EXTREMISM AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SOUTH ASIA

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EXTREMISM, TECHNOLOGY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: PERSPECTIVES FROM BANGLADESH

Amena Mohsin and Nahian Reza Sabriet

The contemporary political scenario—both at the global and domestic level—appears to be embroiled in certain brutal, totalitarian ideologies in their cognitive and manifest forms. Populism and extremism are two instances of such ideologies. Extremism is not a new phenomenon. The demise of the Cold War was expected to amplify human security, rights and values. This, ironically, did not happen.

This study focuses on extremism and its impact on gender-based violence. It defines extremism as an ideology that is totalitarian in its manifestations, as a process which embeds itself in social, cultural (and often political) systems by using different tools. It needs to be emphasised that the "popular" and the "political" are more often than not intertwined.

In recent times, there has been an emphasis on examining religious extremism. In the backdrop of the 9/11 attack in America, the world witnessed a proliferation of religious extremism. However, it is critical to note here that academicians and policy makers are often enthusiastic about religious fundamentalism but tend to overlook other forms of extremism that emanate from secular, progressive and rational forces—terms normally associated with modernity.

Extremism is generally believed to occur in a physical space. However, with the evolution of technology, online spaces have also been exposed to extremist forces. The COVID-19 pandemic (which literally locked the world down into virtual platforms) exposed us to both physical, social isolation and the technology divide. This study seeks to map the use of technology by secular and religion-centric forces to spread extremism, and its impact on power relations and gender-based violence. We argue that patriarchy and masculinity are bolstered by the manipulative use of technology, which is majorly responsible for the rise of hypermasculinity—another form of extremism.

According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender.[1] These acts can be sexual, physical, mental and economic and the harm can be inflicted in public or private.[2] Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) notes that heterosexuality, victim-blaming, stigma and women's unequal rights in taking decisions on marriage, sex and childbearing are associated with pervasive gender-based violence.[3] Arguably, the normalisation of hypermasculine structures have resulted in varied forms of "extremisms" against women in both public and private domains.

The paper is divided into six sections. After the introduction, the second section discusses the methodology, the third section examines the resurgence of religion in the Bangladesh context, the fourth section briefly discusses the ideology of hypermasculinity,

the fifth section examines the use of technology by secular and religion-centric forces to bolster a hypermasculine system and its impact on gender-based violence. The final section discusses national and international laws and conventions on gender that the Bangladesh state is signatory to, followed by concluding remarks.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on both qualitative and quantitative data. For qualitative analysis, book chapters and journal articles have been reviewed. Among other qualitative sources, we have used open-source print material and social media mapping. For quantitative data analysis, 86 Facebook profiles and nine YouTube profiles have been mapped. Variables in profiling are: profile name, gender, educational background and group affiliation. Facebook and YouTube have been selected based on the Bangladesh National Information and Communications Technology Household Survey report (2018-19) which found that Facebook, Viber and YouTube were the most popular social media sites in the country.[4] Since Viber is an encrypted social media app and its information cannot be accessed publicly, this study has depended on Facebook and YouTube data.

We have also used primary data from the Centre for Genocide Studies (CGS) at Dhaka University, which has created a databank on violence called the Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO). BPO maps violence based on real-time news reports of 18 national and seven local Bangladeshi newspapers. The platform maps and analyses 26 categories of violence including assault, sexual assault, gender-based violence, terror attacks, violent extremism and mob violence.

RELIGION, SECULARISM AND NATIONALISM

In Bangladeshi politics, religion, secularism and nationalism have become interlocking variables. To understand the current debate surrounding secularism versus religion in Bangladesh, one needs to understand its nation-building journey. Beginning with the Language Movement in 1948, religion was never an issue for East Bengalis. One's Bengali and Muslim identity went hand-in-hand with each other. The Bangladesh Liberation Movement was predominantly a nationalist movement, anchored on issues of "Bangladeshi" language and culture. It was the Bengali political elite who counterposed the movement to religion, since Pakistan had used religion (within the otherwise "secular" discourse of nationalism) to establish its hegemony in East Bengal.

In independent Bangladesh, secularism was considered to be a logical conclusion since religion had been used to carry out the 1971 genocide. The state consciously made a separation between religion and politics by banning communal-based political parties—Article 38 of the Bangladesh Constitution spells this clearly. Secularism was also interpreted as being accommodative, since the Bangladesh state explicitly espoused the freedom and equality of all religions.

