

Social Dynamics of Frequent Clashes in Rural Bangladesh: A Study on Brahmanbaria District

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Abstract - Rural conflicts are becoming more severe in recent years; predominantly, political conflicts are increasing in Bangladesh. A few clashes in Brahmanbaria districts recently gained widespread momentum in the country. According to a report, 1437 clashes occurred in the last two years, which caused 151 deaths and many injuries. Some conflicts were assumed to be clan-based (*gushti*) and strengthened by the aim of establishing supremacy in the area by local elites. No study has been conducted on this issue previously concerning the causes and consequences of this frequent violence. So, the study aims to explore the nature and pattern of frequent clashes and provide some recommendations based on the findings. The present study adopted qualitative methods. Primary data were collected from five selected villages from Sarail Upazila, where conflicts broke out the most. Initially, the researchers used the participant observation method for understanding the issue and locating the respondents for the interview. Then, data were collected using in-depth interviews, Key informant interviews, and Focus group discussion methods. The findings of the study suggest that conflicts in Brahmanbaria are a deep-rooted problem. There are no specific causes or patterns of these clashes, yet people's participation in these clashes increases. Conflict breaks out for a minimal matter; later, local clans and villagers join the mob. Often, these clashes end with mutual agreement mediated by the village headman, but the hatred between or among groups remains the same, which causes further clashes.

Keywords: Clashes, Supremacy, Salish, Hostility

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict in Bangladesh is a common scenario. Most of the violence in Bangladesh is centered on politics and power, owing to its violent political culture (Herbert, 2019:2). A few clashes in the Brahmanbaria district, mostly in rural areas, gained widespread momentum in the whole country. Due to the frequency and ferocious nature of such conflicts, it emerges as one of the major issues lately. Clashes were so violent that people, including police, were wounded severely even killed in many cases (The Daily Star, 2020). Over the last two years, 1,437 conflicts have occurred in various areas, including Sarail, Nabinagar, and Nasirnagar. Clashes between villagers regarding silly matters sometimes cost the lives of many people. In these clashes, 151 people died in those incidents, and 7,185 were injured (Amin, 2021). These clashes usually happen between two groups having previous issues. Clashes often start with a trivial matter like a verbal spat over something, which later

becomes a physical altercation. In most cases, such altercation happens between two villagers or groups (*gushti* based). These villagers/groups have some *Sardars* or local leaders who lead such a clash. Villagers knowing that such leaders are backing them, often engage in a physical confrontation over a trivial issue, and later, their villagers or group join them. Local residents said that the group leaders sit together for plans before a clash. They chart the course of action, and loudspeakers announce the decisions from mosques. Some conflicts were assumed to be clan-based and strengthened by the aim of establishing supremacy in the area by local elites.

In some cases, as reported in the newspaper, local headmen or *Sardars* patron such clashes for establishing their dominance in the area. Also, political polarization and conflict were found to be major causes (Taalash, 2020). The population of this area is reported to have a higher rate of illiteracy and bigotry. There is no explicit elucidation for these kinds of clashes. People begin aggressively yelling at each other, and they appear with homebred weapons, and a group of their families joined them in battle all of a sudden. Minimal disagreement or heat blows all over the village, often expanding the radius and resulting in a bigger level clash. People seem to be more likely to flaunt their family's dominance, authority, and control over others. The village's wealthy and influential residents do not participate in the massacre; however, they direct and inspire the other villagers. It was found that some villages and groups have been in constant conflict for decades. As a result, some clashes break out as a continuation of previous conflicts or hostile relationships (Amin, 2021). There are several interest groups as well; in most cases, interest groups provoke the commoners. Influential persons vow to provide funds and necessary support regardless of how the village community deals with their enemy - this kind of encouragement results in many brutalities among the impoverished peasants and other local people. Villagers prepare homebred weapons for fighting. Often, police and local administration try to stop these clashes, but they fail to do so due to villagers' reluctance and aggressive behaviour. Clashes often result in *Salish*, a local informal court, where perpetrators are fined or punished; yet, the efficiency of such a court is questionable. Villagers and *Sardars* (headman) engage in frequent clashes even after the formal

resolution. Amid the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, many conflicts broke out, which were headlines of major newspapers and TV channels (The Daily Star, 2020). During a clash amid a countrywide shutdown due to the spread of coronavirus, a conflict broke out between two groups where the rival cut off a man's leg; then, that group carried out a victory rally with that leg; that event went viral (The Business Standard, 2020).

