

Avijit killing and the limits of speech: Revisiting the media perspective of Bangladesh

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[Abstract: The writer-blogger Avijit Roy's murder at the end of February 2015 and the aftermath debates that pounded over a series of criticism on ethical and anti-ethical positions of free expression were the focus of this study. The study examined how the print media of Bangladesh treated this murder and looked into the ways of shaping mediated public discourse regarding this killing. It also focused on the public debates dividing into for or against the free expression of opinions and the spreading of hate speech. Items published as news and views from a total of 57 issues of four national daily newspapers both in Bangla and English were examined to get a qualitative impression of the debate and to get an idea of how the public figures who acted as opinion sources were quoted. Also, some Facebook posts were analyzed to get an overall impression of social media on the cause and consequence of this murder. The study found that sometimes public figures do use hate speech and promote conflicting debates in media as a weapon of political benefits. Conflicting issues like religious radicalism, dominant cultural norms, and various offensive issues need to be revisited to get standard performance by the media of Bangladesh.]

Keywords: Freedom of expression, limits of speech, blogger, Bangladeshi newspapers

Introduction

In February 2015 Bangladeshi American blogger Avijit Roy, the founder of a secularist website '*Mukto Mona*' was hacked to death in a busy street in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Just a few days later another blogger Washikur Rahman met the same fate. Both men were killed for allegedly airing critical views on religion on social media. Threats of violence against freethinkers in Bangladesh were common (The New York Times Magazine, 2015). The social media space in Bangladesh is a polarized place where on one side are secular bloggers who want to prevent religion from seeking further into politics; on the other hand, some voices associate themselves with political Islam pushing for blasphemy laws to protect their religion. Ahmed (2018, p. 11) observed clashing with political and religious authorities is a rich legacy of the media in Bangladesh and the historical region of Bengal.

The law enforcement bodies have launched a crackdown on alleged 'Islamic militants' in response to a wave of violence against atheist bloggers, liberal academics, gay-rights campaigners, foreign aid workers, and members of minority religious groups.

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In 2015 in Bangladesh, according to Odhikar (a Bangladeshi human rights organization), 64 people disappeared, 185 died in extrajudicial killings, and a further 197 died in political violence (Aljazeera, 2016). Furthermore, the government itself initiated formulating policies and laws to direct security agencies to monitor social media and prosecute political opponents, journalists, internet commentators, broadcasters, and users who offend the government (Human Rights Watch, 2018). It observed police in Bangladesh had registered hundreds of complaints under the Information and Communication Technology Act (2016) including against authors of social media posts and journalists criticizing the political leadership and the ruling Awami League party. Again, Amnesty International (2021) observed that how defamation is criminalized under the Digital Security Act (2018) shows the serious shortcomings of a criminal approach to defamation, where the law has been further instrumentalized to silence dissent. Also, the law is being increasingly used to stifle dissent on social media, websites, and digital platforms. Amnesty International reports that at least 433 people got imprisoned under the DSA as of July 2021, most of whom are held on allegations of publishing false and offensive information online. Human rights activists and civil society groups have criticized the tactics and strategies of such crackdowns of going after the suspects. Increasing use of the internet has made surveillance on the Net by the authority more frequent. Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) ordered blocking of several sites amidst a tense national election campaign at the end of 2018 (Anon., 2018).

As for the context, the route to this study goes back to 1971, Bangladesh's war of independence with Pakistan, and a legal case that has yet to be resolved. The top figures of the opposition *Jamaat-e-Islami* party were hanged to death and life sentences after being convicted of genocide back in 1971 by the war crimes tribunal that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina set up in 2010 to investigate what happened in 1971. The ruling *Awami League* made the war crimes trials one of its key goals, however, the opposition parties including the *Bangladesh Nationalist Party* (BNP), and the *Jammat-e-Islami* take the war crimes trials as politically motivated and have more to do with settling scores of oppositions in the name of dispensing justice to the war victims (Reuters, 2013, 2015). The fractious and discordant nature of the country's politics was exposed as the major parties failed to come close when dealing with an issue as emotive as trials of war crimes (BBC, 2013). The social media debates about the trials began online, people spilled out onto the streets, and voices were raised from the '*gonojagoron moncho*' (a platform of people's renaissance) or called as '*Shahbag Movement*' to vow the end of war criminals in the country. The *Jamaat-e-Islami* and the allied parties went on '*hartal*' in protest of the controversial verdict by the tribunals and alleged that the movement is blessed by the then AL government which used the protests to potentially gain electoral support from Shahbagh supporters and to increase nationalist sentiments (IRB, 2014). On the other hand, the mainstream media of Bangladesh went on with their regular duties in questioning the government's version of this story had found themselves under pressure. Ever since this ongoing political and social unrest started in 2013 till to date, restrictions are placed on both traditional and online media. Social media platforms were blocked for 22 days in 2015 to quell violence as a response to the death penalty handed out by the war crimes tribunals. This history of censorship worryingly displayed where the priorities of the state lie, especially given the fact that writers, bloggers, and publishers have also been under direct attack from religious extremists since 2013 (The Asia Dialogue, 2018).