A major problem arose when secularism was translated into Bangla as *dhormoniropekkhota* by framers of the Constitution, which means neutrality about religion. Over time, this neutrality came to be interpreted as irreligiosity, arguing that one has to

stand for a religion—one cannot be "neutral" about it. In a Muslim country where a majority of the population is deeply religious, anxiety around Hindu domination—which has existed since the colonial period—was whipped up for political advantage. Religion is a highly emotive issue and can be easily moulded to support different interpretations. Soon, communalism—which is irreligious—came to be equated with religiosity. This shift took place because the state had neglected the study of religion in mainstream discourse, leaving it to be interpreted largely by village *Imams*. Many of them studied in *Qawmi* madrassahs which believe in a deeply parochial, orthodox and often distorted interpretation of Islam.

In Bangladesh, there are two types of madrassahs: *Aliya* and *Qawmi*. The former has a scientific curriculum while the latter caters only to religious education. The *Aliya* curriculum follows the Calcutta Aliya Madrassah model established by the British in 1780. The purpose was to prepare local Muslims to join the mainstream secular workforce. The *Qawmi* curriculum, on the other hand, has its origins in the highly conservative *Deobondi* sect which believes that the secular *Aliya* model had failed.[5]

In *Aliya* madrassahs, students are taught Quran, Arabic, Islamic History, Social Sciences, Arts, Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics as well as Information and Communication Technology (ICT).[6] On the other hand, the *Qawmi* curriculum focuses almost exclusively on religious specialisations like *Tazwid* (Quranic grammar) and *Hifzul* (Quran memorisation).[7] The *Qawmi* curriculum is developed by teachers without any government regulation. Subjects such as Bangla, English, Mathematics are taught only at a superficial level.[8] Some of their textbooks are written in Persian and Urdu. After completing the *Daurah* (Postgraduate) level, *Qawmi* students specialise in Islamic Law to qualify as *Muhaddith* (*Hadith* scholar), *Mufti* (religious judge) or *Maulana* (religious guide).[9]

Rural-urban divide and class play an important role. *Qawmi* students—who constitute the bulk of madrassah-educated students—often come from rural and economically depressed backgrounds. Not only the curriculum, the mode of education is also steeply parochial. Consequently, major sections of Bangladesh's rural—and now increasingly urban—population are developing an orthodox understanding of religion.

With globalisation, religion reappeared as an important variable in global politics. Globalisation—with its thrust towards homogenisation—and the relative thinness of borders created parallel but often contradictory trends. The idea of a "global village" brings with it the threat of a global culture. Perceptions of relative deprivation and being humiliated over a period of time create a crisis of identity. Religion is often looked upon as a political identity, separate from one's personal beliefs. This brings religion to the public sphere.

Bangladesh's labour market in the Middle East brought not only remittance to the home country, but also its norms and values. Islam in Bengal always had a syncretic element to it. It is the land of *Bauls* and *Lalons* who preached religious harmony. Increasingly, however, Islam is being interpreted in the orthodox *Wahabi* manner. Religion and its radicalisation is no longer limited to unemployed and madrassah-educated people, it has spread to middle and upper-middle classes as well. Religion—the missing link in politics—has secured its place as an interlocking variable in global as well as national politics,

commonly known as *glocalisation*. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to locate intervening variables for the politicisation of religion at the global level.

BANGLADESH POLITICS AND RELIGION

The Constitution of Bangladesh was adopted by the Parliament on 4 November 1972. In the second paragraph of its Preamble, the Constitution accepted nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism as the state's fundamental principles. In order to implement this, Article 12 of the Constitution stated:

> The principle of secularism shall be realized by the elimination of:
>
> Communalism in all forms; the granting by the state of political status in favour of any religion; the abuse of religion for political purposes; any discrimination against, or persecution of persons practicing a particular religion.[10]

Article 38, paragraph 2 of the Constitution further stated:

> No person shall have the right to form or be a member or otherwise take part in the activities of, any communal or other association or union, which in the name or on the basis of any religion has for its object, or pursues a political purpose.[11]

The regime of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman ended with his assassination on 15 August 1975. The coup leaders used Islam to secure—and to a certain extent, legitimise—their position. Following a number of coups, Major-General Zia ur Rahman (Zia) emerged as the strongman. Zia opted for a different model of nationhood for Bengalis—religion was its most critical and defining element. This came to be known as Bangladeshi nationalism. In its manifesto the Bangladesh Nationalist party (BNP)—the political party floated by Zia—defines Bangladeshi nationalism as:

> Religious belief and love for religion are a great and imperishable characteristic of the Bangladeshi nation... the vast majority of our people are followers of Islam. The fact is well reflected and manifest in our stable and liberal national life.[12]

Its ideals were incorporated into the Constitution. By the proclamation of Order 1 of 1977, "*Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim*" (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) was inserted in the beginning of the Constitution, above the Preamble. In Article 8, Clause 1 was substituted by:

> the principles of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and socialism meaning economic and social justice, together with

> the principles derived from them... shall constitute
> the fundamental principles of state policy.[13]

Secularism as a state principle was dropped from the Constitution. Article 12, which banned the formation of communal political parties was also dropped from the Constitution. Article 9, which stressed on the lingual and cultural unity of Bengali nationalism was dropped as well. Article 6, Clause 2 replaced "Bengalis", the citizens of Bangladesh with "Bangladeshis". These changes were implemented by the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution on 5 April 1977.

