CONCLUSION

On the face of it, the recent phase of Bangladesh's history is full of contradictions. A late entrant in the historical arena of an ancient subcontinent, she changed her statehood twice in less than twenty five years. Her identity was obscured by the cross-currents of history. For centuries, a large majority of the people in this region were agonized by the conflicting pulls of an universal faith and a particularist habitat. Her hastily-drawn arbitrary boundaries cut across a distinct geographical and linguistic zone. Prior to the second partition of Bengal in 1947, there was no historical unit corresponding to Bangladesh. Viewed in this perspective, Bangladesh may be interpreted as the handiwork of what the political scientists describe as instrumental factors of nationalism. As the political identity of Bangladesh in the last phase of its evolution was shaped by a tripartite conflict between the Hindu *bhadralok*, Muslim *ashraf* and vernacular Muslim elite, Bangladesh is often portrayed as a fabrication of the political elites to legitimize their power. An analysis of Bangladesh's history, however, indicates that underlying forces in Bangladesh's search for identity were deeply-rooted. The political elites did not create a new nation out of nothing; they at best accelerated the process of nationhood.

Though Bangladesh is not a well-defined natural zone, she is the centre of a distinct region from the institutional point of view. The grass-roots institutions of rural settlements in Bangladesh region were significantly different from those in other parts of South Asia. The villages in Bangladesh, it has been rightly observed, are elusive. Even after population census exercises over a century, the exact number of villages in Bangladesh is unknown. In fact, there is no consensus on the definition of village itself in this region. In north India and the Deccan, a village was a distinct administrative unit with traditional village officials, a self-sufficient economic isolate and a vibrant social entity. Though recent anthropological research debunks the romantic image of village communities in South Asia as

"little republics", there is consensus on corporate identity of villages in much of South Asia. By contrast, most of the rural settlements in Bangladesh region were neither distinct administrative nor self-sufficient economic units. They were at best social entities. Broadly, the villages are classified by anthropologists into two categories: corporate villages and open villages. A corporate village was a closed organization with some form of collective responsibility. In an open village, there is no joint responsibility; individuals were responsible for their actions. Most villages in Bangladesh region were open whereas the majority of villages in other parts of South Asia including parts of west Bengal were corporate. There are three sets of evidence which suggest that rural settlements in Bangladesh were different not only from those in north India and the Deccan but also from those in much of west Bengal. First, the physical layout of a typical village in Bangladesh region was different from that in west Bengal and north India. The majority of villages in Bangladesh contained linear and dispersed settlements. As a result it is very difficult to define the boundary of such villages. Typical villages in west Bengal and north India were nucleated where houses were concentrated in a well-defined area. Secondly, historical evidence indicates that a typical village in west Bengal was larger and more populous than that in Bangladesh zone. Finally, the census reports during last one hundred years indicate that a village government could be traced in western areas of Bengal whereas it was virtually non-existent in Bangladesh region. Two caveats should, however, be added in this connection. First, the difference between a corporate village and an open village is not always one of kind, but often one of degree. The degree of corporateness varies from village to village. Secondly, all rural settlements in a particular region may not be homogenous. Even within the same region the structure of a few villages may deviate from the general pattern.

A survey of anthropological literature on the determinants of the structure of rural settlements indicates that such determinants may vary not only from region to region but also within a region itself. A small change in the topography may significantly influence the structure of rural settlements. In South Asia, three main compulsions for strong corporate rural settlements could be identified: (i) protection against foreign invaders, (ii) protection against wild animals and, (iii) provision of public services such as irrigation. Bangladesh did not lie athwart the direct routes of foreign invasions. It is not

cost-effective to defend open villages which were predominant in Bangladesh region. Furthermore, foreign invasions in this region were sporadic and less frequent than in north India. Wild animals were not also viewed as serious threats to life and property in this region. Houses are usually built on stilts where wild animals pose a serious threat to human habitation. Historical sources indicate that dwelling houses in Bangladesh region had usually been built on the ground. Finally, the abundance of water in Bangladesh region guaranteed for all practical purposes the independence of the household in respect of water supply. Corporate institutions were needed in much of South Asia for construction, operation and maintenance of communal sources of water supply. Close cooperation was essential not only for running large-scale irrigation systems as envisaged in the Marxian theory but also in operating minor irrigation sources such as village tanks which were extensively used in the Deccan. The economic benefits of corporate institutions in villages of Bangladesh region were, therefore, limited. The village in Bangladesh was primarily a social entity with loosely-structured institutions which lacked collectivist spirit.

