

# Everyday Forms of Discrimination Experienced by the Minority: An Exploratory Study in a Village in Bangladesh

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## Abstract

Contrary to the ongoing major researches on institutional discrimination in Bangladesh, in general, and individual level discrimination focusing physically salient group(s) in the US, in particular, this exploratory study analyzed various patterns of discrimination that the members of a physically non-salient minority in Bangladesh experience in their everyday lives through interaction with the majority. The study also examined whether there was any variation among the participants in terms of receiving discrimination. Collecting data by using a semi-structured interview from 40 randomly selected religious minority household heads from a village in Bangladesh, the study identified the following discriminatory patterns: (i) criticizing rituals and practices, (ii) verbal harassment, (iii) offering poor services, (iv) exploitation of labor and money, (v) threats, (vi) physical attack, (vii) creating obstacles in performing festivals and (viii) land dispossession. This study found that participants from the lower socio-economic status (SES) were more prone to receiving discrimination than those from the upper SES. The most unique patterns of discrimination experienced by the participants were criticizing rituals and practices, exploitation of labor and money, threatening, creating obstacles in performing festivals and land dispossession. In terms of the effect of each pattern on the victims, land grabbing was found to be the most dreadful pattern of discrimination. The participants were victimized more in the environment surrounded by known members of the majority. Parallel to some other studies, the physically non-salient participants of the present study were found to experience the discriminatory patterns of verbal harassment, offering poor services and physical attack.

**Key words:** Bangladesh, Discrimination, Minority, Prejudice and Socio-Economic Status (SES).

## Introduction

Bangladesh, the youngest in terms of getting independence among the countries in South Asia, has a population of 147 millions (2003 World Population Data Sheet). When she became independent from Pakistan in 1971, the Constitution of Bangladesh included secularism as one of the four basic state principles. Soon after the political turmoil of 1975 when military took power, the basic principles of state ideology changed. According to Barkat et. al. (1997, p. 9), “The glorious war of independence of

Bangladesh in 1971 laid down the foundation of a secular state where all people-no matter to which religious or ethnic groups they belong-would enjoy and exercise their rights from which they were deprived in the past. But, unfortunately, the spirit of the liberation-building a secular nation with due participation of all people, still remains a dream.” Replacing secularism, the Fifth Amendment adopted in 1977 included Islamic ideology in state’s principle and the Eighth Amendment of 1988 declared Islam as the state religion.

The “majoritarization”<sup>1</sup> started at an institutional level by amending the constitution and the formulation and implementation of various policies gradually alienated all religious minorities (e.g., Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and others) from the mainstream of society. However, the sufferings of Hindu religious minority were multifarious due to the social, economic and political factors associated with the group’s long historical relation with the Muslim religious majority (Barkat et. al. 1997, p. 19). Discrimination against Hindu religious minority is considered as one of the major reasons for the out migration which became evident in the decline of the its group size (Barkat et. al. 1997; Barkat, 2000; Sen, 1993; Bhowmik, 1993; Bhattacharyya, 1993; Rahman, 1993; Moral, 2001). Barkat et. al. (1997, p. 3) pointed out, “Mass out-migration of Hindu population during mid 1960s and onward is a reality beyond doubt. Among various factors, the implementation of Enemy Property Act/Vested Property Act has contributed the process of such out-migration. The estimated size of such out-migration (missing Hindu population) during 1964-1991 was 5.3 million, or 538 persons each day, since 1964, with as high as 703 persons per day during 1964-1971.” **Table 1** shows the numerical changes in the population of different religious groups in Bangladesh from 1941 to 1991.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Population by Religious Composition in Bangladesh, 1941 to 1991

Year	Muslims (%)	Hindus (%)	Others (%)
1941	70.3	28.0	1.7
1951	76.9	22.0	1.1
1961	80.4	18.5	1.1
1974	85.4	13.5	1.1
1981	86.6	12.1	1.2
1991	88.3	10.5	1.2

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh 2000 (2002), p. 30.

**N.B.** ‘Others’ include the members of Buddhists, Christians and animists or nature worshippers.

Discrimination against the minority resulting from religious categorization in Bangladesh can be traced back to the history when the Indian sub-continent was divided on the basis of its two major religions, India for the Hindus and Pakistan for the Muslims. This division was the direct effect of colonial ruler’s ‘divide and rule’ policy, which was reflected clearly, at first, in 1905 in Lord Curzon’s notorious policy known as *Bongo Bhongo* (Partition of Bengal). Although two countries were born in 1947 along a religious line of division, the classification was faulty because there were many religious minorities in both countries. The partition from religious boundary made religious minorities especially the Muslims and the Hindus in India and Pakistan respectively more insecure because they had to live, for the first time in the history of Indian subcontinent, in a country which was made for the members of other religious group (Kabir, 1980). The two religious groups became more marginalized in the power structures

of the societies. The insecurity resulted in the mass out migration of the Hindus from Pakistan to India (Kabir, 1980; Umar, 1973) and Muslims from India to Pakistan (Ahmed, 1997). Present Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan up to 1971 (known as East Pakistan) and during that period (1947-1971), the state undertook various initiatives that affected minorities severely (Kabir, 1980; Barkat et. al. 1997). The partial role of the state towards religious minorities was reflected in the formulation and implementation of various policies in the Pakistan period (Kabir, 1980). However, this trend continued to Bangladesh even when she gained independence from Pakistan in 1971, for which people of the country including all minorities fought together.

In Bangladesh, some scholars, although few in number, analyzed discrimination against the religious minority. Using sociological perspective, Sen (1994) described the evolution of discriminatory property law known as Enemy (Vested) Property Act<sup>2</sup> and analyzed the long-standing socio-economic impact of it on the Hindu religious minority group in Bangladesh. Dutta (1993), based on secondary data and observation, cited the poor participation of Hindu religious minority in parliament, supplying data from the general elections from 1954 to 1991. His data showed an alarmingly poor participation of the minority community in defense services and no participation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Home Office and Defense and various other important and higher level job categories.

Barkat et al. (1997), administering in-depth interview with checklists and conducting group discussions explored the magnitude of the suffering resulting from the implementation of Vested Property Act (VPA) and evaluated its impact on the socio-economic life of the Hindu community. Moral (2001), based on secondary data, criticized some constitutional amendments and legal provisions as well as government policies that discriminate against Hindu religious minority group in Bangladesh. He also examined discrimination in public appointments and political participation and noted incidents of violence against minority communities. Along with this, he also indicated the illegal occupation of land held by minorities by gangs or powerful persons to be a serious threat to religious minorities. Ghuhathakurta (2002), on the basis of secondary data, discussed communal politics in the Indian sub-continent as far as it relates to the Hindus in Bangladesh. Ghuhathakurta identified business, employment and education as the areas of discrimination against Hindus. According to her, discriminatory practices contributed to the gradual alienation of minorities to such an extent that it often resulted in the total loss of their identity.

Timm (2002) described discrimination against the Christian religious minority in Bangladesh. Citing the major policies from Pakistan period to present Bangladesh, he delineated how the majoritarization affected the Christian religious minority in Bangladesh. Bhikshu (2002) also analyzed the sufferings of the Buddhist religious minority in Bangladesh. He described how land of the Buddhist people living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh, were affected by the various development policies of the government from colonial period to present Bangladesh.

Aforementioned studies on discrimination against religious minorities in Bangladesh focused mainly on the institutional aspect of discrimination. Although these studies did not consider many subtle forms of discrimination that the religious minorities in Bangladesh experienced in their everyday lives of interaction with the religious majority, they contributed to the development of macro level sociocultural theories of prejudice and discrimination developed during 1960s and 1970s (Duckitt, 1992a; Brown, 1995). Researchers emphasized on sociocultural factors mainly the normative aspect and social transmission of prejudice and discrimination during 1960s. The normative approach to prejudice at that time involved basically an optimistic view of the future race relations and emphasis was given on effective desegregation. However, observing the incident of civil rights movement in the U.S., researchers on prejudice

realized during 1970s that socially shared and normative patterns of prejudice and discrimination could no longer be credibly viewed as just cultural and institutional traditions, and instead seemed to be maintained by more basic intergroup conflicts and social structural conditions. The attention of the scholars was mainly to the social and institutional patterns of discrimination.

However, from the findings of several important studies during 1970s such as symbolic racism of McConahay and Hough (1976), scholars during 1980s realized that the persistence and pervasiveness of prejudice and discrimination might not be fully explicable in terms of group interests and social structure. It was suspected that some psychological processes might also be operative. From this realization, the cognitive paradigm emphasizing mainly the universal psychological process of categorization developed in analyzing intergroup relation (Duckitt, 1992a). Under this perspective scholars, mainly social psychologists (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Ashmore and DelBoca, 1981; Hamiltom, 1981), developed a large volume of micro studies on prejudice and discrimination. However, these researches were predominantly experimental (Duckitt, 1992a).

