

The Shahbagh Movement of 2013 and its Impacts on the Politics of Bangladesh: A Modest Review

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Abstract

A hotchpotch political system exists in Bangladesh. Ruling party in the name of strengthening democratic system corners the opposition and politicizes all machineries of the government including the judiciary. Awami League led 14-party alliance due to her failure found her self alienated from the people in the second half of 4th year in office. In order to restore government's declining support government played a drama with regard to the verdict of alleged war criminal Abdul Kader Mollah and gave birth to the so called Shahbagh movement. The first couples of weak Shahbagh gathering died down the failure of government, and ongoing opposition movement faced huge set back. But anti-Islamic blog writings by the organizers of Shahbagh created another movement of religious masses. Uncensored support for and protection of these bloggers, and brutal massacre against the religious people washed away AL led government's deeming chance of gaining power back. In this article the researcher analyses the genesis, working, success and failure of Shahbagh movement with an insight view, and at the end its consequence on AL led 14-party alliance government in electoral politics.

Keywords: Shahbagh Gathering, War Crime, Anti-Islamic language, Bloggers and Online Network Activist, Hepajat-e-Islam

1. Introduction:

Practically democratic norms and values are not available in third world countries. In these countries people are made fool by political parties and pressure groups through thousands of pledges for establishing democratic polity in the country. But reality lies in the practice of authoritarian system, in some cases fascist policy, at every stage of the governance. Bangladesh has not yet broken through this circle since her independence though her emergence was caused for the materialization of exploitation free democratic society. Awami League led 14-party alliance under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina came into power with a huge majority of the people in 9th parliamentary polls held on 29th December, 2008 obtaining more than three fourths seats in the House.(The Daily Star, January, 2009) With this brute majority Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina started to reveal her government's ten year roadmap instead of constitutional tenure of her government-five year. Keeping this view in mind it brought 15th amendment to the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh scrapping non-party caretaker government provision for holding free, fair and impartial election.(Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, 2011) Government's popularity began fumbling from the second month of her office for her alleged involvement with regard to the BDR mutiny occurred on 25th February, 2009 causing the death of 76 people including 57 high ranked army officers.(The Daily Pioneer, February, 2009) However on the eve of 5th year in office AL government found herself totally isolated from the common people.(The Times of India, August, 2012) Standing on the edge of blank popular support government gave birth to the Shahbagh movement with the object of sowing her support among the people. This movement at first leaving behind misrule, corruption, inefficiency, inaction, authoritarian rule etc succeeded to draw whole hearted support for the government. But vexatious use of language against Islam by the organizers of this movement made the existing gap between AL government and people one degree wider than before. This article is intended to unmask the genesis, objective and political impact of Shahbagh movement which was orchestrated by ruling AL and its allies as the spontaneous out burst of the spirit of 1971 war through the youths of 2013.

2. Popular Support of 14-Party Alliance Government:

Rampant corruption, violent emergence of Islamic fundamentalist groups, and die-hard attempt of BNP-led 4-party alliance government in capturing victory in national polls through recruiting partisan person in the office of non-party caretaker government expedited the formation of military backed 1/11 government in Bangladesh in 2007.(The Daily Star, January, 2007) AL led 14-party alliance had an understanding with the members of 1/11 government. Present Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina immediately after the event of 1/11 congratulating the military backed Fakruddin and Moinuddin government asserted that with rejoice that 1/11 government was the result of their movement for non-party caretaker government.(The Daily Janakantha, January, 2007) However this government at first proceeded with minus two formula-excluding AL Chief Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chief Khaleda Zia from Bangladesh politics.(The New Nation, April, 2007) But government's political ambition declined its acceptability among the people and in the first half of 2nd year in office Fakruddin-Moinuddin government detached from the people because of rigid stand of BNP Chief Khaleda Zia against her departure of

the country (Associated Press, May, 2007), exposure of corruption in army in civilian nature. Under this circumstances members of 1/11 government had to persuade an underhand dealing with AL leadership for its peaceful exit. Because of this liaison AL led 14-party alliance got more than three-fourths seats in the House in 2008 election. Perhaps, for this reason, Critics say, in spite of operating stream roller of oppression by military supported Fakruddin government against AL top leadership AL led 14-party alliance government immune and legalized all actions of Fakruddin Government.(The Daily Janakantha, January, 2009)

A government having an overwhelming popular support like AL led 14-part alliance government should cautiously do business with the hopes and aspirations of the people. But this government failed to diagnose the mind of the people in this regard.

3. Collapse of Popularity of 14-Party Alliance Government:

Armed force is the symbol of sovereign entity of the state. Unfettered exercise of power by the government lies in the presence or absence of her having a strong standing army. AL was and is always for the existence of weak armed forces in Bangladesh. AL led 14-party alliance government successfully crippled armed forces as well as security of Bangladesh by masterminding Bangladesh Rifles mutiny on 25th February, 2009 causing the death of 57 high ranked army officers along with their family members.(The Daily Pioneer, February, 2009) More than 460 army officers lost their jobs for questioning the inaction of government in taking prompt action against the mutiny and trial of mutiny brokers. Though the special tribunal constituted for adjudicating BDR mutiny case announced its verdict on 4th November, 2013 giving 152 criminals with death penalty and others imprisonment with discretionary terms including life imprisonment, yet it could not remove the discussion of her involvement in the event from the minds of common masses.(The Naya Diganta, November, 2013)

Around 3.3 million small investors invested their capital in capital market. Ninety-six thousand crore taka was disappeared from the market because of manipulation caused by some big fishes of the government including PM's family members and Adviser. At this 33 lakh families became pauper losing everything in share market collapse in 2010-2011. An inquiry commission headed by Khaled Mosarrof was set up to bring out the culprits of the collapse. The report suggested the poor regulatory body, inaction of government and involvement of high ranked political leaders and their associates caused this collapse. It asked the government to take action against some manipulators. But Finance Minister Abul Mal Abdul Muhit not only got stunned watching the name of these culprits but also failed to utter their names in public, let alone taking any legal steps against them.(Bangladeshnews24.com.October, 2011)

Killing of political rivals and innocent people, bomb explosions, extortion, terrorist activities and bid capture by Chhatra League (student wing of AL) and Jubo League (youth front of AL) created an anarchic and lawlessness environment across the country.(The Protham Alo, March, 2013) Disappearance of opposition leaders(The Naya Diganta January, 2013), specially BNP leader Elias Ali, in the hands of law enforcing members, increase of extra judicial killing, inaction of government as well as law enforcing agencies in detaining and adjudicating the murderers of journalist couple Sagar-Runi proved acute lawlessness in the country.