The weakness of grass-roots institutions in much of eastern and southern Bengal was at the same time a blessing as well as a handicap. The primacy of the individual in the social life in eastern and southern Bengal promoted robust individualism. This, in turn, enriched cultural life by letting hundred flowers of heresy, heterodoxy and esoterism bloom. Nihar Ranjan Roy rightly underscores the "aversion of the Bengalis for traditional religion" (1400 B.S., p. 712). Northern India which is also referred to as Aryan-Bharatvarsa had been steadfast and firm in its loyalty to rituals, spiritual meditation and social ideals as prescribed by the scriptures of Hinduism. By contrast, Bengal witnessed the emergence of a number of non-vedic cults in open defiance of Brahmanical and Buddhist orthodoxy. These cults not only believed in humanism that placed human beings at the centre of the natural order but also attributed all religious mysteries to human body itself. In Bengal, there were four major forms of mystic Buddhism: *Vajrayana, Shajayana, Kalachakrayana* and *Mantrayana.* These were essentially influenced by tantric practices of yoga school of Hindu philosophy. Bengal played a significant role in disseminating the mystic tantric doctrines. The proponents of these mystic doctrines were known as *Siddas* most of whom are believed to have been born in Bengal. *Nathism* which was a form

of tantric yoga exercised considerable influence in northern and eastern Bengal. The earliest forms of Bengali literature were composed by these mystics in a symbolic language which is known as *"Sandhya-bhasa"* (twilight language). These mystics rebelled not only against traditional beliefs but also against social and caste restrictions. A synthesis of folk cults and religions was practiced by the Bauls of Bengal. The main tenets of all folk religions in Bengal was well-expressed in the following Baul song:

> . *"No master I obey, nor injunctions, canons or custom.*
> *Man-made distinctions have no hold on me now*
> *I rejoice in the gladness of the love that*
> *wells out of my own being.*
> *In love there is no separation, but a meeting*
> *of hearts forever". (Sen 1961, p.101)*

The success of Islam in the social environment of eastern and southern Bengal is not, therefore, at all surprising. The weak social institutions can easily account for the preponderance of the Muslims in Lower Bengal. The traditional explanations on Muslim majority in Bengal tend to ignore the institutional uniqueness of Bengal and attribute the unusual success of Islam in eastern and southern Bengal to resentment of the lower castes against the violent oppressions of the upper castes and to intense missionary activities of the Muslim saints and sufis. These traditional explanations cannot, however, satisfactorily explain the unique success of Islam in Bengal. The oppressions of the numerically superior lower castes is not at all unique to Bengal. In fact, such oppressions were more glaring in Bihar and south India. Despite caste inequities, lower castes in other parts of South Asia did not accept Islam. The intensive missionary propaganda of Muslim preachers and saints was not also limited to Bengal; similar missionaries were also active in other parts of South Asia where the hold of Hinduism remained undisturbed. The Islamic proselytization efforts in Bangladesh region succeeded not because the oppressed lower castes were won over by the spiritual powers of the Muslim sufis but because the lower castes in eastern and southern Bengal lived in a loosely-structured society which provided a congenial environment for voluntary conversion. In the rest of South . Asia, social and economic controls of corporate villages were so pervasive and effective that individuals, in the face of dire consequences of ostracism, did not dare to challenge the authority of tra-

ditional orthodoxy. Paradoxically, lower castes in Bengal flocked to Islam not because they were oppressed but because the stranglehold of the upper caste in lower Bengal was less complete than in other parts of South Asia where caste oppressions were more rampant. The diffusion of Islam was easier in areas where degree of corporateness of grass-roots institutions was low. There is, therefore, a close correspondence in Bangladesh region between the share of Muslim population and the openness of the villages. An analysis of the rural settlements in Bengal suggests that the degree of corporateness of the rural settlements decreased as one moved from the west to the east in Bengal. The share of Muslim population in Bengal correspondingly increased from the western to eastern areas.