Contrary to the mainstream studies both in terms of institutional discrimination (macro level) and research design (experimental) predominated during 1970s and 1980s and onward, Feagin (1991) identified many subtle forms of discrimination evident in the everyday life of interaction between the members of two groups. Selecting 37 middle-class African Americans through snowball sampling and collecting data from them by in-depth interviewing, Feagin's (1991) study found (1) avoidance actions, (2) rejection actions, (3) verbal attacks, (4) and physical threats and harassment by white police officers and other whites as a continuum of discriminatory patterns faced by middle-class African Americans. The study identified a strong relationship between types of discrimination and particular sites, with rejection/poor-service discrimination being most common in public accommodation and verbal attacks or physical threat discrimination by white citizens or police officers most likely in the street.

Following Feagin (1991), Hein (2000) also conducted a study and interviewed forty-eight Hmong Americans to examine the pattern of interpersonal discrimination and compared the results of the study with that of Feagin (1991). Verbal harassment, poor service in stores, physical harassment, such as assault and having objects thrown at them, avoidance, and police mistreatment were the common forms of interpersonal discrimination reported by Hmong Americans. The distribution of interpersonal discrimination identified by Hein indicated strong parallels in microlevel inequality for Hmong Americans and African Americans. But Hmong Americans' accounts of face-to-face discrimination in public revealed two additional dimensions of microlevel inequality not reported in the literature on African Americans: nativism and limited English proficiency.

Feagin (1991) and Hein's (2000) studies successfully revealed both the blatant and subtle nature of discrimination evident in the everyday life of interaction between the two groups. However, these studies along with other micro studies developed specifically under the cognitive paradigm of categorization seem to pay less attention to the concept of power<sup>3</sup> in the analysis of discrimination. The cognitive function of categorization is mighty and indispensable for human interaction in society. However, it seems that the cognitive function is not the sole cause or source of prejudice and discrimination. The present study contends that within the framework of the formation of various groups from categorization, it is the power relation that plays a significant role in extending or receiving discriminatory action. Moreover, previous studies did not consider the socio-economic status (SES) that often becomes a crucial factor for the parties involved in interactive situation in everyday life and therefore failed to examine whether there was any variation among the victims in terms of receiving discriminatory actions.

From the above considerations, the present study, emphasizing on the concept of power attempted to examine how the power relation affects intergroup relations. More specifically, the research question was what the prejudicial and discriminatory patterns the members of a religious group, excluded from power (or marginalized) and therefore, termed as 'minority', experienced when they interacted with the members of another religious group who had connection to the power structure and hence, the 'majority.'

The target group (religious minority) of the present study is different from other studies conducted so far on individual level discrimination. Most of the studies on individual level discrimination were carried out in the US and the participants were mostly from African Americans (Feagin, 1991; Feagin and Sikes, 1994; Byng, 1998). Although there are some studies in the US which considered minorities other than African Americans such as Hmong in Hein's (2000) study, these studies similar to the former ones selected participants from groups bearing physically salient characteristic(s) through which they could be easily identified in the wider society in which they lived. Individual level discriminatory experience of the members of a group bearing inborn physically salient characteristic(s) such as African American, Hmong, Japanese American and so forth in a majority group of Caucasians may not be the same to the members of other groups who do not have any apparently visible mark(s). From this point of view, the present study explored the patterns of discrimination that the members of a religious minority group, bearing physically non-salient characteristic from that of the majority, experience in their everyday lives of interaction with the religious majority in Bangladesh. Therefore, the findings of the present study could be used to compare and contrast the discriminatory situations experienced by the members of two groups bearing physically salient and non-salient characteristics and/or other cross-cultural settings. The study applied survey design in analyzing intergroup relations. The methodological variation as well as the inclusion of the SES in the analysis of discrimination would provide a chance to examine theory of intergroup relation from a different angle.

The followings are the objectives of the study: (1) to explore the patterns of discriminations that the members of Hindu religious minority experience in their everyday lives of interaction with the Muslim religious majority in Bangladesh, (2) to examine whether there is any variation among the Hindu religious minority in terms of the extent of receiving discrimination (3) to compare and contrast the findings of the present study with those of some major studies conducted on individual level discrimination in the US to explore some unique patterns of individual level discrimination.

There are different religious minorities in Bangladesh. In order to answer the research question, however, the present study focuses only on the experiences of the Hindu religious minority for three reasons. Firstly, the historical incident related to the partition of India in 1947 made the Hindu religious minority living in Pakistan more prone to the discrimination in the process of radical change of the political and social structure because Pakistan was created for the Muslims. This incident also affected the lives of the Muslim religious minority in India because India was created for the Hindus. Since this article concentrates on religious minorities in Bangladesh, there is no scope to discuss the discrimination against the Muslim religious minority in India. Secondly, the members of Hindu religious minority share the same physical characteristics along with the Muslim religious majority and therefore, cannot be identified immediately in an interactive situation that is occurred in an unknown environment. Thirdly, the Hindu religious minority is the largest in size compared to other religious minority groups in Bangladesh and this group has had more antagonistic relations with the Muslims in different periods of history. Moreover, these two groups were in power by turns in different phases in the history of Indian

subcontinent. Therefore, this study on Hindu religious minority in Bangladesh will give the opportunity to examine how the members of a less powerful group that dominated once upon a time both economically (during colonial period: 1757-1947) and politically (during Sena rule: from eleventh to thirteenth century) experience discrimination when they interact with the religious majority of the country.

Selection of participants from the Hindu religious minority does not necessarily mean that analysis of discrimination on other religious minorities and/or from other lines of inquiry such as gender, class, caste, language and so forth are less significant in Bangladesh. Moreover, by conducting study on discrimination against the Hindu minority, the author does not intend to deny the caste-based prejudice and discrimination that has been continuing for centuries within the Hindu religious group. However, this short article focuses only on discrimination from religious categorization because many historical events such as the partition of Indian Sub-continent, series of communal riots and so forth indicate the significance of the inclusion of religious categorization in the analysis of discrimination.

### **Theoretical Approach and the Major Concepts of the Study**

The present study applies the theory of intergroup relations based on the cognitive paradigm of categorization in analyzing discriminatory experiences of the 'minority.' From this perspective, discrimination can be defined as a behavior that results from ingroup favoritism evolving from categorization, and its concomitant effect of prejudice. In order for the human cognition to function, the process of categorization (generalization) is imperative (Allport, 1954). Orderly living depends upon it because humans are exposed to million more stimuli at a time while they are awake. When this cognitive function is applied to homo sapiens, different categories of human groups such as men, women, adults, children, and many more are created. There are various means of categorizing people such as race, caste, religion, sex, language and so forth (Goffman, 1963) to create order in social life. Members of a given society affiliate themselves with these categories and interact with the other in a given situation by following the normative expectations that the society provides for them. This affiliation provides the foundation of group formation and develops the feelings of 'we' and 'they.' Connor (1994) also argues that the essence of an ethnic group is not tangible but psychological (feeling of "we") and any symbol (e.g., race, religion etc.) can serve the purpose of the formation of this categorization and unification of members of the categorical group.

The members who feel or have the same characteristic(s) in a given situation consider themselves as the member of a group and treat themselves as the members of ingroup. They have the feelings of sameness or "we." The members of the society who depart from them regarding the particular characteristic(s) are considered as members of an outgroup and treated as "they." Actually, people respond more positively to in-group members and they do so more rapidly than to out-group members (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1993; Fiske, 1998).

Allport and many other researchers (e.g., Tajfel, 1981) pointed out that stereotypes arise from a process of categorization. Stallybrass (1977, p. 601) defined stereotype as "an over-simplified mental image of (usually) some category of person, institution or event which is shared, in essential features, by large numbers of people... Stereotypes are commonly, but not necessarily, accompanied by prejudice, i.e. by a favorable or unfavorable predisposition towards any member of the category in question" (quoted in Tajfel, 1981, p.143).

Allport (1954, p.7) defines prejudice as "an avertive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs

to a group, simply because he (she) belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group.” Prejudice as an attitude consists of three related components: beliefs about the attitude object (the cognitive component); feelings toward it (the affective component); and action tendencies or behavioral dispositions toward it (the conative or behavioral component). Stereotype is a part of cognitive component, intergroup dislike and negative evaluation are equivalent to the affective component and the social distance is part of the behavioral component (Duckitt, 1992b). While members of various groups interact with each other, their prejudicial attitudes do not always remain suppressive. Most of the cases prejudice inclines to reflect in discriminatory actions (Allport, 1954; Feldman and Donohoe, 1978; Press, L., et. al. 1979).

There have been a number of studies that show that the mere perception of belonging to two distinct groups that is; social categorization per se is sufficient to trigger intergroup discrimination favoring the in-group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). However, power relation among the concerned groups in a given society tends to play a crucial role in the analysis of discrimination. When prejudice remains up to cognitive and affective level, power relation among the groups is not a matter at all. However, power relation becomes important when attitude (prejudice both cognitive and affective) leads to any action (behavior or discrimination). Any member of a particular category or group might have stereotypes or prejudice toward the member(s) of other group(s) in society. But all groups can not extend discriminatory behavior toward the other group(s). It appears that the only group that has connection with the power structure of the society can extend various types of discrimination towards the other group members who do not have power or are marginal. Houten (1998) emphasized on the access to the political power to define whether a group is ‘majority’ or ‘minority.’ He (p. 113) argued, “A *minority* designates an ethnically distinct group which is excluded from (or has only marginal) political power in the state in which it resides...A *majority* ...is an ethnically distinct group which possesses political power.” Since the majority has connection to the political power, they have the greater chance to exploit the existing social, economic, political and other institutions of society to maximize its group interest at the expense of other minority group(s) in society. On the contrary, the minority, being at the bottom of the power structure, tends to experience a wide variety of discriminatory situations.

