Managing Minority Issues in Bangladesh: A Case Study of Micro-minorities

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Abstract

The task as suggested above is indeed a challenging one. The term ‘minority’ itself is loaded and contested concept. Essentially, it remains a construct and divide of the modern state, more importantly a pointer of modern state’s failure to accommodate the pluralities and diversities of its population. Bangladesh, a predominantly politically constructed ‘Bengali Muslim’ majority state has more than 45 ethnic/minority communities which the state has so far failed to recognize constitutionally as well as institutionally. Consequently, the cultural, political and economic rights of the minority communities continue to be violated which further marginalizes them. It is somewhat of an irony that among the minorities the relatively numerically dominant ones have managed to gain some space either due to their resort to armed conflict or few among them have acquired a relatively higher literacy rate which has provided them national and international exposure. Micro-minorities, on the other hand, are trapped in the historio-political construction of ‘majority-minority’ categorizations. In fact, and more tragically, they have ended up as a ‘subset’ of minority community, where the latter is more restricted to the relatively numerically large minority groups such as the Bengali Hindus and Buddhist Chakmas, with little or no attention allotted to them. Demography or what ought to be regarded as the political economy of population studies marked them distinctively, particularly from the time population census began to be conducted, not so much to address their plight as much to shun them off from majoritarian discourses. In this respect, the constitution of democracy within the fold of crass or aggressive majoritarianism, a feature that is very much predominant in Bangladesh, cannot help but marginalize them further. The paper will discuss this in some details with particular reference to nine communities, namely, Oraon, Paharia, Hajong, Khasia, Munda, Manipuri, Rakhaine, Garo and Santal.