

Discourses on Minority : The Case of Hindu Religious Minority in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Collecting data from the members of both majority and minority groups through in-depth interview, this article describes how the majority represents the Hindu religious minority in Bangladesh through various discourses. The article analyzes functioning of the discourses in interactive situation between majority and minority. It also explores the strategies that the minority applies to cope with the discourses in face to face situation. The study found that other than epithetical discourses, there were many stereotypical discourses regarding the negative personality characteristics of Hindus, their religion etc. India was found as one of the focal points regarding the stereotypical images of the majority regarding the minority. Most of the cases, the minority adopted the strategy of being silent, avoiding, laughing etc. to cope with the discourses. Data showed vulnerability of the minority in an interactive situation with the majority.

1. Introduction

The concepts of 'majority' and 'minority' appear frequently in the discussion on intergroup relation. Scholars in studying majority-minority relation emphasized a number of concepts so far. Some scholars (e.g. Allport, 1954; Duckitt, 1992) considered prejudice, some discrimination (e.g. Feagin, 1991; Hein, 2000) and some (e.g. Beloff and Coupar, 1969; Richards and Jaffee, 1972; Montgomery and Enzie, 1973; Porter, 1974; Mabe and Williams, 1975; Feldman and Donohoe, 1978; Press, Burt and Barling, 1979) both, assuming a linkage between

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them. Although these studies provided significant insight to understand majority-minority relation, the studies paid less attention to analyze how the majority constructs the minority through language and exercise power by this. The representation of the minority by the majority through linguistic devices is considered as discourse. Foucault argued that discourses are much more than linguistic performances. They are players of power, which mobilize rules, codes and procedures to assert a particular understanding. The construction of knowledge takes place within these rules, codes and procedures. They organize reality in specific ways that involve particular epistemologies. According to Foucault discourse needs to be studied archaeologically and genealogically so that we can uncover their effective formation through non-discursive practices (Foucault, 1972 in Ahmed, 1994). For the matter of discourse, Foucault said, it was not to show that the mechanisms or process of the language were entirely preserved in it; but rather to reveal, in the density of verbal performances, the diversity of the possible levels of analysis; to show that in addition to methods of linguistic structuration (or interpretation), one could draw a specific descriptions of statements, of their formation, and of the regularities proper to discourse (Foucault, 1972).

Generally, prejudicial attitude proceeds to the discourses. Allport (1954, p.7) defined prejudice as 'an avertive or hostile attitude towards 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.' Whenever groups are formed in society, the group members may bear prejudgment toward the other group members in society. Prejudgments become prejudices, Allport (1954) argued, when they are not reversible when exposed to new warrantable knowledge. Therefore, members from the majority may have prejudice towards the minority and vice versa. From prejudicial attitudes, the members of one group represent the other(s) in different ways by using different epithets. In addition to using epithets, the majority represents the minority by constructing some negative images that originate from stereotype. The epithets and negative images become discourses. Though the minority, having stereotype and prejudice in mind, bears various negative images and uses many epithets to label the majority, these cannot be

discourses. Epithets used only by the majority and the negative images they bear to represent the minority become discourses. Throughout the world, we observe usage of a wide variety of epithets by powerful group towards the powerless group(s). For example, the Polish use 'Reptiles' for Ukrainians, the Germans use '*Polish Cattle*' to the neighbors to the East, '*Prussian Swine*' is used for the Germans by the Poles and the White use '*Nigger*' to label the Blacks (Allport, 1954).

