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# Political Otherness of the Bihari Community in Bangladesh

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## Abstract

The Bihari community in Bangladesh, consisting of de facto stateless individuals, has long been excluded politically, socially, and economically. This article explores the nature of the political otherness of the Bihari people, who have been the victims of divisive politics. The Bihari people are deprived of a series of fundamental rights, including citizenship status, voting rights, political representation, access to government facilities, freedom to participate in elections as a candidate, as well as access to passports, banking accounts, and insurance. This article investigates how political factors have contributed to the historical and contemporary forms of othering of the Bihari community. Based on six months' fieldwork in three Bihari camps in Dhaka—Geneva Camp (Mohammadpur), Murapara Bihari Camp (Mirpur), and Kurmitola Bihari Camp (Mirpur), we inquire into the nature of such political otherness. Building on the theoretical insights from Robert Park, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Ruth Levitas, we identify the reasons underlying statelessness and explain the otherness of the Bihari community. Survey and interview data are collected from primary sources, supplemented with data from published and unpublished sources. We find that the Bihari people have neither political power nor access to political participation at the local or national level as electoral candidates due to their identity, residential location, lack of active citizenship status, and limited access to voting rights. Moreover, the Bihari identity and residence in Bihari camps are the principal obstacles to access to a passport, government services, bank accounts, and insurance facilities. This article concludes that the people of the Bihari community in Bangladesh are the victims of severe political exclusion, and such exclusion is responsible for the “otherness” of the Bihari people.

**Keywords:** Bihari Community, Othering Identity, Political Exclusion, Social Exclusion, Bangladesh

## 1. Introduction

Social exclusion has been a central focus of many classical and contemporary studies in sociology. From a micro perspective, social exclusion refers to a condition by which an individual fails to become a part of mainstream society. The idea of “otherness” in the present study emerges under a theoretical understanding of exclusion. We define “otherness” as a political discourse by which the state or the majoritarian group identifies a minority

community as a distinct section of the population to whom social goods and services are distributed unequally. This article examines how the identity of the “other community” is constructed by taking the Bihari community of Dhaka city as a case of empirical investigation. The Bihari community is a marginalized ethnic minority community in Bangladesh. This community consists of Urdu-speaking Muslim migrants who migrated from India and Pakistan and settled in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) after the partition of British India in 1947 (Bashar, 2006; Khan & Samadder, 2011; Khan, 2015). Though most of this population live in India and Pakistan, many reside in Bangladesh. After the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971, the community received a different name: “Stranded Pakistanis” (Yasmin, 2004; Lynch & Cook, 2006; Sattar, 2013; Khan and Samadder, 2007). A wide range of studies have shown that Biharis in Bangladesh were stateless until 2008 (Farzana, 2008; Hussain, 2009). Subsequently, they secured a small number of legal rights following a judgment by the Dhaka High Court. One such right is that those born in Bangladesh were offered Bangladeshi citizenship, while those considered adults in 1971 could not obtain Bangladeshi citizenship (BBC, May 19, 2008; Hussain, 2009).

After reviewing a large variety of writings on minority exclusion and the historical background of the Bihari community, we discover that the nature and degree of the otherness of the Bihari community have received insufficient attention from a sociological point of view. Attempting to fill this research gap, this study explores the construction of “otherness” of the Bihari community in urban Bangladesh from a sociological perspective. It explains the construction of political otherness by exploring the forms, extent, and incidence of political marginalization among the Bihari community of Bangladesh. The most salient forms of political marginalization among the Bihari community include a crisis of identity, denial of legal rights, civic isolation, lack of political rights, territorial segregation, victim blaming, and police violence.

This article explores the construction of an “othering identity” among the Bihari community in urban Bangladesh and its relation to political factors. It examines how the majoritarian group constructs an “othering identity” of a minority community called “Bihari.” The central research question is as follows: How do political factors contribute to the construction of the Bihari community’s historical and contemporary forms of othering identity? We also investigate the nature of political otherness among the Bihari people by considering various important indicators, such as citizenship status, voting rights, political representation, participation in elections as a candidate, inadequate government facilities, access to a passport, banking account, and insurance. Based on the theoretical insights of Robert Park, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Ruth Levitas and using mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative), we find that the lack of access to the abovementioned major political factors and resources is increasing the vulnerability of the Bihari people. The most significant finding of this study is that the Bihari community of Bangladesh are victims of varied levels of political exclusion, which creates a condition of “political otherness” among the camp-based Bihari people.

Through extensive empirical surveys and the application of sociological theories, this article conducts a thorough and detailed examination of the Bihari people in Bangladesh, revealing how a majority group constructs an “othering identity” for a minority group. We collect data through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and find that intergenerational differences in the Bihari community are a direct result of socio-political exclusion and a lack of necessary government support. In addition, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature on political marginality and labor-market exclusion by providing a multidisciplinary examination of the discrimination and crisis experienced by the Bihari minority in Bangladesh. This study helps to develop a deeper understanding of the diverse historical background and multiple forms of exclusion faced by the Bihari community in urban Bangladesh.

This article is divided into seven sections. The first section deals with the study objective and research question. The second section discusses the historical background of the Bihari crisis. The third section discusses relevant theories and literatures on otherness. The fourth section clarifies the research methodology. The fifth section details the findings. The sixth section consists of a discussion, and the final section draws conclusions.

## 2. Historical Background of the Bihari Crisis

The Biharis are a distinct ethno-linguistic and cultural minority. Urdu-speaking Muslim people migrated to former East Bengal (later East Pakistan) from unstable areas of Bihar. Many also moved to what had been known as Pakistan (both East and West Pakistan), searching for better life opportunities following India's partition in the 1940s. In Pakistan, these refugees were known as Muhajirs, and in Bangladesh, they were referred to as Biharis. In 1947, the Biharis moved from East Pakistan to West Pakistan, becoming part of the West Pakistani civil-military-bureaucratic aristocracy (Zaheer, 1994; Kozlowski, 1996; Ilias, 2003; Redclift, 2011). They viewed themselves as superior to Bengali Muslims, who were considered "lower-caste Hindu converts." Most Biharis opposed Bangladesh's creation and worked with the Pakistani government during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. They allegedly aided and abetted the Pakistani army's atrocities in 1971 and participated in crimes against humanity. As a result, they were shunned and rejected after Bangladesh became independent on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1971 (Paulsen, 2006; Haider, 2016).

The legal status of the Urdu-speaking Bihari community of Bangladesh is unique and remains controversial (Arif, 2018; Rahaman, 2019). Their status does not conform to any specific social group including ethnic minority, refugee, emigrant, or diaspora (Farzana, 2009). According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Article 1A (2), the Biharis are not refugees. Haider argued that "the Biharis are not refugees, because they have not fled the country of their residence" (Haider, 2016). Some scholars (Bashar, 2006; Hussain, 2009; Arif, 2018) have considered the Bihari people to be "stateless." Under the 1954 "Convention Relating to the Status of the Stateless People," the Bihari people are de facto stateless because their citizenship is ineffective and they are ineligible for Bangladeshi citizenship under Bangladeshi law. A person shall not be entitled to be a citizen of Bangladesh if he or she "owes, affirms, or adheres, expressly or by conduct, allegiance to a foreign state" according to the Bangladesh Citizenship (Temporary Provisions) Ordinance 1978. Being stateless, the Bihari people do not enjoy state protection from Bangladesh. They are unable to demonstrate their de jure statelessness and are subjected to prolonged security and human rights violations.

Many legal and non-legal authors have contributed to the global citizenship debate. Carens (2000: 161–2) refuted the notion that citizenship is merely a legal position or membership in a nation-state. Similarly, Bauböck viewed citizenship as a complicated interplay between the individual and the state (Bauböck, 1999). Post-colonial South Asian nation-states have utilized excessive power to diminish the ability of ordinary people, particularly members of minority populations, to resist discriminatory official policies. Bangladesh's Biharis are one such community, subjected to state actors' exclusionary powers (Haider, 2018). Biharis are categorized as "stranded Pakistanis," left behind by Pakistan (Ahsan & Hussain, 1990; Paulsen, 2006). Pakistan was unwilling to repatriate the Biharis following defeat in the liberation war of Bangladesh, subsequent political crisis, and poor economic conditions (Sen, 2000; Arif, 2018), resulting in their settlement and uncertain status in Bangladesh. The Biharis thus became the victims of two conflicting types of nationalism (Bangladeshi and Pakistani) stoked by the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 (Hashmi, 1998).

