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Overcoming Socio-Cultural Exclusion Through Skill Execution: A Case Study of the Minority *Biharis* in Dhaka

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Abstract

Minority communities often face economic struggles. It becomes even worse when they are socially marginalized. For their survival, they adopt different methods to overcome it. There are destructive methods and constructive methods. Community-based entrepreneurship that allows for the execution of particular skills has proved to be one suitable constructive method to overcome their struggle. However, most research does not go further to check whether that method can sustain their existence for good. This study is on a particular group of minorities called Biharis, which refers to the people from the state of Bihar, India, residing as a marginalized group inside a particular sector in Dhaka, Bangladesh. To survive, they have adopted a particular crafting skill of making Benarasi Saree. Saree refers to a traditional garment worn by women in South Asia, while Benarasi refers to something related to the city of Benaras in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. After a couple of generations, who not only helped overcome the economic struggle to some extent but also brought social inclusion, they faced a new struggle that threatened to make them give up that skill. The aim of the study is to find out what they are thinking to overcome this new struggle. The researchers adopted the qualitative method, searching for a grounded theory by collecting data through participant observation. Later, immersive techniques were applied to extract the implicit themes. Findings suggest that even though they have the passion to keep the skills going, they are ready to give them up without prejudice in order to survive, which brings to attention how significant the intervention from the top is if such rare skills develop in marginalized societies and later cease to exist.

Keywords: Minorites, Marginalized communities, *Biharis*, *Benarasi,* Socio-cultural exclusion

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Minority communities exist in various contexts. They often struggle to exist primarily because of lack of economic solvency. In severe cases, they are also marginalized, which adds to the misery. They are often deprived of access to basic human rights such as proper shelter, good education, access to health facilities, lack of recreational facilities and such. Some situations are politically motivated, and not easy to resolve. In some cases, the authorities have lack of resources to help them. Some others are purely because of lack of proper planning (Imai et al, 2011). Though in some cases, the members of these communities have no other choice but to get engaged in illegal activities, the good thing is that in many cases, this kind of marginalized communities find a way through some sort of constructive skills, and /or by venturing entrepreneurship through community-based enterprises. However, one continuous struggle the minorities always face at some stage of their survival is social exclusion. The social majority around them always come up with one excuse or more to seclude them in greater communal or social activities, and thus making just survival even harder, let alone social inclusion (Ahmed et al, 2023). This study focuses on a particular marginalized community in Dhaka, Bangladesh, comprising a group of minorities called *Biharis*, and focuses how they are trying to overcome various struggles in order to fight for their survival and at the same time trying to avoid social inclusion.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Community Based Enterprises

Human beings survive through communities. Community is a social foundation that can support a variety of enterprises of different shapes (Hertel et al 2019, Defourny and Nyssens, 2008). The nature of the participants and their shared interest are the key factors in a community. The contribution of the participants in a community will differ based on their position in the community and the issues that they care about. Depending on the number, small or large groups of people or organizations can form communities. The key is that the participants share a common interest. From a regional viewpoint, communities might differ based on the geographic borders they have,

such as township, city, state, or country. However, community can be formed by non-physical criteria as well. Different political groups or recreation enterprises such as the sports or arts can likewise be represented by communities (Fischer and Nijkamp, 2009). Social networks between the participants give people access to information, funding, and growth possibilities that can help them decrease risk of losing the standard of their lifestyle, and achieve common goals. When community-based entrepreneurs work together to achieve both social and financial goals, they form social businesses. Communities can be entrepreneurial when they act together to build a social venture through sharing relational traits. The community is an important part of social entrepreneurship because it creates an environment that determines the types of entrepreneurial activity that occurs. Many communities are built on a social affair, and community-based entrepreneurs are known for this. Generally, people may suffer difficulties such as poverty, a lack of skills, illiteracy, inadequate health-care systems, etc. Most of the time these are the issues that cannot be solved on an individual basis but can be solved more effectively through collaborative efforts. It is necessary to bring together the poor and the disenfranchised in order to solve individual or collective concerns (Yunus, 2008).

Because of the efforts of dedicated individuals to promote self-employment, community-based entrepreneurship has evolved. Community-based entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a potential development option. All over the globe, the general model of community-based business is the same. It is managed by a single person or a group of people who are economically similar. It has been acknowledged as an excellent instrument for developing the ability of underprivileged groups (Rao, 2003). Every step of the way, from societal hurdles to the market, the community-based entrepreneurial enterprise faces difficulties. Because of socioeconomic constraints, this type of entrepreneurship occurs among the most marginalized people. Studies have demonstrated that via entrepreneurial activities based on collective effort, they can escape the quagmire of poverty and immobility (Suresh and Saravan, 2013).

Community-based entrepreneurship has paved the way for poor people's mobilization and empowerment, allowing them to better control their own well-being and benefit from economic activity. The increase of entrepreneurial activities is a key component of the overall economic development strategy. Community-based entrepreneurship is rather straightforward; management is long-term, and they focus on intensive innovation firms. Unsatisfactory institutional support, ranging from money to technical aid, limits the goal and impacts the ability to meet basic entrepreneurial requirements (Parwez, 2017). However, even though entrepreneurial activity can play a big role to overcome economic struggle for a community, scopes become limited if the community is comprised of minorities.