Like Rahman, Zia was assassinated in May 1981 by a group of army officers. Following his death, Bangladeshi nationalism transformed from liberal Islamic nationalism to a more totalitarian version. General H. M. Ershad assumed power through a bloodless coup in March 1982 by overthrowing the elected BNP government of Justice Abdus Sattar. Ershad accepted the Bangladeshi model of nationhood but made it more totalitarian by giving it a stronger Islamic orientation. This move was ostensibly taken to legitimise his power.

Through the Eighth Amendment on 7 June 1988, Islam was declared as the state religion of Bangladesh (Article 2, Clause A) with the provision that other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the Republic.[14] Islam became a cardinal feature of Bangladeshi nationalism.

This move created the "minority" question—today, not only Bengali Hindus but also Ahmediyas and Qadiyanis are under attack due to these constitutional changes. Today, the Awami League has annulled the Fifth Amendment. The party has proposed reverting to the 1972 Constitution (when secularism was one of the state's fundamental principles) yet it wants to retain Islam as the state religion. Retaining Islam as the state religion and yet declaring the state to be secular is a fundamental contradiction. The arithmetic of state politics in a majoritarian democracy propels the electoral system towards the majority. This becomes problematic for minorities, since there are no Constitutional safeguards for them such as proportional representation.

Manipulating religion for political purposes impacts society. It begins to acquire hypermasculine norms which restrict women. It may be noted that "modern" society is not bereft of this. Technology has become a major tool in the hands of both the secular and religion-centric to perpetuate gender-based violence. This includes creating a hypermasculine state online where women and girls are bullied and violated. A highly gendered social and political imagination leads to the creation of what this paper defines as the "-ism" of hypermasculinity. Hypermasculinism is an extremist ideology highly intolerant of feminine/feminist ideals and spaces.

HYPERMASCULINITY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN BANGLADESH

While explaining hypermasculinity or hegemonic masculinity, scholars have taken note of Gramsci's idea of hegemony from his *Prison Notebook*. Gramsci refers to hegemony as "the winning and holding of power and the formation (and destruction) of social groups."[15] Taking cue, hypermasculinity can be defined as a "culturally idealised form of masculine character" that stabilises the dominant structure within a gendered order.[16]

Hypermasculinity does not necessarily imply men's domination over women. It signifies a power relation where men have control over institutional power that corresponds to gender relations.[17] Connell defines hypermasculinity as:

> a configuration of practice but it is also seen as being institutionalized in large-scale gender regimes, that is, as a process that involves both social structure and personal life.[18]

In Bangladesh, hypermasculinity in private and public domains leads to different types of violence against women. These include assault, domestic violence, dowry-related violence, kidnapping, gender-based human trafficking. The following figures illustrate trends from 2014-2021.