Initially, the government of Bangladesh promised to offer citizenship to the Bihari community, but the promise of citizenship remains unfulfilled. Article 2 of the Bangladesh Citizenship (Temporary Provisions) Order (President Order 149 of 1972) offers them citizenship like it does to the Bengali people. Some Biharis accepted citizenship and integrated into Bangladeshi culture, while others refused citizenship and instead opted for repatriation to Pakistan (Haider, 2018: 32). This group was disqualified from attaining Bangladeshi citizenship and subsequently became camp dwellers (Redclift, 2013). The Bihari culture and the Urdu language strengthened their segregation. This period marked the starting point of their identity crisis. Since then, the Bihari people have held a distinct cultural identity and have been labelled as "war criminals" (Redclift, 2010). The repercussions of their "betrayal" of the country may explain why they are continually victimized institutionally and discriminated against in present-day, independent Bangladesh (Redclift, 2011).

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation of Bangladesh, requested The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) involvement in the repatriation of the Bihari people. UNHCR registered the names of those who wanted to repatriate with the assistance of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent

Society (ICRC) (Haider, 2018: 33). ICRC enlisted 540,000 Biharis wishing to repatriate in the post-war period (Noor, 2005) and established 66 camps throughout Bangladesh for temporary settlement and protection (RMRRU, 2007). Following Bangladesh's independence in 1971, one million Biharis (non-Bengalis) were repatriated from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. After President Zia-ul- Haq's death in 1988, the repatriation effort was halted. The Pakistani government has since showed no renewed interest in reuniting the Biharis with their families. The Biharis claim to be Pakistanis because the formation of Pakistan would have been impossible without their involvement. An estimated 100,000 Biharis have crossed the border illegally into Pakistan, while another 250,000–300,000 remain in Bangladesh. However, out of 534,792 Biharis who opted for repatriation through the ICRC, a total of 178,069 returned legitimately to Pakistan (Haider, 2016). The most significant hurdles to the Biharis' social integration are linked to history, specifically the negative image formed following the betrayal in the liberation war of 1971 (Chowdhury, 1998).

### 3. Otherness: A Central Idea of *Sociological Analysis*

In this section, we discuss why the synthesis of various theories is required to understand the otherness of the Bihari community. The present study considers "otherness" as a social condition where individuals do not partake in the fundamental accomplishments of society. This article relies on major classical and contemporary theories of marginality, otherness, and exclusion to develop a research framework, collect data, and ultimately explain the research findings.

Rogers Brubaker's prominent writing is a key pillar in the study of ethnicity, race, and nationalism. Brubaker reconceptualized ethnically framed conflict as something that extends beyond the conflict between ethnic groups. By shifting the systematic attention from identity to identifications, from groups as entities to group-making projects, from shared culture to categorization, from substance to process, he showed that ethnicity, race, and nationalism are worldly perspectives: ways of seeing, interpreting, and representing the social world. Thus, ethnicity, race, and nationhood only exist through our perceptions, interpretations, representations, categorizations, and identifications (Brubaker, 2004).

Fredrik Barth's writing is key in understanding the notions of ethnicity and ethnic groups, introducing a new arena of enquiry into the sociological and scientific study of ethnicity. Barth's view is that ethnic identity is created and sustained through interactive processes of inclusion and exclusion. He considered anthropological notions of cultures as bounded entities and ethnicity as primordial bonds. Barth elucidated three basic assertions that fundamentally challenge the established anthropological conceptions of ethnicity. First, ethnicity is not defined by culture, but defined explicitly by social organization. The second is the ascription and self-identification of ethnic identifications, which are situationally dependent and can be transformed. The final assertion relates to social boundary and dichotomization, which views ethnicity as a product of types of inter-group relations. The ethnic boundary is a social boundary whose formation and continuation are dependent upon interaction with "Others" (Barth, 1969).

**"Othering"** is a situation in which individuals or communities are defined and considered "outcasts" according to the principles of a community or social group. This phenomenon involves saying that others "are somehow different from the mainstream people." In other words, **"othering"** can be defined as a series of dynamics, procedures, and constructions that produce marginality and insistent inequality across any number of the wide range of human differences on the basis of group identities. Othering and marginality can happen both at the individual and group levels. This state incorporates different terminologies of prejudice based on group identities and offers a descriptive framework that exposes a set of common procedures and situations that promulgate community- or group-based inequality and marginality. **"Otherness"** is the outcome of a discursive procedure by which a leading in-group (i.e., "Us," the Self) constructs a single or several dominated out-groups (i.e., "Them," the Other) by stigmatizing a difference – actual or imaginary – presented as a denial of identity and therefore a purpose for probable discernment. Thus, "otherness" is an inferior social position that can lead to marginalization and social exclusion.

Having unequal access to the opportunities and services required to live a respectable, comfortable, balanced, and happy life is a form of social exclusion. A discriminating or "othering" process based on cultural, social, economic, or racial identification is another form of social exclusion, and such discrimination can lead to potent exclusionary processes. In this context, "otherness" is viewed as a theoretical concept that includes any symbolic representation of "others" (phenotypically as well as in philosophy, beliefs, customs, and practices). However, it also encompasses the heavy burden of preconceptions that lead to division, conflict, hostility, stigmatization, and even violence. Thus, "otherness" is a form of intersubjective social exclusion.

This study uses three relevant theories of otherness offered by Robert Park (1928), W. E. B. Du Bois (1903), and Ruth Levitas (2005) to identify the reasons for statelessness and explain the dynamics of exclusion and otherness among the Bihari community. These theories help us to define the underlying dimensions behind the construction of "political otherness" among the Bihari community of urban Bangladesh.

Robert Park's (1864–1944) concept of the marginal man has been the catalyst for a large body of work in American sociology over the past eight decades. "Marginal man" theory, a sociological concept first developed by Park, a prominent sociologist of the Chicago School, and later analyzed by Park's student, Everett Stonequist (1901–1979), explains how a person is influenced and assimilated into two different cultural groups and strives to establish an identity. According to "marginal man" theory, Park (1928) proposed that multiracial persons remain isolated on the margins of society as they do not fit into a given monoracial cluster. Park argued that multiracial persons have a unique, ambivalent social psychology that leads not only to psychological agony but also to greater levels of social enterprise compared to monoracial persons (Cheng and Lively, 2009; Goldberg, 2012). In extending Park's theory, Stonequist (1935, 1937) proposed three stages of identity formation: preparation, crisis, and resolution of the identity crisis. During the preparation period, multiracial people acquaint themselves with different cultures. In the crisis period, multiracial persons understand their precarious social status and consequently feel conflicted about their multiracial tradition. Resolution of the identity crisis takes one of three forms, i.e., assimilation into the dominant culture, assimilation into a minority culture, or the formation of a new multiracial cluster. One of two firm identity outcomes is presumed: recognition of either a single racial cluster or both racial clusters. Initial theorists agreed that refusing to settle firmly on a single category of racial identity is a tension-filled phase on the way to accepting a steady, and thus entirely developed, racial identity (Stonequist, 1961). In this way, the concept of the "marginal man" is used to explain how an individual suspended between two cultural realities may struggle to establish an identity. This theory is relevant to the controversial identity of the Bihari community because almost every person in the Bihari camp conceals their identity and dwelling place from others when outside of the camp area.

Double consciousness refers to the central conflict experienced by subordinated or colonized groups within an oppressive social structure. This concept was first introduced by the African American intellectual and political figure W. E. B. Du Bois in his autoethnographic work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in 1903, where the author explained the African-American experience of double consciousness, including his personal experience. Double consciousness is a struggle that is faced by African Americans for remaining true to black culture while simultaneously adjusting to the dominant white society. Initially, double consciousness was precisely the psychological challenge that African Americans experienced: "always looking at oneself through the eyes" of a racist white society and "measuring oneself by means of a nation that looked back in contempt" (Du Bois, 1994). Du Bois claimed, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness...one ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois, 1994).