This study conducted fieldwork in the four most inflicted villages to explore the major causes and consequences of frequent clashes. No study has been conducted on this issue previously concerning the causes and consequences of this frequent violence. The only source of such clashes is print and electronic media reports. The study further explores the nature and pattern of frequent clashes and provides some recommendations to minimize such clashes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

An important feature of Bangladesh is the great ethnic (national) unity of the population of the republic, almost 98% of which is made up of Bengalis (Gankovsky, 1974), with a history of harmonious social relations and a strong sense of national identity (Herbert, 2019). In the past, Bangladeshi villages stood for something that didn't move or change. They were once associated with 'primitivism' and all that feeds off the darker aspects of centuries-old heritage and traditions. Only recently, some villages in Bangladesh experienced wholesale social transformation (Sarkar, 2018). Yet, centuries-old traditions have not much changed in village areas. Compared to urban areas like Dhaka or Chittagong, people in village areas retain old traditions in every aspect of their lives. Village society in Bangladesh, broadly societies in the Indian sub-continent, mostly remains stagnant for decades without any major transformation (Karim, 1976). Marx called this *Asiatic Mode of Production* characterized by an unchanging state and society with a hydraulic economy and despotic government (Mondal, 2014). Village societies haven't much progressed due to their century's old tradition and heritage. Bangladesh is largely made up of a low-lying fertile delta area that serves as the floodplain for two rivers: the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. In conjunction with other rivers, these two rivers bring down silt and deposit it on the plain, improving soil fertility and spreading the delta into the Bay of Bengal. The annual combination of fertility replacement, floods, and a wet, humid climate makes non-irrigated rice production suitable (Wood, 1981).

Bangladesh has a violent political culture mostly involving youth (Midgley, 2018). Social, ethnic, religious conflicts are latent but often used for political purposes. Some forms of violence associated with politics are extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, torture, beating, and harassment (Herbert, 2019). Politically motivated blockades and strikes are common in Bangladesh, especially during elections. The widespread political conflicts caused by political polarization imply a political culture where the

participants are unwilling to compromise with the opponents but use violence to achieve their political aims (Midgley, 2018).

Further, the criminalization of politics contributed to intensifying the use of violence to establish political supremacy. Recently, the Rohingya insurgency on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border has emerged as one of the major national challenges. As 1.1 million Rohingya people made their way to Bangladesh, it caused triggered violence in the Coxsbazar district. Some news reports stated that Rohingyas are often involved in the clash with local Bengalis. Apart from that, conflict in CHT is another major concern for Bangladesh. The indigenous community there experience widespread discrimination, violence, and abuse (Herbert, 2019). The case of Brahmanbaria can be compared to the experience of Char land people in Bangladesh; Zaman (1991) described the role of 'Lathiyal' in establishing political supremacy in the Char area. The local elites, mostly *Joetdars* [Wealthy peasants who own extensive tracts of land], use patron-tied Lathiyals to organize violent conflict, which results in grabbing new land. Such conflicts were fueled by local elites (Jotedar) like Sardars of Brahmanbaria.

According to Khan (2013), the power structure in rural society comprises *samaj*, *gushti*, and *Salish*. *Gushti* refers to a clan-like social system centred on common lineage. *Samaj* denotes a feeling of community bonding, while *Salish* represents the village court. Khan argued that the role of *gushti* in social conflicts was vital in the past. *Gushti* is a common feeling that has assisted in the formation of a cohesive group. Despite Khan's anticipation that both *gushti* and *samaj* are declining in rural areas, they are still present in Brahmanbaria to some extent. *Gushti*, as Khan pointed out, aids in the process of mobilization against an opposition group in a conflict, where the opponents are formed based on another *gushti*.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section reviewed theories related to conflict, conflict behaviour, and the stigma associated with such conflicts. Different scholars defined the conflict differently, focusing on causes, nature, pattern, and outcome.

