

INTERRELIGIOUS EMPATHY IN STRENGTHENING NATIONAL INTEGRITY OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Empathy in interreligious activism and harmony has tremendous impacts. Therefore, this study explores the influence and effectiveness of interreligious empathy in strengthening the national integrity of Bangladesh. Other related issues have also been investigated to get the whole picture. Hopefully, findings can cooperate with policymakers to determine the level of relationship between interreligious empathy and national integrity. Thus, the result will assist them in taking further steps to strengthen the national integrity of Bangladesh. Data have been collected using a qualitative approach, and the data analysis method is applied to analyze these to find relevant information. This study finds a significant correlation between interreligious empathy and the national integrity of Bangladesh. The peace-loving people of Bangladesh have a historical legacy of assisting each other. Communal violence and terrorism will not develop here permanently. The Zero Tolerance Policy of the Bangladesh government toward terrorism, Constitutional safeguards for religious freedom and expression, and unique amenities for the observation of different communities, religious festivals, and so on enforce interreligious empathy in Bangladesh. Interreligious empathy ensures stability and development and, ultimately, national integrity. Nurturing interreligious empathy is an appropriate strategy for the national integrity of Bangladesh, which is demonstrated in this study. An implication for policymakers is that they can put more emphasis on interreligious empathy.

Keywords: *Interreligious Empathy, Bangladesh, National Integrity, Development, People, Constitution.*

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Introduction

Religion is an integral part of the socio-religious lives of the people of Bangladesh. According to the Population & Housing Census 2022, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and other religions' adherents constitute 91.04%, 7.95%, 0.61%, 0.30%, and 0.12% of the total population of Bangladesh, respectively. People co-exist here peacefully, irrespective of religion, race, and caste. This co-existence and cohesion have a significant impact on national integrity and nation-building. However, more research needs to be conducted on how interreligious empathy contributes to national integrity. Although some researchers have focused on interreligious harmony in Bangladesh with a historical approach, little is known about how religious harmony and empathy work from the public stage to the government level in Bangladesh's unity and development. Although religious peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue have increased in recent years (Farid, 2022), the number of research on specifying Bangladesh and peacebuilding process is not sufficient. At the same time the literature on this comparatively new concept in the academic world, but old in practical areas, does not express proper and broad realities of interfaith empathy in Bangladesh.

In recent decades, the rise of terrorism and communal violence has increased. In most cases, religion is blamed as the cause of these conflicts and hatred, especially after the event of 9/11 (Garred & Abu Nimer, 2018). Smock (2016) regretfully mentioned that every major religion in the world has a relation to violence. Some terrorist groups, directly or indirectly, have risen in the name of religion, but his overstatement is not valid in every case. Religion is not the sole element behind conflicts. Besides, different faith-based organizations are engaged in many peacebuilding activities. Similarly, Swami Vivekananda, an Indian sage, supports religion's role in every peace and conflict that occurs in the world (Islam, 2002).

In addition to international affairs, religion has played an essential role in national integrity among cultures, different nations, and mixed religious societies like Bangladesh, where religion is all-pervading in people's lives. No country can gain its utmost development without harmony among the people. From the emergence of Bangladesh to her surprising economic development, unity among multi-faith people plays a vital role (Adams & Stark, 2015). However, communal conflict and violence are pretty standard in this land. However, inclusive and tolerant behavior toward each other is necessary for the national integration of Bangladesh.

Based on this background, this work aims to answer the targeted question; “How does interreligious empathy contribute to the national integrity of Bangladesh?” Thus, this research’s central objectives are:

- To determine whether interreligious empathy has any impact on the national integrity of Bangladesh.
- To analyze barriers behind establishing interreligious harmony.
- To develop ways to increase religious harmony among Bangladeshis.

The findings generated from this research can provide policymakers with a greater understanding of the significance of interreligious empathy in the national life of Bangladesh.

