

(Slide1) Introduction

My name is Pushpita Gupta. I was born in Bangladesh.

I am the daughter of a freedom fighter and proud to say my father fought for Bangla Culture, Bangla Civilisation.

(Slide 2) Background

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

Villagers dread losing their possessions to arson attacks. Documents, certificates and personal items are difficult and sometimes impossible to replace.

Why DOCUMENTS... because certificates are the ticket to a better future. Children cannot progress in school-life without proof of their acquired qualifications.

(Slide 3) Background (in 2013)

On 7th March 2013, Amnesty International published a report which document a “Wave of violent attacks against Hindu minority”

Survivors told Amnesty International that the attacks were taking place following the rallies organised by the opposition Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and its student group Chhatra Shibir.

Bangladesh Hindu, Buddha and Christian Unity Council reported that 4 people were killed and 34 were injured. 300 Hindu temples and 1500 business and properties destroyed.

(Slide 4) Background (in 2014)

In 2014, after the 5th January elections, it is widely reported that workers and supporters of the opposition parties began attacking the minority communities all over the country.

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

(Slide 5) Gaibandha Trip

After 5th January election violence, I contacted friends and family to increase awareness. We organised a prayer, held in East London on 26th January to raise funds.

I travelled to Bangladesh to see people directly affected by the troubles and provide some financial aid to one of the affected villages, 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 the BNP and Jamaat activists even though the elections had ended over a month ago.

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

(Slide 6) Meeting with Village Elders on 7th February

The Bangladesh Hindu, Buddha and Christian Unity Council gave me a compiled list of the victims of the recent violence and with help from Bangladesh Ekattorer Ghatak 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 Molina Rani Burman in the village of Shundargonj in Gaibandha District.

(Slide 7) Shundarganj Fatalities

Mrs Burman with her husband Mr Shaitendra Chandra Burman and their two children, had returned home after casting their vote on 5th January election. The BNP attackers came into their home and when Mr Burman tried to protect his daughter, the intruders set upon him, kicking him non-stop.

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

In the same village, Abdul Halim was attacked and killed when he tried to defend his Hindu neighbour. A third person, Kolilur Rahman was hacked to pieces with knives and machetes. BNP/Jamaat attackers targeted both of these men who they knew were pro-Government volunteers and Hindu sympathisers.

The killing of 2 muslims was also to deter others from helping. I have 32 accounts from the villagers that I noted from that day of violence. Villager's houses were burnt to the ground, their temples destroyed. Hair salons, coffee shops, small provision stores, tailor's sewing machines were damaged beyond repair.

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

(Slide 8) Destruction in Shundargonj

More than a month later since 5th January elections, 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.

(Slide 9)

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

(Slide 10) Victims of Shundargonj

Here we have some pictures of villagers were given a small donation:

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 11) More Victims

Picture 1: Nilu Debnath

Picture 2: Pradip Sarkar

Picture 3: Jiten Chandra

(Slide 12) Justice for Minorities

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.

In 2013-14, the Government raised hopes that there will be a trial, but there has been no progress whatsoever.

Justice is promised but is yet to be delivered.

By comparison, any subject spoken against Islam is swiftly punished (e.g. Telecommunications Minister Abdul Latif Siddiqui who was removed from office for his comments).

More recently on 15th November, Lokenath Temple was destroyed in an arson attack. Just in the month of October, during the holiest period of the Hindu calendar (and the time for Bengali Hindu's biggest festival, the Durga Puja), 29 statues of Hindu deities were destroyed.

Secularism in Bangladesh is under serious threat.

(Slide 13) Representation in Public Office

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 the medical core.

Lack of equal opportunity also results in biased reporting and playing down of racially motivated attacks, by both Government and media. Hindus, Christians and Buddhists are second class citizens in Bangladesh.

Statistic on Minorities in Bangladesh shows in 1971 there was 22%, 1974 13%, 2011 8%. Minority numbers are predicted to be less than 5% in next 20 years.

(Slide 14) Conclusion

Communities are leaving to become refugees, mostly in India.

Attackers of all incidents of last two years have been known activists from BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, yet no effort to bring them to trial. 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,
- providing support for justice to the Government of Bangladesh,
- quell any exporting of radical views and biased political ploys from Western Countries.

(Slide 15) Recommendations

Judicial Enquiry – To identify the attackers and bring them to justice – no one should be able to hide behind any political party, i.e. individuals should be named, shamed and expelled from politics.

Speedy Trial – justice delayed is justice denied. Attackers to be put on trial quickly to set an example to discourage, and also to assure the minority people.

Minority Protection Act – in line with British Race Relations Act 1968.

Minority Commission to monitor and evaluate all minority issues. Jobs in Military and Public Sectors to be monitored and periodic reports to be published by all departments as to promote equal opportunities.

Resources allocated and all initiatives to be adequately funded.

Dear Lords, 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 children can visit Bangladesh without any fear and also be proud of their heritage.

My family 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