



# Violence against Minority Population In Bangladesh: **Gains of Few and Loss of the Nation**

Dr. Ferdous Jahan and Muhammad Ashikur Rahman



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## Contents

FORWARD	04
Executive Summary	05
Introduction	06-07
Who are Minorities?	07
Historical Context of Violence against Minorities	08-12
The Recent Scenario	12-22
Factors behind Violence against Minorities	23-29
Is it Possible to Change the Trends of Violence Against Minorities?	29-32
Photo Galary	33-35

## FORWARD

Bangladesh requires creating an immense pace towards reduction of poverty and inequalities between man and woman, rural and urban and majority and minority in terms of religion, faith, creed, race and ethnicity. Uttaran, which started its journey at Jatpur village of Tala upazilla under Satkhira district, are protesting violence and disparity against marginalized. The organization is still proceeding forward along with the development-possibilities of local people in Southwest region of Bangladesh. Uttaran emphasizes on capacity building of vulnerable communities through different types of activities in order to ensure sustainable development.

Bangladesh has shown the world that it has been able to expand its food production substantially, develop important new export industries such as ready-made garments and shrimp, improve areas of its health care and education social sectors and point the way to new potential solutions to global poverty. Despite of different kinds of challenges, Bangladesh's economy began to fare better, its population growth rate was reduced, and the country's overall poverty levels went into declined.

The particularly period of 2013, Bangladesh has witnessed an increased level of political disturbance, confrontation and manifested into nationwide strikes, commonly called hartals. The hartal days are gripped with street violence between those supporting the strikes and the police force, and damaging and destroying of property. During the period, such political actions caused murders, burning down houses and business organizations and cutting down trees at Bangladesh particularly of southwest region i.e. Satkhira, Jessore, Khulna. Religious and ethnic minorities of suffered from frequent assaults, tortures, threats, displacement and marginalization. Human Rights are gravely in threat due to the extremist political activities.

As a human rights based organisation Uttaran took initiative to conduct a study with objective to understand in depth rights violation situation of minorities communities particularly women, Hindu and untouchable communities, small farmers and labourers.

The report focuses on Khulna, Jessore and Sathkira and adjacent regions, collecting data primarily from local minority people belonging mostly to Hinduism and from local journalists.

We thank all the member of community who supported to collect information and journalists. We thank Dr. Ferdous Jahan and Mohammad Ashikur Rahman for their support to conduct the study. I wish you all the best.

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**Shahidul Islam**  
Director  
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## Executive Summary

After the new government came to power in its second consecutive term through the recent controversial election, the conditions for minority communities of the country's different regions was expected to improve but unfortunately remained extremely distressing. The scale of violence went up with the supporters of war criminals further exacerbating the overall situation. Religious and ethnic minorities of Bangladesh particularly of southwestern region suffered from frequent assaults, tortures, threats, displacement and marginalization in the last 10 to 12 months. However, exploiting these vulnerable people is not an entirely new phenomenon in Bangladesh. Having analyzed the historical context of minority persecution in Bangladesh, we have found that the trend continued since the riot of 1964; through the liberation war in 1971, the regime of dictatorship in 1980, in the run up to the 2001 and 2008 elections to date. Although recent incidents received some coverage in the media, however, a thorough investigation on this issue with necessary measures to take has not yet been done. Some groups, individuals and researchers have tried to bring the issue to the limelight but those do not seem sufficient for the government to take the issue in hand ensuring swift and severe punishment of the miscreants and peaceful co-existence of majority and minority citizens of the country.

The paper blending previous researches, media coverage and our analysis, argues that apparently there is politics encompassing two major possessions of minority people which are 'vote' and 'land'. Political parties particularly ruling parties during their regimes benefit most out these two possessions, the reason why politics persists around minority people in Bangladesh. Other reasons behind violence against minorities range from economic, social, cultural and religious backgrounds, to ideological standpoint of secular and Islamist parties.

The paper focuses on Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira and adjacent regions, the south-west coastal areas of Bangladesh, given the recent attacks on minorities in these areas, collecting data primarily from local minority people belonging mostly to Hinduism and from local journalists. We also collected secondary data from various researches conducted on minority issues, reports and newspapers. The report details evidence of violence against Hindu and other ethnic communities, including arsons, killing, rape, attacks on religious sites; and intimidation, political influence, displacement and consequential loss of properties.

The report suggests that minority Hindus represent the most vulnerable section of the study area. The ongoing violence has seriously affected their lives and properties and may inhibit their right to express their religious and ethnic identity. These limitations may in turn restrict their access to education, health services, and employment and even threaten their existence in the region.

The report highlights how political, economic, religious and cultural factors are responsible for communal fracas in Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira and how violence helps influential groups to occupy minority people's lands and properties. It also shows the migration trend of minorities particularly Hindus to the neighboring Hindu-majority West Bengal and other parts of the country. Roles of the government, socio-cultural and political groups and media on minority issues have also been discussed in the paper.

In looking for solutions, the report focuses on the urgent need for formulating a special act and forming a national minority commission. A constitutional provision to safeguard minority rights is also urged as the constitution of Bangladesh recognizes no minority in the country and contains no special provision for their protection and promotion. Forming a separate ministry on minority affairs and formulation of policy delineating their rights, promotion plan, and stern penalty for any sort of violence against them are also recommended.

## 1. Introduction

Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira districts are located in the south-west of Bangladesh along the border with the Indian state of West Bengal in the west. The three districts are adjacent to each other with the largest mangrove in the world 'Sundarbans' forest to the south and beyond that the Bay of Bengal. The region is one of the most vulnerable and poorest regions of Bangladesh in terms of climate change and disaster proneness. Natural disasters along with other problems such as salinity, water logging, arable land crisis etc. lead to livelihood insecurity which leaves the people living there extremely vulnerable and prone to migration to other areas. However, apart from these natural factors, human trafficking, violence against minority people, land grabbing have also contributed to huge displacement of citizens from the region. Yet, the region does not seem to attract enough attention from the government to take initiatives in fixing these issues and problems. Climate change impacted people particularly minorities remain in the far cry from rehabilitation programs, employment and overall infrastructural development.

Since the liberation of Bangladesh, both Hindu and Muslim citizens along with other marginal communities have been living together with peace and harmony. At the same time weak and powerless people (most of them are from religious minority groups) have been victims of land grabbing, property dispute and violence, inflicted by powerful groups with political ties. The underlying tension between "settlers" (people who migrated from India after partition in 1947) and original inhabitants of the regions has exacerbated the vulnerability of people of this region.

The issues of violence against and exploitation of minority have re-surfaced since the advent of electoral democracy in Bangladesh in 1991. It has been observed that the minority populations have been subject to political use by both major political parties. There is evidence that during big political events like national elections, religious minority population are often threatened, abused, displaced and even killed and their properties get plundered leaving them without shelter. During the recent (10<sup>th</sup>) national election, these types of violence and atrocious activities have reached a new height. Given that the major opposition party did not participate in the election, their activists tried to coerce them not to vote while the ruling party did the opposite. The minority citizens thus became victims of both parties. Specifically, right before the election, due to absence of strong political leadership, the administration and law enforcers became inactive and political thugs took this opportunity to realize their economic and political objectives by means of persecution and exploitation. But this time, the situation was a bit different from previous election-period violence because the current government is widely believed to protect minorities more than that of any other government. Therefore, despite being subject to government's support and constant vigilance of law enforcing agencies, why still they became victim of such brutal and undemocratic actions provides a big question mark.

The question leads us to find out other factors that instigated perpetrators to carry out such terrible atrocities. One of the factors is the issue of war criminals' tribunal. The ruling party when it came to power, promised to ensure justice for victims of crimes during the liberation war of 1971. The Islamic party leaders who have been accused and convicted for such crimes by the war crime tribunal were rehabilitated after 1975 and gained significant political power and support base within the country. Satkhira is considered as a stronghold district of Jamat-E-Islami. Jamat won in four of five constituencies in the 5<sup>th</sup>, one in 7<sup>th</sup> and three in 8<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections in Satkhira.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the execution of Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abdul Kader Mullah, on

<sup>1</sup> Calculation conducted by Mannan Sadiat (2014) based on Bangladesh Election Commission data

December 12, 2013, and death sentence of Delwar Hossain Sayedee resulted in retaliation by Jamat supporters and resulted in violence against minority people all across Bangladesh including Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira. But the surprising fact is that in some instances, the Awami League activists who are known to be the savior of minority people were found to be the perpetrators of violence against minority<sup>2</sup>. This presents a puzzle that needs to be resolved. In this paper, we will try to answer: why minority populations are systematically abused by political thugs? Why does the state fail to protect them? And why do the known vanguards of minority rights participate in violence against the people who they are supposed to protect? We will use qualitative interview information and newspaper reports for our analysis. Before and after the 2010 election, eight key informant interviews and two focused group discussions were held in Satkhira and Jessore to support the secondary sources of data for this paper.

The paper is divided into six sections. After this introductory section, section 2 defines minority citizens in general and Bangladesh context in particular. Section 3 narrates the historical contexts of violence against minorities in Bangladesh. Section 4 depicts a picture of recent incidents of violence against minority population. Section 5 tries to explain the reasons behind violence against minorities and finally section 6 sheds some light on how such incidents can be reduced by the taking specific steps mainly by the government.

## 2. Who are Minorities?

As this paper deals with minorities, defining the group is important. Sociologist Louis Wirth defined a minority group as "a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination."<sup>3</sup> In democratic societies, it is based on the numerical ratio to the population as a whole in a particular area. But in international law the term "minority" is commonly used in more restricted sense. It refers to a particular group within a country which differs from the dominant group in terms of religion, ethnicity, race, language, and origin.