Besides, the article is formed as follows: First, the extant literature on interreligious harmony, dialogue, empathy factors for national integrity, etc., is reviewed to develop a conceptual framework. The methods and procedures executed in this research are explained. After that, the study’s results are presented in different sub-sections. Finally, the study gives some indications that come from Bangladesh’s national level.

Methodology

A qualitative approach has been followed in this research. The method used in the literature review is both qualitative and quantitative approaches and a multi-range of documents, viz., newspapers, articles, official documents, papers, texts, electronic documents, images, and other relevant sources were taken into consideration for data collection (Routledge Davie & Wyatt, 2011). Thus, a researcher can work with pre-existing data for an in-depth analysis in a qualitative document analysis. In the qualitative approach, the document analysis method is appropriate and scientific. It is a well-recognized method, and many researchers (Goldstein and Reiboldt, 2004; Hansen, 1995) have harnessed it. The nature and objective of the present study indicate that it will be convenient to go with this document analysis method. To find the significance of interreligious empathy in Bangladesh, researchers must rely on pre-existing available texts. Besides, from vast data sources, appropriate data are used with proper scrutinization, which is only possible with this method. While browsing data, relevant questions and supplementary data were found to help conduct the research. In this method, the researcher has the advantage of finding the reliability of one data by cross-checking with other data.

Thus, stability and broad data coverage can be confirmed (Bowen, 2016). Last but not least, different steps in executing research in document analysis, i.e., searching, sorting, analyzing, and synthesizing data (Labuschagne, 2003), are rigorously followed. Interreligious harmony, empathy, history of Bangladesh, and national integrities are some of the entries is searching necessary documents in different search engines.

Definition of Interreligious Harmony and Interreligious Empathy

The term interreligious harmony consists of three terms, i.e., ‘inter,’ ‘religion,’ and ‘harmony.’ Inter refers to within some units. Religion can be defined as the way people choose their lives, including their beliefs and communal practices, with necessary moral codes. At the same time, harmony denotes concord, with consensus among different entity elements. In other words, harmony is the absence of conflict. Li (2009) has explained harmony as a relational concept. To him, harmony is the co-existence of diverse entities. Harmony is a relational concept in the sense that it depends on the context and condition. Human society depends on the social condition to which man belongs. Cheng (2006) has expressed harmony similarly, stressing the context of cohesion. So, when harmony is spoken in the context of religion, it can be called interreligious harmony, where reciprocity and faith prevail among adherents of different religions.

Zuo'an (2013) explained interreligious harmony in general and particular ways. To him, interreligious harmony is a harmonious and shared development among individuals in a society and the earth. He has emphasized the global aspect of interreligious harmony, as at the present age of globalization, people from different religions, races, and regions meet directly or indirectly. Religious beliefs and practices are exposed worldwide through global technology and new media. Here, religious harmony is essential. In the same line, communal harmony is considered by Malik (2016) as the co-existence of people with love and peace irrespective of their religions, castes, and genders. Evaluating communal harmony, Alam (2022) has found that communal harmony aims to encourage a way of life where goodwill, harmony, and peaceful co-existence will be established based on religious values of love for all.

Another concept closely related to interreligious harmony is interreligious empathy. It is more or less similar to interreligious harmony. Through empathy, one values another's emotions. Empathy is the feeling that one understands another's well and woe as part of another's situation.

Here, selfish intention and hypocrisy are absent. It is like obeying the 'Golden Rule,' which is "Do unto others as you would have them, do unto you" (Matthew: 7:12). Unconditional affection and love for others is the core message of empathy. Often, two words, sympathy, and empathy, are mingled. But some differences remain between these two terms.