Along with these, involvement of top AL leaders, Advisers, Ministers and PM's family members in Hall Mark scandal, Destiny money laundering event, Padma Bridge Bribery case, Railway Recruitment Business, illegal VOIP Business, Baswajit Murder etc deteriorated the image and popularity of AL led 14-party alliance government. Besides these benevolent attitude (providing transit free of charge, keeping silence regarding non-stop killing of Bangladeshi in the hands of Indian BSF) of this government towards India diminished her acceptability to the people. Although for the above reasons government lost her credibility to the people but AL asserted that popularity of PM Sheikh Hasina increased. Critics opined that this was nothing but a ridiculous propaganda.

4. Growing Support for Opposition BNP:

It is heard that despite step motherly attitude of military backed civilian government of Fakruddin Ahmed BNP had to stand for in the 2008 polls unwillingly in the pressure of its main political ally Jamaat-e-Islam. In this election BNP bagged the poorest election result since her emergence in 1979.(The Daily Star, December, 2008) That the achievement of lowest seats in the House as well as failure of absorbing Jamaat pressure for participating in 9th parliamentary polls made AL led-14-party alliance government pleased and AL denied the existence of BNP as a political force. But government's relentless attempts for destroying BNP leadership, and keeping Khaleda Zia and her sons out of politics through lodging unknown number of false criminal cases helped BNP accumulating popularity again. Scrapping of non-party caretaker government from the constitution, blatant use of judiciary as a political tool against opposition, unlimited corruption in government and party(The Naya Diganta, December, 2012), deteriorating law and order(The Naya Diganta, January, 2013), roaring prize of daily needs etc decreased the acceptability of AL led government further.

Government tried to stop opposition voice both in the House and outside by applying different tricks viz., using ugly and nasty languages in the House against the opposition MPs, imposing ban on political

activities of the opposition parties in the name of public interest, arrest of opposition leaders on false cases). This authoritarian behaviour of the regime reminds the BNP and other minor like minded parties of the BAKSAL regime in 1975. Being frustrated of government's attitude towards opposition not only BNP, other small political parties were to realize that their individual movement would not scratch upon the government nor the people until like minded political parties assert themselves united from one platform. Accordingly on April 18, 2012 BNP formed 18-party opposition alliance to face and change government's autocratic rule and mood.(The New Age, April, 2012) On the other hand AL government termed this alliance an anti-liberation alliance.

5. War Crimes Issue:

AL government's election manifesto reveals that her fifth priority was to arrange the trial of war criminals.(AL's Election Manifesto, 2008) Though this point is related to a minimal number of the voters yet government used this point to cover up all her government's misdeeds, corruption, inefficiency, deteriorating law and order, suppression of opposition etc. AL government not only suppressed political opposition but also enchained non-political groups as well as common people such as movement of affected shareholders in 2010-2011 share-market collapse, movement of non-government school teachers in 2012-2013(The Naya Diganta, January, 2013), wage increase movement of garment workers, movement of National Committee for the Protection Gas, Mineral Resources etc. Because of authoritarian attitude towards opposition political parties and non-political groups and failure in materializing top most priorities stipulated in her election manifesto reduced the popularity of AL government to its lowest ceiling, it is said. Indian intelligent agency RAW directed a secret survey with regard to AL led 14-party alliance government's popularity in second half of fourth year of her office. Survey report negated any possibility of forming next government by AL.(The Economist, September, 2012) Under this atmosphere government strived to break political unity between Jamaat and BNP. First initiative was taken by Indian High Commissioner at meeting held at his resident in November 2012.(The Daily Star, November, 2012) Second attempt was made on 12th July, 2013 at US Embassy, Dhaka where PM's Adviser Gohar Rizvi and Barrister Abdur Razzak exchanged views under the good office of Dan W. Mozina.(The Ekattar TV, July, 2013) But these attempts were burnt into smoke.

6. Speculation of Political Liaison between Government and Jamaa-e-Islam:

AL led 14-party alliance government did not permit Jamaat-e-Islam and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir to hold any public meeting or procession. Every political procession, gathering, seminar, was dismantled by law enforcing authorities with tear cells, live bullet shots, clashes with members of Jamaat-Shibir. In public government and its alliances branded Jamaat as enemy of the country and vowed to diminish it as a political power i.e., AL government was for the closure of Jamaat-Shibir politics in Bangladesh. Since Jamaat was a part of 18-party alliance government's efforts was seen futile until it could break BNP-Jamaat tie.