The central question of this study keeping the background was to get the meaning of to what extent the Avijit killing incident initiated the public discourse on the ethics and

anti-ethics juxtaposition of opinion and freedom of speech and how people expressed their dissatisfactions or hatred. The study also tried to explore in what ways the newspapers of Bangladesh went to uphold public sentiment and repugnance as dominant cultural norms of the country on one hand and the scope of freedom of expression within the limits, on the other. Furthermore, this study portrayed the restrictive measures by the authority to curb media which reflects the socio-political culture of Bangladeshi society.

Freedom of expression in Bangladesh

Free speech is the cornerstone of democracy, but not excuse for spreading hate speech (UN Montenegro, 2021). It is essential to the people's right to criticize the government, even during wartime or other national emergencies. Freedom of speech means that any ideas may be heard. The people and not the government shall decide what is true and what is false. Debates on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide open. A strong tradition of free speech should result from a series of choices. These choices should be not only Supreme Court decisions or ruling party mandates but also choices by advocacy groups that bring the major cases before the court and choices by society to affirm very broad protection of free speech. The central question is why those choices were not made in Bangladesh yet so far to be realized as effective.

In Articles 39 and 43 of the Bangladesh Constitution, the right to freedom of speech and expression is recognized. Islam (2017) observes despite the constitutional protection, sections 57, 54, 61, and 76 of the ICT Act, 2006 and the Amendment of 2013 thereof have given huge discretionary power to the police, abuse of which has been one of the major concerns in Bangladesh (Islam 2017). On the flip side, freedom on the Net or social media has been comparatively a new issue that most countries yet to have a clear reference for. Islam (2017) observes that the Constitution of Bangladesh, the ICT Act, and other relevant laws are not synchronized enough to control social media in relation to the right to freedom of speech and expression.

The revisions to the International War Crimes Tribunal Act (1973) in 2009 and 2011 and the current tribunal's procedural rules were intended to meet international standards. Issues such as victim and witness protection, the presumption of innocence, defendant access to counsel, and the right to bail all these standards are ensured in the aims of revision (bdlaws, 2022). Established by the Awami League government in 2010, the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) started handing down verdicts in early 2013 (Refworld, 2014). However, observers note gathering evidence 40 years later and ensuring that the law and rules of procedure meet international standards is a complicated process with many challenges (HRW, 2011). However, the trials conducted by the War Crime Tribunal so far have fallen short of these standards. Concerns raised by Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2011) regarding political interference, shortcomings in the due process rights of the accused, and inadequate protection given to witnesses and defense lawyers. In 2013, the ICT handed down several sentences, with most defendants receiving the death penalty. Abdul Quader Mollah was executed in February, prompting fears of increased instability. Following the Shahbagh protests, the law governing the tribunal was amended in February 2013 to allow prosecutors as well as the defense to appeal sentences (Amnesty International, 2013).

In the political arena, Bangladesh has been having a strong two-party system with power alternating regularly between political coalitions led by the AL and BNP. Both the major political parties make regular use of *hartals* (strikes) and mass protests to oppose

their counterpart's initiatives, observed Freedom House (2014). The level of political violence and intolerance to dissents in Bangladesh reaches heights and increases during the national elections. As observed, harassment of the opposition was widespread in 2013, ranging from charges filed against senior opposition political leaders to limitations placed on political activities, particularly rallies, and processions; the report says (Freedom House, 2014).

The status of the media in Bangladesh declined from Partly Free to Not Free and is almost in the same position for the last couple of years. The consequential effects of the murders of four bloggers and a publisher by Islamist militants, threats and nonfatal attacks against other writers, continued legal harassment of media outlets and press freedom advocates, government-sanctioned economic pressure on certain outlets, and attempts to censor social media, have resulted in shrinking democratic state in Bangladesh (Freedom House, 2016). It is mentioned in the report that in 2015 Bangladesh's media environment suffered major holdups. Deadly attacks against bloggers and a spate of politically motivated legal cases against journalists marked the year. State censorship on internet-based content and the signs of intolerance by the AL govt. also had an alarming effect on freedom of expression (Freedom House, 2016). Print media, however, are generally given more freedom than broadcasters. The television industry is not out of these challenges. In May 2013, several television stations were closed down by authorities. The issue of closure remains a problem for the television industry, representing a crisis not only in its political economy but also in its status in the community. Groups concerned very often accuse commercial television of lacking integrity and credibility as a source of news and information. The perception is reinforced by the fact that leading political figures with interests in television were detained on charges of corruption. Also, the market-oriented practices of the majority of TV channels weaken the capacity of television and fundamentally make it incompatible with the normative theses of the public sphere or post-Habermasian public spheres (Genilo and Shafi, 2013).