Bangladesh possesses a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual pluralistic society. Its people have variety of beliefs. Several languages are spoken indifferent parts of the country, especially in the tribal areas and Chittagong Hill Tract districts. A good number of ethnic groups live in the north and northeastern part and the Hill districts of the country. Moreover, a considerable number of Biharis (stranded Pakistanis) is also residing in different parts of Bangladesh. Therefore, the minorities in Bangladesh can be classified under four different heads<sup>4</sup> :

- Religious Minorities;
- Ethnic Minorities;
- Linguistic Minorities; and
- Other minorities

In our focused area, two types of minorities - Religious and Ethnic - are mostly found. Among religious minorities Hindus comprise the majority followed by Christian and Buddhists. Ethnic minorities though very limited are also seen here. Among them Monda community comprises the largest group followed by Barmon, Sawntal, Tripura, Chakma and others. Detailed information and statistics have been inserted in section 5 of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> AL men attacked Hindus: discussion, New Age, 10 January, 2014

<sup>3</sup> Wirth, L: "The Problem of Minority Groups.", page 347, Columbia University Press 1945

<sup>4</sup> Gobinda Chandra, Mandal Rights of Minorities: The Case of Bangladesh

### 3. Historical Context of Violence against Minorities

Before 1950s the region was a Hindu Majority area. When riots erupted in the mid-1940s and again in 1964, there were migrations and exodus from both ends. Consequently, this region became a Muslim Majority with some Hindu and other minority groups still living there who were not able or did not choose to migrate. Notwithstanding of these riots, people started living peacefully once again particularly there were no collisions between local Hindus and local Muslims. Migrants as well were searching for a better future. They exchanged their houses and land in India with the land and houses of Hindus - usually rich Zamindars (landlords) - who lived in East Pakistan. Some of the old abandoned houses belonging to Zamindars are still found in the region. On both sides of the border still there are many people with both emotional and physical ties (relatives and extended family members living in the other part) to the other part. It is interesting to see that in many tea-shops some people of Bangladesh put up pictures of the Taj Mahal, others in India put up pictures of Bangladesh's Jamuna Bridge. Each year, during the festivals of Eid and Durga Puja, people from both sides of the border throng to the banks of the Ichhamati river and sometimes cross to attend fairs and to visit family on the 'other side' for a few hours.

But the continuation of these peaceful co-existence and emotional exchange of Hindu and Muslim people have been disrupted on many occasions after liberation. People, particularly migrants, cannot altogether root out mistrusts and hatred towards original inhabitants. The historical basis of this mistrust is the fact that during the riots in West Bengal, India, many West Bengali Muslims had to leave their lands and homes and cross the rivers towards East Pakistan. Many lived in refugee camps. Some of these camps are in Bangladesh's Satkhira district such as those established in Koikhali, Kalinchi, and Bhetkhali. Some of the refugees have organized themselves into the 'Refugees' Society' as they used to be shunned by the local population.

Historical events such as communal riots in 1950, 1964, the then Muslim League being a stronghold in this region and subsequently Jamaat-e-Islami taking over their position, huge exodus of Bengali Hindus during liberation war in 1971, demolition of 16th-century Babri Mosque in 1992, Muslim persecution in Burma etc. have fed a wider anti-minority feeling in the country. And all these historical events had a religio-political basis.

Looking into these historical events of violence inflicted by religious majority against religious minorities in this region helps us to understand the political economy of the violence against minority in Bangladesh. Most events including religious conflicts have a political motive. Even communal riots in India were largely politically motivated. In his book "Votes and Violence" (2005), Steven I Wilkinson argued that-

Politicians both cause them and, more importantly, have the power to prevent them, through their control of the state governments responsible for law and order.<sup>5</sup>

Wilkinson develops a political theory of ethnic (religious, racial, linguistic) violence. He argues that when politicians need minority group's support, they prevent incidents of violence against them. When they do not need such support, they do not feel motivated to protect the minority. Although Wilkinson's theory concentrates at the state-level in India, he also examines the town-level causes of ethnic violence. The recent incidents of violence against minority population in Bangladesh context are similar to Wilkinson's arguments and findings.

<sup>5</sup> Steven I Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral competition and ethnic riots in India*, 2005

Our argument is that if politicians conspire to make an impression that their party is the savior of minority groups and another party is intolerant to them, then they might just let violence happen and afterwards make public statements against such violence and help the victims to resume their life. This would undermine other parties in the elections and the "pro-minority" party would get more support (votes in other word) from minority population themselves and more importantly from those who believe in minority rights. And majority people of Bangladesh believe that minority people should have equal rights as citizens. Thus, inflicting violence may serve political purpose. Second, land grabbing and plundering property of vulnerable minorities is an easy business for locally influential people belonging to some political parties. Hence, apolitical and economic gain-seeking motive often work behind vandalism and arsons of minority people's properties. Political and economic factors inciting violence on minority will be discussed later in this paper. Here, we will produce some chronological events around attack and exploitation on minority people of Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira.

Table 1: Incidents of Violence Against Minority Population from Newspaper Reports (2002-2008)

Published in	Incidents
Atrocities Against Minorities in Bangladesh; Visit to Satkhira, Khulna, A Report by Rabindra Ghosh, 2002	In "Khalash Khali" a village under Tala police station about 38 kilometer away from Satkhira town where a group of miscreants with infuriated intention and ill motive purported to have been produced a deed of "Power of Attorney" authorizing some of the miscreants to sell the entire property of the then zaminder (landlord) Shri Chatterjee. Mrs. Dipti Rani Chatterjee (50) the only legal heir of landlord Shri Chatterjee and daughter of the late landlord told in an interview that she is the only legal heir of all the properties of her father; as her elder brother is handicapped and unable to speak even, the High Court declared to be the legal heir of all zaminder estates and she also showed the copy of High Court order for perusal. But she told that some of the miscreants with ill motive, considering her an orphan, produced a fraudulent deed and purported to have been signed by Mrs. Chatterjee with false signature of her. On the basis of the fraudulent deed the miscreants broke into the house of Mrs. Chatterjee and forcefully occupied the house and also confiscated the land of Mrs. Chatterjee. According to eyewitness and Mrs. Chatterjee that she was compelled to leave the country forever.
Daily Jugantor, Daily Janakantha and Vorer Kagaj, Published on 6 June, 2002	Shri Gobinda Lal Sardar and his mother Mrs. Sundhari Sardar of Fatepur within Kaliganj police station were mercilessly beaten by a Jamait-Islami leader of the locality. The mother and son of the Sadar family were dragged out of their house tied up with rope and beaten up on the way to the torture cell of the accused Jamait Islami leader. The notorious Jamait leader Mr. Gazi run a torture cell to torment minority victims such as Sardar family to evict them out of the property and the country.

<p>BBC News, Published on 15 January, 2004</p>	<p>A prominent journalist, Manik Saha, 45, the Khulna correspondent of the New Age newspaper and president of the Khulna press club has been killed in a bomb attack.</p> <p>Witnesses say an unidentified assailant threw the bomb at Mr Saha while he was riding in a rickshaw.</p>
<p>The Daily Star, Published on 29 March, 2005</p>	<p>About 42 bighas of land of a Hindu family has been grabbed allegedly by ruling party hoodlums at village Chhoto Shanta in Debhata upazila on Sunday. A temple was also torched and an image was damaged during the attack. At least 10 persons were injured when they tried to resist the attackers. However, local BNP leader and Parulia UP Chairman Golam Farooq Babu refuted the allegation. Police have been deployed in the area, but they failed to drive out the grabbers or arrest them.</p>
<p>The Daily Prothom Alo and Samakal, Published on 18 March, 2006</p>	<p>Some terrorists with deadly weapons attacked six minority Hindu families at Daserpatty within Ashasuni Police Station of Satkhira. The injured Bhaven Mondal and Tarak Mondal reported to the Press at Satkhira that the perpetrators belonging to Lal Surjya Club demanded toll of Taka 30,000, a cow belonging to this Hindu family. The owner of the cow went to take back the cow from the possession of perpetrators and they demanded again a toll of Taka 30,000. They refused to pay and consequently the owner has been beaten mercilessly, although the cow has been recovered later on.</p>
<p>The daily Sangbad, Daily Janakantha, Published on 11 July, 2006</p>	<p>Consequent upon killing of Mirza Masud Khan Jewel-Ex. Chatradal Leader, the BNP activists armed with deadly weapons attacked some houses of minority communities at village -Dudli within Patkelghata Police Station under Satkhira district on 9th July, 2006. They also looted belongings of houses, damaged and burnt houses belonging to the minority groups. Police arrested eight minorities on charge of killing of Mirza Masud Khan on suspicion on the contrary.</p>
<p>The Daily Star, Published on 6 April, 2007</p>	<p>The Munda community in Kashipur of Shyamnagar upazila in Satkhira sent copies of a letter to the Anti-corruption Commission, intelligence agencies and joint forces asking for their help in preventing influential land grabbers taking away their ancestral homesteads. In the letter, around 300 indigenous people of 46 families alleged that influential land grabbers have been torturing them, threatening them with death and implicating them in false cases filed with Shyamnagar Police Station. They said the land grabbers are hatching conspiracy to create panic among the people of Munda community. "Over 29 Munda families were compelled to leave their ancestral lands and take shelter at another place," they said. They said one Kamrul Islam of Iswaripur in Shyamnagar has been pumping in saline water from the river into his shrimp enclosure set up around Kashipur destroying arable land so that the Munda community cannot cultivate their lands.</p> <p>Moreover, Kamrul and his gang are not only torturing the indigenous people but also harassing them by implicating them in false cases in a bid to compel them to leave the area, they added.</p> <p>They said Kamrul's younger brother Monzur Rahi, son-in-law of former Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker Gazi Nazrul Islam, and his gang attacked the indigenous people on April 17 last year that left 12 people of the community injured.</p> <p>The gang also chopped down trees on their lands and cut open an embankment that ruined the water of their pond with saline water, they alleged. They said they had filed cases with a police station but no action was taken against the criminals.</p>

