

From Sympathizers to Perpetrators: Examining the Involvement of Rural Women in Bangladesh in Violent Extremism

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Abstract : This paper attempts to explain the factors contribute in attracting and engaging rural women in Bangladesh toward political Islam that in many cases manifests itself in the form of violent extremism (VE). Bangladesh, the fourth largest Muslim majority country in the world, has been confronting the problem of VE in the name of Islam since a long. The political Islamists, explaining the events like military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, anti-Muslim politics in neighboring India and Myanmar, Islamophobia in the West, and several other issues in their own way, have become to a vast extent successful in creating a high level of emotion, anger and a feeling of being oppressed worldwide among the ordinary Muslims masses. Half-hearted role of public intellectuals and political expediency of liberal political forces in explaining these events in a secular democratic way also facilitate the extremists to earn political dividend. VE was perceived as an all-male activism of the political Islamists' in the past in Bangladesh. However, evidence in the recent times shows that there are sympathizers, recruiters, and perpetrators as well among the womenfolk in favor of VE-based political Islam. The first section in this paper sheds light on the way the political Islamists build rapport with and win over the heart of target women in countryside under the camouflage of preaching authentic Islam. This section also describes the role of family in involvement of women in VE. The second section discusses wide-ranging use of websites, facebook, laptop, mobile phones and several other means in the way to motivate and radicalize women. How the involvement with political Islamists brings changes in thinking process, lifestyle and family life of motivated women has been focused in the third section. The final section deals briefly with the way out relying on the argument that law and order forces alone cannot tackle this problem.

Keywords : Bangladesh, political Islam, violent extremism, women

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