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Islamic Radicalisation in Bangladesh: An Analysis of Political Islamism in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Islamism in the modern world is clearly portrayed as a notion of religious extremism. Bangladesh on the other hand as a young developing nation finds its root into two different branches of ideology: Bengali cultural and Muslim ideology. The militant groups in Bangladesh have been found active recently specially after 2015 when international media spotted Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and the Islamic State's (IS) presence in the country. This study, however, aims at understanding the Islamic radicalisation in Bangladesh through the analysis of Islamist political and non-political groups' functions and propaganda. In this article the ideas of Islamic radicalisation, mutations and role and function of Islamist militant as well as political group have been discussed. The role of Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing in the radicalisation have been discussed. The disputed relationship of Jamaat and the radical extremists as well as ban on their politics have created a complex scenario in Bangladesh. The political polarisation and politicising of counter terrorism effort have weakened the government's effort to tackle radical organisation. Honest and tolerant political intervention by welcoming different views regarding the solution of the radicalisation problem can help address it effectively.

1. Introduction

Radicalisation as a terminology widely has been used in the terrorism-related literature which can be the by-product of the cold war and possibly be publicised by the 9/11 attack in the US (Beriş, 2018). Since 2001 after the proclamation of President Bush the nature of the fight against terrorism has been changed as well as the nature of terrorism (Bush, 2003; "Terrorism," n.d.). Due to complex nature and the problem of terrorism United States and its allied nation found themselves at war with this phenomenon where Islam has been blamed for its influence (Kramer, 1993). In the political arena, this notion was criticized but still, Islam has been considered not just as a religious belief rather as an influential political idea towards jihadi islamism (Griffiths & Hasan, 2015). Scholars bargained with the issue of Islamism where they popularly presented it as political-ideological movements and thus again claimed to be the cause of fundamentalism (Villalón, 1995). Islamism in the modern world is clearly portrayed as a notion of religious extremism.

Bangladesh on the other hand as a young developing nation finds its root into two different branches of ideology: Bengali cultural and Muslim ideology (Murshid, 1993). It got its independence from Pakistan who indiscriminately tortured Bengali general people who wanted to have their own identity intact with religious tolerance (Murshid, 1997). But the then political group Jamaat-e-Islami (JEI) being motivated with Islamic political ideology supported

Pakistan and helped prevent Bangladesh from getting its independence which ended up with a bloody war killing about 3 million Bengalis. The birth of the nation was therefore full of violence and still, it is suffering from its culture of political violence (Islam, 2010).

However, after the end of the Bangladesh liberation war and subsequently the cold war, JEI found active with militia activities which gave birth to other Islamic radical groups. Therefore, since the early 1990s religious based terrorism or militancy has been a great concern for the county (Muniruzzaman, 2010). The political and religious culture of Bangladesh remained indecisive in practice. Besides, according to the academician like Huntington (as cited in Hossain, 2004), the claim of Islam and the democratic government system does not go along as both of them differ with their principles of sovereignty (Hossain, 2004). But at this age when the world is fighting against terrorism, there have been limited number of studies about the radical Islamist groups in Bangladesh which even lack "clear understanding as to the identity of the groups" (Riaz, 2016a).

Islamic radicalisation, especially the militant activities leading to terrorism have been widely evident in Bangladesh after 2001. The end of 90s remained eventful as Bangladesh experienced its Islamist political movement (Riaz, 2016a) where the Islamist leaders questioned about the moderate and secular democratic ideas of Bangladesh. This particular period was intense that international

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media spotted Islamist militancy in Bangladesh which they linked with the regional terrorism (Khan, 2011). The media and public felt active presence of the Islamist militant group while they managed to execute serial bomb blasts around the country within short period of time. The discussion of Islamic radicalisation got its coverage right after the 9/11 attack and the US intervention in the middle east between 1999 and 2005. This period was critical as US intervention on the Muslim countries attacked their sentiments and it also increased their anti-west emotion over the region.