Analysis on discrimination demands a clear distinction between two types of behavioral situations i.e., interpersonal and intergroup. According to Tajfel (1978) interpersonal behavior is any social encounter between two or more people in which all interaction that takes place is determined by the personal relationship between the individuals and by their respective individual characteristics (e.g., personal identities generate behavior). On the contrary, intergroup behavior includes the entire behavior of two or more individuals towards each other that is determined by their memberships in different social groups or categories. Differential treatment that is undertaken considering personal characteristic or qualities of a person should not be considered as discrimination (Allport, 1954). A robber, a murderer may desire “equality of treatment” and we may without compunction deny it to the person. In this case the person receives unequal treatment due to his or her personal characteristic or harmful deeds the person committed to the society and this type of behavior cannot be considered as discrimination.

Discrimination takes place when an individual(s) is accorded unfavorable treatment because of his or her categorical identity i.e., religion, sex, race and so forth that an individual possesses. Analysis of discrimination in this present study is done focusing not on interpersonal but on intergroup level(s). Considering this categorical aspect of intergroup behavior, the official memorandum of the United Nations (1949, p.2) defines the issue: “Discrimination includes any conduct based on a distinction made

on grounds of natural or social categories, which have no relation either to individual capacities or merits, or to the concrete behavior of the individual person.”

Discrimination can be exercised both on institutional and individual levels. Institutional discrimination refers to the denial of opportunities and equal rights to individuals and groups that results from the normal operations of a society (Schaefer, 1996). Institutional discrimination involves discrimination in social policies, housing, access to medical treatment, and so forth (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Members of “majority group” often make the policies that lead to institutional discrimination directed at members of “minority group(s).” Individual discrimination, on the other hand, refers to blatant, subtle, and covert actions taken by a majority group willfully or half-consciously, to exclude, restrict, or otherwise harm minority groups (Feagin and Sikes, 1994). Individual level discrimination is exerted by the member(s) of majority group during one’s course of interaction with the member(s) of minority group(s). Thus, individual level discrimination is also the part of intergroup interaction because the discrimination is conducted not on the basis of personal but group affiliation involved in a given situation.

Although discrimination on the two levels differs from each other in the way it is applied to the minority (through formulating policies or laws in the case of institutional level discrimination and through everyday form of interaction in the case of individual level discrimination), both are connected with each other. When an individual from the majority group provides unfavorable and unfair action towards the member(s) of minority group(s), he or she receives support from social institutions either directly or indirectly. Psychologically, an individual member from the majority possesses feelings of power and superiority over the minority as his or her ingroup is in power of society and this feeling is reflected in the interaction with the minority. Similarly, members from the majority shape the social institutions to materialize their own group interests. This is how institutional level leads to the individual level discrimination and vice versa.

Acknowledging this connection between the two levels of discrimination, the present article focuses on discrimination that the minority experiences at individual level with the majority. In the following sections, the term ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ will be referred to ‘Muslim religious majority’ and ‘Hindu religious minority’ in Bangladesh respectively.

## Method

In this study, 40 minority household heads were selected randomly from a village consisting of 112 households, of which minority and majority households were 83 and 29 respectively. By using an in-depth semi-structured interview, the present researcher collected data from the minority household heads in person from July to August in 2002 and from August to September in 2003. Although, it is difficult to collect data from a large number of participants by using this technique and therefore, the result cannot be generalized, a researcher who is quite familiar to the field can utilize this to know participants’ points of view in detail and collect data within a relatively short period. Researchers on discrimination, nowadays, quite often rely on this qualitative technique (Essed, 1990; Feagin, 1991; Feagin and Sikes, 1994, Byng, 1998; Hein, 2000).

The measurement scale developed by Meier and Bell (1959) has been used in this study with slight modification for measuring socio-economic status (SES) [Table 2]. Meier and Bell determined SES by calculating a composite score based on a simple average of scores given for each participant’s occupation, education, and income. In the case of Bangladesh, especially in rural areas, land plays an important



role in determining a person's SES along with occupation, education and income. Considering this, socio-economic status has been measured based on occupational prestige (determined by asking questions to the participants from the list of occupations), education, monthly income, and land. The total score received a person for his or her occupational prestige, education, monthly income and land is calculated. The theoretical score on the scale ranges from 4 to 25. The score range has been grouped into three categories i.e., lower SES (4-10), middle SES (11-17) and upper SES (18-25). The scoring system of the variables used in the scale is shown in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Measurement of Socio-Economic Status (SES)

Occupation	Score	Land (Acre)	Score	Monthly Income (Tk.)	Score	Education	Score
Fishing	1	0	1	Below 3,000	1	Illiterate	1
Carpenter	2	.01 to .33	2	3,000 to below 5,000	2	Primary	2
Farmer	3	.34 to .99	3	5,000 to below 7,000	3	Secondary	3
Small business	4	1.00 to 1.65	4	7,000 to below 9,000	4	College	4
Government service	5	1.66 to 2.31	5	9,000 and above	5	Higher	5
Banker	6	2.32 and above	6				
Doctor	7						
Religious Practitioner	8						
Teacher	9						

**N.B.** Three female participants of the study were involved in housekeeping. In spite of having economic value, their works are not evaluated positively in patriarchal Bangladesh society since these are not related directly to cash income. In estimating their occupational prestige, they were given their husbands' occupational prestige score.

## Results

### Brief Overview on Power Structure of the Study Area

Since the article deals with discrimination from the point of view of intergroup power relationship, it might be important to examine, at least briefly, the major social organizations which are central to the power structure of the study area and to evaluate the position of majority and minority by relating them to these organizations. Although the power structure in the village is connected indirectly to the overall power structure of the country, the discussion of this section will be limited to those organizations to which the villagers are connected directly.

The most informal and traditional social organization found to be active in exercising power in the study area is the *Samaj*. The boundary of *Samaj* is not confined to the study village. Most of the cases, it was observed that the boundary included the study village as well as its northern neighboring village. Some leaders known as *Matabbor* head *Samaj*. The participants of the study named thirteen *Matabbors* from the two villages included in the *Samaj*. Whenever there is any dispute, the villagers, generally, go the *Matabbors* to seek justice. Among the thirteen *Matabbors*, there were two from the minority. However, the participants informed that these two could play their roles effectively when there was any dispute within the minority and the concerned parties wanted to solve it by seeking justice to the *Matabbors* from the ingroup. When there was any dispute between majority and minority, these two were given little scope to play effective role. Most of the cases, they attended the meeting organized for

settling the disputes as guests. Some of these *Matabbors* from the majority are connected to the greater power structure of the society because they have position in different committees formed by the major political parties in Union or Thana level (Union and Thana are local administrative units. Union is lower unit than Thana).

Ward is the lowest level formal organization that exercises power in study area. The Ward in the study area consists of four villages. The villagers elected a member who heads the Ward. Six members have been elected so far but none of them is from the minority. The next highest level formal administrative unit to which villagers have access quite often is Union Parishad headed by an elected Chairperson. From its inception in 1960, eight Chairpersons have been elected to run the office for ten separate periods (Although the present Chairperson is the fifteenth in number, who is running the office, there were six government-selected officials who run the office when election was not held). However, all of these elected Chairpersons were from the majority.

From the aforementioned description, we observe that the minority in the study village has some participation in the informal social organization known as *Samaj*. However, when we evaluate their power in terms of effective role in *Samaj* where *Matabbors* from both majority and minority are present, their position is found as marginal. The marginality of their position in local power structure becomes more acute when none is found in the formal administrative units working closely to the villagers.

### **Background Characteristics of the Participants**

Among the participants, 35 were male and 5 female<sup>4</sup>. The age of the participants varies from 24 to 70 (mean = 44.1). Five participants (12.5 %) were in their thirties, 14 (35.0%) were in their forties, 10 (25.0%) in their fifties, 6 (15.0%) were in their sixties and 5 (12.5%) in their seventies. Almost all of the participants (88%) belonged to an economically active age group. Most of the participants (72.5%) were married. However, there were 10 (25.0%) single people and one widow. On average, the participants completed 9 years of schooling (secondary school level). The average schooling of the parents' of the participants was as follows: 6 years (beginning of the secondary school level) for father and 4 years (primary level) for mother. Although the participants had more education on average than their parents, they were relatively poorly educated. Among the participants, 9 were farmers (22.5%), 7 small business holders (17.5 %), 6 government service holders (15.0 %) and 7 teachers (17.5%). Additionally, there were two fish traders, one carpenter, one banker, three religious practitioners, one doctor and 3 housewives. In the case of father's occupation of the participants, 11 were farmers (27.5%), 4 fish traders (10.0 %), 6 teachers (15.0 %), 7 religious practitioners (17.5%). In addition, there were 2 small business holders, 3 government service holders, 2 carpenters, 4 doctors, and one day laborer. All the participants' mothers were engaged in housekeeping. Eleven (27%) participants were living in poor economic conditions (monthly income below 5,000 taka<sup>5</sup>). Fifteen (37.5%) were living in more or less sound economic conditions (monthly income 5,000 to below 9,000 taka) and the remaining fourteen (35%) were from wealthy families (monthly income 9,000 taka and above). On average, the participants possessed 1.41 acres of land. There was one landless participant. More than half (62.5%) of the participants belonged to the middle SES, whereas, participants from lower and upper SES were 27.5% and 10% respectively.

