

Acculturation Level and Cultural Adaptive Strategies of Camp-Dwelling *Biharis* in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT: This study rambles on those ‘Bangladeshis’ who made mass people of Bangladesh contemplate for a long time whether ‘Bangladesh is for Bangladeshis or for *Bangalis*.’ This statement is sufficient for hinting that current research is on Urdu-Speaking Bangladeshi minor group who were the victims of political jumbles and helplessly migrated to present territory of Bangladesh after the partition of Indian subcontinent and hold a range of fundamental cultural heterogeneities with native Bengalis. The research aimed to investigate the acculturation level, cultural adaptation strategies and factors stimulating the acculturation process of camp-dwelling *Biharis*. In order to reach the objectives, mixed research methodology has been followed where composite indexing of numeric values and qualitative analysis of observation, narrative interviews and KIIs have been conducted. The study reveals that due to having social, cultural and ideological conflicts, *Biharis* have not been able to fully assimilate with the host community. Yet, they have managed to integrate with native Bengalis as indicated by composite index value of 0.53 through cultural learning, intermarriages, social interactions, legalizing political identity, entrance to labor force etc. Because of persisting discrimination, power conflict, prejudice and lack of peoplehood, they are still on the third stage of Gordon’s Model of Assimilation.

Keywords: Acculturation; Adaptive Strategy; Assimilation; Camp-Dwelling *Biharis*; Cultural Integration

INTRODUCTION

Being exhausted of the seesawing political decisions of British rulers and futile negotiations between political parties and being terrified of the frequently occurring horrific riots across the undivided India, eyes of Muslims saw Pakistan as their dreamland offering them hope and betterment. More than half million Muslim people from West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Koch Behar and Assam happened to reach the eastern part of Pakistan in 1947 bringing nothing but fear, uncertainty and hopes along with them from their native land (Talbot, 2009; Kuczkiewicz- Fraś, 2019; Bharadwaj et al., 2008, Wasty et al., 2016). The share of people coming from Bihar was dominating enough to change the collective name of all migrants from ‘*Muhajirs*’ to ‘*Biharis*’ by the locals. 14.50% of the migrants were *Biharis* in true sense who had little cultural homogeneity with native Bengalis except for the religious bonding (Jamaluddin, 2008). This Urdu-speaking community of Bihar never opted for ‘Bengal’, rather chose the nearer Pakistan.

Though there was no racial difference between Bengalis and *Biharis*, clear distinctions were visible between the cultural practices of these two communities, where language was the most prominent one. On *Bihari*’s arrival to East Pakistan, even the Bengali migrants pushed them to corner because of their cultural differences; let alone the hosts. Accommodation of *Biharis* with the locals seemed way too tougher than that of migrant Bengalis (Rahman and Schendel, 2003). The distinctions barely faded out during the entire Pakistan period due to the growing dissatisfaction of Bengali host community towards the new settlers caused by the ‘special treatment’ given to them by the then Pakistani government. Ruling government of newly formed Pakistan state was Urdu-speaking West Pakistanis who were more bounteous to *Biharis*. Ruling party saw Bengalis with the notion of disapproval and considered them as Semi-Hindu or Pro-Indian which resulted in treating only Bihari people as loyal and providing them with best possible facilities and services (Roy, 2015; Oldenburg, 1985; Ghoshal, 2018). Initially, *Biharis* received tremendous facilities in resettlement, rehabilitation and in getting reliefs (The Azad, 1949 cited in Ghoshal, 2018). Later *Biharis* grabbed the better share of all employment sectors from manufacturing, commerce to government services which naturally sowed the seed of jealousy in

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natives and developed a perspective of unacceptance towards the *Biharis* (Chowdhury, 1987). But the offense of created distance and detachment of majority of the *Biharis* from hosts cannot entirely be imposed upon the unacceptance of Bengali community. Rather, the flocking of *Biharis* among themselves was a big reason why maximum *Biharis* could never blend with the natives. It was rational for the migrants to shorten their journey and hence, the border districts of East Pakistan such as Dinajpur, Rajshahi experienced a huge concentration of migrants including the *Biharis* (Ghoshal, 2018). The government also spent a huge budget and rehabilitated the *Biharis* in quarters (NAB, 1949 and EPPLAP, 1952 cited in Ghoshal, 2018). A huge number of *Biharis* got the employment opportunity in railways and so, settled in railway colonies of Parbatipur and Saidpur. Moreover, inexpensive accommodations were offered to the *Biharis* at newly built Mohammadpur and Mirpur quarters to deal with the increased migrant population by the government. Some were also resettled in Gandaria of Dhaka where non-Bengali communities used to live from before (Ghosh, 2007; Talbot and Singh, 2009; Naobelal, 1948 cited in Ghoshal, 2018). Therefore, the act of 'living within themselves' could hardly knock off the distinctions and dissatisfaction between the two communities during Pakistan period.

