement. Per Hegel's dialectical philosophy, the state is an end in itself, where individuals are sublated - preserved and transcended - within the universal entity of the state (Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, George Wilhem Fiedrich Hegel, 1999). In other words, Hegel conceptualized the state as an organism, where (a) The state is the apex of human civilization, where the spirit of humanity finds its ultimate and absolute realization through the course of history and the application of reason, (b) Individuals are like fleeting moments or cells within a larger living entity, playing a small but essential role in the life and purpose of the greater organism, called State, and (c) The preservation of the state's unity and coherence is the paramount objective, taking precedence over the interests of some or all the individuals. The *Volksgeist*, the soul of a State, is the invisible thread that weaves together its past, present, and future, building the state into a nation. Like a living organism, the *Volksgeist* breathes life into the state, giving it a unique identity and purpose, which then erupts as nationalism. This collective consciousness, a manifestation of the Absolute Spirit unfolding through history, allows the state to recognize itself as a distinct organism, an autonomous and singular entity. In Hegel's terms, his state was the whole body within which human individuals lived as cells and parts, and that the soul or *Volksgeist* of this living body is what humans take as nationalism. This humanized state, gives the idea that whatever ideological orientation, system of governance, or relationship with other states is, is because of the state's own consciousness, not because of human activities, and human beings living inside the state are bound to follow the state's wants, which they receive as nationalism.

However, this raises questions about human agency's role in shaping nationalism. For, it is these human individuals, who drive the nation-making process, by navigating through the complex dynamics

of unity, differentiation, and self-definition. They articulate collective identities, draw boundaries, and negotiate differences, highlighting the paradoxical nature of the state as an ideational construct cultivating nationalism. This paradox is evident in various contexts, such as the Balkans, where the dissolution of Yugoslavia led to the emergence of new nation-states, and the United Kingdom, where the complexities of Scottish and Welsh nationalism continue to shape the national narrative. In this context, the concept of an ultimate organism called a state with its identity masquerading as nationalism appears paradoxical. If everything is man-made, how can the state, an ideational construct, cultivate nationalism?

Pierre Bourdieu's insight offers a clarifying perspective, emphasizing the need to question presuppositions and preconceptions that underlie our understanding of the state. Bourdieu argues that *"...to have a chance of thinking a state that still thinks itself through those who attempt to think it, one must strive to question all the presuppositions and preconstruction inscribed in the reality under analysis..."* (Bourdieu, 1998) i.e. by acknowledging the limitations of human mastery and recognizing the influence of forces beyond our comprehension, we can gain a deeper understanding of nationalism's persistent enigma. Bourdieu's call for objective analysis reveals the state as a self-perpetuating entity that constructs its identity through its subject-individuals, resonating with Hegel's concept of the state as an organic whole. In other words, even when a singular person or a community of like-minded people tries to think of the state and its ideology; it is the state itself that is exerting its *Volksgeist* or wishes through the human agents. The enduring *Volksgeist*, or national spirit, plays a vital role in fostering national belonging, as exemplified by the Kurdish people's strong national identity despite diaspora. This phenomenon underscores an event, of the state's attempt to establish itself through the individuals- it's similar to how multiple atoms make up a singular molecule, and then these molecules arrange themselves into a shaped structure, and the circle goes on. Interestingly enough, this process echoes the origins of life itself, where inorganic compounds coalesced into organic cells, which then underwent polymerization to form larger macromolecules, and the process went on, ultimately giving rise to the diverse life forms we observe today (National Library of Medicine).

