

A Triangle of Communal Harmony, Communal Violence & Political Power: A Sociological Analysis

Marjan Huque*

Abstract

Situated in the Gangetic deltaic plain, the people of Bangladesh have lived in peace since time immemorial. As followers of the four main religions of South Asia, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, they co-existed in harmony with the common language, heritage and culture being the binding force. This commonality having its deep root in the general psyche was the source of the non-communal harmony they cherished for ages. But at one stage, during the last part of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, this atmosphere was vitiated. Communalism and fundamentalism are two major evils of our time. They constitute a cancerous sickness of the mind which is eating into the vitals of our society and is unleashing violence and terrorism of the worst kind. Today we find large parts of South Asia in the grip of the above two evils, some more strongly than the other, but they are very much there. Recent attacks on Hindus and their property demonstrate the immensely sad but blunt reality that even after forty two years of democratic pluralistic existence, the religious minority of Bangladesh have not been able to save themselves from the deadly embrace of communal fire. The stark reality is that this religious violence wears the apparel of politics. The unquenchable thirst for power of political leaders victimizes the minority community living in our country. As for recommendation the author opines that we must put to effective use without any more delay or hesitation our educational institutions, mass media like the television, radio, cinema and newspapers, and our literary and socio-cultural organisations for the promotion of secular values. Constitutional rights as well as Universal Human Rights should be implemented strictly by the government. To stop any sorts of violence against minorities should be stopped by strict laws with exemplary punishment. Political leaders should come forward with strong commitment to the nation and to the people and the civil society should play a larger role. The state and various organs of society should actively promote cultural festivals that cut across religious and communal distinctions, such as, in the case of Bangladesh, the observance of 1st Baishakh or the Bengali New Year, 1st of Falgun or the spring festival, 21st February or the Bengali Language Martyrs Day, 25th Baishakh or Tagore's Birthday, 11th Joishto or Nazrul's birth day, 16th December or Bangladesh Victory Day, and 26th March, the Independence Day of Bangladesh. Creative literature, too, can play an important role in this field. Religious leaders who are not political should come forward with proper explanation of religions. Imams of different mosques should have clear knowledge of human rights, constitutional rights and other laws with religious knowledge. People's awareness should be increased regarding communal relationships, communal violence.

Keywords: *Secularism, Communalism, Democracy, Power, Politics, Violence, Religion.*

* Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology & Social Work, The People's University of Bangladesh

Introduction

The chaos in the society, the political crisis, economic entropy, moral miasma and spiritual vacuum contribute to the coming collapse of the society. We are going through a fragmented time, maddening in an insatiable race for power and more power at the expense of other. It cannot be serene, secured and stable. Therefore we are not at the stable period of time. We are now standing at the cross road with our beliefs and misbeliefs. This pendulum situation makes us confused and puts us “to be or not to be” state. What we see before us is a horrendous graveyard of communal harmony which was built at long ago with blood and sweat, toils and tears.

Though we live in society, but we are more influenced by the state than the society. There is no state in the world where only one religion exists. At this age of globalization, in any state; people with different religions live which is a common phenomenon. Though the religion is a personal belief but the religious rituals are the matters of the society where he belongs to. The social division is generally based on the religion and religion gets into the politics and the centre of politics is power. To be in the power or to get hold of the power whatever the fact is; there rises the communalism. But communalism is a matter of politics. Religion goes under the politics and then religious violence is evitable. In our Sub-continent communalism was there and still it prevails. Not in Sub-continent but all over the globe clash of communalism exists. Capitalism and imperialism both introduce religion in politics. That is not for the sake of religion but for their own interests. Humanity is defeated here within this pythonic process of capitalism and imperialism. All the great achievements and all the advancements of human being are being demolished at the hand of greediness of power. Man is not safe to another man who wants to grab power. “A man is a wolf rather than a man to another man”. As Shakespeare noted this quite a few lines in his play:

“What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how
infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and
admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like
a god! the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals—and yet,
to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me—
nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.”(Hamlet)

Political use of religion is so common in Indian subcontinent from the very time of the advent of the Aryans. They used religion as a political weapon and their seed has become like a Banyan tree. And that’s what we see still today, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India are suffering due to religion based politics. Even the political parties who oppose fundamentalism and communalism often take shelter under the umbrella of religion. The outbreaks of communal violence have not been the result of spontaneous outbursts of passionately held religious beliefs; they are carefully planned and orchestrated and occur within a context of political mobilisation.

