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A legacy, which despite a court ruling that brought back Secularism as a main principle in Bangladesh's Constitution recently in the 15th Amendment, is cleverly diluted by having Islam as a state religion within it. This mish mash of a clash of beliefs installed by a party none other than the one that was in the leadership of our Liberation War, the Awami League. The party that was considered secular and the party that had Secularism as one of the main principles of our Constitution when it was first formed in 1972. Too full of making compromises in order to remain in power, too confused as to what its real positioning viz. the people should be, quite removed from reality, and most important, too unsure of exactly how strong a base it has, have often led to such incomprehensible decisions.

No doubt, Awami League has taken up certain issues strongly, without letting itself be coerced by greater Powers that be, Powers that lie beyond our lands. For that we remain satisfied that justice, though delayed was not denied. The lifting of the Indemnity Ordinance in turn led to the culmination of the verdict of the killers of Bangabandhu, even though some are living in exile and attempts to bring them back have not been fruitful. Still, we feel a sense of peace that justice has been done. Similarly, the trial of those indicted for crimes against humanity committed in 1971 continued with most of the major and well-known killers having their cases tried, verdict given and implemented. This, despite huge pressures from external sources, for reasons that are best known to them, hearsay being huge sums of money was paid for lobbyists, a factor that could easily be believed, since not all the war criminals had similar reactions or pressures put on the courts from the outside world. Only those with the 'right' contacts were lobbied for. The willpower to continue to take to court these cases, ensure justice for the millions who were brutally killed gave us hope that when mandated, the mandate being the huge mass upsurge in favour of the trials, at Shahbagh from February, 2013 onwards, the government would act. A phenomenon that even today gives me hope that the Bangladesh we dreamt of once, will rise again, provided the people of this land once again rise up as one.

YET, what do we see now? What could be perceived as the effects of compromises with backward forces that had been relegated to either exile or forced into their holes? Why does a party like Awami League feel it is necessary to help ensure such forces feel secure and contented? If the reason for this is stated as cultural, why were they not being courted, as in the present scenario, after the Liberation War? Why was it that only after religious based parties, previously banned, and only allowed after 1978, when General Ziaur Rahman created space for them, that political parties felt the need to pander to them? We now observe that in our census, over the years, the numbers of non-Muslims have shown a steady decline. Is this the Bangladesh with the principle of Secularism that we fought for? We observe that non-Muslim places of worship are attacked and looted. We have seen how deliberately certain quarters falsely implicate an innocent person belonging to a religion or belief, other than that of the perpetrators of this hate mob, can instigate

people to attack, ravage, destroy, loot, even kill people. We have seen this with women who were involved in eking their existence through participating in non-governmental organisations' development programmes for women in the early 90s. We have seen the systemic attack throughout these years on the Ahmadia population and their mosques. We have seen the attack on the Hindus, in Nasirnagar, Brahmanbaria, in Sathia in Pabna, in many other places too. We have seen attacks on poor Adivasis, Santals and landless peasants in Mohimaganj, Gaibandha. We have seen attacks on Hindu majority areas in the South West, in order to grab their lands. A farming system that is not only not viable, but destructive, ecologically unsound, dangerous on health grounds. We have seen what has systematically been happening in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where despite an Accord being signed as far back as 1997, by the present government, which has seen very little if at all, of any moves to implement this in favour of those with whom the Accord was signed, in its stead



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persecution of the very people the Accord was supposed to protect.

We witnessed the attacks on the bloggers, using the feeble excuse of calling them atheists. All bloggers are not atheists. Nor are all atheists bloggers. Activists who took such a valiant and active part in the exhilarating movement at Shahbag were also targeted. Some were threatened, creating fear in their minds, resulting in a perceived lessening of the strong, vibrant, fearless actions that we had seen before. Writers were attacked or threatened. Artists too were not spared from fearing what consequences could lie in store for them next. Would they be the next to be targeted? Publishers were killed, some escaped per chance, like Ahmedur Rashid Tutul, his friends Ranadipam Basu and Tarek. Unfortunately, the same day Faisal Arefin Dipon was killed. He had no visitors, therefore only after his body was found did the world know the extent of killings that were targeting people relentlessly. Both Dipon and Tutul had published books that had impacted many

youths, books by Avijit Roy who had been brutally killed on February 27, 2015. His partner, Rafida Ahmed Banya, escaped death, but was severely and brutally wounded, having lost a finger along with many other physical as well as emotional and psychological wounds. That year saw a spate of killings including Ananta Bijoy Das, Niladri Chattapadhyay, Wasequr Rahman Babu, etc. It started with an attack on Asif Mohiuddin who escaped death, but a month later on February 13, 2013, Ahmed Rajeeb Haider was hacked. He died two days later.