The Evolution of Bangladesh's National Identity:

Bangladesh, as a relatively new and smaller nation, continues to grapple with defining its national identity. The 1947 partition of British India into India and Pakistan serves as a pivotal context in understanding this challenge. Specifically, the division of Bengal into two states - West Bengal, with secular leanings, and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), founded on Islamic principles envisioned by the Muslim League. Historically a hub of Hindu-Muslim unity, with a 54% Muslim population (Claude, 2007), Bengal struggled with the territorial divide along strict religious lines. This duty of ensuring a peaceful transition now came upon the Muslim League government in power in the province. Thus, 'Direct Action' (Sengupta, 2024) was announced by the league's leader Md. Ali Jinnah. This partition not only separated territories but also created complex identity dynamics, as Bangladesh's *Volksgeist*, or national spirit, began to take shape. Expected as a peaceful measure, the direct action soon grew communal and violent towards the Hindus who were lesser in number, more so in the urban epicenter of Calcutta, where riots were the staple of 1946. The amicable action of Jinnah between August 16 and August 19, 1946, led Calcutta to witness one of the worst episodes of Hindu-Muslim communal violence, which left between 5,000 to 10,000 dead, and some 15,000 wounded. This 'Great Calcutta Killings' was a singular powerful event that consolidated the creation of the Islamic state of Pakistan. The non-Islamic citizens of the new nation soon found themselves tortured on the wrong side of the border as second-class citizens. (Abi-Habib & Rehman, 2020) and started mass migration to India (Dalrymple, 2015).

The exclusion criteria that conditioned the new nation of Pakistan did run deeper into the subconscious of its citizens which found diversity as its enemy thus, the Hindu population in East Pakistan, which stood at 20.5% at the time of partition, dwindled significantly to just 1.6% by 1998 (Abi-Habib & Rehman, 2020) and is still on the decline. While an understanding of a common enemy did provide solidarity to the new nation, the newly defined *Volksgeist*, which had religious homogenization as its main feature, stretched its clutches towards cultural and linguistic homogenization to enhance an East-West conformity. Pakistan's 1948 decision to establish Urdu as the sole national language (Ahmed, 2021) triggered resistance in East Pakistan, where Bengali was the prevalent language, ultimately leading to

language movements of 1952, migration to India in search of safe-haven (Hindu and Muslim irrespectively), and fatalities in Dhaka.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Awami League, secured a decisive victory in East Pakistan, prompting his advocacy for enhanced autonomy. However, the centralized government in West Pakistan refused to recognize him as leader, invalidating the election results. This sparked widespread protests, culminating in Rahman's iconic "Joy Bangla" speech on March 7, 1971, where he declared Bangladesh's independence (The National Archives). His subsequent arrest only fueled the resistance. On March 25, 1971, the Pakistani military initiated Operation Searchlight, marking a significant escalation of violence. This brutal crackdown, which continued throughout the nine-month Bangladesh Liberation War, saw the Pakistani army target Bengali civilians, particularly Hindus and supporters of the Awami League, Bengali military or police personnel, intellectuals, students, and professionals, while victims included members of both majority (Bengali Muslim) and minority (non-Muslim) communities (Congress.Gov, 2022). The conflict resulted in a significant humanitarian crisis, with estimated deaths ranging from 500,000 to 3 million and the displacement of approximately 10 million refugees who fled to India (European Foundation for South Asian Studies, 2017). The Bengali guerrilla fighters, called Mukti Bahini, with support from the Indian Army (Sherina & Bhall, 2022), fought back against the West Pakistani army. The ultimate victory of Bangladesh over West Pakistan on December 16, 1971, now celebrated as Victory Day, brought an end to the conflict and ushered in a new era of independence. This hard-fought liberation, achieved with Indian assistance, was more than just a political triumph, for it not only granted Bangladesh, its long-due independence, but also ensured the preservation of Bengali culture and Islamic values, distinct from the religious extremism that characterized Pakistan (Sheikh, 2024). This event is viewed as the third Indo-Pakistan war (Zakaria, 2019), fostered a newfound détente between Hindus and Muslims within Bangladesh, shaping a national identity rooted in resilience and diversity.

Party and Partisan Politics:

Bangladesh, despite its secular aspirations for independence, has grappled with its Islamic heritage, leading to a complex and often contentious relationship with minority communities. This tension has been exacerbated by the divergent ideologies of the two dominant political parties, the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). While the AL has generally espoused a more inclusive and secular vision, the BNP has often leaned towards a more conservative and Islamist perspective. This ideological divide has manifested in significant policy differences, particularly concerning the rights and protections of minority groups, notably the Hindu community.

