**Assignment 02**

**From Liberation to Globalization: The Evolving Face of Bengali Nationalism**

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**Nationalism through the lens of anthropology**

Nationalism, in the words of anthropology, is a socio-political ideology that underlines cultural identity based on common language, traditions, ethnicity, or historical experiences shared by people, making them part of a unique nation. Nationalism is very often a response to colonialism, political subjugation, or cultural suppression as a means of resistance and self-determination. While nationalism can bring people together into a shared identity, it also has an opposite side. Anthropologists critique nationalism because of its propensity to draw boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, basically separating people into "us" and "them." Those who fit the national identity, based on things such as language, ethnicity, or religion, are included, while those who do not are excluded or marginalized. This exclusion often leads to inequality, where the minority groups are pushed to the margins of society and denied equal rights, recognition, or opportunities. Further, nationalism can reinforce power hierarchies in which dominant groups use it to maintain control or privilege over others. (Couroucli, 2009) says, anthropologists have found that studying nationalism depends a lot on how researchers interact with the people they study, especially in places with political tension. For example, during Greece's military rule (1967–1974), nationalism wasn’t just about a shared sense of belonging, it also involved power struggles and memories of the past. In such cases, communities often retreat to so-called "safe" narratives of their history-myths or heroic tales but avoid speaking about more contemporary or contested events. It really shows how people mold and shape their national identity for protection when the people feel they are being watched or judged. According to (*iResearchNet*), it has been described that nationalism is an entity that can give individuals psychological security and pride in culture, and thereby the sense of communities and richness of identity. On the other hand, it becomes hostile, triggering conflict and making division if manipulated by a power-hungry leadership. Fueled by patriotism, ethnicity, religion, and economic interests, nationalism can be twisted to justify atrocities and oppression, as we witnessed figures like Hitler, Stalin, and Caesar. While it can unite people, it can also be a force that creates hatred and fuels injustice when used for selfish or destructive purposes. According to (Sabra, 2007), previously nations were described as natural or even inevitable, new scholars highlight the idea of Benedict Anderson that a nation is an "imagined community." However, this text goes beyond such views to show how nationalist discourses are deeply gendered and racialized. According to feminist scholars like Anne McClintock, women are symbolically positioned as preservers of national traditions, bound to the backward-looking face of nationalism, while men embody its forward-looking, modern aspect. Nationalism often uses the family-like ideas that would make social rules and divisions seem natural and normal. For instance, it upholds men's place in public roles of leadership or soldiers, whereas women are tied to private roles of home and family caretaking. This develops and solidifies a division between "public/male" and "private/female" and naturalizes these roles, making it seem like these roles are natural and unchangeable. Ultimately, nationalism is a site of social contestation, producing inclusion and exclusion, both of which anthropologists must investigate through everyday experiences in order to understand the real effects on individuals and communities.

**Bengali identity and nationalism in general**

Bangladeshi identity is deeply connected with the culture, history, and struggles for independence of the nation. While Bengali nationalism is all about shared language and cultural heritage, Bangladeshi identity grew as a distinct concept after the country's independence in 1971. It reflects the unique blend of our cultural traditions, religious values, and political history that defines Bangladesh. Most of the Bangladeshis are Bengali Muslims; our culture comprises a combination of Islamic ways and immense local heritage regarding literature, music, and art. Festivals like Pohela Boishakh, the Bengali New Year, highlight our shared cultural roots, while religious celebrations like Eid reflect the country's strong influence of Islam. Bangladeshi culture, throughout history, has evolved under the influence of various rulers from the Sultans of Bengal to the Mughals who contributed to the region's architecture, language, and political systems. Article by (Absar, 2014) says, the British colonial period steered Western education and ideas, further shaping the identity of the region. After independence, there was a conscious effort to establish a distinct Bangladeshi nationalism, separate from West Bengal in India. This was followed by debates over the proper balance to be given to secular Bengali culture versus Islamic values, which reflected the population's diverse beliefs. Bangladeshi identity also proudly embraces the historical role of Bengali struggle for survival. An example could be the Bengali Language Movement, which became one of the main events that created and established the rights of people toward their language and culture. Also, the Liberation War in 1971, giving birth to Bangladesh, constitutes one basis for national pride. The people of Bangladesh, through shared traditions, common history, and hopes for their future, have emerged relatively united despite challenges along the way, such as political instability and debates over identity.

