

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PATTERNS OF SOCIAL MEDIA BASED RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Bangladesh has experienced religious violence in the past few years, with a change in its patterns. In recent times, violence has used the media as a powerful tool. In this context, this article explores the research gap about the nature and systematic media patterns used to propagate religious violence. This article also inspects the media and its association with religious extremism in Bangladesh. This paper has attempted to focus on the rise and propagation of religious extremism using media, especially social media (Facebook and YouTube). In this article, it has been explored that there is a common pattern of proliferating religious violence and communal riots in recent years. This paper has also figured out that violence has several motives. It has been argued that religion has been used as a tool to exercise political and monetary gain. Furthermore, this paper has suggested some effective measures to combat this uncontrolled recent media terror and ensure the national integrity of Bangladesh.

Keywords: Religion, Media, Bangladesh, Religious Extremism in Bangladesh, Militancy, Terrorism, Communal Violence.

Introduction

In a globalized world, media play a catalytic role in changing society. The world has seen remarkable change in recent years across all spheres owing to the influence of media. These modifications also had an impact on and significantly changed the media system as well. Indeed, we are in such a cultural experiment where instantaneous access to knowledge, facts, and information is attainable because of the technologies of information and communication. Media's role in comprehending the spatial and the temporal components of social life are incomprehensible as media impact grows rapidly (Hoover, 2006).

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Religion and the media have a mutually beneficial relationship. Both have a significant effect and are interdependent. It is certainly true that the media has increased people's access to religion on a global scale. In addition to research on religions, it is now simpler to find information about religion. The internet system, in particular, has brought revolutionary changes and contributions to the study of religions (Campbell, 2011).

Despite thousands of advantages of media, it cannot be denied that it also has many disadvantages. The majority of the time, it has to do with unethical and uncontrolled media exposure. The media served as the medium for a group of people who use media with unethical purpose. The misuse of religion in the media has had some grave consequences for Bangladesh. In addition, the statement of the study problem investigates how media and religion interact in Bangladesh and identifies the relationship between media, religion, and religious extremism.

This paper focuses on electronic media, especially social media, and its relation to religious extremism. To focus the research issue, numerous case studies have been addressed and analyzed in this study. This article has examined the research issue within the context of two main research questions: a) examining the ways in which social media has been used to disseminate religious extremism and b) identifying the types of statements or elements that typically make up those activities. This paper attempt to answer to major research gaps, i.e. patterns of media based religious violence and the language and motivations used in social media (Facebook and YouTube) which worked behind that violence. In the findings of this article, the patterns of the religious violence that arose over disinformation and fake news on social media have been analyzed and found that there exist some common patterns which are repeatedly used for spreading fake news and communal violence.

Additionally, the motivations behind those attacks and incidents have been examined using argumentation. In this process, few incidents of the recent times have been analyzed based on the expert reports. This article uses secondary data to support its arguments. Newspaper articles, reports and journal articles have been taken into consideration for the information. A careful study has been carried out to avoid any error, thus crosschecks have been done where needed.

Definition of Media, Misinformation, Disinformation, and Religious Extremism

Media

The media is one instrument of communication that has brought people together globally. Since the Latin word “medium” means “in the middle,” the word “media” refers to content creators, traditional mass communication networks, and other technology instruments for mediated human discourse. According to Hoag (2008), this category includes traditional print media such as newspapers, magazines, or books; traditional electronic media such as cable, satellite, broadband, or broadcasting; motion pictures; video games; recorded music; commercials; and Internet-based versions of any of these media. It is common to use the words “mass media” and “media” interchangeably. When newspapers and magazines first appeared, the term “media” was first employed (Pushparaj, 2014). The media serves as a vehicle for conveying information and entertainment to a sizable and diverse population (Kumar, 2008).

Types of Media

Print media is one of the primary information sources among the several media formats. Historically, the transmission of printed materials has been referred to as print media. Publications, books, handbills or flyers, magazines, booklets, barouches, home magazines, journals or newsletters, direct mailers are all included (Paul & Rai, 2021).