2.2 Struggle for Communities Comprised of Minorities

Community based enterprises already becomes difficult to be initiated or sustained when the community is poor. It is intensified if the community is a minority. Discriminatory hurdles have frequently hampered minority business enterprises' efforts to attain these educational and business-related experiences, as well as the other basic components of business viability. These constraints frequently result in overly tiny, less profitable, and overall unviable businesses. Schermerhorn (1996) has defined the ‘minority’ people as those who are in a subordinate position to their numbers but determined to maintain their cultural identity from the majority people. Farzana (2008) further disintegrated into five components, namely: smaller in number; has a status as subordinate compared to the communities of the majorities; has a different ethnic, religious, and/or linguistic traits compared to the communities of the majorities around them; has a will or wish to preserve or safeguard or strengthen the patterns of their lifestyle; and in some cases, has the issue of not having the citizenship of the country they reside. For example, South Asians are minorities in the United States, based on their number, ethnicity, or religious status. Hispanics are minorities there in terms of linguistic traits and ethnicity, and in some cases, citizenship issues. Chinese communities are known for their efforts to safeguard their cultural traits such as food habit (Lu and Fine, 1995).

If a community is comprised of minorities, their community-based enterprises are distinguished by the higher challenges they face while striving to get these key building components. The entire process is more challenging for minorities than it is for the society's large or major group of people (Bates, 1997). Access to financial resources and product markets is constrained by applicable obstacles; access to skills and expertise that enable firm creation is sometimes limited. Barriers frequently result in extremely small and less sustainable enterprises when compared to those controlled by non-minorities. The increased prevalence of marginal firms leads to higher dropout rate among minority-owned businesses. Finally, barriers hinder some aspiring minority enterprises from ever venturing into self-employment. The structure of the minority corporate sector is very distinct than it was during the 20th century. Business diversity has blossomed as its size and breadth have grown. Today's rising areas of minority enterprise are associated with large firms that frequently service a racially diversified customer. These companies are increasingly selling to other companies, especially huge multinationals. Because the participation of minority owners has been traditionally small, these areas are referred to as developing lines of minority enterprise. It was observed that community-based entrepreneurs employ community assets such as financial, professional, and labor resources to overcome the hurdles of poverty (Johnstone and Lionais 2004). The capacity of community-based entrepreneurs to utilize resources was dependent on the trust placed in them by others. The trust placed in them by society raised the value of their social capital, which they effectively leveraged to attain their goals (Bourdieau, 1986). Therefore, it is seen that the enterprises by the minorities often fall short. That is when their last resort is to offer whatever skills they have to the local bigger agents who control the market.

This focus of this paper is on the ‘*Biharis’,* a particular community in the city of Dhaka, Bangladesh, which is not only localized inside a physical territory, and burdened by poverty, but also are comprised of minorities. They are outnumbered by the surrounding communities, rated as subordinated by their neighboring communities, have a different linguistic trait, struggling to sustain their cultural identity, and has complex citizenship issues. However, this particular case study is unique because of one very significant issue. This community members have a particular sophisticated crafting skill unmatched locally, a special handloom crafting skill brought into the country many years ago, but widely practiced by this particular community in Dhaka City (Shahid and Sen, 2018). While all those five elements are a hindrance, the skill is the positive part of this particular case study. The combination of those negative elements and the lone positive element make it a very interesting phenomenon. The way their particular skills were exploited in a community-based entrepreneurship has made the interaction more complex, and possibly very unique. However, before going into the details of the nature of this particular skill embedded into their community-based entrepreneurship, it is important to look into the history of the *‘Biharis’*, and the particular skill they possess.

2.3 *Biharis:* A Minority Community in Dhaka

The Indian Independence Act was passed in 1947 by the British government, which opted to put the Indian subcontinent's independence on hold. Two-nation theory promoted this distinction and firmly rooted nationalist feelings in both Pakistan and India, the two proposed countries. Religion served as the line of demarcation separating them. However, the concentration of Muslims was in two separate areas in the subcontinent what is now Pakistan and Bangladesh, marked as West and East Pakistan respectively at that time. They were geographically separated by 2,000 km with India in between. But the imminence of independence associated with the assurance of the separation of religion brought cheers among the Muslims in both East and West Pakistan and the Hindus in India and tempted them to ignore till now so many other issues associated with this separation (Khanna 2023).