Perhaps with the object of making a political contact with Jamaat, government expedited the process of war criminal cases against top Jamaat leaders. War Crimes Tribunal-1 on 21st January, 2013 declared first judgment against Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, a non-political figure, widely known as Bacchu Razakar, with death penalty. Jamaat was not seen excited or anxious about this verdict. After this verdict PM Sheikh Hasina declared that capital punishment would be inflicted upon all the war criminals.(The Janakantha, January, 2013) But interesting thing was that this Bacchu Razakar was found nowhere in the country. It was heard that with aid and assistance of law enforcing agencies under the order of top government officials Maulana Abul Kalam crossed Bangladesh border into India seven hours before the issue of arrest warrant on 3rd May, 2012.(The Daily Star, December, 2012) It was also heard that Bacchu Razakar was second-in-command of Faridpur Razakar committee chaired by Engineer Mosharrof Hossain, currently holding ministerial post for Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment Affair. This Engineer Mosharrof Hossain is none other than father-in-law of PM's only daughter Putul. No anxiety, headache, interest was seen among the members 14-party alliance government and so called civil society relating to this escape of Bacchu Razakar. It is to be noted here that from the first day of the start of investigation of crimes against humanity, rape, arson, torture against Bacchu Razakar, he and his house were under 24 hours surveillance of law enforcing agencies. It may be presumed that since Bacchu Razakar severed his tie with Jamaat in early 1980's and did not attach himself to any right wing political party- BNP or Jamaat, his conviction by WCT-2 did have no impact on the image of opposition. (The Daily Star, December, 2012) Government perhaps realizing zero benefit from the issue of Bacchu Razakar did not highlight the issue further. Not only that so called pro-government civil society was not talkative nor found to create agitated movement regarding the escape or absconding of Bacchu Razakar.

Watching the silent reaction towards Bacchu Razakar case the country was awaiting for the announcement of same kind of judgement in veteran Jamaat leader Abdul Kader Mollah's case. But the verdict astonished as well as stunned the nation except Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh and the accused himself. After the read out of the judgment when Abdul Kader Mollah was brought out from the court room with cops he was seen happy and joyful, and he showed victory symbol putting his fingers up.(The Daily Inqilab, February, 2013) This

display of physical acts by Kader Mollah made the common people suspicious of the will and sincerity of the government about holding trial of war criminals because the WCT-1 gave sentence of life imprisonment to Kader Mollah despite proof of all charges brought against him beyond reasonable doubt.

Through the declaration of such verdict common people sensed a probable liaison between government and Jamaat. They strived to make a chain between the behaviour and actions of law enforcing agencies and Jamaat-Shibir of 4th February, 2013, the day before the declaration of judgment against Kader Mollah. It is said earlier that from the first day of 14-party alliance government, Jamaat and Chhatra Shibir were not given permission of any sort for holding public meeting, seminar, conference, procession, sit-in rather government took ruthless action against them in the name of keeping law and order sound and healthy. But all on a sudden government allowed Jamaat and Chhatra Shibir to hold public procession along with meeting on 4th February 2013 in Dhaka. On this day members of Jamaat and Shibir were seen to give away flowers and garlands to members of law enforcing agencies all over the country. Not only that, they hugged each other in lieu of clashes and bomb explosion.(The Daily Protham Alo, February, 2013)

Perhaps it was a ploy depicted and masterminded by the think tank of AL led 14-party alliance government for giving birth to a new drama with the object of gaining major political advantage against opposition and at the same time healing up her lost image among the voters.

7. Gathering of People in Police Protection:

Bangladesh constitution gives every citizen the right to procession, sit-in, meeting etc subject to restriction imposed by law. Accordingly every lawful procession, meeting, gathering, sit-in, human chain requires prior sanction of law enforcing authority. Without previous permission these programs are illegal. In spite of having constitutional sanction procession and sit-in at Shahbagh Square, the centre route to every corner of capital Dhaka, must have the blessing of government and Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner. Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner did not permit any political party, group, organization, to hold a large scale meeting, procession, sit-in, human chain, at Shahbagh intersection for causing traffic jam from the first day of 14-party alliance government. Every such program at Shahbagh was dogged and dismantled by ruthless police actions.

Under this atmosphere immediately after the declaration of life imprison sentence against Jamaat leader Abdyl Kader Mollah by WCT-2 some bloggers gathered at Shahbagh intersection in the afternoon and the Square became a gathering of thousands of demonstrators within a short while closing down all the routes towards Shahbagh creating unprecedented traffic jam and human sufferings of all walks of life.(The Daily Amar Desh, February, 2013) It was not clear when did the organizers of Shahbagh movement seek and get permission from the DMP for the gathering there? A question strikes under what capacity the organizers got permission for sit-in at Shahbagh because DMP turned down all the requests from opposition for using the Square for meeting and procession in 14-party alliance rule. People sought answer to another question why the organizers and gathering got first class security from the law enforcing agencies.

AL organizing secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim on 5th February, 2013, verdict announcing day, directed all party rank and profile and all its associated and like minded bodies to stage demonstration across the country to mobilize public support for war crimes trial. He said 73 organizational district units of AL were directed to join to and take part in Shahbagh Square movement.(The Daily Star, February, 2013) Perhaps this direction of top leadership of AL provided live blood to Shahbagh gathering. The so-called initiators of this gathering before emerging any assumption in the mind of common people regarding their political affiliation introduced them as “the Bloggers and Online Activist Network” independent of any politics.(The Ajker Kagoj, February, 2013) These bloggers relentlessly announced that they were propagating the voice of common masses who were dissatisfied with, aggrieved of and disappointed at the life imprison verdict against Abdul Kader Mollah of WCT-2.

Information Minister Hasanul Huq Inu joining the handful of bloggers and online activists expressed his and his party's (Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal) solidarity with demand of Square and he too demanded death penalty for Kader Mollah. Following his footsteps Industry Minister Dilip Barua attended the Square and advocated for death penalty of Kader Mollah. Not only that, all top political figures of left political parties joining the Shahbagh gathering enchanted death penalty for Kader Mollah.(The Daily Star, February, 2013) Perhaps watching the overwhelming presence of left political leaders AL top leaders viz- Dr. Hasan Mahmud(Forest and Environment Minister), Mr. Shahjahan Khan(Water Transport Minister), Barrister Amirul Islam, Noor-ul-Alam Lenin, Abdus Sobhan Golap, Asaduzzaman Noor, without killing any moment seen at the centre point of Square and voiced for death penalty for Kader Mollah. Not only that, presence of all student wings of pro-government political parties made the gathering of a number of bloggers a human sea within a couple of days.(The Naya Diganta, February, 2013) AL law makers in the House including PM Sheikh Hasina strongly supported and upheld the voice of Shahbagh gathering. PM Sheikh Hasina sitting in the House not only sang in the same tune with the Square but also asked the judges of the War Crimes Tribunals to put down judgment keeping the voice

of Shahbagh Square in mind.(The Daily Protham Alo, February, 2013) It was apparent within forty-eight hours that participants to the Square overtly and covertly belonged to AL and left oriented political, social, cultural, and intellectual groups. But all on a sudden the gathering not only rebuked AL leaders- Mahbulul Huq Hanif (Joint Secretary of AL) Enamul Huq (State Minister for Power), Hussain Mansur (Petro Bangla Chairman), but also hurled bottles and shoes at them when they proceeded to the centre of Square for expressing their solidarity with the gathering. The Square later on said that these persons were diverting the so-called spirit of the movement towards AL pocket.(The Daily Star, February, 2013)