**Historical events that influenced the understanding of bengali nationalism**

The historical events that molded the understanding and construction of Bengali nationalism were crucial to defining its unique identity and political trajectory. In this context, colonialism, the Partition of 1947, and the Liberation War of 1971 had immense influence on the growth of a nationalist consciousness regarding issues of cultural pride, economic exploitation, and political sovereignty. In the colonial era, there was both modernization and marginalization in Bengal. According to (Tinker, 2023​), it was during the Bengal Renaissance that people felt proud of their culture and intellectual achievements, but British policies such as the Permanent Settlement system created a wide gap between the rich and poor. These developments laid the foundation for a growing sense of injustice and the need for self-determination, which would later fuel nationalist movements. While initially meant to improve administration, the Partition of Bengal in 1905 underlined the political and cultural divisions between Hindus and Muslims, fostering early debates about identity. These struggles with identity had been further amplified by the 1947 Partition, which placed East Bengal (later East Pakistan), in a situation of economic and political subjugation by West Pakistan. The imposition of Urdu as a state language over Bengali catalyzed the Bengali Language Movement, a cornerstone of cultural nationalism. It helped the Bengalis articulate their distinctiveness not only at the level of language but also in cultural and political terms and unifying diverse groups under a common cause. The 1971 War of Liberation became the ultimate expression of Bengali nationalism: decades of economic neglect and cultural suppression boiled over into a fight for independence. It was then that nationalism turned into a force transcending religion and rested in the domains of language, culture, and sovereignty. Bangladesh was born with the epitome of that struggle and deeply engraved the spirit of self-determination and pride for the culture in its psyche. All these events together redefined nationalism for Bengalis, emphasizing their distinct identity, the importance of justice and equality, and the enduring power of cultural heritage. Each historical moment added to the layers of understanding and turned nationalism into a unifying force and a tool for political and cultural assertion.

**Historical Processes Intersecting with Gender Roles**

Historical processes in Bangladesh have influenced and intersected with gender roles throughout its history, often highlighting not only progress but also challenges. According to (Adams, 2015), in the 19th century, reformers like Rammohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen tried to challenge certain harmful practices such as child marriage and sati. Sati was a historical practice in which a widow had to burn herself at her husband's funeral. It was seen as a sign of loyalty towards her husband, but the act was highly harmful and forced upon many women. The historical roots of this practice were embedded in a patriarchal notion that idealized a woman's loyalty for her husband, even after death. It was quite common in some parts of India, including Bengal, during the early centuries. Rammohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen stood against such practices thus constituting early efforts towards women's rights. While reforms like ending such inhuman practices like child marriages or sati were meant to improve the women's lives, the decision and action for such changes were mostly taken by men themselves. Very few women during those days were involved in these discussions and decisions, which shows that they did not hold much power or opinion in determining their own rights or roles in the society. Even though the changes were positive changes that were beneficial for the society, women used to have poor participation in shaping them. Later on, the motive of Islamic revival movements was that women are supposed to be morally virtuous and protect the honor of their family. These movements portrayed women as being responsible for the maintenance of moral values of their families and communities. Therefore, all the traditional gender expectations, such as women staying indoors and not holding any public roles became stronger. This emphasis reduced women's freedom to engage in work, education, or other activities outside the home. On the other hand, traditions like sufi tradition where people used to do spiritual practices within Islam, focusing on making a personal, deep connection with God. The Sufi traditions were more open to women's participation in religious activities. (Absar, 2014) says, in certain Sufi communities, women could even take leadership roles, like guiding prayers or participating in rituals which was very rare in traditional Islamic practices. Thus, Sufi spaces become more inclusive, open to both men and women, allowing women an opportunity for active participation in religious and social life. During the 1971 Liberation War, Women Faced extreme violence, that showed the newly independent Bangladesh the urgent need to address gender issues. Since then, the women's empowerment perspective has been emphasized, improving women's access to education and jobs as a means for overcoming their socially imposed boundaries. Yet, with cultural practices such as child marriage, dowry, and purdah (the seclusion of women) persisting, the implementation of such reforms had a really poor progress. These challenges demonstrate that while certain steps have been taken toward improving gender equality, deeply rooted cultural and religious traditions continue to shape and often restrict the roles that women can take in society. In Bangladesh, history has shaped the role of genders through a mixture of development and tradition. Many of the reform movements, influenced by religious beliefs, typically highlighted women's responsibility limited to family honor and morality, which mostly confined women to their homes. Yet, while efforts such as promoting education and women employment opened ways to change such practices, deep cultural and religious norms continued to hold back these small steps forward against ongoing challenges to true equality.

