

(Slide1) Introduction

My name is Pushpita Gupta.

I live in London, England but I was born in Bangladesh.

I am a Humanitarian and a Cultural Activist. I am here on behalf of Secular Bangladesh Movement UK.

I am fighting for a Secular Bangladesh.

I am fighting for Minority Hindus.

I am fighting for Women's Rights.

(Slide 2) Background: Secular Bangladesh Movement UK

Not a day goes by without some racially motivated attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh.

In 2014, after the 5th January elections, it is widely reported the incidents of attacking the minority communities in Abyaynagar, Thakurgaon, Chittagong, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, Satkhira, Gaibandha, Dinajpur and some other districts.

The BBC reported "They raped, looted, vandalized and set the Hindu houses on fire in several districts across the country"

Secular Bangladesh Movement UK formed as a pressure group to make Bangladesh Government accountable for actions against perpetrators of atrocities.

On 10th January 2014, Bangladesh Daily Sun Newspaper reported two Hindu housewives have been raped in their own homes in Manirampur region of Jessore. They held the men of the house hostage and sexually abused the two housewives.

They had vandalised at least 150 houses and businesses, forcing the residents to flee the area. The attackers also torched many houses and looted valuables.

(Slide 3) Gaibandha Trip

After 5th January election violence, I travelled to Bangladesh to see people directly affected by the troubles and provide some financial aid to several villages in the affected district of Gaibandha, and also to show that we in the UK are there to provide support to their plight and suffering.

Villagers knew their attackers. Villagers are very afraid of all political activists even though the elections had ended.

Villagers are frustrated with lack of support from Government to bring the attackers to justice, despite providing names.

(Slide 4) Meeting with Village Elders on 7th February

The Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist and Christian Unity Council gave me a compiled list of the victims of the recent violence and with help from Bangladesh Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee, on 7th February I travelled from Dhaka by car for 10hrs to reach the Northern District of Gaibandha.

This is where I was first introduced to Mrs Shurobala Roy in the village of Shundargonj in Gaibandha District.

Mrs Shurobala Roy with her husband Mr Kuka Roy and their two children had returned home after casting their vote on 5th January election. The political activists followed them and came into their home and when Mr Roy tried to protect his family, the intruders set upon him, kicking him non-stop.

Mr Roy was taken to hospital, but died after two days of suffering.

(Slide 5) Victims of the Destruction in Shundargoni

Villager's houses were burnt to the ground, their temples destroyed. There was destruction to hair salons, coffee shops and small provision stores. Tailor's sewing machines were damaged beyond repair.

Motorcycles were torched. Banana plantations were flattened. Ponds full of fish were poisoned.

There is distrust with government as villagers cry for justice has not been acted upon.

Following the attacks, teenage girls have stopped going out in fear of being easy targets; girls are too afraid to go to school. During my visit, parents did not allow their daughters to come for this gathering.

Picture 1: Ganesh Sarkar

Picture 2: Shapon Kumar

Picture 3: Belarani Das

Picture 4: Village elder, Shobudh Das was kicked to the ground and lost several teeth.

(Slide 6) Victims of Shundargoni

Islamic extremists attack local Hindus celebrating Lakshmi Puja injuring 20 including a heavily pregnant lady (Tulsi Rani), causing the death of her unborn first child and making her infertile, she can never be a mother again.

(Slide 7) Justice for Minorities, Justice for Women

Rather than charity, all villagers want is justice. I would like to see some justice in my lifetime for these acts of violence.

Since 1990, there have been no judicial trials for any of the atrocities afflicted on minorities. Yes 1990 is when we can track back to but I can probably say with some conviction, that since liberation in 1971 in the last 44 years, thousands of deities and temples have been destroyed but not a single perpetrator were punished or prosecuted.

Justice is promised but is yet to be delivered.

Like previous years again and again, in October and November temples demolished and numerous Hindu statues destroyed during Durga Puja.