A. Protracted Violence

One of the eminent theorists, Edward Azar (1990; 1991), described the protracted (long-lasting) conflict as a "violent struggle" by communal groups for their basic needs. The outbreak of violence among these groups results from their frustration with an identity crisis. As defined by Azar, protracted conflicts have three basic characteristics: genesis, process dynamics, and outcome analysis. *Genesis* refers to the reasons behind the creation of conflictive situations. It is a collection of circumstances that lead to the transition of non-conflictual contexts into conflictual ones. Deprivation of a society of necessities leads to mutual grievances and

disorder. Governments and multinational organizations play an essential part in causing or resolving protracted social conflicts.

The triggering of overt conflict is due to *process dynamics*. A seemingly insignificant occurrence may result in community conflict. Community solutions are created to address the problems and accomplish the basic goals. When communal authority fails to regulate conflicts, the state can resort to coercive measures. A catalyst can be a minor thing at first, but it does not have to be (e.g., an insult to an individual with strong communal ties). However, the insignificant incident continues to become a watershed moment in which the collective victimization of individuals is recognized. Person complaints (or conflicting goals) that are recognized collectively inevitably lead to collective violence. Azar stated that there is no clear winner or endpoint in such conflicts. Protracted social conflict distorts and impedes the efficient functioning of state institutions. It promotes and enhances pessimism through culture, demoralizes politicians, and paralyzes efforts to find peaceful solutions. Though Azar's theory is most often used to analyze ethnic or nationalistic movements or conflicts, it may also be used to analyze the conflict in Brahmanbaria. The process dynamics that Azar described are similar to Brahmanbaria's situation. Even though the conflict is not ethnic or nationalist, people in Brahmanbaria have been in long-term conflict with one another, which, as Azar said, is often latent and only comes to a surface as a result of minor incidents or triggering factor.

B. Human Needs

Maslow (1943) and Burton (1990) are credited for the Human needs theory. Every human has basic needs to live; when basic needs are not met, new forms of behaviour can be formed, which might lead to violence. This is not only about subsistence; there are unmet human needs such as protection, identity, recognition, participation, and understanding. When these needs are not fulfilled, human's usual networking can turn negatively into violence. Unfulfilled desires can lead to feelings that reflect destructive behaviour, confusion, disappointment, frustration, helplessness, irritation, sadness, and embarrassment. Since the need is not centred on subsistence, it allows for other needs like power and influence. In the case of Brahmanbaria, political leaders and influential people tend to establish their supremacy using frequent conflicts.

C. Social Identity

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) focused on intergroup struggle based on self-definitions depending on their enrolment in a social gathering. Social identity can be considered in *categorization*, *identification*, and *comparison*. Categorization is the way people put others into categories. Usually, people label one another based on interest, ethnicity, gender, occupation, etc. Once social

identity has been known, individuals will choose to associate with certain groups. Collective identity becomes one's "in-group." A cluster that poses a threat to his/her group is named "out-group" - for instance, someone from a distinct background, from the opposite aspects of social space. Then, people compare their group to another to maintain their self-esteem, often by power relation with a bias to their group. Once two groups identify as rivals, prejudice emerges, forcing them to compete to maintain their self-esteem. Such groupings based on common interests are a common phenomenon in Brahmanbaria. Excluding their groups, people tend to assume others as the opponent.