Different Types of Gender-based Violence in Bangladesh between 2014-2021

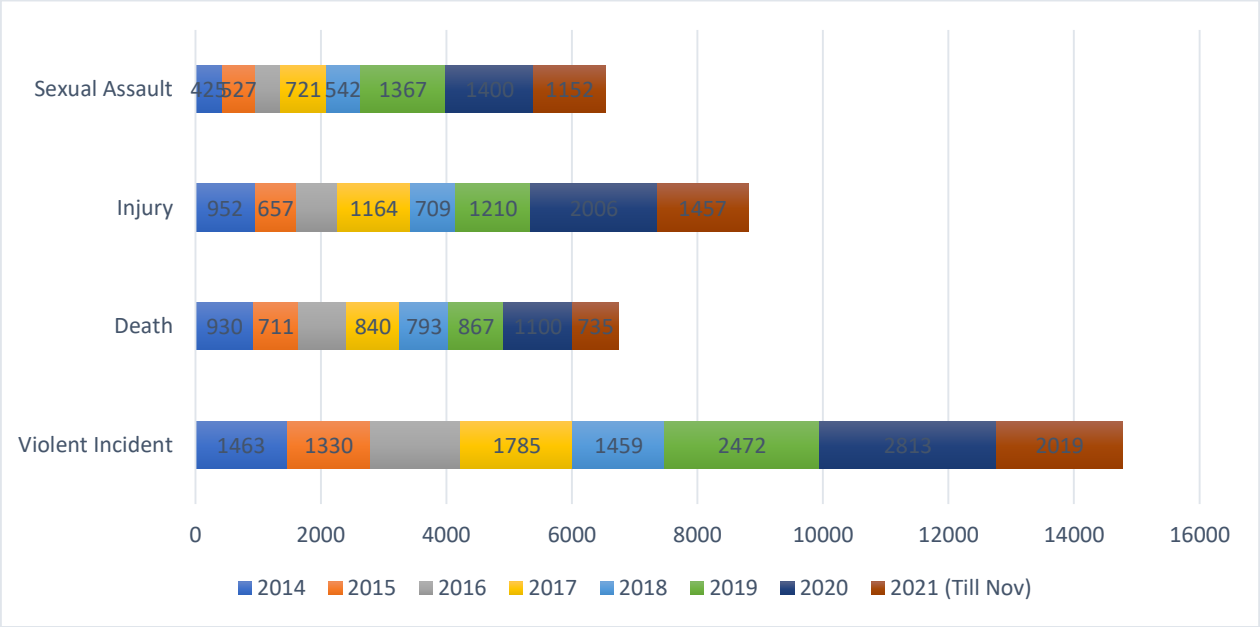

Figure 1: Different Types of Gender-based Violence in Bangladesh between 2014-2021

Data from BPO shows that the number of sexual assaults, death, injury and violent incidents[19] have been increasing since 2014 (Figure 1). At the same time, between 2014 and 2021, more than 312 women died annually as a result of domestic violence (Figure 2). This peaked in 2014 and in 2020, corresponding with the rise of domestic violence globally during the pandemic (Figure 2).[20]

Deaths from Domestic Violence (2014-2021)

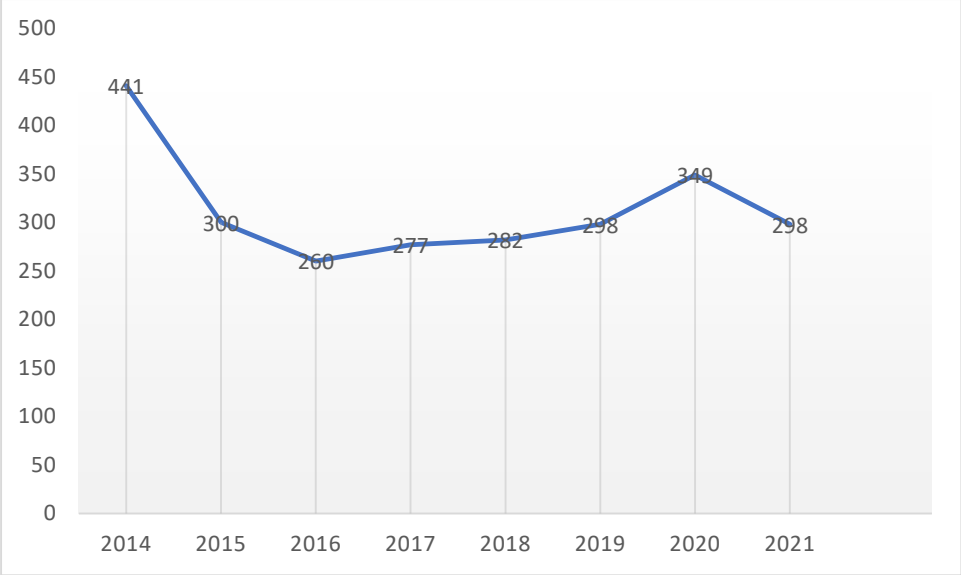

Figure 2: Year-wise deaths from Domestic Violence (2014-2021)

Incident, Death and Injury from Sexual Assault (2014-2021)

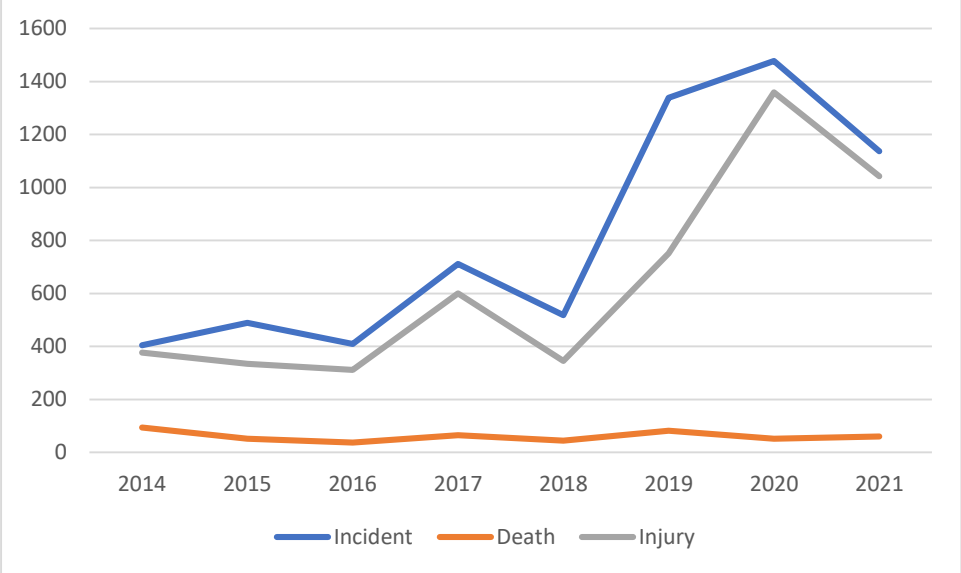

Figure 3: Incident, Death and Injury from Sexual Assault (2014-2021)