The concept of double consciousness is important because it illuminated the experiences of black people living in post-slavery America, and correspondingly, it provided a framework for understanding the position of oppressed people in an oppressive world. At present, double consciousness is no longer limited to the survival of African Americans; rather, many ethnic Americans experience this in their consciousness while trying to amalgamate to particular cultural traditions often defined by the standards of the dominant white society. This theory has laid a strong foundation in the fields of marginalization, race, gender issues, colonialism, and exclusion.

In this study, we used this theory to explain the identity crisis of the Bihari community in Bangladesh. The Bihari Muslims of Bangladesh remain aloof from the idea of a Bangladeshi Muslim community. Consequently, people of this community experience a double consciousness of being both Bihari and Muslim.

Ruth Levitas, a famous British female sociologist and scholar, extensively studied social exclusion, otherness, and marginalization. She tried to discover the fundamental trends of sociopolitical change in the causes of social exclusion and marginalization, with a particular focus on UK society. Levitas stated that there are three discourses of societal exclusion and otherness. The principal one is known as the redistributionist discourse (RED). This discourse argues that people's lack of exclusive privileges to citizenship rights weakens their well-being conditions, producing scarcity, otherness, social exclusion, segregation, alienation, discrimination, poverty, and marginalization. She argued that RED has a close association with the ideas of socio-political, cultural, and economic citizenship, representing a distinct form of the critique of inequality and exclusion (Levitas, 2005: 14). The subsequent discourse is known as the moral underclass discourse (MUD), discussing the fate of omitted, deprived, and excluded individuals. This approach centers on the dependent activities of the excluded and disadvantaged people who lose skills and ability through reliance on others for well-being. This discourse views otherness by focusing on the cultural dimension of exclusion instead of the material clarifications of poverty (Levitas, 2005: 21). Levitas's final discourse is a social integrationist discourse (SID). This discourse studies social exclusion, otherness, and marginalization through connection with the labor market. Moreover, this approach highlights discrimination among remunerated workers, principally wage discrimination and economic inequalities in gender outlines (Levitas, 2005: 26; Jane Mathieson et al., 2008: 18).

Under the theoretical viewpoints of Levitas, we argue that the Bihari people are not considered Bangladeshi citizens. The government of Bangladesh is reluctant to categorize the Biharis according to the different categories of citizenship because people of this community are regarded as “stranded Pakistanis.” However, the government is not interested in offering full citizenship status to this community like the Bengali community for various reasons. Bihari people have no access to active citizenship status, political participation, civic amenities, employment, bank accounts, insurance facilities, and the business sector because they belong to an “outsider Muslim” minority community in the eyes of Bangladeshi people. Therefore, people of the Bihari community have become “de facto stateless individuals” and are constantly deprived of multiple civil rights and amenities, representing a clear sign of “otherness.”

In light of the relevant theoretical perspectives of Park, Du Bois, and Levitas on the social exclusion, vulnerability, and marginalization of ethnic minority communities, the present study develops the following analytical framework to explain the multiple instances of exclusion and otherness of the camp-based Bihari community in Bangladesh (Please see Figure 1).

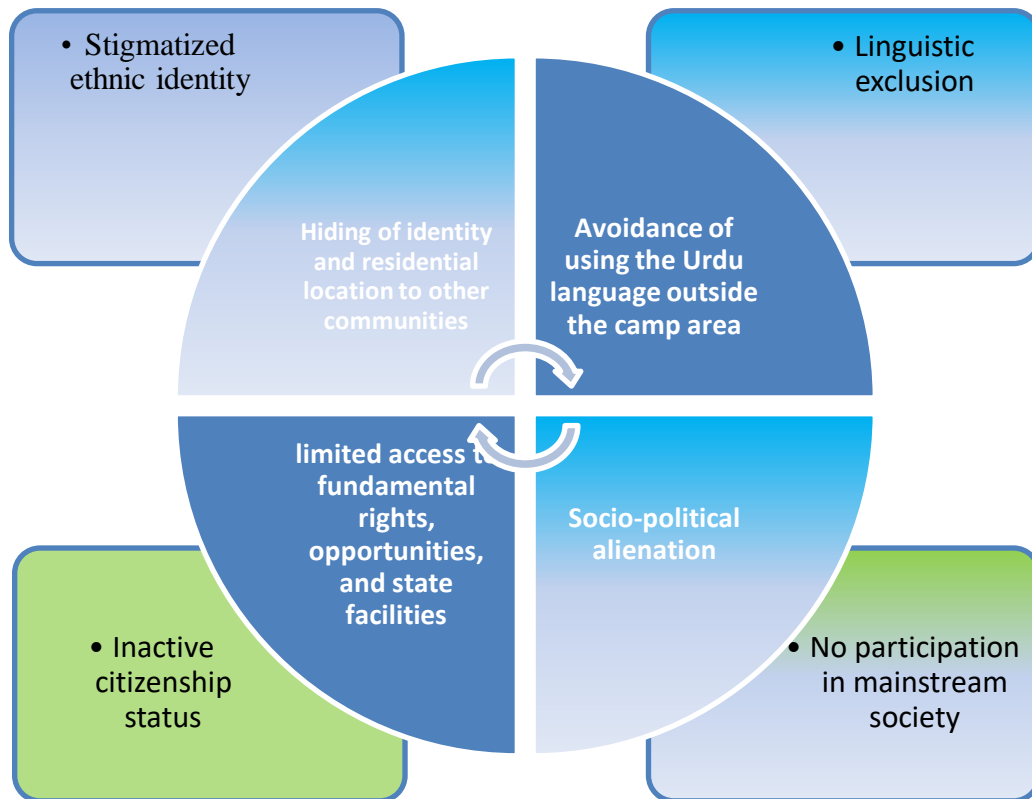


Figure 1: Analytical Framework

Based on the theoretical perspectives, in this section, we analyze the situation of the Bihari community and find that the Bihari community is not only excluded from formal citizenship rights but also discriminated in the labor market. They have no access to civil society participation and also suffer from multiple exclusions from the social arena. Therefore, the lack of access to these four significant variables is responsible for the social exclusion and otherness of the Bihari community in Bangladesh. People of the Bihari community are treated differently by the majority population of Bangladesh and, as a result, are denied full citizenship, political involvement, social amenities, job opportunities, banking and insurance services, income-generating activities, and access to the commercial sector. The lack of access to these basic services and amenities makes the Bihari people a “marginal community” in Bangladesh, reflecting Park’s “marginal man” theory. In addition, these factors indicate the “otherness” of this minority group.

We link the situation of the Bihari community in Bangladesh to the theoretical viewpoint of Levitas and argue that the “de facto stateless individuals” belonging to this minority group may be considered “other” like the minority communities of Bangladesh. Their obedience to the country is questionable as the government’s stance on this community remains unclear. As a result, they are continually excluded from multiple social privileges, economic amenities, and civic rights, which is a crucial indicator of “political otherness.” Du Bois’s theory of double consciousness is pertinent to understanding the confrontational identity, political marginality, and socioeconomic exclusion of the Bihari community since most of the Bihari camp dwellers conceal their identities and residential areas from other communities when outside of the camp area. Consequently, this community has become the victims of the “othering identity” and faced multiple challenges over the past 52 years, making them a “defenseless and vulnerable minority” group in contemporary Bangladesh.

We attempt to establish a causal link between our research findings and relevant theories. This provides context for the Bihari issue in Bangladesh and highlights the contributing factors. The views of the aforementioned scholars (Park, Du Bois, and Levitas) help us to develop a conceptual understanding of the overarching pattern of social marginalization and exclusion among the Bihari people living in the Mohammadpur Geneva camp, the Murapara Bihari camp, and the Kurmitola Bihari camp. This conceptual understanding connects the findings of the study to the actual predicament of the Bihari people. In illuminating the larger context of marginalization,



otherness, and social exclusion, we find that these theories are consistent with the findings of our own research, which supports their validity. In particular, the political circumstances that have led to the marginalization and exclusion of the Bihari community in Bangladesh are examined, discussed, and evaluated in light of the study findings.

