



Navigating Geopolitical Pressures: Minority Rights in Bangladesh's Regional and Global Contexts

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Abstract

This study investigates the dynamics of minority rights in Bangladesh, situated within regional diplomatic interference and international pressures. It concentrates on Hindu societies who live in Bangladesh, a majority Muslim country and discovers blueprints of inspirations that transnational dogmas exert on native communal associations, media exposure, and governmental reactions. This study combines a qualitative method of interviews with religious authorities, scholars, political leaders and journalists including significant content reviewing of media output, research articles, policies and non-government publications to investigate interconnections amongst external pressures, governance and societal resilience. The paper finds that even as extreme Hinduva ideas and discourses within India fashioned a sense of insecurity amongst Bangladeshi Hindus, although interfaith historical harmony is generally prevailed amongst the majority Muslims. Global powers such as Western actors and media tend to decrease the complications of socio-political realities. However, it wires Islamophobic ideas and contributes to the unsuspecting justification of global Hinduva extreme ideologies. The paper highlights the necessity to establish strong domestic legal systems, interfaith solidarity, regional diplomacy, and media reform. It posits that the ability of Bangladesh to protect minority rights, uphold secularism, and endure external forces is important not only to internal unity but also to the confidence of South Asian sovereignty.

Keywords

Bangladesh, Minority Rights, Geopolitical Pressures, Global Engagements and Regional Dynamics

1. Introduction

The issue of minority rights especially of the Hindu community in Bangladesh holds an obscure status due to the influence of domestic politics, regional ideologies as well as international strategic demands. The principles of equality, secularism, and religious freedom are inconsistently practiced, despite being presented in the Constitution, and are often limited by a practicality approach to politics and a time-changing concept of nationalism. The post-independent determination of Bangladesh towards pluralism is still struggling in a regional and international environment characterized by an ideological polarization and geopolitical rivalry.

The emergence of the Hindutva ideology in India has played a major role in shaping Bangladesh in negotiating its religious and political identity. The Hindu majoritarianism shift in India has transformed the discourse in South Asia that presents ideological pressures beyond national boundaries. In Indian political and media, the image of Bangladesh as a systematic discriminatory view of Hindus is frequently featured an image that is sometimes overstated or is selectively created in political interests. These accounts justify India of its exclusionary policies, including Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC), as India being a protector of South Asian Hindus. These depictions often ignore the history of coexistence in Bangladesh and its

continuous initiatives to maintain religious harmony, making its global image as well as bilateral relationship with India trickier.

Western intervention, especially that of the United States also puts Bangladesh in the perspective of human rights and religious freedom. Although all these issues are usually legitimate, they are also coupled with the overarching geopolitical moves to prevent the influence of China on South Asia. The western media and think tanks at times tend to inflate politicized or unprovable minority persecution, which is in some cases influenced by the diaspora or partisan concerns. Although the forms of discrimination should be considered, the automatic dissemination of inflated news is a threat of the human rights movement becoming a means of geopolitical rivalry and not a justice.

This environment is complicated by regional and multilateral actors. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is relatively silent regarding the cause of the non-Muslim minorities, which can be seen as the clear instance of its restraining attitude towards its member states and the emphasis on political expediency over the ethical steadiness. In the meantime, China has been expanding its involvement in the Belt and Road Initiative with a focus on economic rather than rights relations.

Balanced between these opposing forces, Bangladesh has had to struggle with dualism in ensuring the protection of the minority groups against the national autonomy. The politicization of the Hindu minority rights; Indian ideological expansionism, Western moral diplomacy, international media framing, is used to show how internal social facts are eclipsed by external protecting, accuses or usefulness.

This paper will focus on discussing critically the relationship between the rights of the Hindu minority, ideological growth of the regions and geopolitical involvement of the world in modern Bangladesh. The following are the objectives of the research:

1. To examine the effects of the emergence of Hindu nationalism in India and its impact on internal politics in Bangladesh as well as communal relations and policy reactions of Bangladesh to the Hindu minority.
2. To assess the impact that the Indian and Western media have on the stories of minority rights in Bangladesh and examine the geopolitical rationale behind U.S. and European human rights activism in South Asia.
3. To determine the selective positioning of multilateral institutions such as the OIC and the strategic evasion of the human rights rhetoric by China in favour of the economic and cultural leverage within Bangladesh.
4. To develop practical suggestions of empowering minority rights in Bangladesh amid geopolitical challenges in the region and changing world interactions.

In meeting these goals, the research will contribute to a sophisticated definition of the contentious framing of the rights of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh and its struggle within a discursive overlap between the local structures of governance, local rivalry, and international politics. In the end, it states that pluralism in Bangladesh relies on the capability of the state to implement an autonomous moral and political system that cannot be instrumentalized by outsiders and that empower the inclusion of citizens at home.

2. Literature Review

Religious minorities often are seen as a vulnerable segment in society since they often suffer persecution, discrimination, and exclusion from the rest of the population (Petri, 2018). Religiously motivated violence and intolerance have recently increased in many parts of the world, contributing to greater social hostility and tension (Fox, 2016). In acknowledgment of this concerning trend, the United Nations General Assembly has established August 22 as *International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief* (United Nations).