Bangladesh, predominantly a Muslim country, has a population of 134 millions (2002 World Population Data Sheet). The religious composition of the people of Bangladesh is as follows: Islam: 88.3%, Sanatan (Hindu) 10.5% and other (Buddhist, Christian etc.) 1.2% (Bangladesh Population Census, 1991). In Bangladesh, religion bears a special significance because religion seems to play a very important role in people's everyday lives. Among the various religious groups, Muslim and Hindu had antagonistic relations in different eras in history and have had prejudice toward each other. Members of both groups in Bangladesh have their own epithets to label the members of the other. Hindus, from their prejudices, use the epithets of *Yavan*, *Masla* etc. to indicate Muslims. On the other hand, the members of the majority group (Muslim) use various epithets such as *Maalaun*, *Maalu*, *Haanud*, *Deda* etc. to indicate the Hindu minority people. These epithets result from the prejudicial attitude of the Muslim towards the Hindu minority. The usage of epithet is one of the several discourses that the majority (Muslim) constructs to represent the minority (Hindu). It has already been mentioned that although Hindus in Bangladesh (the member of minority group) have various epithets to address Muslims (members of majority), these epithets can not be discourses because the minority, being at the bottom of the power structure of the society, seldom can use these epithets to address the majority in face-to-face interaction. Due to this reason, the epithets used by the majority to represent the minority will only be the concern of this article.

This article, *firstly*, identifies the prevailing discourses on Hindu minority people in Bangladesh. This section deals with the discourses on minority from two angles i.e. epithetical and stereotypical discourses. *Secondly*, the article analyzes functioning of discourses in interactive situations between the majority and the minority. *Finally*,

the article describes the strategies that the minority applies to cope with these discourses.

2. Definition of the Concepts of 'Majority' and 'Minority' Group

The term 'minorities' carries with it a myriad of complex dimensions, each of which addresses a particular aspect of the majority-minority dichotomy and each of which is very dependent on the context in which the observations are made. Various theoretical models have been developed in the past to explain the social, economic and political interaction between minority and majority within a given society. They generally start with the premise that a stratification and hierarchy of groups exist within a given society. The strata may be defined on the basis of numeric representation, through power relations or by some combination of the two. Schermerhorn (1970) describes a power paradigm that uses relative size and direct access to power to determine whether groups in a society are dominant or subordinate. According to Schermerhorn's characterization, if a group has both size and power it is the 'majority'. If it has size but does not have power he classifies it as the 'mass subjects'. If it has power but does not have size Schermerhorn assigns the label 'elite'. The group that has neither size nor power is classified as a 'minority' (Goldmann, 2000). Although the definition of the concepts of 'majority' and 'minority', given by Schermerhorn, cannot be applied universally, it matches with the situation of Bangladesh. Muslims in Bangladesh are the members of the 'majority group', whereas members of other religious groups belong to the 'minority group'. There are several religious minorities in Bangladesh such as Hindu, Buddhist, Christian etc. Among the minority groups, Hindu religious group has been selected in the present study because this group is the largest in size among religious minorities in Bangladesh and compare to other minority groups, Hindu religious minority has had more antagonistic relation with the majority group.

3. Present Study

Since the present study intends to analyze the existing discourses of the majority on the minority, the setting in which the groups in interest

have chance to interact frequently with each other is very important. There should be participants in the study area from both minority and majority who interact with each other in their everyday lives. Considering this point, two villages, named B and G (pseudo name), have been selected for the study. In village B there are 133 households whereas in village G, the number of household is 211. Among 133 households in village B, there are 116 Hindu households whereas in village G, the number of Hindu household is 1. Though there is only one minority household in village G, there are many minority households next to village G with whom majority in village G interact more frequently. In this study, participants for the majority and minority group have been selected from village G and B respectively. The participants have been grouped into three socio-economic status (SES)¹ categories.

Household heads were chosen as participants in the study because they exercise power in the house in most of the cases, control property, especially land and their socio-economic status influences mostly the lives of other family members. Two separate lists of the households (majority household in village G and minority household in B) were prepared first. From the lists, 110 households (majority) from village G and 40 households (minority) from village B were selected randomly for the study. The household head of each of the selected household was interviewed for the study. Social survey method was chosen for the study. Specifically, data were collected from the majority and the minority by utilizing structured and semi-structured interview schedules respectively.