In order to give the Shahbagh movement a non-political color, the thinkers of the gathering hasty set up a structure of the movement with Dr. Imran H. Sarker as Convener of “the Bloggers and Online Network Activists” and Mahmudul Huq Munshi as secretary thereof. But these main figures of the gathering particularly Dr.Imran H. Sarker were constantly assisted, guided, trained and prepared by Nasiruddin Yousuff Bachchu, the eminent dramatist, freedom fighter and spokes person of AL ideology and Shaharier Kabir, the die-heart AL worshiper, in making any speech before the media as well as the people attending the Square.(The Daily Star, February, 2013)

The mastermind of the movement quoted the gathering of people in different names, viz. Generation Square (Projanmo Chhatar), Youth Square (Tarunno Chhatar) so that people could feel the gathering of Square was nothing but the spontaneous outburst of the feeling of general masses.(The Financial Express, February, 2013)

Report suggested that with the object of living the gathering around the clock garment workers and day labourers were hired for 350 taka each for attending the Square at night starting from 10 p.m.¹ This presence of garment workers and day labourers at night turned the so-called Youth Square into mid-aged or in some cases old-aged Square.

It is unimaginable to think that a public gathering called for and arranged by organizers in reaction to a verdict of the court would be sheltered, financed and fed by the government of a country. This imagination became true with regard to Shahbagh movement. The members of the Bloggers and Online Network Activists were given VIP status in respect of enjoying security, residence, food and entertainment. These persons particularly Convener Dr.Imran H Sarker and Secretary Mahmudul Huq Munshi were given 24 hours police protection. The Square itself was cordon by three tiers of security arrangements. Three operation theatres of Bangabandhu Medical College Hospital were converted into leisure room for the organizers of Shahbagh movement. Government and security forces ensured all sorts of facilities including beautiful women, costly wine, drugs-yaba, in these rooms. The organizers after spending some period at the Square joined the leisure room and directed the movement plan. Not only that, top government ministers and officials were often seen visiting the leisure rooms.(The Naya Diganta, March, 2013)

8. Efforts of Media to Make the Movement Non-political:

In spite of having all the blessings of government, pro-government political parties and their affiliated wings, security forces, media telecast ins and outs of Shahbagh movement suppressing the reality of the ground-such as VIP security protection to the square and organizers thereof, open media publicity, free food and drinks for organizers, unprecedented traffic jam, sufferings of hospital bound patients, free availability of drugs-wine, yaba. The common people created an assumption of the movement that it was nothing but a drama threatred by the government. On the other hand in order to diminish this presumption of common masses the media, media personnel, government ministers, pro-government political parties, left leaning political parties, excluding a few relentlessly propagated that the Shahabagh movement was non-political, neither government nor pro-government political parties had any influence over and, blessing and support for the movement.

Couple of private channels viz.-Islamic TV and Diganta TV, and couples of print media viz.- the Amar Desh, the Naya Diganta, strived to show the orchestrator of the movement, objective and goal thereof. Due to their investigative and transparent revelation of Shahbagh gathering, most of the people withdrew their support for the Square. As a result of which organizers of the movement strongly demanded ban on publication of these two news papers, and broadcasting and cancellation of licenses of these channels.(The Daily Janakantha, February, 2013)

9. Demands of the Shahbagh Movement:

The Shahbagh gathering first took her footing in the afternoon of 5th February, 2013 in reaction to the life imprisonment verdict against Jamaat leader Kader Mollah announced by WCT-2. This gathering exclusively demanded death penalty for the offence committed by Kader Mollah. Few hours later this gathering changing

¹ Researcher after an interview with two participants who attended the Shahbagh gathering because of not finding any accommodation in hotel came to know that they were given 1000 taka and dinner packet each for nighthold at Shahbagh gathering.

this demand asked death penalty for all war criminals and demanded ban on all Islam based political groups and parties, news papers and private TV channels not supporting the movement, all financial, welfare and educational institutions and bodies carried on by Jamaat-e-Islam and BNP. The Shahbagh gathering formed for ensuring death penalty for Kader Mollah put several demands before the PM Sheikh Hasina on 8th February, 2013 and asked for their immediate implementation. The demands of the Shahbagh Square are:

9.1 Ensure Death Penalty for All Razakar and AL-Badr Members Who Committed Crimes against Humanity like, Mass Killing, Rape, Arson, Looting in 1971. (The Daily Inqilab, February, 2013)

This demand questioned the neutrality and impartial role of our judiciary. Not only that it vitiated the concept of natural justice, and it was nothing but contempt of court. International War Crimes Tribunal-2 announced life imprisonment judgment against Kader Mollah on the basis of evidence produced before it. One may not like the verdict. But he can not accuse the court of imposing soft punishment. This, obviously, undermined the sanctity of the court. Whether an accused is guilty or not it is a judicial matter and it is to be adjudicated through the production of evidence. This demand and gathering of huge people for that cause no doubt is an insult for our so called independent judicial system. By putting this demand the so-called pro-liberation forces have decided the fate of alleged war criminals prior to actual adjudication of the same is taken place.