The concurrent event at the middle east and Afghanistan also affected Bangladesh as the Islamist militant group motivated by their counterpart wanted to establish Sharia system in Bangladesh by any means necessary (Riaz & Raji, 2011). Several militant groups appeared since the end of 1990s who propagated their agenda of Sharia through opposing the Bengali culture and their secular identity and also targeted criminal justice system which is according to their principle not conducive with the sharia law. On the other hand, the young generations, who are mostly getting education from Islamic Curriculum based institution, are vulnerable to this Islamist ideology. The lack of proper education and knowledge about religious teachings has been identified as a contributing factor leading individuals, particularly young people, to become involved in militancy and commit serious offenses. This issue is exacerbated by certain mullahs, especially those affiliated with terrorist groups, who provide purposeful interpretations of the Qur'an to motivate and recruit individuals into terrorist organizations. Such actions pose a significant threat to state security and stability (Wahyudi, 2018; Zacharopoulos *et al.*, 2021). Research has shown that formal education has a long-term impact on individuals' lives, influencing their behaviours and choices (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Collaborations between families and schools have been recognized as crucial in promoting academic success and positive outcomes for individuals (Hakyemez-Paul *et al.*, 2018; Rush, 2008). Moreover, involving service users in educational settings, such as mental health nurse education, has been found to be beneficial in enhancing learning experiences and driving positive actions in practice. In the context of terrorism prevention, it is essential to address the manipulation of religious teachings to justify violent acts. Radical ideologies, often misinterpreted from religious texts, can lead individuals towards extremist behaviours and terrorist activities (Zacharopoulos *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, interventions focusing on promoting tolerance values and countering radicalization through family involvement and education are imperative (Wahyudi, 2018).

The militant groups in Bangladesh have been found active recently specially after 2015 when international media spotted Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and the Islamic State's (IS) presence in the country (Riaz, 2016b). This study, however, aims at understanding the Islamic radicalisation in Bangladesh through the analysis of Islamist political and non-political groups' functions

and propaganda. In the following sections the ideas of Islamic radicalisation, mutations and role and function of Islamist militant as well as political group have been discussed.

2. Materials and Method

The current political landscape in Bangladesh, particularly under the ruling government party, has been marked by authoritarian tendencies towards opposition parties and Islamist groups. This situation can be analysed through the lens of several theories, including the Theories of Collective Action, Resource Mobilization, and Political Opportunity Structure. The Resource Mobilization Theory emphasizes the importance of resources in social movements (Jenkins, 1983). In the context of Bangladesh, this theory can help explain how the ruling government party mobilizes resources to maintain its power and suppress opposition, including Islamist groups. The government's control over resources such as funding, media, and security forces enables it to exert authoritarian tendencies.

The Theories of Collective Action focus on how individuals come together to achieve common goals (Tadros, 2020). In Bangladesh, opposition parties and Islamist groups may engage in collective action to resist the authoritarian tendencies of the ruling government. Understanding the dynamics of collective action can shed light on how these groups mobilize and organize to challenge the government's actions. Political Opportunity Structure theories examine how political opportunities or constraints influence collective action (Karl, 1990). In the case of Bangladesh, the political opportunity structure created by the ruling government's authoritarianism shapes the strategies and tactics of opposition parties and Islamist groups. The government's restrictions on political freedoms and crackdown on dissent create challenges for those seeking to oppose its policies.

Moreover, the rise of Islamist militant activities in Bangladesh can be linked to the political environment shaped by the authoritarian tendencies of the ruling government. Studies have shown that support for Islamist terrorism in Bangladesh is influenced by factors such as views on Sharia law and literalist interpretations of scripture (Gill, 2007). The government's actions and policies may inadvertently contribute to the radicalization of certain segments of society, leading to increased militant activities. In conclusion, the political issues in Bangladesh, including authoritarian tendencies towards opposition parties and Islamist groups, as well as the rise of Islamist militant activities, can be analysed through the lenses of the Theories of Collective Action, Resource Mobilization, and Political Opportunity Structure. Understanding these theories can provide insights into the dynamics of power, mobilization of resources, and political opportunities that shape the current political landscape in Bangladesh.