Freedom of religion or belief, opinion and expression, peaceful assembly, and association are dependent, interrelated, and reinforcing. Articles 18, 19, and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights entrench these fundamental rights. Their protection is a key issue in the fight against intolerance and religious or belief-grounded discrimination. (United Nations)

The postcolonial nation-building process in South Asia has often incorporated majoritarian religious identities and ethnicities at the expense of minorities. This hegemony has affected political

and social discourse, limiting the involvement, representation, and acknowledgement of minorities in the public (Pattanaik, 2013; Hofmann & Caruso, 2011; Adeney, 2015).

The predominant religious beliefs in Bangladesh are Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. The 2022 census shows that the total population of Muslims is 91.04%, whereas Hindus are 7.95%, Buddhists are 0.61%, Christians are 0.30%, and the remaining 0.12% are other minorities. Religious minorities, therefore, constitute about 8 percent of the population, with the majority being Hindus.(Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2022)

In 1971, Bangladesh became a secular state, and the concept of secularism was included as one of the four main principles of the original constitution. Nevertheless, in 1979, secularism was abolished as a state principle by the amendments to the constitution, and Islam was made the state religion in 1988 (Bhuiyan, 2017). After these developments, in 1990 and 1992, there was a massive killing of Hindus through communal attacks (Riaz, 2004). Religious minorities have long been victims of systemic discrimination, whether in the form of violence, intimidation, or institutional neglect, and habitually worsened by the malpractice of the police and the lack of action on the part of the judiciary (Chaney &Sahoo, 2020).

Structural discrimination and occasional violence against the Hindu minority (around 8 percent of the population) persist, even with the constitutional undertaking of secularism by the nation (Misra, 2025). The political instability has frequently magnified such weaknesses, making religious minorities easy victims of social and political violence (Pattanaik, 2013).

The recent research points to the overlap of the minority identity with the digital expression in Bangladesh. Fear, stigma, and misinformation regarding the use of social media platforms are common among Hindu, Buddhist, and Indigenous communities - a manifestation of postcolonial and social-digital disparities (Rifat et al., 2024). Likewise, the Indigenous issues are often represented as negative or marginalized in the popular news, and the media frames highlight the conflict and protest. These images support marginalization and further intensify the vulnerabilities. Land grabbing, especially in Indigenous areas, has continued to be a rife issue where influential players grab land forcefully in the guise of development or tourism (Paul et al., 2025).

The geographical location of Bangladesh, which is surrounded by India on three sides and connected to the Bay of Bengal, makes the country imperative in connectivity and security to the region. India considers Bangladesh to be crucial to its own security, especially in matters of insurgency, migration, and stability of its northeastern states. This nearness forces Dhaka to consider Indian interests in its domestic and foreign policy, particularly minority rights and border management. (Haqueet, al., 2024; Hasan, 2025)

At the same time, the fast growth rates of economic interaction, investments into the infrastructure, and inclusion of Bangladesh into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by China have enhanced the influence of Beijing, threatening the traditional leadership of India. The Chinese investments are not purely economic but have more extensive geostrategic objectives, such as equalizing India's power and gaining control over the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. (Hoque et. al, 2025; Jahan&Hossain, 2024)

This has seen Bangladesh embark on a hedging policy in an attempt to strike a balance between its relationships with both India and China and enjoy the maximized economic and security advantage without reliance on either (Lutf&Shanto, 2023).

The available literatures have shown that minorities in religion around the world are unreasonably persecuted and socially marginalized, and the intolerance is increasing at the expense of intercommunal living. Majoritarian identities have often been utilized in postcolonial nation-building in South Asia, to the systematic disadvantage of the minority groups. Structural discrimination, digital marginalization, and media bias against Hindu, Buddhist, and Indigenous communities in Bangladesh have been made easier by the presence of constitutional amendments and political instability despite the secular foundations of the country. At the same time, the literature points to the strategic location of Bangladesh in South Asia, where both India's and China's security issues and economic investments dictate the domestic policies of the minority. In contrast, the Western discourses of human rights pressure through the strategic alliances and aid offer conditionalities.

Nevertheless, the present literatures pay little attention to how the regional power relations, global interactions, and foreign interventions interact with national politics to influence the result of minority rights. The gap highlights the necessity of the multi-level analysis, which integrates

geopolitics, domestic governance, and the experiences of minority groups. The current research fills this gap by positioning the rights of the minority in the context of the greater geopolitical space of Bangladesh, therefore connecting the insights of human rights literature and international relations literature.

3. Methodology

The paper applied a qualitative research methodology to investigate the influence of regional dynamics, global interactions, and domestic political attitudes on minority rights in Bangladesh. In this research the qualitative method is mainly fitting, because it assists to investigate the socio-political process elaborately, to scrutinize the life experiences of minorities and to discover the understated diplomatic characteristics between the internal governmental domestic structures at home and the external powers of the global world. Highlighting subjective experiences and contextual influences help gain a deeper insight into how social forces, domestic policy and geopolitical pressures interweave and influence minority groups.

Through employing in-depth interviews with the key informants, the primary data was collected. To categorize the respondents and guarantee that people with relevant knowledge or lived experience the purposive sampling was utilized in the paper. The key informants included political science professors, government officials, leaders of minority communities (Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and Indigenous), law enforcement agencies, political leaders, legal professionals, human rights workers and Islamic scholars.