9.2 Ban on Religion based Politics Including Politics of Jamaat-e-Islam and its Student Wing Chhatra Shibir, and Scrapping of Nationality of those who are Members of Jamaat-Shibir (The Daily Inqilab, February, 2013)

This demand is not a good sign for the child democracy so far developed in Bangladesh after the demise of President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975. Having been dominated by Indian agents and policies Sheikh Mujibur Rahman obliterated the presence of Islamic political forces in Bangladesh. By doing so he negated the historic influence of Islamic forces behind the birth of Pakistan in 1947. Because of excessive dependency on India and client like attitude of Sheikh Mujib government towards India most of the people of the Bangladesh, because of historic religious point of view, prayed for getting rid of AL rule.

Post Mujib governments, viz. Khandakar Mushtak Ahmed, Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem and lastly Ziaur Rahman gave their efforts to mobilize anti-Indian sentiment as well as historic Islamic values of the people of independent Bangladesh under one umbrella and they (particularly Zia) had succeeded to set up a strong cemented bond among the nationalist political forces against India and AL. Not only that they brought changes to the constitution for a clean, healthy and smooth inclusive democratic political culture based on Islamic values in Bangladesh. (Franda, 1982)

The Shahbagh gathering by tabling this demand not only, denied the feeling of nationalist people, but also exhumed the non-democratic exclusive values nourished by President Sheikh Mujib and Indian brokers. This is a threat to the so-called multiparty democratic system in Bangladesh. It is obviously, the violation of spirit of liberation war.

9.3 Retrial of War Criminals Who were Freed in 1975: (The Daily Inqilab, February, 2013)

This demand no doubt has undermined and ignored the sovereign power of the state. In January, 1974 the then Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a colossal public meeting held at Dhaka declared general mercy for all war criminals held and adjudicated for war crimes. However he authorized the trial of persons accused of specific allegation of killing, rape, arson, looting and destruction of properties and water transports. After this announcement the working of Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunals) Order 1972 and International War Crimes Tribunal Act 1973 became inactive in the remainder of his rule. Not only that all of the accused arrested and detained for war crimes were set free. (The Dainik Bangla, December, 1973) After the change in political arena in August, 1975 the latter governments just repealed these laws for creating political integration removing divisive politics of Sheikh Mujib. (The Ittefaq, January, 1976)

But the insertion of this demand by the Shabsagh mastermind regenerates divisive policy patronized and practiced by pro-Indian groups in Mujib reign. Therefore the stipulation of this demand reminded the people of the abuse, harassment and persecution sustained and suffered during Mujib regime for political and personal grievances in the disguise of war crimes. (Ahmed, 1984) Not only that, it denied the father of nation by ignoring his general mercy.

9.4 Boycotting of Business Entities Owned, Managed and Operated by the Members of Jamaat-Shibir:

Finance is the life blood of any political or non-political organization to run its activities smoothly. In Bangladesh like all other Muslim states where Islamic parties are working as political force only Jamaat-e-Islam has own business and financial institution. These financial and business entities provide money for the party. Not only that these institutions provide the workers of Jamaat-Shibir with jobs. Because of having own financial sources Jamaat-Shibir leaders and workers do not involve themselves in any financial corruption such as

hijacking, bribery, robbery, etc. For better service and involvement in social welfare programs these institution have earned huge appreciation in the country. Through this demand the Shahbagh gathering not only took initiative to detach Jamaat-Shibir from the people but also cripple it financially.

9.5 Banning of All the Businesses, Social and Cultural Organizations Belonging to Razakar and Al-Badr Activists: (The Ittefaq, February, 2013)

Every person-citizen or non-citizen has the right to set up business and operate the same according to Constitution of Bangladesh. One can't ask the shut down of any business, social, cultural and welfare organization because he dislikes the owner. Business, social, cultural, educational and welfare institutions and organizations run by so called Razakar and Al-Badr are very close to the heart of common masses because of their people oriented services. Shahbagh organizers, the proxy of AL and left political parties, intended to segregate Jamaat-Shibir from the cordial relation existing with common people. Keeping this intent in mind the Shahbagh masterminds stipulated this point in their demands. But reality is that this point was legally and constitutionally wrong, and against the spirit of liberation war.

9.6 Demand of Stringent Punishment to those Jamaat-Shibir Members Who have Committed Crimes of Sedition by Threatening with Civil War for Trying its Leaders for War Crimes: (The Daily Star, February, 2013)

PM Sheikh Hasina and her associates told the media in an open public meeting that opposition leader Khaleda Zia should be tried for opposing the trial of war criminals.(The naya Diganta, February, 2013) AL top leadership during the process of war crimes trial made various attempt to convince Jamaat-Shibir leaders to sever political liaison with BNP in exchange of giving them immunity of war crime issue. Not only that the members of law enforcing agencies during interrogation of Jamaat leaders (alleged war criminals) had asked them not to work with BNP and if they agreed to segregate from BNP they would be acquitted of all charges.¹ That means the trial of war criminals is nothing but a political ploy being played by government. Being aware of the intent of government Jamaat and other opposition leaders openly expressed their dismay over the government's political desire for holding the trial. They said that government was intending to divide the nation and provide every element required for dragging the country into civil war.(The Amar Desh, February, 2013)

On 4th February, 2013 for unknown reason government allowed Jamaat-Shibir to hold peaceful procession in Dhaka. On this day the members of Jamaat-Shibir and law enforcing agencies were seen to hug each other, exchange flowers between them. At the end the leaders of the procession told the media that if farcical trial of its leaders were not stopped civil war was imminent in the country.(The Daily Inqilab, February, 2013) Though government itself was fueling the sentiment of civil war by creating congenial atmosphere with that end, yet through the Shahbagh it accused the opposition for abetting civil war in the country. Not only that, Shahbagh demanded trial of the opposition for expressing apprehension of that. It is absurd and nothing but a dirty political trick.

