



The May of 2011 has been a watershed event in the history of West Bengal. The Left Front government lead by the Marxists, has been replaced by a new hope for change. Many are optimistic that *Mamata Banerjee* might be able to put an end to continuing violence across rural Bengal. However, in her pursuit to defeating her political opponents, she has conveniently brushed aside one of the most debilitating problems of Bengal – that of poverty, religious education and violence connected to it. Sample the following event. After Friday prayers, about 2000 people, armed with swords and knives let themselves loose on poor villagers preparing to celebrate *Durga Puja* in a sleepy town called *Kartikpur*.

Not an unfamiliar event in Bangladesh, many would suppose. Would it surprise you if you were told that *Kartikpur* lies in the *Barasat* division of the *North 24 Parganas*, only 30 miles from Kolkata? Would it surprise you if you were told of similar events in *Deganga* and *Beliaghata* – all in the same district of West Bengal? We Bengalis pride ourselves on our secular and liberal credentials. If so, why were events of such gross religious intolerance and human rights abuse as has been seen in *Deganga*, or *West Midnapore*, summarily censored by the media? What is even more shocking is that these aren't isolated incidents, but premeditated acts of violence intended to instill fear in poor members of one particular community. Villages in Bengal, especially those near the border with Bangladesh are crying of victimization and injustice, and there seems to be a purposeful intent from the government officials to shut this debate out of the window. But there is an ominous pattern here. The way *Taslima Nasreen* has been hounded out of Bengal, by the same people who arrange mass rallies in support of *Al-Qaeda* and *Osama bin Laden* on the streets of *Kolkata*, brings back memories from the mid- 1940s and Direct Action Day. While powerplays unfold between the major political parties, supporters of one particular religious community are almost always at the receiving end of all the abuse and violence. The administration and the political parties seem to think, that the best way to deal with such situations is to let time take its own course so that people would forget about these crimes.

Not us. We refuse to accept that West Bengal, where Bengalis had the freedom from religious violence, would be compromised due to the inability of security enforcement to crack down on such criminals. As the history has shown, without religious harmony, mere industrial development and infrastructural growth would be a case of one-step-forward-two-steps-back. In this pursuit, we have embarked upon a project to draw the attention of people in India and around the world to the ground realities in Bengal. An investigative rights activist and independent filmmaker would be compiling a short film on growing cases of religious fanaticism in rural Bengal. The aim of this project is to make people aware that the danger of such extremism is closer than many would like to admit. We would like to expose policymakers to the urgent need to address the danger at hand.

We appeal to you for your cooperation and support in making this project a success. Even a small contribution to this cause would help the millions of people in rural Bengal, who are probably not ruling out a repeat of the traumatic experiences of 1947.

Tax-exempt donations online are being accepted at <http://factusa.org/donate.aspx>

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Sincerely,

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