

Hate is bringing us closer to our own extinction



NO STRINGS ATTACHED

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We are living in a time when the whole world seems to be consumed by one overpowering emotion: hate. Clusters of hate emanate from every corner. Hate complemented by fear has become a powerful, effective political tool used by leaders, groups, media outlets and YouTubers in order to fulfil an agenda. Because nothing unites people more than hate these days; it creates a common enemy and forms a groupthink against the "other." It unites people and allows them to overlook flaws or differences of the group members for the time being to fight that common enemy that is the root cause of all misery.

However, while hatred for something harmful to people can sometimes yield positive outcomes, such as the people's uprising against a repressive regime in Bangladesh in July-August 2024, it can also become a venomous tool when used to falsify truth and manipulate people to act violently against a target. The spread of false propaganda against Bangladesh by certain Indian media outlets illustrates this danger, exploiting pre-existing anti-Muslim sentiments to instil hostility and resentment. Politicians in India have long used hate speech to demonise Bangladeshis, particularly Bangalee Muslim immigrants, reinforcing the idea that their presence would "pollute" India. Politicians in India have openly called Bangladeshis "termites" and "infiltrators" many times. This foundation of hate laid by political figures continues to fuel hostility, as evidenced by the recent events surrounding the arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das, a Bangladeshi Hindu monk and former ISKCON



VISUAL:
SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

leader, which spurred a campaign of hate against Bangladesh in India.

Some Indian media have had a field day cashing in on this hate by spreading all kinds of disinformation. Without any qualms, these media outlets have been showing video footage and pictures falsely implying that they were of Hindus being persecuted. So far, these images and footage have been debunked by fact-checkers, but the damage has been done. The hate has already spread.

And as we know, hate begets hate. The attack on the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission office in Tripura's Agartala, with the Bangladesh flag being burnt or desecrated, have successfully provoked the

anger and hatred on this side of the border. In Bangladesh, Indian flags have been disrespected, and political and religious groups have marched towards the Indian High Commissions—though there have been no attacks. But the seed of mistrust has been sown deeper into many hearts. Following the arrest of Chinmoy, a few Indian doctors

boy had to be taken into custody by the army because he allegedly made a comment on Facebook which was deemed to be hurtful to the religious sentiments of Muslims. Temples have been vandalised and business places of Hindus have been attacked.

Why is hate such a favourite political tool? The politics of hate flourishes on fear and division. The

feel angry and powerless. We need a punching bag, someone or some group to blame for our state of helplessness. This is the perfect environment for political hate to thrive. Politicians all over the world have capitalised on this by projecting messages of hate through mainstream and social media campaigns of disinformation. By fuelling pre-existing prejudices or even creating new ones, the powerful consolidate their power. Thus, hate has been used to justify genocide by dehumanising people (Best example: Israel's relentless military actions to annihilate the Palestinians in Gaza), to violently attack members of vulnerable communities in the name of religion, and to label countries as terrorist states for electoral victories and expansionary ambitions.

Social media and technology have made it dramatically easier and faster to spread hate. Anyone can publish anything on a social media platform. As we all know, negative content, especially those that promote divisiveness, always does well on social media, thanks to the algorithms. So, hate speech gets even more amplified and further influences the target audience. Media companies, meanwhile, make money out of such content because they get more clicks, shares and comments and hence keep on promoting hate-filled content.

So, without even realising it, people become the stooges of this vicious cycle.

But is there no way out of this cesspool of vitriol that only results in death and destruction? Do we not realise that the path of hatred is a suicidal journey for humankind?

Bangladesh has historically been a region of religious harmony and multiculturalism. Over the decades, unfortunately, this has changed with pluralism being overshadowed by religious dogmatism. Foreign ideologies have seeped into the void left by the undemocratic nature of democratic governments, leaving people with no choice but to take one side over the other. Those wanting to brainwash being convince them to hate anyone who does not conform to their way of thinking. Meanwhile, those who consider themselves "progressive" fall into the trap of othering groups that don't share their perspectives, thus perpetuating the sequence of mistrust, fear and hate.

The good news is every poison has its antidote, and so does hate. The cure lies in embracing empathy, compassion, and kindness—precious virtues that must be protected, nurtured, and spread across communities and nations. We must recognise our shared humanity, one that transcends every barrier, be it religion, nationality, ethnicity, class or gender. We must rise above the urge to simplify complex issues and blame others. Instead, we must strive to truly connect with one another, seek to understand diverse perspectives and craft solutions that uplift us all, not just a select few.

Time is running out for us humans. We are on the brink of extinction from the consequences of our greed and ignorance, and hate is the rolling rock that will push us over the cliff. It's time to stand together and push back on hate. It's the only way we will survive.

Reading Rokeya through the lens of 1857-58 and July 2024



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People of the Indian subcontinent, especially those in Bengal, never accepted European colonial rule. They launched many waves of anticolonial resistance since the arrival of the coloniser in the early 16th century. The most decisive—and of tragic consequences—was the Great Rebellion of 1857-58 (*Mahadidroh*) which the British mischaracterised as "Sepoy Mutiny." It was begun by the *sipahis* of the Bengal army.