9.7 Boycotting of War Criminals' Mass Media (like Diganta TV, Islamic TV, the Daily Naya Diganta, the Daily Amar Desh, the Sangram, etc), War Criminals and Their Accomplice: (The Daily Star, February, 2013)

It is a laughter joke. The Shahbagh spokesperson asserted that it was for the establishment of secularized political democratic norms and values. But by sounding this demand they declined their existence. It bore the phenomenon that existed during Shikh Mujib reign after the establishment of one party BAKSAL polity in Bangladesh on 25th January, 1975. Sheikh Mujib stopped the publication and circulation of all news papers excluding government owned four news papers. By doing this, Mujib government basically shut down the voice of the opposition through news media.(Bahar, 1997) The organizers of Shahbagh gathering were very much annoyed with these news media because of revealing authentic news against them. It is to be noted here that AL led 14-party alliance government was very much aggrieved of the true news published in these media. Government had been endeavoring to stop the publication and broad casting of these media for high lighting opposition voice and unearthing corruption and wrong doing of government. By advocating for this point Shahbagh attached itself to the agenda of AL led government.

9.8 Effect of These Demands:

These demands were rational and logical according to the Shahbagh leaders since these stipulated the so-called spirit of liberation war. PM Sheikh Hasina from the floor of the House asserted her soul's attachment to these demands. Imran H. Sarkar, the convener of Shahbagh movement, called upon the PM office along with these

¹ The researcher got the information from a defense lawyer who was present in the meeting held between Prime Minister Adviser Gohar Rizvi and top Jamaat leaders called upon by Indian Embassy at Dhaka in early November, 2012.

demands in the form of memorandum on 8th February, 2013. PM office assured them of their complete accomplishment through all possible assistance. Not only that, it told all machineries of state including judiciary to accommodate the feeling of Shahbagh in their actions and decisions.(The Daily Star, February, 2013)

Accordingly government brought change in the War Crimes Tribunal Act-1973 allowing the plaintiff to file appeal against lenient punishment declared by the tribunal. After this amendment government made appeal against life imprisonment verdict of Abdul Kader Mollah to the High Court and the court declared death penalty against Kader Mollah. War Crimes Tribunals announced death penalty against all accused facing war crimes charges after the submission of these demands except Golam Azam.

Government imposed tight surveillance over the publication and circulation of all news papers and broadcasting of private television channels. From May 5, 2013 government stopped broadcasting of Diganta TV and Islamic TV channels, and cancelled publication and circulation of the Amar Desh.(The Daily Inqilab, May, 2013) After this event, no electronic media was seen to broadcast or publish any negative but true news against Government or Shahbagh gathering.

BNP did not support the demands of the Square. But watching the presence of thousands of people around the Square from 8th to 14th February, 2013 it was forced to pledge for continuing the trial of war criminals in a sound and transparent way.

10. Revelation of Indian Involvement:

India attempted to create an atmosphere in Bangladesh to remind the people of present Bangladesh of the aid, assistance, sacrifice and cooperation made by the people and government of India during 1971 war. It could only be possible when the patriotic songs, drama, brutality of 1971 war by Pak Army and its ally would be re-orchestrated in a youth gathering of pro-Indian force. Keeping this goal in mind Indian government through its intelligent wing RAW masterminded, financed and arranged the Shahbagh gathering on 5th February, 2013.(The Indian Express, May, 2013) It became clear when Bangladeshi people were delayed and sometime denied of Indian Vissa for not-attending the Shahbagh gathering. It is to be noted here that Indian Embassy in Bangladesh put a question to the vissa seekers whether they went to Shahbagh or not. Not only that Indian Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid and President Pranab Mukhagee expressed solidarity with the youth of Shahbagh.(The Naya Diganta, March, 2013) Since the people of Bangladesh, for historical reason, do not favour Indian involvement and interference in Bangladeshi affairs this solidarity of India with Shahbagh gathering negated AL government's popularity further.

11. Anti-Islamic Statements of the Organizers of Shahbagh Square:

Presence of few hundred thousand participants in the Square on day number four, five and eleven of the movement organizing bloggers started to preach anti-Islamic voice through online social media-face book. Perhaps they were joyful of the fact that could have managed the nation to stand against Islamic values of the society. Being mingled of that sense with the political agenda of 14-party alliance government they undermined, criticized and rebuked general people who did question the motive of the movement, and did not support the movement. Not only that they used defamatory and disrespectful words and remarks against the holy Quaran, the Sunnah and rebuked our Prophet Mohammad (sm). Publication of such illicit comments of the bloggers particularly by Ahmed Rajib Haider, Lucky Akhtar, Asif Mohiuddin, Arif Jebtik, Arifur Rahman, Shamima Ujja, Abul Kashem, Rana Ray, Niloy Nil, Shuvojit Voumik, Shubroto, Imram H. Sarkar, etc sparked the hidden Muslim Sentiment of the masses.(The Naya Diganta, February, 2013)

It is to be noted here that AL led 14-party alliance government, its different wings and branches-political, social, economic, cultural, student and intellectual, all left oriented political parties as well as pro-Indian people of the country propagated so-called non-communal political system in Bangladesh. In the name of establishing non-communal polity these classes engaged in blurring the norms and values of Islam from the society.

But religious feeling is embedded so deeply in rural Bangladesh, and in middle class and lower class of the society that every attempt of putting Islam away from day to day life of the country is rejected with cyclonic force. But interesting matter is that people of Bangladesh are not fundamentalist. Sheikh Mujib government suppressed Islamic forces during his reign from 1972 to 1975, Hasina government tortured religious people from 1996-2001, and in 2013 AL led 14-party alliance government through Shahbagh gathering tried to cornered Islamic values from the society and politics.

But this effort became futile again. It is not clear why the people of Bangladesh upset any effort of cornering religion from social, political, economic, educational and cultural life of the country. Its answer perhaps lies in the fact of the emergence of Pakistan on the basis of religion in 1947.