The vigorous individualism in rural settlements of Bengal also found expression in lilting music, tender lyrics and a moving folk literature. From the *charyas* composed during the 9th-12th century to modern Bengali literature, lyrics, which embodied the most sublime feelings of the individuals, constituted the greatest treasure of the Bengali literature. *Sadukti Karnamitra* and *Kabindrabachansamuchchaya* are the titles of two collections of verses and lyrics which were compiled before the Muslim conquest in the thirteenth century. These compilations illustrate the width, depth, and variety of early Bengali lyrics. Most epics in Bengali literature were translated from alien languages. As Roy rightly remarked, "it appears that the Bengali genius found its expression in lyrics and even now lyrics stir the Bengali hearts. The wide canvas and the deep crosscurrents of the epics is not their cup of tea" (1400 B.S., p. 720). The robust individualism of Bengalis also found expression in folk literature, specially in Mymensingh ballads. As a western expert on folk literature rightly observed: "In these Mymensingh ballads I found an instinct for original thinking, countless instances of individual swaraj and a high value attached to deeds in contrast to passiveness" (Quoted in Shahidullah 1374 B.S., p. 509). The Bengali literature which embodied the joys and sorrows of the Bengalis, became in the eyes of the people, as holy as the Ganges. As a poet in the pre-Muslim Bengal observed, the cultivation of Bengali language was as meritorious as bathing in the Ganges because the Bengali language was as full, deep, meaningful, suggestive and beauteous as the Ganges itself (Roy 1400 B.S., p. 552).

Individualism of the Bengalis also shaped architecture, sculpture and painting in the region. Compared to the temples and viharas in

other parts of South Asia, temples in Bengal were generally small and constricted. Bengal did not produce such massive and towering structures as the Bhuvaneshwar, Khajuraho or the temple-cities in the Deccan. The canvas of the Bengali painting was narrow. There was no Ajanta, or Ellora here. Bengal lacked massive sculptures like the Buddha statue in Saranath, the sculptures of Udayagiri, Elephanta and Ellora and Nataraj icons in the Deccan. The paintings in Bengal focussed on isolated and fragmentary pictures of life. The deeply-ingrained individualism denied width to the works of art and architecture in Bengal, but it imparted intensity and depth to works of the Bengalis (Roy 1400 B.S., pp 719-720).

The uniqueness of social institutions in Bengal also contributed to the development of a new school of family law. Law of inheritance in Bengal is prescribed by the *Dayabhaga* school whereas it is governed by *Mitakshara* in the rest of north India. Because of high level of individualism in Bengal society, women were given higher status in *Dayabhag* law than in the other systems of inheritance law. *Dayabhaga* recognized the right of a widow to enjoy the properties left by her husband. In other systems of Hindu law, no official right of inheritance of women was recognized.(Rahman 1994, p. 118). The *Mitakshara* system of law considered all property as family property and conferred on sons and grandsons the right in the family property even before the death of the owner. Owing to high degree of individualism in Bengal, *Dayabhaga* school maintains that sons have right over the property on the death of their father.

The weakness of grass-roots institutions and the consequential primacy of individuals was not, however, an unmixed blessing. It undermined her political development. In the jargon of public choice literature, political life in Bangladesh region was characterized by "isolation paradox". Public choice theory assumes that the nature and effectiveness of political, social and economic institutions depend on their benefits and costs. Institutions are shaped by contractual arrangements among individuals for provision of public goods and for minimization of harmful effects of externalities. Such contractual arrangements succeed where a social contract is economically profitable. Isolation paradox arises in exceptional cases where individuals act to the detriment of each other though the social costs of such actions are much higher than the sum of benefits received by individuals themselves. This paradox is likely to occur where according to the perception of the participants the enforcement costs of

a social contract are high and free-riding, in the sense of availing of the benefits, without paying the concomitant costs, is easy. In such an environment, each participant pursues a strictly dominant strategy and does not make any compromise for the welfare of the society as a whole (Sen 1967).