During periods of BNP rule, the country adorned Islam as the State religion, and witnessed a rise in religious intolerance and violence against minorities, as documented by reputable media outlets such as The Daily Star (The Daily Star, 2015). These incidents, including attacks on Hindu temples and individuals, particularly the case of targeted attacks on Hindu minorities and other political activists after the general elections of 2001 where BNP was found guilty by the Bangladeshi High Court-led judicial commission; were often met with denial or downplaying by BNP leaders, who dismissed such reports as '*meaningless and ridiculous*' (Ethirajan, 2011). In a similar tone, BNP leaders like Mirza Islam Alamgir also refuted the report of attacks on the minority Hindu community in Bangladesh post student-citizen protest of 2024 as '*very unfortunate propaganda*' (The Economic Times, 2024). The role of the king-making ally of BNP - Jamaat-e-Islami, a noted anti-Hindu agent (European Foundation for South Asian Studies) is problematic. This Jamaat was also against Bangladesh's liberation from Pakistan and committed war crimes against fellow East-Pakistani citizens with the help of a West-Pakistan-aided military force, called Shanti Bahini. Their activities included killing multitudes of non-combatant East-Pakistanis, including children, raping women (especially non-Muslims), kidnapping and killing scholars, doctors, and scientists, amongst others. The forgotten genocide against Bengalis and Hindus casts a long, haunting shadow over the 20th century. This chilling disregard for human life continues to wound the souls of millions, a searing reminder of a past that refuses to be truly buried (Congress.Gov, 2022). Following Bangladesh's independence, Jamaat-e-Islami, although banned by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, after his assassination in 1975, the political landscape shifted. President Ziaur Rahman, leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), reinstated Jamaat-e-Islami in 1977 through the controversial Fifth Amendment

to the constitution. This amendment abolished secularism and declared Islam the state religion. Ziaur Rahman's wife, Khaleda Zia, continued to uphold this policy after his death.

Jamaat-e-Islami, a political organization established with the aim of creating a unified Indian state based on Islamic principles, maintained a deeply skeptical stance towards secularism and democracy, viewing them as incompatible with Islamic values and, therefore, 'Haram'- Islamic for *forbidden*) (European Foundation for South Asian Studies, 2017). Under the rule of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, non-Muslim and ethnic minority communities in Bangladesh faced severe persecution. This period witnessed a surge in communal violence, with frequent attacks targeting places of worship, resulting in widespread killings and rapes. The silence of the civil society in the face of these atrocities is a matter of grave concern. Some within civil society may have been influenced by theocratic ideologies, while others were likely intimidated by the fear of retribution. This failure to stand up against these illiberal forces created a climate of fear and insecurity for minority communities (European Foundation for South Asian Studies, 2017). Despite a brief period of hope following the formation of the 'Ekattorer Ghatak-Dalal Nirmul Committee' – a movement for justice for the victims of the 1971 genocide (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2018) led by Jahanara Imam (Biswas, 2024) – the progress towards a more inclusive society in Bangladesh was short-lived. Following her passing in 1994, the country unfortunately reverted to a state of xenophobia. This regression is further evidenced by the continuous decline in the Hindu population in Bangladesh, a trend observed in every census since 1901 (News18, 2024). The situation is alarming, as Bangladesh has witnessed a surge in brutal killings of religious minorities, including Ahmadis, Hindus, and secular Bangladeshis, in recent years. Furthermore, Islamist groups such as Jamaat-e-Islami and Hefazat-e-Islam are actively advocating for the adoption of Pakistan's discriminatory policies, seeking to officially declare certain sects as "non-Muslims" (U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2006).