Figure 3 shows that even though the number of deaths from sexual assault has hardly changed over the years, incidents and injuries have been on the rise. Men in general are responsible for the highest number of incidents (28.65%). Among other perpetrator groups there are goons/miscreants (15.5%), youth (13.5%), public (6.5%), neighbours (5.8%), faculty members (4.3%), family members (3.96%), stalkers (2.7%) and drivers (1.5%). It is

important to note that these groups are not mutually exclusive and "men" as an outlier limits the actual percentage of other groups.

With the popularity of e-transport services like Uber and *Pathao*, there are new concerns for women's public safety. Despite options to track perpetrators, service providers have been unable to control verbal and sexual harassment of women sufficiently. It is, however, not a Bangladesh-specific phenomenon. In the United States, Uber reported 6,000 reports of sexual assault in two years.[21] BPO data records 96 incidents where women were assaulted by drivers and all of them were men. Among other exclusive cases, the rise of (male) teenage gangs led to seven cases of abduction and assault across the country.[22]

Motives behind Gender-based Violence

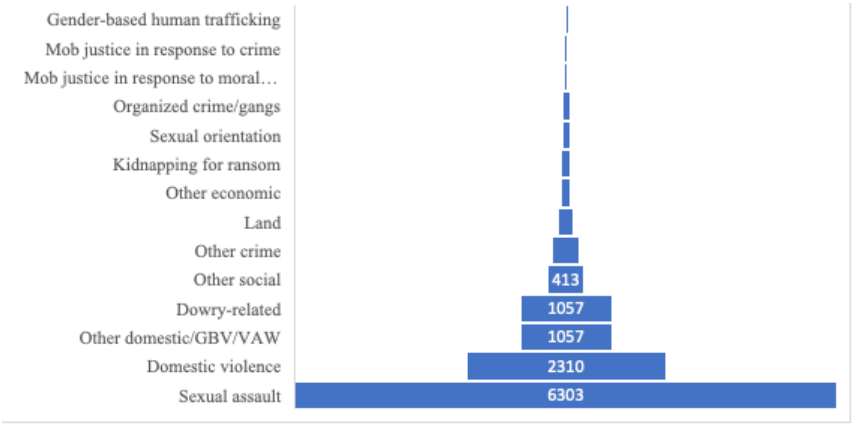

Figure 4: Motives behind Gender-based Violence

Domestic violence (general and other kinds[23]) and dowry-related violence are the most common motives behind gender-based violence after sexual assault (Figure 4). This is why the question of hypermasculinity and women's agency in the private domain becomes relevant. Since private domains are dominated by hypermasculinity, it limits women's agency to raise their voice against physical and structural violence.

HYPERMASCULINITY IN SOCIAL MEDIA

With the widespread use of social media, violence against women has become as rampant as it is in the physical space. According to a 2021 report, there are 47.61 million internet users (28.8% of the total population) and 45 million social media users (27.2% of the total population) in Bangladesh.[24] However, Bangladesh National ICT Survey shows that 54.8% of the urban population and 34.8% of the rural population use the internet.[25] Internet

accessibility is also gendered. According to the same survey, 53.2% men and 34.2% women have access to internet.[26] Therefore, patriarchy prevails in technology usage both quantitatively and qualitatively. As a result, women become the most common victims of harassment and gender-based violence on social media.

Various phrases are used to define gender-based violence on social media. These include "tech-misogyny", "gendered cyberhate", "cyberbullying", "online harassment".[27] Both women and men can be victims of cyberhate. However, research has shown that cyberbullying against women is disproportionately high globally as well as in Bangladesh.

A survey conducted by Plan International among 14,000 women and girls in 33 countries found that 60% of women were harassed on social media.[28] Facebook had the highest number of harassments reported by 39% of the participants. Among other platforms, Instagram was reported by 23%, WhatsApp by 14%, Snapchat by 10%, Twitter by 9% and TikTok by 6%.[29] According to Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Cyber Crime Division, women constitute 80% of cyberbullying victims in Bangladesh.[30]

Our study of 86 Facebook and nine YouTube profiles show that both secular and religious forces can be responsible for spreading misogyny online. Among the profiles, 69.81% had a general education background and 30.19% had a madrassah background. 39.62% had completed primary and secondary level education and were enrolled in tertiary level courses (Figure 5).