But these distinctions sharpened into hostility and dissatisfaction transformed into hatred and enmity during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. The stance and actions of the *Biharis* during the liberation worked as a prove that they could not accommodate themselves with the mass people of the country where they migrated to. Their support to West Pakistanis, assisting them as collaborators, engagement in Bengali killing triggered the anger of the Bengalis which led to the persecution of *Biharis* in Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna, Mymensingh and Rangpur (Government of Pakistan, 1971). After the independence of Bangladesh, approximately 7,00,000 *Biharis* concentrated in camps of Dhaka, Saidpur, Chattogram and Khulna awaiting repatriation to Pakistan. Legally and illegally nearly 3,00,000 *Biharis* could go to Pakistan, but rest fated to continue their lives in Bangladesh (Sen, 1999; Zahed, 2013; New York Times, 1988). An estimation of Al Falah (2006) showed that nearly 1,51,000 destitute *Biharis* are still residing in 116 camps throughout Bangladesh.

After 50 years of liberation, Bangladesh definitely desires for a country free from social conflict and

social inequity where rights and development of minor communities are ensured and cultural diversity is promoted. Identification of acculturation level, factors affecting acculturation and coping strategies of the spatially segregated *Bihari* community, precisely the camp-dwelling *Bihari* community were the prime objectives of this research which can reveal about the present Bengali-*Bihari* relationship and more broadly about the social inequity, conflict, development and cultural diversity.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Acculturation manifests the adaptation strategy of a culture in confrontation of a new culture. While migrating, migrant community not only physically appears in a new land but also carries in their long-practiced customs, traditions, and values with them which may contradict with the existing culture of the natives. Clashing of two cultures mostly suggests modification of the minor culture under the influence of dominant culture, but sometimes might result in complete resistance and denial of the opposite culture. Therefore, "cultural acculturation is a process of adaptation to new conditions of life" (Thurnwald, 1932). This adaption strategies can drive to four directions: assimilation, integration, segregation and marginalization (Berry, 1992). In assimilation, a community completely sheds off its own culture with time and adopts the culture of the dominant community while in integration a community learns the culture of the dominant community and simultaneously continues its own cultural practices. Rejection of learning of dominant culture and sticking to own culture is considered as segregation. A rare incident may also occur when the cultures of both major and minor community are denied and a totally new culture is accepted (Berry, 1997). Selection of the acculturation path by a community or individual is influenced by a number of factors such as age, sex, economic status, education level, level of similarity and dissimilarity with the opposite cultures, time, intermarriage, acceptance of host community etc. (Kennedy, 1944, 1952; Duncan and Lieberman, 1959; Park, 1928; Park and Burgess, 1921; Nelson and Teske, 1974; Bernard, 1950; Goldmann, 2000). Therefore, a composite analysis of the factors having impact upon acculturation process can disclose the acculturation direction or acculturation level of a community. 'Gordon's stages of assimilation' a hypothetical model, is a good choice to determine the acculturation level of an alien community qualitatively. Though it gained a number of criticisms,

it is one of the most helpful options to determine acculturation stage. Gordon (1964) proposed seven successive stages through which a minor community infiltrates through and reaches complete assimilation. In the very first stage, a minor group learns the culture of the major group which has been termed as 'acculturation.' Gradually they enter the secondary and primary labor force, addressed as 'integration.' Large scale intermarriages take place in the third stage, known as 'amalgamation.' Slowly the minor community becomes a part of 'identificational assimilation' where a sense of peoplehood is developed with dominant group. As disappearance of prejudice, preconceived notions towards the dominant culture and people occurs, a minor group moves to successive stages near assimilation. The last stage where a minor group achieves complete civic assimilation is free from power conflict (Marger, 2012).

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the present research were to measure the acculturation level of the camp-dwelling *Biharis* and identify the process, factors and coping strategies of acculturation. Acculturation level has been tried to figure out with two methods: Composite Indexing and Gordon's Model of Assimilation. The use of composite indices, a complete numeric analysis, to figure out the acculturation level is widely granted method in acculturation studies (Rumbaut, 2005; Vigdor, 2008). But cultural studies loses its beauty and detailing if only quantified. Therefore, a mixed methodology has been undertaken in current research where quantitative analysis with composite indexing and qualitative analysis of observation, narrative interviews, KIIs have been done. Moreover, collected qualitative and quantitative data have been used to figure out on which stage of Gordon's Model of Assimilation camp-residing *Biharis* are. The study has been conducted over purposively selected 379 samples derived from known population size who were directly interviewed through semi-structured questionnaires. This research was carried out in the year of 2021. In this research, strict quota sampling has not been used but while selecting the respondents, it has been ensured that respondents from different age groups, sex, occupations and educational qualifications are included. Moreover, since the study was carried out amid COVID-19 situation, convenience of the surveyors was another consideration. Moreover, focal persons like *Bihari* leaders, aged person with long experience, worst