<p>The Daily Prothom Alo, Published on 8 April 2007</p>	<p>55 Christian families of Tala upazila of Satkhira district were ostracized. A case was lodged when a Christian couple was repressed few days back. Later police arrested the accused. To this the influential people of the area ostracized them. Nobody of the local bazaar is selling anything to the people of Christian community and even nobody is giving them any work. The Christian couple is now fleeing away for the continuous threat to withdraw the case.</p> <p>Laxmi Sarkar, wife of Bistu Sarkar of village Laxmanpur told that an influential named Sheikh Haidar Ali of village Noapara told her to meet him centering her family feud. Laxmi Sarkar along with her husband was going to Sheikh Haidar's house by van on March 21 last. On the way Sheikh Haidar Ali stopped the van and took them to task. He also beat up Laxmi Sarkar and her husband when they protested it.</p> <p>Laxmi Sarkar and her husband went to local Jatpur police camp for a justice to the incident. Both of them at the advice of camp in charge Anisur Rahman took primary aid from Upazila Health Complex. Bistu Sarkar lodged a case with Tala police station on that very night accusing Sheikh Haidar Ali. Later police arrested Haidar Ali on March 22.</p> <p>Laxmi Sarkar told that about 40-50 men led by chairman of Tetulia Union Parishad Mokbul Hossain, Haidar Ali's cousin Sheikh Moshir Rahman, Tarapad Sarkar and Kanai Das came to her house on March 22 night. They forcibly took the signatures of Laxmi Sarkar and her husband on two white papers saying that they would settle the matter. The next day Moshir Rahman took them to Tala police station by a microbus. Both Laxmi Sarkar and her husband were forced beforehand to say before the OC of Tala police station Abdur Razzak that the matter was solved. Being forced Laxmi Sarkar and her husband admitted that. Later the subject of the settlement of the matter was put down on the papers on which signatures of Laxmi Sarkar and her husband were taken were submitted before the court and then the court granted the bail of Sheikh Haidar Ali on March 25.</p> <p>Some Christian inhabitants of Laxman village told that after Sheikh Haidar Ali was freed on bail, the people of Christian Palli (village) were ostracized. Lutfar Mallik, Atiar Sardar, Abdus Sattar and Delwar Hossain supported Haidar Ali for this work.</p>
<p>The Daily Ittefaq, Published on 24 March, 2008</p>	<p>Amratola-Chapra of Mongla: Due to continuous threat from the influential quarters, Parimal Roy (45), dirt poor and hapless father of a Hindu schoolgirl couldn't file a case against the kidnapers of his daughter at the local police station. Nobody is speaking out against this crime fearing retribution, as the kidnapper come from a very powerful and influential family. Finding no other alternatives, Parimal, the poor and helpless father has decided to sell the ancestral home, his only material asset, and leave his village. This Sunday, Parimal expressed his grievance and helplessness in front of a group of journalists at the local press club.</p> <p>As per Parimal, his daughter (16) is going to appear at this year's S.S.C. (Secondary School Certificate) examination from the local Amratola-Chapra Secondary School. On the fateful evening of March 2, when she went outside of her home in order to respond to nature's call, she was abducted by a neighborhood hoodlum, Saiful Molla, son of Hai Molla, a powerful and wealthy local man. He used a motorcycle to abduct her. Two local young men named Tapas and Suman Mondal were the accomplices of this incident.</p>

The aforementioned cases provide a clear picture of the plight of minorities in the region and clearly justify our argument that minorities are still choked by the torture and threats from different influential groups- be it political or local influential groups. Regrettably this trend of persecuting minorities seems to be established regardless of government's repeated vows to eliminate such injustice and crime from the society. In the next section we will discuss the most recent incidents of persecution on minority people in the three districts.

## 4. The Recent Scenario

Attacks on the minority community in Khulna, Jessore, Satkhira continue to date, particularly in the run up to the recently held election and immediately after the election. There are cases that Hindu temples have been ransacked, villages destroyed and scores of Hindu women are reported to have been raped and injured. 'The violent attacks caused 452 houses, 246 business establishments and 26 temples vandalised, looted or set on fire in at least 76 places in 23 districts.'<sup>6</sup> A total of 485 houses, 578 business establishments and 152 temples were vandalised, looted and set on fire in sectarian attacks in 32 districts in 44 days between November 25, 2013 and January 8, the parishad in a press conference on January 9 alleged.<sup>7</sup>

In March and December of this year, two major waves of violence were launched on Hindu properties, temples, and businesses in the southwestern districts. The death sentence to Delwar Hossain Sayedee last year and particularly the execution of Abdul Kader Mullah precede the violence. The nature of violence was so severe that it triggered an exodus of inhabitants to West Bengal, Khulna and Dhaka cities. We will discuss here some forms of violence and torture on minorities and how government responded to the situation.

### 4.1 Vandalism, Violence and Arsons

In the recent spate of violence, minorities of Khulna, Jessore, Satkhira came under severe attack. According to statistics presented by Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad in a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity on the basis of the information provided by its local units, 'in the last one month, more than 70 households, business centers belonging to Hindu families including freedom fighter Shubhash Ghosh, Taposh Acharyo, Milon Sarkar, Gopal Goshamy, Tarok Sarkar are looted and set on fire in Satkhira district including Agordari and Debhata upazila.'<sup>8</sup> 'In different parts of the district, alleged Jamaat-Shibir men have burned and vandalized at least 36 houses and shops belonging to Hindus since the execution of convicted war criminal Abdul Kader Mullah.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Primary Report of Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad's local units

<sup>7</sup> Primary Report of Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad's local units

<sup>8</sup> Primary Report of Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad's local units

<sup>9</sup> Panicked, Hindus Flee, The Daily Star, 16 December, 2013

A report of Daily Star brought the case of Shyamol and his uncle Gopal Chandra Ghosal to light. According to the report, 'Gopal Chandra Ghosal was one of the worst victims of the Agardari village under Sadar upazila. "His house came under attack immediately after the appeal verdict of war criminal Abdul Kader Mullah was delivered on November 26.'<sup>10</sup> Around 60 masked men from nearby villages stormed his house and took away his TV, refrigerator and some furniture, and set those on fire. They also took two motorbikes of the family, burnt one and vandalised the other. The attackers also wanted to slaughter Gopal and one of his grandsons but finally spared them after women of the house begged for mercy. His nephew Shyamol, a lawyer by profession, said many Hindu families had sent their women and children family members to safe places while a few men stayed back to guard their houses.'<sup>11</sup>

In Jessore, 'Miscreants vandalized at least 46 Hindu houses and establishments and torched 6 more on Sunday night. They accused the victims of voting for Awami League. About 200 residents of Malopara took shelter at Deyapara village across the river Bhairab following the attack. Jessore Police Super Jaydev Kumar Bhadra inspected the villages. In instant response, Avaynagar administration distributed 200 blankets among the victims. There have been allegations that police, ruling Awami league leaders and the administration didn't promptly respond to their calls of help. Police arrived much later after the carnage was complete.'<sup>12</sup>

Religious structures, temples are not spared from the atrocities and violence. According to an article published in The Daily Star more than 60 Hindu temples were damaged or destroyed between February and April 2013.<sup>13</sup> Satkhira and Jessore witnessed the worst of these damages. Similar incidents repeated during December last year and January of this year. Similar incidents repeated during December last year and January of this year.

#### **4.2 Rape and Sexual Violence against Women**

Minority women of the focused areas are more vulnerable than that of men. During and after violence, it is reported that women members of the family were sent to their relatives' house for safety. There is a number of cases where it has been found that women belonging to minority community became victims of rape and sexual abuse. Women have been raped as part of the strategy to terrorize and humiliate these communities.<sup>14</sup> Here we will present a case of a girl gang raped in Satkhira district. Odhikar carried out a fact finding mission into this incident. The case is derived from Odhikar's Fact Finding Report titled "Gang rape of a girl in Satkhira District: Allegation against police for putting false information in the FIR and taking bribe."

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<sup>10</sup> Hindus, AL men desert homes, The Daily Star, 22 December, 2013

<sup>11</sup> Hindus, AL men desert homes, The Daily Star, 22 December, 2013

<sup>12</sup> Minorities attacked in 4 districts, the Daily Ittefaq, 7 January, 2014

<sup>13</sup> Abbas Faiz, Protect the Hindu community, The Daily Star, 10 February, 2014

<sup>14</sup> Ananta Yusuf, Communal Terror Continues, The Star, 17 January, 2014

On February 26, 2013, Gita Rani<sup>15</sup> (18) a student of 12<sup>th</sup> grade and belonging to the minority Hindu Community under Assasuni Police Station in Satkhira, went to visit a fair in Bamondanga village. At around 8:30pm she was seen to have been in a conversation with an old acquaintance Anup Mondol at the east side of that fair. All of a sudden a group of 7-8 miscreants rushed towards them aggressively, beat up Anup and robbed both their cell phones and Anup's wallet. At one point due to their incessant beating Anup got fainted, and then they forcefully took Gita to a marsh land (normally a paddy field which is inundated during monsoon season) in Bamondanga where she was raped by four persons. After committing rape, on February 27, 2013 at around 4:00 in the morning, one of the rapists left Gita at a house in a nearby Baintola village. From a woman in that house, Gita came to know about Alamgir, who dropped her at that house. From there at around 8:00pm, an unidentified man and a lady took Gita to a place named Tetultala by a motorcycle. While struggling to reach home from Tetultala, Gita was seen by her teacher who helped her to return home. Gita was admitted at the Ashashuni Upazila Health Complex on February 28 and she was treated there until March 03, 2013. During this period Gita's father and maternal uncle went to the Ashashuni Police Station six times, in order to file a case for gang rape of Gita. However, Mohammad Emdad Hossain, Officer-in-Charge of the Ashashuni Police Station did not pay heed. The Officer-in-Charge finally recorded the statement when Gita herself appeared with her family members on March 6, 2013 at the police station. Gita told him that she was abducted from the fair and then raped by Alamgir and three other strangers whom she never saw before. Following instruction of the police in-charge, a man in the police station named Pobitro Kumar Das prepared the FIR (First Information Report). He did not read out the FIR to Gita but asked her to sign on it. At the FIR it is mentioned that Gita was gang raped by five persons. The FIR recorded Anup Kumar, Himangsu, Mohammad Rabbi, Yahiya and Kamallesh as the accused. A case was filed under section 7/9(3)/30 of the Prevention of Repression against Women and Children Act, 2000 (amended 2003). The case number is 6; Date: 06/03/2013. But Gita alleged that, she was raped by four persons who were unknown to her but she came to know about Alamgir, a local journalist. It is revealed through Odhikar's fact finding that, Alamgir claimed himself as a journalist of 'Doinik Kafela' and 'Radio Nolta', however at present he is not employed as a journalist by any media but by using false visiting card he is involved with illegal and antisocial activities at the locality. Three of the five persons mentioned in the FIR, Anup Mondol (police in FIR wrote his name as Anup Kumar), Himangsu and Kamallesh were known to Gita and not rapists. She also stated that she does not know Mohammad Rabbi and Yahiya, but their names have been written in the FIR as rapists. Moreover, in the FIR, OC Mohammad Emdad ordered to state Alamgir's name as the person responsible for saving Gita's life instead of putting him as one of the accused. Besides putting false names; for the purpose of filing the case, the Officer-in-Charge took a bribe of Tk 5000/- (although he initially demanded Tk 15,000/-) from Gita's uncle. It is to be noted that filing FIR is a right of the victim and is provided without any cost as per law in any police station.