This study employs a secondary data based qualitative approach by integrating qualitative analysis and empirical

observations to investigate Islamic radicalization in Bangladesh. A comprehensive literature review established foundational knowledge, followed by qualitative analyses encompassing content analysis of propaganda materials and archival research to comprehend the functions, roles, and ideological evolution of Islamist political and non-political groups. Additionally, an examination of political polarization's impact on counter-terrorism efforts was conducted, culminating in policy recommendations emphasizing the need for inclusive political interventions to effectively address the issue of radicalization within the country.

3. Radicalisation in Bangladesh

The foundational basis of the constitution of Bangladesh was democracy, socialism and secularism (Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972). Bangladesh with its Bengali cultural tradition and history enjoyed secularism with respect to all four major faith within the communities which are Muslim, Hindu, Christian and Buddhist (El-Said, 2012). All the major festivals of the four major religions have been marked as national holidays and also celebrated by people from every sphere of the society. Since the independence of the Bangladesh it did not experienced many noticeable religious unrest or intolerance towards it but some people found to participate into the extremist ideological groups (El-Said, 2012). It has to be mentioned here that, even though the country has been enjoying multi-religious, multi-ethnic cohabitation but Islam has always remained a religion of majority in Bangladesh (Islam & Islam, 2018).

Religious radicalisation in Bangladesh is not very old and its link towards militant or terrorism activities are also countable after 1990s. The prevalence of terrorism got its present identity or face of organised powerful terror organisation since 459 blasts in 63 districts in 30 minutes in 2005 occurred in Bangladesh ("459 blasts in 63 districts in 30 minutes," 2005). The Islamist terrorist groups in Bangladesh found to change their identity as well as member so frequently that it is hard to estimate their real count even though pioneer criminologist in Bangladesh Mohammad Azizur Rahman claimed that around seventy Islamist militia could be found between 1999-2010 (Rahman, 2016). Initially Bangladesh experienced most of the violent extremism by the Islamist group starting from 1999 to 2005 (El-Said, 2012; M. A. Rahman & Kashem, 2011). After a while for 2006 to 2012 being motivated by Al Qaeda different militant groups attacked sporadically in Bangladesh (Bashar, 2017b). Historically, Bangladesh got its radicalised forms of groups and their activities since the end of Afghan war and by the return of the veterans return as well as migrant workers from the middle east, as they influenced general people which was doped by US intervention in the major Muslim countries like Iraq and other events at Palestine, thus resulted in creating anti-western sentiment (Hosain, 2012) by the Islamist who subsequently turned into radical terrorist groups or otherwise (Harrigan, 2013).

Since the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971, it has been experiencing different forms of extremism which includes but not limited to left-wing extremism, ethnic militancy, religious extremism etc. Support has been observed from the extreme left toward extreme right wing based on ideology. There were few notorious left-wing parties like: Purba Bangla Communist Party (PBCP), Red Flag, Gono Mukti Fouz (GMF), Biplobi Community Party, Sarbahara Party etc., some of them were dissolved later and some re-emerged with different names due to lack of support and marginalisation (Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, 2014). Apart from the left-wing and Islamist militant group there is another ethnic based militia organisation namely Parbatya Chattagram Jana Shanghatti Samiti (PCJSS), who have been active since its inception at the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the south eastern part of the country. Due to several indigenous groups' extreme supporters and their practice of violence caused rise in the tension level at CHT who were mostly activist of individual culture and practices (Bashar, 2011). After the tragic events of 9/11, there was a surge in global attention towards terrorism, leading to the misrepresentation of Bangladesh as a hub for terror activities (Rabeya & Hossain, 2017). This portrayal was inaccurate considering the historically peaceful and harmonious nature of Bangladeshi society. Following the serial bomb blasts in 2005, Bangladesh faced challenges with law and order, further exacerbating the situation (Rabeya & Hossain, 2017).