To capture individual experiences, institutional reaction, insights of susceptibility and how regional and international pressure is perceived to affect minority rights the in-depth interviews were structured. Participants were interviewed, and the proceedings were recorded with their consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized to ensure confidentiality. The summary of respondents as follows:

SL	Code	Designation	Organization/ Religion	Category	Academic Qualification	Sex	Age
1	LMC-01	Business	Ethnic Buddhist from Hill tracks	Leaders of Minority Communities	BA	Male	48
2	LMC-02	Hindu Puruhit	Chatteshwari Kali Mandir, Chittagong	Leaders of Minority Communities	MA	Male	55
3	LMC-03	Buddhist Bhikko	Nandankanon Buddha Bihar, Chittagong	Leaders of Minority Communities	BA	Male	44
4	LMC-04	Christian Priest	Pathorgara Catholic Church, Chittagong	Leaders of Minority Communities	MA	Male	55
5	PPS-01	Professor of Political Science	University of Chittagong	Professor of Political Science	PhD	Male	56
6	GO-01	Upazila Social Welfare Office	Government Republic Bangladesh	Government Official	PhD	Male	47
7	PL-01	Ameer	Bangladesh JamaatIslami	Political Leaders	MA	Male	55
8	PL-02	Local Leader	Amar Bangladesh Party	Political Leaders	MA	Male	40
9	LEA-01	OC of a Thana	Bangladesh Police Chittagong	Law Enforcement Agency	MA	Female	43
10	HRW-01	Member	Odhikar	Human Rights Workers	MA	Female	50
11	LP-02	Advocate	Chittagong Bar	Legal Professional	Dawrae Hadith	Male	45
12	IS-01	Professor	International	Islamic	PhD	Male	54

			Islamic University Chittagong	Scholars			
13	J-01	Staff Reporter	DainikAmardesh	Journalist	BA	Male	45

The secondary data was collected through getting a comprehensive literature review of scholarly research articles, books, newspaper articles, policy documents and credible online reports. This also provided a broader contextual meaning of historical, political and geopolitical factors that shaped the minority rights in Bangladesh. Thematic analysis was the only way to process primary and secondary data and, therefore, reveal common patterns, themes, and insights related to the vulnerability of minorities, the reaction of the government, and the interaction of domestic and foreign elements.

The study was done in rigorous ethics. Informed consent was given to all the participants and their anonymity and confidentiality were taken care of. Emphasis had been put on minority participants so that they were safe, particularly in risky socio-political regions. The research was carried out in compliance with the ethical principles and guidelines of the research on the human subjects in institutions and international laws which safeguard the integrity of the research study and human subjects.

4. Findings

4.1. The Different Minority Groups in Bangladesh

4.1.1. Religious Minorities

In Bangladesh, the leading religion is Islam practiced by the greatest majority. Some of the other religious groups are Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Shias, Baha'is and Ahmadis, although they differ in terms of population and social integration (Mandal, 2004). The Bangladesh Population and Housing Census 2022 shows that 91.04% of the population are Muslims (around 160.51 million), 7.95% are Hindus, 0.61% are Buddhists and 0.30% are Christians (Corraya, 2022). And other smaller communities like the Baha'i and smaller branches of the Muslim religion are more insignificant and have a population of 10,000 to 100,000 Baha'is and 2.97 million Shias respectively (Minority Rights Group International, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2009). The social exclusion and the lack of recognition by the state persist in the Ahmadiyya community (100,000) (U.S. Department of State, 2005).

4.1.2. Ethnic Minorities

At least 27 ethnically different communities live in Bangladesh, mostly located in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and in the plains adjacent to them, and are commonly called Adivasis. The Hill Tracts, including almost 10 percent of the Bangladesh area, contains 13 indigenous peoples; the most important of whom are the Chakma, Marma and Tripura who form approximately 90 percent of the residents. They are affiliated to Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Hinduism. The others are Lusai, Pankho, Mizo, Mru, Khyang, Santal, Mandi, Khasi, Monipuri, Oraon, Hajong and Rajbangshi (Mandal, 2004). According to the 2022 Census, the number of Indigenous people is estimated to be 1.65 million, which is about 1 percent of the national population (IWGIA, 2024).

4.1.3. Linguistic Minorities

Ethnic and religious identities usually intersect with linguistic minorities in Bangladesh. The indigenous languages have six major families, namely, Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic (e.g., Khasi, Munda), Tibeto-Burmese (e.g., Kuki-Chin, Bodo), and others (Shadri, Rakhaine, Meithei, Kol and Cockborok). These language diversities highlight the cultural diversity among the Adivasi people in Bangladesh (Mandal, 2004). The Biharis, who are non-Bengali Urdu-speaking migrants who settled on Bangladesh during the Partition of 1947, still stand in a complicated position in the sociopolitical life of Bangladesh. Though some 163,000 of them had been repatriated to Pakistan by 1981, an estimated 200,000-300,000 of them are still in Bangladesh, many habitually in a refugee-like status despite gradual attempts of naturalization (Mandal, 2004; Minority Rights Group International, 2018).

4.1.4. Sexual Minorities

Hijra people, an officially recognized third sex in Bangladesh are a sexual minority. Although they are formally recognized, they still face a high level of discrimination, social exclusion, and economic and political exclusion (Hossain, 2017).

4.2. Regional Dynamics: the Impact of Hindu Nationalism in India on Bangladesh

The expansion of Hindu nationalist rhetoric to Bangladesh is an intricate problem that integrates the philosophy of religion and the regional strategy and online fake news. The effects on the

politics in the short term are minimal, however, the effects of the social peace and stability of the region are long-term and rooted and with the rights of the minority. To find a solution to this condition, the joint regional organisations, the caring media activity and the revitalised commitment to secular democratic values on either side of the border are going to be resolved.