The case of Gita Rani is just an example of how vulnerable minority women are and how they are exposed to sexual abuse. The more disappointment is the fact that it is difficult for victims to put the criminals on trial as the administration with their corrupt practices let criminals go away encouraging them to carry out such crimes over and over again.

<sup>15</sup> Pseudonym (The real names of the rape victim and her relatives have not been disclosed in this report rather in some cases pseudonyms have been used)

### 4.3 Spreading Rumor and Propaganda

Spreading rumor and propaganda is a strategy that some groups use to receive general people's support for a particular cause. In Bangladesh this phenomenon has been common. The most recent rumor was spread around different parts of the country in March last year that JI leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee's face has been seen or reflected on the surface of the Moon. Some news agency reported that the news was even announced from mosques in few places. It is interesting to note the time period of this rumor game being played just after the war crime tribunal sentenced Delwar Hossain Sayedee to death. The motivation behind this rumor might be to motivate general Muslims to participate in the mass protest against the verdict. The group floating the rumor has been successful in the sense that after the incident protests were organized in many places of Bangladesh including Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira taking the form of violence against minorities.

"Drishtipat, a local Jamaat-e-Islami patronized newspaper, spread a rumor that a school play in the village had made indecent remarks about the Prophet. The local newspaper reportedly circulated complimentary copies of the paper to different houses, bazaars and mosques. By March 30, the news had spread and people started protesting in different villages. The Star has obtained earlier copies of Drishtipat from 2011, which show that the newspaper had spread similar propaganda in the past to incite violence against the religious minorities living in the area."<sup>16</sup>

Talking to the local journalists of Satkhira we came to know about some other propaganda cases. The case of a school teacher and a human rights activist belonging to the minority community is worth mentioning here. Some miscreants of Satkhira town molested her. She filed a case against them. School authority and some AL activists got involved in the issue. They forced her to withdraw the case but she did not. Consequently miscreants released an obscene photo on the internet adding her face on it. Facing this, she filed yet another case and as a result the school authority suspended her.

Propaganda and rumor against minorities is not a new dimension of communalism in Bangladesh. In recent attacks on minorities, rumors played a crucial role. Before torching a single hut or temple it was a rumor that instigated people to lash out against the minorities.

### 4.4 Consequences of Violence that Minorities Face

Minorities face severe consequences resulting from the oppression and attacks on them. Most often the violence leaves them in a state of fear and helplessness. They are threatened, killed, women are raped, and propaganda is spread against them. Thousands of Hindu families who own the soil for generations have left behind all their movable and immovable properties. Having found no shelter, they were forced to flee to the neighboring West Bengal, India or other parts of the country. According to a report of The Daily Star, "around 200 to 250 solvent Hindu people from affected remote villages had left their homes and taken refuge in the district town, Khulna and the capital. Some had even moved to India through legal or illegal means."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ananta Yusuf, Communal Terror Continues, The Star, 17 January, 2014

<sup>17</sup> Hindus, AL men desert homes, The Daily Star, 22 December, 2013

During our recent visit in the study area, we observed that minority particularly Hindu households in miles of different villages have been vacant. One respondent said that he observed more than 50 families migrating to India in a month. According to the respondents, among minority people who have some assets and properties tend to migrate and people who have nothing to stay. As a consequence, the poor and vulnerable minority populations who cannot opt the option to migrate continue to repeatedly suffer from violence and attacks.

It is not merely violence or attack on the minority people that caused them to migrate though. There are other issues relating to environmental hazards or natural disasters. In his research leading environmentalist Dr. Ainun Nishat found out some major reasons behind migration of people from our study area.

The major reasons for migration in Satkhira appear to fall under the following categories: livelihood vulnerability, disaster management, land use change, basic services and facilities and natural disaster.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, after the cyclone Aila devastated large areas of Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira, migration trend of minority people increased more than before. However, recent violence against them on political, economic, religious, and cultural ground exacerbates their state to the ultimate.

The issue, however, that has always been overlooked is the psychological trauma that minority people of these areas go through during and after any attack on them. Apart from their loss of lives and properties by both manmade (violence, attacks) and natural disaster, there are those who still live there with fear and insecurity. Government and many non-government organizations in some cases stretch their helping hand to the sufferers but that can hardly repair their loss of lives and security compensated in the form of money. "Trust and respect in society, which money cannot buy, is lost in such attacks. The social fabric of Bangladesh is rent asunder."<sup>19</sup>

These dreadful situations make them re-think whether or not to stay where they lived for ages. In the face of all these attacks and violence some still stay bearing the tortures of the attackers who are patronized and indemnified by political parties. We wonder how long they could fight against both natural and the worst form of manmade disasters. If the situation persists, one day in near future minorities will be entirely wiped out from the area making another sad history.

#### **4.4.1 State of Different Small Professionals**

The lives of different professionals came to a standstill as there were instances that laborers did not get works for the political unrest; small farmers and fisher folks left their farms and lands being threatened; fishing nets were burned in the recent violence. New Age reported that "the attacks took place immediately after the elections on January 5 during which Hindu households were vandalised and fishing nets were burned, and recurred in Panchagarh and Satkhira. Many families have chosen not to return home for fear of further attacks despite assurances from local administrations."<sup>20</sup> Miscreants equipped with weapons and explosives attacked more than a hundred houses in a village of fishermen after the elections.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Ainun Nishat, Role of Governance in Climate Change induced Migration, Final Report, 2013

<sup>19</sup> BANGLADESH: Attacks on non-Muslims must stop now, forever, Financial times, 13 January, 2014

<sup>20</sup> Editorial: Deplorable attacks on religious minority communities, New Age, 9 January 2014

<sup>21</sup> ATTACKS ON RELIGIOUS MINORITIES: Fresh attacks take place in Satkhira, Panchagarh, New Age, 8 January 2014

"When anything happens, Hindus are attacked," says Subhash Ghosh, his eyes filling with tears as he stands outside the burnt shell of his house in the Bangladeshi countryside near the Indian border. "Everything is lost."

He and another 21 members of his extended family have sought refuge in a nearby town and dare not stay the night on the farm their family has owned for more than a century.<sup>22</sup>

"The correspondent in Jessore said that a number of fishermen left their houses for safety again although a temporary police camp was set up at Malopara-Chapatala at Abhaynagar."<sup>23</sup>

These unpleasant incidents in the areas where mostly poor minority people feeding on fishing, day laboring, farming etc. clearly demonstrate that how vulnerable and insecure they and their livelihood have been. In such circumstance, little efforts from government have been seen to make the victims return home safe and sound and compensate for their loss. "The deputy commissioner of Jessore, however, said that Tk 3.37 lakh and four tonnes of rice had been allocated for the victims.<sup>24</sup> But this seems too inadequate to make it up for the victims considering their huge loss of property and livelihood security. As we mentioned earlier that poor section of the community tend to migrate more than that of rich section, attacks on minorities of these small professionals living hand to mouth may root them out entirely.

#### **4.5 Reactions of the Government, Civil Society and International Actors**

Waves of protest by different socio-political, cultural and professional bodies swept over the country with the demand for stern action against the people who attacked Hindus and other ethnic minorities in different regions during and after the January 5, 2014 national election.

The Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) demanded due compensation to the victimized families from a protest rally in front of the capital's Jatiya Press Club. Terming the attacks as crimes against humanity, they demanded a ban on all communal organisations, including Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir, immediately.<sup>25</sup>

A civil society body, "Samprodayik Sohingsotar Protirodhe Bikhuddho Janata", headed by rights activist Khusi Kabir asked why the government and the Election Commission, despite being aware of vulnerability of Hindus, could not protect them from the post-election persecution.<sup>26</sup>

Manusher Jonno Foundation and associate organizations issued a press statement calling upon the progressive forces to stand united against such violence. The organization will send aid to the affected areas.<sup>27</sup>

Sushasoner Jannoy Nagorik (SHUJAN) formed a human chain, while several progressive organizations held a rally in front of the National Museum. SHUJAN Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said culture of impunity was responsible for recurrence of such attacks.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Hindu minority become target of Bangladesh violence, Financial Times, 13 January, 2014

<sup>23</sup> ATTACKS ON RELIGIOUS MINORITIES: Fresh attacks take place in Satkhira, Panchagarh, New Age, 8 January 2014

<sup>24</sup> ATTACKS ON RELIGIOUS MINORITIES: Fresh attacks take place in Satkhira, Panchagarh, New Age, 8 January 2014

<sup>25</sup> Protests against minority repression sweep country, The Daily Star, 9 January, 2014

<sup>26</sup> Protests against minority repression sweep country, The Daily Star, 9 January, 2014

<sup>27</sup> Protests against minority repression sweep country, The Daily Star, 9 January, 2014

<sup>28</sup> Protests against minority repression sweep country, The Daily Star, 9 January, 2014

A team of "Bangladesh Rukhe Darao", a platform of progressive and pro-liberation forces, visited parts of Satkhira district that have been wrecked by violence by suspected Jamaat-Shibir activists after the Jamaat-e-Islami leader and convicted war criminal Abdul Kader Mullah was executed. The team, led by journalist Abed Khan, called upon the local people to build resistance against anti-liberation forces. They also urged the government to take stern action against Jamaat-Shibir men for their involvement in the violence escalating around the country, including Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira.