#### **4. Methodology and Data**

This section focuses on the research methodology of this study, which guides the structure of the article.

##### *4.1. Research Design*

We followed triangulation or a mixed method approach to conduct this study. This study used mixed methods to fill the gap in the quantitative data and support our arguments. Mixed methods are essential in sociological research because they provide three important elements: the voices of the participants, comprehensive analyses of phenomena, and enhanced validity of findings. For these reasons, we relied on mixed methods in this study.

##### *4.2. Techniques of Data Collection*

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to collect data. The technique under the quantitative method is the survey, and the techniques under the qualitative method are FGD (focus group discussion), KII (key informant interview), and IDI (in-depth interview). The survey method is highly representative, precise, cost effective, and convenient in gathering data from a large population. FGD is often used as a qualitative technique for gaining an in-depth understanding of social issues. This method is helpful in understanding respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions, while other methods are inappropriate. KII are qualitative in-depth interviews that help to collect data from an extensive range of people—including community leaders, residents, or experts—who have actual knowledge about the particular society or community problem. IDI is an unstructured personal interview between a single respondent and a highly skilled interviewer. This method helped us understand respondents' underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings on specific social issues. The main benefit of in-depth interviews is that highly comprehensive data can be obtained. We used these methods in this study because they allowed us to understand the contradictions between quantitative results and qualitative findings. Although the study used mixed methods, it emphasized the survey data and in-depth interviews.

##### *4.3. Selection of the Area and the Respondents*

We conducted this study in Dhaka city (the capital of Bangladesh). First, among the major Bihari camps (Dhaka, Khulna, Jessore, Syedpur, Nilfamari, Narayanganj, and Mymensingh) of Bangladesh, we selected the Dhaka metropolitan city. The reason for selecting Dhaka city is that this area is the easiest to visit frequently and collect data. Then, from the Bihari camps in Dhaka metropolitan city, we selected three Bihari camps through a random sampling technique, namely Geneva Camp (Mohammadpur), Murapara Bihari Camp (Mirpur), and Kurmitola Bihari Camp (Mirpur). We then conducted research through continuous fieldwork in these three Bihari camps. This study took the Bihari people as the study population. Following purposive random sampling, we selected the respondents of this study. We interviewed 32 Bihari people aged 18–72 years old, conducted four FGDs with 10 participants each, conducted five key informant interviews, and surveyed 304 people who were currently living in these three Bihari camps. The study encompassed both empirical and explanatory research.

##### *4.4. Data Collection Period*

We collected data from June 28, 2021, to December 4, 2021. Quantitative data were collected through a semi-structured survey questionnaire. We collected the qualitative data through 4 FGDs, 5 KIIs, and 32 IDIs and also used recorders and field notes for qualitative data collection purposes. We conducted face-to-face IDIs using an interview schedule. Each interview took approximately one hour to complete. In addition, we invited 10 participants to each focus group session, lasting around 50 minutes. Secondary data were required to explain the

research problem and to select the study area. We collected secondary data for this study through the literature and publications available in national and international reports, documents, journal articles, websites, etc.

#### 4.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using STATA (Version-13) and Microsoft Excel. We also analyzed the qualitative data by reviewing field notes and recorders. Qualitative data were transcribed into text. Accordingly, transcriptions and expanded notes were recorded in Microsoft Word.

#### 4.6. Statistical Analysis

We collected data on socio-demographic information, citizenship status, voting rights, political power, participation in elections, passport issues, bank accounts, insurance facilities, and inadequate access to government facilities. We mainly performed descriptive statistics to observe the “otherness” status of the Bihari community. In addition, this study considered the citizenship status of this community as one of the key indicators for determining “otherness.” Univariate and bivariate analyses were performed to observe the association between exploratory variables and citizenship status. Moreover, we conducted a multivariate logistic regression model including the variables with a  $p < 0.25$  to identify factors. “Citizenship status” was considered as the outcome variable and “demographic characteristics” (e.g., geographic area, sex, age, marital status, education, religion, household size, household income, and expenditure) were considered as the dependent variables for this analysis. We performed a multivariate logistic regression using a generalized linear model. The variables with a  $p$ -value  $< 0.25$  in the bivariate model were included in the multivariate model.

#### 4.7. Ethics

When conducting any research, the researcher must consider ethical issues (Neuman, 2006). We tried to maintain ethical standards in every phase of this study. We warmly welcomed the respondents and cordially requested them to answer the questions. All respondents were asked before the interview, and informed consent was taken before participation in this study. Moreover, we maintained confidentiality and ensured the privacy of the respondents. All respondents were assured that the information collected would remain confidential.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Demography

A total of 304 persons participated in the survey from three Bihari camps in Dhaka city. We found equally distributed samples from the Mohammadpur Geneva Camp: 34% (104/304), Murapara Bihari Camp (Mirpur): 33% (100/304), and Kurmitola Bihari Camp (Mirpur): 33% (100/304). Among the respondents, 32% (95/304) were aged 31–40 years, 55% were male (167/304), and 84% (255/304) were married. All respondents were from the Muslim community. Sixty-five percent (199/304) of the respondents had six and above family members. About half of the respondents, 47% (144/304), were illiterate. In addition, 37% (113/304) of the respondents were involved in day-to-day income-generating activities, while another 37% (111/304) of the respondents were not engaged in income-generating activities. Two thirds of the respondents, 75% (227/304), had a monthly family income of 5,000–10,000 BDT.

### 5.2. Political factors of otherness

#### 5.2.1. Citizenship Status

The area ( $P < 0.01$ ), age ( $< 0.01$ ), and family size ( $P = 0.01$ ) were found to be statistically significant in the bivariate analysis with citizenship status (please see Table 1). On the other hand, sex ( $P > 0.05$ ), marital status ( $P > 0.05$ ), occupation ( $P > 0.05$ ), education ( $P > 0.05$ ), and household income ( $P > 0.05$ ) were not statistically significant (see Table 1).

Table 1: Bivariate analysis considering the "citizenship status" as a dependent variable.

Variable	%Yes(n/N)	%No(n/N)	P-Value
<b>Area</b>			
Mohammadpur Geneva Camp	19(20/104)	81(84/104)	0.05
Murapara Bihari Camp (Mirpur)	33(33/100)	67(67/100)	
Kurmitola Bihari Camp (Mirpur)	32(32/100)	68(68/100)	
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	30(50/167)	70(117/167)	0.39
Female	26(35/137)	74(102/137)	
<b>Age</b>			
0–20	25(2/6)	75(4/6)	0.06
21–50	31(66/210)	69(144/210)	
51–70	17(13/77)	83(64/77)	
70 and above	44(4/9)	56(5/9)	
<b>Marital status</b>			
Married	26(67/255)	74(188/255)	0.13
Unmarried	48(12/25)	52(13/25)	
Widowed	22(2/7)	78(5/7)	
Divorced	27(4/11)	73(7/8)	
<b>Household size</b>			
2–5 members	19(20/105)	81(85/105)	0.01
6 and above members	33(65/199)	67(134/199)	
<b>Occupation</b>			
Business	35(18/52)	65(34/52)	0.61
Day labor	27(31/113)	73(82/113)	
Unemployed	27(30/111)	73(81/111)	
Others	21(6/28)	79(22/28)	
<b>Education</b>			
Illiterate	28(40/144)	72(104/144)	0.97
Primary	29(32/112)	71((80/112)	
SSC and above	27(13/48)	73(35/48)	
<b>Household income</b>			
No income	0(0/3)	100(3/3)	0.75
5,000–10,000	28(64/227)	72(163/227)	
10,001–20,000	29(20/70)	71(50/70)	
20,001–30,000	25(1/4)	75(3/4)	

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

We performed a multivariate logistic regression model with variables  $p < 0.25$  to identify factors related to citizenship status. In the multivariate model, we found that unmarried people were 2.5 times more likely to have citizenship than married people (aOR: 2.50, 95% CI: 1.06–5.88,  $P=0.04$ ), and that this association was statistically significant. Participants who had six or more family members had approximately twice as much citizenship as those with 2–5 family members (aOR: 1.92, 95% CI: 1.02–3.62,  $P=0.04$ ). For the other participants in Mirpur, its value ( $P=0.1$ ) was significant with the camp's citizenship status (see Table 2).