Religion could not maintain this bond for very long. As many nations have attempted to do so in the past and failed, separating religion from politics is not a simple feat for a nation. At the beginning, religion served as the social glue that tried to hold people from very different cultures together and promoted stability, which worked in this case as well. But it was not free from its fatal consequences. The first of them was the conflict associated with the migration of the minorities of both regions to the other region. To be specific, it was the crisis related to the Muslims of India fleeing to the two parts of the newly built Pakistan, and the Hindus of those two parts of Pakistan fleeing to India. It forced 10-12 million people to flee their homes (Talbot & Singh, 2009). As a result, a massive refugee crisis erupted. One of the major groups was the *Biharis*, who were Muslims living in India. Hailing mostly from Indian State of Bihar, a neighboring state at the West of current Bangladesh. Today's *Biharis* were major victims of the partition. Though named as *Biharis* they actually migrated from various Indian provinces other than only Bihar. They fled to East and West Pakistan, fearful of being killed by militant Indian Hindu nationalist groups. Since 1947, nearly 1 million Biharis have migrated to Eastern Pakistan i.e., current Bangladesh. They fled to avoid the communal clashes that erupted after the partition (Muquim, 2017).

Initially, the influx of Biharis was not viewed negatively by the Bengali people in East Pakistan (current Bangladesh) as an expression of Muslim communal feelings. Following partition, many well-off Hindu families migrated to India, leaving their properties in Bangladesh behind. Bengali Muslims and freedom fighters, including new immigrant *Biharis*, seized their lands. Muslim emigrants from India were not considered foreign or minority at the time. The country was characterized by communal harmony. Above all, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the national leader of Bangladesh, welcomed *Biharis* to East Pakistan (Chatterjee, 1973).

These *Biharis* had multiple skills. The railway industry employed the majority of the *Bihari* populace. Due to their skills, they were able to work as entrepreneurs, doctors, public servants, industrial workers, clerks, and railroad workers. However, once the partition was established, issues other than religion started to make an impact. Due to their physical resemblance to West Pakistanis with their paler skin, *Biharis* often thought of themselves as superior to Bengalis, which occasionally resulted in interethnic warfare (Hashmi, 1996). The other major issue was the stark difference between the cultures, especially starting with the differences in language. The quest for freedom in East Pakistan was gaining momentum based on the fact that the Bangladeshis rejected Urdu as the only national language of Pakistan, imposed by the West Pakistani Government. Therefore, the Biharis, who spoke Urdu, were not welcome anymore. the development of Bengali customs and culture in East Pakistan i.e., Bangladesh, the coexistence of *Biharis* with the Bangladeshis did not succeed in fostering communal harmony (Hashmi, 2022).

Biharis favored a unified Pakistan because of their innate ties to West Pakistan, language and religion being the major two similarities added with the skin color issues (Sattar, 2013). In 1960, they backed quasi-military rule, and in the election of 1970, they eventually backed a united Pakistan. The Biharis were thus unwelcome, despised, and hated in East Pakistan, which eventually demanded independence from West Pakistan as a result of their blatant support for West Pakistan. However, despite *Biharis'* strong support from West Pakistani elites, the rivalry and discontent between Bengalis in Bangladesh and the *Biharis* persisted. Bengali political elites denounced the notion that Urdu speakers enjoyed advantages in areas where Bengalis predominate. The Muslim League, the dominant political party in the then East Pakistan, exploited people's sentiments toward language and religion as the conflict reached its peak (Muquim, 2017). *Biharis* enthusiastically backed Pakistani armed forces; some of them even sided with the opposition during the freedom war of Bangladesh in 1971. *Bihari* people were exposed to Bengali hatred following the Pakistani military's surrender since they had publicly backed the West Pakistani military throughout Bangladesh's independence war. The Bangladeshi government initially gave citizenship, but there was disagreement over it. Some of them became citizens of Bangladesh and integrated themselves into Bangladeshi culture. The remainder of them opted to return to Pakistan rather than accepting citizenship. Their identity dilemma started as a result of this. Allegiance to a specific nation is required for citizenship status. In the case of the *Biharis*, those who chose to leave Bangladesh and relocate to Pakistan were not eligible to become citizens. They subsequently settled in a camp. They became stateless.

An agreement known as the New Delhi Agreement was signed in August 1973 by the governments of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. To address the issues facing stateless persons, the agreement was signed. This deal had important ramifications, one of which being Pakistan's decision to accept 170,000 *Bihari* people. However, the Bhutto administration in Pakistan at that time lacked enthusiasm for the repatriation of *Biharis*. So occasionally, several political figures from Bangladesh brought up this subject at various international forums. Pakistan repatriated several *Biharis* between 1972 and 1999 (Table 1). However, a huge group still remained stateless in Bangladesh (Khatoon, 2022).

Table 1: Number of repatriated Biharis over the years (Sen, 1999)

Year	Number of repatriated Biharis
1973-1974	163,072
1979	9,872
1982	4800
1993	325

Figure 1: A bird's eye view of a *Bihari* camp in Dhaka, showing a stark difference in built-form from the taller buildings around (Source: authors, 2023)