4. Epithetical Discourses

Representation of Hindu minority in Bangladesh has come through a long way though its form has been changed from time to time. This representation may be either direct and/ indirect and be reflected in the various agencies of mass media, stories, novels, poems, daily conversation etc. Various writings of medieval period provide evidence regarding the representation of Hindus by the Muslims in history. Muslims used *Maalaun*, *Kaafir* etc. to address Hindus (Sarkar and Sarkar, 1985; Islam, 1401 B.S.). The neglected attitudes of Muslims to

the beliefs, customs and idolatry of Hindus was evident in '*Rasul Bijoy*' (Victory of the Prophet) by Jainuddin, '*Rasul Bijoy*' (Victory of the Prophet) and '*Hanifer Digbijoy*' (Hanifa's World Conquering) by Shabirid Khan, '*Jaikum Rajar Lorai*' (The Battle of King Jaikum), by Syed Sultan, '*Sonavan*' by Fakir Garibullah, '*Jaiguuner Kissa*' (The Story of Jaigun) by Syed Hamja. The origin of Hindus was reflected in negative way in '*Nabi Bangsho*' (Descent of Prophet) by poet Syed Sultan. The poet said,

Je Sob Nurer Dekhi Pronam Na Koila.
Kaafir Hoiya Sei Jogote Janmilla
Aage Na Pronomiya Je Poschate Pronomila
Hindu Kule Janmi Puni Musolman Hoila
Je Aage Pronam Kori Pache Na Korilo
Musolman Kule Janmi Kafir Hoilo (Jalil, 1986 in
Islam, 1401 B.S)

[One who did not show reverence to Allah, he or she had been born as Kaafir in the world. One who did not show reverence at first but did so later, he or she, though born as Hindu first, became Muslim again. One who showed reverence at first but did not so later, he or she, though born as Muslim first, became Kaafir.]

The attitude of the poet toward idolatry was expressed in the following way:

Shashrete Likheche Sei Bhabe Murti
Nischoy Hoibo Taar Noroke Bosoti

[It is written in the *Shashtra* (the sacred book) that one will be placed in hell that worships idol]

The opinion regarding the holy book, *Vedas*, of Hindus was expressed in the following way:

Vedas Shastro Srijiya Na Koila Kon Kaaj
Raakho Niya Chariveda Samudrer Maj. (Jalil, 1986 in Islam,
1401 B.S.).

[The sacred book *Vedas* does not work well. Throw away the four *Vedas* in the middle of sea.]

Islam (1401 B.S.) opined that these quotations of poet Syed Sultan regarding Hindus are not separate matters. All of these reflect the negative attitude of Muslims towards Hindus in medieval period. Other than medieval period, this type of representation can also be found in colonial period. Several writers of colonial period presented Hindus in very derogative way in their writings. One of the prominent writers in Bengali literature, Mir Mossaraf Hossain, described Hindus as very *Cunning* in his one poem entitled '*Bortoman Musolman Samajer Ekkhani Chitra*' (A Description of Present Muslim Society) published in 1897. Hossain said,

Prothomete 'Choch' Hoye
 Poshe Hindu Roye Roye
 Musolman Zamider Ghare
 Crome Chepe Boshe Ghare
 Saddhya Nai Matha Nare

'Fal' Hoye Fare Chere Pore. (Monirujjaman, 1970)

[Hindus, firstly, entered into Muslim Zaminders' house in a very sub massive way.

Gradually they spread their net works in such a way that they become harmful to shelter provider]

After the ending of colonial period, representation of minority took a new turn when India and Pakistan evolved as two separate nations on the basis of 'Two Nation Theory' whereas Pakistan was considered as the homeland for Muslims and India for Hindus. Though two countries were born on the basis of religion and a large number of Hindus migrated to India before or after the partition, there was a considerable number of Hindus in East Pakistan. These Hindu minority people became the target of prejudice and discrimination in their every day lives. When the Hindu leaders tried to voice the grievances of the minority, they were often attacked by the ruling party and the press for their alleged 'divided loyalty' or disloyalty to Pakistan (Kabir, 1980). The *Dawn* (1948) made a number of editorial comments against them as "deliberate recalcitrants." During Pakistan period, international politics was associated with minority representation. Minority Hindus in East

Pakistan were thought to be related to India as India emerged as a country for Hindus. The label 'agent of India' has been attached to the Hindu since that period (Umar, 1973). The same trend in labeling Hindu minority can also be observed even in Bangladesh when it got independence from Pakistan. In the research area one male participant from the middle SES said,