4.2.1. *The rise of Hindu nationalism and its regional reverberations*

The phenomenon of Hindu nationalism in India is a complex feature that has political and ideological dimensions, which have far-reaching implications on the region particularly to Bangladesh. According to the Hindutva philosophy and being closely tied to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Hindu nationalism works in terms of the civilizational identities of the Hindu nation of India. This ideological shift undermines the secular roots of India and the regional stance. This transition causes some anxiety in Bangladesh, a Muslim-majority country, with historical, cultural, and geopolitical links with India. Communalization of Indian politics may be a dangerous move that would fuel interreligious conflicts, empower extremist groups, and make bilateral relations harder. Besides, the religious polarization in India can potentially cross the borders, which will contribute to mistrust, radicalization, and eventual flows of refugees. (Longkumer 2018; Chaney and Sahoo 2020).

4.2.2. *Emerging traces of Hindu nationalism in Bangladesh*

PPS-01, PL-01, IS-01, J01, LMC-03, and HRW-01 witnessed a trend of assertive Hindu identity politics where marginal but vocal actors have been rampant in recent years. They claimed that these movements come as a reaction to occasional acts of violence towards the Hindu communities or as a result of transnational Hindutva discourses in the diaspora networks. As part of the Indian right-wing discourses, segments of the Hindu diaspora have intensified the Hindu persecution in Bangladesh through global media campaigns. On the domestic scale, a small group of right-wing Hindu organizations sometimes forms following communal events. Still, they are poorly organized and not as militant as the RSS or VHP in India. However, LMC-02 did not accept the concept of widespread Hindutva influence, with the exposure of younger Hindus in Bangladesh being limited.

4.2.3. *Hindu nationalism, politics, and internationalization of minority discourses*

HMW01, J-01, PPS-01, PL-01-02, LMC-03, and IS-01 claimed that the BJP and the RSS have systematically internationalized the problem of Hindu minorities in the neighboring countries and presented themselves as protectors of a transnational Hindu community. Instrumentalization of religious identity in the foreign policy of India is seen in the statements of RSS leaders who demanded the intervention of the United Nations in Bangladesh. This policy has a domestic political purpose as well to mobilize the Hindu community and avert electoral losses (RSS Urges UN Intervention to Halt Atrocities Against Hindus in Bangladesh, 2025). The discriminatory attention given to the Hindus overseas, as compared to the disenfranchisement of the Muslim minorities in India, shows how the logic of Hindutva politics is asymmetrical: foreign promotion is converted into domestic unification.

4.2.4. *The politics of perception and cross-border disinformation*

Nearly all respondents, except LMC-02 and LMC-04, contended strongly that since the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government in August 2024, Bangladesh was going through a period of political instability with misinformation and communal violence in the country. The politically motivated violence has been falsely reported as anti-Hindu persecution by disseminating false narratives, which are often aired in Indian media and social networks. According to investigations by law enforcement, more than 98 percent of the 1,254 reported cases were political and not religious. According to the reports of the South Asian Policy Initiative (SAPI) and unbiased fact-checkers, a well-organized disinformation campaign under the influence of Hindu nationalist networks was aimed at destabilizing Bangladesh and causing a worsening of bilateral relations. In reaction, the Center for the Study of Organized Hate (CSOH) organized panel sessions on the contribution of social media in propagating hate speech and its impact on minority rights and local stability (The Center for the Study of Organized Hate 2025; Amin and Sikdar 2025).

4.2.5. Arming religious identity and destabilizing social cohesion

PPS-01, J-01, IS-01, LMC-03 and PL-01-02 claimed that the strategic representation of Bangladeshi Hindus as victims of systematic persecution has dysfunctional political interests. In their view, when projected externally, such accounts can pose a risk of alienating Hindu citizens in Bangladesh by formulating them as subjects of a foreign state, instead of as citizens of the nation-state. This is a weakness of secularism and religious pluralism ideals at the core of the Bangladesh political identity. In addition to that, the increasing role of India in the minority discourse in Bangladesh puts pressure on the domestic policymakers who have to strike a balance between the emerging minority rights and national sovereignty. The vision of foreign intervention makes it worse and undermines social solidarity.

4.2.6. India's strategic humanitarianism and political leverage

PPS-01, J-01, IS-01, and PL-01-02 assert that India's regional practice of defending minorities in Bangladesh as a matter of humanitarian concern is a double strategic intention. India's 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act, which grants Indian citizenship to religious minorities persecuted from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, is ostensibly based on humanitarian grounds. Nevertheless, it implicitly reveals that Bangladesh is a hostile state to its minority communities. This rhetoric serves not only to justify regional interference on behalf of India but also its international reputation as the "protector of Hindus." In light of the 2024 political uprising in Bangladesh, Indian officials, as well as the media, have increased discussion regarding the threat to Hindus, a narrative serving both to support domestic Hindutva ideology and to expand geopolitical influence globally.

4.2.7. The geopolitics of the region and calculated interventionism of India

PPS-01, J-01, IS-01, LMC-03, and PL-01-02 added that India's response to the political transition in Bangladesh would demonstrate the further recalibration of regional policy. The tenure of Sheikh Hasina has given India a dependable ally, especially in controlling the borders, countering terrorism, and restricting the impact of the Chinese in the South Asian front. Her dismissal shook these strategic alignments, and this was a cause of concern in New Delhi. By portraying the interim government of Bangladesh as inefficient in protecting the minorities, India not only aims at disqualifying the new government but also maintains an upper hand in Dhaka. This could offer the benefits to the BJP-led government of supporting a regional base and, at the same time, attract domestic constituencies with the rhetoric of Hindu victimization. The convergence of the ideological and strategic interests reveals how religious nationalism is becoming more intertwined with the regional geopolitics in South Asia.

