The State we are in

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In our 35th year as Bangladesh, it is important that we evaluate whether this new state has in fact been able to live up to the expectations of this particular Bangal nation. In doing this we should be able to uncover our weaknesses and our strengths, but most relevant to today's turbulent climate of suicide bombings and the violent demands for an Islamic State, we will be able to understand to what extent these demands might be justified, and what failings in statecraft have necessitated such an aggressive expression of commonly held values.

To understand the State's responsibility to the Nation, its is necessary to understand the temperament and sensibilities of the people that constitute the Nation. Such an analysis will not yield a homogenous result, certainly there must be numerous generally overlapping values that allow us to group together as a nation in the first place.

Language is often cited as the binding factor within this nation. However, that this is not entirely correct is demonstrated by the fact that across the river in West Bengal they speak the same language yet we separated ourselves from them, and they from us, because of a real or perceived notion that we were not anymore of the same mind. It is also reinforced by the numerous English medium educational institutions and newspapers in Bangladesh and by the fact that we who read and write using the English language are not often completely dismissed as being non-members of this nation. And of course the various dialects and variations within Bangla itself (with Sylheti being recognised unofficially as a separate language altogether) does not allow us to define our nationhood strictly along linguistic lines.

It is difficult, moreover, to define a state through the culture of the nation it governs; as such a thing is not static but constantly evolves every time it comes into contact with new influences, and will necessarily vary throughout eras, as well as from region to region and between economic classes. For example the culture of the people of East Bengal two generations ago and my own Bangali culture varies vastly, as does the culture of an individual from an upper echelon of society vary from that of a rural fisherman. For that matter the culture of two members of the upper echelon, one educated in England and the other in Bangladesh, may as well differ, as will the culture of a rickshawalla from Rajshahi be ever-so-slightly different from that of a coolie from Chandpur. Cultural expressions similarly may vary, giving rise to the numerous different types of food, dress and music that emerge out of any seemingly uniform grouping, and while at the moment such a variety of expressions in Bangladesh is somewhat absent, it will over time expand, as will the culture itself, and ultimately diverge just as Sylheti is beginning to diverge from Bangla. And finally, let us not forget the million or so non-Bangali tribals who live within the boundaries of the state of Bangladesh.

As a point of fact, Muslim Bangalis historically defined their political orientation neither through language nor through culture as is testified to by their separation from West Bengal. Also, that the creation of Bangladesh has little to do with language and culture and much more to do with tangible factors such as economics and social justice is evidenced by the fact that Bangali was established as an official language of Pakistan. Therefore the fight on the language front had already been fought and won - years before the need for separation became a reality, and by the fact that the creation of Bangladesh has not prevented, neither has it attempted to prevent. Bangali culture from being influenced by external factors and 'non Bangali' elements, such as, for instance, Hindi music and English films.

Therefore it becomes necessary to seek the roots of this nation-state elsewhere, in its shared values and beliefs, in its commonly held notions of right and wrong, in its understanding and agreement as to what is fair and just, in the essential nature of its temperament and in that thing that in Bangla is called '*Mon*' but in English has no absolute equivalent. It is also in its sensibilities as a people who stand for a certain kind of humanity and in its affirmation of the rights and dignities of man. Indeed, the roots of this Nation State are found in its morality and the roots of morality, regardless of whether we are willing to acknowledge it or not, have always lain in religion.

There is a huge difference between religion and an institutionalised theology or between what can be called the spirit or essence of religion and between various sectarian rituals, practices, doctrines and dogmas. I use the word religion due to an absence in the English language, of a word for '*Dhormo*', that thing that constitutes the principles, values, morality and beliefs of any individual or community and is the essential precursor to all their '*Kormo*'- their choices, actions, deeds and works. In legal language it can be likened to the intentions that define the act - the Mens Rea which is necessary in order to establish criminality. '*Dhormo*' is the inner to the outer, and in the context of political philosophy it can be understood as the ideals which underlie the actions of a state, its vision and its purpose, and therefore its reasons for being. In other words, if the State exists as the actionable component of a particular collective, then certainly