Because of the existence of isolation paradox, grass-roots institutions in Bangladesh region were weak. This, in turn, impeded the development of viable political institutions. As a survey of the political evolution in Bengal in Chapter 3 suggests, political institutions in Bangladesh region were small, short-lived and highly unstable. These may be described as "contractual states". Despite repeated failures of contractual states, the Bengalis in the pre-Muslim period could not avert frequent political anarchy and establish sustainable political entity embracing the entire territorial unit. The Muslim rulers of Delhi ultimately fashioned predatory states from above. As suggested in Chapter 3, the Muslim rulers in Delhi succeeded in unifying Bengal, thanks to better means of transport and improved weapons. However, the establishment of a predatory state could not eliminate political instability in the region. The predatory states in Muslim Bengal did not derive their strength from within the region itself, their survival depended on the strength of Delhi-based empires. The emergence of a predatory state in Bengal had two harmful effects on her polity. First, in the absence of corporate institutions at the village level, the Muslim rulers in Bengal had to depend on local intermediaries for collection of revenue and maintenance of law and order. Unlike the feudal lords in Europe, the intermediaries in Muslim Bengal had no hereditary rights. They could at any time be replaced by a local competitor. Every intermediary therefore, tried to eliminate the potential rivals so that they remain indispensable for revenue collection in the locality. This struggle for survival of Hindu intermediaries generated relentless factionalism which is known in Bengal as *daladali* (Basu 1956). Subsequent political changes could not eliminate the vicious effects of factionalism in social life in both rural and urban areas. The tastes of the Bengali elites for factionalism in the first part of this century were described by Nirad C. Chaudhuri in the following manner: "The Bengalis, and more specially the Bengalis of Calcutta, were and still remain, some of the finest virtuoso of factiousness. There is hardly any branch of it which they do not practice, and hardly any activity into which it has not wormed its way... The latest

consequence of this factiousness, now that political power has come into the hands of these clique-ridden creatures is going to be chronic political instability. The stasis. of Plato and the *asabiya* of Ibn Khaldun were as milk and water compared with this distilled spirit of factiousness" (1988, p. 401).

Secondly, the intermediaries in Bengal were loyal neither to their masters nor to their constituents. Because of the temporary nature of their assignment, the intermediaries in Bengal tried to exact as much rent as possible in the shortest possible time. Rent-seeking, therefore, became the hallmark of administration in Bengal. As the sixteenth century poet Mukundaram lamented: "The revenue collector (sarkar) has become a curse; he wrongly records uncultivated land as cultivated and takes *dhuti* (as bribe) without doing any favour" (Quoted in Shahidullah 1374 B.S., p. 392). It is usually assumed that the introduction of western practices by the British in administration necessitated the growth of intermediaries who mediated between the foreign rulers and unlettered masses. In the traditional historical literature, these intermediaries are usually blamed for introduction of corrupt practices. In fact neither intermediaries nor corrupt practices were created by the innovations introduced by the British; they existed long before the establishment of the Raj.

Historical evidence presented in this study partly supports the primordial interpretation of nationalism in Bangladesh. Obviously Bangladesh was not a distinct geographical, historical or linguistic unit. Nevertheless the uniqueness of her grass-roots institutions set Bangladesh apart from the rest of South Asian sub-continent. Her political experience and religious evolution differed significantly from the rest of South Asia. The distinct identity of Bangladesh region, however, lay dormant for a long time. Paradoxically, the very forces which silently moulded her identity delayed its public expression. The robust individualism which characterized Bangladesh region impeded the development of collective institutions which are essential for nourishing collective consciousness. Bangladesh region was different from the rest of South Asia because political institutions in this region were weak. The primacy of the individual in the social life precluded the development of a regional identity. Consequently, nationalism in this region did not surface at all till manipulations of the elites forced its articulation through a tortuous process. History, therefore, does not fully vindicate the primordial interpretation of nationalism in Bangladesh.