It was the time to our Durga Puja. I started for home from town by mishuk (a kind of transport on which three people, along with its driver can travel) after offering prayers in the temple. I did not wear traditional dress and ornaments. Therefore, it was difficult to identify me as a member of Hindu unless somebody knew me personally. There were two people from the majority along with me in the mishuk. When we started, one of my fellows started talking to the other fellow: 'Every year, Maalaun's sons start what they call Puja. Hundreds of males and females run to the town in that period. Generally, one cannot realize that there are so many Hindus in the country. They have not received any lessons from the Liberation war though many of them were killed and tortured'. The other fellow number supported him and added 'it was wrong not to kill all of them during the Liberation War. Following Indian Culture, they make a statue with mud, gather together and address it Mum, Mum. Do they have any religion? It would be better if all of them could be sent to India. (Case- 1)

Epithets may be applied in various ways. Laughing, aggression, teasing, joking etc. are only a few in this regard. The particular way of using epithet depends on the nature of personal relation between the majority and the minority. The SES of the minority also affects it. The collected data reveal that minority from the middle and upper SES generally receives epithets from the majority in laughing and/ joking way. The majority applies these two means of using epithets also with classmates, friends or co-workers from the minority. The following statement reveals how epithet is used in joking way by close surroundings from the majority:

As far as I can remember, in high school when we gossiped together, some of our classmates from the majority used abusive epithets towards us (minority students) in a joking way. The representation style was such that they were using it just for making fun but they never considered whether we were taking it in that way or whether we were hurt by it or not. (Case-2).

Epithets are used aggressively if the minority belongs to lower socio economic status. The aggressive manner of using epithet is observed in the following statement collected from 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 (previously known) from 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. (Case-3).

Epithets are sometimes used to tease minority 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 epithet 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. As we were passing by the tea stall, I heard one of the

members from majority talking loudly seeing us; "All Haanuds were packed together and gave their vote in favor of boat (a symbol of a major political party). Otherwise, it would never win in the election." We passed the place pretending that we had not heard their discussion. (Case-4).

5. Stereotypical Discourses

Stereotype is an aspect of mental process. It is fixed idea that accompanies the category or particular group. The stereotype acts both as a justificatory device for categorical acceptance or rejection of a group, and as a screening of selective device to maintain simplicity in perception and in thinking. 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 members of people... Stereotypes are commonly, but necessarily, accompanied by prejudice, i.e. by a favorable predisposition towards any member of the category in question" (quoted in Tajfel, 1981). The majority in Bangladesh has various stereotypical images for the minority. These images reflect how the majority represents the minority in their cognition. Eventually, these stereotypes regarding minority become discourses.

Table 1 Attitude of the Majority towards Stereotypical Discourses on the Minority.

Stereotypical Discourses on the Minority	Attitude of the Majority *		
	Disagree	Agree	Uncertain
Hindus are fonder of India than Bangladesh	9 (8)	35 (32)	8 (7)
Hindus are the most selfish	16 (15)	88 (80)	6 (5)
Hindus break promise easily	35 (32)	57 (52)	18 (16)
Hindus are Hypo crates.	5 (4)	93 (85)	12 (11)
Hindus consider India as their motherland	5 (4)	102(93)	3 (3)
Hindus dispatch money and valuable goods from Bangladesh to India	11 (10)	91 (83)	8 (7)
Hindus have no religion in real sense	24 (22)	83 (75)	3 (3)

Source: Field Survey, 2002, * The total number of participants from the majority was 110.

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

The attitude of the majority toward stereotypical discourses is easily understood from Table 1. Among the stereotypical discourses, the discourse of '*Hindus consider India as their motherland*' is found as the most popular discourse in the study. Almost all (93%) of the participants from the majority support this discourse. The second most popular discourses are '*Hindus are fonder of India than Bangladesh*' and '*Hindus are Hypo crates*'. Most of the participants (85%) agree with these two discourses. The discourses of '*Hindus dispatch money and valuable goods from Bangladesh to India*' and '*Hindus are the most selfish*' can be graded as the third and fourth popular discourses respectively. The fifth most popular discourse found in the study is '*Hindus have no religion in real sense*.' The least popular discourse in the study is '*Hindus break promise easily*.' In spite of less popularity, more than half (52%) of the participants agree with this discourse. Other than the discourse of '*Hindus break promise easily*', there is almost no disagreement among the participants from the majority for the other discourses. Though small in number compared to the attitude type of 'disagreement' and 'agreement', the highest number (relative to other discourses) of participants has expressed the attitude of 'uncertainty' for this discourse. The tendency of the majority to relate 'India' with 'Hindu' is clearly evident in the discourses. These discourses express prejudice of the majority and help maintain a distance between minority and majority.