Rationality of the study:

Bangladesh is a developing country. She has to go a long way. Thus she requires national integrity and work spirit. But from 1971 to 2014, religion is used frequently in politics which destroys this national unison and we cannot achieve the real goal which is still fur-flanged.

Objectives of the study:

The core objective of the study is to know the prevailing situations of religious minority and reasons of violation of human rights. To achieve the core objective of the study covers the following specific goals:

- 1) To know the existing situations of religious minority
- 2) To discover the types of violence
- 3) To unearth the reasons behind the violence
- 4) To unveil the secrets behind circumstantial orientation

Study area:

To know about the study, I had to choose Dhaka, Kustia and Barisal. The minority and majority people were the respondents and these respective areas were my research area.

Sources of data:

I used primary and secondary sources for my research work. The primary source of my research was respondents who provide their valuable opinions and information. These help me to do further work of my research. Besides this, various research articles, books, journals, magazines, newspaper reports, e-books are used as the secondary sources of my research work.

Methodology:

To collect information for the research work, I had to follow different methodologies. To do this research, the methodologies which were convenient to me, I used all those for my work. Among them, participant observation, semi-structured, unstructured questionnaire based interview, focused group discussion, case studies. In this research I implement qualitative and quantitative research methods. I used fake names for the representational data.

Literature review:

Jaswant Singh (2009) in his book 'Jinnah: India-Partition-Independence' tried to show that during the partition of Sub-continent Lord Mount Batten called an assembly for the division of this region. The central leaders of that period particularly central leader of Congress and Muslim League were present and they were in favor of the division but the general leaders and mass people were against the stream and against the decision of the great leaders. The voice of the mass people was never heard and the result was communal riot or communal conflict (16-20 August, 1946). He wants to make emphasis on that the pivotal leaders are the determiner of any political changes in the society or any political gain. The mass people are just the puppets at the hand of these political masters. Whatever the consequence is the mass people has to go through the political masters' desire. The biggest untruth of partition of India was the division in the name of religion. The fact is that it was impossible for two people who have lived side by side for centuries to be divided by the thin line of religion as interdependency on our work and culture was the most important aspect of Hindu-Muslim relations in India. Even, the founder of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who was a staunch secularist and who Sarojini Naidu once described as Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity, always felt that the issue of Pakistan was not religious but political.

Varshney, Ashutosh and Gubler, Joshua (2012), 'Does the State Promote Communal Violence for Electoral Reasons?'—in their writing they tried to show that the prime responsibility of the Government of any secular state is to ensure the safety and security of lives of the people and their properties which is guaranteed by the constitution of the country

and this constitution is the safeguard of the general people. If there is any communal violence in any state; then it is easily understandable that state is not performing its duty properly and the harbor of the mass people is no more at the hands of the government where the general people can have their shelter. Though the state has law enforcement mechanism, nevertheless it cannot restore the peace and tranquility of the people. In that case we have to realize that state works in favor of any specific religion for which it works for. This biasness ensures the long lasting power of the political government and this attitude of the state as well as the political government is liable for the communal violence within the state.