The search for identity in Bangladesh region did not spring automatically from within her society. It was triggered by twin shocks of political and spiritual invasions by Muslim rulers and Islam. All ancient civilizations which experienced significant conversions to Islam faced a conflict of loyalties, between the indigenous culture and the new faith. Bangladesh region was not an exception to this. Literary evidence indicates the existence of a dichotomy of faith and the habitat in the Bengali Muslim mind since the fourteenth century. These inner conflicts were mirrored in the writings of medieval poets like Shah Md. Saghir, Muzammil, Syed Sultan, Abdul Hakim and a host of Muslim poets. This duality of the mind of the Bengali Muslims was initially confined to cultural sphere. The inner conflicts of Bengal Muslims did not surface in the political arena till the advent of the British Raj. Economic and political polarization in the pre-British Bengal could not take place along communal lines. Local Muslim converts as well as lower caste Hindus were exploited by a coalition of immigrant Muslims and upper caste Hindus. The British rulers by replacing the Muslim exploiters united locally converted and immigrant Muslims. The identity crisis was further sharpened by the manipulation of the middle classes which emerged during the British rule. As discussed in Chapter 5, the identity of Bengal Muslims was ultimately defined through a process of tri-partite conflict between the Hindu *bhadralok*, immigrant Muslim *ashraf* and vernacular Muslim elite which mainly consisted of the educated jotedars. The manipulations by the elites of this duality in Muslim mind resulted in tortuous twists and turns in Bangladesh's quest for national identity. However, the dichotomy of territorial and extra-territorial loyalties in the Bengali Muslims was not invented by the middle classes, it existed long before the middle classes came into being. Bangladesh was, therefore, shaped by a blend of primordial and instrumental factors.

The relative strength of natural (primordial) and man-made (instrumental) factors, is not, however, the main issue of debate on Bangladesh nationalism today. The most contentious debate concerns the competing dogmas of "Bengali" and "Bangladeshi" nationalism. Literally, "Bengali nationalism" is a linguistic nationalism that assumes the Bengali language as the basis of nationhood in Bangladesh. On the face of it, "Bangladeshi nationalism" is presented as a territorial nationalism in contrast to "Bengali nationalism" which is construed as supra-nationalism that aims to unite the Bengali

speaking people in India and Bangladesh. In fact, there has been as yet no serious conflict between territorial and linguistic nationalism in Bangladesh. In reality, "Bangladeshi" nationalism is not territorial nationalism. The present boundaries of Bangladesh were drawn in pursuance of the two-nation theory. "Bangladeshi nationalism" which considers East Pakistan as the direct precursor of Bangladesh is, therefore, a form of religious nationalism that underscores the Muslim preponderance in the country (Umar 1987). Viewed in this context Bengali and Bangladeshi nationalisms are not two distinct nationalisms, they are two different strands of a complex and multidimensional nationhood. Nationalism in Bangladesh was shaped by an interplay of faith and habitat, religion and language and extra-territorial and territorial loyalties. Both linguistic and religious strands constitute inseparable ingredients of nationalism in Bangladesh. For the historians, the dichotomy between "Bengali" and "Bangladeshi" nationalism is, therefore, unreal. Both the strands were woven into the warp and woof of nationhood in Bangladesh.

While the historians can ignore the controversy on the "Bengali" versus "Bangladeshi" nationalism, politicians cannot. If Islam is considered as an essential component of Bangladeshi nationalism, the role of the minority community in the political life of Bangladesh needs to be delineated. Bangladesh contains more than 14.5 million Hindus and 1.4 million Buddhists and Christians. Total Hindu population in Bangladesh exceeds the population of Muslim majority countries like Yemen Republic, Jordan, Tajikistan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Oman etc. Politicians in Bangladesh must, therefore, come to grips with this inescapable reality. The doctrines of "Bengali" and "Bangladeshi" nationalism (in its territorial version) seek to deny this problem by eliminating altogether the role of Islam in the political evolution in this region. This approach is not, however, supported by history.