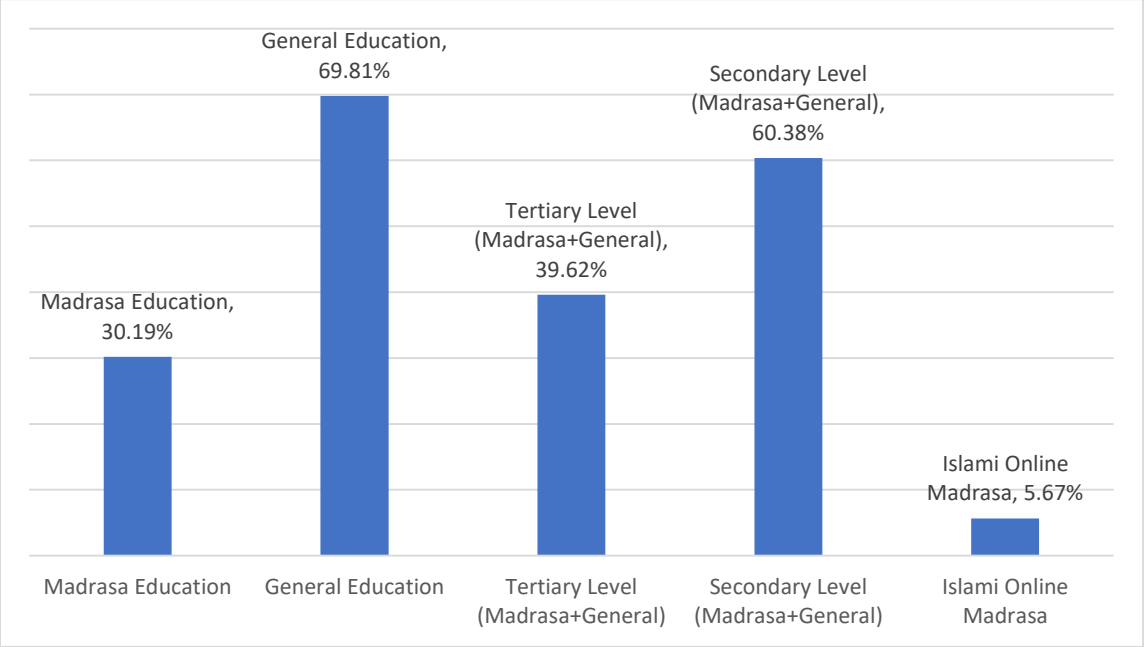

Figure 5: Education background of profiles

Irrespective of their background, they were members of anti-feminist and misogynist groups like *Masna Sulsa Rubaya* ("Second, Third and Fourth Marriage", a group that promotes polygamy with reference to Islamic texts), *Quomi Patro-Patri* (a group that promotes marriages between religious men and women), *Porda - the sign of Modesty*, *Porda narir ohongkar* ("Veil is a woman's pride").

Facebook and YouTube Comments ("Secular" Forces)

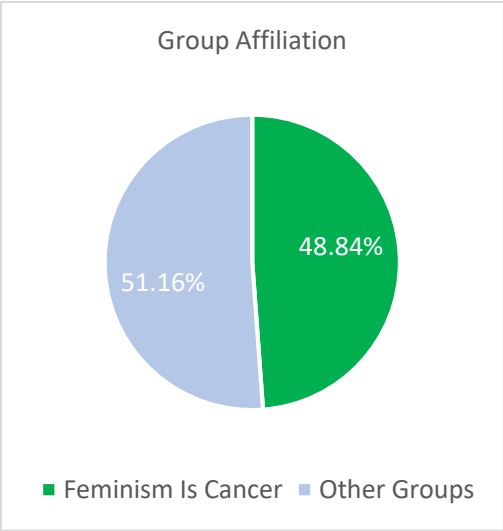

Figure 6: Group affiliation

Feminism is Cancer is the most popular group among secular misogynist forces. 51.16% of the profiles studied belonged to this group. It is filled with vile and derogatory comments again women—mostly about their attire and activities in public and private domains. Both men and women participate in these groups. As mentioned before, hypermasculinity is not about the binaries of men versus women or men's domination of women. It is that dominant masculinist voices denounce women's agency and other feminist/feminine voices.

These groups typically have an acutely limited understanding of womanhood, piety and femininity. To them, "pious" and "good" women are those who use hijab or the veil and restrict their public appearances. In one such group, Amina[1] commented on November 17, 2020, "It is *waajib* [religious duty, obligatory] for all women to cover their heads and faces". Taufiq Munwar commented on a post on March 16, 2020, "Women who wear clothes by revealing the ankles are considered as eunuchs".