Table 2: Multivariate analysis of citizenship status

Citizenship status	Odds Ratio	P>z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
<b>Address</b>				
Mohammadpur Geneva Camp	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
Murapara Bihari Camp (Mirpur)	1.75	0.10	0.90	3.40
Kurmitola Bihari Camp (Mirpur)	1.49	0.27	0.74	3.01
<b>Marital Status</b>				
Married	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
Unmarried	2.50	0.04	1.06	5.88
Widowed	1.01	0.99	0.20	5.22
Divorced	1.05	0.93	0.31	3.60
<b>Household Size</b>				
2–5 members	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
6 and above	1.92	0.04	1.02	3.62

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

From the qualitative fieldwork, we found that stranded Pakistanis or the Bihari community have lived in inhuman conditions across different camps in Bangladesh for several decades and are excluded from all of the fundamental necessities of modern human life. The camp residents face issues with housing conditions, and approximately seven to 10 people share a small (8 feet by 8 feet) room for living. Moreover, around 12–15 families must share one toilet and bathroom, meaning that women, children, and young girls face issues of privacy due to this inadequate sanitation arrangement. In this regard, one male married respondent aged 40 from the Kurmitola Bihari camp stated,

*"I think the Bihari people have no access to the citizenship status of Bangladesh. They could form a political party and fight for their demands and rights if they had access. Unfortunately, Biharis are always used by the political parties of Bangladesh to fulfill their political interests. The government of Bangladesh has provided NID (National Identity Cards) cards to the Bihari peoples, so we are the citizens of Bangladesh. But the government is discriminating against us in all respects. We are not getting equal rights like the Bengali people, and sometimes getting proper justice as a citizen is a daydream for us. What should we do with this so-called citizenship status and NID cards?" (KII, November 6, 2021).*

Findings also showed that the Bihari people have no political rights and participation. They are unable to raise their voices against injustices. In addition, the Bihari community has no political party and national representatives of their own; instead, their political life is always controlled by the local political leaders of the Bengali community. The Biharis have minimal access to citizenship status and voting rights due to their identity crisis. People of this community have no access to bank accounts, bank loans, passports, and insurance facilities like the Bengalis, and, as a result, they feel stateless.

### 5.2.2. Access to Government Facilities

This study investigated whether the state provides access to facilities to the camp-based Bihari people. Among the 304 respondents, only 35 (12%) respondents claimed that the state provides access to some facilities, but that those facilities are inadequate. On the other hand, 269 respondents (88%) claimed that the Bihari people do not have access to any facilities from the government. This political exclusion is responsible for the "otherness" of the Bihari community.

### 5.2.3. Types of Facilities

This study describes the types of facilities provided to the Bihari people by the state. Of 35 respondents, 19 (54%) reported having access to water facilities, 34 (97%) mentioned access to housing facilities, 17 (49%) mentioned limited access to health and sanitation facilities, 10 (29%) mentioned access to education allowance for children, 26 (74%) mentioned access to widow allowance, and 23 (66%) claimed access to old-age allowance. All 35 respondents claimed that the government did not provide access to pipeline gas facilities, cash assistance, and loans to the camp-based Biharis. However, electricity was provided.

### 5.2.4. Voting Rights

In this study, 35% (109/304) of respondents replied that they have voting rights in the Bangladeshi election. Of these, 44% are from the Mohammadpur Geneva camp, 41% are from the Murapara Bihari camp, and 22% are from the Kurmitola Bihari camp. In a bivariate analysis, we found only the camp area to be statistically significantly associated ( $P < 0.01$ ) with voting rights (please see Table 3).

Table 3: Bivariate analysis considering "voting right" as a dependent variable

Variable	% Yes (109/304)	%No (195/304)	P-Value
<b>Area</b>			
Mohammadpur Geneva Camp	44(46/104)	56(58/104)	0.00
Murapara Bihari Camp	41(41/100)	59(59/100)	
Kurmitola Bihari Camp	22(22/100)	78(78/100)	
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	38(64/167)	62(103/167)	0.32
Female	33(45/137)	67(92/137)	
<b>Age</b>			
0–20	38(3/8)	62(5/8)	0.83
21–50	34(72/210)	(138/210)	
51–70	39(30/77)	61(47/77)	
70 and above	44(4/9)	56(5/9)	
<b>Marital status</b>			
Married	35(90/255)	65(165/255)	0.84
Unmarried	44(11/25)	56(14/25)	
Widowed	33(3/9)	67(6/9)	
Divorced	33(5/15)	67(10/15)	
<b>Household size</b>			
2–5 members	37(39/105)	63(66/105)	0.73
6 and above members	35(70/199)	65(129/199)	
<b>Occupation</b>			
Business	35(18/52)	65(34/52)	0.95
Day labor	35(39/113)	65(74/113)	
Unemployed	38(42/111)	62(69/111)	
Others	36(10/28)	64(18/28)	
<b>Education</b>			
Illiterate	35(51/144)	65(93/144)	0.87
Primary	38(42/112)	62(70/112)	
SSC and above	33(16/48)	67(32/48)	

Household income			
No income	33(1/3)	66(2/3)	0.87
5,000–10,000	35(79/227)	65(148/227)	
10,001–20,000	39(27/70)	61(50/70)	
20,001–30,000	50(2/4)	50(2/4)	

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

About one-fourth of the study participants said that they have no clear idea about the employment of the Bihari people in political parties. However, a small number of IDI participants (2/32) shared their personal experiences of being involved with Bangladeshi political parties. One participant showed disinterest in replying to this issue. Participants from the FGD in the Geneva camp stated that Bangladeshi political parties employ the Bihari people with views aligned to their own interests. These parties usually employ the Bihari community during the election period. Mostly these Bihari people are engaged during the election campaign. In some situations, political parties consider the Bihari community as an effective vote bank. For this temporal involvement, parties provide financial incentives to the election campaigners according to five IDI participants. One of the male participants aged 38 from the Geneva camp stated,

*"Since the Biharis have partial voting rights, the political parties come to our camps during the election only to demand that we vote. We are the 'vote bank' for them. No, we never get political assistance like the Bengali people when we need it. The Bihari people face discrimination in education, health, sanitation, language, culture, gender, etc. But we cannot protest against the discriminatory attitude of the state towards us due to our inferior status"* (IDI, September 10, 2021).

In some situations, political leaders promise to give the Bihari community access to several facilities. However, generally, the political parties fail to meet the commitments made prior to the national or local elections. Respondents also revealed that they have not received any help during emergencies, e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic situation. One participant expressed his frustration by saying that the national identity card is nothing but a showpiece. On the other hand, one KII participant noted that politically influential individuals maintain communication with the Bihari community to use their name, thereby allowing them to receive money from several NGOs.

#### 5.2.5. Possession of Bangladeshi Passports

The graph below illustrates the proportion of Bihari people with the right to own a Bangladeshi passport. Among the 304 respondents, only one respondent (0.33%) from the Murapara camp confirmed that he had a Bangladeshi passport, obtained using a fake address instead of his camp address. On the other hand, 303 respondents (99.67%) claimed that the government of Bangladesh never issues passports to the Bihari people, and for this reason, they have no legal access to the Bangladeshi passport. Thus, the camp-based Bihari people are treated as “others” in regards to access to a Bangladeshi passport.