The tide turned against Jamaat-e-Islami when the Awami League, led by Sheikh Hasina- the then Prime Minister of Bangladesh, campaigned to try war criminals in 2008. Following her electoral victory, Prime Minister Hasina took a significant step towards accountability by establishing the International Crimes Tribunal in 2009. She also amended the 1973 act to hold organizations, not just individuals, responsible for war crimes. This move, which aimed to de-Islamist the country's approach to justice, was met with strong opposition from Pakistan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia (European Foundation for South Asian Studies). Despite this, the government proceeded with a series of arrests, which took place from June to December 2010, marking a crucial milestone in Bangladesh's pursuit of justice and accountability. The 2013 execution of Abdul Quader Molla, a key Jamaat-e-Islami leader, marked a significant milestone in Bangladesh's pursuit of justice for the 1971 Liberation War. This landmark achievement was the culmination of decades of tireless advocacy by victims' families and activists, notably championed by Jahanara Imam's "Ekattorer Ghatak-Dalal Nirmul Committee." The 2013 social revolution, driven by the passion and activism of Bangladeshi youth, played a crucial role in bringing this outcome to fruition. The mass protests that erupted in Dhaka's Shahbag Square underscored the widespread public demand for accountability, marking a pivotal moment in Bangladesh's struggle for justice and reconciliation.

Bangladesh's Unsettling Parallels with Nazi Germany:

Despite warnings from various quarters about the potential dire consequences of their return to power (Adhikary, 2023), public opinion in Bangladesh in 2009 appeared to be somewhat favorable towards Jamaat-e-Islami. A poll conducted that year revealed a nuanced public perception, with 40% of Bangladeshis expressing a positive view of the party, while 41% held negative feelings towards it, suggesting a relatively divided public opinion regarding their role in the country (Fair & Oldmixon, 2015). This sentiment, coupled with the growing influence of Islamist ideology, particularly after the 2024 student protests, led to the surprising reinstatement of Jamaat on 28th August 2024 (Ramachandran, 2024), after a brief 27-day ban. This reversal occurred under the caretaker government headed by Muhammad Yunus based on the claim that there was "no specific evidence of involvement with terrorism and violence" (Mecca Times, 2024). The shift in Bangladesh's political landscape, marked by the BNP's resurgence and the Awami League's absence, created a power vacuum that allowed an unchallenged Islamist outlook to dominate, ultimately influencing politically motivated youth to perpetrate communal atrocities against Hindus. This shift raises concerns about a potential return to a

more conservative and Islamist-dominated political landscape (Bhattacharjee, 2024), who agree that “*The Caliphate is a better system of government than*” the present Bangladeshi government (Fair & Oldmixon, 2015).

The alarming escalation of sectarian violence in Bangladesh bears an unsettling resemblance to the precipitous rise of Nazi Germany. As economic instability and social discontent fueled the Nazi Party's (History, 2024) ascent, similarly, Bangladesh's fragile economy and simmering social tensions have created a fertile ground for extremist ideologies to flourish (Graffe, 2010). In a chilling echo of Nazi Germany's scapegoating of Jews, Bangladesh's Hindu minority has become the target of systematic persecution, with increasing incidents of violence, land grabbing, and forced conversions. Many Indian Newspapers have recorded these events in great detail, which have made a roar in the Lok Sabha with politicians like Shri Sandeep Kumar Pathak, demanding affirmative steps from the Ministry of External Affairs (Ministry Of External Affairs, 2024). However, the answer remains a resonance of Bangladesh's acknowledgment of 88 proven cases of Hindu targeting after the ousting of Sheikh Hasina (The New Indian Express, 2024). Significantly, the belated acknowledgment of fatalities followed a period of vehement denial by the Bangladeshi Interim Government's Chief Advisor, Muhammad Yunus, who dismissed concerns about the burgeoning influence of radicalism and the precarious security of the nation's Hindu and other minority populations as mere media-driven propaganda (Mustafa, 2024) which elicited sharp rebukes from both the Indian government and then President-elect of the United States (Haider, 2024). Additionally, on November 25, 2024, Hindu Priest Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari was detained by the caretaker government following an accusation by BNP leader Firoz Khan. The arrest was based on charges related to alleged disrespect for the Bangladeshi National Flag (The Times of India, 2025). In a chilling interview with The Indian Express, the 74-year-old Supreme Court titan, Rabindra Ghosh, ignited a firestorm, denouncing the charges as a politically orchestrated witch hunt – a venomous plot to silence his impassioned crusade for Hindu unity. Casting a long shadow over the conversation, Ghosh lamented the interim government's abject failure to protect its minority populations. A chilling premonition gripped him: 'There's no assurance I won't be killed.' Plagued by a barrage of death threats, he drew a chilling parallel to Das's previous legal counsel, who were savagely assaulted, leaving Das without any legal representation in court (The Indian Express, 2024).

