DEPRIVATION OF HINDU MINORITY IN BANGLADESH:
Living with Vested Property

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First Published by Pathak Shamabesh, February 2008
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ISBN 984-70212-0004-7
Price: Taka 300.00

UK. £ 10.00; USD 20.00

Published by
Shahidul Islam Bizu
PATHAK SHAMABESH
27, Aziz Market (First Floor), Shahbag, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh
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Enactment and implementation of the Enemy Property Act and its continuation in the name of Vested Property Act has its distinct historical root doctrined in the religion-based statecraft of Pakistan. The feudal-military autocratic rulers of Pakistan in their quest for Pakistanization of Pakistan, from the very outset, wanted to get rid of the majority – the Bengalees and Bangali culture. The consequences of operation of Enemy/Vested Property Act have been, simply, gross denial of freedom and liberty, and institutionalization of systematic socio-cultural, economic, and political deprivation of the Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. The national disaster has been so huge that during the last four decades (1965 to 2006) approximately 1.2 million (out of the total of 2.7 million) households or 6 million people belonging to Hindu religion are directly and severely affected by the Enemy/Vested Property Act and have lost 2.6 million acres of their own land property. They have lost, in addition to land property, other immovable and movable property. The approximate money value of such loss (US$55 Billion) would be equivalent to 75 percent of the GDP of Bangladesh (in 2007 price). In addition, there has been unmeasurable extent of national loses of human capital formation evident in forced mass-outmigration of Hindu minority, breaking of family ties, stresses and strains, mental agonies, loss of human potentials, disruption in communal harmony, unfreedom, cultural disintegration, and fueling of non-secular mindset and rise of religious fundamentalism. For the Hindu community, all these have created a perpetual cycle of deprivation including powerlessness, vulnerability, physical and psychological weaknesses, poverty, and isolation. The whole issue has been instrumental in producing and reproducing distress and deprivation among Hindu minority as well as institutionalizing communal mindset in a historically secular context.

This Act contradicts the basic spirit of the Proclamation of Independence of Bangladesh and the basic premises of the Constitutional provisions of “equality, equity, freedom and justice for all citizens”. This Act is inherently communal, anti-human, and anti-democracy. To ensure a true environment for humane development in Bangladesh, there is no alternative but to abolish this Act and return back the properties affected by Enemy/Vested Property Act to their legal owners and/or inheritors. The resolution of the problems of deprivation of Hindu minorities created by the Enemy/Vested property Act demands insightful leadership with cool head, courage and warm heart together with substantive public actions. This is absolutely necessary to institutionalize freedom, liberty and choice as both means and ends to true humane development in future

Bangladesh.