Later on, since the 2005 attack until 2013, Bangladesh did not experience any notable terror attack which helped it to stay out of the list of high terror risk country, but the religious fundamentalism remained as a core problem. The tension increased after 2013 when the Islamist militant groups started serious attacks on bloggers, publishers, university teachers, foreigners and members of minority groups (Khalid, 2016). These attacks raised the tension in the international arena subsequently increased the risk status in the Global Terrorism Index (GTI): "Terrorism Index in Bangladesh decreased to 5.70 in 2017 from 6.18 in 2016. Terrorism Index in Bangladesh averaged 5.14 from 2002 until 2017, reaching an all-time high of 6.48 in 2015 and a record low of 4.10 in 2012" (Bangladesh Terrorism Index, 2019). The score has decreased though now it stands at 25th in GTI ranking with a comparative better position within the region (GTI report 2018). The number of extremism or activities increased after 2015. In the last decades, serial killings of bloggers and murders of secular intellectuals as well as attack on foreign nationals were such events of terror. Particularly the "Holey Artisan Bakery" attack in 2016 got the world wide attention where 20 people were killed ("Bangladesh Siege: Twenty hostages..", n.d.; BBC, 2016).

4. Mutation of the Militants

The radicalization of Islamist militants in Bangladesh cannot be solely attributed to the Kuwait-Iraq war period. The Gulf War, particularly the Iraq-Kuwait conflict, did

have significant implications for the region, leading to the deployment of various military strategies and weapons (AL-Hashimi & Wang, 2013). However, it is essential to note that the emergence of new perceptions of Muslims and Islam, associating them with insecurity and radicalism, was influenced by a combination of conflicts, including the major Arab Israeli wars, the Iraq-Iran war, and civil wars in Lebanon, Sudan, and Somalia (Amour, 2018).

The involvement of different militant groups in conflicts such as the Iran-Iraq war and subsequent wars in the region did contribute to the spread of radical ideologies (Tezcür & Asadzade, 2018). For example, Kurdish militant groups engaged in guerrilla warfare during the Iran Iraq War (Tezcür & Asadzade, 2018). Additionally, the support provided by various countries to combat militant threats, like Saudi Arabia aiding Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, showcases the complex dynamics of regional alliances and their impact on militant activities (Oztig, 2021).

The influx of Islamic State and Al Qaeda into Bangladesh in 2013 did mark a significant shift in the radicalization landscape, influencing the recruitment and targeting strategies of Islamist militants (Mostofa, 2021). The presence of these extremist groups in the region, fuelled by conflicts like the Iraq war, has indeed posed challenges to the security and stability of Bangladesh. The interconnected nature of conflicts in the Middle East and South Asia has created a breeding ground for radical ideologies, with militants exploiting socio-political grievances to further their agendas (Davenport, 2017).

As discussed in the earlier section, that Bangladesh got its radical terrorist groups activities at the early 1990s when the Afghan war veterans returned to Bangladesh after fighting with anti-Soviet war. The inception of the terrorism occurred with the hand of Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islam (HuJIB) and Jamaat ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) who successfully managed to detonate bombs in 63 districts simultaneously in 17 August 2005 ("459 blasts in 63 districts in 30 minutes," 2005). However, to tackle the crisis the then government formed elite forces comprising Police, Army and other forces. As a result, the terrorist group had to change their identity and revived with a new form. Ansarul Islam (or Ansar) as another radical group also emerged as a shadow of JMB declared itself the Islamic State-Bangladesh who collected member for the war at Iraq and Syria (International Crisis Group, 2018). Since the 1990s a handful of radical groups appeared in the scene in the terrorist activities in Bangladesh (Curtis & Hossain, 2010), among them the JMB, HuJIB, Jagrota Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and Shahadat-e-Hikma are on the top list. The notable terrorist attack contains the bomb attack targeted Bengali New Year Festival at Ramona Botamul in 14 April 2001 which claimed ten lives and injured many others ("9 killed in bomb attack in Bangladesh," 2001). The radical groups later attacked on the judicial system, on 29 November 2005, to highlight the importance of Sharia law while the attack nine people were dead which included lawyers, police and general people and people also died at the

court premises of Gazipur and Chittagong districts as well (Curtis & Hossain, 2010).