### **Discriminatory Experiences of the Participants**

In order to investigate the first objective of the study, in other words the discriminatory experiences of the minority at an individual level, the participants were asked questions regarding some typical dis-

crimatory situations they encountered. The participants were also encouraged to report other experiences (if they had them) to find out the maximum discriminatory experiences. Table 3 listed the wide variety of discriminatory experiences that affected the social and economic condition and psychology of the minority in different degrees. As shown in Table 3, (unless it is mentioned further, the sources of the subsequent tables are the same and the figures used in parentheses in all the tables indicate percentages) among the various discriminatory patterns, the participants were affected mostly by ‘criticizing rituals and practices.’ 33 participants experienced this pattern. This type was followed by verbal harassment. 31 participants reported this type of discriminatory experience. Besides these, some other notable forms of discriminatory patterns found in the study are threatening behavior (25 participants), physical attacks (12 participants), creating obstacles in performing festivals (24 participants) and land dispossession (25 participants). Offering poor services (4 participants) and exploitation of labor and money (3 participants) were found as the least reported discriminatory experiences in the present study.

**Table 3.** Patterns of Discrimination by the Number of Affected Participants

Patterns of Discrimination	Participants Experiencing each Pattern *
Criticizing rituals and practices	33 (82)
Verbal harassment	31 (77)
Offering poor services	4 (10)
Exploitation of labor and money	3 (7)
Threatening behavior	25 (62)
Physical attack	12 (30)
Creating obstacles in performing festivals	24 (60)
Land dispossession	25 (62)

Source: Field Survey, 2002, 2003. \* Total number of participant is 40. Each participant answered more than one category. Therefore, the total number of frequencies is more than 40.

**(1) Criticizing the Rituals and Practices:** Criticizing the rituals and practices of the minority is a noticeable form of discrimination. Most participants (82 %) acknowledged that they had found that the majority criticized the religion, rituals and the practices of the minority (**Table 3**). The general locations of this kind of discussion found in the present study are bus, train, road and so forth. In an environment surrounding by known people such as the work place, or a friend circle, the minority was also the victim of this type of discussion.

There is traditional dress and ornaments for the members of the Hindu minority. Most of them (70 %) reported that they were hesitant to wear these because they thought that if they wore them, the majority would easily identify them as minority members and therefore, become easy victims of abusive epithets. They are also asked questions again and again about the dress and ornaments. Some of the participants thought that all of the members of the majority did not ask questions to know about the culture. They thought that the way of asking was enough to understand that they criticized it. In a familiar environment, it is not a problem for them but in an unfamiliar environment i.e. in public places, they face many untoward experiences due to their affiliation with a religion. The treatment pattern in public places sometimes changes for the identity. In some cases, one is treated in a negligent way for the minority group identity. The following statements of a participant (male) from the upper SES reveal this:

In my village area, I don't feel as much uncomfortable as I feel in unknown places to wear our traditional dress. I always become psychologically weak when I wear this in unknown places. This is because the way the majority behaves is sometimes dependent on whether somebody wears the traditional dress of his or her religion or the common dress of all. If I want to go somewhere by rickshaw wearing traditional dress, the rickshaw puller from the majority behaves with me in a very negligent way sometimes. One can easily understand it by the words the rickshaw puller uses to him or her. Even in a bus, the conductors use very disparaging words of address such as *tumi, tui* (Bengali words used in place of the English word "you" which might be considered disparaging depending on the context) towards a minority member if he or she wears traditional dress.

According to some participants, there is a tendency on the part of some majority members to identify the rituals and practices of the Hindus with the rituals of India. Another tendency was observed in the study when some members of the minority were identified as citizens of India. This was revealed in the statement collected from a 40-year old married woman from the middle SES:

One day, I went to a shop in town to buy some cosmetic items. As I'm married, I dressed in *shari*, conch and vermilion. These were enough to identify me as a member of Hindu religious group. I searched for some items in the shop and wanted to buy some of them. But I decided not to buy one item, which I selected at first for buying. Therefore, I returned the item to its place. At that time one sales person told me, "*Didi* (sister), this item is from your country and very good." I was surprised to hear the words 'your country.' I asked him what he wanted to mean by these words. Then he simply replied, "Your country, India." I told him that I was born in this country, my forefathers were also born here so how did I become a citizen of India? Then he replied, "*Didi*, it's our country. As you're Hindu, your country is India." I was thinking how stupid he was and what type of prejudice he was bearing in his mind toward the members of the minority."

**(2) Verbal Harassment:** A majority of the participants (77 %) were attacked verbally (Table 3). Using abusive epithets, they were hurt mentally. The locally used epithets by majority people are '*Haanud*', '*Maalaun*', and '*Maalu*'. Epithets have been used, according to the participants, in two ways: directly and indirectly. Within close surroundings, minority people are victimized directly by epithets either aggressively or in joking way. The aggressive way of using epithet was observed in the following statement collected from an interview with a fisherman from the lower SES:

One day evening, I took the fish that I caught from the nearby bodies of water to a village market to sell. A customer, known to me, from the majority group came to me and asked, "Hei *Haanud* son, what's the price of your fish?" I became very angry for the way of his addressing but I tried to control my anger, as I had nothing to do. I hiked up price more than usual due to my anger with him. Understanding this, he replied, "*Haanud* son, which of your fathers from India will buy fish from you at such a high price?" Fearing negative consequences, I dared not to tell him anything more. Finding no reply from me, he left the place.

Using epithets in closed surrounding was also observed in the study. The participants reported that they had been harassed verbally by classmates, friends or co-workers from the majority in a joking form.

Participants sometimes receive verbal harassment indirectly in public places. When somebody from

the minority passes through a place, the nearby people from the majority sometimes start talking among themselves and utter abusive epithets seeing nearby minority people. They do not use epithets directly towards the minority. But they talk about it among themselves in such a way that minority people can hear it. A 35-year old small businessman from the middle SES reported it in the following way:

It was the evening, after the general election in 1996. I, along with some other neighbors from the minority, was returning home from town after shopping. We were crossing a tea stall located next to our village. We saw from a close distance that some people from the majority were gossiping in the tea stall. While crossing to the tea stall, I heard one of the members from the majority talking loudly seeing us, "All *Haanuds* were packed together and gave their votes in favor of boat (the symbol of a major political party in Bangladesh). Otherwise, it would never win in the election." We passed the place pretending that we did not hear their discussion.

**(3) Offering Poor Services:** Though only a few people (10 %) experienced this pattern (**Table 3**), this type bears a different dimension in intergroup discrimination against minorities in Bangladesh. Although Hindu religious minority people do not have any in born stigmatized quality by which they can be identified in public places, they are not totally unidentifiable. Hindu married women are easily identified because of their dressing and ornament patterns. But there is another way to identify the members of the Hindu minority. Generally, the names of Hindu minority people are different from those of the majority. Therefore one can identify easily a minority person by hearing the name or seeing the written form of the name. When one is identified in a public place as a member of the minority either by name or by dressing pattern, he or she sometimes receives unequal treatment. The experience of an assistant of a deed writer from the middle SES was as follows:

I went to a bank to deposit some money. I was the last person in the queue. When my turn came, I gave the form and money to the person working. He looked at the name in the form and refused to receive money from me on the excuse that it was the time to say prayers. But there were 15 minutes more until prayer time. He told me that he would start work again after saying prayers. Although he received money from all the other people, he asked me to wait for one hour (for saying prayers and lunch break). I came out of the building and went to a nearby restaurant and found that person taking lunch without going to say prayers. I did not say anything to him because I understood that he refused to receive money from me identifying me as a minority member by seeing my name on the form. If it were not the reason, he would not receive the form from me at first. Before receiving it, he would tell that it was the time to say prayers. Moreover, he did not go to say prayers, as it was not the appropriate time for prayers.

Some participants reported that sometimes they faced trouble in getting a loan from a bank for the purposes of building a house or investment in business. The concerned person responsible for issuing the loan sometimes creates obstacles by showing many rules and regulations. The experience of a male who worked for a bank from the middle SES was as follows.

In order to build a house by buying a piece of land in the town, I wanted to take a loan of 945,000 taka from a bank. I had to prepare a mortgage deed with the bank through the District Sub-Registrar Office of Land. Along with my advocate, I went to the Sub-Registrar to make an agreement. My advocate took all of the papers to the Sub-Registrar

to get his signature. I followed the advocate. The advocate gave all of the papers to the Sub-Registrar. Seeing my name he said to the advocate, "How does a bank approve such a huge amount of loan to a Hindu? Who is the loan seeker?" Then the advocate showed me. The Sub-Registrar was not ready to see me there and therefore, felt uncomfortable in face-to-face situation. He signed all the papers. As I had occupational resources, I managed it without any problem. But I have seen many minority people, while working in a bank, face difficulty in getting a loan from a bank.