The second type of media is known as electronic media, and it can only be accessed by means of an electrical connection. Broadcast media is another name for it. It includes devices like telephones, radios, and televisions (Lee, 2009). The third category is social media, also referred to as new media. A new method of news delivery began to emerge with the development of the Internet and mobile technology. There are many social media websites available today, including blogs, social networks, microblogs, forums, wikis, and places to share photographs, audio, and video.

Misinformation and Disinformation

Despite being spoken simultaneously; misinformation and disinformation have very different semantics. Misinformation is the unintentional spread of erroneous information. In other words, ignorance and a lack of information lead to misinformation. Another definition of disinformation is the deliberate creation and dissemination of false information with the intention of achieving a particular result (Al-Zaman, 2019). “Disinformation is simply misinformation purposefully conveyed to mislead the receiver into believing that it is information” (Floridi, 2011, p. 260).

The prefix “dis-” typically has a negative connotation and implies “not” (disagree, disable), as well as the inverse (disestablish, disaffection) (G. & C. Merriam Co., 1961). The word “disinformation” was primarily adapted and modified from Russian *dezinformatsiya* by the KGB’s Department of Black Propaganda in the 1950 (Bittman, 1985). Three potential explanations for misinformation were put up by Floridi (1996, 2005, 2011): (a) Disinformation propagation is defective; (b) the source knows it is false; and (c) it is intentionally transmitted to deceive. Thus, the intentional dissemination of erroneous information with the goal of misleading people is known as disinformation.

Religious Extremism

Although there is no clear definition of extremism, it’s generally portrayed negatively. Indeed, the term is explained from different perspectives. It has often been interpreted in paradoxes and contentions. Religious extremism grows up when for many people and groups who define their identities exclusively through religious lens, and become intolerant to other views because in their minds, only their views on religion is valid. This viewpoint is regarded as representing the monolithic view of all faiths. Any action, attitude, or opinion that deviates from accepted religious practices or beliefs is referred to as religious extremism (Lutz & Lutz, 2008).

Despite a lively socio-religious debate, it is frequently said that extremism rejects freedom of speech and choice. This strain of thinking rejects all liberal viewpoints and functions as the antithesis of civil and human rights (Cronin, 2008). Extremists are those who support the idea that extremism is good as strategy and ideology. The radicals believe their ideology to be unquestionably true and as a result aim to force it on others by any means necessary, including using violence if necessary. They believe that the only path to a better future is via extremism (Wibisono, et al. 2019).

Social Networking Platforms and Religious Extremism in Bangladesh

From the year 2013 to 2022 in Bangladesh a number of violent incidents have been took place where the social media specially the Facebook was used as a powerful weapon to operate the violent actions. Incident in Ramu (an upazila in Cox’s Bazar district of Bangladesh) is one of the most violent cases in Bangladesh where fake news triggered religion in September 29, 2012. The rampage started with the desecration of the Qur’an, the sacred text of Islam. After an investigation, it was discovered that the Facebook page containing the anti-Islamic image that started the violence had been Photoshopped. A screenshot of Ramu-based Buddhist

Uttam Kumar Barua's Facebook profile page was taken, and the address of an anti-Islamic website was cropped out and pasted on the address bar that can be seen in the picture. It appeared that the anti-Islamic website had shared the picture with Uttam and 26 other people once the manipulation was completed. (Ahmed and Liton, 2019). The mediums of circulating those photoshopped screenshots were mobile to mobile via Bluetooth (Ahmed & Manik, 2012).