Ali Riaz is a distinguish professor at an USA university who is also happen to be an analyst of Islamic radicalisation in Bangladesh and their terrorist activities, he shared that the Islamist terrorist group passed through their five generations which started with the terrorist activities by HuJI B, the members who joined anti-Soviet war at Afghanistan during the period of 1979 to 1992 (Riaz, 2016a). JMB is the second generation group appeared as 'Qital Fi-Sabilillah' in 1996 and changed the name in 1998, while the third generation started from 2001 with the introduction of Hizbut Tahrir who as Professor Riaz mentioned that, had connection with international organisation in other countries (Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), 2017). In the report of BIPSS (Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), 2017), the fourth generation was started in 2007 when Jamat-ul-Muslemin came into being later performed its function as 'Ansarulah Bangla Team'. The report also discussed the presence of Al Qaeda in Bangladesh with the motivation of Anwar Alwaki who helped form Ansar Al-Islam.

The emergence of ISIS is considered as the fifth generation of radicalisation which attract man to fight abroad and join them directly from different countries. JMB later was divided into two groups as it struggled with its leadership after massive arrest and execution by Bangladesh law enforcement agency, they came up with Neo-JMB in 2015 who claimed to have direct connection with IS. But no study showed any foreign IS member to come and propagate in Bangladesh which means the terrorists were home group. Researchers like Ali Riaz extended their doubts on the religious political parties of Bangladesh to have link with these radicalised groups (Riaz, 2013).

With a view to establish a Sharia law-based state in line with the IS, the fifth generation, a group of educated youth, of radicalisation started in Bangladesh which can be identified back in 2015 (Riaz, 2016a). These group started their brutality in the month of Ramadan in 2016 by attacking at Holy Artisan Bakery where the dead were mostly foreigners. After military operation all of the assailants got themselves dead but revealed their well education and family background (Dearden, 2016).

5. Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir

Jamaat e Islami as a Islamist activist got its early inception in 26 August 1941 with the hand of Mawlana Sayed Abul A'ala Moududi with the name of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, which later the group was divided into two after the division of India in 1947, further after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 it was named as Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB) (Patwary, 2014, p. 91). At the first outset it was a simply Islamically motivated group who would practice the laws and rules provided by Allah mentioned in the Quran and Hadith who later on with the pace of time formed political party and participated into national

elections in Bangladesh. As a religious political party, they remained unique with their beliefs and practices through their political activities. There are several disputes about their status as Islamic fundamentalist group where it has always defended itself as the supreme leader of JIB professor Golam Ajam said, they wanted to present and establish Islam in Bangladesh through preparing its people with honesty, good character and other human qualities (Patwary, 2014, p. 104).

But its role in the independence war of Bangladesh which is highly disputed and disagreed by its party leaders, the media and politicians of Bangladesh have always tried to find and establish its link with religious based militants and terrorist (Hossain & Siddiquee, 2004). Because of its religious principles and political thinking, it is believed that they have attracted many Islamists Jihadist who later found their own. For example, the leader of JMB, Abdur Rahman shared in his statement to the court that he was motivated by the speech of the JIB's Islamic speaker, Deloar Hossain Sayedi but he did not like their political ways, for example accepting female as the country's prime minister (Patwary, 2014, p. 315). Even though the present government and the media claim JIB have alleged relationship between Islamist radical group and other radical extremist like JMB (Patwary, 2014, p. 314).

The student wing of JIB, Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), were arrested mostly in the case of 2005 nationwide bomb blast (Ganguly, 2006). The JIB leader Motiur Rahman Nizami was alleged to have connection which he refused and blamed media for fabricating information (Liton, 2006). He was held accountable for war crimes and sentenced to death at the International Crimes Tribunal court and executed in 2016 (Adhikary & Habib, 2016). Many other top leaders were hanged by the government for their involvement in the war crimes but their direct involvement with the Islamist radicalisation could not be established.