Despite the tension of territorial and religious loyalties among the Muslims of Bengal, Hindu-Muslim relations during more than five hundred years of Muslim rule were characterized by peaceful coexistence of religious communities. In the absence of strong corporate institutions, the Bengali Hindus had been accustomed to heresy and heterodoxy. Because of deeply-ingrained individualism, the Bengalis had respect for each other's religious views. Like the Muslims, the Hindus in Bangladesh region also had an aversion for orthodox Brahminism and caste rigidities. Both the communities were deeply

imbued by humanism and spirit of tolerance. Their attitude towards life evolved in the same social and political environment. They were highly individualistic and emotional. Despite the difference in religion, there was enough commonness to unite the Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh region. Prior to the establishment of the British Raj, there was, therefore, no obstacle to Hindu-Muslim cooperation. The two communities fell apart during the British rule because of the manipulations of the elites. The birth of Pakistan in 1947 represented the triumph of these divisive forces. The victory of fundamentalist forces ultimately turned out to be an aberration. Both the religious communities came closer to each other in the wake of the language movement. Through democratic process, the Muslims in Bangladesh repeatedly disowned the fundamentalist demand for a theocratic state. The Hindus and Muslims in Bangladesh were inspired not only by the memory of a common past but also by a dream for the future (Roy 1987).

A historian is often described as a "Prophet in Reverse". It is very difficult to resist the temptation of extrapolating from the past to the future. Historians are wary of the dangers of such extrapolations which may underestimate the probability of the unexpected. Nevertheless, some of the trends of the society in the region had been in operation for a long time. It will, therefore, be unwise to overlook these trends in formulating policies for the future.

One of the recurrent themes of this study is that grass-roots institutions in Bangladesh region had been historically weak. This implies that local governments in this region were never well-organized. The same trend continues today. As a recent UNDP Report on Public Administration Sector Study in Bangladesh rightly points out, "...the real challenges in establishing an appropriate local government system in Bangladesh, as envisaged in the Constitution (Articles 59 & 60) arises from lack of adequate pressures from the local people and their institution and delay from administrative and political leadership to encourage the development of a locally based political process by sharing power, responsibility and authority with elected local government bodies. People and institutions at the local level are not well-organized for local level actions due to various reasons" (1993, p. 47).

Ever since the enactment of the Bengal Village Chowkidari Act of 1870, the successive governments have tried to establish village governments in this region. These policy-makers failed to appreciate

the fact that unlike in other parts of South Asia, corporate villages did not exist in much of the open villages in Bangladesh region. The attempt to establish local government in rural Bangladesh does not mean a return to the past; it involves creation of new institutions which did not exist at all. What Thompson, a British administrator in Bengal, observed in 1923 is also valid for Bangladesh today: "The absence village... means the absence of the germs of corporate life. To develop any form of local government in rural areas, something more is necessary than to stimulate village organizations already in existence and endow village officials with increased powers. A local Authority has to be constructed where nothing of the sort existed before and, what is a matter of great difficulty a sense of public duty, a will to subordinate private wishes to official advantage, has to be grafted, where it is in a wide sense a novelty" (1923, p. 126).

Despite experiments during last 125 years, local governments in rural Bangladesh have not succeeded in striking roots. Functionally moribund, financially bankrupt and centrally controlled, local governments in Bangladesh are not grass-roots peoples' organizations; they are just command performances. One of the reasons for the failure of such institutions in rural Bangladesh may be its size. An average union—the lowest tier of local government, contains more than twenty seven thousand people. It is extremely difficult to establish corporate institutions for such a large group. The policy-makers in countries like Bangladesh where historically local insti-tutions were weak and ineffective should pay heed to the advice given by the eighteenth century philosopher David Hume: "Two neighbors may agree to drain a meadow, which they possess in common; because it is easy for them to know each others mind, and each must perceive, that the immediate consequence of his failing in his part, is the abandoning the whole project. But it is very difficult, and indeed impossible, that a thousand persons should agree in such action; it being difficult for them to concert so complicated a design and still more difficult for them to execute it, while each seeks a pretext to free himself of the trouble and expense, and wou'd lay the whole burden on others. Political society easily remedies both these inconveniences" (Quoted in Wade 1985, p. 15). Bangladesh experienced dysfunction not only of large local governments but also of cooperative organizations. For a long time Bangladesh experimented with union multipurpose cooperative societies which recruited members from 10 to 15 villages with a population of ten to fifteen thousand

people. These organizations signally failed for two reasons. First, group cohesion in such societies was very weak. "There was little relationship among the membership itself, it was too scattered. There was no social cohesion, no solidarity". Secondly, large organizations like union multipurpose cooperative societies were based on the assumption of social harmony among various groups with different purposes. However, the rural economy in Bangladesh is characterized by "chaotic economic conflict" (Khan 1983, Vol. II).