John R. Hall (2001), *Religion and Violence: Social Processes in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press), in his books he shows that religion is often considered as a vessel of peace, both inner and social. Over the centuries toward cultural pluralism and freedom, modern theorists optimistically concluded that religion would either decline in significance or become a pillar of universalistic culture promoting a veritable community of mankind. Thus, as a flash point for violence, religion scarcely warranted attention in the metanarratives of modernity. A moment's reflection attests that religion and violence are often woven together in history's tapestries. So many religions have justified violence under certain circumstances, and others have become caught up in its processes. Even the violence of modern movements toward the nation-state was interwoven with religious thread, whether in struggles of reformation and counter-reformation, or secularization that would eliminate religion. Religion and violence are hardly strangers.

Political discord and instability, dearth of cultural unity and importance, lack of secular belief and insecure social security system side by side with procrastination in social justice system have led to the monstrous crime in Cox's Bazar and Chittagong. By harming the Buddhist community, the hooligans have actually challenged the social system of our country. On political ground, it foretells a sorry state of our political mechanism. From the cultural viewpoint, it demonstrates our dwarfism in cultural strength and value. In addition to it, it also has disclosed a fragile social orchestration of Bangladesh, pointing at how insecure our state structure is in the face of evil designs!

Scio-economic background of the respondent of my research work:

My respondents are from different districts. They are from different age group. Most of the respondents are poor and uneducated. They live miserable life in society. I talked with different respondents for their personal experiences. They shared with me their bitter and practical experiences they got last communal violence. The following chart will show respondents with different background.

Chart-01

Sl. No	Name	Age	Profession	Education Qualification	Economic Status	District
01	Narayan	20	Student	HSC	Poor	Jinaidah
02	Kalayani	22	Student	BA(Hons)	Well-off	Barishal
03	Kakoli	18	Student	Class Five	Poor	Kustia
04	Giribala	45	House wife	Class Two	Poor	Dhaka
05	Madhob	50	Business	SSC	Well-off	Dhaka
06	Taposh	45	Government Service	Masters	Well-off	Dhaka

07	Surobala	35	House wife	Class six	Poor	Kustia
08	Bishakha	35	House wife	SSC	Poor	Jinaidah
09	Haripodo	40	Farmer	uneducated	Poor	Barishal
10	Sandhya	25	Student	HSC	Well-off	Jinaidah
11	Shantosh	55	Business	Graduation	Well-off	Barisal
12	Sanjoy	25	student	HSC	Poor	Dhaka

Communalism and women insecurity:

Most of the societies are patriarch. Women are the suppressed section in this society. When violence is occurred among the man, the women of opposition become the worst victims. If you look at the history; since 1946 to 2014, women are the victim of any violence including communal violence. In 1947; one of the Congress leaders, Kripalini Achariaya told; "I saw a well where 107 young and middle aged women jumped into it to save their chastity." He added, "At an altar, I saw that Hindu men slaughtered 50 women of their own cast to save the chastity from brutality". One of my respondents of my research work, told me; "We are living in a nuclear family. Our girls go to schools and colleges. But we are scared regarding their safety and security. Therefore; a man is always with them for their protection. We are always anxious that any moment they can be the victim of brutality".

From 1971 women were raped, tortured physically and mentally and in 2001 and 2014 post-election violence cost raped of women, mental torture and physical torture. The Babri Mosque in Ayodhya of India was demolished in 1992 by the Hindu extremists. The present version has been updated by incorporating the subsequent carnage that took place at Gujarat, India and the communal disturbances that broke out in Bangladesh in 2001 and afterwards. As a backlash communal riot broke out in its ghastly form in different parts of Bangladesh. Although the Hindus in Bangladesh were victims of communal disturbances from time to time but the intensity and barbarity of communal riot that flared up in Bangladesh in December '92 surpassed savagery beyond imagination. Common people and civil society were shocked by this heinous act. Another respondent told; "In 2006 when the Babri Mosque was demolished; though we did not suffer a lot physically but we suffered mentally. We had to save our women from brutality. For that we had to cost a lot." Another respondent told on the last communal violence on the Shatkhira; "I have sent my daughter-in-law to her father's house. Though police are patrolling the village, we are scared,"

Game and gain in communalism:

Historically Bangladesh is an abode of communal harmony. People of different religion live side by side. But this harmonious co-existence is now going through a bleeding spiraling journey to its higher destiny by the hands of the political cannibalism grabbing the greed of political power. The mental-moral-moronism of political leaders blames the political epilepsy. Communal harmony is now half-truths and total lies wrapped in glossy deception which has exploited the credulity of the mass people.