Presidium Member of the Communist Party of Bangladesh Ruhin Hossain Prince said the ruling party leaders wanted to grab Hindus' land, while the opposition wanted to annihilate them from the country to secure their vote bank by pushing Hindus to more vulnerable condition.<sup>29</sup>

On 6 February, 2014 The Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad organized a press conference held in Dhaka Reporters Unity on the situation of religious minority after the 10<sup>th</sup> general election. In a written statement they expressed their deep concern over the issue. The council presented a primary report portraying a general picture of minority attacks in different parts of the country. They placed some demands to the government in order to put on the table as immediately as possible.

Some reactions from other countries were also noted on this appalling issue.

On 4 March, the United States Department of State expressed concerns over the attacks on Hindu temples and homes in Bangladesh.<sup>30</sup> Dan Mozena US Ambassador to Bangladesh expresses concern about attack on Bengali Hindu community.<sup>31</sup>

The British High Commissioner in Dhaka, Mr. Robert Gibson expressed his deep concern and resentment upon the attack upon the religious places and the recent attacks in a press conference on Sunday 3 March held in Dhaka.<sup>32</sup>

In India, activists of Gairik Bharat burned an effigy of Sheikh Hasina in Silchar, in protest against her failure to protect the Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.<sup>33</sup>

The Amnesty International has called upon the Bangladesh government for giving better protection to the minority Hindus in the country. In a March 6 report, titled 'Bangladesh: Wave of Violent Attacks against Hindu Minority', the Amnesty said as many as 40 Hindu temples were vandalized in attacks by supporters of an Islamic party. Several hundred were rendered homeless as shops and houses belonging to the Hindu community were burnt down over the past week, it said. The report gave Bangladesh's war crimes trial as the context to the violence against the Hindus.<sup>34</sup>

Despite all these prompt reactions from many quarters - both national and international - to punish those responsible for attacking minority communities and to ensure security for them, government responses to address the issue were largely disappointing. Some groups including The Bangladesh Hindu-Bouddha-Christian Oikya Parishad alleged that government utterly failed to protect lives and properties of minority people and to bring perpetrators to book. 'The Oikya

<sup>29</sup> Protests against minority repression sweep country, The Daily Star, 9 January, 2014

<sup>30</sup> Patrick, Ventrell (4 March 2013). "Daily Press Briefing" (Press release), Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of State

<sup>31</sup> US worried at violence", The Daily Star (Bangladesh), March 12, 2013 & "Mozena: Violence is not the way to resolution", The Daily Ittefaq, March 11, 2013

<sup>32</sup> UK calls for restraint in Bangladesh", bdnews24.com, 3 March, 2013

<sup>33</sup> ভারতে হাসিনার কুশপুতুলদাহ AmaderShomoy.com (in Bengali), 3 March, 2013

<sup>34</sup> Amnesty calls for protecting Hindus, bdnews24.com, 7 March, 2013 &

Parishad leader blamed the Chief Election Commissioner and the government for failing to ensure the security of minorities and alleged that the targeted attacks had caused a sense of insecurity in the minorities.<sup>35</sup> In his article published in *The Daily Star*, Rumi Ahmed, a political analyst said "it is true that compared to what the administration did to prevent escalation of violence in December 1992, in Hathajari, Satkhira and Ramu, the current administration failed to mobilize resources in time to stop the rioters with a heavy-handed approach."<sup>36</sup>

In Bangladesh, governments have always tried to gain political advantage out of minority issues. The current government instead of taking immediate actions against the miscreants in recent violence goes in the same way. Ironically, they seem to find it convenient to blame the opposition political parties. Although, law enforcement agencies launched a joint drive in Satkhira consisting of Police, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) to restore law and order. However, this failed to remove the security concern among the minority people. Rather, the operation has been blamed to have shown political bias as the joint force allegedly arrested and killed opposition's political party men. It "caused panic and dissatisfaction among people because of law enforcers' excesses indiscriminate fire killing people and bulldozing houses of opposition men."<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, involvement of ruling party's high ranking political leaders in such violence raises questions of its seriousness to stop these incidents. In a discussion, Kaberi Gayen, professor of mass communication and journalism at Dhaka University said "she felt uncomfortable to hear that former AL whip Sheikh Abdul Wahab, who faced allegations of involvement in the Abhaynagar attacks in Jessore, was seen sitting beside Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina when she went to the upazila to visit the affected Hindu families."<sup>38</sup>

Government also failed to implement suggestions made by a judicial commission that probed the 2001 post-polls violence. The commission submitted a report in April 2011 suggesting some initiatives in order to avert post-poll violence against minorities. But according to the chief of the commission, Mohammad Shahabuddin, no recommendation has been implemented.

However, the prime minister visited the southwestern region immediately after the violence erupted and assured that her government is beside the people of this region. She said at a rally that "You (people of Satkhira) must unite and stand against these wicked forces. We are with you; the law enforcers are with you."<sup>39</sup>

Officers in the Ministry of Home Affairs said that government has taken a zero tolerance policy regarding the attack on the minority. In an interview with *BBC Bangla*, Additional Secretary Mr. Kamal Uddin said that district administrators have already been provided with special instructions to prepare and submit detailed reports on minority attack in different districts. He also said that according to the existing law, an accelerated prosecution will take place and officers hinted that cases will be filed exclusively for each incident. Officers also informed that

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<sup>35</sup> Attacks aim to force minorities out of country: Oikya Parishad, 7 February, 2014

<sup>36</sup> Rumi Ahmed, The minorities of Bangladesh, *The Daily Star*, 5 October, 2012

<sup>37</sup> Panic grips Satkhira over joint forces drive, *New Age*, 26 January, 2014

<sup>38</sup> State failed to save Hindus, *The Daily Star*, 1 February, 2014

<sup>39</sup> *Bdnews24.com*, 20 January, 2014

the government is investigating to form a special tribunal to put those into justice who were involved in attacking on the minority communities at different times after 2001 election.<sup>40</sup>

On 15 January, 2014, the High Court (HC) directed the government to immediately provide adequate security to the minority communities and other people vulnerable to post-polls violence. The HC directive came in the wake of attacks on minorities particularly on Hindus all across Bangladesh.

#### **4.6 Violation of Human Rights, Role of Law Enforcement**

State has its machineries, the law enforcement agencies, which are remunerated to protect people's lives and properties. But in the recent spree of killing and violence all across Bangladesh after February 28, 2013 till election period, their role has been utterly inappropriate. It is reported in different media pieces that law enforcement agencies remain unmoving while the situation badly demanded them to be on the spot. On the other hand, there are accusations that law enforcers have carried out indiscriminate attack on general public including women, students, farmers who are not by any means a part of this sickening politics, in the name of stopping attackers of minorities. Therefore we will put this discussion under two points:

1. No actions when actions were needed
2. Indiscriminate attack on general public

Odhikar, One of Bangladesh's largest human rights bodies, has issued an uncompromising statement condemning the human rights abuses that have taken place by policemen in combination of other forces. In its statement the organization said, "the violence took an extreme turn on February 28, 2013. On that day, the International Crimes Tribunal-1 sentenced Jamaat leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee to death for crimes against humanity during the liberation war in 1971. Jamaat-Shibir activists initiated a violent protest against the sentence which also involved acts of arson. Police and other law enforcement agencies used lethal weapons and killed many people, not just Jamaat-Shibir activists, to try and quell the violence. Due to this killing spree by the police, people attacked the local administrative offices and police stations in protest. It has been learnt from the information sent by local human rights defenders associated with Odhikar, that among those who were shot dead by security forces, were students, farmers and members of the general public, who were not involved in any political parties. Moreover, on many television channels, police were seen opening fire at unarmed people."<sup>41</sup>

ABM Musleh Uddin, a human rights advocate, based in United States posted his thoughts as to human rights abuse in Bangladesh by law enforcement agencies on 'Peace & collaborative development network' (PCDN). He held that "the role of the law enforcement in preventing this violence is fraught with depravity and misuse of jurisdiction of this force. After every incident, police usually protects attackers belonging to the ruling party and arrests innocent people as scapegoats. Abusing their authorities, the political leaders prevent law enforcers from arresting their party workers. In addition, even though apprehended, culprits slipped out of the legal process by bribing law enforcers and legal officers."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> BBC Bangla, Why trial of attacking Hindus is not held? 9 January, 2014

<sup>41</sup> Odhikar's statement issued on 5 March 2013

<sup>42</sup> Attacks on Minorities in Bangladesh: Human Rights Abuses Must Be Stopped, ABM Mosleh Uddin, Peace & collaborative development network, 10 November 2013

Joint forces comprising the RAB, police and BGB conducted the operation from December 16 to 21, 2014 in Satkhira killing peoples belonging to Jammat-e-Islami and Islami Chatra Shibir. At least five activists of Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir were killed on the first day of operation.<sup>43</sup> But in indiscriminate firing innocent people were also killed. However, Police has this tendency to brand whoever killed or arrested as Jamaat activists. "Even BNP leader Anwarul Islam and rickshaw-van puller Hafizul Islam have been branded as Jamaat men after their killings,"<sup>44</sup> a rights activist said to New Age. Anwarul, also Agardari union parishad chairman, was killed in 'crossfire' on December 30, 2013.<sup>45</sup>

It is generic for law enforcement agencies to uphold human rights in every country whereas ironically around the recent violence against minorities in Bangladesh, they have not only violated human rights by killing people arbitrarily and abusing their jurisdiction, but also encouraged other parties to kill people by being apathetic and taking no actions where necessary.

There are ample reasons to believe that most of the attacks occurred under the nose of the local administration and different law enforcement agencies, which had been deployed in the first place to pre-empt such occurrences during and after the elections. Media reports have it that a number of victims at Obhayanagar in Jessore repeatedly sought help from the police and other law enforcement agencies over telephone in the wake of the violence but their pleas fell on deaf ears. Worse still, the Jessore police superintendent, who happens to belong to the Hindu community, sought to justify his force's inaction by saying that the law enforcers 'were busy ensuring security of the polling stations rather than of minority communities'.<sup>46</sup>

There are evidences that unveil the same indifference the Jessore district administration had shown during voting when perpetrators went on the rampage forcing the authorities to suspend voting in Monirampur upazila.

