Shibir spread a rumour that the Hindu community had killed Jamaat leader Abu Bakkar. This was the first time that such an attack had occurred in this neighbourhood. The attack on Malopara left around 100 families completely shattered. Many houses were reduced to ashes. Some 600 Hindus, including women and children, had to flee their village by swimming across the Bhairab River. Victims of the three villages believe that the attack was not an 'outburst of emotion for Bakkar' of Jamaat, rather it was an orchestrated operation.



Satkhira March 30, 2012. PHOTO: STAR FILE

This is not the first time that minorities have been attacked during election time. The same kind of attacks, especially on Hindu communities, were carried out after the electoral triumph of the Bangladesh National Party (BNP)-Jamaat alliance in October 2001. The obvious reason for targeting them was that these communities generally vote for the Awami League, although there are other factors at play.

It is quite clear that the Jamaat-e-Islami, after acquiring a strong foothold in the political arena, accelerated the number of religious attacks in almost all the remote hamlets of Bangladesh. On the other hand, the political use of Islam by both the major parties have made these communities even more vulnerable to such violence.

According to Md Akhtaruzzaman, professor of the department of Islamic History and Cultural Studies, Dhaka University, says this contradicts the basic teachings of Islam. Islam, says Akhtaruzzaman, represents peace and would never permit the kind of atrocities the country has witnessed in the last few weeks. He says, "Historically, we have seen atrocities for years. Every time this form of violence was unleashed against a political back drop it went into the second phase, where some perpetrators started grabbing land."

The miscreants try to justify the atrocities as an effort to "save our faith", Islam. A section of religious leaders exploit the religion to serve vested interests. History carries evidence of hundreds and thousands of such examples. The purpose of such acts was to attain political power or to cling to the already acquired authority.

February 8, 2012 onwards...

In 2012 and 2013, between February and November, at least 20 attacks were reported against the minority communities at Hathazari and Bashkhali in Chittagong, Kaliganj of Satkhira, Chirirbandar of Dinajpur, besides Ramu in Cox's Bazar, Sathia of Pabna, Barisal and so on.

The assault started in Hathazari in 2012, when Shibir members influenced locals to attack, loot and plunder Hindu households. Eight temples, 12 shops and a number of houses were burnt down. A resident of Nondirhat, Abu Salam also alleges that Jamaat and Shibir leaders instigated the violence in Nondirhat by influencing local people. He says, "Following the deaths of two Shibir activists during clashes with activists of the pro-government