D. Stigma

Stigma refers to: "a devalued stereotype," which is an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" (Goffman, 1963:3). Stigma is an aspect of social life that complicates everyday micro-level interaction. Goffman defined several types of stigma in a social context: tribal, physical deformity, and blemish character. Psychologists further expanded stigma at the individual level in social interaction- mostly individual-level consequences and coping responses. Link and Phelan (2001) stated concurrence of 4 processes: 1. labelling human differences, 2. stereotyping such differences, 3. separating those labelled from "us," and 4. Status loss and discrimination. In the case of Brhmanbaria, discredit is associated with winning or losing in a clash. Drawing from these theories, a theoretical framework has been designed which guided the study. This framework is designed to keep the events (extracted from newspaper reports and researchers' observations) in mind.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A methodology usually involves theoretical principles and frameworks that provide the guidelines of research (Sarantakos, 2005), and it connotes a set of rules and procedures to guide research (Miller and Brewer, 2003). Though the conflict in rural areas is so common in Bangladesh, the case of Brahmanbaria gained widespread momentum very recently. This study is designed to reveal the causes and patterns of prevailing conflicts. This study is qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive in nature, concerning its nature and subject matter. Primary data were collected from 4 selected villages from Sarail Upazila, where conflicts broke out the most. In rural areas, the formal governance of the local government is structured around a system of elected Union Parishads or councils, which are the lower tier of the country's administrative system. Each of which serves a total of nine villages (Lewis & Hossain, 2019). Sarail Upazila is located between 24°00' and 24°11' north latitudes and between 90°59' and 91°15' east longitudes.

Initially, the researchers used the participant observation method for understanding the issue and locating the respondents for the interview. No previous study has been

conducted on this matter. For this reason, it is necessary to present a descriptive and detailed view of the subject matter to obtain an insight into the causes and consequences of such clashes. In conformity with the research topic, data were collected using in-depth interviews, Key informant interviews, and Focus group discussion methods. A total of 30 local people participated in this study. Besides, KII was taken from the local UNO. Data were collected from August 2020 to February 2021. Initially, it was hard to conduct in-depth interviews since the issue is very critical in the area, and people were afraid to talk about it. Some of the respondents denied cooperating, fearing the consequence of their participation. Researchers guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality and took some time for rapport building. Interviews were recorded only after the permission of the respondents. In this case, 5 of the respondents denied talking. The researcher clearly explained the researcher’s purpose and guaranteed confidentiality. Besides recording, the researcher took extensive field notes in case some of the information might be missed. Field notes helped to ideate the respondents’ appearance, pattern, environment, and socio-economic condition, which allowed the other researchers to understand the context more rigorously.

Upon completion of the recordings, the researcher transcribed all the interviews and organized the field notes in MS word files. The researchers read transcribed files several times to make a summary before the procedures of coding. The researchers generated some of the common codes while keeping in mind the research questions. Then, researchers coded the transcripts using qualitative coding guidelines using qualitative analysis software *Atlast.ti 9*. Then generated codes were transformed into categories. The researchers looked for emerging themes in the data, which were further used for thematic analysis by going back and forth to the original transcript. In any research involving human subjects, the researcher should be careful about ethical issues (Baker, 1993). The researcher strongly maintained ethical issues in this research.

The respondents were clearly told about the purpose before the data collection procedure began. The participation of every respondent was voluntary; no one received anything in exchange. The respondents were guaranteed the confidentiality and usage of data. Only the researchers had access to the recordings and field notes; it was never disclosed to anyone not involved in the research project. The name and addresses of the respondent were not recorded anywhere in the questionnaire.

V. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

From the data gathered through interviews and focus group discussions, it is apparent that there are no static causes behind such clashes or conflicts. For instance, people start exchanging aggressive words between them. Suddenly, they come up with homebred arms and start fighting each other. It is evident that, as respondents mention, during these conflicts, most of the group members don’t even know or bother why they are fighting. The fight then spreads all over the village; sometimes, the rage continues to get bigger, and in turn, the minimal incident becomes a union-level clash (Bangla Tribune, 2018). However, no matter how it begins, the news of the incidents propagates in the whole village within a concise period. To defeat the other village or community, people join with homebred arms (Fol, Ramda, Lathi, Muli Bash-Khali). Sometimes villagers use the mosque’s microphone to announce to come people and join in the clash (Amin, 2021). Under the leadership of a wealthy or influential person, these clashes further expand. The prevailing power struggle among various groups, mainly between families and villages, is the leading factor in such conflicts. This power struggle revolves around controlling the local market or controlling a particular territory, which can sometimes be a family tradition.

Here, we tried to list some particular causes we found through field interviews.