An AL activist of Obhoynagar upazila said he had called the deputy commissioner, the UNO and the Obhoynagar police station's OC for help. "They all said police or Rab or army were on their way, but they did not come until all had been ruined."

Obhoynagar UNO Sifat Mehnaz said she had not come to know about the incident until 5pm. Police reached Malonpara around 11pm.<sup>47</sup>

"'We were busy ensuring security of the polling stations rather than of minority communities,' the superintendent of police in Jessore, Joydeb Kumar Bhadra, said. 'We had no information that such attack could take place'. He said on Monday night that it was impossible for the law enforcers alone to ensure fool-proof security.'<sup>48</sup>

Such a statement could only be a manifestation of the general apathy towards the rights of the minority communities, religious and ethnic, that apparently runs through the administration. Earlier we mentioned that in previous such occasions, the government and the main opposition engaged in a blame game over responsibility of the attacks taking no initiatives to undertake any credible investigation. This blame game helped law enforcement agencies to be inert as well as

<sup>43</sup> 5 killed in Satkhira joint forces drive, The Daily Star, 16 December, 2013

<sup>44</sup> Panic grips Satkhira over joint forces drive, New Age, 26 January 2014

<sup>45</sup> Panic grips Satkhira over joint forces drive, New Age, 26 January 2014

<sup>46</sup> Editorial: Deplorable attacks on religious minority communities, New Age, 9 January 2014

<sup>47</sup> Emran Hossain, Obhoynagar reminds of '71 horrors, Dhaka Tribune, 7 January 2014

<sup>48</sup> ATTACKS ON RELIGIOUS MINORITIES: Fresh attacks take place in Satkhira, Panchagarh, New Age, 8 January 2014

inhumane in varying occasions. In one hand they themselves violated human rights with indiscriminate firing and bulldozing households of innocents and let political hooligans cause mayhem to the people on the other. This has been absolutely unprofessional and clear violations of human rights by the law enforcers. State must shoulder every responsibility for any sort of these human rights violations committed by its agencies.

While the law enforcement agencies need to deal with the real attackers with professionalism if to prevent further attacks on minorities by not killing, arresting or harassing people who have no part in the violence, all political, social and cultural organizations need to play a concerted and unequivocal role in protecting minority rights in general.

#### **4.7 Role of Media in Reporting Minority Issues**

Media attention on recent minority issues is abundant. A number of national and international newspapers reported on minority issues. The southwestern region particularly Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira came up frequently with importance given to the Hindu minorities being tortured and persecuted. Despite this fact, there is still debate about the role of media on the very issue which has been largely politicized. The process of politicization often have resulted in contradictory reporting that confuses general people about the extent to what minorities are affected, which groups are perpetrating violence etc. Quality and ethics of media reporting on the issue is still questionable.

Sometimes it is seen that some events go unreported on purpose. Two major attacks on Hindu community in Hathajari and Chittagong carried out in February 2012 can be cited as examples. These events remained much under the radar. The reason why media does not want to publicize certain events is to a large extent political. 'Major media of Bangladesh decided not to embarrass the so-called progressive secular government by publishing these stories of minority persecution. During the immediate aftermath, government leadership, in the face of utter failure to control the situation in a timely manner, found it convenient to blame the opposition political parties. Eight months have passed, but no real efforts have been made to investigate and punish the perpetrators in Hajhajari.'<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, different newspapers provide contradictory information on the same event. Moreover, when rumors against minorities are provoked, media do not play its due role by providing true and uniformed information. In an interview with The Daily Star, Salimullah Khan, professor of General Education Department, ULAB says that 'the fact that people are buying the rumors and reacting to them indicates that the media has failed largely to play its role.'<sup>50</sup>

In many cases it has been seen that media reports accused a particular group behind all attacks and atrocities. After investigating those very events, it has been found that those reports exaggerated the role of a particular group in the attack while another group is found guilty. This malpractice of media around minority issues is so unfortunate that people of Bangladesh and minorities themselves being confused about the facts and figures have been losing trust over the media.

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<sup>49</sup> Rumi Ahmed, The minorities of Bangladesh, 5 October, 2012

<sup>50</sup> Ananta Yusuf, Communal Terror Continues, The Star, 17 January, 2014

## 5. Factors behind Violence against Minorities

There should be no debate on whether minority people, particularly Hindu community are oppressed on many occasions. Since 2002, we have seen many such events covered in the local and international media. Political commitments to safeguard and to take zero tolerance approach towards exploiting minorities in Bangladesh have been proved farcical. However, the current government has a non-communal, non-discriminatory and secular political ideology. Each time the Awami League assumed power, the party leaders reiterated their commitment to protect minorities from any sort of violence and discrimination. During the regime of this government it is seen that minorities enjoyed privileges in getting jobs and other facilities. The question is why they are still the target of such condemnable violence and torture? In this segment we will try to respond to this question.

### 5.1 Political Factors

Before election, a Hindu woman was questioned that which political party she preferred to cast her vote for. The answer was interesting as she said "we are already accused of voting Awami League - no matter we vote for them or not; so let us be guilty by voting AL".<sup>51</sup> There is a perceived notion that minority people especially Hindus are on the AL side. As in Bangladesh, politics is confrontational and if political identity of a group is exposed to their rival group, they become extremely vulnerable particularly when they do not have power to protect themselves and at the same time they are politically important. Minority groups of Bangladesh face this cruel reality. Some miscreants belonging to different political groups like Jamat-e-Islami, BNP, Jatiya Party and even pro AL activists take advantage of their helplessness. Political commitments before election to uphold minorities' rights and to provide exemplary punishment to the perpetrators have always been rhetoric. Some statistical data in this regard will present a picture.

**Table 2: Examples of Politically Motivated Incidents of Violence against Minorities**

Time Period	Number of Events
2002	147 attacks on Hindu religious institutions have been reported in the media. In several parts of the country, house deities, temples were destroyed, festivals were disrupted and debutter property seized. <sup>52</sup>  56 cases of land grabbing have been reported in the media. Santhals, Khasias and Rakhains have been the victims of land grabbing, often at the behest of influential, political leaders both in position and opposition. <sup>53</sup>
During the period from March 2009 to May 2010	There were at least 150 incidents of repression including land seizures, arson, rape, and at least three killings. <sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Random interview with minority people in different parts of the country, a woman named Nirupama Bala of Ishania village, Bochaganj Upazila, Dinajpur district said this.

<sup>52</sup> 36 AmenaMohsin, Rights of Minorities in Bangladesh, in Human Rights in Bangladesh-2002, Ain O Salish Kendra, Dhaka2003, P.229-230

<sup>53</sup> 36 AmenaMohsin, Rights of Minorities in Bangladesh, in Human Rights in Bangladesh-2002, Ain O Salish Kendra, Dhaka2003, P.229-230

<sup>54</sup> Asian Tribune, Vol. 11 No. 395

It is important to look at the time period of violence against minorities occurred in different places of Bangladesh. In one hand, 2002 was the post-poll period when BNP-led four-party alliance government assumed power. They apparently failed to stop violence. So did AL government after coming to power in 2008 general election. And following the recent general election we have seen how the magnitude of violence on minority community increases in different regions of Bangladesh. Southwestern region has been one of the worst affected areas where miscreants involved in the recent killing, looting, arson attacks and violence against the minority community. A question haunts- who are the perpetrators? Law enforcing agencies have this responsibility to find out the answer. But one thing is clear that political parties and their activists are behind all these.

Political activists instigate violence against minority for their political and economic gain. Taj Hashmi, Professor of Security Studies, Austin Peay State University identified two reasons of attacking minorities: a) to loot, expropriate and eventually expel Hindu-Buddhist minorities from Bangladesh; or b) to fish in the muddy water, to malign their political rivals, Islamic or "secular".<sup>55</sup> He also argues that "since the emergence of Bangladesh, leaders and followers of "secular" political parties have been indulging in the "politics of greed, expropriation and plunder"; to make themselves rich overnight, preferably at the cost of weak and under-represented minorities (Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Chakma, Garo, Santal and other "tribal" people and non-Bengalis / Biharis). These political parties also resort to the "false flag" method; they do all the killing, looting, raping and destroying Hindu-Buddhist temples, shops and homesteads by putting the blame on their political rivals to fish in the muddy water."<sup>56</sup> Refuting his article referring "secular" political parties' involvement in the communal violence, Istiaq Ansari, an activist argues that "even the most reactionary, fundamentalist, rightist theoreticians, political leaders and media have not yet blamed the secular and liberal forces for participating in or organizing communal violence."<sup>57</sup>

It is true that ever since the issue of war crime trial emerged, violence against minorities particularly Hindus spiked to a great extent. The issue creates a political turmoil in the country as the whole process was thought to be a political setting to obliterate Jamat-E-Islam(JI) which worked against liberation in 1971. During the trial we have seen a number of attacks and vandalisms carried out in different parts of the country. However, after the hanging of JI leader Abdul Kader Mullah, on December 12 last year, and death sentence to Delwar Hossain Sayedee, two top leaders of JI, violence unleashed in a horrific way. In this case as well minorities paid the toll disproportionately. The violence nakedly targeted minorities turning their life into a nightmare while political parties gained at the cost of their life and property. JI activists being accused of perpetrating most of the attacks, stand out in the local and national media. Some references are as follows:

1. Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad general secretary Gostha Bihary Mandal said more than 100 houses, a few temples and 50 business houses had been destroyed in a wave attacks on the minority community since February 28, 2013.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> TazHashmi, Political Islam And "Communal Violence" In Bangladesh

<sup>56</sup> TazHashmi, Political Islam And "Communal Violence" In Bangladesh

<sup>57</sup> Istiaq Ansari, Communal Violence in Bangladesh

<sup>58</sup> New Age, 25 January, 2013

2. A report of Prothom Alo says that, soon after the execution of Abdul Kader Mullah, Jamaat Shibir activists run amok in different areas of Satkhira including Kathanda Bazar of SatkhiraSadar, Sardarpara, Nayabazar, Kaliganj, Krisnanagar, Kalapara etc. They vandalize, loot and set fire on 25-30 houses and business centers of minorities including AL activists. According to the report, JI activists also smash up more than 30 households, shops, political and business centers and plunder properties of minority people.<sup>59</sup>
3. The latest round of violence began in the Satkhira district nearly a year ago, but worsened sharply in December, when JI took control of several villages, cutting down trees and building embankments to stop the security forces from entering. Some locals call the area "Pakistan in Bangladesh".<sup>60</sup>