**(4) Exploitation of Labor and Money:** Only a few participants (7 %) experienced this pattern in this study (**Table 3**). The participants were employed in the house of a majority member with the assurance that he would receive money for his service. After receiving service from him for a long time, he was denied pay. Sometimes, some items that the participants took to the village market to sell were taken away after being told that the money would be paid later. However, the money was never paid. The experience of a 40-year old fisherman from the lower socio-economic status was as follows:

I caught some fish and took it to the village market to sell. A person from the majority came to me and took the fish, asking me to receive the money for the fish later from a shop in the market where he would be. After selling all of my other fish, I went to the shop to get the money. I saw the person who took fish from me in the shop. When I requested him to pay the money he replied, "Come later." I went there later again and he said, "Wait, why are you so restless? Come later." I went again to the shop but did not find him in the shop. I came to know that he had gone to his house. Later on, in another market day, I found him and asked about the money. He replied, "What's the money for?" I replied, "For fish." Just after listening to this he started shouting saying, "Is there anybody here who can say that I've bought anything from anybody without paying money? I haven't bought anything from you for which I'll have to pay." Then I requested him to pay the money saying that otherwise my children would be starving. Then he said, "I have told you that I haven't bought anything from you. Why are you asking me again and again?" By this time, some people gathered there. After hearing the matter, they told me, "Drop the matter. It's only a matter of 20 taka." I told them, "I have earned 30 taka for the whole day. If I lose 20 taka, how I can buy bread for my children." Then somebody from the gathering replied, "Don't worry. God will be with you." After that I returned home without getting the money.

**(5) Threatening Behavior:** In terms of the number of people affected and the frequency of receiving it by each person, threatening behavior is found as a popular pattern of discrimination in this study. The majority of the households (about 62 per cent) acknowledged that the members of the majority threatened them at least once (**Table 3**). On average each of the participants received threats 3 times so far. Among those who received threatening behavior more than once, 47 per cent received threats from the same person repeatedly. Followings are the major reasons observed in the study for threatening behavior towards the minority.

(a) *Disobeying Order:* Two minority people (8 %) reported that they were threatened when they refused an order such as repairing a net, crossing river, selling land to a preferable person and so forth of some majority members. According to the victims, they were not supposed to follow the orders and they

had no scope to do so. Therefore, they refused it and received threatening behavior.

(b) *Obstruction in Materializing Economic Benefit*: When somebody from the minority protested against any misdeed conducted by the majority such as changing or pulling out border marks of land, grabbing land, letting cattle not to graze in crop fields and so forth (40 per cent), he or she received threatening behavior.

(c) *Scapegoat*: Three participants (12 %) reported that some members from the majority threatened them just for suspecting that they had done some misdeed even though they did not do so. One participant reported that he was threatened after being suspected that his dog had bitten a chicken of a neighbor from the majority. Another participant received a threat from a majority member because he suspected that the victim had stolen some of the bamboo polls from a bamboo bridge over a canal.

(d) *For Extending Moral Support to Victim*: Four participants (14 %) were threatened due to providing moral support to a victim of their group. When a majority member assaulted a minority member and some minority provided moral support to the victim, the members were threatened.

(e) *Political Reason*: Three participants (12 %) received threats due to their political affiliation. This happened during an election period. The influence of international politics was also observed in this study as some of the participants were threatened after the demolition of Babri Mosque in 1992 and the communal riot at Gujrat in India in 2001.

(f) *Seeking Justice*: Four participants (14 %) were threatened when they sought justice from village leaders or the members of local government or to the elder family members of the beneficiary for any injustice done by the majority. They were threatened to abstain from doing the same thing for the next time.

Various modes of threatening behavior are observed in this study. Some of these are: dismissal from job, killing, crippling, expulsion from country, pulling out of teeth, violating (in the case of female) and so forth.

**(6) Physical Attack**: Physical attack was found as another important pattern of intergroup discrimination in this study. About 30 per cent of the participants reported that they had been assaulted by the members of the majority at least once so far (**Table 3**). The highest number of assaults experienced by the victim was four. In terms of age, the victims of this pattern were relatively young (the mean age: 40 years old, and the range: 24 to 60 years old) compared to those who did not experience physical assault (the mean age: 46 years old, the range: 27 to 70 years old). Five reasons identified for the attacks on the minority are competition on utilizing government owned land (one affected), facing obstacles in materializing economic benefit (two affected), taking revenge for seeking justice (three affected), political issues (two affected), and creating panic (four affected). These reasons are elaborated below.

(i) *Competition on Utilizing Government Owned Land*: There is some government owned land in the study village, which is used communally by village farmers as grazing land. During the rainy season, when all of the cultivable land is prepared for paddy plantation, the farmers take their cattle to this place for grazing. There is competition among the farmers in utilizing the land and minority people are found to be the victims of the competition. The experience of a minority male farmer from the lower SES was as follows.

One day, after cultivating my land, I took my two bullocks to the grazing land. Many farmers were there at that time with their cattle. I found a place there and started feeding grass to the bullocks. A neighbor from the majority group came to the grazing land later

along with his three cows. He asked me to leave the area. I told him that it was a common land and I had come to the place earlier. Therefore, I was not supposed to leave the place. He replied that it was his place and therefore, he had the sole authority to use it according to his will. When I tried to bargain with him, he assaulted me and drove away my bullocks from the place.

(ii) *Creating Obstacles in Materializing Economic Benefit*: It was reported by the participants that some majority members from the lower socio-economic status sometimes caught fish from the pond, took fruit and vegetables away from the gardens of minority members without their consent. When it was obstructed by anybody from the minority, the person sometimes received physical harassment. One of the male participants from middle SES explained his experience in the following way:

One day in the afternoon, I saw a neighbor from the majority fishing with hook in our pond in which we were cultivating fish. He did not receive permission from us to do so. I asked him why he was doing so without receiving permission from us. I asked him also to stop that because we were cultivating fish in the pond. He replied to me that he would not catch the fish that we were cultivating. But how was that possible? How could he select fish without catching it? Moreover, why did he do it without seeking permission from us? When I pressed him again not to do it, he came to me and hit me with the stick he used in his hook.

(iii) *For Seeking Justice*: It is observed that some members from the majority assaulted the minority when the latter sought justice to anybody for the injustice done by the majority. Facing the same trouble repeatedly, participants sometimes seek justice from the village leader, the local government body or the older family members of the concerned beneficiary. When this goes against the interest of the concerned majority, the person assaulted the minority as revenge. The statement of a 32-year old male victim from the lower SES is as follows:

I was taking lunch in my house. Hearing a strange sound outside of my house, I went out of my house and found a neighbor from the majority at the top of a betel nut tree. When he saw me, he quickly climbed down from the tree. I caught his hand and asked him why he was taking betel nut without my permission. He asked me to set him free and promised that he would never do the same again. I set him free. A few days later, he did the same thing at night. At that time, I caught him again and told that I would inform the matter to his uncle. Next day, I sought justice from his uncle for his deed. His uncle assured me that he would settle it. Two days later, the person whom I found stealing came to my court yard and asked me, "Uncle, are you in house? Please come out. I have an urgent business with you." Hearing his voice, I came out from the house. As soon as I went out from the house, he started hitting me using a large stick. I ran away and took shelter in the house. He reminded me that if I sought justice again to anybody for any of his actions, the same would happen.

(iv) *Political Issue*: For supporting a political party and campaigning in favor of it during an election period, some of the minority people were assaulted by a section of the majority people who were affiliated with another political party. Almost all the minority people in this study were found to be the supporters of a political party. In the study area the votes of the minority are considered to be very crucial because the candidate whom the minority votes for wins in the local election center. After the election, if the favorite political party of the minority is defeated to form central government, they sometimes



experience some untoward situation. In some cases, some active political workers from the minority reported that some members from the majority belonging to the opposite political party attacked them after the election. A male participant from the lower SES who was an active worker of a political party described his experience in the following way:

I was an active worker of a major political party that was defeated to form government after the national election. During the election period, I campaigned for the candidate nominated by my favorite political party. One-day in the afternoon, after the election, I was returning from a village market after shopping. When I reached an area where most of the people were the supporters of the opposite political party, some supporters attacked me saying, 'You convinced all *Haanuds* (epithet used for the Hindus) to vote for your political party. So, what? Could you win in the election? We will drive you away from the country to India.'

The participants reported that they did not experience that type of violent behavior earlier (before the election in 2001) over election issue although they were tensed in all local or national level elections.

(v) *Creating Panic*: Without any specific reason, some people from the minority were assaulted. Based on some lame excuses, a section of the majority attack some of them from the lower socio-economic status just for creating panic among minority. Minority people think that this is a signal to them not to take any action against the activities done by the majority even these go against the interests of the minority. Most of the cases, the victims are selected from the lower socio-economic status because they will not resist the attack.