Secularism in Bangladesh is under serious threat.

(Slide 8) Racial Equality

Political representation is far below the percentage of population.

No top posts ever in Judiciary, Army, Air Force, Navy, Police and Border Security Force.

Recruitment in Army, Air Force and Navy is almost nil apart from medical core.

Lack of equal opportunity also results in biased reporting and playing down of racially motivated attacks, by both supporters of political parties and by news and media reporters.

Hindus, Christians and Buddhists are second class citizens in Bangladesh.

Minorities in Bangladesh; 1971 22%, 1974 13%, 2014 9%

Minority numbers are predicted to be less than 5% in next 20 years.

(Slide 9) Rise of Extremism

Bangladesh is a secular democracy and recent surveys show that the majority of the population would like it to remain so.

Religious minorities and intellectuals are terrified with the rise of extremism in Bangladesh.

Once the fanatics get power they will export the ideology.

Western government need only look at Pakistan and Afghanistan to see where Bangladesh is heading.

(Slide 10) Government Oppression and Attacks by Extremists

By comparison, any subject spoken against Islam extremists is swiftly punished (Telecommunications Minister Abdul Latif Siddiqui who was arrested and removed from office for his comments), see URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdul_Latif_Siddiqui

Chronologically, bloggers killed so far, Niloy Chatterjee, Washiqur Rahman Babu, Dr Avijit Roy and Ananta Bijoy Das.

Publishers targeted: Faisal Arefin Dipan was murdered and Ahmedur Rashid Tutul along with 2 others were wounded in separate attacks; both printed Dr Avijit Roy's works.

Section 57 of ICT Act introduced by Government restricting freedom of speech, e.g. journalist and senior editor Probir Sikdar arrested for criticising government minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain who was accused of land grabbing Hindu property; Mohon Kumar Mondal arrested after criticising Islam on Facebook. Instead of protecting minorities, even dirty Government officials are abusing laws that give them power to seize Hindu property.

(Slide 11) Motivations for Attacks

Lack of justice against criminal activity - bribery and corruption is widespread; victims are too afraid to speak up against the criminals.

Religious – Hindus are considered infidels (inhuman) by Muslim attackers; which give them the impression that it is acceptable to convert or kill non-muslims.

Political – Hindus favour Awami League's secular views, therefore, by intimidating Hindus, Awami League support is weakened. However, now even the Government is infiltrated with extremists who are against secularism.

Financial – terrorising the minority community in the hope of driving Hindus away to become refugees elsewhere; the vacant land is ceased.

(Slide 12) Women are Vulnerable

The effects to women are:

- Hindu women are targeted and victimised
- They are forced to endure physical violence
- They are brutally raped
- Their husbands are murdered.
- They face death themselves.

(Slide 13) Conclusion

Communities are leaving to become refugees, mostly in India.

Attackers of all incidents of last two years have been known activists from all political parties, yet no effort to bring them to trial and seek justice.

Government & opposition party support for minorities is not at a satisfactory level.

Encourage the minorities not to leave Bangladesh - Bangladesh is as much their country. Encourage them to fight for their rights to live in peace.

Promote harmony but harmony requires some form of justice.

Western Governments have an obligation to:

- encourage and levy secularism,
- encourage media reporting of the truth,
- demand justice from the Government of Bangladesh.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

My Father, Grandfathers uncles and family fought for Bangladesh, and many died doing so during the 1971 liberation war.

My parents and a lot of relatives passed away sad at the way they were treated with little recognition of their sacrifices for their country. I want to leave a better future so that my two daughters can visit Bangladesh without any fear and also be proud of their heritage.

My family should have equal rights to live in Bangladesh peacefully and proudly.

On behalf of my family and all Hindus in Bangladesh, I am seeking JUSTICE.

Thank-you

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Secular Bangladesh Movement, UK

<http://www.facebook.com/secularbangladeshmovement>

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