In 116 harsh camps in Bangladesh, a linguistic minority of about 300,000 *Biharis* live (Figure 1). They speak Urdu, the official language of Pakistan. In Bangladesh, they are known by a variety of names, including non-Bengalis, *Biharis*, and Urdu speakers, among others, in the local society. Their citizenship was recognized, and they were given the appellation Urdu Speaking Bangladeshi by the High Court of Bangladesh in 2008. They are not, however, considered a linguistic minority in Bangladesh. The camp occupants have now lived in these settlements for more than 40 years, which is a typical illustration of a sub-human lifestyle. The community's inability to get equal access to jobs was commonly emphasized. In addition to being routinely excluded from all government jobs, discrimination against Urdu speakers in the job sector is still a major issue because of their address and unclear status. Indeed, individuals who do secure formal work frequently experience salary discrimination and treatment disparities. As a result, the vast majority are forced into the unorganized sector where they receive pitiful wages as rickshaw pullers, drivers, butchers, barbers, mechanics, and craft workers. The people that live in *Bihari* camps are extremely poor. They lack access to education, health care, and economic development because of poverty and state discrimination. The group of Urdu-speakers and *Biharis* engages in very few economic activities, most of which are concentrated in their settlements and homes. They engage in various activities, including small businesses and day labor, food vending, eating establishments, handicrafts, sequin work, Jari, Karchupi, etc. Jari refers to Gold or Silver threaded lace, and Karchupi refers to the manual needlework on clothes. Inside the neighborhood, most family members, including women and kids, work at various handcraft businesses, sell Karchupi, and make and sell their own meals. However, the skill in crafting Benarasi Saree, is the most unique of them all, and they are often attached with that identity by the local outsiders.

2.4 *Benarasi*: A Special Crafting Skill of the *Biharis*

The *Benarasi saree* originated in Benaras, a city in northern India, during the Mughal era in the 16th century. Since then, the Muslim immigrants from Benaras have been producing *Benarasi sarees* around several parts of the subcontinent (Shahid and Sen 2018, Ferdous et al., 2014), and in Dhaka, they settled in Mohammadpur and Mirpur (Figures 2, 3, and 4).

a) b)

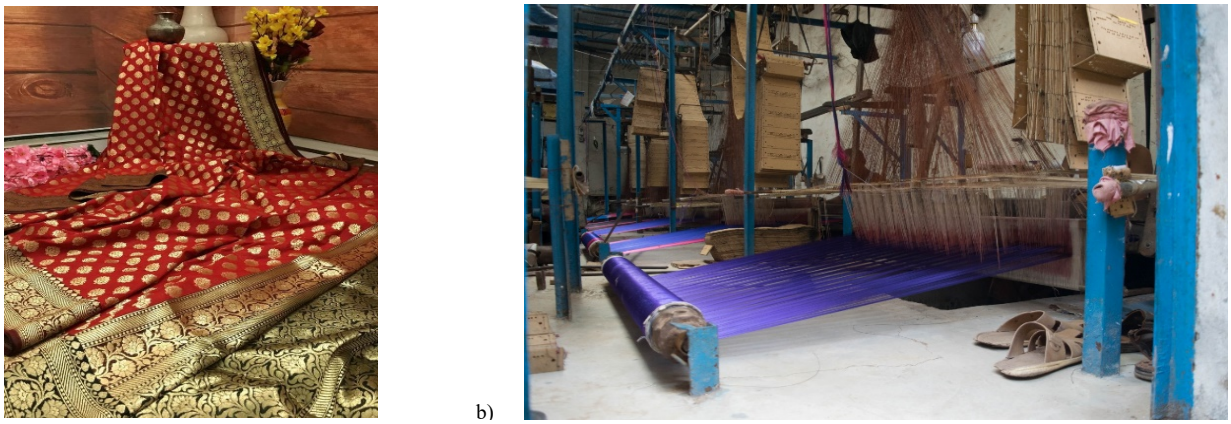

Figure 2: a) A typical *Benarasi Saree*, b) A craftsman is working on the handloom machine (Source: Authors, 2023)

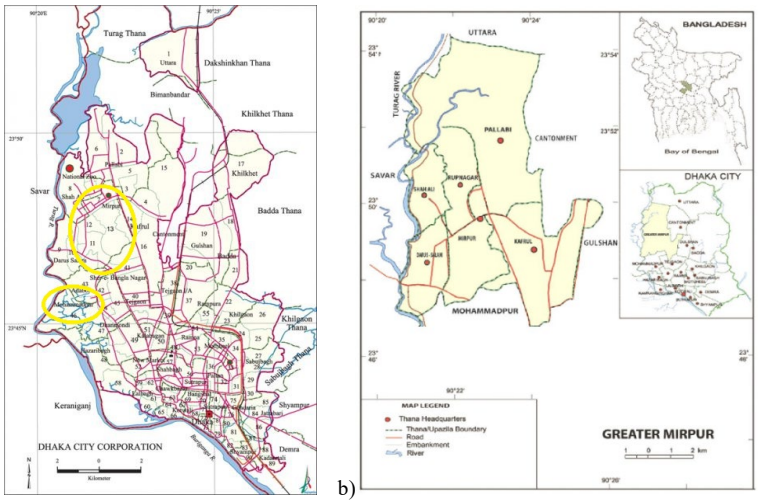

Figure 3: a) Map showing Mohammadpur and Mirpur inside Dhaka City marked with yellow circles, b) A close up look at Mirpur, the context of this research (DNCC, 2023)

Figure 4: a) View of a major node serving as one entry point to the camp, b) a city road separating the surrounding neighborhood from the camp to the right, c) a busy alley inside the camp, d) another alley in the camp, e) view of the interior of one house where a worker is engaged in making *Benarasi sarees* (Source: authors, 2023).