Regrettably, the Indian foreign policy had always been guided by its faith in the Awami League (AL) and its Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, as a dependable ally in ensuring that the region is stable and resistant to Islamist extremist movements. Nevertheless, during the leadership of Hasina, the AL strategically used pro-Hindu rhetoric and symbolic displays to improve its relationship with New Delhi and tended to position itself as the only bearer of secularism and the rights of minorities. This alignment was a diplomatic phenomenon instead of a policy commitment. More than 3,600 cases of violence against religious minorities were registered in 2013-2021, although not one of them resulted in the completion of judicial processes. This longstanding culture of impunity highlights the gap between the governmental rhetoric on the protection of minorities and the actual governance. Instrumentalization of minority issues into political legitimacy, both nationally and internationally, therefore exposes the weakness of the secular system in Bangladesh during Hasina's rule and casts serious doubts on whether India is still supportive of a regime that has been highly symbolic rather than substantive in protecting minority rights. (Mostafa, 2025)

4.3. Regional Dynamics: the influence of China in Minority issues in Bangladesh

PPS-01, J-01, LP-01 added that China experiences its involvement with minority affairs in Bangladesh without direct interference or coercion; that is, most of its influence is indirect through its geopolitical, economic, and soft power policies as opposed to direct involvement in the minority affairs of the country.

The expansion of Chinese relations with Bangladesh in terms of large-scale investments, infrastructural development, and military relations has made it more influential in the area and in many cases to offset India. The relationship complicates Bangladesh in dealing with the sensitive issue such as minority rights since the nation wants to have a good relationship with both powers. (Baghernia&Meraji, 2020; Yasmin, 2023)

China has also increased its cultural activities in Bangladesh through Confucius Institutes, education exchange, and even through media collaboration. Although these efforts bring about the Chinese language and culture, they have also provoked the question of political influence and the formulation of the general narratives, including those of the minorities. (Alom, et. al, 2024)

China has been a diplomatic player in the Rohingya refugee crisis, and it has been pushing both Bangladesh and Myanmar to bilateral solutions. Its treatment has however been criticised to focus on regional stability and its strategic interests at the expense of the minorities and their humanitarian concerns. (Zahed, 2022)

China has, to a great extent, not given much attention to the discrimination of the minority communities in Bangladesh by Islamist factions due to its strategic and economic interests rather than human rights. However, in spite of reported cases of religious intolerance and violence, Beijing has directly talked with the leaders of Islamist groups like Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and Hefazat-e-Islam. These interactions, such as the invitations of China, are the signs of the practical diplomacy of Beijing to enhance bilateral relations and increase its influence in South Asia. Developing relations with the state and non-state actors, China attempts to guarantee that Bangladesh will follow its Belt and Road Initiative and other geopolitical aims in the region. (Antonopoulos, 2024)

4.4. Global Engagements: the Position of the OIC on Minority Rights in Bangladesh

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation is the world's second-largest intergovernmental organization, which aims to promote and protect the interests of the Muslim world and encourage peace and global harmony. Under its broad mandate, the OIC deals with human rights and minority rights, but its activities are usually perceived in the context of Islamic values. The organization is comprised of 57 Islamic nations that form a platform to cooperate in several areas, including politics and economics. (Majid, 2017).

PPS-01, J-01, IS-01, LMC-04 & PL-01-02 The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has been playing the smallest role in offering minority rights in Bangladesh. The institution is quite dormant in the country, and it is sad that the OIC has not been more observable or active in promoting communal harmony and peace in Bangladesh.

4.5. Global Engagements: the US and Minority Rights in Bangladesh

4.5.1. Western involvement and diplomatic pressure

The US and the European Union significantly influence Bangladesh's policies concerning minority rights under diplomatic pressure, conditionality of aid, and advocacy for human rights. US foreign policy is characterized by the principles of democracy and religious freedom, which are interconnected with the further development of bilateral cooperation, as reflected in such documents as the International Religious Freedom Reports and the Global Magnitsky Act (Datta, 2024). On the same note, the EU uses political discussions and commerce systems, such as the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+), to facilitate adherence to human rights principles, including NGOs and legal reforms that foster inclusivity and tolerance (Islam & Muhammad, 2022). However, the success of these external forces is limited by Bangladesh's prioritizing sovereignty, non-intervention, and domestic issues of institutional discrimination and political marginalization of minorities (Ahmed 2013; Mundhe, 2016; Raka&Rahman, 2024). PPS-01, J-01, IS-01, and PL-01-02, argued that, in most cases where there is violence against minorities in Bangladesh, the international community, including the US, UN, and EU, is quick to blame the Muslim-majority population- especially the Islamist groups without conducting adequate investigation or verifiable evidence. However, LMC-04 refuted that aforementioned assertion, emphasizing that the US puts immense pressure on the Bangladeshi government to maintain minority rights and implement effective measures for violations thereof.