Sympathy means sharing other's feelings without understanding the actual position of that person. Islam (n.d.) has explained sympathy and empathy through an example (as cited in Akhter, 2020). Irritating toward his employee, an officer dismissed him from his job. When the employee got out of the room stumbled to the door. The officer asked whether he was okay. He offered the employee ointment. Here, the officer's care is out of his duty. It can be termed sympathy, as he did not do so out of his unconditional love towards the officer. On the other hand, love between a mother and a child can be termed empathy.

What is the process of being empathetic? To be empathetic, one has to know how to love without selfishness. One has to listen and realize other's emotional state. Finally, one needs to speak to the person about one's real empathetic feelings about others' emotional matters. One must be ready to support others in all the ways of life. Interreligious empathy among people helps to eliminate racism, hatred, violent crime, and bullying. Christchurch mosque attack in New Zealand in 2019 is the result of a lack of empathy. The attacker had a kind of hatred toward Muslims.

Religions of the world always spread the message of empathy toward every human being. If it is followed by the adherents of all religions, this world will be filled with peace. Promoting empathy, love, kindness, compassion, and so on is a must. From the beginning of human civilization, different religions promulgated the message of love for all. Islam (2022) was impressed when he found that the ethical teachings of every religion are identical. He has chronologically shown the peaceful messages of different religions. In the case of Bahaism, he has found, "desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself" (p.04). The teaching of the Islamic faith, as mentioned in Islam (2022), is "not one of you truly believers until you wishes for others what you wish for yourself" (p.04). From the academic perspective of the study of religion, it can be stated that, almost every religion preaches the message of interfaith empathy.

Similarly, Akhter (2020) has argued that empathy is the best way to maintain interfaith harmony and peace. Although people may adhere to

different religions, they are brethren of the same human family. It is God's divine plan that He has created many races and religions, but humanity is one. There is unity in diversity, which is beauty. Zuo'an (2013) has proposed some distinctive ways to promote interfaith harmony and, ultimately, interfaith empathy. According to him, support for harmony, mutual respect, social responsibilities, opposition to the abuse of religion, and watching out for extremism may ensure interreligious empathy and harmony.

Interreligious dialogue is another critical issue for ensuring interfaith empathy. In international politics, negotiation, alternatively dialogue, is seen as the essential tool for conflict resolution. Simply speaking, dialogue is a conversation among different parties. In a dialogue, participants join to exchange their perspectives to learn from the dialogue partners (Chatterjii, 1971). Dialogue has a special significance in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society. When representatives from different faiths discuss, their understanding of their tradition can be termed an interreligious dialogue. In this process, the partners have complete ideas about other religions, which would assist in eradicating conflict in the name of religion (Uysal, 2016). Singh (2021) stressed the interreligious dialogue's involvement in promoting understanding and developing acceptance among each other of different religious partners. This life is like a river. Religionists should cooperate with others rather than drown in crossing this river of suffering. Rozario (2022) measures interreligious dialogue in four levels, i.e., knowledge, action, spirituality, and morality.

The ultimate goal of interreligious dialogue is peace. The participants recognize each other through this process. Abu-Nimer (2003) urged interreligious dialogue to develop long-term relationships. The unity of humankind represents brotherhood. Acknowledging mutual respect, love, forgiveness, tolerance, and religious freedom via interreligious dialogue will help achieve religious harmony (Alam, 2022; Farid, 2022; Singh, 2021). Prophets have spread this message of harmony to build bridges among human beings. Acknowledging the Confession of diversity is mandatory for a peaceful world.

While diversity is beauty, unity in diversity is a necessity. In a country where multi-religious, cultural, ethnic, and lingual people reside, it is called a pluralistic society. But people from different identities unite together to establish a nation. This is called political integration. However, after a

state materializes, unity among its citizens is a prerequisite for its stability and development. Citizens should have patriotism and fellow-feeling.