The ideology of Islamic nationalism, propagated by radical groups, has spawned an atmosphere of intolerance, eerily reminiscent of the Aryan supremacy that underpinned Nazi Germany's genocidal agenda (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,). Moreover, the government's inadequate response to these atrocities, often marred by complicity and appeasement, has drawn unsettling comparisons to the Nazi regime's tacit condoning of violence against minorities. Yunus, when asked by a reporter at The Hindu, ‘What can be done to reassure Bangladesh's minority communities, who feel scared and targeted, amidst rising radical Islam and potential changes to the constitution that could eliminate secularism?’ his answer was to showcase his table of Human Rights Activists in the caretaker government (Haider, 2024). The proponent's argument rests on the assumption that a government composed of human rights activists will inherently lead to the widespread implementation of the Human Rights Paradigm. This assumption relies heavily on the concept of procedural justice, which posits that just outcomes will naturally follow from fair processes. However, this perspective overlooks the critical limitations of procedural justice in the face of existing power imbalances, inadequate representation, and systemic injustices (Thacher, 2019). In such contexts, procedural justice often fails to deliver equitable outcomes, necessitating the implementation of affirmative action measures to safeguard the rights and interests of marginalized groups. Surprisingly, it is the same Yunus, who in his appointment to the International Advisory Council of International Development Law Organization in May 2016, argued that ‘the law (procedures) serves the people who can afford it’ and called for the implementation of affirmative action to help the poor (International Development Law Organisation). Although said to improve the banking system, Yunus’ experiments with affirmative actions, to distribute justice to the poor, deviating from procedural justice was one of his cherished ideals, which somehow in the way have changed, thus reservation towards affirmative application of the ‘good law’ in case of religious minorities in Bangladesh.

The debate surrounding Muhammad Yunus's leadership in Bangladesh is complex, with some viewing it as a crucial opportunity to break free from authoritarian rule and restore stability, while others argue that this perspective oversimplifies the situation. Critics contend that Yunus's interim government has not made sufficient progress in safeguarding minority rights and that his leadership is often portrayed in an overly idealized manner. The situation in Bangladesh is particularly uncertain, given the country's

history of political instability. The ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024 led to the establishment of an interim government under Yunus's leadership, which has been tasked with reforming the election system and public administration. However, the outcome of this transition remains unclear, and some experts have drawn parallels with other countries that have experienced similar transitions, such as Iran in 1979. Joseph Wright, Erica Frantz, and Barbara Geddes identify three potential outcomes after a dictator's removal: continued autocratic rule under new leadership, a transition to democracy, or the establishment of a new autocratic regime. The future of Bangladesh remains uncertain, and the path it will follow remains to be determined (Banka, 2024).

Confronting Religious Extremism:

History warns that unchecked extremism can rapidly lead to catastrophic consequences. This is evident in multiple places where religious fundamentalism has spawned egregious human rights abuses. The plight of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, who faced genocide, forced migration, and torture at the hands of Buddhist extremists, is a stark example. Similarly, the targeting of Christians and other minorities in Pakistan, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia underscores the global reach of religious intolerance. Afghanistan under Taliban rule and Iran's Shia-dominated regime have also witnessed widespread human rights violations against minority groups. A comparative analysis reveals common factors contributing to these crises: weak governance, economic instability, and the exploitation of religious differences for political gain. Furthermore, the international community's inadequate response to these atrocities has emboldened perpetrators, allowing extremism to flourish. Studies have shown that countries with high levels of religious freedom and pluralism are less prone to conflict and human rights abuses (USCIRF, 2021). Conversely, nations ranking low on the Global Peace Index, such as Myanmar (132nd) and Afghanistan (162nd), have witnessed devastating consequences of unchecked extremism (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2022). Bangladesh's current trajectory raises concerns that it may join this unfortunate cohort unless swift action is taken to address the root causes of sectarian violence.