TABLE I CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

| Incidental/Minimal | Psychological | Social | Political |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| Simple disagreement on any matter | Egoism/ high self-esteem | The social status associated with winning or losing | Establishing supremacy in an area |
| Verbal spat | Long established hatred toward a particular group of people | Revenge | Generating influence through violence |
| | Hereditary arrogance | Long-established dispute | Proliferating dominance |
| | Lack of tolerance | | |

As most respondents supposed, these clashes were recently reported in print and electronic media; otherwise, this is a normal condition. It takes a particular person or group to lead such clashes. Usually, village heads [including local union chairman, members, Sardars and other influential persons] are responsible for such happenings as they mobilize people. Besides, other powerful people (i.e., rich persons) lead the clash by extending their support and arranging resources needed for confronting the opposite.

Sometimes a longstanding dispute leads to small encounters between two groups. It is reported that a rivalry between Aruail and Pakshimul unions under Sarail Police Station has been ongoing for around 30 years (Amin, 2021). Common villagers are forced to participate, fearing they would be discredited or ashamed to stay at home while their people were fighting. Usually, the winner group neglects the losers in many ways. As one of the respondents from Aruail said:

“Because the village is little, people can see each other daily. Everyday people just make fun of the issues in front of the victim. For this reason, the victim had anger in his mind. If he gets a chance, he will attack them.” (Ranidiya, Aruail)

As mentioned by the respondents, one of the common reasons is the “land or property” issue. Sarail Upazilla contains many cultivable lands where a lot of people directly or indirectly depend on agriculture. As of now, 60.67% of people are farmers (Banglapedia). Frequent disputes over a piece of land characterize the geographical condition of the village. It is reported in a daily newspaper that a youth was killed in a dispute over land in 2017 (Rising BD, 2017). Such disputes still continue, as one of the respondents stated:

“It is related to property and ethnicity. There is land beside someone’s land, which drowns away during the rainy season. Then two land’s mark line of ownership gets mixed. After this mixing, people had to reorganize this to claim ownership. Sometimes, 1 or 1.5 feet of mismatch happens in the land measurement. If the matter lies between two groups, then these two groups create a big scene.” (Inhabitants of Ranidiya, Aruail village)

Some respondents stated that people’s mindset is to blame for the frequent clashes that break out in Sarail Upazilla. People love to fight one another for no notable reason at all. Sometimes people look after causes to fight the other person or group. Though educated people try to stop the clash, they are forced to listen to the elders and influential persons. One of the respondents mentioned:

“The educated people have to follow what the elders do. Their opinion to stop these becomes worthless. Upon entering the clash, educated persons lose their moral duty. In such a conflict, students participate mostly. Elderly people give commands, but boys engage in violence using local weapons.”

It is alleged that local leaders profit from such clashes in multiple ways; for instance, people file cases after a clash where influential people take money from both parties. Also, during a resolution meeting or Salish, influential people (headman, *Matbors*, and *Sardars*) take cash from perpetrators for the sake of mitigation. Sometimes local *Sardars* take a fine share of compensation set by them in a resolution. Many expatriate people are said to offer financial and legal assistance to those involved in the clashes.

Most of the conflicts are influenced by previous events and prevailing animosity between two groups. Villagers are always ready for violent confrontation since they get used to doing such repeated in previous years, so it’s not hard to chart out a plan and attack the opponents with homebred arms in a short period. Later, such confrontations result in filing cases, Salish, financial penalty, arrest, and temporary settling down by *Sardars* and elders of the village.

A. Risk Factors

Geographically, Brahmanbaria is a riverbank area. As many people believe, people in riverbank areas tend to be fiercer than other people. There are two rivers in Sarail Upazila, namely: Meghna and Titas. It’s not a secret that people of the area are highly influenced by previous happenings that influence future violence. The practice of hatred toward people of other villages/gushti tends to be overlooked by the people. This institutional hatred practice is one of the major reasons for such violence. The literacy rate is much lower in Sarail Upazila than the national average; only 32.9% (male 36.2%, female 29.7%) people are literate. Much unemployed youth in the village play a provocative role in such clashes, mentioned by a respondent.