National integration can be termed as a feeling or awareness among the citizens of a state through which they imagine themselves as a united unit irrespective of any difference of religion or race. They work for the common good of the nation. Simson (n.d. cited at nios.ac.in) argues that national integration is a type of loyalty to the country rather than any other kind of loyalty to other groups. In this process, commitment from local leadership is transformed to national leadership. So, a rise of national institutions in place of local organizations' autonomy is observed in this process. Local communities can integrate into a broader community (Mulyoto, 2011). The national feeling increases bonding among citizens. It is a similar process of turning from pre-modernism to modernism (Massialas, 1977). Weiner (1972) has identified five forms of national integration, i.e., (1) integration of cultural loyalties, (2) integration of political units, (3) integration of citizens, (4) integration of leaders and citizens, and (5) integration of organizations of persons.

Background Study and Analysis

The Emergence of Bangladesh: A History of Communal Harmony

The Pala Dynasty is the sole Buddhist dynasty in India. Hence, a flourishing of Buddhism in this dynasty has been noticed. It is the 'golden age of Bengal'. Besides associating with the growth of Buddhism, the Pala king patronized Hinduism. Even non-Buddhists found their position in high administrative posts. In a word, the Pala kings believed in interreligious and intercultural harmony.

After the Buddhist rule, the Muslim reign started in Bengal, preferably known as the medieval period (1204-1757) (Rahim, 1963; Tarafdar, 1965; Rahaman, 1995). The majority of the people of Bengal were Hindus. That is why the minor Muslim ruling regime had to maintain religious harmony in the state to develop Bengal. The Hindus found their position in administration and army (Huda, 2022). Whoever comes to Bengal accepts it as a melting pot (Begum, 2019). So, the historical background of Bengal is that of a multi-cultural society. Religious tolerance and freedom existed during the Sultanate and the Mughal period, although there were some allegations of destruction for personal economic gain, not state policy (Akhtaruzzaman, 2009).

The British East India Company established its first business center at Hariharpur in 1633 (Maiti, 1985). They reigned in 1757 after the Battle of Plassey (Tarafdar, 1965). The British initiated a 'divide and rule' policy to strengthen their oppression and exploitation. Muhammad Ali Jinnah proposed the 'Two-Nation Theory,' which states that two nations would be based on religion (Thomson Garrat, 1999). The Indian people, with their nationalistic zeal, stood against the British. So, the British found no other way to rule the sub-continent. In 1947, the Indian subcontinent was divided into two states, Pakistan and India, based on the majority of Muslims and Hindus. In the British period, this region witnessed different communal attacks and riots.

In 1947, present-day Bangladesh, which was named East Pakistan, became a part of Pakistan. The birth of Pakistan was on the foundation of religion. However, people in Pakistan were religious, harmony-loving people. On the other hand, the Pakistani ruling regime always tried to dominate the people of East Pakistan. They took Islam as a tool to justify their unfair actions towards the people of East Pakistan. The first incident was the State Language Movement of 1952 (Muhith, 1978), when the Pakistani ruling party, ignoring Bangla, tried to establish Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan. The people of East Pakistan protested this. The Pakistani ruling party tried to divide the Bengalees by using religion. They tried to ban the works of Rabindranath and introduce Arabic scripts in Bengal text. However, People in East Pakistan were non-communal. They protested and immobilized all the communal activities of the Pakistani government. Finally, in 1971, Bengalee Hindus and Muslims fought hand in hand to end Pakistani oppression permanently. In 1971, Bangladesh acquired independence with the leadership of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Overall, the history of the emergence of Bangladesh is the history of the fight for justice and peace. In this connection, protecting communal harmony and peace was one of the crucial founding stone of the emergence of Bangladesh.

The State Policy of Bangladesh

The Constitution of a country is considered a mirror of that country. The nation's philosophy is expressed in the Constitution. The main philosophy of the Bangladesh Constitution is the spirit of the Liberation War of 1971. Regarding this in the Preamble of the Constitution, it is said that:

I pledge that the high ideals of nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism, which inspired our heroic people to dedicate themselves

to and our brave martyrs to sacrifice their lives in the national liberation struggle, shall be the fundamental principles of the Constitution.