4.5.2. Disagreement between rhetoric and ground realities

HMW01, J-01, PPS-01, PL-01-02, and IS-01 stated that claims of systemic violence against minorities in Bangladesh do not always reflect the realities on the ground. To illustrate, the argument by Donald Trump that mob violence against minorities would not happen in his administration presents a significant contrast to mostly peaceful and highly secure Durga Puja celebrations that demonstrate the desire of the government to achieve communal harmony (Trump Condemns Brutal Violence against Minorities in Bangladesh, 2024). The respondents claim that politics often drives such statements to attract voter blocs that worry about religious freedoms internationally, especially in the U.S. Hindu diaspora.

4.5.3. Misinformation and its regional implications

Misinformation regarding minority rights has distorted global perceptions of Bangladesh, complicating diplomacy and undermining credible human rights advocacy. Politically motivated diaspora networks, Indian media, and social media channels have often exaggerated incidents—such as communal unrest in 2021 and 2024—portraying them as state-backed persecution of Hindus. Fact-checkers including BBC Reality Check, Reuters, and Rumor Scanner have repeatedly debunked these claims (Mohsina and Kapur 2024). HMW01, J-01, PPS-01, PL-01-02 & IS-01 noticed that following Sheikh Hasina's resignation on August 5, 2024, false narratives falsely framing politically motivated violence as communal attacks proliferated, often accompanied by doctored images and videos from external actors.

4.5.4. The Role of Media and International Actors

HMW01, J-01, PPS-01, PL-01-02 and IS-01 contended that the Media narratives and false propaganda campaigns have exasperated tensions and anxieties. The Indian media and formation of committees to oversee the Bangladeshi Hindus creates the impression that the interim government cannot protect the minorities. These stories insinuate that the coming back of Hasina would only guarantee the safety of the minorities. In the same manner, the remarks of international political leaders such as Donald Trump are likely to fuel the tensions even further by introducing one-sided and sensationalized reports. The global actors should engage constructively with Bangladesh, based on proven evidence and the realization of Bangladesh past track record in ensuring religious harmony in its effort to stabilize the interim government.

4.5.5. Reassessing the ICHRRF narrative on minority rights in Bangladesh

Stories about the persecution of Hindus, demographic loss, and the domination by the majority have continued to take over much of the global discourse on minority rights in Bangladesh. This perception was strengthened by the report published by International Commission on Human Rights and Religious Freedom (ICHRRF), a U.S. based NGO in 2022 which controversially described the situation as ethnic cleansing, and likened it to the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. These comparisons however have serious methodological and ethical deficiencies. The weaknesses of the report are also the reliance on unproven testimonies, such as the one of the controversial personality who claims that 37 million minorities have disappeared PriyaSaha, who made false claims in the presence of former U.S. President Donald Trump, further weakening the credibility of the report. Despite the fact that Bangladesh periodically violates the tensions of communal character, they are not systematically or state-organized but, in the great part, localized and politicized. The ICHRRF's sensational framing neglects Bangladesh's secular constitutional foundations and documented efforts toward interfaith coexistence, rendering its conclusions politically motivated rather than empirically grounded. (Chowdhury , 2022)

5. Discussion

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony helps in understanding how dominant groups maintain power not just through coercion but by shaping the cultural and ideological terrain (Sardar, 2024). In India, Hindu nationalist actors (notably the RSS and BJP) embed Hindutva ideology across society by controlling and influencing education, religious institutions, and media, thus manufacturing consent and presenting their worldview as "common sense" (Deshmukh, 2021).

Hindutva hegemony is reinforced through the mass mediation of religious figures (gurus), the recontextualization of public rituals, and the "saffronisation" of public spaces and education. These practices create a homogenized Hindu identity, often by constructing Muslims as the "external Other" and Dalits as the "internal Other" to be incorporated. (Bhatia , 2020; Natrajan, 2021)

Media—both traditional and social—play a central role in normalizing Hindutva. The BJP's sophisticated use of social media and IT cells has transformed public discourse, branding leaders like Modi as embodiments of Hindu nationalism and recasting political events through a Hindutva lens. (Tahir&Mujahid, 2025)

Hindutva discourses extend beyond India's borders, influencing diaspora communities and framing neighboring countries especially Bangladesh as failing to protect Hindus, which serves to justify Indian hegemonic aspirations and reinforce domestic unity (Ghosh, 2015). However, the respondents argued that the transnational projection of Indian Hindutva ideology has generated a pervasive sense of fear and insecurity within Bangladeshi society, particularly by amplifying religious sensitivities and perceived external interference. This, in turn, has fostered a latent hostility among

segments of the Muslim majority toward the Hindu minority. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the broader Muslim community in Bangladesh continues to demonstrate a sustained commitment to interreligious harmony, mutual respect, and the principles of peaceful coexistence that underpin the nation's secular foundations.

Indian government also executes soft power strategy regarding geopolitical interference. Joseph Nye's concept of soft power—the ability to shape preferences and outcomes through attraction rather than coercion—offers a valuable lens for understanding how states use cultural and ideological narratives for geopolitical influence (Nye, 2004a).

The use of religious or civilizational identity to claim transnational moral authority aligns with broader trends where states assert “civilizational sovereignty” to justify interventions or policy stance. Such strategies can both enhance a country's soft power and provoke resistance from other states that view these moves as challenges to their own sovereignty. (Nye, 2004b)

The Western portrayal of minority issues in Bangladesh, often reflects broader patterns identified in media framing theory (Entman, 1993) as analyzed through media framing theory, often simplifies complex socio-political events into moral binaries, emphasizing victimhood and culpability. This is evident in the U.S. media's portrayal of Bangladesh, which tends to highlight religious intolerance while neglecting the political roots of unrest (Alam, 2021). This selective framing can distort causal realities and contribute to the securitization of Bangladesh's domestic politics, inviting external pressure and legitimizing interventions, particularly from regional actors like India.

