

OPINION



# GULSHAN MASSACRE AND THE COLLAPSE OF THEORIES

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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Bangladesh because of democratic deficit and squabble between the political parties of the country. This explanation has recently been made popular by a section of the Western media. But the Gulshan attack belies this explanation. This attack is similar to the recent terrorist attacks which happened in France, Belgium, the USA and Turkey. Do these countries have democratic deficit too to pave the way for the attacks? May be; however, the Western media did not talk about democratic deficit in these countries in the aftermaths of the attacks.

We need to invoke different theories to explain the new turn in terrorist attacks in Bangladesh. I believe the theory of alienation and the power of ideology can better explain the involvement of youths in terrorist activities. Bangladeshi society has been undergoing a great transition in recent years which can be characterized by high GDP growth, increasing commercialisation and commodification of everyday life, high income inequality,

changes in the family structure from joint family to nuclear family and one income household to two income household, and urbanisation. In this transition, depression and alienation among the youths, especially the upscale youths are pretty common.

Among youths who are non-practicing Muslims and having a sense of being isolated or alienated from family and friends are new targets for indoctrination by the extremists. The recruiters of the religious extremist outfits make friends with them and indoctrinate them with an ideology of Jihad which tells them they would receive eternal peace and happiness in the heaven if they could kill non-Muslims and the Muslims who do not follow the extremist brand of Islam. They are said that their act will also count as resistance against the "oppressors" of the Muslims across the world. Youths through a sustain process of indoctrination and armed training turn into assassins who do not hesitate to embrace death.

Encountering the new turn in extremism requires simultaneous and sustained efforts on two fronts. First, the targeted killings and Gulshan massacre suggest that our law enforcement agencies and their intelligence units are not skilled enough to thwart such deadly and sophisticated terrorist attacks. The law enforcement agencies including their intelligence units need to develop capabilities through appropriate training and necessary equipment. The government may consider taking foreign assistance in preparing and equipping the law enforcement agencies. Second, the institutions which French philosopher Louis Althusser called ideological institutions such as family, academic institutions such as schools, madrassas, colleges and universities, religious institutions like mosques, and mass media need to work to dispel the extremist ideology. These institutions prepare people's mindset, create their subjectivity and worldview. Only these institutions have the power to debunk the extremists' myth of eternal peace. And these are also the institutions which are supposed to give comfort to the depressed and the alienated and create an environment for people to feel assimilated in the society.

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HERITAGE

# TALE OF AN OLD PARK

NILIMA JAHAN  
PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Enriched with wonderful architectural features, the historical 'Bahadur Shah Park' is located in Laxmibazar, Old Dhaka. During the first half of the 19th century, Nawab Khwaja Abdul Ghani, the first Nawab of Dhaka recognised by the British Raj, took the initiative of establishing this park.

History says, from the time of its construction till 1957, the park was known as 'Victoria Park', which was named after Queen Victoria, former Queen of the British Empire and Empress of India. Later, in 1957, the park was renamed after the last Mughal emperor,

Mirza Abu Zafar Sirajuddin Muhammad Bahadur Shah Zafar, popularly known as Bahadur Shah II.

Right before establishing this park, the Armenians founded a club for them, known as 'Anta Char' where they used to play different indoor games like- tennis, badminton, billiards, and much more. The club was later demolished by the English. According to many, there was an open place beside the club known as 'Anta Charer Maidan'. In 1857, during the Sepoy Mutiny against colonial rulers, the English soldiers publicly executed the



failed mutineers by hanging them from different trees of the place.

The following year, at the same spot, the commissioner of Dhaka Division read out the announcement of Queen Victoria's direct rule over India. Since, Sepoy Mutiny took place in order to re-establish the rule of Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah II, by ending the British rule, in 1957, the park was named after him as 'Bahadur Shah Park'. A tall historical monument in memory of the martyred sepoy was also erected at that time.

The park has a great historical significance whose remarkable glory and architectural beauty are also of great worth. There are two entrances and two memorials (the tallest one is situated at the eastern side, in memory of the martyred sepoy and the other one is Khawja Hafijullah obelisk). There is another small obelisk signifying the throne of Queen Victoria, and a star-shaped octagonal fountain that stands in the middle of the park. The boundaries of the park are enclosed with iron railing.

Khawja Hafijullah obelisk, the pillar made of granite, was established in 1885, after the death of Khawja Hafijullah, the grandson of Nawab Khwaja Abdul Ghani

and son of Nawab Ahsanullah Khan.

As it is located in a very populous and busy area of the old town surrounded by important institutions like- Dhaka Judges Court, different banks, Jagannath University, Kabi Nazrul College and many more, the park has turned into a place for social gatherings. In fact, it has separate seating arrangements for women as well. Often you may find young students chatting and playing music to entertain people. Apart from these, one can take a morning walk in the park. There is also a morning walker association who offers membership to people who want to enjoy the serenity of this park in the morning.

At present, due to lack of proper maintenance, the former ambience of Bahadur Shah Park is gradually losing its magnificence. Most of the sculptures as well as the overall environment are in decrepit condition.

This historic park will surely make you feel the vibe of the old times. Every day, people from all walks of life come to visit the park – some knowing the significance of this place, while some simply to have a good time with in and amongst nature.