This year saw more killings. Attacks against foreigners, priests, Hindu priests, Christian priests, attacks on teachers at universities, gay rights activists, Bauls, Sufi poets and followers; the list seemed so irregular. Then came the attack on a high end café-cum-restaurant, the Holey Artisan Bakery, also known as Café O. Some twenty people were killed. The attacks, the terror came too close to home for some. A few days later came the attempted attack on the largest Eid congregation at Sholakia,

Kishorganj. This time round, the police were prepared. Hundreds or maybe even thousands of lives were saved at the cost of a few. The main target seemed to have been the Imam who led the prayers. So, what was his issue that he needed to be targeted? His sermons were against extreme Wahhabism, extremism of any sort, he was not a Salafi. He spoke out against the kind of violence that was being preached, that was bringing out a kind of romanticising of giving up your life for a belief, for a cause and thus drawing young kids to this uncertain and violent life. The Maulana was using the large congregation he drew to be aware of these dangers. He cautioned that this was not and could not be called religion. Immediately after, the law enforcing agencies did manage to nab some of the alleged killers, the terrorists, the Jihadists. A few police lost their lives in these encounters too. There seems to be a lull now. What appeared as senseless attacks, in the name of religion, seems to have taken a hiatus.

What has increased though is the num-

ber of children and women who are now the target of attacks, murder, rape, cyber crime through extortion. Apparently, these two sets of criminal, violent attacks may appear unrelated. But are they really so? Is the message being given in all these attacks too different? It appears that the target is to terrorise people into accepting and acting a certain way, a certain path of belief, practice and actions. The rapes in 1971, along with the killing of secular, progressive minds, the killing of our intellectuals, our martyrs, are they very different in its essence to what is happening now, at present? Though, globally the call for a Khilafat, a global Islamic state, or an Islamic region, being a part of a global Islamic identity, was not publicly an issue or a movement then. The call in the use of religion for justifying killings and violence echoes too strongly in its similar use of ideology to justify the ends. The events, the incidents are eerily similar.

It does not lie just with Islam or only one particular brand or cult of Islam. We see this happening in our neighbouring country, India, with the call for cleansing their land for their true patriots, the caste Hindus. The call for intolerance is the same and can be seen in extremist Christian, Jewish propaganda too. Similar to the brand of a similar kind of intolerant Islam we see prevailing, in the name of al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, JMB, al-Qaeda, the Islamic State. It becomes worrying when we see that in our other neighbouring state similar brutal violent actions are being taken against Muslims of a particular ethnicity, the Rohingyas, by the Buddhists. Is this then the age of growing intolerance all around? These are worrying times indeed, similar to the uncertainties we faced during 1971.

We really need to sit back and take a deep look at ourselves and what is happening all around us. I would like to state here, that we also look at the kind of consumerism all around us that forms our thinking. Consumerism that either takes us into religion where we cannot question, where all the religions practiced for centuries are now put under the scanner and discarded as being faulty or not the correct path, *sahi tariqua*, where we get pushed into the kind of consumerism that pushes us to mindlessly accept unnatural and unhealthy lifestyles. It is time that we looked at what we call our beliefs, whether it be religion or otherwise, and ask ourselves whether our beliefs are pushing us and our nation into intolerance. It is time we take a step back and bring back what every belief, every religion, every ideology is truly about: humanity. That is who we are here to care for, to live together in harmony, in peace. That is what those who believed in the spirit of the Liberation War taught us. It is only those who were against us that followed the principles of destruction of the human race.

As stated, right at the beginning, we cannot afford to give up. We have ourselves, our next generation and the generation after that to look out for, to be able to live with hope and dignity. Giving up can never be an option. Just as those we lost, those who were forced to give their lives so that we can live in a free land. We owe it to our martyrs. We owe it to them today more than ever, a vow that we shall fight back for the land that we earned.

The writer is a rights activist.