**(7) Creating Obstacles in Performing Various Festivals:** Aged participants in the present study thought that creating obstacles in performing festivals was a recently developed discriminatory phenomenon. A few decades back they did not experience this type of problem and they did not even imagine that they would ever have to face this type of problem. Two festivals for which the participants were obstructed were religious festivals and marriage ceremonies. More than half of the participants (60 %) reported that they had faced obstacles either in performing religious festivals or marriage festivals (**Table 3**). Participants (83 %) felt disturbances in observing religious festivals in three ways.

*Firstly*, in some cases, the idols of goddesses were destroyed. Participants experienced this type of problem, especially after the demolition of the Babri Mosque in India.

*Secondly*, sometimes they were not allowed to use musical instruments. Traditionally, musical instruments play a key role in the observance of Hindu religious festivals. Hindus gather together, sing and dance playing musical instruments. In some cases, participants were asked not to use the instruments in worship.

*Thirdly*, participants felt very embarrassed when they were asked to stop singing when it was the time to say prayers for the majority. Sometimes, this creates a serious problem for the minority, as most of their religious programs are time constrained. They follow the timetable of a particular ritual assigned in their religious calendar. According to some participants, it is a clear violation of their rights.

Seventeen percent of the participants revealed that they were disturbed sometimes in performing a marriage ceremony. They were not allowed to use musical instruments sometimes. Besides this, in some cases the ceremony or festival was disturbed by artificially created chaos. Taking some tinny issues very seriously such as letting someone from the majority not sit in a chair or honoring the person duly and so forth, some people from the majority create problems. Sometimes they behave rudely with the guests

who come to join the festivals.

**(8) Land Dispossession:** This study found that, in terms of intensity, dispossession of the land of the minority is the most extreme form of discrimination. A large number of households (62 %) were affected by this pattern (**Table 3**). Each of the affected households lost on average .24 acre land (the minimum and maximum amount of land dispossessed was .0025 and 1.57 acre respectively). As agriculture is the main livelihood of the rural people, the main target of the trespasser is agricultural land. In terms of amount, agricultural land (5.14 acre) is affected mostly (**Table 4**) and it is followed by homestead (.48 acre), garden or forest (.24 acre) and pond and water bodies (.16 acre). In terms of the number of participant dispossessed from the land by its type, it is observed that agricultural land of more than half of the participants were affected and it was followed by garden or forest, homestead and pond or water bodies. The majority of the occupants (72 %) are farmers and most of them belong to the lower class. Other than farmers, the occupation of the beneficiaries is local government representatives (12 %), business (8 %), high government officials (4 %) and bank workers (4 %).

**Table 4.** Type of Land Engulfed by the Number of People and Amount of Land

Type of Land	Affected Person	Affected Land (acre)
Homestead	3 (12)	.48 (8)
Garden/Forest	4 (16)	.24 (4)
Pond/Water bodies	1 (4)	.16 (3)
Agricultural land	17 (68)	5.14 (85)
Total	25 (100)	6.02 (100)

Dispossession of land is found to be related to the nature of proximity of the land of the minority to the land of the majority [Chi-square continuity correction = 10.24, df = 1, significance = .001 (**Table 5**)]. Since the minority is not living segregated way from majority people, most participants (73 %) have lands that are close to the border of land belonging to the majority, and 80 per cent of them are the victims of land dispossession.

**Table 5.** Chi Square Test of Independence of Land Dispossession on Proximity of Land of the Minority and the Majority

Land Dispossession	Proximity of Land of Minority to the Land of Majority		Total
	Yes	No	
Yes	23	2	25
No	6	9	15
Total	29	11	40

Chi square value = 10.24, df. = 1, significance = .001

Among the victims, almost all (92 %) have reported that all of their affected land is close to the border of the land of the majority. Having this experience, all the participants prefer to avoid buying new land that is close to the border of the majority. They (95 %) also give priority to buying land especially near to the homestead, in which the majority may come buying land from other neighbors. If minority

members have a shortage of money in this case, they want to sell land in other areas to buy nearby homestead land. Although all of them are not always successful in this case, they want to do so as a safeguard to protect their land.

The four processes of grabbing land identified in the study are listed in **Table 6**. In terms of the amount of land engulfed by each process, forceful occupation is found as the most dreadful process. About 60 per cent of the total engulfed land is captured by this process and it is followed by manipulating co-sharers (28 %), changing border marks (9 %) and falsification of documents (3 %).

**Table 6.** Land Grabbing Process by Affected Household and Amount of Land

Land Grabbing Process	Affected Household	Amount of Land Dispossessed (acre)
Changing border marks	14 (56)	.52 (9)
Forceful occupation	8 (32)	3.65 (60)
Manipulating co-sharer	2 (8)	1.69 (28)
Falsification of documents	1 (4)	.16 (3)
Total	25 (100)	6.02 (100)

Among the various ways of land grabbing, **changing border marks** of the land of the minority is found as the most widely used practice (**Table 6**). More than half of the affected households reported that they lost their land in this way. Generally, there is no permanent pole marking of the borders of land in the villages in Bangladesh. Only a pile of mud is used around each piece of land to mark the border. During the cultivating season, the trespassers tend to increase the borders of the land by changing the mud pile used as a border. As the process is very slow and each time a small amount of land is engulfed, it is difficult to realize that the border of the land has been changed. Two mechanisms operate in the case. In one type the occupant himself (80 % of cases fall in this category) changes the border area. In the other type, an absentee landowner makes his sharecroppers engulf the land by changing the border area. Sharecroppers help in this process as they receive economic benefit from the landowner.

**Forceful occupation** is found to be the second most popular way (32 %) of land grabbing (**Table 6**). In this type, three techniques are found to be operating. In more than half of the cases (63 % cases), the occupant forcefully starts using the land of minority members on the excuse that he has bought the land from the participants' forefather before he died or from the person from whom the participant bought the land before he left in this country. One male participant from the lower socio-economic status reported the incident as follows:

I bought a piece of land (.39 acre) from one of the neighbors from the minority who had left the country. I paid all the money for the land to the person from whom I bought the land before he left the country. One morning, in the farming season, I went to the land for cultivation and found a person from the majority cultivating the land. When I protested against this, the occupant replied that the previous owner had sold the land to him before leaving the country. Though I had the original paper of the land, I could not control it.

In some other cases (25 %), the occupant changes his status forcefully from sharecropper to owner. At the very beginning, the occupant starts cultivating the land of the victim as a sharecropper. After a long time when the owner of the land dies and his successors become the owner, the occupant utilizes the transitional period as the most effective time for grabbing.

Another cunning way of forceful capturing of land observed in this study is that the occupant took advantage of the poor socio-economic status of the victim. At the beginning, the occupant extends the hand of assistance to the victim by providing a small portion of rice, money etc. It continues for a long time and by doing so the beneficiary becomes very intimate with the victim and then forces the victim to give the land the person targeted. One female participant from the lower socio-economic status reports:

My parents were not happy in their conjugal life. They were separated. My mother stayed in the house of her father and received some land from him. We, the four brother and sisters, stayed with our mother. The economic condition of our family was very bad. My mother could not bear family expenses but she had no choice. We starved many days. Once upon a time, a neighbor, a middle-class peasant from the majority extended his hands of cooperation. When we asked him the reason for his help, he replied, "It is just to help you. Don't worry. I will not ask you to give me anything in return." We were very happy because somebody's assistance was badly needed for us at that time. He gave us rice, money etc. and consoled us for our miseries. The way he behaved was very attractive and we relied on him most of the time for any of our problems. Two to three years passed in this way. One day, he asked my mother to pay 12,000 taka. We were very surprised to hear this because we were not in such a condition to give somebody such a large amount of money. When we asked the reason for this, he told us that he had supplied us food and money for a long time and did not take any money in return. He pressed us to return the money within a day. We requested him to give us a few days more to pay the money but he did not accept our request. As our economic condition was very bad, we could not manage the money within the specified time. Then, he forced us to register .36 acre of high quality agricultural land to him; otherwise, he would pick me up from the house. As I was a teenaged girl at that time, my mother became very worried about it. Finding no alternative, she registered her only piece of agricultural land (the price of which would be 30,000 taka at that time) to him.

Grabbing land through **manipulating co-sharers** is the third popular technique observed in the study (**Table 6**). When there is any clash among the co-sharers from the minority, the occupant supports one of them. The beneficiary pretends to provide all supports to the concerned person. With the assurance of solving problems, the person starts using land on behalf of the co-sharer to whom the person assures to provide assistance. And later the person declares oneself as the owner of the land and grabs it. The statement of a male participant from the lower SES is as follows:

We, two brothers, received .36 acre of agricultural land from our father when he died. There were two pieces of land, one containing .14 and the other .22 acre. We, two brothers became separated and our land was divided roughly among us. In terms of inheritance law, each brother had .18 acre land. As an elder brother, I gave the larger piece of land to my younger brother to use. Some years later I faced economic hardship and decided to sell the piece of my land. Before doing that I wanted to get my share of 4 decimal land from the piece of land belonging to my brother. My brother refused to do so. There was a quarrel between us regarding this issue. I filed a case in court in this regard. One of the neighbors from the majority suggested my brother to mortgage the land to him; otherwise, he might not get control over the land when there would be a judgement from the court. My brother agreed on the proposal and mortgaged the land to him. A few years later, I got the

judgement from the court. By this time, the majority member declared himself as the owner of the land even though he used the land in terms of mortgage from my brother. Although I was supposed to get my share of .04 acre of land according to the judgement of the court, the occupant did not agree to give my share back. By paying a little amount of money to my brother for the mortgage, he captured the whole land.

