

## **Communalism: Politics is the root, politics would be the cure**

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The foundation of Bangladesh was created in the war of independence in 1971. The foundation was perceived to be of communal harmony. However, the incidents taken place before and after the election of October 01 have undermined that foundation. Which proves that the foundation was not strong enough. Communal tension is nothing new in the sub-continent. This is historic. Bangladesh is also a part of this history. Two big religious communities in this area are the Muslims and the Hindus. Though they are different in religion, they belong to the same racial origin. However, a line of demarcation has been drawn between them. Though it appears that the division is due to religion, in fact that is not the case. Religion was used as a tool to achieve political benefits and has still been used the same way.

Human society is divided among several religion, race, creed, and ethnic origins. This division creates communities. Once these communities were created to flourish the society. Later these communities bring communalism. Communalism is the act of persecution by the members of one community to the members of other community. Communalism can appear explicitly, in the form of a bloody riot, or it can appear implicitly. Though humanity never benefits from communalism, it appears nonetheless. And it appears from the greater community of the society. Though the communalism in Bangladesh apparently appears as a religious division, the root cause of communalism is politics. This politics has a long history.

In the course of history, the division between the Hindus and the Muslims had created communal clashes. Such clashes had caused the partition of India. One nation became two nations. This also took place due to the politics. About thirty years before the partition of India, Rabindranath Tagore wrote with much anguish, "Our country has a sin regarding the relation between the Hindus and Muslims. . . . We have been living as neighbours since long, we have been using the corps of the same field, the water of the same river, the light of the same Sun, we do speak the same language, still we do not have a healthy relation among us. .. The God will never forgive this sin." But whose sin is this? Definitely, the general people of the society did not commit it. The political leaders committed this crime. However, the bitter aftermath of this process brings much distress only in the lives of the common people.

The politicians told that the religious conflicts would disappear after the partition of India. However, this assurance has never come true. Instead the situation has aggravated. We will limit the scope of this discussion on Bangladesh. Partition of India, specially the partition of Bengal did not improve the situation. Neither the then East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh) has become the home of only Muslims nor the West Bengal has become the home of only Hindus. Is it really possible? The Hindus living in Bangladesh are not aliens. They are the sons of the soil. Few Hindus and

Muslims have exchanged their home during partition of India, but not all have migrated.

The division of India did not put an end to communalism, neither in Pakistan nor in India. Afterward, the politicians started to use communalism as a tool to gain political benefits. The then Pakistani rulers used this tool to avert political crisis. Frustrated Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) realized the fact that they were being colonized by West Pakistan in the disguise of religion. The great movement for Bengali language had paved the way to a non-communal ideology. It made the West Pakistani rulers afraid. After the partition of India, Pakistan was ruled by West Pakistan dominated Muslim league. To stop the spread of non-communal ideologies in the East Pakistan, the Muslim League leaders instigated the use of religion. To divert the public attention from the failure of government to develop the nation, the leaders purposely patronized communalism. They used the Bihari refugees to create communal clash between Bangalees and Biharis, which was coloured as a riot between Hindus and Muslims. They took the principle of making East Pakistan a land of solely Muslims inhabitants. The example of this is the riot in 1964 in the context of Hazaraat Bal mosque conflict in Kashmir. To divert the opposition movement in East Pakistan, led by the political parties like Awami League, NAP, communist party, etc., the West Pakistani rulers purposely provoked communalism in 1962, 1963 and 1964. However, the majority Muslims protected the wide spread of the bloody clash. To discuss further into this, let us take a look back into the fifties.

After the partition of India, based on the religious majority, the Hindus of East Pakistan became compelled to migrate to India. To resolve the issue of citizenship of this huge influx of refugees, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his Pakistani counterpart Liaquat Ali signed a treaty. According to this treaty of 1950, the migrated Hindus to India got Indian citizenship. Then the Hindus of East Pakistan started to migrate silently. In this consequence, the appeal of joint election of Hindus was granted with the support of non-communal parties like Awami League. Afterwards, the marshal law of Ayub Khan created a mass anger in East Pakistan, which gave rise to a political movement. To deviate the political movement, the Hazaraat Bal Mosque issue was brought forward purposely, which gave rise to the riot in 1964. The progressive Muslim leaders stood beside the Hindus and the Hindus realized that they are also the sons of the soil. Hence they also took part in the democratic movement against the military Pakistani rulers. After the mass revolution of 1969 the war of independence took place in 1971.

Both the Hindus and the Muslims took part in the war of independence. The Awami League won the general poll and started to lead the war of independence. Again the rulers took the old tactics. They started to take revenge on the Awami League supporters and on the Hindus. Hence, the Hindus and the Awami League supporters became synonymous. The attacks on the Hindus at that time were also politically motivated. A lot of Hindus fled to India and returned to home after the independence of Bangladesh as they wish to live in their ancestral homestead.

