



Continuity of Violence in Bangladesh

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On 30 March 2015, a blogger, Washiqr Rahman was stabbed to death for his progressive blogs. Before him Avijit Roy, an atheist blogger, was hacked to death in Dhaka on 27 February 2015. He was a Bangladesh born US citizen and the founder of a blog, *Mukto Mano*. According to reports, Ansarullah Bangla Team, an Islamist extremist group based in Bangladesh, claimed the responsibility for the murder. Though his killing has attracted global attention, it was not the first such killing in Bangladesh, especially after 2013. In the past, people were killed in similar fashion for their opinions.

The radical groups have become impatient with any sort of dissent against their archaic views, which they treat as a challenge from an 'enemy'. In 2013, Rajib Haider, a blogger, through his blogs, engaged people to demand capital punishment instead of life-sentence verdict delivered by the International Crime Tribunal- 2 (ICT-2) to the perpetrators of violence in 1971. His blog was one of those, which ignited the Shahbag protests. As a result, Haider was hacked to death by the cadres from *Hefajat-e-Islam Bangladesh* (HeI). The HeI was formed in 2010 to protest against the secular education policy of Bangladesh. Later on, this group carried out violent acts to stop the people from joining the Shahbag protest, demanding capital punishment to the perpetrators of violence during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971.

The root of persisting violence in Bangladesh is embedded in the 1971 war of liberation. In its eastern part, the Pakistani Army and its collaborators unleashed violence against its citizens and carried out rapes to mow down the growing dissidence against the state. Those, who were fighting for liberation, too followed similar means and methods against the non-Bengalis, though the degree was much less in comparison to the violence unleashed by the latter. After Bangladesh was liberated, it was thought that the level of violence will decrease, but it did not. Instead, the political leadership used it as a means to suppress the dissidents.

During Sheikh Mujibur Rehman's tenure, the *Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini* (JRB) was created to fight against the Marxist dissident group, *Gono Bahini*, but the aim was to silent all dissenters through violent means. After the assassination of Sheikh Mujib in 1975, General Ziaur Rehman came to power. During his period, Ghulam Azam, who led Razakars in carrying out violence against many innocent Bengalis in 1971, was allowed to return to Bangladesh from his exile in London. This was the beginning of radicalism, which established itself during the fifteen years of military rule, and it even received support from the political parties after democratic system was restored in 1991.

The primary reason for present confrontation between radical groups and moderate factions is differences in their narrative of 1971, which is contradictory. On the basis of such narration, they consider the other as 'enemy'. Bangladesh, as a country, after coming into existence in 1971, did not make any serious attempt to bridge the differences between them; instead, the differences have been exploited by different groups and parties for electoral gains. In 2009, acting on popular demand, the Awami League government under Sheikh Hasina constituted the ICT-2 to try the perpetrators of violence during the Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971. After the ICT-2 started delivering its verdict since 2013, *Jamaat-i-Islami* (JI) and its umbrella organization have carried out violent protests across Bangladesh. The cadres engaged in hurling petrol bombs and, at certain important locations, even crude bombs were planted.

1971 has not only drawn a line between perpetrators and liberators, but has also created victims. The Liberation war was fought to give space to Bengali identity which is being used to construct a nation at the cost of an inclusive Bangla identity. The Hindus have been included because of their Bengali background, but Muslims from central and east India, who adopted this land as their home in 1947, are being excluded from this imagination after 1971. Absence of such imagination and State's treatment has alienated the members of this group. Most of the members from this community live in various camps spread across the country, where they do not have access to basic facilities that one requires. Marginalization and alienation have acted in unison to radicalize most of the members from this community. They are easy targets, so they get exploited by the stakeholders in the continuity of violence in Bangladesh. Most of the members from this group are engaged in violent activities due to lack of opportunities and the anger they have against the established system. The execution of Mohammad Kamaruzzaman, Assistant Secretary General of JI on 11 March 2015 will escalate the violence and strengthen the radical elements in Bangladesh.

To manage socio-political violence, the state and civil-society need to make certain efforts: *firstly*, let there be discussions and debates over counter-narratives of 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh, instead of compelling all to accept official view. *Secondly*, the deradicalisation of youths should be done through secular educational process; and *finally*, the state has to monitor the financial resources that the radical groups are getting from across the world.

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