Local and national political leaders have different objectives to use communal conflict. Local leaders want to grab the lands and properties of the minority people to fulfill the direct gains. Hindus fall in victim to rape, arson and vandalism so that panic-stricken minority community leave their own residence and own properties. As a result local or grass wood political leaders or activists make fake documents and grab that abandoned lands and properties. These are the direct gains of the local political activists. They are involved in these 'gains-playing'.

Rabindranath Sarkar was the victim of land-grabbing by SohelRana. It was on the land that originally belonged to Rabindranath Sarkar that Rana Plaza was built. During the interview his face was stricken with fear. He was reluctant to say anything. He was trying to avoid the topics of SohelRana or land-grabbing whenever they came up. At some point he started to say, "Journalist brother. You are a Hindu, I am a Hindu. Please don't do any more harm to me. You know, how Hindus have to live in this country. Rana Plaza collapsed on top of my house and office. Four of my staff and three of my house had died. After the accident, goods were looted from my house. I can't even go into my own house. The rescuers have sealed off my house. The members of my family are all staying with relatives in various places." But Bangladesh has not yet degenerated into complete anarchy. And that is why Sohel Rana was a fugitive for days. And it is he who was hunted by the police – in answer to this line of reasoning Mr. Sarkar replied, "He may be fugitive today, but you will see that he will come out shortly. And when he does you guys won't be here. You won't have to pay. Only I will have to pay." Continuing this line of conversation he says at one point, "In 1989, I bought 126 decimals of the land of the line numbers 15, 16, 17 and 23 of Chhoto Bolimeher Mouja, right next to the bus-stand. The original owners of the land were Mustafa Mohsin Mintu, who is a leader of Gono Forum, his brother and his brother's wife. Of these lines a few were bought by SohelRana's father Abdul Khalek. After careful measurements, I put a boundary around my land. In 2001 Abdul Khalek's son, Sohel Rana, knocked down that wall and took over 27 percent of my land. I even filed a case when that happened. His father used to be involved with the BNP. It was after this that I had to leave Savar. For about six-seven months I had to hide at various places. I couldn't return to Savar. I used to stay at hotels in Dhaka. Also, I had to stay with different relatives. My business suffered severely during that time. To return to Savar I had to plead with many of the local people. But I was forced let go off the land that had been grabbed. There is no one in Savar who doesn't know of this incident. You can get the story from anyone here. You don't have to hear it from me."

Rabindranath Sarkar says, "Later they started to build a high-rise there; I noticed that the quality of the builders' work was very poor. I even filed a complaint about this with Savar city council and RAJUK (Capital Development Authority). The people from RAJUK came and halted the work for a couple of days. But later I saw that the work has resumed. Rana is a bigger shot than many of the big leaders, too say nothing of RAJUK." Dhaka, Aug 22 (UNB), US Ambassador Dan W Mozena told on an occasion; "I call upon the government of Bangladesh, the civil society and most importantly the people of Bangladesh to reject these cheap politicians and land grabbers who seek to use religion to advance their self-serving agenda to acquire power and wealth," he told a function in the city. The US diplomat said the greedy owner of Rana Plaza grabbed land from a Hindu family and built on it the building complex that is now known around the world as the symbol of greed, corruption and land grabbing from minorities.

One of the respondents of my research work told; "My friend was living at different village. I was living close to his one. One day he came to me and told me that his neighbor was a grass wood level political activist of a political party. He always intimidated him to leave his residence for India. His wife was good-looking and he had a kid. He could not survive and leave on that lands. He had to leave for India leaving his fore-father's property".