suffers were included who were mostly selected through snow-ball sampling. Therefore, selection of respondents can be addressed as non-probability purposive sampling. Four main indices namely cultural, economic, marital, and socio-civic indices have been combined together in purpose of building composite index. Each of these indices is again formed of several parameters. Proficiency in Bengali Language of the *Biharis*, their preferable language for education medium and the language mostly used among intra-community form the cultural index. Location of the workplace, discrimination faced by *Biharis* at job sector and income level are the parameters of economic index. Marital index is formulated of two parameters: *Biharis*' attitude towards Bengali-*Bihari* intermarriage and close or distant family relationship with Bengalis. Finally, factors namely friendship with Bengalis, overall attitude towards Bengali people, presence of Bengali-*Bihari* social conflicts, treatment of *Biharis* in educational institutions by Bengalis, total schooling year, possession of assets, possession of National Identity Cards and access to civic amenities are grouped together to build socio-civic index. The range of this self-developed composite acculturation index ranges between 0 to 1 where 0 denotes to complete segregation and 1 denotes to complete assimilation. In order to understand the factors, process and coping strategies, qualitative data was mostly used. Qualitative data has revealed in-depth information on persisting discrimination & bullying, family history of the *Biharis*, built up notion towards host community, treatment received from host community, existing social conflicts, identity hiding tendency, perception towards government and flocking tendency. Finally, this research did an audacity to show the entire chain of cultural acculturation process with strategies adopted by the camp-dwelling *Biharis* after their migration through a model which was prepared by synthesizing the collected qualitative and quantitative data and previous relevant literatures. Literatures helped mostly in finding early relationship with host and gradually developed conflict issues (Ghosh, 1997; Ghoshal, 2018; Talbot and Singh, 2009). STATA has been used to analyze quantitative data and in some cases, Microsoft Excel has been used to clean and quantify qualitative data. The study was conducted over three camps: Geneva and Old Kurmitola Camp in Dhaka and Hatikhana Camp in Saidpur of Nilphamari district (Fig. 1). Dhaka and Nilphamari have higher *Bihari* concentrations and these three camps are the largest camp within these two districts based on population size (Al Falah, 2006).

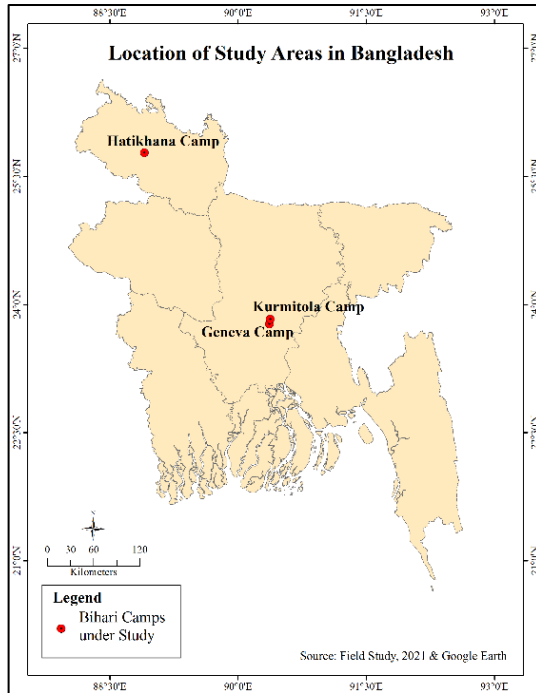


Figure 1: Location of Study Areas in Bangladesh

ACCULTURATION PROCESS OF THE CAMP-DWELLING BIHARIS

It was the general belief of the acculturation studies of early 1920s that complete assimilation takes place within three to four generations of a migrant community though it was later rejected by many sociologists (Sassler, 1920). In reality, to prove the previous statement true, an annexure is needed which is- 'if favorable condition persists.' It might be possible to attain full assimilation within the third generation if all the influencers are in favor. *Biharis* are residing in this territory for more than seventy years and it has been nearly fifteen years since they have been given the citizenship of Bangladesh. Now, the question peeps at our mind- are they assimilated already? 'No' is the simplest answer but the strings of reality are not that simple, rather extremely twisted and interconnected.

Though it is said that *Bihari* community is living in Bangladesh for seventy years, we often disregard the fact that for nearly fifty years, camp-dwelling *Biharis* are spatially segregated and are confined within camps. This spatial exclusion has a remarkable impact on their overall social and communal exclusion from mainstream Bengalis. Due to *Biharis'* cultural dissimilation, their tendency to 'live within own community' and envy of host community, a big portion of this group could never blend with Bengalis