In order to execute the political agenda JIB formed its student wing ICS which is also an important way to recruit members to the group, specially recruiting students from madrasahs and the state-owned prominent universities of Bangladesh (Gohel, 2014). JIB is very much strategic in placing their members at different government departments as well as placing them at important position in the educational institutions who (including all JI members) needed to donate 5% of their monthly income to the party (Barkat, 2013). Besides, JIB maintains its relationship with Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf countries for supports in cash and in kind, for employment and ideological guideline as well (Gohel, 2014). Their economic and political interventions were mostly profitable which provided them economic strength to run their party always actively and effectively. In the context of Bangladesh, the country has been grappling with the implications of political and violent extremism, necessitating a critical appraisal of organizations like the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and their responses to evolving social and political dynamics

(Islam, 2021). The urgency to address domestic Islamist terrorism in Bangladesh has been underscored, with insights from surveys indicating the influence of views on Sharia law and scriptural literalism on supporting extremist goals (Fair & Patel, 2022).

6. Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)

Bangladesh took a little long to identify its radical groups who terrorised people of all faith but found to have connection with both international and local militant based or fundamental based groups. Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) has been a longstanding security threat in Bangladesh, originating from Bangladeshi Afghan war veterans returning to carry out targeted killings. Initially introduced by Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) as a local radical group with foreign training, AQIS later transitioned to groups like JMB and HuJI B, which have been designated as terrorist organizations by the US (Lorch, 2020). The establishment of AQIS in Pakistan in 2014 further solidified its presence in the region (Andersen, 2017). This presence of radical groups like AQIS in Bangladesh is intertwined with factors such as the rise of Islamic orthodoxy, political conflicts, authoritarian governance, and influences from international events like the Afghanistan War (Lorch, 2020). The interconnected nature of these groups and their activities underscores the complex security challenges faced by Bangladesh due to the infiltration of global terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and ISIS/ISIL (Hayat, 2022). AQIS seemed to have close connection with both of the notorious agencies. They are claimed to produce their own custom-made explosives which they have used in killing people around the country. The member of AQIS has also claimed lives of bloggers and thinkers who were blamed to commit blasphemy (Paul, 2017). Later on, they were found to take lives of gay rights activists as well as secular blogger like Avijit Roy all of these kinds of killing believed to had connection with AQIS. This particular group was well organised as they spread their message through leaflet which is also in Bengali.

It also calls on Bangladeshi youth to take Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar as their role models. Despite the clampdown by Bangladeshi authorities, AQIS propaganda is easily accessible in the internet, which is a key factor behind the growing radicalisation in the country. On 30 June, the US Department of State designated AQIS as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation. According to the Bangladeshi authorities, all blogger killings claimed by ABT have been instructed by the leader of the group's military operations, Major Syed Ziaul Haque. Haque was dismissed from the army in 2011 after ABT's failed coup and has been on the run since (Bashar, 2017a).

7. Radicalisation as Political Issue

Radicalisation has many faces as it has many motivational forces for its followers. Among them religious based radicalisation is the oldest one which in case of Bangladesh got its connection with the global extremism rooted in

the ideological similarities. Apparently, it is believed that the root cause of radicalisation lies with the inequalities among the communities of a country, Bangladesh also found its inception of Islamist radicalisation within its complex local and international dynamism revolving around the feelings of marginalisation. This could be the main reason which even encourage people of different socio-economic background to participate into the so called 'Jihad'. Besides, since the independence the Bangladesh has been "tremendously sensitive not only to nature's phenomena but to the political and strategic environment" (Bateman, 1979).