The cottage textile industry in Bangladesh has a long and illustrious history. One of Bangladesh's oldest traditions is the Benarasi Palli, with its renowned Benarasi Saree. Palli refers to a neighborhood where the residents have homogeneous livelihoods.

Over a very long period, this business has helped the nation gain notoriety. From Benaras, India, came the artisans of 'Mirpur *Benarasi Palli*'. Additionally, a small number of weavers are from Bangladesh, as are the majority of the traders. *Benarasi* is primarily known for its bridal attire. The demand for this industry is high both locally and internationally, but nowadays it receives very insufficient attention. Sections 10 and 11 of Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh, are where one can find 'Mirpur *Benarasi Palli*. There are approximately 110 stores, 11,000 weavers, designers, and other workers, according to the trader's organization. Since 1947, the majority of Bangladesh's *Benarasi* weavers have resided. When the *Biharis* were forced to settle down in Mirpur, they found the *Benarasi Palli* at their proximity. It was from that time onwards, they gradually started to learn this skill.

2.5 Economic Struggle of the *Biharis*

Because of their financial instability, the *Bihari* people live in severely poor economic conditions. They were mostly depending on the relief economy during the early years, but with time, the supply of relief has substantially decreased. According to reports, the Bangladeshi government used to pay only approximately $250,000 USD each month on meeting their basic needs, which is far too little (Ahsan & Hussain, 1990). Recently, though, this help has been drastically cut back and even stopped in some circumstances. The inhabitants of the

camps are restricted to the camp perimeter and do not possess any land outside of the camps. Land ownership is particularly significant because the country's economy is primarily agro-based. However, immovable assets like ponds and land are not owned by the *Bihari* people. Due to the restricted employment opportunities in agricultural operations, the economic situation of the camps outside of the Dhaka area is extremely dire. Within the camps' boundaries, residents participate in a variety of activities. While campers in Dhaka City can occasionally find regular employment as rickshaw drivers and construction workers, they frequently endure harassment and prejudice (Rahaman et al, 2020).

The majority of *Biharis* are wage laborers. In Mirpur camp, the *Bihari* residents labor as barbers, *saree* manufacturers, and other menial tasks. They work in great numbers to produce *Benarasi Saree*. They proved to be quite skillful in it and due to the big number of them involved in this craft, it somehow gave them an identity that they like to cherish (Ferdous et al., 2014). However, because to the significant influx of imported items, their *saree* businesses have recently been losing market share. Additionally, they frequently experience harassment from anti-social groups like rent-seekers from the Bengali and *Bihari* communities for financial gain. The *Biharis* have little employment options, either inside or outside of the camps. In Bangladesh, there aren't many jobs, and it's nearly impossible to get a loan for small business materials like looms and fabric. Those who are successful in starting a company must deal with the endemic violence in the camps, which is committed by both local Bengalis who dislike the Biharis for political and racial reasons. Those who attack the camps often use arson as a weapon, and fires expand like monsoon floods, consuming buildings and people. Because they have little left over after family expenses and because of their camp identity, conventional banks have restricted access to this population, saving rates are extremely low. They frequently lack access to any form of bank or commercial financial services. This is primarily due to a lack of guarantors and a permanent address. Even when banks reject to let camp inhabitants to create simple banking accounts, they receive no assistance from the department of the Ward Commissioner in providing an alternate proof of address.

2.6 Struggle for Socio-cultural Identity and Social Exclusion

Bengali national identity was sparked by the linguistic divide and issue between East and West Pakistan, which eventually served as a significant harbinger for nationalism. Because secular scholars and politicians emphasized Bengali identity as a secular construct, the role of Islam in Bengali ethnic character was ambiguous and debated. Some authors who have written about Bangladeshi nationalism have a tendency to believe that it developed as a result of Muslim nationalism's failure during the post-partition era (Rabeya and Hossain, 2017). Muslim nationalism in Pakistan was founded by educated middle classes, many of whom were descended from the landed elite. Bengali nationalism, on the other hand, did not only apply to a specific social group. It is rather a geo-cultural phenomenon. The economic and cultural maltreatment of West Pakistani aristocrats served as both an inspiration for and an expansion of Bengali nationalism. Because of this division, West Pakistanis and East Pakistanis developed a hostile relationship that served as the foundation for Bengalis' demand for their own independent country. In East Pakistan, *Biharis* felt alone and alienated. Because of the parallels in language and culture, they felt a connection to people from West Pakistan because of their distinctiveness. East Pakistani elites were persuaded to favor West Pakistan by offering them more prospects and privileges by West Pakistani aristocrats in East Pakistan. Bengali Muslims in West Pakistan are frequently disregarded as Semi-Hindus and Pakistan's enemies (Sen, 1999). They were led astray by West Pakistani bourgeoisie and confrontation with the native Bengali population resulted in the forthcoming activities for liberation (Hashmi, 1998). Since their repatriation in 1947, *Biharis* have maintained a unique culture. They were well-liked in society since they spoke Urdu and were Muslims. They were in great condition, and they believed themselves to be superior than Bengalis, the Pakistani government provided them with chances including jobs, settlements, and services (Hashmi, 1998). The railway industry employed most of the Bihari populace. Due to their skills, they were able to work as entrepreneurs, doctors, public servants, industrial workers, clerks, and railroad workers. Due to their resemblance to West Pakistanis, Biharis often thought of themselves as superior to Bengalis, which occasionally resulted in interethnic warfare (Hashmi, 1996). However, due to the development of Bengali customs and culture, the coexistence failed in fostering communal harmony. That is why the *Biharis* became socially isolated right after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 (Dasgupta, 2023).