before the liberation of Bangladesh (Rahman and Schendel, 2003; Ghoshal, 2018). After the independence, the *Bihari*-Bengali relationship become even worse due to the political ideological conflicts. Appropriation of the properties and *Bihari* killing by the Bengalis have actually become the main reason for their deteriorating relationship surpassing the cultural and ideological difference. Md. Anwar Azim, a leader of Old Kurmitola Camp shared his story how his family has been struggling for last 33 years to get back their ancestral home appropriated by Bengalis in Lalmonirhat. Md. Selim, another respondent used to live in Mirpur-1, saw killing of his own family members in front of his own eyes and was compelled to leave his own house during war. Even today, some *Biharis* feel traumatized remembering the massacres of the war time and grieves over the lost opulence, peace and happy lives. Nearly 13% of the respondents shared brutal stories of them or their families during interviews. 87.92% of the respondents believe that cultural difference has no linkage with Bengali-*Bihari* conflicts, rather it is the political issues of wartime. Even several years back, it was not possible for the Bengalis to manage easy access to *Bihari* camps due to the prevalent social conflicts. But, over the years, the conflicts have resolved to some extent but is still present (The Daily Star, 2019). Despite improving social relationships with Bengalis, *Biharis* have serious grudge on Bangladesh government for not fulfilling their basic rights and for being indifferent to their rehabilitation program. Insufficient space, inadequate water supply, sanitation, improper waste management system, indoor air pollution, waterlogging, absence of gas line connection, bad social environment are some of never ending problems of the camp life. During the survey, 19% people complained about sanitation problem of the camp, 25.6% about insufficient water supply and 23.6% about congested space of the camp. Besides, 11.6% of the camp dwellers have mentioned that poor drainage and water logging is a major problem of the camps and 4% mentioned about polluted environment too. It is very astonishing that these people, continuously busy in struggling with every moment of their life, can take break to think and ask witty question- "Rohingyas have come to Bangladesh only a few years ago but they have been rehabilitated already. We are living here for ages and even the legit citizen of the country. Why not us?" Government of Bangladesh barely understands that giving only voting rights cannot always ensure participation in electoral competition, decision making process and desire

fulfillment of minor group. Such discrimination and irrational power practice by the hosts are some of the reasons why *Biharis* are not assimilated yet. Such discriminatory attitude is not only shown by the government, but also present in local and community levels. It is the complaint of approximately 34% *Biharis* that they face reluctance to be appointed at any job by the Bengalis only because they are *Biharis*. Bengali people still perceive them as disloyal and betrayer and therefore, are often unwilling to recruit them. In the process of getting lower grade government job, they are often rejected after the verification. They have to face huge hassles in getting jobs, making passports etc. It is funny that often they need to pay bribe to get what they deserve or to achieve over which they have rights already. Less than 2% *Biharis* of the camps are engaged in any high ranked job. Most of them are engaged in small jobs as perceived by society, sometimes in odd jobs like cleaning. Average household income of around 50% households are less than 10,000 BDT per month. It cannot be claimed at all that their financial impoverishment is only because of the discrimination that they face. Rather, low educational qualifications turns out to be a major cause of getting odd jobs and being ill-paid. Nearly 49% camp-dwelling *Biharis* are totally illiterate who lack all the skills and qualifications to do a decent job. *Biharis* often receive ill-treatment and encounter disparity at educational institutions too. They are sometimes denied admission to good schools or colleges because they hail from camps, a crappy and nasty area, as perceived by many of the host community. Sometimes they fall victims to bullying by the natives outside their camps which has created a sense of insecurity among themselves.

This insecurity, disparity, bullying, unacceptance have rendered to two noteworthy characteristics development in camp-dwelling *Biharis*. Firstly, they are frightened to express 'who they are' and 'from where they belong' and have developed a tendency to hide their identity in public. Secondly, they have built up a propensity to 'flock within themselves.' In total, 55.64% people of the camps work inside the camp where majority are women who are engaged in works like hand embroidery, *Karchupi*, paper packet making etc. Some 28% of the men even prefer to work inside the camps being engaged in *Benarasi* making, *Karchupi* work, shop keeping, barbering etc. Even the men who choose to go outside the camp to earn their bread mostly select some very particular places usually concentrated with other *Biharis*. Krishi

Market, Tajmahal Road, Babar Road, Town Hall Market, Adabar are popular among the *Biharis* of Geneva Camp and ECB, Kalapani, Mirpur 10,11,12 are popular workplaces among the inhabitants of Old Kurmitola Camp. The same scenario is also noticed in cases of the educational institutions, particularly in schools. Most of the *Biharis* (90%) are admitted into schools which are open to both Bengali and *Bihari* students but the concentration of *Biharis* are high in those schools- another example of flocking tendency. Moreover, when the camp-dwellers decide to leave the camp and settle down in a better environment, initially, many of them opt for *Bihari* concentrated area for their residence. Maintaining such fine line with the Bengalis hindered the easy cultural assimilation of camp-dwelling *Biharis*.

After spectating the line of contrasts, disparity and conflicting Bengali-*Bihari* relationships, it is not unusual to assume a very low rate of intermarriages between these two communities. But very surprisingly, this hypothesis about inter-communal marriages has totally been ruled out by the reality. More than 98% of the *Biharis* showed interest in intermarriage with Bengalis (Fig. 2). 23% of these camp-residing *Biharis* have close or distant family lineage with Bengalis among which 8% have direct relationship like having Bengali parent or partner. Rate of intermarriages at present has increased than the past which is a clear indication of improving social relationships and better acculturation level. These intermarriages are often used as adaptation technique by the *Biharis* to get acceptance to assimilate or integrate with the natives. Intermarriages can also be addressed as 'development strategy' used by the *Bihari* parents to release their daughters from the irony of camp lives and ensure a better ambient and future for them.