Bangladesh has witnessed a bizarre incident in 2013 that the face of Delwar Hossain Sayeedi, a Jamaat -i- Islami leader was seen in the moon! A photoshopped image showing the face of Sayeedi in the moon was circulated through internet. The photo was also circulated by Jamaat-Shibir activist through cell phones via short message service (SMS) and call (Ahmed, 2014). The caption read: Saydee's visage (in the moon) was visible to folks from Saudi Arabia to Bangladesh from late Friday night until early Saturday. The photoshopped figment of Saydee was discovered on "Basherkella", a Facebook page, where it was circulated to several people. Mosque loudspeakers were used to broadcast announcements in order to bring attention to those who do not use the internet ('Lie Worked Well', 2013).

In November 2013, in Bonogram of Santhia upazila, Pabna, violence happened in Hindu dominated neighborhood claiming that a boy named Rajib Saha belongs to Hindu community has committed a blasphemy by defaming the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) of Islam. In the morning on the day, photocopies of a Facebook post accusing Rajib Shaha of blasphemy were being distributed by a group of people. Investigations revealed that the Facebook page was created on September 14, 2013, and that it was produced in Bangla. The bulk of the hostile posts on the page were made by the page administrator. Later, it was discovered that Rajib Saha had nothing to do with the Facebook page whose copies were being distributed to spark unrest in the affluent Hindu community of Bonogram. (Topu, 2013; Minar & Naher, 2018).

Same method was applied in Comilla, in April, 2014, fake news triggered another violence claiming the defamation of religion and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) by some Hindus. Due to rumours about a Facebook post, police apprehended nine people in addition to two suspected local Hindus, Utsab Das and Srinibas Das. They denied making any such derogatory posts while being interrogated (Minar, & Naher, 2018; "Hinduexistence.org", 2016; "Hindu Houses Attacked", 2014; Alif, Rahman, 2019). In October, 2016, a violent attack was launched on the Hindu community of Brahmanbaria's Nasirnagar upazilla. Communal hatred was spread continuously before the attack accusing a local fisher man 'Rasraj Das' for hurting

religious sentiment of the Muslims. That Facebook post was shared to the locals through hard copies and phone (Azad & Hasan, 2016).

A fabricated Facebook post that was derogatory also served as the catalyst for the clash that occurred in Thakurpara, Rangpur in November 2017. Allegations were put forwarded on Titu Chandra Roy for demeaning Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and Islam. Copies of that Facebook posts taken by screenshots were distributed among the villager (“Rangpur Mayhem”, 2017). In 2019, an unfortunate clash broke out in Borhanuddin of Bhola district and caused four lives. It sparked again from a fake news where a Hindu man Biplob Chandra Shuvo was accused for his Facebook messenger conversations where he expressed his hatred towards Islam. Police find out that the Facebook account of Biplob was hacked and those hateful messages were circulated by the hackers (Mayhem over hate speech through hacked Facebook account in Bhola, 2019).

The October 13, 2021 mayhem of Cumilla happened when the Hindu community was celebrating Durga Puja all across the country. It was another incident of the demeaning the Holy Qur’an. It was circulated all over the social media platforms; YouTube and Facebook. Dates and times of the uploads reveal that several of these recordings were created and posted within hours after the October 13 incident. They can all be categorized as containing hate speech (Social Network of Hate: Content inciting violence, preading lies cause Irreparable damage, 2021).

The YouTube channels and Facebook pages that posted the films explicitly target an audience interested in religious topics. The material can be profane and inciting or harmless religious explanations. The inflammatory films spread on Facebook at an alarming rate because a group of people shared them without checking the content, which infuriated other users, they accepted and believed it without any question (Social Network of Hate: Content inciting violence, spreading lies cause irreparable damage, 2021). The title of the video was “Bangladesh rages after finding the Qur’an beneath idol” was uploaded to YouTube by the “Mojumder Islamic Media” channel, which is owned by a man named Shoriful Islam from Cumilla. The thumbnail was deftly altered with images of men protesting while dressed in religious attire. One of the most popular videos, “the Qur’an demeaned at Cumilla Puja Mondop, the Qur’an rescued Nauzubillah,” was uploaded by a channel called Pirojpur Islamic Media alias Torun Waz at 5:00 pm on the day of the incident and has received over 1.2 lakh views (Social Network of Hate: Content inciting violence, spreading lies cause Irreparable damage, 2021).