The stereotypical discourses on Hindu minority in Bangladesh can be grouped into two broad categories. Some discourses reflect the personality characteristics and some portray the general characteristics of the minority. These two types of stereotypical discourses are analyzed below:

6. Stereotypical Discourses on Personality Characteristics of Minority

The three stereotypical discourses in Table 1 that represent the personality characteristics of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh are '*Hindus are the most selfish*'; '*Hindus break promise easily*' and '*Hindus are Hypo crates*'. The negative representation of the personality characteristics of the minority by the majority can also be observed in

many other studies. Katz and Braly (1933) listed the following traits that the participants of their study ascribed for the African Americans: superstitious, lazy, happy-go-lucky, ignorant, musical. Surveying stereotyped beliefs concerning the African Americans, Yong (1934) reported a long list. A few of the characteristics from the list are: inferior mentality, primitive morality, emotional instability, lazy, religious fanaticism etc. The image of the majority regarding the negative personality characteristics of minority in Bangladesh is also reflected in the interaction between majority and minority in their everyday lives. The experience of a male banker from the minority belonging to the upper SES is as follows.

In order to buy a piece of land in town and build house there, I wanted to take a loan of 945,000 taka² 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 minority? Who is the loan seeker?' Then the advocate showed me. The Sub-Registrar was not ready to see me there. He was very surprised to see me there. Seeing me there face-to-face, 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. (Case-5).

The questions of the Sub-Registrar in above quotation reflect how a member from the majority distrusts the minority. This distrust may be connected with other representations i.e. 'Bangladesh is not the homeland for Hindus', 'They may go to India anytime', 'They break promise easily', 'They are not trustable' etc. regarding Hindu minority. The Sub-Registrar did not know the minority member personally. He, even, did not see him earlier. Without knowing him well, he doubted. This reflects images of the majority regarding the minority.

7. Stereotypical Discourses Relating Hindu Minority with India

India has become the part and parcel in the case of Hindu minority representation in Bangladesh. Various factors in history e.g., emergence of India and Pakistan on the basis of religion, mass out migration of Hindus from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to India etc. are only a few that might influence the cognition of the majority. Though these factors in history do not have any direct connection with the Hindu minority in Bangladesh, the influence of the factors are still evident in the cognition of the majority. The three discourses relating Hindus with India found in the study are: '*Hindus are fonder of India than Bangladesh*', '*Hindus consider India as their motherland*' and '*Hindus dispatch money and valuable goods from Bangladesh to India*'. The reflection of these stereotypes in everyday lives of interaction between majority and minority can be observed in many situations. The statement collected from an interview with a 40-year-old married woman from the middle SES is as follows:

One day I went to a shop in town to buy some cosmetics items. As I am married, I dressed in sari, conch and vermilion. These were enough to identify me as a member of a minority 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 though I selected it first to buy. So 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 so surprised to hear the words 'your country'. I asked him what he wanted to mean by these words. He simply replied, 'Your country, India'. I told him that I was born in this country, my forefathers also were born here so how did I become a citizen of India? Then he replied, 'Didi (Sister), it's our country. As you're Hindu, your country is India'. (Case-6).

Having stereotype in mind, the sales person from the majority tried to motivate the minority person to buy an Indian product hoping that the customer from the minority might like India as well as the product of India. There were products from various countries in the shop. Without showing these sales person indicated only the Indian product. The seller

also identified the customer as the citizen of India observing her dress up that reflected her religious affiliation.