“...there are many people who have evil thoughts. They say a lot of provocative things, which often lead to fights. In fact, the unemployed youth have a bigger role in these fights. Some of these clashes start with youths” (Pakshimul)

One of the risk factors identified by a respondent is not having a police station nearby in the most violent inflicting areas. Most of the time, the police are helpless. Often, clashes start with a little matter and suddenly cause massive people to gather. Since such clashes involve many people with local arms in their hands, police face trouble stopping them. One of the respondents mentioned:

“The main reason for the conflict is not a big matter. Sometimes it’s just a simple issue, but people made this big one. For example, some years ago, one slapped another, not intentionally by mistake. After that, he told that person that it was a mistake. He thinks that the slaps have been given to his little brother in the dark. But he disagrees with the explanation. He asked why he gave this slap. One simple matter, but they make big conflict.” (Aruail residents).

The fight between groups (mostly) lasts for a few minutes or hours and ends before the police arrive on the spot. Many people live abroad in the village. Some of the immigrants provide funds for such clashes. This was reported repeatedly in newspapers that immigrants send cash and arms to their groups (often villages) for making their names. It is alleged that local arms are produced and collected by the funding of the immigrants and local leaders for future clashes. A respondent from Pakshimul village said:

“People in this area already have these weapons in their homes. So, they take these with them when they involve in a clash. They don’t need to be prepared for a long time since they are always prepared.”

Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Sarail mentioned a clash he came across. A Hindu owner from Aruail village owned a shop. That shop was taken by a resident of Bhuishar village (Pakshimul union). But that person changed the ownership of the shop by deception. So, the owner complained to the *Sardars* (headman) of Aruail village. The *Sardars* took

action and beat the possessors. After the end of the Salish, the villagers of Bhuishar, Pakshimul, attacked the villagers of Aruail, and it turned into massive violence. The UNO then came to resolve the issue and make both parties understand. Yet, both parties were involved in a clash again soon after the mitigation. The UNO mentioned:

“[The people of Sarail] have high self-esteem, and they are egoistic – they get offended by small things. And we know that people in riverbanks tend to have high self-esteem. They are not really bad people, yet they are involved in these clashes frequently due to their high self-esteem. Some people tend to maintain higher-class, higher clan/gushti, so they try to maintain that by any means. Their socio-economic status led them to commit such.”

People engage in such violence to serve their families or social groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Despite their differences, they function together during a confrontation. Many people claim that when they win a fight, their status grows. The topic of discussion in the local market is likely to be these clashes. They talk about the winners and losers of a clash. It makes a difference when a group wins because the losers will be mocked, and the winners will be applauded. One of the respondents mentioned this regard:

“They think they are the village’s hero [after winning a clash]. In the village, they walk with his head held high. They don’t care about anyone. But another village people do not take them grandly. They do not like them.” (Aruail)

The pride of victory is extremely important to the people and leaders of the area. Winning gives them more clout in the village. According to a report by The Business Standard, the rivalry between Aruail and Pakshimul village has been going on for 30 years. The majority of the time, the conflict erupted in order to maintain their control over the Aruail market. As a result, minor disputes matter a lot to the influential people in the village who want to expand their control (Amin, 2021).

B. Political Influence on Clashes

The majority of the respondents stated minimal political influence over these clashes, but politically motivated violence spread recently. The present political condition in Sarail is unstable because the ruling failed to secure victory here amid a landslide victory in the 2019 national election. The ruling party is still trying to proliferate their influence in the area while the opposition tries to keep its popularity intact under any circumstances. As UNO of Sarail implied:

“In the first place, No one is influential solely in Sarail; rather, there are some powerpoles. These parties often try to generate influence utilizing violence. Some political leaders use the clashes as an issue for generating influence over the people.”

Politics play a less important role concerning other factors like clan (*gushti*) and village groupings. It is apparent that some people benefit from such clashes and keep on fueling and influencing such confrontations. Political leaders generate influence by extending their support in such confrontations. As stated by the respondents, they support people from behind and provide them with the resources necessary. One of the respondents from Aruail stated:

“Every clash has some principal politicians involved in the matter directly or indirectly. If they want, they can increase and decrease the range of the conflict. These leaders primarily do nothing in particular as most of them are people in business in the local market. They provide money and often handle the matter. They spent lots of money in such encounters.”