The repressive measures by the state and the death threats and attacks against bloggers have aggravated self-censorship practices, leading many to stop writing, go into hiding, or leave the country. As reported, there have been at least five bloggers attacked in Bangladesh since 2013, four of them since February 2015. Niloy Chatterjee, a blogger, was hacked to death at his home in Dhaka, and Ananta Bijoy Das, another blogger, was killed in the Subid Bazar area of Sylhet city as he walked in the morning. Blogger Washiqur Rahman Babu was hacked to death in Dhaka by three men over alleged anti-Islamic writings, with two of the suspected attackers caught near the scene. Bangladeshi-born American writer-blogger Avijit Roy was killed near the Dhaka University campus in 2015 (Aljazeera, 2015).

Censorship of internet-based content by state authorities has become increasingly common in Bangladesh. Periodic blocking of YouTube, Facebook, other social media and messaging applications, and high-profile Bengali blogs is at the discretion of the authority. In November 2015, Freedom House (2016) observed the government temporarily block the social-media platforms Facebook, Viber, and WhatsApp, allegedly to maintain public order at the time of the controversial sentencing of opposition leaders for war crimes dating back to 1971. On a more realistic note, it can be argued that freedom does not mean license however, curtailing freedom of expression with regulations might not be the solution, rather how freedom of expression should be exercised in the context of new media or social media environment should be the debate.

Avijit Roy's posts and foreign media reports

The pretext of the deadly killing of Avijit Roy and the expressions of Avijit in his blogs triggered the miscreants', demands reviewing for a better understanding of the plot of this study. *BBC* in its interpretation mentioned that Roy's family say he received threats after publishing articles promoting secular views, science, and social issues on his Bengali-language blog, *Mukto-mona* (Free Mind). Founding *Mukto-Mona* (Free Mind) blog site in 2001 to champion secular and humanist writing in Muslim-majority Bangladesh, he defended atheism in a recent Facebook post, calling it a 'rational concept to oppose any unscientific and irrational belief' (*BBC News*, 2015).

In an obituary, *BBC News* wrote:

In one of his last published articles in the *Free Inquiry* magazine, Mr Roy wrote: To me, religious extremism is like a highly contagious virus. My own recent experiences in this regard verify the horrific reality that such religious extremism is a virus of faith (27 February 2015).

CNN (2 March 2015) reported:

He had no place for religious dogma, including from Islam, the main religion of his native Bangladesh. Extremists resented him for openly and regularly criticizing religion in his blog. They threatened to kill him if he came home from the United States to visit. On Thursday (Feb. 26) someone finally did.

Report by *The Guardian* (27 February 2015):

Roy, founder of the *Mukto-Mona* (Free-mind) blog, which featured articles on scientific reasoning and religion, had been receiving threats for some time. A Facebook posting this month said that he would be killed once he arrived in the capital. The couple arrived in Dhaka on 15 February.... The attacks starkly underline an increasing gulf between secular bloggers and conservative Islamic groups, often covertly connected with Islamist parties. Secularists have urged authorities to ban religion-based politics, while Islamists have pressed for blasphemy laws to prevent criticism of their faith.

In a post on *Mukto-Mona* Avijit wrote:

I founded this 'blasphemous site *Mukto-Mona* (www.mukto-mona.com) in the year of 2001, with a singular intention: to debate and discuss on controversial, but utterly important issues. Only with this principle, I thought, can the construction of a progressive, rational and secular society be possible in mainstream Bangladesh and South Asia. I was proud of MM's growing popularity in the progressive community over the years... (5 October 2013).

Avijit wrote in another Facebook post (21 January 2015):

'It all started with a book.

A national book fair (popularly known as *Ekushey Book Fair*) is held every February in Bangladesh. One of my recent publishers Jagriti Prakashani published my book *Biswisher Virus* (Bengali for The Virus of Faith) during the Book Fair of 2014. As soon as the book was released, it rose to the Book Fair's bestseller list. At the same time, it hit the cardinal nerve of fundamentalists. The death threats started flowing to my inbox on a regular basis. I suddenly found myself to be a target of militant Islamists and terrorists. A man by the name of Shafiur Rahman Farabi openly issued death threats to me through his numerous Facebook statuses. In one of his widely-circulated statuses, Farabi wrote, 'Avijit Roy lives in America and so, it is not possible to kill him right now. But he will be murdered when he comes back.'

In the same post, Avijit also wrote:

Let me be fair. When I state that certain religious acts are viruses, I certainly do not ignore religion's evolutionary origin. After all, religion is a product of the complex biological and cognitive processes that are deeply rooted in our evolutionary past (21 January 2015).