■3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted grounded theory method. It is a qualitative research method, where a particular phenomenon is studied, and new theories are expected to be discovered based on the collection and the analysis of the data. The key to collect data is the involvement of the researchers within the context. In this study, the researchers were observing the community due to their professional involvement in the community long before this study was undertaken. Though the researchers were not the actual members of the community, but they worked with the members of the community for more than two years with a design project, gaining their trust consequently. At that point, there was no formal research attempt. Once they felt that they were in a situation where many open informal conversations were taking place, it is that point when the researchers started to feel the social problems that the particular community members felt, leading them to a formal start to this research. They started looking for the existing literature on similar communities and contexts around the world, developed a strong background knowledge, and searched for a research gap which they would like to contribute with their newly found access to the community by using formal qualitative research methodologies. The research questions were not asked in a formal manner in the beginning, rather, the researchers played the role of covert participant observers, where the respondents do not know that they are part of an interview. The questions were asked in an informal setup. As the researchers were familiar to the members of the community, it was not difficult to achieve. That also ensured that the respondents were comfortable, and not under pressure to answer anything. The questions were open ended, and the respondents were encouraged to tell stories rather than answering in the form of pointers. There were a few research questions at the beginning. After a few responses, the research questions started to shape up, and at the end, the following questions were considered the most relevant ones which produced significant information. This information served as the basis of data analysis, which went through the process of immersion in order to search for the themes.

The final research questions that addressed the core part of this research were:

- Why did you choose *Benarasi* craft for your living?
- Do you think you are comfortable with the identity as a *Benarasi* craftsman outside your community? Why do you think that?
- Does this skill help you to feel socially included?

The first question intended to find out how the respondents started practicing this particular skill. It is a kind of ice-breaking question, which helped open up the conversation. The second question intended to find out whether they feel attached to this particular skill, and if they do, the third question would search for the main focus of this research, which is whether or not that skill helps them to get the feeling of social inclusion which they did not have in their past generations.

Due to the homogeneous nature of the background of the members of community, this research did not go for a high number of responses. Rather, it settled in once the data started to get saturated. Saturation is a very common principle in qualitative research in order to find out the adequacy of purposive sampling, especially if grounded theory is adopted (Sandelowski, 1995). The interviews gradually lead to some exciting windows for the researchers to come up with new findings. In this case, the third question was not asked in the first few interviews, but going to more interviews, it was clear to the researcher that social inclusion is a major issue. Therefore, more time was given to get the answer to the third question in the later interviews. Once the data started to saturate, the sample size appeared to be adequate. As Morse (1995) explained, in purposive sampling, the experience of the researcher as the participant observer helps decide the number of the samples to be interviewed. As explained before, the questions evolved during the interview process, and the final number of respondents whose responses were significant and were processed during the consequent analysis process was reduced from 38 to 14. After investigating a significant number of studies, Hennink and Kaiser (2022) concluded that this number could be adequate in qualitative studies where saturation can be reached at a relatively smaller sample size.

■4.0 DATA COLLECTION

Before moving on the responses, it might be relevant to give an idea of the houses they live, which reflects their socio-economic conditions. Sketches drawn by the researchers showed the scale of the interiors of the houses reflecting their lifestyles (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Sketches reflecting the lifestyle of the *Biharis* (Sketch credit: author 1)

Responding to the first question, it was found that the *Biharis* could have chosen different crafts for their living, which as a matter of fact they did. However, majority of them have chosen *Benarasi* crafting as their living. The main reason was that they found it tougher to compete in the regular job market as they had to face discrimination. However, there were not enough competition on this particular skill, and the demand was high. They were skillful enough, and they identified that void in the labor market, and engaged themselves into that for their initial economic survival. Here are some extractions from the different stories gathered during the interviews. The real names of the interviewees have not been disclosed because of privacy.

> Barkat, a general handloom worker, resides in Mirpur's Bihari Camp with his wife and two kids. His older brother taught him how to weave by hand, and he has been employed in this field since he was child. He was unable to meet necessities like receiving a primary education. Members of his group also lacked national identification cards. As a result, they are unable to engage in employment outside of hand weaving. He knew his parents were on this job, and mostly because it was difficult for him to look for better job with the low level of education he received, he chose to stay with the profession of his father.

> Rahmat works with handlooms as well. He and his two sons reside in the Mirpur *Bihari* camp, renting a room there. He went to work at a young age. His mother started sending him to work to help support the family when he lost his father when he was a young boy.