After the independence, the Hindus had again faced a lot of depravity and inequality. Democracy, one of the four principles of independent Bangladesh constitution, was not practiced properly. Communalism gained momentum by the opposition to oust the government in an undemocratic way. The government was also reluctant to stamp out the "abandoned property" act, instead it took initiative to safe guard the privilege of those who have encroached Hindu properties in the name of "abandoned property". The Hindus had experienced severe loss of property due to this act. The father of the nation, Sheikh Mujib, was assassinated with his entire family in 1975 and undemocratic force came into state power. As such the way to practice the democratic right became infeasible. Communalism and fanaticism became the norm of the subsequent governments of the country. Secularism, another basic principle of the constitution of independent Bangladesh, was discarded. Later, General Ershad declared Islam as the state religion. Hence religion, from the association of personal life, became associated with the whole state. General Ershad was ousted from the office during the mass revolution in 1990. When he realized that he was about to be overthrown from the state power, he also used communalism to divert the mass attention. Though that did not help him to be in the power, the Hindus faced the cruel consequences.

The revolution of 1990 added a new dimension. Parliamentary system was introduced in the country. However, Islam still remains as the state religion of the country. The whole world experienced a huge change at that time. With the collapse of Soviet Union, United States became the only super power in the world. Fanaticism gained momentum in countries like Afghanistan, India or Pakistan. And Bangladesh was not also excluded from this list. Despite the Parliamentary system, terrorism became a tool in the national politics. This terrorism has created huge tension during this year's pre and post election period. Prior to that, Hindus suffered severe persecution in 1994 in consequence with the Babri mosque incident in India. Migrated Hindus from Bangladesh gained legal citizenship in India according to the 1950 treaty signed by Nehru and Liakot. However, after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, that treaty was made null and void by another treaty signed by Mujib and Indira. Now the Hindus do not even have a way to seek legal citizenship in India, which brings them into a miserable condition.

In these circumstances, the moral support from the majority Muslims could have increased the courage of the Hindus. An organization called "Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad" was formed to safeguard the interests of the religious minorities. But there is no participation of Muslims in this organization, which was needed the most.

This implicit communalism has caused the Hindu population to decline sharply. Once the Hindu population of this part of Bengal was about 45%, now it is less than 10%. Politically they are cast aside, only abused during the poll. Now they have become a self centred and elusive community. Once they were Hindus, now only termed as minority, no more a human being!

The upsurge of this year's violence is in fact the part of the process started in 1947. The miscreants are targeting for their votes and properties. The Hindus are generally perceived as the vote bank of Awami League. However, the scenario was little different this year. This year a significant part of Hindu vote has not gone in favour of the Awami League. Still they were tortured. Most importantly, not only Hindus, Muslims also vote in favour of the Awami League. Then why the Hindus will suffer for their support to the Awami League? Here politics plays a role. The politics is the onslaught of the stronger on the weaker, the deviation of public attention from other issues to this particular case.

This year's violence affected a lot of areas and it went on quite openly. Though the state minister termed these reports as exaggerated, president Shahabuddin's warning on the issue proclaims the magnitude of the issue. Though the state minister tried to refute the news, nothing remains concealed or secret during this era of information technology. The world ultimately gets the news.

This mentality of diverting the mass attention from the failure of the ruling party to govern the state properly to the communal violence has been practiced since long. This ill politics should have been tackled by the honest politics. Are the Hindus being assaulted as they support Awami League or simply because they are minority? And the role of Awami League is also noticeable. In those few areas, where the Awami League leaders took initiative to protect the minorities there, violence did not erupt at a large scale. But in most areas they also did not show up.

In fact, the minorities are the victims of the politics. Mutual understanding and trust is needed to build a healthy relation. And the majority Muslims has to play a significant role in this regard. The Hindus cannot get a legal citizenship in India any longer. This year, some Hindus were even shot down by the Indian border security guards while they were fleeing from Bangladesh.

Some people are still accusing that these reports of minority persecutions are fabricated and these are circulated to defame Bangladesh. It is needed for those people to keep in mind that nobody leaves their ancestral homestead and flees to another country without any reason. Women never say that they are molested, unless they really are.

The mentality of hiding the truth is the ill politics that can only cause more problems. The honest politics is the accomplishment of search for truth, not the attempt to conceal the truth. One might gain temporary benefit by spreading communalism, but that is not paid off in the long run. Once the truth will be uncovered. The Pakistani rulers did not manage to hide it; neither will it happen in Bangladesh.