AL and left political parties accused the then Pakistani regime of directing steamroller of oppression upon the people of East-Pakistan (present Bangladesh) in the name of Islam. But all the parties participated in 1970's historic election accepted Legal Frame Order of 1970 and agreed to follow the provisions of Legal Framework

Order, the first and utmost condition of which was that Pakistan would be a Islamic Republic where Islamic Ideology would be preserved and practiced, as guiding principles.(Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs of Pakistan, 1970) AL perhaps accepted this LFO for deceiving the people in the name of Islam for gaining election victory. But AL did not present any expected life to these people after independence in spite of expunging Islamic ideology from politics and constitution after independence, let alone a better life enjoyed by these people in Pakistan regime.(Ahmed, 1984)

The anti-Muslim role played by Hindu politicians, bureaucrats, Zamindars, cultural activists, poets, authors for stopping partition of Bengal in 1911 and again the negative role of the disciples of all those figures for independent Bengal in early 1947, the Muslim dominated people of Bangladesh dislike Indian domination and Hindu domination in Bangladesh. Every attempt so far taken for implanting anti-Islamic and Indian influence in Bangladesh politics had been out weighted by the religious people of Bangladesh.(The Naya Diganta, July, 2013)

Another thing is that leaders of left political parties in Bangladesh do not practice visible basic rules of Islam-viz, salat, Ramadan, hajj. They consider Islam a barrier to political, social, economic, educational and cultural development. For this reason, in spite of maintaining relatively an honest and sincere life by the leaders of left political parties, left political parties did not manage 1% vote in any national election so far held in the country. However the followers of these political parties control more than 90% media- print and electronic media, of Bangladesh. Though these media propagate non-communal teaching keeping Islamic values from day to day life in the disguise of secularism yet common people are not motivated to their philosophy. Because of these media Shahbagh gathering got cent percent publicity through out the country and world family. However beside Capital Dhaka other City Corporations- Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet, Barishal did not manage hundreds of people to gather for the cause of Shahbagh. Most interesting thing was that in these small gatherings most participants belonged to Hindu community. Municipal towns and entire rural areas (90% of the country) did not swallow the idea of Shahbagh.

On the other hand Shahbagh drew the attention of the common masses including the mega-city dwellers for its anti-Islamic blog writings. Publication of such anti-Islamic verses put down by the members of Bloggers and Online Network Activists helped the Islamic sentiment sparked like a volcanic eruption in the country. Such writing hurt the people so severely that blogger Rajib, self declared atheist, one of the pillars of Shahbagh gathering, was brutally murdered in the evening of 14th February, 2013.

12. Inaction of the Government for the Atheist Bloggers and Brutality against Unarmed Religious Masses:

Islamic scholars of the country declared these bloggers and Online Activists atheist. They asked government and law enforcing agencies to bring the alleged bloggers into justice with exemplary punishment. But PM Sheikh Hasina after the killing of one of the alleged bloggers Ahmed Rajib Haider titled the slain blogger Rajib as Shaheed and said Rajib was the first Shaheed in the 2nd war of independence against Islamic fundamentalists. Government gave slain Rajib the status of 'national hero'.(The Daily Inqilab, February, 2013)

It is to be noted here Batul Sarwar (Associate Professor, Department of Law, Dhaka University) and Nurul Islam (Principal, Dhaka Central Law College) filed No-886/12 writ demanding a ban on blogs and facebook ID lampooning Islam, the Quran, the Sunnah and our Prophet(sm) against Home Secretary, Information Secretary, Inspector General Police, RAB Director General and Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission. In the petition the plaintiff mentioned some names- Ahmed Rajib Haider, Asif Mohiuddin, Arif Jebtik, Arifur Rahman, Niloy Nil, Shuvojit Voumik, Shubroto, etc and their blogs and facebook ID which published anti-Islamic remarks. The High Court accepting the petition on March 21, 2012 ordered the government and IGP, DMP, RAB DG, BTRC to investigate the matter, find out the culprits and bring them into justice.(The Daily Inqilab, February, 2013) Because of upholding this petition Rajib Haider wrote a comment in his blog defying the authority of the court in this regard.(The Daily Inqilab, February, 2013) The law enforcing agencies in spite of finding involvement of these bloggers and facebook ID holders in the alleged misdeed did not take any step. And these bloggers later on involved in the creation of Shahbagh gathering.

Even after the start of Shahbagh gathering the bloggers continued writing anti-Islamic comments in their respective blogs and facebook ID. Bloggers of the Shahbagh defended the writings of slain Rajib.(The Daily Inqilab, February, 2013)

After the killing of Rajib Haider, self declared atheist and one of the pillars of Shahbagh gathering, the government and 14-party alliance leaders congratulated him for his deeds. They abused Islamic sentiment of the masses in the name of accusing Islamic political parties of Rajib's killing. More interesting thing was that government arranged security body-guard for the protection and security of these self declared atheist bloggers and facebook ID holders from 18th February, 2013.(The Daily Inqilab, February, 2013) Not only that government ministers-Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Abulmal Abdul Muhit, Motia Chowdhury, Hasanul Huq Inu, etc and all pro-government medias propagated for banning Islam based political groups and political parties.(The Daily Inqilab, February to March, 2013)

On the other hand religious people of Bangladesh upsurged against these bloggers and facebook ID holder and asked the government for taking stern action against them (bloggers). These people brought out procession out of their religious duty. But government termed them fanatics and propagated that they were being played in the hand of Razakar and war criminals. Government took severe action against these processions and over hundred and fifty people were killed by police fire. Not only that police directed action against the Friday prayers in the National Mosque injuring unknown number of unarmed worshippers on 22nd February, 2013.(The Naya Diganta, February, 2013)