Though ages have passed by since they have arrived to this territory, they are still adherent to their own cultural practices which is the main issue of dissimilarity between Bengalis and *Biharis*. Maximum *Biharis* (61%) still speak only in Urdu within their own community (Fig. 3). Trying to find several households in camps member of which are linguistically fully assimilated with the mainstream Bengalis was a failed attempt.

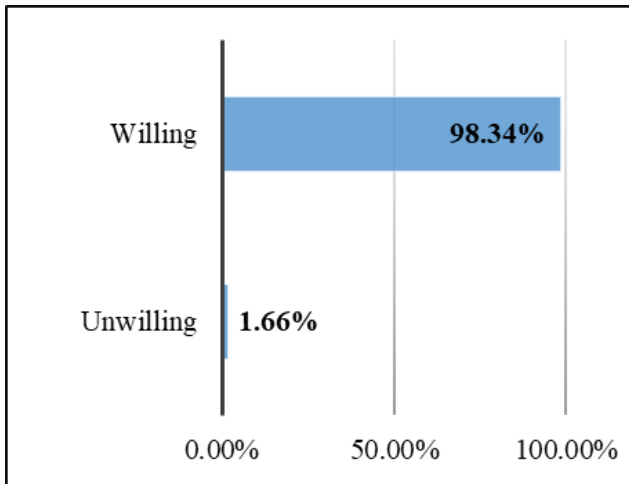


Figure 2: Interest of *Biharis* in Intermarriage

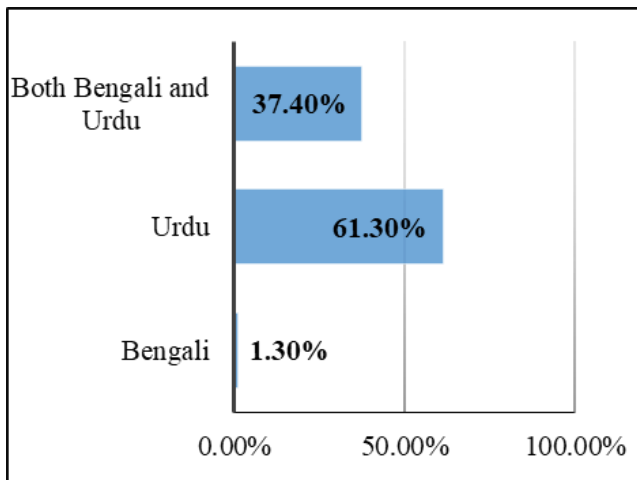


Figure 3: Language Use within *Bihari* Community

Along with language, *Biharis* still practice their own cultural customs and observe the festivals. Some of which are totally different from the customs and practices of Bengalis. Grandeur celebration of *Muharram*, *Ashura*, *Shab-e-Barat*, *Shab-e-Meraz*, *Shab-e-Qadr*, *Eid-e-Miladunnabi* are unusual among the Bengalis. The festivals of *Muharram* and *Ashura* have special place in *Bihari* culture. The celebrations continue for 10 days at a stretch with some customs might not be familiar to the Bengalis; for example: wearing turbans by *Bihari* men, bringing out *Tajia* procession to restage the history of *Karbala*. *Khaja Baba*, *Akheri Budh*, *Murga Fateha*, *Kunda Fateha* are addressed as ‘religious customs’ which are very unpopular among the same religion practitioners-Bengali Muslims. Illuminating the neighborhood with lights or lamps and bringing out procession during *Eid-e-Miladunnabi* is also unfamiliar among Bengali Muslims. Remaining awake on the eve of wedding day, making of cake or *pitha* specially for the

marriage and distribution of it in the mosques and neighborhood after marriage, inviting new groom to bride’s house after the new moon shows up are some of the wedding rituals found only in *Bihari* culture. Wearing of special kinds of headbands by both bride and groom at the wedding differs from the Bengali Muslim wedding attire. Bengalis’ love for *Payesh* has been replaced by *Haluwa* in *Bihari* culture. Majority of these camp-dwelling *Biharis* were found indifferent to celebrate *Pahela Baishakh*, one of the key cultural festivals of Bengalis. Social dispute, impoverishment, unawareness of *Biharis* are causing some of the *Bihari* practices to become obsolete too such as *kawali* song, *tajia* procession, Urdu literature etc. Though the main differences between Bengalis and *Biharis* lie in ‘culture’, it is ‘culture’ again to tie two communities up- their religion. *Eid-ul-Fitr*, *Eid-ul-Azha*, *Gaye Holud* in wedding are integral part of both cultures. Moreover, Bengalis’ food habit has largely been influenced by *Bihari* culture and *Bihari* cuisine and hotels have gradually become attractions to gourmet Bengalis; a real life example of two-way acculturation process as viewed earlier by Eaton (1952), Gillin and Raimy (1940), Spiro (1955), Samora (1956). Similar race, religion, food habits, dresses have helped *Biharis* to fill up the gaps to some extent that exist between these two communities created by ideological conflicts and other cultural differences. The year-long social conflict had slowly started to resolve after their recognition as citizens of Bangladesh. Over the years, many (80%) of the *Biharis* have been able to build good friendship with Bengalis outside the camp. At present, most (70%) of the *Biharis* express satisfactory attitude towards Bengalis and address them as ‘Muslim brothers.’ These have paved ways for their ‘easy integration’ with the host community.