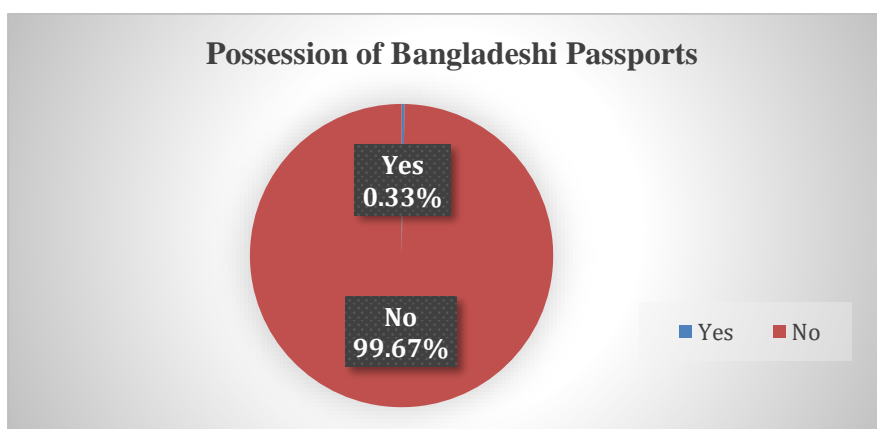


Figure 2: Possession of a Bangladeshi passport

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

### 5.2.6. Reasons for Not Possessing a Bangladeshi Passport

This study shows the given reasons why the Bihari respondents do not possess Bangladeshi passports. Among the 303 respondents, 100% reported having no access to Bangladeshi passports due to their Bihari identity. However, 292 (96%) respondents said that they are unable to access Bangladeshi passports because they reside in Bihari camps, which are considered restricted areas. A total of 222 (73%) respondents claimed that having a passport is unnecessary. Another 61 (20%) respondents claimed that the government of Bangladesh has a suspicious attitude towards the Bihari people. The government and the general public suspect that most Bihari people are closely linked to violence and illegal activities, and for this reason, the government is reluctant to issue Bangladeshi passports to the camp-based Bihari people. 231 (76%) respondents said that they have not received a passport because the government thinks that the Biharis are connected to criminal activities. This relationship between the Bihari people and the government constitutes a blame game. Finally, 64 (21%) respondents stated that they have no passport due to financial problems.

When asked whether the state is the core political institution responsible for making the Bihari people “other,” a significant number of the study participants avoided the issue by saying that they have no idea who is responsible for their present vulnerable condition. However, over half of the total IDI participants blamed the state for their “otherness” and vulnerability. Elaborating on this issue, one participant referred to the national identity card provided by government authorities by writing “*Atke pora Pakistani,*” which means “*Refugee.*” One of the married female respondents aged 35 from the Kurmitola Bihari camp stated, “*I think that we have no power to protest against the discriminatory attitude of the state towards the Bihari community because we are the minority. Due to our Bihari identity and social stigma, we never get any political help from the Bengali people. Moreover, Bengali people think that we are connected with Pakistan. For this reason, they are unwilling to give us political assistance. The government does not issue passports for us, and we have no access to bank accounts and insurance facilities due to our identity and residential location. We can only open bank accounts and get passports if we use a fake address instead of the camp address*” (IDI, November 4, 2021).

In explaining their political vulnerability, one KII participant mentioned political inequality. Bihari leaders are also responsible for the marginalization of the wider community. Bihari politicians are dishonest and ineffective at raising issues on behalf of the community. One of the FGD participants related the historical context fueling the present situation. He identified the liberation war as the main cause of partition among the Bengali and Bihari communities. In stark contrast, another participant said the blame for the present condition lay with the community itself.

### 5.2.7. Exercising Political Power

This study investigated whether the Bihari people have the ability to exercise political power with the government or political parties. Among the 304 respondents, each one claimed to be unable to exercise political power like Bengali citizens. This suggests political exclusion. Due to this type of discrimination, the Bihari community is treated as “others” by the mainstream Bengali community.

### 5.2.8. Reasons for Not Exercising Political Power

The following graph illustrates why the Biharis are unable to exercise political power in the same manner as the Bengalis. Out of the 304 respondents, all respondents (100%) claimed that the Bihari identity is primarily responsible for the problem. In addition, 291 respondents (96%) believe that the cause of this problem relates to having a camp address. However, 217 respondents (71%) argued that the lack of citizenship status is responsible, and 72 respondents (24%) claimed that the government's attitude towards Biharis is questionable. Finally, 173 respondents (57%) indicated no interest in the political affairs of Bangladesh.



Figure 3: Reasons for not exercising political power

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

This study also found that none of the study participants had formal membership in any political party in Bangladesh. In terms of the reason for not possessing membership, the main focus was on individual barriers and the nature of existing opportunities in the political parties. Participants identified economic status, educational qualification, and gender identity as the main barriers to involvement in mainstream politics. One of the male participants aged 58 from the Murapara Bihari camp noted,

*"We have no political representative from the Bihari community who can talk to the government about our problems. We have an organization named SPGRC, which is run by the Bihari leaders. But this is not a political organization. Our leaders always try to discuss our problems with the relevant authorities through SPGRC, but in most cases, their attempts are unsuccessful. We are the victims of political inequality, and I think politics is the only reason for our present situation. This is the reality of our life; every camp member has been facing this political discrimination for years" (IDI, July 20, 2021).*

The limited number of political parties does not support engagement by the Bihari people. In the present system, the Bihari people experience little opportunity for involvement. However, some IDI participants (3/32) said that the Bihari people are secretly supportive of two major political parties in Bangladesh. However, the political allegiances were never revealed. The Bihari people mainly support the rolling parties in Bangladesh in a bid to ensure communal rights. In doing this, they also try to reduce their vulnerability. In some situations, the Bihari people seek to exercise power with partial exposure to political parties.

#### 5.2.9. Participating in the Election as a Candidate

This study found evidence of the Bihari people participating in the national election of Bangladesh as electoral candidates. All respondents across the three camps claimed that the Bihari people have no right to participate in the national election of Bangladesh as electoral candidates. Those with voter identity cards are only able to participate in the elections as voters.

#### 5.2.10. Reasons for Not Participating in the Election as a Candidate

The graph below describes the reasons for the Bihari people's non-participation in the national and local elections as electoral candidates. Many factors are responsible for this non-participation. Among the 304 respondents of the three Bihari camps, 221 respondents (73%) claimed that they cannot participate in any election because they had no citizenship status. However, 194 respondents (63%) said that they have no voting rights and, for that reason, are unable to participate in the election. In this study, 295 respondents (97%) argued that their Bihari identity is responsible for the problem, and 177 respondents (58%) stated that they were unable to participate in the elections because they were not included in the voter list. Finally, 109 respondents (36%) expressed disinterest in the elections in Bangladesh.



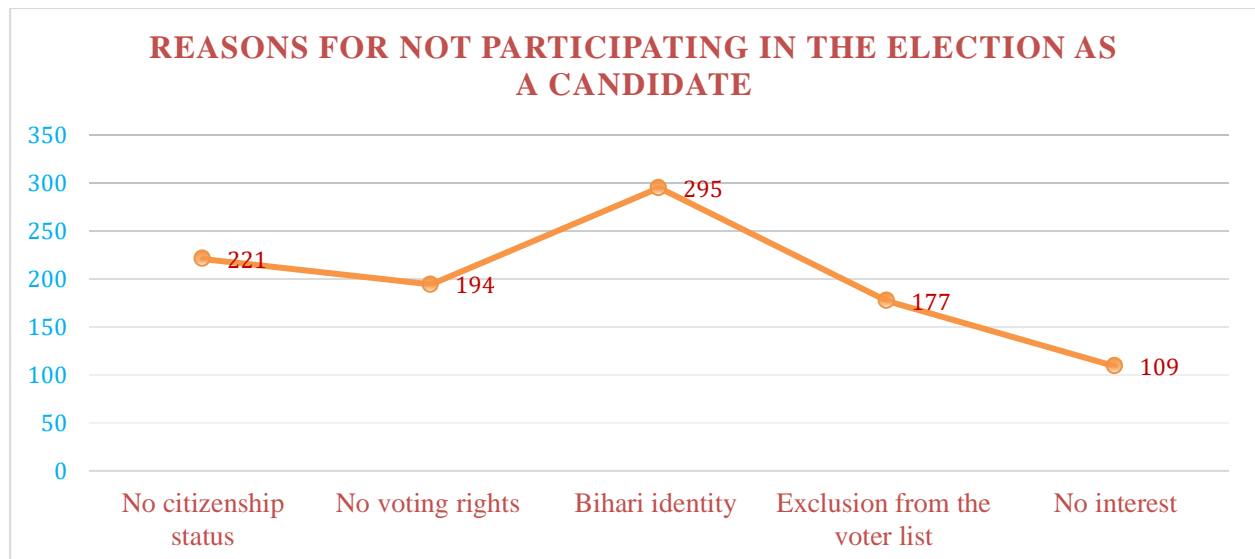


Figure 4: Graphical presentation depicting the reasons for not participating in the election as a candidate