13. Emergence of Leadership of Religious Masses and Devastating Action of Government on 5th May, 2013:

Watching government's stand for the atheist bloggers and facebook ID holders i.e., for the Shahbagh organizers and against religious people of the country the top Islamic scholars of Bangladesh under the leadership of Ahmed Shafi, the spiritual leader of Hepazat-e-Islam on March 10, 2013 called for a long march on April 6, 2013 and a grand public meeting at the end of long march at Shapla Square, Dhaka on that day for pressing upon the government for taking severe action against the atheist bloggers viz., Imran H. Sarkar (convener of the Bloggers and Online Activist Network), Asif Mohiuddin, Lucky Akhtar, Arif Jebtik, Arifur Rahman, Shamima Ujja, Abul Kashem, Rana Ray, Niloy Nil, Shuvojit Voumik, Shubroto, etc.(The New Age, March, 11, 2013) With the aim of foiling this long march and public meeting thereafter at Shapla Square government on 4th April, 2013 blocked all routes to Dhaka by imposing undeclared transport curfew on all vehicles including train and water transport all over the country.(The Amar Desh, April, 2013) Not only that with the object of pacifying the explosive mood of the religious masses police arrested three low profiled atheist bloggers on 3rd April, 2013.(The Naya Diganta, April, 2013) Defying this undeclared curfew millions of religious people reached Dhaka on foot and made a gathering of three million religious Muslims at Shapla Square on April 6, 2013. From this meeting Ahmed Safi, spiritual leader of Islamic scholars, put 13-point demand before the government for their immediate materialization. Top five of these demand were directly related to Shabagh gathering viz., Reinsertion of the absolute confidence and faith in Almighty Allah in the Constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh, Legislate of blasphemy law, arrest and try the Shahbaghi atheist bloggers including Imran H. Sarkar, the convener of Shahbagh Gathering, death penalty shall be imposed upon the culprit bloggers who profaned Allah, His Prophet and Islam, western style free-mixing male-female relation must be stopped. (The New Nation, April, 2013)

They rebuked the government and its machineries for nourishing and patronizing Shabagh bloggers, and accused the government of maligning Islamic sentiment of the religious people of the country. Hepazat leaders vowed to resist the Shahbagh bloggers by their own if government did not take action against them. They gave government one month ultimatum and said if within that stipulated period their thirteen point demand were not met they would start oust government movement after the program of Dhaka seize on 5th May, 2013.(The Bangladesh Observer, April, 2013) PM Sheikh Hasina rejected the demands describing those as hindrance to so called development and democracy.(The Naya Diganta, April, 2013) At the end of successful Dhaka Seize program on 5th May by the religious people under the banner of Hepajat-e-Islam government for unknown reason allowed them to a sit-in program at Shapla Square in afternoon. In the dead of night law enforcing agencies operated a brutal massacre upon the unarmed pious Muslim protesters closing down all roads and power supply to the Square. But government ministers-Home Minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Hasanul Haque Inu and others announced with joyful mood that the Hepajat members did not stand ten minutes against police action and law enforcing agencies dragged them out without any blood shed.(Ekattar TV, May, 2013) But report suggested that 155000 bullet shells were found lying on the streets around the Shapla Square in the morning of 6th May, 2013. Unconfirmed report suggested that around 2500 to 3000 people were killed during the operation.(The Daily Inqilab, May, 2013) Not only that law enforcing agencies started dogging down every member of Hepajat-e-Islam so that they did not open their mouth regarding the massacre before the people.(The Naya Diganta, May, 2013)

14. Consequence of Government's Stand for Shahbagh Bloggers:

Government brutally tried to suppress the emergence of Islamic sentiment of the common people of Bangladesh. The massacre carried out by law enforcing agencies against the unarmed worshipping members of Hepazat-e-Islam on the night of May 5, 2013 proved that desire of government. Common people construed that government did so for the protection and continuation of the Shahbagh gathering. But after the start of eruption of Islamic sentiment of the common masses the Shahbagh gathering lost its acceptability to the common masses. As a result, the number of participants of the Shahbagh gathering reduced to less than hundred in place of hundred thousand in normal days.

But heart breaking actions of government against pious Muslims caused her crashing defeat in all four city-corporation elections held on June 15, 2013. Not only that, government succumbed huge loss in her home

constituency of Gazipur City-corporation held on July 4, 2013. After crashing defeats in these polls government Ministers out of conscience admitted that their support for Shahbagh alienated them from the common masses and setting up of Shahbagh gathering was a mistake for the government.(The Naya Diganta, June, 2013) Not only that government's popularity touched the bottom of the basket.(The Ananda Bazar, June, 2013)

15. Conclusion:

AL led 14-party alliance at the end of fourth year in office found her alienated from the people for lawlessness, corruption, share market collapse, the Padma bridge scandal, hall mark scandal, disappearance of BNP leader Elias Ali, Saga-Runi murder, subservient attitude toward India, etc. AL government ignoring this reality propagated that the opposition was making these false and fictitious allegation against the government in order to save the war criminals. With the object of upholding this stand government expedited business of war crimes tribunal. In doing so, government staged a drama regarding the trial of Abdul Kader Mollah. This drama gave birth to the Shahbagh Movement. Presence of million people on days 4, 5, and 11 in the Shahbagh gathering subsiding failure and misdeeds of government, established war crime issue the main and utmost goal of the nation.(The Naya Diganta, February, 2013) But the masterminds of the Shahbagh forgetting the historical influence of Islam in Bangladesh politics demanded ban on Islam based groups and political parties, and the self declared atheist bloggers ridiculed Islamic, the Quran, the Sunnah and our Prophet (sm). These actions of Shahbagh gathering shook the Islamic sentiment of god fearing masses. These people demanded severe punishment for the bloggers and started movement out of their religious duty for the realization thereof. Government's brutality against the religious people forced Hepajat-e-Islam to sit in the steering wheel of anti-atheist movement. The presence of three million people in the Hepajat meeting of April 6, 2013 out numbered the cause of Shahbagh gathering. Government with the view of crashing the unity of religious people under Hepajat leadership operated massacre against the unarmed worshipping Muslims in the dead of night of 5th May, 2013. After this event popularity of the government reduced so acutely that government lost every poll so far held free and fair with a huge margin. Thus it is said that though Shahbagh helped increasing popularity of the government within a couples of week after its emergence yet it brought the image of the government at its lowest ceiling for its anti-Islamic role.

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