One ex-union Parishad member of Sarail was killed brutally in February 2020 by a rival attack (The Daily Star, 2020). A conflict broke out after the event took place. According to the respondents, there prevailed a conflict over spreading dominance between the present UP member and the ex-Union Parishad member for a long period, which caused that killing. It is also found that union Parishad members and the area chairman make a minor/trivial incident too big to maintain their influence. Further, the involvement of political leaders in such violence intensifies people’s spirit to fight. Backed by the leaders, people take part in clashes knowing that leaders will care for the aftermath.

C. Consequences

Many newspapers and TV channels reported injuries and deaths by such clashes, mostly during lockdown for Covid-19. As newspaper and TV channels reported, many such clashes broke out in April-July (Financial Express, 2020). Mutilation is another major consequence. Many people were injured so severely that they lost their body parts. One of the viral reports was that a rickshaw puller lost his leg and later died during a clash (The Daily Observer, 2020). Often people file a case against each other after the clash. One of the respondents stated:

“After facing a big loss, they go to the police and file a case against them (the other group). The involvement of lawsuits makes the issue more intense. Sometimes accused must go to the police station and give attendance. The lawsuit has gone by many years. Accused people spent lots of money on this. Sometimes they left their house and lived in their relative’s place.” (Ranidiya, Aruail)

Sometimes local Sardars and village heads try to provide a solution in the village court (Salish). In Salish, moderators (Sardars) provide a financial penalty for both parties. Clashes cause economic and physical damage to both parties. Such clash makes the condition of villages’ appalling’ owing to the fear of upshot. Many people hide to avoid being caught by the police after the clash is over. Fearing police interrogation, many people try to avoid going

in public and stay at home. During a time of violence, people cannot move from one place to another because of fear of being beaten up by rivals.

Frequent clashes harm the village's social stability. Such clashes spread hatred and hostility among villagers. Many participants in this study said they are still fearful if they see a crowd of people in the local market. Though such frequent conflicts trigger anxiety and fear in the area, they benefit a group of people. Many political leaders and powerful people, as previously said, use such violence to maintain their dominance. Some people also resort to violence in order to exclude their opponents or rivals from the field. Influential people do not take steps to prevent it because of its benefits; instead, they facilitate it. Candidates in local elections, for example, attempt to gain control and establish supremacy by using violence. As many respondents said, many expatriates and wealthy people fund such violence.

D. Conflict Settlement

Often, these clashes end with mutual agreement mediated by the village headman, but the hatred between or among groups remains the same, which causes further clashes. After clashes, the local administration tries to mitigate the issue between the groups. Local police also help the administration to provide a solution, sometimes using Salish. Traditionally, Salish is one of the popular informal courts and judicial institutions at the local level. Gram Adalat is another form of a local court run by the UP Chairperson, and in the end, there are the formal civil and criminal courts run by the state. The study finds Salish as a fast institution for resolving local and family disputes though it is widely accepted in rural areas. The power structure highly influences Salish, and so the powerless and marginalized people have to suffer sometimes. Village courts are run by a panel of people from the rural authority. The village court resolves family disputes, land disputes, physical conflict, minor theft, forgery, and loan recovery cases. The UP Chairperson and other reputed members try to resolve so that the victims need not go to the divisional or supreme court. Often, a third party comes to resolve the issue.

In most cases, they are from another village or respected persons of the region whose decision will be obeyed by both parties. Police do not interfere until any of the groups files any case. It is found that educated people often come to offer a solution for long-established disputes or clashes, but people do not listen to them, as one of the respondents said. Again, the financial penalty might be imposed on both parties, but their disputes over a minimal matter prevail for a long time, consequently influencing future confrontations. For instance, the mentality of taking revenge on the losing side might seed future clashes. Some just wait for the right moment to take revenge. So, the resolution does not work out and encourages further violence. Regarding this issue, one of the respondents from Aruail village stated:

“Yes, those people who get affected a lot need compensation. After getting compensation, they are satisfied. But those people who had to provide compensation didn't get satisfied; they say they are at a loss. But after analysis, it was found that the compensations are given to those people who are really affected.”