The central state policy is expressed in the above-mentioned passage. Here, secularism which can be best explained by the Bengali connotation *Dharma Nirapekshata* is one of the fundamental policies of Bangladesh. The other three vital state policies are also related to secularism. If it is spoken about nationalism, it can be said that the spirit of nationalism is only possible when people have harmonious relations and a sense of integrity. In a society where communal violence and religious hatred take place here and there, the development of solid nationalism is not possible. Socialism ensures the rights of every citizen- oppressed or privileged, minority or majority. If religious minority groups are deprived of their economic rights, the Constitution's policy regarding socialism will not come into force. Another policy, democracy, vie for people's dignity, rights, and freedom. If the opinion of religious minorities is not appropriately addressed, democracy will be fragile. Article 12 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh details secularism.

The principle of secularism shall be realized by the elimination of Communalism in all its forms.

- a) The granting by the state of political status in favor of any religion.
- b) The abuse of religion for political purposes.
- c) Any discrimination against, or persecution of, persons practicing a particular religion.

Articles 19, 27, 28, 29, 41 have provisions for religious freedom and equality of rights. So, the Constitution of the People's Republic clearly describes secularism and religious empathy as the primary tool for national integrity and development.

Interreligious Empathy and World Scenario

For the development of any nation or region, political stability, peaceful relations among people, investment from other countries, natural and industrial resources, and so forth are essential. Political scientists stress four critical elements of a state, i.e., 1) population, 2) territory, 3) government, and d) sovereignty (Kapur, 2010). With population, a state can be imagined. The state's government is elected and works for the people. Internal stability confirms the sovereignty of the state. Without the

notion of interreligious empathy in a multi-religious state, all of the key formulating elements will go in vain. This is true for all countries of the world.

For example, Australia and Sweden have taken interreligious dialogue initiatives to maintain state sovereignty, stability, development, and peace (Rahman, 2022). According to their website, Australia's Jewish Christian Muslim Association (JCMA) was established in Melbourne in 2003. The main aim of this association is to work as a bridge among different faith communities, e.g., Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Interreligious dialogue in Australia from an international perspective is an important working tool. One of their impressive activities is to visit different schools where they introduce different traditions of Australia. They aim to promote peace and justice for all human beings by reducing religious bigotry, violence, and racism.

Interreligious Dialogue and Action Week (IDA-Week) is a Swiss organization working for interreligious harmony and empathy. In its declaration, peace, and tolerance are the main objectives to be gained. To attain this goal, a fight against prejudices and radicalism is declared (Schmid, 2020). However, different terrorist groups based on religious fanaticism and radicalism also exist. They are a threat to world peace. In Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Nigeria, severe consequences of religious hatred and intolerance are observed. Syria and Afghanistan become failed states. Religion-based terrorist groups Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabab, ISIS, and Tehrik-i-Taliban are destroying stability in the world. Apart from organized terrorist groups, many individuals personally express their religious and racial hatred towards people of other faiths. For example, in the Christchurch Mosque attack on March 16, 2019, Breton Tarrant killed 51 innocent people (Stelloh, 2019). This type of hatred is occurring in different corners of the world.

In South Asia, a comparison between Bangladesh and Pakistan will show that Bangladesh is a heaven of interreligious empathy, and people work for national integrity. On the other hand, religious conflict is widespread in Pakistan. A comparative chart of the development of these two countries will show the importance of interreligious empathy in national integrity (Bangladesh Ministry of Finance, 2023; Pakistan Finance Division, 2023; World Bank, 2023).