Islamophobia theory posits that Western narratives often depict Muslim-majority societies as inherently intolerant and crisis-ridden, reinforcing a civilizational hierarchy that marginalizes these nations. This perspective is supported by media representations that frame Muslims as cultural outsiders and threats to security, particularly following events like 9/11, which intensified negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims in Western media (Rane et al., 2014; Suryandari&Arifin, 2021). Such biased narratives not only shape public perception but also influence diplomatic discourse, as seen in the overreactions to incidents involving minorities in Bangladesh, which can inadvertently validate Hindutva rhetoric in India by portraying Hindus as victims and justifying interference in Bangladesh's affairs (Kaul, 2020). This dynamic underscores the need for more balanced media practices to mitigate the perpetuation of Islamophobic sentiments and foster intercommunity understanding (Khan et al., 2024; Suryandari&Arifin, 2021).

Bangladesh's constitutional commitment to secularism and interfaith coexistence functions as a crucial safeguard against both ideological and geopolitical pressures. Nevertheless, historical patterns of impunity for communal violence, alongside the politicization and instrumentalization of minority issues, expose enduring gaps between statutory provisions and their effective implementation. These dynamics corroborate theoretical perspectives on secularism in postcolonial states, which posit that constitutional protections alone are insufficient without active institutional enforcement and societal legitimacy (Asad, 2003; Bhargava, 2010). The findings underscore the necessity of proactive governance, robust law enforcement, and sustained public engagement to reinforce secular norms and mitigate the external politicization of minority concerns.

Moreover, the study highlights that Bangladeshi Muslims, broadly speaking, have consistently demonstrated solidarity and sympathy towards minority communities, reflecting Islamic teachings that emphasize peace, coexistence, and harmonious relations with religious minorities. Islamist organizations such as Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and Hefazat-e-Islam including Marasah students have, in several instances, actively contributed to the protection of Hindu communities and the safeguarding of their religious sites especially after July 2024 revolution, underscoring the pluralistic dimensions of Bangladeshi Islam in practice (Aljazeera, August 7, 2024; Malik, 2024; *The New Indian Express*, 2024). Minority Rights exist in Islam and its leaders have practically implemented the commands of Allah and His messenger. History is witness to the fact that Islam granted special rights to the Minorities before more than 1400 years from now. The modern world recognized their Rights through United Nations only in 20th century.

The analysis further illustrates that minority rights and communal cohesion are simultaneously influenced by external ideological pressures and internal governance gaps. Hindu communities in Bangladesh occupy a particularly delicate position, navigating the intersection of national belonging and transnational ideological influences. Preserving secularism and social harmony

thus requires fostering interfaith solidarity, resisting divisive external narratives, and strengthening inclusive governance mechanisms capable of safeguarding minority rights while promoting national cohesion.

6. Recommendations

6.1. For the government of Bangladesh

6.1.1. *Strengthening domestic frameworks for minority protection*

LMC-01-02-03-04, HRW-01, LP-01, and PPS-01 underlined that Bangladesh government needs to strengthen institutional and legal mechanisms in defending minorities, guarding their religious institutions, prosecuting perpetrators of communal violence, and ensuring their clear administration of justice without any outside interference.

6.1.2. *Maintaining sovereignty under the influence of geopolitics*

PPS-01, IS-01, and PL-01-02 noted that the issue of religious diversity management at the autonomous level is critical to the sovereignty of Bangladesh. They stressed on the agenda of raising minority concerns in an open manner and avert the use of these concerns to undermine the governments in the regions, therefore, intensifying the national sovereignty and underlining the perception of Bangladesh as a fair, democratic, and independent nation.

6.1.3. *Enhancing democratic governance and institutional trust*

The majority of the respondents claimed that the interim government should strike a balance between stability and inclusivity since the downfall of the Hasina regime. They also focused their attention on enhancing the capability of law enforcement, winning trust in the judicial and electoral systems, and inclusive dialogue, and a clear roadmap to free and fair elections to showcase the democratic strength of Bangladesh and its revival.

6.1.4. *Strengthening the legacy of pluralism and resilience in Bangladesh*

Nearly all the respondents claimed that the unity exhibited in the last Durga Puja festivities, where the Muslims and Hindus cohesively secured the communal peace; depict the spirit of coexistence that has always existed in Bangladesh. The maintenance and encouragement of such instances of unity must be considered as a part of national policy and national educational efforts. Bangladesh can again be seen as an example of religious harmony in South Asia with a new commitment to justice, human dignity and equality.

6.1.5. *Enhancement of strategic partnerships to achieve regional balance*

It was advised by PPS-01 and PL-01-02 that Bangladesh consider scaling down its dependence on any individual regional power, most particularly, India through the diversification of its diplomatic relationship and economic ties with Pakistan, China, Turkey, and western powers. This multidirectional involvement would contribute to flexibility in geopolitics, protection of national interests, and allow Dhaka to act following sovereign and development-focused policies and reduce the influence of the unilateral region.

6.1.6. *Launching a strong national media system*

Majority of the respondents suggested that Bangladesh should enhance an independent, ethical, media sector with professional journalism and fact-checking and media literacy initiatives to counter the misinformation and Islamophobic narratives, proper domestic and international reporting, national unity, and the international image of the country should not be manipulated by foreigners.