The channel is administered by M. Zakaria Hossain's assistant. He is a preacher (*khatib*) at Khulna's Baitun Nazat Masjid. The channel has created six videos on the subject since the tragedy. In fact, his assistant manages the channel to advertise his sermons, according to Zakaria. The broadcaster urged viewers to be ready for Islamic warfare in the video comments. Within 72 hours following the Cumilla tragedy, a channel called Rose Tv News, which lacks any identification on its operators, uploaded 27 videos on the subject. A lakh people have watched some of the videos. The films also go into great detail about how religious beliefs and ideals are being attacked. The videos' titles used language like "Many martyrs were killed in the siege of Cumilla, and the BGB was deployed there. Adopting strict efforts to impede the *Alem* community". Professor Rahman, editor of Factwatch, claims, "we published five-seven articles debunking rumours just in the first 24 hours (after the Cumilla incident) (Social Network of Hate: Content inciting violence, spreading lies cause irreparable damage, 2021).

During the first phase, people were mostly sharing news of the Holy Qur'an being demeaned, but slowly the rumors crept in. People have been sharing content on Facebook since the day after the Cumilla incident, speculating about the main culprit and inflating casualty numbers, Professor Rahman said. The video of one person not involved with the Cumilla incident at all was shared widely, citing him to be the culprit. The situation became dangerous to the point where people close to him started posting saying they fear for his life" (Social Network of Hate: Content inciting violence, spreading lies cause irreparable damage, 2021).

In July 2022, another same incident happened in the Sahapara village in Dighalia union of Narail's Lohagara upazila. Mobs protesting a Facebook post that allegedly offended religious sensitivities carried out the attacks. Locals claimed that Akash Saha, a villager who is 18 and a college student, was the author of the message. After Juma prayers (July 15, 2022), they assembled and staged a demonstration in front of the student's home, calling for his arrest. While he was gone, the crowds spread to nearby Hindu homes, even those of persons who were unrelated to the Facebook post. As they planned to file a complaint against Akash under the Digital Security Act, the police detained Akash's father Ashoke Saha in the evening in order to "get the situation under control" (Roy, 2022).

Unfortunately, some popular newspaper had contributed much to fuel fake news and violence in the recent years. As it is mentioned before, A significant online campaign was launched against prosecution of leading Jamaat-e-Islami figures charged with war crimes in 2012 and 2013, frequently utilizing fake images and

misleading facts. A crucial part of the effort was performed by the Facebook page BasherKella, which received support from various right-wing newspapers. A photo of a ceremony to change the *Gilaf* (cover) of the Holy Kaaba in Makkah was published in some of those newspapers with misleading captions. “A human chain headed by the khatib of Holy Kaaba opposing the war crimes trial in Bangladesh” (Adhikary & Habib, 2016).

Communal Hate Mongering Speech and Propagation of Extremism in the *Waz-Mehfils* and Social Networking Platforms

Facebook and YouTube in particular have become flooded with sermons from clerics on the coronavirus, hateful rants against members of minority religious groups, proclamations in support of women’s rights, and messages from secular humanists. Religious leaders around this period produced videos contains sermons that were widely disseminated on social media such as: ‘coronavirus does not exist’; ‘Jews, Christians and other infidels are conspiring against Muslim World’; ‘Corona is a soldier of Allah to fight infidels’, ‘Corona does not infect a practicing Muslims’, ‘Corona is a punishment meant only for non-Muslims’; ‘millions of non-Muslims are converting to Islam to escape corona’ etc. They also encourage “violence” against people who practice other religions, Atheists, minority Muslim sects, secular humanists, and minority sexual groupings. Additionally, they call for the total “separation of Muslims” from followers of other religions (Doftori, 2021).