Country	GDP Growth (%)	Per Capital Income (U.S. \$)	Life Expectancy (Year)	Literacy Rate (%)	Reserves (Bill. US\$)
	F.Y. 2022-2023	F.Y. 2022-23	Y 2020	F.Y. 2020-2021	Y 2022
Bangladesh	6.03	2765	72	74.1	33.7
Pakistan	0.29(Y 2023)	1568	66	62.8	9.93

Terrorism and Communal Violence in Bangladesh

Terrorists use violent ways to express their presence by intimidating people and destroying public property. Terrorists think the society is not in the right way. To bring society on the right track, violent activities through which revolutionary heroism can be shown are the perfect way. Through different stages of brainwashing, terrorists have forgotten empathy toward other people. They become cruel. They do not hesitate to operate any brutal activities towards their opposition, as they consider them inferior and evil. Recently, the world has witnessed many incidents of brutal attacks in different schools in Europe and North America (Engelbrecht, 2023). The innocent school children do not know why they are targeted.

Bangladesh is the fourth largest Muslim country in population (Pew Research Center, 2011). In Bangladesh, the nature of terrorism is religious, extremist, and political; Riaz (2008) opines that the returners of the Afghan War brought extremist ideology inspired by Ohabi idealism in the Middle East and other international terrorist organizations. Major General Zia-ur-Rahman, the then President of Bangladesh, has introduced different Islamist policies in Bangladesh to legalize their power using religion in the name of politics. These steps paved the way for the introduction of extremism and Islamic militancy here (Kabir, 2001).

The leading militant group in Bangladesh is Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam Bangladesh (HUJI-B), formed in 1992. It has a link with Al-Qaeda (Vaughn, 2007). Their different atrocious activities include an attack on poet Shamsur Rahman and former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Bombing at Ramna Park during the Bangla New Year celebration is one of the violent example of terrorism in Bangladesh by them. Other militant groups in Bangladesh are Jamat-u-Mujahideen in Bangladesh (JMB), Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), the Ansarullah Bangla Team, Purba Banglar Communist Party, Lashkar-e-Toiba, Allah’r Dal, Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Hizb-ut-Tawhid (Akhter, 2020).

A significant increase in terrorist attacks and militant groups has been noticed during 2015. AQIS, I.S., and the Ansarullah Bangla Team have declared their presence in Bangladesh. Holey Artisan Bakery hostage crisis (2016), bombing of Shia Ashura ritual at Dhaka (2015), attack during Sholakia Eid prayers (2016), murder of atheist bloggers, communal violence during Durga Puja at Cumilla and Gaibandha (2021), and Ramu violence (2012) all have local and international terrorist dimensions (Riaz, 2017; Akhter, 2020).

The Institute for Economics and Peace (2023) has found in their report on the Global Terrorism Index 2022 and 2023 that Bangladesh has ranked 40th and 43rd, respectively, among different countries of the world. In 2018, it was the 25th for Bangladesh. These statistics show a clear improvement in Bangladesh regarding the diminishing of terrorism. The progress in this field results from the 'Zero Tolerance policy to Terrorism' of the present government. Counter Terrorism Unit, with the support of other law agencies, has driven several successful operations against terrorist groups. These efforts have shown the growth of terrorism in Bangladesh. However, terrorist groups are still reorganizing themselves under new names.

Interreligious Empathy in Establishing National Integrity of Bangladesh: from root level to policy level

Bangladesh is a land of interreligious harmony. From its very origin to today, Bengal, Bangladesh, shows its secular nature. Bengalee culture is that of peace-loving. In medieval Bengali literature, poet Chandidas boldly declares (Shekhar, 2012);

Sobar upore manush satya

Tahar upore nai.

Meaning: 'There is none above human being'. The same tune is found in the works of other Bengalee poets, i.e., Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Shamsur Rahman, Jibananda Das, Sukanta Bhattacharya, Lalon Shah, Hason Raja, Sufia Kamal and so forth. This trend continues till now.