People in these groups believe a woman should have less decision-making power in marriage and sexual relationships. On January 17, 2021 Aziz Khan posted on a Facebook group: "By giving men the permission to marry four women, Islam has not done any harm to women". Some resort to frivolous and unscientific opinions. On March 20, 2021 Abdul Moshiur commented, "Men's brains are bigger than women's; So, they can marry four times."

Some of the comments promote and defend intimate partner violence and marital rape. On November 4, 2020 Sabina Akhter commented, "Husbands do not need any consent from their wives to have intimate sexual relations". On December 20, 2020 Sadia Begum

[1] All names have been changed for privacy

commented on a YouTube video on power relations in the private domain, “Husband is the president of a household.”

Self-reliant and feminist women are demonised. On April 3, 2021 Shamima Akhter commented, “Begum Rokeya was the first woman who had the bad intention of giving equality of status to women”. Kabir Mamun added, “Islam did not permit women to earn money.” On March 25, 2021 Saimum Sabbir mentioned, “Feminist, self-reliant and divorced women are to be avoided while taking the decision of marriage”.

In these groups, women’s participation in the workforce or public domain is seen in a highly negative way. On March 21, 2021 Akram Abudullah commented, “Capitalists employ women at working place to create artificial competition.” On March 2, 2021 Saidur Rahman added, “For women, obtaining college degree, establishing own career are propaganda promoted by feminism.”

***Waaz* (Religious Forces)**

Waaz is a popular medium among religious forces. These are usually public gatherings where prominent religious scholars and leaders give lectures on Islam and contemporary social issues. *Waaz* is usually a live affair but social media has given organisers the opportunity to reach out to a larger population.

Waaz speakers are strongly vocal about supporting a husband’s right to dominate his wife in both private and public. On October 23, 2019 Mizanur Rahman Ajhari, a popular *Waaz* speaker stated, “A woman’s paradise is situated under the feet of her husband.”

On March 15, 2020, popular speaker Mufti Kazi Ibrahim said in his speech, “Women who wear shirts and pants are responsible for the spread of Coronavirus.” Similar comments were made by Dr Abubakar Muhammad Zakaria on July 16, 2019. He even vilified the custom of wearing the sari, a traditional Bengali dress worn by women from all walks of life. According to him, “Sari is prohibited for women. Sari cannot be a woman’s attire”.

In *Waaz* events, speakers do not hesitate to state that women are the property of their husbands. On February 27, 2020 Hasanur Rahman Noksebondi said in his speech, “Husbands buy the women with dowry. So, women cannot divorce their husbands”. Women’s movements in both private and public are also restricted. On September 22, 2019 Abdur Razzak bin Yusuf stated, “Husbands should not allow their wives to visit their relatives.” Similar comments came from a *Waaz* session on March 16, 2020 where Tarek Monowar declared, “Women going out is violation of *purdah*. The more women stay inside, the more will be the number of pious people”. On May 20, 2020 Rofikullah Afsari said that women’s voices should not be heard by outsiders.

Short videos from *Waaz* and other clips are widely circulated over WhatsApp, Telegram and other popular encrypted social media applications which are impossible to trace. Men or women who try to protest or oppose these viewpoints are collectively targeted by extremist groups, who report and get them banned online. Sometimes, these

women get flagged as feminists, are criticised for using foul language and blamed for "destroying youth".

LAWS PERTAINING TO WOMEN

Bangladesh has not signed any international convention related to cybersecurity. Regarding women, Bangladesh is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) with particular reservations on Article 2, which condemns discrimination against women in all its forms and Article 16, which stipulates equal rights and responsibilities during marriage and its dissolution.[31] Bangladesh retains the provision of personal laws in its Constitution, which significantly curtails the freedom of women in many spheres. Arguably, this contradicts the principle of equality as a fundamental Constitutional right. CEDAW does not include harassment of women on digital platforms, though Article 14 (f) refers to access to appropriate technology.

Bangladesh has also adopted several laws to protect women from gender-based violence such as the Violence Against Women and Children Act (2000) and the Domestic Violence – Prevention and Protection Act (2010). These acts focus primarily on physical and structural forms of violence against women in private and public spheres, rather than on social media. This paper argues that since social media has penetrated both private and public domains, there is a need to redefine the scope of the two.