Now, let’s directly come over to the main cultural difference-the linguistic heterogeneity. It has been found that almost half of the camp-dwelling *Biharis* have good command over Bengali language with some variation in accent which let a person spot them quickly as non-native Bengali speakers (Fig. 4). On the contrary, another one-third of the *Biharis* can speak excellent Bengali which makes it hard to differentiate them from local Bengalis and leaves only one way to identify them as *Biharis*- their dwelling space; the camps. Therefore, in some cases, ‘the space they reside in’ talks more about who they are than ‘their actual cultural attributes.’ Only a very small percentage of people has moderate to low proficiency of Bengali language most of whom are women who are mostly confined to camps and have little

interaction with the Bengali people. But the thing to think over is that maximum of them is nonchalant to use Bengali within their own community and use only Urdu. But some 37% people try to use Bengali at their home, mainly with their children so that they can speak fluent Bengali and sometimes for the preference of the children of Bengali to Urdu. Despite having Urdu as their mother tongue and using it in their day-to-day life for communication, they prioritize Bengali over Urdu as education medium. Majority (74%) of the *Biharis* feel that there is no need of learning Urdu at educational institutions (Fig. 5). The percentage is even higher in the cases of their children. “What’s the point of learning Urdu? Urdu is of no use outside the camp. Bengali can give us good jobs”- the line echoes almost everywhere in the camp. Therefore, it can be easily understood that learning Bengali is more a conscious process to them and another coping technique to integrate with the host. Allurement of Bengali to the young generation suggests a probable consequence of assimilation in future.

Where integration is a conscious process, assimilation is more a subconscious mechanism which makes minor group more identical to host community gradually. Again, assimilation denotes total oblivion of own culture and integration refers to the simultaneous practice of both cultures. Proficiency of Bengali language, *Biharis’* presence in secondary labor force, intermarriages along with their practices of own language, festivals, customs prove that *Biharis* are already integrated with the host community but not assimilated. A value of composite index ranging between 0.33-0.66 suggests integration in simple self-made index within which values of all the camps have fallen into. None of the secondary indices could also achieve a perfect 1 which denotes complete assimilation. Socio-civic index obtains the highest value where economic index gets the lowest (Fig. 6). Though all the camps are at integration stage, spatial variation is present among them which refers to different acculturation levels of the study camps. In Geneva and Kurmitola camps, 11% and 12% of the

respondents were found on ‘near to assimilation’ stage respectively whereas in Hatikhana camp, this percentage is 7%. Again, 3% *Biharis* of Hatikhana camp are still on ‘near to segregation’ stage. But, in the camps of Dhaka city, not a single respondent was found segregated from host community.