In sharp contrast to failure of large organizations in Bangladesh, small peoples' organizations have demonstrated enormous potentialities. The Grameen Bank which is built on the nucleus of small groups at the grass-roots have attained significant success in mobilizing the rural poor. As a World Bank report rightly observed, "What has been difficult to accomplish for several decades with the support of governments and various bilateral and multilateral agencies has been accomplished by Grameen Bank in a decade" (Khandkar, Khalily and Khan 1994, pp. 15-16). The success of Grameen Bank is clearly attributable to a better appreciation of the dynamics of Bangladesh society compared to all other official programmes. The experience of Grameen Bank and other NGOs in Bangladesh clearly suggests that the establishment of new and small grass-roots institutions is the key to building of sustainable organizations in Bangladesh.

A survey of the political evolution of Bangladesh region indicates that because of institutional vacuum at the grass-roots, polity in this region was corroded by intermediaries, rent-seeking, factionalism and political instability. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, these destructive forces were interrelated and mutually-reinforcing. They are likely to destabilize her political life until countervailing forces of local governments, peoples' organizations and civic groups make their presence felt. A question, therefore, arises whether the same historical forces will repeat themselves in the future. There are three distinct possibilities. First, one may agree with the optimistic public choice literature that suggests that people learn from the mistakes of their non-cooperation. According to North (1990), there are three essential conditions for sustainable cooperation: (1) individuals repeatedly interact, (2) they have a great deal of information about each other and (3) the number of individuals involved is small. While the first two conditions could be easily fulfilled, it is doubtful whether small cohesive groups will be formed automatically. As the

Grameen Bank experience shows, the initiative to set up small groups may have to come from outside. The second possibility is that the compulsions for cooperation may change in the future. With the highest density of population (excluding city states) in the world and the silent pressures of globalization, collective organizations may emerge gradually to counteract the institutional vacuum. Finally, the people in Bangladesh may not learn anything from past. Those who do not learn from history are condemned to live with it.

About two hundred years after the French Revolution the great revolutionary Zhou-En-lai was asked to comment about the significance of the Revolution. He is reported to have answered, "it is too soon to tell" (Schama 1989). Obviously twenty five years is too short a span of time to assess the significance of the Bangladesh Revolution which was at the same time a social and nationalist revolution. As a social revolution, the great dream of a socialist transformation in a People's Republic has already been rudely shattered by the collapse of the command economies throughout the world. This has not, however, solved the demands for social justice, equity and human dignity. The possibility of new challenges to social equilibrium in Bangladesh cannot, therefore, be ruled out.

As a nationalist revolution, the significance of Bangladesh revolution has been interpreted in various ways. Lawrence Ziring described Bangladesh as an "anachronism within anachronism" which are just reactions to past mistakes and warned that the real Bangladesh is yet to emerge (1992, p. 216). These worries are not, however, justified. Bengali irredentism is not a potent force as yet. Another author argues that "the birth of Bangladesh is in many ways a unique phenomenon and poses a number of interesting questions to students of political development" (Jahan 1994, p. 203). The birth of Bangladesh has raised fundamental questions about the concept of nationhood in South Asian subcontinent. The emergence of Bangladesh reveals that South Asia does not contain one or two nations but many nations. Bangladesh may not, therefore, be the last hidden nation to surface in this subcontinent. The relationship between the "parts" and "whole" in South Asia may not be a settled issue, their respective roles may have to be renegotiated in the future.

In a sense, the birth of Bangladesh represents the end of nationalistic phase of her history. This has ushered in the more difficult phase of institution-building. The energetic individualism that characterized historically the people in this region had nurtured a social

milieu which was antagonistic to institutional development. The real challenge before the people of Bangladesh today was well expressed in a verse attributed to the fifteenth century poet Chandidas:

> *"Garon Bhangite Pare Achhe Kato Khal*
> *Bhangiya Gorite Pare Je Jon Biral"*

(There are many knaves who can destroy a structure. Rare indeed is the person who can rebuild on the ruins) (Quoted in Bose 1986, p. 1)