Treating minority as scapegoat is also observed in the study. The stereotypical belief that 'Hindus dispatch money and valuable goods from Bangladesh to India' reflects how the majority treats the minority as scapegoat. The majority blames the minority for the poor economic condition of the country by arguing that they transfer money and other valuable goods to India. It is also heard that from the majority that 'if Hindus have two taka they try to deposit one taka in India'.

Stereotypical Discourses on Religion of Hindu Minority: Most of the participants from the minority (82%) acknowledge that they have found the members from the majority to criticize the religion, rituals and practices of the minority. The general places of discussion found in the study are bus, train, road etc. In private places, such as working place, or friends' circle, the minority also becomes victim of this type of discussion. Organizing religious discussion by the majority under the leadership of a priest is a common picture of the study villages, especially in the winter season. The participants reported that in some cases, the main speaker sometimes, discusses about the religion, rituals and practices of the minority in an objectionable way to attract the audience. One male participant from the middle SES reported,

Especially in the winter season, you'll find at least one big gathering once a week organized by rich families from the majority in villages. Sometimes, there is an announcement regarding such a gathering and religious priests are invited to deliver speeches on religion. Hundreds of people from the majority sometimes gather together to listen such lectures. In some cases, the speaker starts a discussion about other religions in an objectionable way mentioning, 'Hindus have no religion. They worship idols. So, they are infidels and they are enemies of us and our religion'. As in most of the cases, a loudspeaker is used for this purpose; so one can listen to it from a far distance clearly at night. This type of discussion is sometimes tape recorded and played in buses. So when a member of a minority travels in a bus and listens to some objectionable discussion about the people and practices of one's own religion then definitely he or she feels bad psychologically. (Case-7)

The lecture of the speaker from the majority in a public gathering indicates power, function and effects of discourses on the minority in society. As it is spread in the public place, it can affect human cognition quickly from a long distance.

8. Functioning of Discourses in an Interactive Situation

It seems, apparently, that linguistic devices are neutral and powerless but in reality they are the part of discourses and subjugate the minority continuously. Representation is invariably political. It creates images, mostly stereotypical, which is definitely linked with power (Ferdous, 2002). Discourse itself is a kind of representation, which can be produced through knowledge, language or text. Said (1978) noted that knowledge is not power neutral. It, he added, is connected with economical, political and ideological power. To understand the power relationship between majority and minority in Bangladesh, we have to give concentration on the politics of knowledge. Said (1978) indicated how the general liberal consensus that 'true' knowledge is fundamentally nonpolitical (and conversely, that overtly political knowledge is not true knowledge) obscures the highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced. The analysis of this paper suggests that power is not concentrated on state apparatus only.

According to Foucault (1972) power is productive and simply a negative force, the sole function of which is repression. He treats power as a net like organization of relationship running through the whole social body, it exists only in action and must be exercised. He saw power as being produced and reproduced through constant social interaction, from many different directions. Foucault (1981) described power as 'not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society'. Following Foucault's analysis, Kondo (1990, p. 307) stated that power is 'creative, coercive and extensive with meaning'. Power is not simply embedded in structural relations-maintained by force of one kind or another-but also constituted through language and everyday practice (Bourdieu, 1991).

In Bangladesh, we can observe the application of power on the minority by the majority through language that acts as discourse. The dormant intention of the majority in the case of representing the minority by using epithets is repression. The way of addressing the minority by the majority by using epithets "*Hei Haanud son, what's the price of your fish?*" (case no-3) shows the power of the majority. The fish seller could not reply the person from the majority using epithets that the minority generally uses for the majority. His failure to give counter reply to the person from majority using epithets reflects his submissive position in an interactive situation with the majority. The coping strategy used by the minority also reveals the power of language. His vulnerable condition in this interactive situation is also reflected when he said, "*I became very angry for the way of his addressing but I tried to control my anger, as I had nothing to do*" (case no-3). When the member of the majority labeled him with India saying, "*Haanud son, which of your father from India will buy fish from you with such a high price?*" (case-3), the fish seller remained silent. This is the power relationship that is a symbol of repression. The repression may be either psychological or social or economical or political or a combination of the three. When the majority uses epithets to the minority, the minority feels psychologically weak. The situation creates psychological stress on the minority.