'Following this latest rounds of attacks on minorities, the government has hurled accusations on opposition political parties. The pro-government media and civil society has echoed the story of the attacks having been undertaken by the opposition. The police, virtually across the country, have registered complaints maintaining the position of the pro-ruling party, holding the opposition responsible. The chief opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and its ally, Bangladesh Jamaat-E-Islami (BJI), have, in turn, blamed the ruling party, the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), for the attacks.'<sup>61</sup>

However, pointing the finger merely at opposition parties saying that they are in the forefront of perpetrating all these attacks, loots, vandalism of temples, land grabbing and all other forms of persecution would be too immature to make people believe. This argument would also be oversimplified considering the fact that on many occasions it is found that AL activists were behind the attack and arson. Advocate Subrata Chowdhury, the central leader of Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad in an interview with BBC Bangla said that, 'it has now become a slogan that Jamaat and Shibir are responsible for the attack on the minority but in many cases evidences are there that Awami league's leaders are involved with recent spate of attacks on the minority.'<sup>62</sup>

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has had the opportunity to enquire after the well-being of victims in Chapatala village, Avoyanagar, in Jessore district. The victims' version of events contradicts the government's take. Residents of Chapatala state the following:

'They say Mr. Ranjit Kumar Roy, a ruling party candidate, a Hindu, won the election. Cadres of the defeated candidate, Mr. Abdul Wahab - who was a leader of the Bangladesh Awami League until he was denied a ticket by the party this election - led the attacks. Supporters of few other political parties, those with links to the attack leaders, and local 'petty criminals', thieves and muggers, jointly committed the crimes. Around seventy lower caste Hindu families lost most of their assets as a result. Their houses and shops have been looted, belongings burnt.'<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> ProthomAlo, 14 December, 2013

<sup>60</sup> Hindu minority become target of Bangladesh violence, Financial Times, 13 January, 2014

<sup>61</sup> BANGLADESH: Attacks on non-Muslims must stop now, forever; A Statement from the Asian Human Rights Commission, 13 January, 2014

<sup>62</sup> BBC Bangla, 9 January, 2014

<sup>63</sup> BANGLADESH: Attacks on non-Muslims must stop now, forever; A Statement from the Asian Human Rights Commission, 13 January, 2014

The controversial election held on January 5, 2014 was largely unsuccessful in bringing voters to the vote centers. The percentage of total votes cast as against the total number of voters was one of lowest in the history of Bangladesh. Minority voters particularly Hindus were the major attendants at many vote centers including Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira. This has been the main reason why minority people became the target of attack. As we mentioned earlier that if political identity of a group is exposed, they become extremely vulnerable particularly when they don't have power to protect themselves and at the same time they are politically important. But this time minorities faced the worst circumstances. Both opposition and government party activists found the minority issue as a great political instrument to take advantage of. While the opposition party activists inflicted violence on minorities for voting in the election, the ruling party did the same to force them to vote.

## 5.2 Economic Factors

'When we say it's just political, it legitimizes the violence,' explains Jyotrimoy Barua, a Supreme Court lawyer. 'Most of the people's houses they are burning are [those of the] poor. If you burn their house, they will leave the country, and you get their land.'<sup>64</sup> Both Barua and Hashmi talked about the economic gain reprobates look for out of minorities. In this section we will discuss about the political economy around land of minorities with special reference to the three districts.

The southwestern districts particularly Satkhira lie in the coastal area of Bangladesh. In these regions land is scarce especially arable lands for excessive salinity and other natural disasters that go over the district almost every year. 'After the monsoon of 2011, tens of thousands of Satkhira's small holdings - almost half the homes in the district - were ruined by waterlogging, which occurs when groundwater saturates the soil and makes agriculture extremely difficult or impossible.'<sup>65</sup> Therefore land is valuable and there is intense competition for usable land exacerbating the minority issue. We need to consider the amount of land minority people own in the focused areas in order to understand the whole issue. Having considered the total minority households and population in Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira, we can have a pretty good guess about their land ownership.

**Table 3: Minority Households and Population in Khulna**

<b>Minority Households and Population in Khulna<sup>66</sup></b>			
<b>Population by Religion</b>		<b>Population by Ethnicity</b>	
<b>Hindu</b>	525727 (22.67%)	<b>Monda</b>	1003
<b>Christian</b>	15239 (0.65%)	<b>Barmon</b>	51
<b>Buddhist</b>	97	<b>Sawntal</b>	38
<b>Others</b>	715 (0.03%)	<b>Others</b>	962
<b>Total</b>	<b>541778 (23.36%)</b>		<b>2054</b>
<b>Total Households</b>	<b>127477<sup>67*</sup> (approximate)</b>		<b>483</b>

<sup>64</sup> The Hindus of Bangladesh Fear for Their Future, Time World, 14 January, 2014

<sup>65</sup> The Hindus of Bangladesh Fear for Their Future, Time World, 14 January, 2014

<sup>66</sup> Census Report of Bangladesh, 2011

<sup>67</sup> \* 127477 is not the exact figure we found from the census report, rather we found 483. We derived the total household by religion dividing 360177 by 4.25 (average household population) which is derived by dividing 2054 by 483.

**Table 4: Minority Households and Population in Jessore**

<b>Minority Households and Population in Jessore<sup>68</sup></b>			
<b>Population by Religion</b>		<b>Population by Ethnicity</b>	
<b>Hindu</b>	310184 (11.22%)	<b>Tripura</b>	320
<b>Christian</b>	5556 (0.2%)	<b>Barmon</b>	253
<b>Buddhist</b>	112	<b>Chakma</b>	85
<b>Others</b>	2533 (0.09%)	<b>Others</b>	16774
<b>Total</b>	<b>318385 (11.5%)</b>		<b>17432</b>
<b>Total Households</b>	<b>70752<sup>69</sup> * (approximate)</b>		<b>3795</b>

**Table 5: Minority Households and Population in Satkhira**

<b>Minority Households and Population in Satkhira<sup>70</sup></b>			
<b>Population by Religion</b>		<b>Population by Ethnicity</b>	
<b>Hindu</b>	351551 (17.70%)	<b>Monda</b>	2131
<b>Christian</b>	6178 (0.31%)	<b>Barmon</b>	262
<b>Buddhist</b>	18	<b>Sawntal</b>	105
<b>Others</b>	2430 (0.12%)	<b>Others</b>	117
<b>Total</b>	<b>360177 (18.13%)</b>		<b>2615</b>
<b>Total Households</b>	<b>85229<sup>71</sup> * (approximate)</b>		<b>571</b>

Other than their households, minority people have lands used for shops, markets and agricultural purposes. They also have some immovable and moveable properties. This huge property owned by minority people seems so alluring to the politically influential groups. The group takes advantage of their (minorities) migration trend making the number of minority population decline further. The following data shows the declining trend of Hindu population in overall Bangladesh including Khulna, Jessore, and Satkhira.

**Table 6: Declining Hindu Population in Bangladesh**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1941	<b>28.0</b>
1951	<b>22.0</b>
1961	<b>18.5</b>
1974	<b>13.5</b>
1981	<b>12.13</b>
1991	<b>11.62</b>
2001	<b>9.2</b>
2011	<b>9.7<sup>72</sup></b>

<sup>68</sup> Census Report of Bangladesh, 2011

<sup>69</sup> \* 70752 is not the exact figure we found from the census report, rather we found 3795. We derived the total household by religion dividing by 4.5 (average household population) which is derived by dividing 17432 by 3795.

<sup>70</sup> Census Report of Bangladesh, 2011

<sup>71</sup> 85229 is not the exact figure we found from the census report, rather we found 571. We derived the total household by religion dividing 360177 by 4.226 (average household population) which is derived by dividing 2615 by 571.

<sup>72</sup> Bangladesh Census Report, BBS

**Table 7: Declining Hindu Population in the southwestern region**

Year	Satkhira	Jessore	Khulna
2001	395365	293841	600845
2011	351551	310184	525727 <sup>73</sup>

The above tables clearly show the declining trend of Hindu population in overall Bangladesh and three southwestern districts. Similar case is seen for other minority groups belonging to different religions and ethnic communities. Table 5 shows, in 10 years the number of minority population has gone down in two districts (Satkhira and Khulna) and slightly increased in Jessore as the former two districts sent some migrants to this district. Research shows that some of them went to the neighboring Hindu-majority West Bengal of India for good and some remained in the country as internal migrants.

Perpetrators understand that it is easy to push helpless minority people out of Satkhira and Khulna by means of exploitative strategies such as burning houses, threatening to kill, rape and so on. Once they are gone, their lands are occupied and legalized through the Enemy/Vested property Act<sup>74</sup> which has been amended recently. Politicians and land grabbers in collaboration with corrupt officials like Tehsildars of land departments adopt foul means to realize their ill motive of ousting minorities from their places. Still politics persists.

A book titled "Deprivation of Hindu Minority in Bangladesh: Living with Vested Property" by Abul Barkat (eds), presents some valuable data which will be useful to understand the political interventions in grabbing land of minorities in Bangladesh.

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).<sup>75</sup>

The book also shows the distribution of the percentage of occupants in terms of their political affiliation with different parties during different regimes. In 1995, when Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was ruling, 71.6%, the highest percentage of occupants was tagged to the party, followed by 11.1% that was tagged to Awami League, 4.9% to Jatya Party and 3.7% to Jamaat-e-Islami. In 1996, when Awami league took over, the picture changed a bit. At that period the highest percentage of occupants belonged to the Awami League. Rests were distributed to BNP,

<sup>73</sup> Bangladesh Census Report, BBS (2001, 2011)

<sup>74</sup> The Vested Property Act is a controversial law in Bangladesh that allows the Government to confiscate property from individuals it deems as an enemy of the state. Before the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, it was known as the Enemy Property Act and is still referred to as such in common parlance. The act is criticized as a tool for appropriating the lands of the minority population. After the 2001 election the then government succeeded in a drive to repeal the act. The Vested Properties Return Act (2001) was implemented with controversial components (Schedule-B) still being attached with the Act. Most recently the parliament passed the Vested Property Return (second amendment) Bill-2013 dropping the schedule-B. After the independence the government listed some of the properties of Hindus on schedule-B saying that those properties belonged to others not the occupants.