On the other hand, national leaders do play with different way proving it new flavor to it gain power. The wrath of communal attack on September 29 last year, a total of 500 Buddha statues made of gold, bronze and white stone were looted. Communal attack in Ramu did not take place only because of lack of communal harmony there was political reason behind the attack. Communalism in the present context cannot be eliminated from the society as it is

very much rooted in people's mind, political parties, administrative and statutory bodies. The savagery that occurred in Ramu, near Cox's Bazar is an act diametrically opposite to democracy and secularism. Though Bangladesh is not an ideal example of secularism, yet the people of this land are by and large secular and their aspiration for true democracy justifies how secular they are behaviorally. But the section, which had played havoc with the Buddhist villages and damaged Lord Buddha statues of high archaeological value, does not represent the true Bangladeshis, and more poignantly, they do not respect the cultural diversity and bonding of Bangladesh. So, it remains to be seen under what compulsion or intention they had gone that far to harm the Buddha statues. The exuberance that they burst forth after that repulsive action itself testifies to their bestial mindset. They have no cultural identity, nor do they keep faith in cultural unity, under which a society's aspiration for totality and plurality gets formed. This is the reality of our politics. Everybody blames each other for this type of religious violence. This 'blame-game' ultimately brings darkness for the nation. Political parties identified one another either as atheist or fundamentalist or in so other titles which are directly related to religious sentiment. Each and every political party has used religion just to grab political power, not from the live toward religion.

To become the donor of political parties for practicing the own religion:

Though religion and constitution enshrine the rights of the religion practice but all this the paper based rights only. In reality it is the fringe to the coin; due to the Fifth Amendment when Islam was declared as the state religion, minority of our country started to migrate to the neighboring country. Minority people started to confine themselves. One of the respondent told; "we are the well-off .My father is the Head –Master of a school. We have enough lands in our area. The political leaders demand money from my father to run their parties. We are doing so because if there is any communal violence takes place so that we can have shelter or protect ourselves". We are giving money to assist these political leaders to establish their political power. Besides, we are also exercising the same power living within the surrounding. According Michel Foucault, "Power is a phenomenon. It is presenting two contradictory faces-repressive and liberatory. The some practices are experienced as repressive by some are viewed as liberatory by others. For Foucault (1980); power is productive; it produces effects at the level of desire (p59). In human relation, repression and liberation co-exist to different degrees wherever power is present. Hence;"It would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of sub-ordination which; by definition; are means of escape". (1982, p225). Power relations indefinitely are diversified.

Entrance in administration to stay safe:

To keep safe and to be in the main stream, the minority people work in administration. It also provides them safety and security and ensures secured life having power in the society. One of the respondent told; "Our grad father left the country in 1971 leaving behind their property. The neighboring people occupied the abundant lands. But when we came back, with the help of the local Muslim leader we regain the lands. These people behave very nice during day but we see different faces at night. Therefore we want to enter into the state machinery through which they get the power to survive as well as practice power." Another respondent who works at administration, told; "Since we have to live in this country, I had to work in government. My personal observation is that before getting the job I felt unsafe and in secured. But after being part of a government job, I feel more secured." Niklas Luhman's theory of power is based on fundamental pillars. He analyzes power functionally; as symbolically generalized medium of communication' which endows his conception of power with a strong evolutionary foundation.

Communal Co-existence is the demand of general Hindus and Muslims:

The mass people want to live side by side with harmony. They do not have problem with religions. It is the aged old tradition of this land. This general people want peaceful co-existence irrespective of religions. They do not understand the black corridor of politics. They just know the plain and simple lives and to lead peaceful with their cultures and religion. Bangladesh is a land of communal harmony. Followers of all faiths live in peace here. Religions are for individuals, but festivals for all. These people are living under the poverty level who struggle for their existence whichever the religion is. Therefore to them politics is meaningless rather living a quiet life with communal co-existence is their prime choice.