So, with the help of the police and administration, local authorities attempt to resolve the issue by Salish to provide compensation and punish the perpetrators. When a group is punished or faces a financial penalty, they take revenge in the subsequent collision. That means they are always prepared for a clash; no Salish or penalty would be able to disarm them. In the majority of cases, police attempt to prevent clashes. Due to people being hostile and aggressive, they do not care about the police and are reluctant to seek a proper solution.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Since this study addresses the causes and patterns of rural conflict, it will facilitate the respective authorities in comprehending the nature of these conflicts and allowing them to take appropriate action.

1. The literacy rate in this region is meagre. People are ignorant of the consequences of the recurrent clashes. The Upazilla Education Office, with the District Education Office, should organize some informative seminars/workshops on basic literacy.
2. The police station was found to be too far from the villages. Though a small police camp is situated in the market, their capability is too low to handle a huge mob. District Police authorities can think about placing small police camps in the most vulnerable villages.
3. Bangladesh Police inaugurated community Bit Policing at the village level to increase the interaction between people and police to reduce crimes (NEW AGE, 2019). Increasing Bit policing sessions can reduce frequent clashes throughout this area.
4. The study found that “Sardars” (Head of the village/community) influence the people of the villages. A list of those Sardars should be placed in the data centre of the police authority and Upazilla Nirbahi Officers (UNO) office. These Sardars can play a big role in mitigating many conflicts.
5. The study found that non-government organizations didn't take any steps regarding these frequent clashes in Brahmanbaria. It is high time the government takes steps to address the issue of frequent clashes.
6. Rural Educational institutions can play a role by organizing some peace workshops along with their teachers and union Parishad members.
7. Union Parishad Chairman & Members must monitor their allocated wards every week. They can organize a weekly meeting in these villages to solve problematic issues.

8. Local authorities can organize recreational or traditional programs involving local people to strengthen solidarity among the people.
9. The area's elected representatives should play a crucial role in minimizing such violence. Some awareness programs should be initiated aimed at making people understand.
10. It was found that foreign immigrants send cash to aid their groups in clashes. Local administration must be aware of such cash flows and monitor the supply of illegal arms.

VII. LIMITATIONS

This qualitative study was conducted in a limited setting with few interviews due to time and budget constraints. Also, there was no research available on this topic. The findings of this qualitative study will help future research.

A. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

B. Source of funding

The researchers received no funding for this research. It was self-funded.

C. Authors Contribution

AR conceptualized this study, developed tools, designed data collection, analyzed data, and wrote the manuscript. MTH supported the development of the study's concept, data analysis, and writing, editing, and finalizing of the manuscript. MSAR and JA supported in designing the field study, developing tools & reviewing the manuscript. JAS and SYP supported the critical review of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

D. Availability of Data and Materials

Data are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This explorative study tried to find out the root causes and effects of such occurrences. Clashes in certain areas are common in Brahmanbaria, and Sarail Upazila is significant. Powerful people's influence, egoism, group affiliation (based on mutual interests), feelings of vengeance, lack of awareness, and low illiteracy rate all play key roles in causing frequent clashes. Village Sardars and other influential people organize such conflicts to show their muscle power to dominate the area. In addition, many people extract benefits from such clashes. There is a geographical factor too. People who live in riverbank areas are often in distress and face a great deal of uncertainty. As a result, even minor issues enrage them, causing them to turn to violence to resolve their disputes. According to

this study, these clashes erupted over trivial issues, with villagers joining in with locally made weapons. Even though these fights harm people in many ways and some die, the villagers are often keenly involved in such clashes. The authorities and educated people attempt to stop it, but the villagers refuse to listen. Conflicts have arisen in the last year owing to Covid-19 and the countrywide shutdown.

As the study found, unemployed and young people are the most provocative in such clashes; school and college closures will exacerbate the situation. Many students have dropped out in recent years due to Covid-19, and many youths have also been involved in work due to family pressure. This huge dropout may be a catalyst for more violence in the coming years. Without strong law enforcement, it is impossible to prevent rural clashes. People, as well as law enforcement agencies, must be made aware of the situation. Both representatives of the people, including the local UP chairman and members, must be involved in this work. To end these conflicts, the rule of law must be established. Government policies should be adopted and enforced. Further research can be conducted on triggering factors of frequent clashes in the Brahmanbaria district.

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