**Falsification of documents** of land is found as another form of land grabbing (**Table 6**). The occupant (attracted by the victim for his middle class resources) with the assurance of providing technical support in preparing some important documents of land makes the land record as his own. Some local land officials, taking bribes, assist the person in the process. This is expressed in the statement of a male from the lower SES.

We, four brothers, got in total 2.80 acre land from our father. Although we had been separated after the death of our father, we did not divide the land among ourselves. We divided the crops equally among us after harvest. When we left our home and took shelter in a nearby safe place during the liberation war, my father lost all documents of his land. After the independence of the country, he managed to prepare all the documents except for a piece of .16 acre land. After the death of our father, I took initiative to prepare the paper of the land. I requested one of my neighbors from the majority to help me as he had long experience of settling land issues. He assured to help me. I told him that I would bear the expenses that would be needed to prepare the document. A few months later I inquired about the improvement of preparing the paper. He informed me that the work had been completed and asked me to give 10,000 taka for the expenses of preparing the document of the land. I gave him the money. Next year I went to the local land office to pay tax for the land and came to know that the land did not belong to me. The official told me that according to the paper available in the office, my father had sold the land to the neighbor whom I requested to help. The news came to me as a thunderbolt. I could not believe it. I went to the person quickly and asked about it. Then he replied that there was a problem with my land. Therefore, he listed it as his land so that other people could not grab it. He assured me not to be worried. He told me that although the land belonged to him, it was actually mine. He also told me that if I did not believe it then he would register the land to me. When I pressed him to register the land to me, he was taking his time. A few years later he died. I could not finish the procedure to get the land back in my name. Although I'm still using the land, his son may evict me from the land anytime.

**Table 7.** SES of the Beneficiaries and the Amount of Land Dispossessed

SES	No. of Beneficiaries	Amount of Land Dispossessed (acre)
Lower	10 (40)	1.04 (17)
Middle	6 (24)	1.89 (32)
Upper	9 (36)	3.09 (51)
Total	25 (100)	6.02 (100)

While analyzing the social positions of the beneficiaries of land dispossession, it was observed that more than one third of the beneficiaries were from the lower socio-economic status<sup>6</sup>. However, they

grabbed the least amount of land (17 %) from the minority compared to the land grabbed by the beneficiaries from other SES (**Table 7**) categories. Only about one third of the beneficiaries from the upper socio-economic status were found to capture almost half of (51 %) the engulfed land.

### Discriminatory Experiences and the Socio-Economic Status (SES) of the Participants

In order to investigate the second objective of the study, discriminatory patterns experienced by the participants were analyzed by relating with their socio-economic status. It was observed from **Table 8** that there were some variations among the participants in terms of their socio-economic status and the pattern of discrimination they experience.

**Table 8.** Experience of Discriminatory Patterns by Socio-Economic Status of the Participants

Discriminatory Patterns	Socio-Economic Statuses (SES)			Sub Total***
	Lower* n = 11	Middle* n = 25	Upper* n = 4	
Criticizing rituals and practices	7 (64)	23 (92)	3 (75)	33
Verbal harassment	10 (91)	19 (76)	2 (50)	31
Offering poor services	2 (18)	2 (8)	0 (0)	4
Exploitation of labor and money	2 (18)	1 (4)	0 (0)	3
Threatening behavior	9 (82)	15 (60)	1 (25)	25
Physical attack	5 (45)	7 (28)	0 (0)	12
Obstacles in performing festivals	8 (73)	16 (64)	0 (0)	24
Land dispossession	8 (73)	14 (56)	3 (75)	25
Sub Total **	51	97	9	157
Mean	4.64	3.88	2.25	3.93

\* Each participant answered more than one category. Therefore, the frequency in sub-total (column) exceeds the number of participant belonging to each SES.

\*\* Indicates the total number of discriminatory events experienced by the participants in each SES category.

\*\*\* Indicates the total participants (out of forty) who experienced each pattern of discrimination.

**N.B.** Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages and are calculated on the basis of the total participants belonging to each SES category

Participants from the upper socio-economic status differ to some extent from the participants from both the middle and lower SES because the former did not report any event for the discriminatory patterns of offering poor services, exploitation of labor and money, physical attack and creating obstacles in performing festivals. Except for the discriminatory pattern of criticizing rituals and practices, participants belonging to the lower SES reported more discriminatory events in all categories than those did by the middle SES. However, the participants, irrespective of their SES, experienced the discriminatory patterns of criticizing rituals and practices, verbal harassment, threatening behavior and land dispossession. When the grand mean score on discrimination (3.93) is compared with the means for each of the SES categories, it is observed that except for the lower SES (4.64), the means for the participants belonging to the middle (3.88) and upper (2.25) SES categories are lower than the grand mean. Therefore, the result indicates a difference among the participants in receiving discrimination by their SES. However, further analysis of the data is needed to reach any conclusion.

In order to know whether there is any statistically significant difference among the participants in the extent of receiving discrimination<sup>7</sup> by their SES, one way Analysis of Variance was performed. **Table 9** shows the results of the analysis. The results indicate that there exists a difference among the participants in receiving discrimination by their SES and the difference is statistically significant at .05 level. In order to know which SES category differs from other(s), Scheffe multiple-comparison test was performed (Walsh, 1990, p.134).

**Table 9.** ANOVA Summary Table on Variations in the Extent of Receiving Discrimination by the SES of the Participants

Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta Square
Between groups	16.84	2	8.42	3.897	0.029	0.174
Within groups	79.935	37	2.16			
Total	96.775	39				
Multiple Comparisons of Means						
Means			Lower SES = 4.64, Middle SES = 3.88; n.s.			
			Lower SES = 4.64, Upper SES = 2.25; p < .05			
			Middle SES = 3.88, Upper SES = 2.25; n.s.			

Source: SPSS Printout of the data collected from Field Survey 2002, 2003.

**N.B.** The dependent variable for ANOVA is the 'Extent of Receiving Discrimination.'

From the results of the test, it was observed that participants from the lower SES were more victims of discriminatory actions compared to the participants from the upper SES. The mean number of discriminatory actions received by participants from the lower and upper SES was 4.64 and 2.25 respectively. The difference was statistically significant at .05. However, no significant difference was observed in the extent of receiving discrimination between participants from the lower and middle as well as the middle and upper SES. SES explained 17.4 percent of variance in the extent of receiving discrimination. This finding suggests that in terms of the degree of experiencing discrimination, all members from the religious minority group are not the same. Members from the lower SES are more prone to experiencing discrimination.

The third objective of the study was investigated by comparing the results of the present study with those of some previous studies (Feagin, 1991; Hein, 2000) reviewed in the beginning of the present article. However, the result of this inquiry was presented in the next section where the findings of the present study were discussed in the context of previous studies.

## Discussion

Applying the theory of intergroup relations based on the cognitive paradigm of categorization in a survey setting, this study attempted to examine patterns of discrimination that the members of a physically non-salient religious minority experience while they interact with the members of a religious majority group. By collecting data from the interaction of everyday life between the members of the two groups, the study reported eight discriminatory patterns at the micro level. In this section, the major findings of this study will be discussed in the context of previous theoretical studies.

In terms of the effect of each discriminatory pattern on the victims, land grabbing can be considered as the most dreadful pattern of discrimination to the minority. This pattern affects the victim, the victim's family members and descendants as well as the demographic structure in the region when, in some extreme situations, it leads to migration. This pattern of individual level discrimination is not discussed in contemporary studies of discrimination in the U.S. (Hein, 2000; Feagin, 1991; Byng, 1998; Feagin and Sikes, 1994), in spite of the fact that Native Americans and indigenous people in Hawaii have been facing similar issues for many generations.

Grabbing land through forceful dispossession questions the existing law and order situation of the society. Grabbing land through falsification of documents also discloses the existence of groups with vested interests who are indirectly involved in the repression of the minority. Their role is invisible but it has a long lasting effect on the minority. Although the majority from the lower SES is higher in number in the grabbing of lands from the minority, the role of the majority from the upper SES is the most dreadful for the minority since they control almost half of the engulfed land.

The culture of minority is also under threat. Some members from the majority not allowing the minority to perform religious and other festivals in traditional ways sometimes disturb them. Intolerant attitudes of some members from the majority toward the minority are expressed when the minority is asked to stop performing festivals when it is the time for the majority to say prayers. It is also expressed in their criticisms regarding the religious rituals and practices of the minority. Allport's (1954) term '*antilocution*' is applicable here, especially when members of the majority criticize the rituals and practices of the minority with fellow members. This reveals the majority's sense of superiority over the minority.