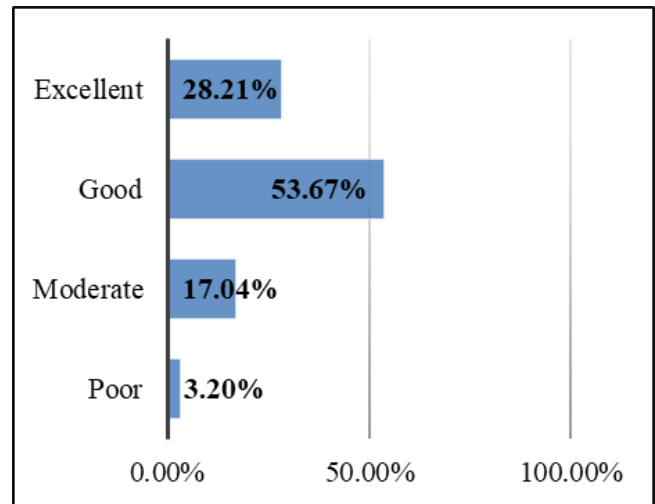


Figure 4: Bengali Language Proficiency by *Biharis*

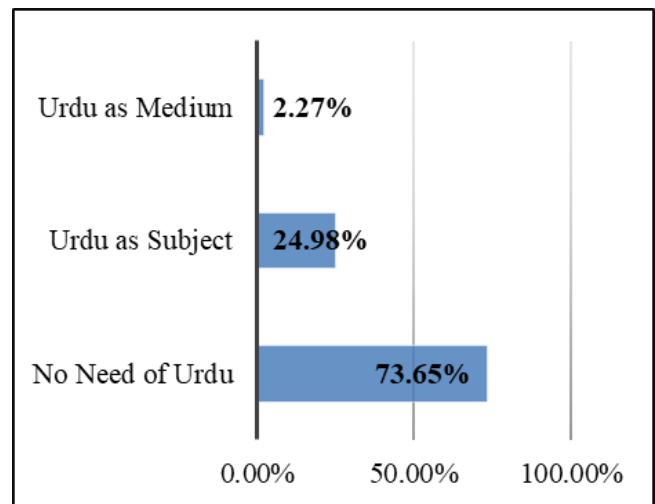


Figure 5: Language Preference for Education

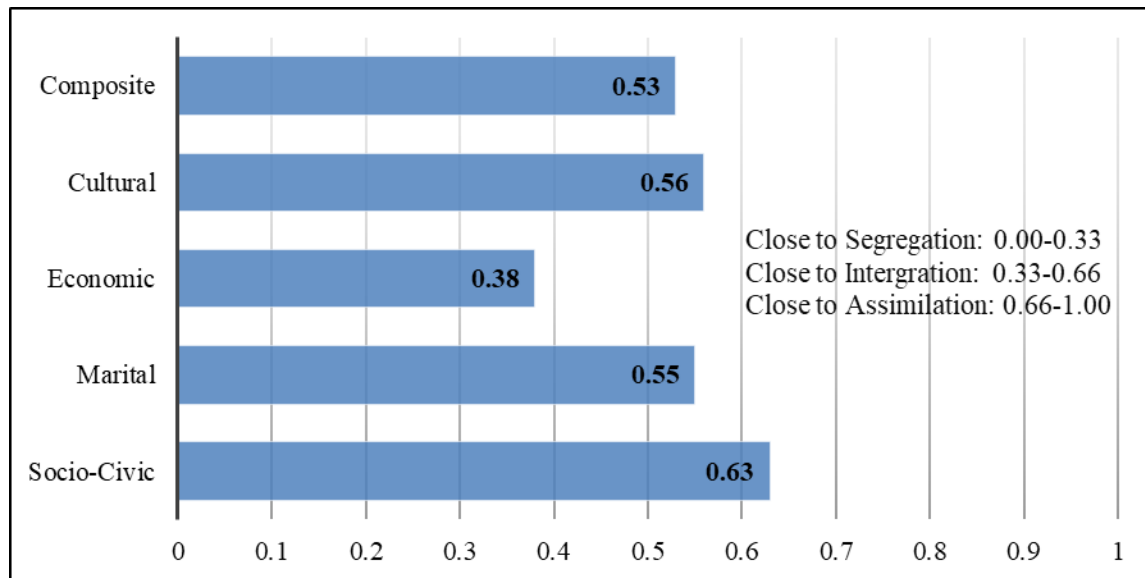


Figure 6: Composite Index of Acculturation of Camp-Dwelling *Biharis*

It has been already discussed that camp-dwelling *Biharis* have learned some dominant cultural practices of the host community. For instance, *Biharis* have good command over the language of the host community, Bengali. Then, camp-residing *Biharis* have already entered into the secondary labor force which refers to their involvement in low-income generating and low social-status defining jobs. Camp-dwelling *Biharis* are hardly found in powerful or noteworthy job fields. High level of intermarriages between Bengalis-*Biharis* are well-prevalent. According to Gordon's Model of Assimilation, i) acculturation, ii) integration and iii) amalgamation are first three consecutive stages where a minor group learns culture of dominant community, enters labor force and intermarries respectively. Therefore, it is understood that camp-dwelling *Biharis* have crossed the first three stages of Gordon's Assimilation Model successfully. However, in the later stages of Gordon's Model of Assimilation, the minor community gradually develops a sense of 'we feeling' with the host, discrimination-prejudice-power conflict vanish and eventually they become culturally identical to the dominant group in the seventh or last stage. But, persisting discrimination, power conflict, prejudices, spatial segregation and absence of the sense of peoplehood on dominant culture as discussed earlier have halted *Biharis*' progress to successive stages. Therefore, camp-dwelling *Biharis* still stands in the third stage of this hypothetical model of Gordon's. If a comparison is run between the self-made index continuum and Gordon's Model of Assimilation, 'integration' of Composite Index Continuum is equivalent up to the third stage of Gordon's Model- 'amalgamation.' Because, 'integration' in Composite

Index Continuum refers to learning and practicing of culture of dominant community and developing occupational and marital relationship with the same without forgetting the practice of native cultural traits.

ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES OF ACCULTURATION

In order to integrate with the host community, *Biharis* have adopted a number of strategies (Fig. 7). Learning of Bengali language and increasing their proficiency can be addressed as one of the most vital strategies. Good command over Bengali also favors them in hiding their real identity and getting into workforce. Intermarriages with local Bengalis have also helped in their integration. Another major technique to integrate with the host community is to leave the camps which in one hand, provides them with better civic amenities, on the other hand, it assists again in hiding identity to escape social discrimination, bullying and unacceptance. Their eventual realization that without education, progress and integration are hardly achievable pushed them to secure decent educational qualifications which again can be regarded as an adaptive strategy. A fascinating story to share is that in few hotels run by the *Biharis*, stickers of national flag of Bangladesh have been used for decoration. By this, in one sense, they want to show political ideological similarity with Bengalis which was one of the main causes of their social exclusion. In other sense, it expresses the boldness of their character to claim 'who they are'- the legal citizen of the country. Still today, *Biharis* integration strategy mostly rambles around 'hiding identity.' This definitely raises question if this can be regarded as 'actual integration.'