> At the time, being a weaver paid him well and it was a reliable source of income. Because of this, the majority of people used to begin working as hand weavers at a young age. He began working as a weaver's assistant and is now trained as a weaver.

It was similar stories with most of the respondents. Initially secluded as outsiders, they failed to receive proper education. They were desperately looking for options. The location where they were allowed to settle in, was already notable for this particular industry. This was not a very easy skill either. However, desperation added to their inherited skill let them to adapt themselves into this industry. They survived the initial scare of becoming extinct.

The second question was deeper in the sense that mere economic survival may not be the ultimate goal for any person, or a community. Recognition is more important. Whether economic survival put them in a comparatively better social position with their identity as the *Benarasi* craftsmen, was thus the next point of inquiry. Though many of them disagree to admit this particular skill as their cultural identity, as they did not bring this skill with them while migrating, rather they learned it after moving here; but they did not feel disrespected when they are recognized as *Benarasi* Craftsmen. As a matter of fact, it started to give them more acceptability to the neighboring communities, which made them comfortable with that cultural identity. Here are some responses to the second question.

> Monir is quite proud of his weaving skills despite all of these challenges. It helped him to earn appropriate compensation and respect. Unlike his previous generation, who felt the social exclusion more acutely, his generation has received more recognition from the community outside. He feels that it is the result of the struggle their parents went through and he is grateful for that.
> Hossain also expressed similar feelings. He did not face that severeness of social exclusion, as he gains respect from the neighboring community. By 'respect', he means the way he is recognized as a *Benarasi* craftsman outside.

The story is similar. The first generation took the heat. Their struggle eased the way for the next generation a bit. Though they are still easily recognizable as a migrant by their accent, or styles, however, the outside communities do not consider them as a threat. Rather, they consider them as a contributor to the local economy. As the skill is special, and not everyone in the local communities around have that particular skill, they kind of accept these migrant Biharis as a special member of the community. Moreover, the Biharis have earned respect through generations by their good behavior. That also helped them establish social recognition to some extent.
The third and the last question was crucial in several ways. The second question yielded a fairly positive response throughout the interview, and started to give the researcher the feeling of satisfaction that social recognition is all that this minorities were looking for. However, it appeared to be a bubble that was about to pop sooner or later. Here are some extractions from the interviews that would give some insight.

> In the past, Anwar's job received appropriate compensation and respect, but with time, they are steadily losing all these things. He personally does not wish to engage his kids, who are already receiving a solid education, in his line of work. He believes that the demand for *Benarasi* will rise once more if the import of Indian sarees can be reduced. Then they can start up their old custom again.
> Ismail feels that people inside his community are increasingly distancing themselves from this line of work today. It is quite tough for them to support a large family on such a small wage because it doesn't pay well right now. His two sons are not working in this industry. One works as a security guard, while the other is employed by a garments factory. Despite feeling proud of his job, he does not receive the required support from those around him. It takes approximately a week to make one *Benarasi* saree, which accounts for its high cost. However, imported machine-made sarees only require a maximum of one or two days. Since imported sarees were much less expensive, people began selling them under the name *Benarasi*. As a result, the demand for genuine *Benarasi* sarees is dwindling, which causes weavers to lose their jobs.

There are a few issues simultaneously going on here. The first one is that the hard-earned cultural identity and the social inclusion are not selling nicely any more as the business is facing challenge from outside. That means the economic struggle has bounced back. Right now, it is the invasion of machine-made *Sarees* from India, which are cheaper and are produced in mass scale. Since the demand has shrunk, their earnings have reduced. Therefore, social inclusion has become just a 'value', but without a 'price' tag that can provide them with a better lifestyle. It subsequently forcing them to even forfeit the 'identity', which was not theirs at the first place.

That leads to the second issue. Are they going to stick to their skill just to maintain that identity and cherish the social inclusion earned by their past generations, and continue to struggle economically? Or, rather, they would look for other options to improve their economic status. The responses show that they are ready to give up this skill unless they are paid well enough. They do not have the power to establish the authority of the business it once had. It is beyond their capacity as the business is controlled by '*Mahajan'*s or the business lords, who are not even members of their community. That is the reason why their next generation is giving up the skill for other occupation that can pay better. Also, access to formal education has become easier, which gives them options to choose other professions in the future.

■5.0 DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

After immersing through the various responses, several themes started to emerge. Some of them complies with the findings from similar research in the past, while some others provided interesting findings that was very much context specific. Here are the themes that appeared to be more significant ones than the others.