Bengalees are ethnically a hybrid nation. They have blood connections with Mongoloid, Negroid, Caucasoid, and Australoid (Islam, 2021). Later, the Arabs, the Europeans, and other nations came here. Link with different cultures makes them harmonious people. The rise and growth

of different religious traditions, e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity mainly, is amazing. People from each of these communities work hand in hand for the nation's development. The Constitution of the People's Republic confirms this co-existence. State policy enhances this harmony. For example, the national anthem of Bangladesh is composed by Rabindranath Tagore. The government provides holidays on religious occasions for different communities, which is not found in any other country. National programs start with recitation from the holy texts of four major religions (Islam, 2011). The government has understood that any division among people will not bring good results for the country. Harmony and stability will provide more national integrity. In a multi-religious and multi-cultural country like Bangladesh, interreligious and intercultural empathy among people is a must for all kinds of development. Bangladesh is in the history of development at present, which is only possible because of the existing interreligious empathy among the citizens of Bangladesh (Bangladesh Ministry of Finance, 2023). People, especially those residing in villages, trust faith leaders greatly. Education, arbitration, social reforms, and other development topics are more effective when religious leaders come forward to associate for implementation. Thus, in the national integrity discourse, religion can play a vital role (Adams, 2015).

Along with the government, root-level people can work to increase national integrity. From the British period to the present Bangladesh, people protest against discrimination against people irrespective of religion and culture. Zia-ur-Rahman and H.M. Ershad tried to change the secular nature of Bangladesh, but the people of Bangladesh, with their harmonious notion, did not support them and establish a democratic nation. When there were attacks in Ramu and Cumilla, human chains were formed by general people to express their grievances against such atrocities. Faraaz Ayaaz Hossain is the model of secular Bangladesh who has sacrificed his life for the saving life of foreigners during a terrorist attack at Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka (Ahmed, 2016). These activities show the importance of interreligious empathy in building national integrity.

Conclusion

This study investigated the significant role of interreligious empathy and harmony in building national integrity at the root and policy levels in Bangladesh. To the best of this researcher's knowledge, it is the first

specific research to manifest the relation between interreligious empathy and national integrity in Bangladesh. This study, along with other previous studies, shows that interreligious harmony is essential for the development of a country. The history of Bangladesh demonstrates her secular nature. Rulers from the ancient period to the medieval period had many concerns about national integrity and using empathy toward citizens. When there has been the rise of extremism, divide and rule policy, Islamism in state policy, and so forth, the people of Bengal have protested against these. Finally, with the Liberation War in 1971, Bangladesh emerged as an independent country. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has different elements related to interreligious empathy. The philosophy of the Constitution is to integrate people through a common identity, and that is Bengalee. As per the research objective, this study has found that terrorism, extremism, and political use of religion are some barriers to building national integrity.

In general, the results indicate that the people of Bangladesh are secular and work with each other to develop the country. They are the resources of the country when they are united. Moreover, this study finds that despite the rise of extremism and militancy in the 1980s, this cannot grow in this land because of the interreligious empathy among people. The government has taken many initiatives to bring the misguided individuals correctly.

This research proves that religion plays a vital role in people's lives. Sociologist Durkheim (1965) stressed the function of religion in a society. Religion gives meaning to life, reinforces social unity, controls the well-wishers of every humankind, and promotes positive social change. Bengalees subconsciously follow these religious roles, providing significant national integrity elements.

In addition, government initiatives to take more and more projects on interreligious empathy, understanding, and cooperation among citizens, respect toward each other, initiatives to discourage religious extremists, programs on interfaith dialogues, educating students about the importance of pluralistic society in the age of globalization, deradicalizing fundamentalists through dialogue for ensuring social stability, promotion of right and justice, resistance of abuse of religion and last but not the least advancing the causes of interreligious empathy can fabricate national integrity of Bangladesh (Zuo'an, 2013; Zulkeffliatal, 2018; Rahman &

Khambali, 2013). This research presents logical, solid support for the importance of interreligious empathy in a nation like Bangladesh for national integrity and progress.

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