Power is exercised in everyday life through construction of stereotypical images regarding minority people. All negative picture and images such as '*Hindus are the most selfish*;' '*Hindus break promise easily*' and '*Hindus are Hypo crates*' are used to represent the powerless minority group in society. Members of the majority, having negative images regarding the minority in their mind, discriminate the minority. The images get social form as the majority shares these with the fellow group members. Extending discrimination to the minority by the majority bearing negative attitudes in their mind indicates the execution of power of majority. Teasing the ritual of the minority people is a way of exercising religious power. When the member of the majority declared "*Hindus have no religion. They worship idol. So, they are infidels and they are enemy of us and our religion*" (case 7), the member of minority feels stress psychologically and found them as a powerless group in the society.

State patronization plays the key role to the representation of the minority. The inclusion of the words '*Bismilla ar Rahman ar Rahim*' (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) at the outset of the constitution and the declaration of Islam as the state religion in the constitution of Bangladesh make majority feel superior psychologically over the minority. The majority having superiority in state creates many discursive fields that influence the pattern of interaction between the majority and the minority. This situation makes religious minorities feel more insecure and powerless. It also turns the relationship between majority and minority in two opposite poles.

9. Coping Strategy

Foucault's discussion on 'resistance' and its relation with 'power' can be used in analyzing the strategies that the minority adopts to cope with the prevailing discourses. Resistance is not external to power, but continuous with its complex mechanisms in a specific situation, resistance, for Foucault, is simply the term for the encounter of multiple and conflicting forces of power. This is why Foucault writes, 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault, 1981, p.95). He also notes, 'as soon there is a power relation, there is the possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy' (Foucault, 1988 in Muckelbauer, 2000, p.79). Recalling Foucault's comment that power is best understood as a collection of actions on other actions, the encounter of these actions, then, demands resistance. Resistance does not need or originate from somewhere outside of power, such as a privileged subjective space, in order to be real and effective. Members of a group, being at the bottom of the power structure of the society, may resist the action(s) of the power holding group members by adopting various strategies.

According to Feagin (1991, p.103), "middle-class strategies for coping with discrimination range from careful assessment to withdrawal, resigned acceptance, verbal confrontation, or physical confrontation. Later action might include a court suit." Gardner (1980) reported

'blocking' as a coping strategy for women dealing with street remarks. In this strategy women just ignore the discrimination and continue with the interaction. Feagin and Sikes (1994) in *Living with Racism: The Black Middle-Class Experience* argue that the personal coping strategies black use to counter discrimination are: (1) defensiveness; (2) over-achieving; (3) developing a healthy self-concept; (4) prayer; and (5) humor or laughter. Goffman (1963) in his famous book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* has mentioned various strategies that stigmatized person uses in face-to-face situation. One of the strategies is hiding stigma symbol. He mentions name changing as an example of it. Scott (1985) identified foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on as the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups.

Silence (as resigned acceptance in Feagin: 1991; and blocking in Gardner: 1980), avoiding, pretending and laughing are strategies that the minority in the present study are found to adopt frequently to cope with discourses. The adoption of particular strategy by a person from the minority is dependent on the person's position in the power structure. In some cases, the minority takes the discourses as for granted. They think that, as minority, they have to hear this and consider the discourse as a normal issue. In this way the minority also legalizes the power of the majority. One participant reported, *"It is natural that the majority will say this. They are powerful and we are powerless. We have to hear this because they are all in all"*. Pretending of overlooking is considered as a form of resistance in this study (case-4). Minority people sometimes cope with the discourses by taking it as a matter of joke or humor. (Feagin and Sikes, 1994). When there is no way to leave the scene or take any other strategy to face it, some participants tend to laugh with it. The statement of a 55-year female schoolteacher from middle SES is as follows:

In working place, you'll find sometimes that your co-workers from the majority are discussing something about the rituals and practices of Hindu that is objectionable. In some cases, the discussion will not be confined within them. They'll try to involve you in the discussion in various ways. You have no

scope to avoid it; even you cannot seek justice for it to anybody. They are your co-workers, so you've to work with them from 9am to 5pm. So what one can do, especially if he or she is alone in this type of situation. You've to pretend that you never mind with this type of discussion. Otherwise, they may enjoy it very much. So, taking it easy and joining with their discussion by laughing is the only solution left for one. (Case-8)

There is a tendency of some participants to hide their identities (same as Goffman, 1963) to avoid the untoward situations. This strategy is mostly applied in public places. In some cases, the male participants hide the traditional ornaments (*maala*, the wooden necklace) that he wears just to avoid receiving comments from the majority. As the physical appearance of both the majority and minority (Hindu) is the same, this strategy sometimes works well. In extreme cases, minority members avoid wearing traditional dress or ornaments (same as Goffman, 1963 when a physically handicap rejects to use instrumental assistance to hide his or her stigma symbol). Some participants have been found who prefer not to tell their real names in public places because these names are taken from Hindu religion and by these names they can be identified as minority members. Somebody likes to keep a neutral nickname and wants to be introduced with other people by this name. The statement of a 30-year old petty businessman from lower SES is as follows:

My mother gave me the maala (a wooden made necklace used generally by Hindu people) and asked me to wear it. She passed away. This is the only symbol; I'm bearing now from her. I did not wear it from religious point of view. But by seeing this, anybody can easily identify me as a member of minority. So, in public places, I like to hide it by keeping it inside of my shirt so that nobody can see it. Another problem of mine is my name. As the name is related to Hindu religion, anybody can identify. That's why I've kept a neutral nickname of my own. In public places, I introduce myself by that nickname. When I'll have a child, I'll keep a neutral name of him or her so that none can identify him or as a member of minority. (Case- 9).

Being silent (as resigned acceptance in Feagin, 1991; and blocking in Gardner, 1980) is found to be the most widely practiced coping strategies of minorities in the study. They think it as the best way to save themselves from further negative consequences. The argument of a male participant from the middle SES is as follows:

We're facing troubles everyday in many ways. It is not that one does not want to face it with all of his or her efforts. But what will happen ultimately? Can one seek justice to somebody for his or her everyday life problems? Then he or she will have to go to the village leader everyday. And what will one get in return of it? Justice! If one is lucky enough then, he or she may get it. So, what will be ultimate result? Definitely, further repression. So, is not it better to be silent? At least one will be safe from the next negative consequences that may derive if any other strategy is adopted. (Case-10).

Coping strategy is not a form of exercising power. It is just a process to interact with power relation. The various strategies adopted by the members of minority in the study such as silence, avoiding, pretending and laughing can be considered as the strategies of resistance from Foucaultian perspective. For Foucault's subject (minority in the context of this study), resistance is not to power itself, but to particular technologies of power, to specific strategies of social practices. Like power, resistance is a local event that must be concerned with specificity of the practices in particular power relations.

10. Conclusion

In this article, we have tried to analyze the relationship between majority and minority in Bangladesh from Foucaultian discourse analysis perspective. Linguistic devices are considered as discourses in this study. Usage of epithets to represent the minority by the majority is one form of discourses. The majority uses the epithets in various ways, e.g., laughing aggressively, teasing etc. The adoption of the particular way of using epithets depends on the nature of individual level relationship between majority and minority and the socio-economic status of minority people. There are some stereotypical

images of the majority regarding the characteristics of minority people. In most of the cases, the stereotypical images connect the Hindu religious minority in Bangladesh with India. These images present the personality characteristics of the minority in negative way. Being silent, laughing, pretending, avoiding, and mild verbal protest are the most widely used strategies that the minority undertakes to cope with the discourses in an interactive situation. The type of strategies they adopt most frequently also reveals their vulnerability in the society.

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Note

1. **Socio-economic Status (SES):** The measurement scale developed by Meier and Bell has been used in this study with slight modification. Meier and Bell determined SES by 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, Social-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 from a person for occupational prestige, education, monthly income and land is reported. 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). For detail discussion please see D. L. Meier and W. Bell, Anomia and Differential Access to the Achievement of Life Goals. *American Sociological Review*, 24, 1959, pp. 189-202.

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