6.1.7. *Authorizing minority people as agents of national unity*

The vast majority of the respondents indicated that the Bangladeshi Hindus are also part of the national identity of the country due to the strong historical and cultural investment they possess. They can be one of the most effective counter-narratives to efforts at communal polarization because of their active participation in the life of the nation and their opposition to the divisive external forces. Inclusivity by encouraging minority voices in the policy making and discourse will also ensure the concept that Bangladesh is as strong as its diversity is embedded.

6.2. For Civil Society and Religious Leaders

Developing media accountability and interfaith solidarity

PPS-01 and IS-01 have stressed that the divisive narratives that have splintered the Bangladeshi civil society, religious leaders, and media need to be countered by the Bangladeshi people, using interfaith cooperation as the method: to jointly hold their festivals and to protect the minority sites of their community, and in the process ensure social cohesion and challenge the image that Bangladesh is a religiously-divided society.

6.3. For Regional Actors: India***Enhancing regional stability by diplomatic exposure***

PPS-01 and PL-01-02 observed that the changing politics in Bangladesh influences the stability in South Asia. They called upon India, pursuing its policy of Neighbourhood First, to use constructive means in its regular diplomacy with Bangladeshi authorities, military, and civil society to avert rival interference and facilitate democratic process to maintain a balance of power and cooperation in the region.

6.4. For International Community**6.4.1. *Promoting international long-term support based on partnership, rather than intervention***

The majority of the respondents argued that the international community should take moderation and accountability in its involvement with Bangladesh. Instead of increasing sensationalized narratives or delivering political pressure, global players are to pay attention to building capacity, governance reform, and empowering civil society. Positive working relationships especially in the fields of human rights monitoring, interfaith schooling and institutional building can be used to assist Bangladesh in maintaining peace and pluralism.

6.4.2. *Enhancing the role of the OIC in the protection of the minority rights*

The arguments brought by PPS-01, HRW-01 and IS-01 stated that OIC needed to take the initiative to protect the rights of the minorities in Muslim majorities such as Bangladesh. The OIC can facilitate the provision of security and dignity to all citizens of the state by facilitating justice, equality and interfaith harmony through dialogue, coordination of policies and monitoring which represent the fundamental Islamic values.

6.5. For Hindu Community***Opposing the Hindutva hegemony and reasserting Bangladeshi patriotism***

PPS-01, PL-01 and IS-01 stressed that the Hindu community of Bangladesh should not be associated with the Indian Hindutva politics. The continuation of interfaith solidarity and national unity by collaborating with Muslim fellow citizens will save the pluralist tradition in Bangladesh and the opposition to the divisive discourses that would pose a threat to its inclusive and traditionally rooted identity and society.

7. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that the rights of the minority in Bangladesh are influenced as a result of the interaction between domestic politics and transnational ideology, regional geopolitics as well as global media discourse. The nationalist Hindu discourses of India, especially through the RSS and BJP, have a direct and indirect influence in the Bangladeshi society and the diaspora networks, creating tensions on communal harmony. At the same time, the global actors and western media tend to simplify the issues of minorities, which form moral opposites and distort realities in the local places, contributing to a rise in tensions and indirectly authorising Indian interventions. The strategic and economic involvement of China is another factor contributing to the balance in the region.

Bangladesh has overcome these challenges as evidenced by its constitutionally founded secularism, interfaith coexistence, and inclusive civic values and principles. The societies of Muslims and Hindus are also very active in their traditions of mutual respect and civil unity which is a sign of their ability to stay stable and resilient against any external forces. But there are still weak points, such as the impact of transnational Hindutva on the young generation, lack of selectivity in internationalizing minority stories, and lack of legal enforcement of minority rights.

To overcome these obstacles, it is necessary to support domestic legal systems, encourage civic patriotism based on the pluralistic legacy of Bangladesh, build stronger interfaith and civic civil society organizations, develop effective system of media to eliminate misinformation, and use strategic engagement with regional and international partners. These efforts can be facilitated by the OIC and other multilateral actors without interfering with sovereignty. As the experience of Bangladesh shows, the minority rights are not only based on the legal provisions but the social cohesion and the civic culture as well as the institutional stability, presenting an example of the tolerance and democracy stability in South Asia.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations, despite offering valuable insights into the nature of minority rights in Bangladesh's geopolitics. This work only addresses the rights of the Hindu minority and not other minorities like Buddhists, Christians, Hill Tracts indigenous people, Ahmadiyyah, Rohingya, Shia,

Biharis, and third-gender, and this restricts the externalizability of this work. It also provides no quantitative information, extensive field research, or longitudinal research to examine how the rights of minorities change over time in response to geopolitical changes. Moreover, the paper fails to provide comparative perspectives on other regional states that were experiencing the same level of minority-geopolitical difficulties as India, Myanmar, or Pakistan. Importantly, the research does not address the role of international mechanisms, including UN oversight (UPR, Special Procedures, OHCHR) and European Union pressures (e.g., trade conditionalities, human rights dialogues), which influence Bangladesh's policies and legal frameworks on minority protection.

The future study would be more multi-minority, adopt a mixed-methods approach, and use longitudinal and comparative study designs to include more comprehensive, empirically based, and regionally specific information on minority rights amid geopolitical pressures in Bangladesh. Additionally it should also examine how UN mechanisms and EU engagement influence Bangladesh's minority rights policies.

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