

THE TREND IN COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

Collective silence
SPELLS DISASTER

There is little hope that justice will be done in the Narail attack. One wonders just how indifferent a state can be that it fails to provide minimum security to the Hindu community? One of Narail's victims, Dipali Rani Saha said, "After one group looted my house, another group turned up and burnt our house as they found nothing to loot. After failing to break into one of our rooms where we were hiding, they attacked the nearby temple and vandalised the idol".

BENOY DUTTA

Communal attack in Narail: a case filed against 250 unidentified people, three arrested (The Daily Star, July 18, 2022).

This is yet another disturbing headline that highlights a pattern of violence against minority communities.

Last year in October, incidents of communal attacks took place in Cumilla, Noakhali and Chandpur districts after a copy of the Holy Quran was found in a puja mandap in Cumilla. Nine months have gone by since the attacks that included arson and vandalism of Hindu temples and mandaps, yet investigations in most of the cases have not been completed. Some 439 identified and 5,700 unidentified people were accused in 51 cases filed in the three districts. Charge sheets were submitted in only three cases in Noakhali. Meanwhile probes in the remaining 48 cases (94 percent) were not completed in the last nine months (Prothom Alo, July 18, 2022).

Let's go back a little more, to March 2021 specifically. Twenty-two people were detained and 1,500 accused in a communal attack in Shalla of Sunamganj (Deutsche Welle, March 19, 2021). One thing seems to stand out in these reports. In each of these incidents, a large number of "unidentified" people are accused. But how do the police arrest these unidentified culprits? Obviously it is not possible. This only indicates the state's lack of any real interest in holding the attackers accountable and punishing them for their crimes.

This continued indifference and silence have created a culture of impunity for extremists to engage in communal violence. The result is a growing trend towards fanatical views among the religious majority.

The silence of the state and society allows communalism to spread through every

only feel more confident and empowered. When the state is punishing the victims instead of the perpetrators, it makes extremists more aggressive. This is the root of all evil.

We have seen attacks in Ramu of Cox's Bazar; Nasirnagar of Brahmanbaria; Gobindaganj of Gaibandha; Patgram of Lalmonirhat; Muradnagar of Cumilla; Monpura of Bhola; Santhia of Pabna; Kaharol of Dinaipur; Tala of Satkhira; Mongla of Bagerhat; Gangachara of Rangpur; Mohonpur of Rajshahi; Satkania of Chattogram; Benapole of Jashore; Mohammadpur of Magura; Nageshwari of Kurigram; Borhanuddin of Bhola; Shalla of Sunamganj; Nanua Dighir Par of Cumilla; Sahapara of Narail -- the list is endless.

Has justice been served in any of those incidents? The answer is no. Interestingly, most of these communal attacks took place in

Lohagora Upazila of Narail who is accused of posting something derogatory about religion on Facebook. We are all too familiar with this narrative of communal attacks, so is the government. But why is there no justice? Why does no one speak up when Hindus (or members of other minority communities) are attacked? It is because the state really doesn't want to address this. The truth is if there is political will it is possible to right any wrong. If a person unscrewing the nuts of the Padma bridge can be captured within 24 hours, why can't communal attackers be apprehended?

There is little hope that justice will be done in the Narail attack. One wonders just how indifferent a state can be that it fails to provide minimum security to the Hindu community? One of Narail's victims, Dipali Rani Saha said, "After one group looted my house, another



the last 15 years. Since 2010, communal attacks have taken place based on false accusations of demeaning religion through Facebook posts. It's the same old script which was previously being used through loudspeakers before launching such attacks. And now the bigots use the latest technology to spread hate; they open a fake Facebook ID of a Hindu and post a status or comment demeaning Islam. However, those who created the fake IDs remain scot-free.

Based on that status or comment, violent attacks are launched. Incidents of looting houses, vandalising temples and businesses are common in those attacks. In some cases, incidents of sexual harassment and even rape also take place. However, during the attacks police, administration, ministers, lawmakers, bureaucrats -- all remain silent spectators. What happens next is filing of cases against the individuals accused of demeaning religion along with their family members. This pattern is followed in every incident. After the damage is done the government rushes to the area where attacks have taken place with relief materials and make efforts to rebuild the damaged houses. The local administration joins in as do the ministers. Lofty statements are issued and the media publishes the news.

This is the standard procedure for the last 15 years. None of the victims of false allegations like Rasraj, Uttam Barua and Biplab Chandra gave any status or comment that demeaned religion but they were nevertheless arrested. Considering the trend, a similar fate probably awaits Akash Saha of Digholiya village in

group turned up and burnt our house as they found nothing to loot. After failing to break into one of our rooms where we were hiding, they attacked the nearby temple and vandalised the idol" (The Daily Star, July 17, 2022). The local MP woke up from his slumber only after this barbaric attack. When the attack was underway on July 15, people tried to contact him, his assistant informed that they were taking care of things. Is this how they "took care" of things?

The disconnect between people and lawmakers is all too obvious. Most of the MPs failed to show that they have a sense of public responsibility. Is it not because they came to power unopposed? This culture of total apathy towards the plight of minority communities must end. It is painful when the sufferer says, "They attacked us because we are Hindus" (The Daily Star, 17 July, 2022).

Nothing could be more hurtful and humiliating than to see Hindus being attacked in a country which was liberated with the sacrifice of the lives of people of all religions. Communalism is a kind of poison. Once it enters the body, it spreads everywhere. Today the fundamentalists are attacking Hindu households and vandalising temples. Is there any guarantee that they would not attack a Muslim tomorrow? Because fanatics have no religion, they only hate. If we cannot uproot this destructive force, Bangladesh as defined by the values of our Liberation movement, will cease to exist.