5.1 Skill Is a Method to Survive the Initial Phase of Social Exclusion for The Minorities

The *Biharis* did not bring the particular *Benarasi* crafting skill with them when they migrated. It was their method of adaptation to the surrounding situation when survival was at stake. May be relevant to some extent, in nature, there are examples where a particular species might mutate in order to survive in a situation they never experienced before (Foster 2010). Importantly, this is an adaptation technic,

common in various tiers in the society. The only reason why becoming skillful in a specific job becomes an essential feature for the minorities is because as they are often marginalized, and do not have access to the opportunities that the surrounding communities of majorities enjoy as a head start, they need an extra gear to fight that lag. The *Biharis* found this particular industry needing skilled labor, and they took this challenge for survival, which they did at the initial phase. It is similar to what the Vietnamese immigrants were doing in California when the manicure industry started to be overwhelmingly occupied by them. It neither suggested that these migrant workers were displacing native workers, nor it suggested that all Vietnamese have only this manicure skills. It just showed that those migrant workers as minorities did not have that much easy access to all sectors of business or job market, and they were skillful enough to adapt to this particular business solely for their survival after seeing the demand in that market (Federman et. al. 2016). It can also be argued that unlike the *Biharis,* the Vietnamese migrants do not live in a restricted physical territory. Therefore, they have the privilege to spread around looking for jobs, which the *Biharis* cannot. For this reason, not only any skill, but only this particular skill was their only way to survive.

5.2 Social Recognition Alone Cannot Be Enough if Affluence is Under Threat

After the initial economic struggle, which were overcome by their hardship through achieving a particular skill, the biproduct was social recognition. During the initial phase of economic survival, social recognition is not at the top of the priority list. However, at some point, it becomes an essential demand as humans live in a society and do not enjoy social exclusion. By social recognition, comes the feeling of inclusion. However, as in this case, we have seen that the particular skill comes under threat with the emergence of machine-made products, which are cheaper and can also be mass produced. The skill is in danger to be neglected, resulting in the economic struggle back to them. Like many other professions in crafts and skills become endangered by machine invasion, the social recognition become secondary, and the skillful craftsmen or artists become dispensable. However, one can argue that the hard-earned social inclusion might pave the way for them to look for different other professions for them to survive. Therefore, achieving social inclusion may still be considered as an important step for them to establish their presence in the community.

5.3 The Romanticism of Leaning to a Particular 'Craft' Only Because of Its 'Value' is a Vague Idea

This is probably the most important finding in this study, as it shows the consequences of the previous two stages that were echoed in the previous two themes. The sequence of these three themes can be graphically represented by the flow chart below (Figure 6):

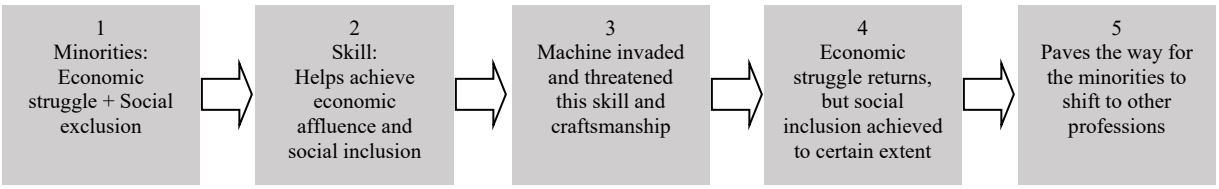

Figure 6: Flow chart showing the sequential phases of the *Biharis* in Dhaka city, Bangladesh

Here, it is important to understand this transition from phase 4 to phase 5. Often there is an outcry to save the crafting skill citing the issue of restoration or preservation. Often, this is seen as a negative cultural effect. However, as long as the economic and political infrastructure is not developed to protect the skilled workers economically and socially, there is no way a particular skill can be saved from being extinct. In case of this particular minority, it would be even easier to give up the skill in a generation or two, as they did not inherit it in the first place, they adapted to it. Therefore, the current sense of attachment with the skill that brought them some sort of social inclusion and recognition may actually be bubbles that have started to pop once the economic struggle has started to come back. However, the positive thing what we can take from this study is that this transition phase, when part of the generation is still active in the previous skilled profession, and the other part is searching for other professions paves the way for them, the minorities as a whole, to be part of the greater community around them. It is because, according to this study, social inclusion or recognition has been at least partially achieved through the hard work with that particular skill.

■6.0 CONCLUSION

There are some major takings from this study. First, the minorities in different context may face a diverse set of issues, but there is one important issue that needs to be resolved very quickly at the beginning. It is the economic struggle. In this case, a particular skill helped them. Once the economic condition is better, access to education becomes easier, and education can help them to enlighten. They can see areas to improve their own skill, as well as they can see other outlets through which they can improve their economic condition further. Social inclusion is always important for any human being or a particular community. But it must be earned. No one can get this for free. That is the lesson here. Skill played an important role for them. The current economic struggle may have distracted them from their skill which once helped them to survive for a couple of generations. However, the earned social recognition has given them the confidence that they can survive, and the future generation are likely to survive even without the skill of their parents. And, for those, who are worried about the preservation of the skill, they have more to do than just hope for it to survive by itself. It does not work like that, and this study has shown glimpses of that. We need a better organizational power to keep the crafty skill alive, and plan accordingly so that at least a part of the community can keep the skill going, and some new influx of craftsmen can be injected to protect the skill, not necessarily inside this particular community, but could probably be through other social processes as well. That being said, is beyond the scope of this research, as it mainly focused on the feelings that were brought with it when social exclusion in a minority community is at stake. However, that could as well open up the scope for future studies on this topic.

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