Sermons delivered by certain controversial Islamic clerics have long been accused of demeaning women, secularism and minority communities. In 2019, the Home Ministry sent a letter to government agencies with six recommendations for monitoring and reining in clerics who are alleged to have preached inflammatory sermons to Muslims. Whether the letter had any discernible effects on radical preaching is uncertain. Minority representatives praised the police statement and noted that for too long, minorities and women have been hurt by the aggressive comments of Islamic clerics (Bangladesh clamps down on provocative Islamic sermons, 2021).

On January 19, 2021, a top police officer stated that they would monitor *waz mahfils* to identify clerics and take appropriate action in the event of extreme, inflammatory, or hateful sermons. “We have noticed that recently some speakers in *waz mahfils* are giving political and indecent speeches about mothers and sisters rather than discussing the five pillars of Islam,” The English-language Daily

Star stated that Monirul Islam, the head of the police's Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit, spoke at a meeting of Islamic leaders in the capital Dhaka (Bangladesh clamps down on provocative Islamic sermons, 2021).

The videos feature sermons by some Islamist leaders that are filled with hate speech directed towards a variety of targets, including democracy, secularism, cultural traditions of Bangladesh, the Liberation War, the development of Bangladesh as an independent nation, religious and ethnic minorities, bilateral relations with India, and a long list of other "issues." In their war cry, these waz-mongers exhort their listeners to destroy the memorials honoring the national and linguistic martyrs, put out the eternal flame (Shikha Chirantan), and destroy any sculptures honoring the Liberation War (Salam, 2020).

Some *waz mahfils* nearly often include insults directed towards Ahmadiyya Muslims, who are typically labelled as heretics in the end. They openly rail against Hindus, calling them *kafirs* (disbeliever), and designate Christians as infidels and Jewish stooges. They are willing to cast doubt on the Liberation War and the intellectual martyrs who perished at the hands of the Pakistani military. They detest Pohela Boishak, Ekushey February, Durga Puja, Buddha Purnima, Christmas, and other religious and cultural festivities. They have no qualms in demanding the Holy Qur'an and Hadith to take the place of the national constitution in order to rule the nation (Salam, 2020).

It is alarming that a good number of people watch the hours of sermons that are posted online, since the number of views and shares are visible for everyone. It is raising the question of how much farther their "teachings" apply to the populace of this nation. These extremist Islamists have also called for the "Islamization" of school texts and made hateful statements against the national anthem and flag. Maulana Manzoor Ahmad Chinioti founded the Khatme Nabuwwat movement in Multan, and the Bangladesh branch is a "photocopy" of the Khatme Nabuwwat Movement Pakistan, the movement's head admitted as much in a video that went popular on social media (Salam, 2020).

Based on a background research, Maulana Manzoor Ahmed Chinioti encouraged sectarian violence in Pakistan. Maulana Chinioti's speeches, according to a Pakistani journal, were full of hate speech and lies. It also noted how his followers' donations to Khatme Nabuwwat had allowed him to amass wealth. When he paid a visit to Bangladesh in 1994, he stirred up a lot of controversy by trying to include Bangladesh to his network of terrorists. His influence on our nation's more radical

groups was widely reported in newspapers across the country (Salam, 2020).

Soon after, when Chinioti visited Bangladesh, At the Ekushey book festival, a terrorist attacked Professor and writer Humayun Azad, at the University of Dhaka. He (Chinioti) had several meetings in Dhaka with Maulana Obaidul Haq, Mufti Amini, Shaykh Ul Hadith Allamah Azizul Haque, and other Jamaat-e-Islami officials. (Salam, 2020). With the intention of undermining a secular, democratic, and pluralist society, Khatme Nabuwat made an effort to turn Bangladesh into a hardline Islamic state. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of waz-mongers escaped prosecution for encouraging anti-government protests. No charges were ever brought against them for undermining secularism, pluralism, and democracy. They also faced no charges for violating the faiths of Ahmadiyya Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. (Salam, 2020).