**Translated from Bangla; Benoy Dutta is a writer and journalist.*

Major attacks and
case progress

RAMU MAYHEM

Sept 29-30, 2012

- Bigots vandalised and set fire to Buddhist temples and Buddhist households in Ramu and Ukhiya, after spreading rumour that the Facebook page of a local Buddhist youth was bearing a photo demeaning Islam.
- Eighteen cases were filed with three police stations in Cox's Bazar.
- No trials have begun yet.
- Two writ petitions filed with the High Court are also still pending.

BONOGRAM VIOLENCE

Nov 2, 2013

- Mobs vandalised and torched houses, shops, temples of Hindu communities in three villages of Bonogram of Pabna, claiming that one Rajib Saha had maligned the Prophet (PBUH) on a Facebook page.
- Rajib's father filed a case for the attack which is still pending with a Pabna court.
- Police also filed two cases -- one for attacking cops and another for maligning the Prophet (PBUH) using digital media; a cyber tribunal in Rajshahi last year pronounced the verdict in the second case.

NASIRNAGAR MAYHEM

Oct 30, 2016

- Zealots vandalised and looted over 100 Hindu homes and 17 temples in Nasirnagar of Brahmanbaria following announcements made from two rallies of Islamists over an alleged anti-Islam Facebook post from the account of one Rasraj Das.
- The zealots also set nine Hindu homes on fire on November 4, 5, 13 and 16.
- Rasraj, a fisherman, was freed in January 2017 after months of detention as police found evidence that his Facebook account was hacked or faked by someone else before the anti-religious post was uploaded from it.
- Eight cases were filed with Nasirnagar Police Station accusing some 2,000 unidentified people. Law enforcers submitted charge sheets in two cases.

CUMILLA VIOLENCE

Oct 13 last year

- A mob incited by a Facebook Live video attacked Nanua Dighir Par puja mandap in Cumilla after someone placed a copy of the Holy Quran at the temple.
- It was followed by a series of deadly attacks on Hindus across the country.
- Later, it was found through CCTV footage that a man named Iqbal Hossain placed the holy book at the mandap.
- A total of 12 cases were filed after the incident in Cumilla. Of those, six are now under investigation by the CID while Cumilla district police are investigating two others. CID submitted the charge sheet in one case. PBI is investigating four other cases and submitted the charge sheet in one.

SUNAMGANJ MAYHEM

March 17 last year

- Several hundred supporters of Hefajat-e-Islam attacked, vandalised and looted at least 90 Hindu houses in Noagaon village over a Facebook post reportedly made by Jhumon Das, a resident of the village, criticising Hefajat leader Mamunul Haque.
- After the incident, two cases were filed with Shalla Police Station -- one filed by a villager and another by police. Both the cases are now under investigation.
- Jhumon's mother lodged a case which is now being investigated by the CID.
- Jhumon, who was detained a day before the attack, was later sued in a case filed by police under Digital Security Act. He got bail in September. The case is now under trial at a cyber tribunal in Sylhet.

Islam does not
allows violence
Pesh imam of nat'l mosque
believes no Muslim can
attack minorities

RASHIDUL HASAN

Islam is a religion of peace which never supports any violent activities against people of other religions, said Maulana Mohiuddin Kasham, a pesh imam of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque.

In an interview with The Daily Star, Maulana Mohiuddin also said Islam has unequivocally guaranteed safety of religious minorities.

"Our sacred responsibility is that if anyone speaks ill of our Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH), we will criticise and protest it. But there are some regulations of Islam to lodge such protests," he said, referring to a recent communal attack following an alleged Facebook post.

"In such cases," he clarified, "we will express hatred from the core of our heart and protest verbally. That protest does not mean we will set fire to houses. Neither the rules of the state nor the norms of Islam support taking the law into own hands.

He added, "I believe no Muslim can carry out attacks on minorities."

It is to wipe out minorities
from country
Says Rana Dasgupta

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Narail mayhem is not an isolated incident. It is a part of series of attacks being carried out one after another across the country in the last few years with a goal to wipe out minorities from the country.

Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad, said this, adding that communal forces have infiltrated the Awami League, the administration and law enforcement agencies.

"We don't see any effective move from the government or the ruling party to eradicate the



communal forces. So far, we have not seen any instance that Awami League men built resistance against the communal forces carrying out attacks on minorities in anywhere across the country."

He added, "If any attacker is arrested, he comes out of jail within one or two weeks on bail. It takes a few years to prepare a charge sheet. As a result, a culture of impunity has been developed over the years."

Rana Dasgupta thinks existing laws are not enough to protect minorities. He demands enactment of the Minority Protection Act as well as establishing the National Minority Commission.

Culture of impunity
encourages attacks

Barrister Jyotirmoy
Barua on rising
communal violence

DIPAN NANDY

Members of minority communities are coming under attacks frequently. About 20,000 criminal cases have been filed in connection with these attacks in the last two decades.

But verdict has been delivered in only one case, which was filed over the rape of Purnima Rani Shil. Attackers feel encouraged because of such a culture of impunity, said Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua.

After the Awami League came to power in 2009, it crushed powerful political parties like the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islam with iron fists, he said.

"But they cannot reign in some unorganised people committing communal attacks. Because they don't really want to do it."

The noted human rights lawyer observed that there are 19 lawmakers in parliament who belong to the minority communities.

But they are not making any statements about the communal attacks, he said.

"If they make a comment, they might not get the party nomination in the future."