The epicentre of the war that followed was Delhi where the *sipahis* and other freedom fighters flocked. By that time, Mughal rule under its last emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar shrunk to Delhi and its surrounding areas. The freedom fighters declared him *Badshah-e-Hind* (the emperor of India) and the symbolic leader of the revolt. Mainly due to the treachery of local sell-outs, informants and opportunists, the uprising failed.

After quelling the revolt, the British perpetrated mass murder, rape, lawfare, confiscation of property, and similar human rights violations, whose primary victims were the Muslim community. Tens of thousands of people were slaughtered. At one point, with revolver shots from a point blank range, British cavalry officer William Hodson killed members of the Mughal royal family, including Mirza Mughal and Mirza Khizr Sultan. Their severed heads were then presented to their father, Bahadur Shah Zafar.

In a 2011 Routledge essay titled "The Backlash in Delhi," historian Arshad Islam says, "The British soldiers started looting, plundering, and demanding money. However, after gorging money they put to the sword Hindus and Muslims indiscriminately, but later they only

fell upon the Muslims," women being the worst sufferers.

Delhi and other cities affected by the rebellion were littered with "heaps of dead bodies" and presented "an awful spectacle." Fearing death and dishonour at the hands of colonial forces, "men, women, and children were roaming barefooted ... Mothers who could not bear the miseries of their [hungry] children threw themselves into wells" and innumerable women committed suicide to guard their chastity. Many surviving Muslim women of respectable families—including descendants of Bahadur Shah Zafar—later lived as beggars and domestic helpers.

This landmark event had massive impacts on the subsequent relations between the coloniser and the colonised in the region. The following discussion sheds some light on the self-censorship practices of native writers in its aftermath.

Many anticolonial rebels suffered penal servitude and died in the dreaded island prison of the Andamans. One of them was great writer and jurist Fazl-e-Haq (also spelt Fadh-i-Haq) Khairabadi (1796-1861)—honourably known as *Allamah* (a great scholar)—on whom poet Intizamullah Shahabi wrote an essay titled "Allamah Fadl-i-Haq." In 1953, introducing the essay in the *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, its editor commented on the cultural context of the aftermath of the rebellion, "[Writers of the subcontinent] were overcautious in their statements because they could not afford to be listed among 'political suspects.'"

In his essay, Shahabi states, "In the period that followed the catastrophe

of 1857 it was not possible to say or write anything against the British rule ... For several decades after the War it was impossible to talk of liberation or independence ... [E]ven those who wrote in the earlier decades of the twentieth [century], could not carry us far."

Roquia Sakhawat Hossein (1880-1932), more popularly known

as Rokeya, was born about two decades after the Great Rebellion and wrote in the first few decades of the 20th century. In her work, the Great Rebellion is conspicuous by its absence. Given the lethality of the British response to the uprising, Rokeya had to be sensitive to the political-cultural context in which she operated. This explains the omission of any prominent mention of the uprising in her oeuvre. However, a thematic analysis of her work shows that the spectre of the event was always there at the back of her mind.



Rokeya's parental home in Pairaband, Rangpur.

PHOTO: MD JABIR HASAN

laments on the deplorable condition of Muslims in British India. She sought to lift them from the abyss of wretchedness and from the ills and adversity brought on them by colonial rule. The strategy through which she wanted to materialise this project of ameliorating the condition of Muslims was women's emancipation. She established a link between the

220 millions ignore the 80 million Muslims, their petition will not reach the ears of the British government."

Thus, she pointed to the embedded connection between the public and the private long before latter-day feminist scholars theorised these inherent underpinnings. In her short stories such as "Gyanphal," "Muktiphala" and "Bhrata O Bhogni"

liberation of Muslim women and the overall development of Muslim society. For example, in a 1926 speech delivered at Bengal Women's Education Conference, Rokeya said,

"As the British Government does not recognise the demands of Indian peoples ... [and] our non-Muslim neighbours do not tolerate the interests of Muslims ... in the same way Muslim men refuse to recognise women's desire for progress ... Unless and until our Muslim brothers give proper attention to our [women's] sufferings, the 220 million people of India will not give any heed to their demands; and unless and until those

and essays like "Asha-Jwuti," Rokeya sent the same stark message—to those who wanted to decolonise their country—that without making women equal partners in every sphere of life, it would be impossible to achieve liberation, especially from colonial rule.

My decades-long research on the life and work of Rokeya shows that she didn't seek to improve the condition of women alone. She wanted to break the imperial shackles and to liberate the people of the subcontinent from colonial subjugation, and the key to that liberation, according to her, was the emancipation of women.

Recently, while studying the 1857-58 rebellion and its aftermath, I shuddered with horror thinking of the dreadful consequences had the July uprising failed and Sheikh Hasina remained in power. This also tells me about the heavy burden of the post-1857-58 collective trauma among the Muslim community that Rokeya had to process while she was writing. It is important to consider this aspect of Rokeya's literary career while reading her work. Equally, in order to make our struggle for gender justice relevant and efficacious, we can't turn a blind eye to the larger political context that affects the lives of both men and women.