Contrary to the findings of Feagin (1991) this study observed that minority people are victimized more in an environment surrounded by known members from the majority. As the participants in this study are racially the same as the majority and except for married women they do not show salient group differences (as African American in Feagin's, 1991 study, Hmong American in Hein's, 2000 study), they can easily merge with the wider society at least for the time being. The application of Goffman's (1963, p.42) term '*passing*' is evident here. '*Passing*' in his sense denotes 'the management of undisclosed discrediting information' or in other words 'the means of escaping stigma.' The Hindu religious minority in Bangladesh can generally pass by hiding their religious identities in public places. That is why the minority of the present study receives less discriminatory experiences in an environment surrounded by unknown members of the majority unless they wear traditional dresses or ornaments.

Although the minorities are not members of a physically distinct group (e.g., African American), the majority uses names of the minority to start discrimination against them, because the names of the two groups are quite different. Therefore, the majority can identify them easily when they hear the other's name in the interaction. Goffman's (1963) two terms for stigmatized people i.e. *discredited* and *discreditable* help us analyze a characteristic of the religious minority in Bangladesh. In an environment surrounded by known members from the majority, they are discredited, as everybody knows their religious identities. The environment in which they are surrounded by unknown members of society, the minority people without wearing traditional dresses and ornaments can be regarded as discreditable as long as they do not start any interaction very closely with majority members. As soon as they tell their real names they turn in to being discredited. The ultimate effect of this identification is, sometimes, the denial of appropriate service in public places.

Similar to the findings of other studies (Hein, 2000; Feagin, 1991; Allport, 1954), physical attack,



verbal harassment and offering poor services were also observed as discriminatory patterns in the present study. Analyzing the reasons for physical attack and harassment, it is found that the minority members become the target of malice mainly when they are found to be competitors in materializing economic benefit, political benefit or both by the majority. The minority can be an easy target for harassment if the majority considers them as obstructers in any case. The expectation of the majority that the minority should take the situation for granted is also revealed when the minority is repressed for seeking justice. Other than considering the minority as competitors in the economic and political sectors, the majority's tendency to subjugate the minority is also observed in the present study especially when they threaten the minority for disobeying orders. Treating the minority as a scapegoat (Allport, 1954) also extends the tendency of the majority to subjugate the minority. That the majority is well concerned about activities of the minority is expressed when minority members receive threats for extending moral support to fellow members. Considering moral support of one member to another among the minority as a signal of the group cohesion and treating it as a destructive force against one's own interest, the majority always becomes alert and takes the necessary steps to destroy this force.

The stereotype of the majority toward the minority is expressed when all members of the minority are considered as the supporters of a certain political party (Allport, 1954). Their prejudicial attitude is expressed when they are thought of as the citizens of India and their culture as Indian culture. The Hindus in Bangladesh have been related to the geo-politics of the Indian sub-continent because of the historical fact of the emergence of two countries Pakistan and India where Pakistan is for the Muslims and India for the Hindus. This fact was reflected in the labeling of Hindus living in East Pakistan as the '*agents of India*' during Pakistan period. The Hindus living in present Bangladesh are sometimes addressed by the same epithet in addition to some other epithets such as '*Maalaun, Hanud*' which were used to represent them during pre-colonial and colonial periods (Goswami and Nasreen, 2003). The labels affixed to the minority in the present study reflect the historical conflicts and antagonism between the two large religious groups in the continent.

Epithets, the linguistic representations, used by the majority can become discourses since they can exercise power over the minority. Bourdieu (1991) discussed that the view of power is not simply embedded in structural relations-maintained by force of one kind or another-but also as constituted through language and everyday practice. When the majority uses epithets towards minority people, the minority people feel psychologically weak. They feel bad and the situation creates psychological stress for them. Although the minorities have their own epithets to represent the majority, in most cases they cannot use these epithets to address the majority in face-to-face situations as minorities belong to a lower stratum of the power structure.

Relating the issue of minority of a country to its neighboring country and thereby rewarding them by the discriminatory actions of verbal harassment, threatening, physical attack and so forth bears a uniqueness in individual level discrimination against the Hindu religious minority in Bangladesh. Therefore, the minority problem in Bangladesh is not an isolated matter. It is related to the regional politics of South Asia, especially India. Whenever there is any unrest in India regarding Hindu and Muslim relations, it affects the relations of the majority-minority in Bangladesh. We find evidence in the history of the region in this regard. Particularly, during the Pakistan period, repression against Hindus started in 1964 when Hindus and Muslims in India were engaged in fighting against each other on the issue of a missing sacred hair of a prophet from a mosque in Kashmir, India. The Hindu minority in Bangladesh becomes the target of threatening behavior or faces troubles in performing religious festivals when

majority-minority relations in India deteriorate. Therefore, the minority problem in Bangladesh is not only a domestic problem of one country; it has an international flavor. This point suggests the importance of incorporating the historical analysis in examining intergroup relations.

## Conclusion

It was observed in the present study that the prejudice and its concomitant effect of discrimination evolving from the cognitive aspect of categorization affected the interaction pattern between the members of two distinct groups when power was attached to a group. This aspect of power relation was observed clearly in the patterns of discriminatory action that the members of Hindu religious minority receive during their course of interaction with the Muslim religious majority. Religion provided nothing more than the mere element of categorization in terms of the research question of this study. However, this categorization worked as a clue for the formation of distinct groups. When power was attached to the members of a particular group, it affected the interaction patterns between the members of these two groups. Generally, most members with different social statuses of a minority group experience wide variety of discriminatory patterns (Tajfel, 1981). However, this study concluded that the extent of receiving discrimination was not the same to all the members of the religious minority. The lower the SES of the member of the minority group, the higher was the degree of receiving discrimination.

In relation to other studies on individual level discrimination conducted among the members of a physically salient group in the US, the present study identified some similarities and dissimilarities in experiencing discrimination. Parallel to some US studies, the physically non-salient participants of the present study were found to experience the discriminatory patterns of verbal harassment, offering poor services and physical attack. The most unique patterns of discrimination experienced by the minority in Bangladesh were criticizing rituals and practices, exploitation of labor and money, threatening, creating obstacles in performing festivals and land dispossession. Unlike the members of a physically salient group, the members of a physically non-salient group can merge with the wider society and hence have less probability of receiving discriminatory experiences in an environment surrounded by unknown members from other group(s). Therefore, physical stigmatization can be considered as an extra burden for the members of a minority group in experiencing discrimination in face to face interaction.

The above finding is totally based on a small group study. Therefore, any attempt to generalize the findings might be erroneous. From this analysis, a partial picture on the individual level intergroup discrimination against a religious minority in Bangladesh can be obtained. Individual level intergroup discrimination is not independent from the institutional level of discrimination. A more in-depth study is needed to find the relation between individual and institutional level discrimination. It is for the future study to investigate further the problems of minorities in Bangladesh by incorporating historical approach with the present analytical framework. More cross sectional studies considering other lines of inquiry such as class, caste, language and so forth are also needed to identify the unique patterns of discrimination that minorities experience in their everyday lives of interaction with the majority and enrich the literature on micro studies on discrimination.

## Notes

1. The author defines '*majoritarization*' as a process in which the ideology of a dominant group is institutionalized

and its interest is prioritized in such a way that it affects the lives of subordinate groups living in the society.

2. In order to repeal the Vested Property Act, the government introduced the Vested Property Return Act-2001 in the Parliament on April 8, 2001. However, this did not mitigate the sufferings of the minority. The minimum benefit that the minority was supposed to avail if Vested Property Return Act-2001 were implemented was also stopped when the next government modified sections 9(1) and 14(1) of the Act by introducing the Vested Property Return (Amendment) Act-2002 in the Parliament on November 26, 2002. Therefore, although the original Act does not exist by name, it is still effective in depriving the minority in exercising their property rights.
3. Borman (1969, p.357) defined 'power' as "the effective exercise of authority. Power is a function of the role a particular individual develops within the work groups to which he (or she) belongs." However, a feeling of the affiliation or non-affiliation to the power structure is very important in analyzing intergroup relation. A member, just observing his or her group identity and relating this with the member(s) working in the power exercising bodies can feel superior to the other group members. This feeling is instigated much more when the person observes that his or her in-group members, closed to the power exercising bodies, introduce and implement policies which are directly related to his or her group interests and/or ideology. Without recognizing this psychological aspect of power, many subtle forms of discrimination evident in the everyday life of interaction between the members of two groups cannot be observed and explained.
4. As Bangladesh is a patriarchal society, the number of female headed household is very few.
5. Taka is Bangladesh currency (about 60 taka = 1 US \$).
6. For measuring the SES of beneficiaries, three variables were considered. The victims were asked to report the occupation, land and education of the beneficiaries. Other than monthly income, villagers know each other's occupation, amount of land and education. Based on the information reported by the victims, beneficiaries' SES was estimated.
7. In this study, the participants reported to experience eight patterns of discrimination. In examining the effect of SES on the extent of receiving discriminatory action, each participant was given one score for receiving each type of discrimination. If a participant received five discriminatory patterns out of eight, he or she received score 5.

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