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

More than three-quarters of the study participants said that they have no political leaders or representatives in their community involved in local political parties. Participants added that, due to the unavailability of Bihari political organization, there is no scope for this community to obtain a political representative. With this lack, the Bihari community struggles to raise their voice and secure rights. In this context, one of the unmarried female respondents, aged 20, from the Geneva camp stated,

*"We cannot participate in any election of Bangladesh as a candidate due to our identity and lack of political representation from our community. I saw some Bengali political leaders and their fellows come to our camp before the election and take videos or photos with the camp people. They promised that they would discuss our problems with the government and help us if we vote for them. But after the election, they completely forgot our demands. The government is not worried about our suffering. Moreover, political parties use us only to 'vote' for them during the election" (IDI, August 21, 2021).*

However, less than half of the IDI participants (12/32) conveyed that a non-political organization, SPGRC, is the main channel through which communication with political parties and higher authorities occurs. The chairmen and other members of this organization rely on personal communication to conduct communications. One FGD participant thought that this organization was not capable of adequately conveying the problems of the Bihari people to the authorities.

#### 5.2.11. Development Programs

This study shows the extent to which the government or NGOs have development programs for the camp-based Bihari people. Among the 304 respondents, only 14 respondents (5%) claimed that some government development programs exist for the benefit of the Bihari people. On the other hand, 265 respondents (87%) claimed that NGOs conduct several development programs, which benefit the Bihari people.

Discrimination and deprivation are the most common issues for the Bihari people in their everyday lives. Almost every one of the IDI participants said that the Bihari community is the victim of discrimination by the government and political parties. Moreover, the reluctance of community representatives to speak out about their lack of rights provides space for discrimination by the authorities. One unemployed male FGD participant aged 32 from the Murapara Bihari camp stated,

*"Due to the state's political system, we are now in this inhumane situation and living in a confined camp. The government and political parties have no sympathy for us. There is no one who can talk about our issues or solve our problems properly. Political leaders are reluctant to save us from this discriminatory life, even if they promise to help us. We do not get the same facilities as the Bengalis in the sectors of health, education, employment, loans,*

*housing, allowance, legal aid, etc. Moreover, we are socially, politically, educationally, economically, culturally, and spatially excluded. Sometimes we try to protest, but we cannot because we are stateless people. No one will listen to us, our plight, and our challenges. It is our destiny that the Biharis will face discrimination from generation to generation. Only Allah can save us from this dehumanized life" (FGD, October 12, 2021).*

Another participant added that unexpected situations, e.g., Rohingya-related issues, have exacerbated the problem as the government is preoccupied with other issues. In explaining the forms of discrimination, study participants highlighted socio-political, educational, and health issues. The government is forcing the community to remain in overcrowded camps. In addition, the community receives national identity cards without any holding number. None of the study participants experienced assistance from the political leaders of leading parties, even in emergencies, e.g., during the COVID-19 lockdown. However, the Bihari community offers support to different leaders during national and local elections. Study participants said that those with good connections to the Bengali leaders may have the chance of gaining political assistance.

#### 5.2.12. Types of Aid Programs

This study details the different types of government and NGO aid programs available for the development of the Bihari people. Among the 14 respondents, 12 respondents mentioned government educational allowance, whereas 13 respondents mentioned government health services. However, all 14 respondents cited government-funded old-age allowance. A total of 265 respondents received aid from NGOs. Out of the 265 respondents, only 1 respondent mentioned an NGO-provided housing loan, 1 respondent received a monthly allowance, 181 respondents received educational allowances, and 188 received an old-age allowance. However, 155 respondents claimed that NGOs offer legal aid, while 258 respondents claimed that NGOs provide healthcare aid, 196 respondents claimed that NGOs provide welfare aid, and 185 respondents claimed that NGOs provide community development aid for the Bihari people. Finally, 180 respondents mentioned the micro-credit aid program from the NGOs for the Bihari people.

#### 5.2.13. Institutional Financial Activities

This study discusses the institutional financial activities of the Bihari people. Among the 304 respondents, only 1 respondent (0.33%) was able to open a bank using a fake address. Among the 304 respondents, 303 respondents (99.67%) claimed that as a Bihari they were unable to take out a loan from the bank when necessary because they could not open a bank account. However, 99.67% (303) of respondents mentioned that Bihari people have no access to insurance facilities from government or non-government organizations.

#### 5.2.14. Reasons for Not Being Able to Open Bank Accounts

This study details why the Biharis are unable to open bank accounts. Out of 304 respondents, all respondents felt that they cannot open a bank account due to their stigmatized Bihari identity, whereas 254 respondents (85%) felt that their camp address was responsible for this problem. However, 219 respondents (72%) cited the lack of citizenship status, which creates many problems. Finally, two respondents (0.65%) indicated that they do not feel the need to open a bank account.

#### 5.2.15. Reasons for Not Having Access to Insurance Organizations

This study explains why the Biharis have no access to government or non-government insurance organizations. Of the 304 respondents, 301 (99.34%) felt they have no access to government or non-government insurance organizations due to their stigmatized Bihari identity, whereas 290 respondents (96%) felt that their camp address is responsible for this problem. However, 233 respondents (77%) claimed that their questionable citizenship status creates many problems in this respect. Finally, six respondents (2%) do not feel any necessity to get access to government or non-government insurance organizations.

Some members of the Bihari community are actively involved in election campaigning. Through this, they are able to receive political support from mainstream leaders. Respondents mainly indicated that their stigmatized

identity is the principal reason for not receiving political assistance due to the ongoing association with Pakistan. More than half of the study participants felt that, as Bihari people, they have access to the police station and can file a complaint. However, many are concerned about discrimination by the police. Police usually do not prioritize complaints from the Bihari people. Three IDI participants said that after filing a case at the police station, the chance of receiving proper justice was limited. Another five IDI participants said that generally, people of this group avoid police stations to reduce the risk of issues with senior members of their native community, as well as with the chairman of the non-political organization, SPGRC. In some situations, community members avoid the police station after having previously experienced discrimination. Only one FGD participant stated that the Bihari people receive support from the police. In explaining the reasons for not receiving proper assistance from the local police, study participants mainly indicated that their identity as Bihari and their living locations are responsible. Most IDI participants (28/32) believed that Bihari people are unable to protest against discrimination by the state. One participant mentioned a lack of opportunity to protest. Yet Bihari community leaders continuously seek to protest against discrimination. Due to a lack of political leaders and unity among the community, the Bihari community remains unable to protest the authorities and the state widely. Some of the IDI participants (4/32) felt no need to protest as they believed that it would not benefit the community. The realities unearthed in the interview reflect the “political otherness” of the Bihari community in urban Bangladesh.

## 6. Discussion

Based on the triangulation method, this study found that Bihari community members cannot rent houses outside their camps because the Bengali people mistrust them due to their identity and residential location. The Bangladeshi government does not give the camp-based Bihari people in Bangladesh any aid or political opportunities. According to our findings, the Biharis have a higher rate of health issues than Bengalis due to lower access to government health services. Only a few NGOs offer healthcare, and the services available are woefully insufficient. The Biharis are continuously on edge due to the constant threat of arrest from the police. They are frequently arrested by the police, despite having no formal criminal records in most cases. By collecting a significant volume of empirical evidence, the present study argues that political exclusion and social marginalization are responsible for creating the “othering identity” of the Bihari community in urban Bangladesh. According to several pieces of research, many of the Bihari camps are not suitable for human habitation. The surroundings of these Bihari camps are filthy, contaminated, deplorable, unpleasant, offensive, obnoxious, unsanitary, horrible, unhygienic, uncomfortable, unclean, and unwholesome (Ahsan & Hussain, 1990; Yasmin, 2004; Noor, 2005; Khan and Samadder, 2007; Hussain, 2009; Sattar, 2013; Khan, 2015; Bhattacharjee, 2018). Our analysis aligns with the findings of previous studies, highlighting that the camp-based Bihari community resides in appalling conditions, deprived of even the most basic of necessities and rights, and their plight serves as a sobering example of social marginalization and “political otherness.” Our study focuses mainly on the identity crisis of the Bihari community and aims to explain how society is responsible for creating the “othering” identity of this community. Accordingly, this study applied the notion of “otherness” to an extensive financial, political, and socio-cultural background wherein the Bihari people exist to explore the nature of discernment, disparity, injustice, and dispossession.

The Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) and Development Research Centre (DRC) on Migration, Globalization, and Poverty at the University of Sussex have conducted considerable research on the challenges faced by this economically disadvantaged and socially marginalized ethnic population of Bangladesh. *The Camp-Based Bihari Community: Perception of the New Generation* is a significant piece of literature published by the RMMRU in April 2003. The articles of this periodical described multiple challenges, issues, and complications faced by the Bihari people and placed emphasis on the historical origins of this problem. Several issues of the camp-based Bihari women and young girls were also addressed in different articles of this periodical with special references to “otherness” and other aspects of socioeconomic marginalization. Based on the content of this periodical, it has been shown that women of the Bihari community who reside currently in the Geneva camp are defenseless and unprotected. Bihari women and girls are subject to abuse and harassment both inside and outside of the camp area (RMMRU, 2003). In this context, our analysis demonstrated that Biharis are internally and externally leading an unprotected lifecycle. Despite the fact that the government of Bangladesh has recently offered “citizenship status” to members of the Bihari community, many Bihari men and women feel stateless

because they are socially excluded, politically alienated, and economically marginalized from the mainstream Bengali community of independent Bangladesh.

With regard to such understandings, we argue that ethnic minority exclusion from mainstream Bengali society is achieved through a variety of mechanisms. These include land grabbing, limiting income, unequal access to the business sector, discrimination in the agricultural sector, loss of land, limited economic freedom, lack of employment opportunities, jhum farming, insufficient monetary facilities, poverty, inadequate access to livelihood, discrimination of women, food insecurity, limited healthcare, insufficient water, improper sanitation facilities, and limited opportunities in education. Furthermore, individuals are excluded from matters pertaining to regional management, social services, security, communications, local administration, economic growth, and progress. The Bengali community, on the other hand, do not face any of these forms of discrimination. These realities demonstrate that the Bihari people are marginalized from mainstream Bengali society, and therefore, enjoy significantly less freedom compared to the local Bengali population. In this study, we argue that there is no effective government strategy to support the socio-politically deprived Bihari people. Thus, the political otherness of the Bihari community in Bangladesh is an example of ethnic minority exclusion in many respects.

In light of the current study, insights from sociological theories concerning otherness, social marginalization, and exclusion are clearly relevant given the empirical findings. From the empirical fieldwork, we found that the Stranded Pakistanis or the Bihari community have resided in inhuman conditions across several different camps in Bangladesh for several decades. They are excluded from all of the fundamental necessities of modern human life. Characterized by high levels of poverty and low social status, the Bihari camps in Bangladesh are extremely filthy, unsanitary, and ultimately harmful. The Bihari people are suffering in this country because they have no access to even the most basic rights. The camp-based Bihari individuals have insufficient financial means to support themselves currently. Bihari parents have a strong desire to provide a quality education for their offspring though they are unable to do so because of financial constraints.

This article also found that the rate of illiteracy is significantly higher among the elderly compared to younger generations. The younger generation is striving to access educational opportunities. However, they face widespread prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion from educational institutions, a clear sign of otherness. Bihari parents must lie about their identities and where they live to have their children admitted into lower-grade schools. They are unable to utilize the address of the Bihari camp. While at school, Bengali peers ridicule the Biharis about their identity. Due to the Biharis' lack of command over the Bengali language, teachers often pay little attention to Bihari students. In public settings, members of the Bihari community are not permitted to speak their mother tongue Urdu—a clear sign of linguistic exclusion.

We spoke with two local ward councilors, three NGO workers, and several Bengali people living near the three Bihari camps to gain a deeper understanding of the issues facing the Bihari people. While talking with the Bengali people living near the Bihari camps, we found that they are hesitant about establishing friendships with the Bihari people due to their stigmatized ethnic identity. Bengali people always maintain distance from the Bihari community as they feel that the Bihari people are connected to Pakistan. Local stakeholders stated that the problematic past of the 1971 liberation war underlies the current situation. In blunt terms, the Bengali people do not trust the Bihari people. The identity crisis is the primary issue that the Bihari people of Bangladesh currently face. Consequently, legal citizenship status alone will not enable their full inclusion in society. Many Bihari people of the older generation are eager to return to Pakistan, while members of the current generation view Bangladesh as their true home and are therefore strongly opposed to leaving. The younger generation is determined to succeed in independent Bangladesh, despite all its challenges. The question of repatriation represents a significant division between the two generations. All of these realities have led to the “othering identity” of the camp-based Bihari community in urban Bangladesh. The theoretical frameworks developed by Park, Du Bois, and Levitas provided support for all of these empirical observations.

## 7. Conclusion

The fate of the Bihari community has not changed considerably even after 52 years have passed since the end of the liberation war of Bangladesh. This study analyzed the contributing factors behind the “othering” identity of the Bihari community in urban Bangladesh. Based on the theoretical understandings and the triangulation method, this study examined how Biharis are treated as “other” by the mainstream Bengali community in several ways. The central research question of this study examined the multiple dynamics of political marginalization and societal exclusion among the Bihari community living in Bangladesh by highlighting the creation of otherness. It is evident from this study that many Bihari people are victims of nationalism and remain as strangers to the Bangladeshi people. People of this community have failed to assimilate into Bangladeshi society due to socio-political factors and their use of the Urdu language. Furthermore, the insecure and violent environment of the Bihari camps makes life miserable for these individuals. Those who reside in camps hold an inferior status and are often neglected by the people of Bangladesh, which in turn contributes to the problem of identity crisis and political otherness. We argued that the relationship between poverty, powerlessness, and resource constraints is responsible for the “political otherness” and identity crisis of the Bihari community living in three Bihari camps of the Dhaka metropolitan city.

Understanding the dynamics of political discrimination, multiple exclusion, and social marginalization among Bangladesh's Bihari people is the primary empirical contribution of this research. Our analysis tried to investigate the ways in which the Bihari people are being deprived of their fundamental rights, such as the right to housing, employment, healthcare, proper sanitation, education, political participation, and safety. In doing so, we hoped to uncover the answers to these problems. Furthermore, we analyzed (both theoretically and methodologically) the Bihari community's situation from a political and economic standpoint, finding that the problematic past of 1971 is a major contributor to their present-day socio-political marginalization. The theoretical implications of the study are many and are rooted in the discussion of the identity crisis and issues of otherness and exclusion faced by the Bihari community. Though the government of Bangladesh has recently provided them with citizenship and voting rights, citizenship and full rights are not yet a reality for the Bihari community.

In conclusion, this article proposes a policy recommendation to reduce the political otherness, social deprivation, and marginalization of the Bihari community in urban Bangladesh. We suggest that repatriation to Pakistan is an unrealistic ambition for the Bihari people and therefore recommend rehabilitation of the Bihari community. Therefore, the government of Bangladesh should take the steps required to rehabilitate the Bihari community to counter the “othering” identity. It is also recommended that the government of Bangladesh focuses on poverty alleviation among the Bihari community as per the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

This study contributes to the efforts to understand the historical backgrounds of otherness among the Bihari community in Bangladesh and quantitatively analyze the exclusion that they face. Our analysis contributes to the existing literature on the Bihari community in Bangladesh by offering an integrated analysis of the construction of political otherness, emphasizing the role of a crisis of identity. This research will be useful for future empirical studies on the Bihari community in Bangladesh by providing an overview of political inequality, poverty, labor-market exclusion, and socioeconomic disparity. This study should pave the way for additional in-depth empirical investigations on the different marginalized local communities of independent Bangladesh.

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**Ethics Approval:** All subjects gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in this study.

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