Reports claim that the underground terrorist agents, secret weapons stores, and banned organizations are reuniting under new identities all point to an increase in activity by militant groups and their allies.¹ These terrorist activity claims have fueled worries about a wider religious radicalization. Even if such a trend doesn't result in violence respondents expressed worry at the expanding possibility of extremists replacing conventional values based on moderate cultural and religious practices of Sufi philosophy that is open-minded and Hanafi law with those from the Hanbali school that are stricter widely used throughout the Middle East. Islamists in Bangladesh, according to Maneeza Hossain of the Hudson Institute, have produced a "fictionalised monolithic Islam." Maneeza termed this trend "cultural radicalization" (as cited in Fink, 2010, p. 3).

Analysis and Findings

Planned and Organized Operations

While analyzing the different unwanted incidents centered on the media that occurred in different places and different times in Bangladesh, the most violent ones are often centered on religion. Based on the reports, news, and investigative documentaries, it has been explored that the incidents were not the outcome of a sudden plan, but rather pre-planned and well-planned operations. From the above-mentioned cases, it has been found that from the Ramu incident to the most recent Narail rampage, the patterns of the activism are almost identical. One or two fake Facebook pages and accounts were created with the accused person's names (mostly from the minority community), and the defamatory images and status updates were distributed in a systematic manner by a group of people before they

were widely shared. If anyone investigates the You Tube channels that invoked the public rage, those channels and their contents contained the alleged defamatory images. The news is well edited. Thumbnails are catchy with fake images that can easily grab public attention. The distribution of printed copies of images, as well as discussion prior to the execution of the assignments, suggest that all of these rampages and violent activities are the result of a systematic plan, with trained groups involved.² Arrangements of gun powder to set fire on the houses and police boxes, collection of huge sticks and other local weapons testify that those incidents were not a sudden outburst but a pre-planned organized operation.

The sermons of the religious ‘leaders’, which contain hate speech and communal elements, are also coherent with each other. As it has been mentioned the response of the common people and reports on *waz mahfil*, it has been found that those sermons were full of some common words and sentences like kafir (disbeliever), non-Muslims will be dragged to hell, sermons related to hate speech against women, non-Muslims and anti-pluralism etc. Fake news, as well as disinformation and provocation against Bangladeshi law, sovereignty, and government, have become common issues in recent years. These kinds of sermons are tempting to most of the audience. Consequently, hate speech and disinformation get public support with religious sensitivity.

Religion: Easy tool in Executing Diverse Motives

It is needless to say that religion has been at the core of the incidents. While religious extremism has been a core part of the problem, political and economic affairs are not uncommon in which religion has become a soft target. The people of this subcontinent are very close to religion, and this is no exception to Bangladesh. This religious sensitivity and religiosity of the common people have been the pawns of miscreants over the ages. Throughout history, religion and religious identity have been used to spread hatred and, ultimately, genocide against the common people of Bangladesh, regardless of religious identities. Religion has become a popular and easy medium to reach a large audience in today’s media age, particularly in the age of social media.

According to investigations and case studies of the aforementioned incidents, few of them were entirely religious, but the majority of them had some hidden agenda, and religion was a pawn in achieving those hidden agendas. It is very easy to outline that the attacks were mostly in the minority-dominated areas. The attacks were supposed to be on the minority groups, and the target groups were

the minority people like Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and the Shia community of Bangladesh. A critical analysis reveals that hate mongering speeches and social media-based fake posts were created by using the names of the people belonging to those minority communities, and attacks were very prompt and organized, as we mentioned before. Again, one of the most alarming facts is that the tyrants attack the places of worship and temples of the minority communities first and then destroy the worshipped idols, archaeological monuments, and historically significant sacred scriptures, as we have seen in the Ramu incident in Cox's Bazar.