**Historical Processes Intersecting with Religious ideologies**

Historical processes in Bangladesh reflect how religious ideologies, combined with important events, shaped the national identity of our country. Immediately after independence in 1971, the roots of Bangladesh nationalism were in secularism and Bengali cultural identity, focusing on unity of language and culture. This would later change with the shift in politics intertwined with religion. According to (Sheesh, 2022), in the era of Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Muhammad Ershad, Islamic ideas were used as a means to strengthen power and gain support of the majority Muslim population. They altered the policies and constitution of the country by incorporating Islamic references and even declaring Islam the state religion. The main intentions were to gain public support and make their rule seem more legitimate in a country with a greater muslim population and people deeply connected to their islamic faith. This shift added a religious element to the national identity, which had originally been focused on culture and language after independence. Bangladeshi nationalism came to involve both a pride in Bengali culture and Islamic values. The two groups together made for conflict, on one hand between those who were essentially secularists for whom the country's identity was centered around culture and language, and on the other, those for whom religion should be at its core. The difference between these two demands had influenced politics, education, and society as time evolved and how cultural traditions, along with religious beliefs, have shaped the country's identity. This blend of culture and religion shaped the overall Bangladeshi nationalism.

**Historical Processes Intersecting with economic changes**

The historical processes of Bangladesh, especially after the 1971 Liberation War, have been deeply rooted with the economic changes of the country itself, and also shaped the identity of Bangladeshi nationalism. Immediately after independence, Bangladesh has faced enormous challenges like overwhelming poverty, destroyed infrastructure, and a struggling economy. According to (Sen, 2024), the Bangladesh government initially opted for a socialist policy by nationalizing industries to reconstruct the nation. However, due to inefficiency and corruption in such state-run enterprises, there was a shift toward market-oriented policies in the late 1970s. This was further helped by international agencies such as the IMF and World Bank, which came up with structural reforms, trade liberalization, and growth in the private sector. Study by (Sen, 2024), also says that the RMG sector thus came to symbolize resilience and pride for the nation, driving not only economic growth but also providing jobs to millions of people, especially women, thereby bringing social and economic empowerment. Agriculture also changed dramatically in Bangladesh as the modern farming method improved, such as better seeds, irrigation, and equipment that developed the country's capability of self-sufficiency in food production, hence ensuring food security. This reduced the dependency on imported food, ensuring access to vital crops for the people. At the same time, migrant worker remittances started accruing foreign exchange reserves, while higher living standards improved living standards of many families which also created a sense of connection to a globalized world. Rooted in historical struggle and recovery from war and destruction, many of these economic successes further strengthen the spirit of Bangladeshi nationalism focused on resilience (bouncing back from difficulties), unity (working together as a nation), and progress (moving forward). Therefore, History and economic transformation kept shaping the spirit of Bangladeshi nationalism.