7.1. Political Polarisation

Bangladesh has grappled with political instability since gaining independence from Pakistan, characterized by longstanding political parties struggling to reconcile differing ideologies and agendas. Political distrust and corruption within these parties have perpetuated this instability over decades, fostering an environment of highly confrontational politics marked by unhealthy competition, violence, and destructive engagement (Osman, 2010). The establishment of the war crime tribunal added a new dimension to this ongoing dilemma, revealing the deeply polarized nature of Bangladeshi politics and the role of the current government, the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), in perpetuating confrontational dynamics with the opposition, which in turn influences the resurgence of radical militancy in the country (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Initially founded on principles of secularism, the Bangladesh constitution prohibited religious-based politics; however, amendments to the constitution introduced a multi-party political system under President Ziaur Rahman, paving the way for groups like the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB) to participate in elections (Bhuiyan, 2017; Patwary, 2014). Subsequently, the BAL-led government contested this inclusion, leading to the High Court of Bangladesh banning JIB from participating in the 2013 elections (Hammadi & Burke, 2013). This ban significantly impacted the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), a key ally of JIB and the major opposition to the ruling party, resulting in mass public protests and violent clashes with law enforcement officers that left numerous casualties (Hammadi & Burke, 2013). This marked a turning point for JIB, which increasingly resorted to violence, particularly in the lead-up to the 2014 elections. The ruling party's refusal to meet the major opposition BNP's demands for elections under a non-party interim government led to widespread violent protests, ultimately undermining the electoral process and resulting in numerous fatalities, making 2013 one of the deadliest years in recent memory (International Crisis Group, 2018). The subsequent year witnessed intensified protests by the BNP-JIB alliance, characterized by arson attacks, countrywide strikes, and transport blockades that claimed many lives, with JIB being held responsible for some of the most severe attacks targeting the 2014 elections. The

ruling government responded with forceful measures, further marginalizing opposition voices and creating a protracted political vacuum in Bangladesh. Meanwhile, groups like Ansarul Islam and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) capitalized on the unrest, recruiting members primarily from madrasas and sympathizers to expand their nationwide networks and maintain connections with international terrorist organizations (International Crisis Group, 2018).

7.2. Politicising Counter Terrorism

The current political landscape in Bangladesh, particularly under the ruling BAL party, has exhibited authoritarian tendencies towards opposition parties and Islamist groups. The law enforcement agency, Bangladesh Police, has displayed a robust approach towards curbing extremist activities, often resulting in encounters or fatalities among radical group members, albeit raising concerns regarding human rights violations (Griffiths & Hasan, 2015). The Prime Minister's focus seems to lean towards discrediting the opposition for the unlawful activities of radical groups rather than fostering political consensus to address the threats posed by Jihadist groups. The association between the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB) has led the government to attribute Islamist-based radicalization to these entities (Griffiths & Hasan, 2015). The intertwining of politics and religion in Bangladesh has led to the institutionalization of Islamization, shifting away from secular principles towards an emphasis on "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah" and promoting a form of nationalism with an Islamic character (Islam and Islam, 2018). This blending of religion and politics has created a complex environment where authoritarianism combines election manipulation with mechanisms such as marginalization of political opposition, institutionalization of authoritarian policies, and co-option of religious leaders (Mostofa & Subedi, 2020). In addressing extremism, particularly in the context of violent acts, it is crucial to understand the psychological underpinnings that drive individuals towards deviant behaviour. Extremism is often rooted in a motivational imbalance where a particular need dominates others, leading to a deviation from societal norms (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2017). Risk assessment models have been developed to identify factors contributing to an individual's engagement, intent, and capability for extremist actions, emphasizing the importance of structured guidelines in assessing extremist offenders (Lloyd & Dean, 2015). In conclusion, the political dynamics in Bangladesh, intertwined with religious and authoritarian elements, play a significant role in shaping the approach towards extremism and counterterrorism efforts. Understanding the complex interplay between politics, religion, and psychology is essential in formulating effective strategies to address extremism and promote stability in the region. The prevailing political circumstances in Bangladesh hinder inclusive discussions among parties due to

past elections where a majority of MPs were elected uncontested. Consequently, the government tends to attribute various terrorist activities to the BNP and JIB alliance, exemplified by the 2016 Holy Artisan Bakery attack (PM blames it on local, int'l quarters, 2016). The government has also linked opposition alliances to cases of radical extremism, such as the murder of an Italian in August 2015. Despite subsequent developments revealing the involvement of groups like JMB and Neo-JMB, the initial politicization of counter-terrorism efforts may impede effective action against organized and cunning radical agencies.