Three laws are primarily cited in cases of gender-based harassment on social media platforms: the ICT Act (2006; amended in 2009 and 2013), the Pornography Control Act 2012 (PCA) and the Digital Security Act 2018 (DSA).[32] Section 25 of the DSA states that "knowing transmission, publication or propagation of any data-information" which is "offensive, false or threatening in order to annoy, insult, humiliate or malign a person" shall be punished with "imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years, or with fine not exceeding Taka three lac, or with both."[33] Repeated actions will result in "Five years of imprisonment, or with fine not exceeding Taka 10 lac, or with both."[34] Section 29 of the Act refers to "defamatory information".[35] In the remaining laws, identity fraud (Section 24, DSA), disclosure of confidentiality and privacy (Section 63, ICT Act) as well as possession and distribution of pornographic material (Section 5, PCA) are mentioned.[36]

Neither the DSA nor the ICT Act refers to gender-specific concerns or the plight of women; they don't even incorporate terms like "women", "girls" or "gender". It is only the PCA that addresses women, men and children specifically. Section 8 (1) of the Act prohibits forceful engagement of any "men, women or children" in producing pornography or any agreement to it.[37] Violation of the Act will lead to "imprisonment for a term not exceeding seven years, or with a fine not exceeding Taka two lac, or with both."[38] Although the ICT Act includes "Punishment for publishing fake, obscene or defaming information in electronic form that may hurt religious belief" (Section 57),[39] it does not incorporate any clause that addresses manipulating religious texts or speeches to defame or demean women online. This argument also extends to the DSA which addresses "Publication, broadcast, etc. of information in website or in any electronic format that hurts religious values or sentiment" (Section 28), ignoring how misuse of religious texts can also lead to gender-based violence online.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to review how the (mis)use of technology can lead to the creation of a hypermasculine society. Gender-based violence takes varied forms in society, even in situations that are often characterised as "peaceful". For a woman, "peaceful" has different connotations. A society is militarised not only by uniforms or conventional weapons; ideologies, language, social norms and religion are often weaponised to oppress women. In particular, technology—more specifically, social media—has become a site for the oppression of women.

Patriarchy and hypermasculinity persist across the globe—Bangladesh is no exception. Technology has bolstered this process, affecting women across communities and classes. The lack of legal provisions to address women's plight exacerbates their vulnerabilities. With globalisation, access to smart devices and the internet has become commonplace leading to widespread online abuse of women by both "secular" and "religious" forces.

This is not to undermine the empowering spin-offs of social media on women; the point here is the misuse of technology. This review suggests that social media is an important opinion maker, and it has intruded private and public spaces of our daily lives. This intrusion calls for a redefinition of "spaces". The terms "virtual" and "physical" need violence-mapping and a renewed understanding of their impact on marginalised genders.

This paper reveals the power of social media to create and strengthen a conservative, hypermasculine society. YouTube videos and *Waaz* events often use strong language and make indecent demonstrations of women's bodies, normalising gender-based violence. The absence of an alternative, more tolerant narrative of religion makes it extremely difficult to reverse the processes of extremism among youth.

A multi-pronged and inclusive strategy is required to face these challenges. Education and knowledge are important to prevent hegemonies and extremisms. It is important to identify sources of intolerance and address power dynamics at play in both personal and public domains. Intersectional multilogues are critical—the Covid19 pandemic has retaught us the importance of togetherness, and of the interconnectedness of humanity. Although violence against women (specifically, domestic violence) was on the rise during the pandemic, there were mechanisms to map this. It is information and the will of the people to resist and challenge violence, that one has pinned one's hopes on. State laws are important but the political will to implement them is critical. Power dynamics at the cognitive and practical level need change, which can only be ushered in by an informed and knowledge-based society.

Technology can be a tool for creating a demasculinised society and state. By mapping the spread of violence on social media, this paper has demonstrated its dark side. However, it is the other side that one needs to harness and invest in—more so as the world enters the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The authors would like to acknowledge Qazi Fariha Iqbal for her assistance in data collection.

Endnotes

[1] For details, see "Gender-based Violence", UNHCR, https://www.unhcr.org/gender-based-violence.html

[2] Ibid.

[3] BLAST, Promoting Rights through Inclusion and Empowerment (PRiTIE), 31 Dec 2020, https://www.blast.org.bd/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=623

[4] Government of Bangladesh, Access to Information (a2i), National ICT Household Survey 2018-19, p. 8.

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[14] *The Constitution, op.cit.,*1991, p.5

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[16] Ibid, 646.

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[19] Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), CGS defines violent incidents as "Reported incidents that involved intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a way that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property." [Definition collected from the BPO Codebook, accessed 11 April 2021.]

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[22] BPO Data, http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/

[23] BPO's Gender Based Violence category includes:
(a) Sexual assault: Rape, attempted rape, and other forms of sexual assault.
(b) Domestic violence. Violence between intimate partners and/or members of the same household, regardless of the gender of the victim.
(c) Gender-based human trafficking. Incidents related to gender-based human trafficking.
(d) Dowry-related. Incidents related to dowry issues.
(e) Sexual orientation. Incidents related to discrimination toward sexual minorities.
(f) Other domestic/GBV/VAW.

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