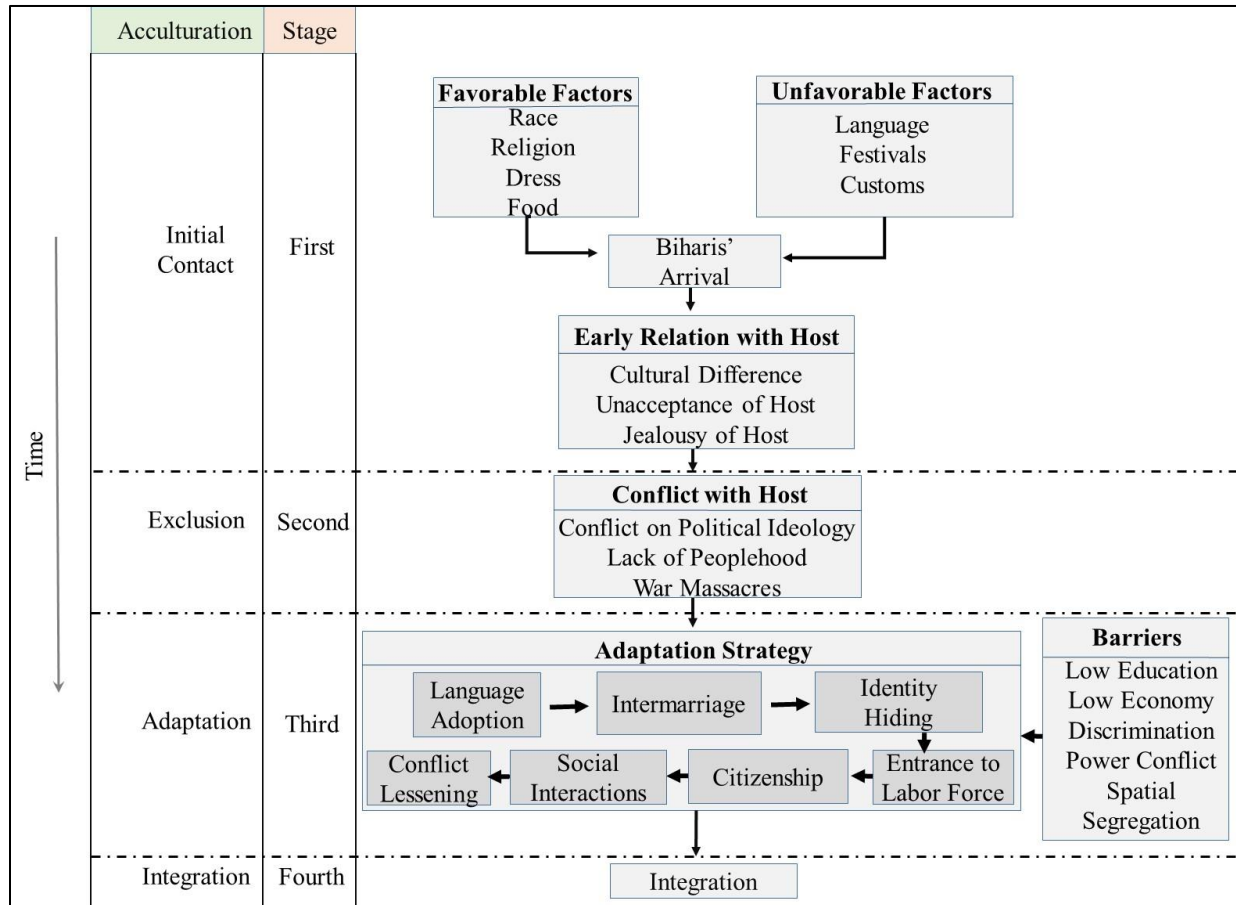


Figure 7: Model of Acculturation Process of Camp-Dwelling Biharis

FACTORS AFFECTING ACCULTURATION

Men were found more integrated with the natives than the women since most of the women are confined within the camps. But women working outside the camp are more integrated than the women in the camps. So, social interactions are more operative in the acculturation process of *Biharis* than the gender. People with higher educational qualifications, financial status and Bengali language proficiency have been able to integrate more. *Biharis'* scenario partially supports the Goldmann's (2000) study on factors of acculturation. Space and segregation have been found major influencers in *Biharis'* acculturation process.

CONCLUSIONS

Jumping off the hindrances of unacceptance, cultural and ideological dissimilarity, social and spatial exclusions, *Biharis* have finally been able to integrate themselves with the host community though prejudices and disparities are still persistent. Inclination of young generation towards Bengali

culture, slow outmode of *Bihari* customs prophesize of possible assimilation in future. Need for social recognition of a legally recognized identity tells a lot about the acculturation process in a society- as perceived from the study of *Biharis*. It is regretful to see that a minor group, maximum of whose members are inhabitants of one of the biggest mega cities of the world is still facing inequity, discrimination and impoverishment- as suggested by the index scores. But 'integration' or 'no assimilation' also has some positive sides too- cultural diversity amidst globalization and excessive cultural pressure from dominant groups.

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