The current political landscape in Bangladesh is characterized by tensions and accusations between the government and opposition parties regarding terrorist activities. The government swiftly attributes such incidents to opposition alliances like the BNP and JIB, as evidenced by the aftermath of the 2016 Holy Artisan Bakery attack (Getmansky & Zeitzoff, 2014). Accusations extend to cases like the 2015 murder of an Italian national, where government officials directly implicate BNP and JIB alliances (Linebarger *et al.*, 2017). Subsequent investigations reveal complexities, with arrests linked to different extremist groups like JMB and Neo-JMB, indicating a multifaceted landscape of radical activities (Berrebi & Klor, 2004). The politicization of counterterrorism efforts, shifting blame towards opposition parties, can have detrimental effects on effectively combating radical agencies (Jackson, 2007). Research suggests that terrorism can influence voter behaviour, potentially holding incumbent politicians accountable for security failures and creating opportunities for opposition parties (Abrahms, 2012). The intertwining of terrorism, political rhetoric, and governance in Bangladesh underscores the complexity of addressing security challenges within a politically charged environment, emphasizing the need for a nuanced, politically impartial approach to counterterrorism that addresses root causes of extremism.

8. Conclusion

Bangladesh has experienced different level of radicalisation and radical extremism since 1990s. After the independence war in 1971, there were few freedom fighters front who later involved in radicalisation based on socialism and Marxism. Those groups found to be active until the rise of the Islamist radicalised group who primarily targeted and executed them. the radicalization of Islamist militants in Bangladesh is a complex phenomenon influenced by various regional conflicts and the presence of extremist groups. The aftermath of wars like the Kuwait-Iraq conflict has had lasting effects on the security landscape of Bangladesh, emphasizing the need for comprehensive strategies to counter radicalization and ensure stability in the region. Later the groups who were motivated at Afghanistan war against Soviet found to have link with Al Qaeda and later ISIS. It seems the extremists find this land to spread and practice their

radical views without getting many obstacles. On the other hand, Islamist based politics opened the door to get involve into their mission of radicalisation. The technological advancement and weak political institution of Bangladesh paved the way for the extremists to propagate their ideology and views.

History of Bengali culture is pretty much ancient, which helped to get Bangladesh independent from Pakistan, but it could not denounce religious influence as the majority of the population's religion is Islam. Therefore, existing political violence and instability helped the Islamist radical groups increase their network. Though the government managed to ban JIB and religious based politics it still could not solve the issue of Islamic radicalisation from its core. Besides, the problem of radicalisation needs participation of all political parties and design a single solution which can influence the society in a positive manner. The continuous political blaming between the two major parties will not solve the problem rather it would create a prolonged and unsolvable issue which may affect a major portion of the young generation and potential section of the society.

Only honest political intervention by welcoming different views regarding the solution of the radicalisation problem can help address it effectively. Democratic culture of government has to be insured along with political polarisation or politicising of counter terrorism has to be stopped. Education system has to be redesigned to address the problem at the core. As "the local and international media has singled out madrasahs as the key to the radical Islamisation of Pakistan and Bangladesh"(Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2016), the government need to aware about it and oversee the madrasah's curriculum. Investigation based report and political discussion on issues are needed to take the problem public and get positive feedback from the society as well. The law enforcement agencies on the other hand have to respect and protect human rights which can inspire people to leave those radical groups and seek help from them. In order to fight terrorism and fundamentalism the government needs to act timely as well as should seek help from both academicians and practitioners to develop tools identify the problem from the root. In conclusion, addressing the educational gaps and misinterpretations of religious teachings that contribute to militancy and terrorism requires a multifaceted approach involving formal education, family-school collaborations, and interventions to promote tolerance and prevent radicalization.

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