Recommendations:

The political culture plays a vital role in quelling social discord. But the communal disharmony creeping out of destruction, panic and social disorder is always dangerous as it sparks political clash. Creating violence capitalising on religious sentiments is backwash of political intolerance and lust for power. Attacking Buddhists and their temples has been materialized, as many conjecture, under political motivation. As the underlying balance of powers changes, a gap between power and the structure of expectations can take shape, causing the associated agreement to lose support. The larger this gap, the greater the tension toward revising expectations in line with the change in power, and thus the more likely some random event will trigger conflicts over the associated interests. Such conflicts then serve to create a new congruence between expectations and power. Today at the dawn of the 21st century, we cannot afford to waste any more time on futile communal bickering. We must put to effective use without any more delay or hesitation our educational institutions, mass media like the television, radio, cinema and newspapers, and our literary and socio-cultural organisations for the promotion of secular values.

- 1 According to secularism of Bangladesh, religion cannot be used as a political weapon any particular religion will not enjoy special favor. All the religions will enjoy equal rights and in order to establish a religious harmony, every religion will be encouraged. Religion will be treated as a personal affair instead of state affair.
- 2 Constitutional rights as well as Universal Human Rights should be implemented strictly by the government. To stop any sorts of violence against minorities should be stopped by strict laws with exemplary punishments.
- 3 By and large, communal violence in this country is engineered mostly by politicians and political parties. Therefore they should come forward with strong commitment to the nation and to the people.
- 4 Civil society should play a larger role.
- 5 The state and various organs of society should actively promote cultural festivals that cut across religious and communal distinctions, such as, in the case of Bangladesh, the observance of 1st Baishakh or the Bengali New Year, 1st of Falgun or the spring festival, 21st February or the Bengali Language Martyrs Day, 25th Baishakh or Tagore's Birthday, 11th Joishto or Nazrul's birth day, 16th December or Bangladesh Victory Day, and 26th March, the Independence Day of Bangladesh. Creative literature, too, can play an important role in this field.
- 6 Mass media have great role to promote communal harmony. Media should be sensible to broad-cast any news relating to communal conflict or violence.

- 7 Administration and law enforcement body should work efficiently and actively under the constitutional rules.
- 8 Religious leaders who are not political should come forward with proper explanation of religions. Imams of different mosques should have clear knowledge of human rights, constitutional rights and other laws with religious knowledge.
- 9 People's awareness should be increased regarding communal relationships, communal violence.

Conclusion:

Bangladesh is standing at the stage where it can give world new ideas particularly on the importance of mother tongue and how it can ignite the minds of all. It is a shining example of how a language unites people and does not discriminate. The flame of current mass protests in Dhaka should not be allowed to die to throw away the communal fascist forces from that country. No society can grow on hatred.

We are brave nation and we have 1952 and 1971 where we can stand together. No religious barriers, no cast, no color can stand on our way to communal harmony. We can establish an unjust society with our unison. If it is not possible to establish "secularism" through state security till then the profound lyrics of Tagore, "Give us a new birth from fear to fearlessness" will remain as mere words confined to pages of the books.



References:

- Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2002)
- Foucault, M (1980). *Power of Knowledge*. Selected Interviews and other writings, 1972-1977. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M (1982): *The Subject and Power*. In H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rainbow (Eds.); Michel Foucault: *Beyond Structuralism and hermeneutics*. Chicago :University of Chicago Press.
- Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sydney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994)
- Hall. John, R. *Transforming Power: Domination, Empowerment and education*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- John R. Hall (2001), *Religion and Violence: Social Processes in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge University Press
- Kreisberg, S. (1992). *Religion and Violence*. 2001, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton.
- Jaswant Singh (2009) in his book '*Jinnah: India-Partition-Independence*'
- Varshney, Ashutosh and Gubler, Joshua (2012), '*Does the State Promote Communal Violence for Electoral Reasons?*'
- Wilkinson, Steven I. (2004), *Votes and Violence*. Cambridge University Press.