While the international community has acknowledged the plight of religious minorities in Bangladesh, particularly Hindus, the response has been insufficient. A notable effort was made by former US government official Tulsi Gabbard, who introduced a resolution calling for the protection of Hindus and other religious minorities in Bangladesh. In her April 2, 2021 speech, Gabbard highlighted the ongoing persecution of these communities, which has persisted since Bangladesh's independence. This campaign involves targeted attacks, murders, arson, and forced displacement. Historically, Hindus constituted approximately 33% of the Bangladeshi population, but due to this persistent Islamist campaign, they now represent only 8%. Recent incidents, such as the attacks on Hindu temples, the destruction of a train, and the burning of government buildings, further underscore the severity of the situation. Unfortunately, the Islamist campaign of terror against religious minorities, secularists, atheists, and others in Bangladesh is not an isolated phenomenon. This trend has been observed for centuries and has been exacerbated by regime changes in Iraq, Libya, and Syria, which led to the toppling or weakening of secular authoritarian leaders who had previously protected religious minorities from Islamist jihadists. The Christian populations in Iraq and Syria have declined dramatically, and Afghanistan, once a multi-religious country, now has a Hindu population estimated at only 1,000 (Gabbard, 2021).

Until the global community, particularly the Muslim majority states, condemns and commits to defeating the Islamist exclusivist ideology, which advocates for the elimination or subjugation of non-Muslims and certain Muslim groups, the persecution of religious minorities will continue worldwide. The ongoing jihadist campaign of terror in countries like Pakistan serves as a stark reminder of this threat (Gabbard, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Bangladesh's current challenges, though daunting, reveal a profound paradox between suffering and strength. In contemporary discourse, the nation is often portrayed through the lens of its hardships—economic instability, political turmoil, and social unrest—overshadowing its intrinsic potential for renewal and unity. The persistence of high inflation, low per capita income, and climate vulnerability has deepened poverty and social alienation, driving many citizens to seek comfort in religion. Yet this spiritual refuge has at times been exploited by opportunistic political and religious

factions, fostering division and exclusionary nationalism. The erosion of interfaith solidarity—once strong between Hindus and Muslims during the liberation struggle of 1971 and the protests of 2024—echoes historical precedents such as the moral coercion experienced in Nazi Germany, where fear and manipulation subdued compassion and dissent. Within this climate, many Bangladeshis remain torn between moral conviction and the oppressive force of extremist rhetoric. The situation calls for renewed reflection on the nation's identity, underscoring the importance of international cooperation and enlightened leadership in restoring Bangladesh's pluralistic foundations.

At the heart of this reflection lies the concept of *Volksgeist*, or the national spirit, which frames Bangladesh's potential for transformation. Like Germany's post-Holocaust reinvention, Bangladesh, too, can reconstruct its identity by confronting its divisions and reawakening its inclusive moral heritage. The metaphor of the nation as a mother—embodied in the hymn "*Amar Sonar Bangla*"—captures this enduring essence: a nurturing figure who loves all her children equally, regardless of religion or background. However, this motherly silence in the face of conflict has too often been mistaken for apathy, allowing sectarianism to deepen. By drawing lessons from Germany's journey from exclusionary nationalism to multiculturalism, Bangladesh can rediscover its unifying heart. Through a renewed commitment to compassion, justice, and collective progress—supported by domestic reform and international solidarity—the country can transform its current struggles into a foundation for inclusive nationhood, ensuring that its future reflects not division, but the shared humanity of all its people.

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