**Contemporary Issues and Debates**

Bengali nationalism is one of the most strong forces in the history of South Asia, over years, this identity has evolved a lot. From fighting for Liberation and language rights to now encompassing a wide array of modern challenges in the current world, such as globalization, identity politics, migration, religion, and economic inequality.

**Gender and Religion**

Gender and religion play an essential role in shaping our national identity. Women and the LGBTQ+ community often encounter nationalism in a different way, Bangladesh being a Muslim majority country, most nationalists marginalize or exploit their identities. For example, women are expected to represent cultural and national dignity, which further brings restriction on their freedom and choice while reinforcing patriarchal norms. In the context of Bengali nationalism, women's contribution to movements related to the Liberation War of 1971 is celebrated but their struggles for equality continue to be sidelined. Exclusion is even more severe among LGBTQ+ individuals because their identities go against the norms of both traditional and nationalism. Although feminist movements in Bangladesh have started challenging such narratives, they face strong resistance from conservative religious and nationalist groups, thereby portraying the complex interplay between gender, religion, and nationalism. In today's world, in the context of Bengali nationalism, globalization manifests in adoption of transnational values mostly among the young generation which in many cases clashes with traditional and national Standards. For instance the emergence of identity politics reveals how Bengali nationalism has become increasingly divided. The demands for recognition of distinctive identities within the broad-based nationalist movement have come from different groups, including ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+, and religious communities. This diversity will likely sharpen the divide between an inclusive idea of nationalism and more exclusionary ones that seek to privilege either linguistic or religious solidarity.

**Economic Factor**

Globalization has dramatically affected Bengali nationalism by reshaping it in cultural, political, and economic ways. Despite offering the opportunities of both cultural exchange and economic advancement, it also challenges traditional notions of nationalism. Migration and diaspora play a large role in the negotiation of Bengali identities. As a result of economic migration, particularly to the Middle Eastern and Western countries, there is a large Bengali diaspora that, through remittances, contributes to the economy while at the same time struggling with questions of identity in the host country. For example, Bangladeshi migrant workers in the Middle East face many challenges that eventually affect their relation to national identity. Often, low wages, poor working conditions, and limited rights lead to their social and economic marginalization. Although they send remittances back to Bangladesh to support their families, which is a huge contribution to the economy, their work is neither recognized nor appreciated in terms of national pride or identity. These diasporic communities also play a double role. Not only do they carry Bengali culture and language overseas to foreign lands, they also simultaneously immerse themselves in hybrid identities, blending with the dominating culture of the host nation. This hybridity complicates the boundaries of traditional Bengali nationalism to readjust to the newer expanded and pluralistic premises of globalization. Another big example is the garment industry in Bangladesh: a source of national pride for being a strong economic driver, yet it underlines sharp inequalities. Workers, mostly women, get poor wages and have to work under unsafe conditions, raising questions of whose interests nationalism serves. This tension between economic growth and social justice brings into critical light the economic grounding of Bengali nationalism.

**Conclusion**

Nationalism is one complex notion developed and nourished by culture, history, and politics. Nationalism is a cause of unity that, at the same time, is the cause of separation. While it unites the people in celebration for a common history and aspirations for the future, it simultaneously excludes others and produces a cause of conflict, most particularly where the conceptualization becomes too exclusionary or has taken to the advantage of the people against another particular people. Nationalism is best understood with a close look at how it shapes identities and creates divisions. Symbols, rituals, and stories related to nationalism all show a shared value of a group; simultaneously, they have the power to shape how one looks upon themselves and others. We today live in a world where the pull of celebration of cultural uniqueness balances with the pull of inclusiveness. This shows that nationalism is not fixed; it's a changing and flexible force. We can use it to make bridges instead of barriers by encouraging dialogue and understanding among cultures, which can help build a more peaceful and fair global community.

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