<sup>75</sup> Abul Barkat (principal author), 2008, Deprivation of Hindu Minority in Bangladesh: Living with Vested Property

Jatya Party and JI with the percentage of 31.7%, 5.8%, 4.8% respectively. In 2006, the picture changed yet again when 18 party alliance led by BNP assumed power. That time, BNP partisan occupants occupied 45.2%, AL occupied 31.4%, JI 8.1% and Jatya Party 6.2%. The facts and figures provided in Barkat's book are interesting to analyze. It is apparent that both BNP and AL had their highest share in occupation of property practices while they ruled. Other parties, on the other hand, remained more or less same in terms of their occupation job.

The above information is valuable to draw a picture in the perspective of the three regions. The districts being situated in the coastal area have been the worst affected regions in Bangladesh. Hindu minorities represent more than 17 percent (2011 Census) of the total population of the region. Therefore, logically majority of Hindu minorities of these regions appears to be more affected by both manmade and natural disasters. Political parties along with their evil tool that is Enemy/Vested Property Act making it easy for grabbers to occupy their lands, add unbounded miseries to their lives.

### **5.3 Religious and Cultural Factors**

Religious misunderstanding sometimes works behind the clash between two groups having different belief systems. In the history of subcontinent we have seen people with different religions get locked in riots and sectarian violence. There was politicization encircling religion though, but still in the 20th century, how elements of religious fanaticism injected through politics lead to violence amongst various religious groups is a matter to take into account.

As we mentioned earlier that there is a historical basis of violence against minorities in the southwestern districts which are religious riots of 1950s and 1964 between Hindu and Muslim. Since the liberation of Bangladesh, up until now some elements of these riots were dormant with occasional eruptions. However, claiming that only religious elements are responsible to make the recent clash and violence happen will be an exaggeration. At least we do not perceive that recent violence against minorities has been solely grounded on religion considering the facts discussed under political and economic factors.

Having interviewed local people and journalists of Satkhira, we came to know that minority people are becoming oppressed culturally as well. A journalist said in an interview that minority people cannot exercise freedom altogether in organizing, participating and enjoying their cultural programs. There are cases that some religious groups impede cultural programs to take place as they think that minorities practice an alien culture which could affect their culture and religion in a misleading way.

## **6. Is it Possible to Change the Trends of Violence Against Minorities?**

At a press conference on 6 February, 2014, Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad has expressed their deep concern about the widespread and systematic attack on minorities all across in Bangladesh. They also announce some demands in order to resolve the issue. We put some of their demands in this section as we think these may bring positive changes in the lives of the minority population.

The organization strongly demanded a special act titled "Bangladesh Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations)" in order to prevent communal violence in Bangladesh. During the formulation of this act, state has to come forward to prosecute perpetrators of violence against minorities. Therefore, crime prevention act, special tribunal, accelerated prosecution act should be implemented effectively.

The Parishad also said, no group including state itself, political parties and administration takes the responsibility of repeated attacks on minorities. In this circumstance, member of the parliament of a particular constituency should be held accountable for any kind of violence against minorities.

The constitution of Bangladesh recognizes no minority in the country and contains no special provision for their protection and promotion. Though in the article 27 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh said, 'all citizens are equal before law and are entitled equal protection of law',<sup>76</sup> the organization urged that still a provision related to constitutional safeguard needs to be incorporated so that equal treatment to minorities is ensured through a specific legislation.

In order to identify reasons of declining minority population from 29.7 percent in 1947 to only 9.7 percent in 2011, a special commission as well as a national minority commission should be formed. Moreover, the judicial commission formed to probe the post-poll repression in 2001 finalized its report and submitted it to the government two years back. With a view to strengthening democracy and rule of law, the organization insisted government to take initiatives in the light of the report. Irrespective of all political parties, they called for exemplary punishment to those who were actually involved in the violence and attacks on minorities anywhere in Bangladesh.

The 9<sup>th</sup> parliament has amended the constitution retrieving provisions of 1972 constitution where secularization of the state is a major policy basis. But mere restoration of secularism does not seem to ensure equal status and equal right of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other ethnic minorities. At least, recent violence against them all across Bangladesh made it a constitutional rhetoric. So what we need to have is a concrete policy on minority affairs articulating their rights, promotion plan, and stern penalty for any sort of violence against them.

**Other key recommendations include:**

- A separate ministry on minority issues should be established to ensure a more substantive approach towards issues relating to the minorities and to facilitate the formulation of overall policy and planning, coordination, evaluation and review of the regulatory framework and development programs for the benefit of the minority communities.
- In the meantime of forming a separate ministry and policy on minority affairs, a national commission needs to be formed under which an investigation committee will always be working in each district where minority people are affected by violence and discrimination.
- Thorough research should be conducted on minority communities encountering violence and persecution on many occasions especially during and post-poll periods. The research should be highlighting their existing conditions and loss of properties incurred for the violence.

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<sup>76</sup> Article 27 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh: "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled equal protection of law."

- Accordingly, minority focused rehabilitation programs and projects should be launched in each district where people of different religion and ethnicity suffer most. Southwestern and northern region in this respect should be taken on priority basis. Some of the program examples may be Employment Generation Program, Housing Program, Poverty Alleviation Program, Awareness Raising and Sensitivity Building Program, and Participatory Cultural Programs where both minority and majority will participate and get to know each other along with their culture.
- Based on researches, advocacy programs and social communication campaigns need to be launched in the focused areas to facilitate the overall primary objectives of the said policy. Advocacy programs should operate to influence the government which in turn will put an end of the violence against minority groups while social communication campaigns need to operate in changing behavior of the people towards minorities. Some examples of advocacy and social communication practices in this regard are:
  1. Mobilizing civil society, government and private sectors, NGOs who may together have influence over policy implementation. These groups should be organized and empowered towards acting against any kind of violation of human rights
  2. Creating networks with organizations working in development sectors to address regional problems and challenges such as water logging, river siltation and arsenic issues, protecting women and child rights, caste and religio-ethnic minority discrimination, climate change and water issue, khas land issues, shrimp farming, and governance
  3. Committees, consortiums and citizen groups should arrange more rallies, media roundtables, meetings, press conferences, seminars, human chains and workshops to press government towards action based policy formulation. Folk songs, streets dramas, cultural programs should also be arranged to let people know about the bad effects of violence against any community of the society. These communication campaigns will make people know how violence begets violence and disrupts social peace and harmony. This will also help all people irrespective of religion, race, ethnicity and political groups of a particular region to be more tolerant and considerate to each other.
- The government should immediately initiate independent investigations of all violence against minorities, including killings, arsons, torture, and attacks on religious property. Results of the investigations should be made public, and those against whom credible evidence is found should be prosecuted in full compliance with fair trial standards.
- A powerful committee should be formed in each violence prone Upazila headed by the most influential person combining political representatives, law enforcement agency members, government officials, investigation committee members, local elites and local people from both minority and majority communities. This committee should be participatory who will hold meeting time to time and share status of minorities of a particular upazila. If any report of violence or attempt of violence is known, the committee will take immediate action and resolve the problems with the help of law enforcement agencies.

- Minority people themselves should be organized and create a voluntary group for each community who will play active role in maintaining liaison with leaders and influential persons belonging to the majority. They will also negotiate during any dispute between the groups. For this they have to make a social relationship among people of different religion and ethnicity.
- Local government/administration should immediately intervene when minority people need help or security and take necessary initiatives to remove
- Any discriminatory law, act, or provision such as Vested Property Act against minority community should be repealed.
- Finally, government must compensate the affected families all over the country adequately and ensure security for them.

There must be a strong political commitment from political parties and from the highest level of the government to protect minorities from recurrent violence. Minorities must not be used as an instrument of politics to play blame games and gain benefits. The enforcement of law with impartial outlook could make a difference and establish rule of law in the country.

# Photo Gallery



Houses of Awami League leader and Hindu community were burnt in Satkhira



Jamaat and Shibir supporters are jubilant during Hartal on the Patkelghata-Khulna-Satkhira highway



Jamaat-Shibir supporters attacked minority houses in Chapatala village of Obhaynagar upazila under Jessore district at the evening of Election Day.



Jamaat -Shibir aggressor destroyed furniture shop at Paikgacha upazila under Khulna district



Jamaat-Shibir supporters damaged Shaheed Minar for protesting of death sentence of Abdul Kader Mullah



Jamaat-Shibir supporters attacked minority community people of Chapatala village of Obhaynagar upazila under Jessore district at the evening of Election Day. One lady is sitting who lost her house

# Photo Gallery



Elderly minority woman of Chapatala village of Obhaynagar upazila under Jessore district could not stop crying. She lost her house and other belongings.



Sanchita Barman was crying continuously. Jamaat-Shibir supporters destroyed her house and other belongings.



Jamaat-Shibir supporters destroyed houses and other important household belongings at the evening of Election Day. This picture collected on next day of attack.



Anita Biswas, a woman of minority community of Chapatala village of Obhaynagar upazila under Jessore district came to her house next day of election and found that she lost everything.



Jamaat-Shibir supporters destroyed houses of minority community people of Chapatala village of Obhaynagar upazila under Jessore district at the evening of Election Day.



Nitai Biswas of Chapatala village of Obhaynagar upazila under Jessore district was crying to describe violent attack.

# Photo Gallery



A business house of an Awami League leader of Assasuni upazila of Satkhira district was destroyed in name of protesting the death sentence of Abdul Kader Mullah



A fashion market of Parulia bazaar area of Debhata upazila under Satkhira district destroyed by Jamaat-Shibir supporters



Jamaat- Shibir supporters blockaded Satkhira-Jessore highway.



Jamaat- Shibir supporters protesting in name of political blockade



Jamaat- Shibir supporters blockaded Satkhira-Khulna highway.



A meeting organized by the civil society members for protesting hartal and blockade situation, at Shaheed Minar area of Sathkhirra.



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