This systematic pattern of attack suggests that it was a motivated attack and that destroying the religious places and monuments was to destroy the mental strength of the minority groups. This is intrigued by the motive of creating fear, and these attacks do not stop there. Destruction of houses and loot of money and expensive assets are very common. Notably, these kinds of acts were very common in 1971 amid the liberation war of Bangladesh. According to reports, these attacks are primarily aimed at seizing the lands of minority groups. In the long run, minority groups are scared of living here, so they may leave their possessions or sell them at a cheap rate and leave this country.

Besides, economic and land-grabbing motives, political motives are not uncommon. Religion has always been an effective tool for politicians around the world. In Bangladesh, religion is closely associated with politics. While religion has been used to gain public support, as we have argued before, religion has also been abused to gain unethical political benefits. Both the majority and minority communities in Bangladesh have been soft targets for some evil politicians, who have used religion to manipulate them. Attacks on minority groups have been proven beneficial for political groups to play the blame game. On the other hand, extremist groups and terrorism have been patronized by certain political groups.

Another most alarming tendency that is creating more terror is the tremendous growth of social media platforms. Innumerable online news portals, YouTube channels, Facebook pages, and unauthorized newspapers that are only circulated on Facebook have gotten the situation out of control. Most of these mediums have no authorized identities. Anyone can now open channels and pages and share anything. To get more views and publicity, spreading fake news has proven very effective. The title and thumbnails contain tempting headlines, misleading photos, and news that will get public attention easily. The aforementioned cases have explored how news stories with misleading titles related to religion were common. Photoshopped images of someone demeaning the Qur'an and the Ka'ba

and spreading misinformation about the government and religious minority groups frequently receive more views, and people prefer to click on those stories over others. In this case, it can be observed that a section of people circulates fake news just to get personal benefits and create misconceptions and communalism among the common people.

Conclusion

This research explores that religious extremism and the rise of Islamic militancy have adopted the media as a powerful tool for spreading propaganda. This research work has explored that attacks on minority groups and the destruction of cultural, traditional, and religious heritages in Bangladesh in recent times have followed a systematic and organized pattern. The underlined motives are not always religious, but also economic and political. This paper suggests that a powerful, systematic monitoring and evaluation system should be in place to control the rapid growth of unauthorized online news portals, YouTube channels, and Facebook pages. Fact checking should be made stricter, and a large group of fact checkers should be in action to prevent religious violence and hate speech. Although the government has passed the Digital Security Act 2018 to prevent unlawful acts in the cyber world, mere digital security acts cannot be proven effective if a large number of people remain uneducated about media literacy and fake news. The government, along with other stakeholders, should form a plan of action to educate the common people about fake news and fact-checking. The government can target schools, colleges, religious institutions; madrasas to educate youths. Fake news and media literacy training should be provided on a regular basis in mosques, temples, churches, and pagodas. To prevent future similar crimes, concrete evidence of punishment should be established. Aside from the law, the education system is critical in shaping the mature outlook of the youth, who can be a nation's strong backbone. In this sense, the education system should be modified, and curricula from the primary to the university level should include interreligious dialogue, harmony, and the academic study of religions as core subjects. Academic study of religions and interreligious dialogue are the inevitable parts of scientific study of religions. A scientific approach to the study of religion undoubtedly provides enough space for critical thinking, enables one to be more empathetic towards others which ensures communal harmony and national integrity.

Notes

1. Cf. The arms cache found in Bogra (southern Bangladesh) on March 24, 2009,

yielded “a bomb bluster, nine firearms, 2,500 bullets, 3,000 grenade splinters, an explosives blaster, four pairs of German-made uniforms, 200-gram gunpowder, bullet-making components and equipment, two walkie-talkies, two bows, two remote control devices, binoculars, a book on how to operate firearms and other extremist literature.” Ahmede Hussain, “From England with Hate,” *Daily Star* (Dhaka), April 3, 2009.

2. Cf. Rangpur Mayhem: Hatred stirred up for days. (2017, November 12). *The Daily Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/rangpur-mayhem-they-whipped-hatred-days-attack-1489861>

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