Another post by Avijit says:

Today, we state clearly that considering apostasy to be a criminal offense in state level in fact is an inexcusable offense. If being religious is someone's right, then being critical to religion is also one's right. There is nothing wrong to be critical to any idea or ideology,...(30 September 2013).

It has been widely agreed that the protection of free speech is essential for a democracy committed to personal autonomy and political pluralism. Free speech is quintessential for maintaining democracy because it facilitates the exchange of diverse opinions. In a representative and vibrant democracy, the exchange of dialogue facilitates the testing of competing claims and obtaining of diverse input into political decision-making. Free speech is also essential to the enjoyment of personal autonomy (Solove 2007). However, Solove (2007, p. 4) expressed concern that the gossip, shaming, and rumors that are being spread online are sometimes having devastating effects on people's lives. Also, Post (1991, p. 268-269) mentions any use of derogatory names, inappropriately directed laughter, inconsiderate jokes, anonymous notes or phone calls, and conspicuous exclusion from conversations are generally prohibited behaviors usually used in a racist expression.

It is evident that potential interpersonal friction exists where the speech of one person threatens the rights or safety of another. Commitment to equality means the existence of free individual expressions. In the area of hate speech, the libertarian notion of free expression comes into tension with the aspiration of equal dignity. With the expansion of the Internet, new regulatory challenges more frequently arise because of the global reach of hate propaganda transmitted from one country like the United States, where it is legal, and streamed into other countries, like France, where such communications are criminal offenses. Societies committed to pluralism are obligated to safeguard individual expression while promoting egalitarian principles (characterized by belief in the equality of all people, especially in political, economic, or social life) against harming others' safety and dignity. The preference for an individual's right to the protection of his own good name reflects the basic concept of the essential dignity and worth of every human being. As pointed out by Solove (2007) hate speakers seek to intimidate targeted groups from participating in the deliberative process. The freedom to intimidate or terrorize vulnerable groups, for instance, can prevent others from enjoying their equal right to public safety. Aggressive encouragement against identifiable groups can also attack their sense of dignity. Against this backdrop, attempts have been taken to use legal regulation to eradicate all visible signs of 'racist sentiment' in countries across the globe. The articles in National Constitutions and the constitutionality of restrictions on racist or hate speech have been scrutinized extensively in different countries. Bangladesh's Penal Code (Section 153A) sanctions against the promotion or attempt to promote feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes. It states clearly that 'whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations, or otherwise, promotes or attempts to promote feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of the citizens of Bangladesh, shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with

both' (Section 153A, The Penal Code, Bangladesh, 1860). On a positive note, these rules are plainly not designed to regulate specific forms of behavior or expression, but rather to encompass and forbid behaviors of possible indication of racism or hate speech.

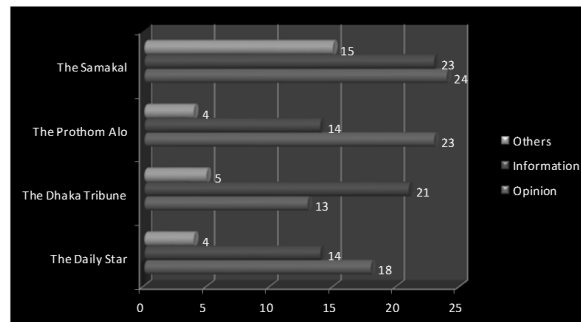
Although the role of free speech and mass participation in our parliamentary democracy has been acknowledged as the lifeblood of good governance and accountability, however, free speech without reasonable limits can provoke unexpected or irrelevant opinions to flow to every corner of society which can destroy communal peace and harmony. This was correctly emphasized by Post (1991) that democracy has its obligation to respect self-assertion. For Post (1991, p. 282), 'the normative essence of democracy is . . . located in the communicative processes necessary to instill a sense of self-determination'. Mentioning the importance of public discourse to the development of a democratic collective will, Post wrote elsewhere, that "racist speech is and ought to be immune from regulation within public discourse (Post 1991, p. 322).

Methodology

Published reports on the killing of Avijit Roy have been identified and coded and measured in column inches with specific samples from four leading daily newspapers in Bangladesh. A total of 57 issues of fifteen days (from 27 February to 13 March) from the four national dailies namely *The Daily Star* (English daily newspaper), *The Dhaka Tribune* (English daily newspaper), *The Prothom Alo* (Bengali daily newspaper), and *The Samakal* (Bengali daily newspaper) were examined. The sample newspapers are popular and are among the top 3 highest-circulated newspapers. Samples of fifteen days of the month of February and March 2015 of each paper have been selected for content analysis. The researcher developed three 'coding themes' to evaluate the sources used by selected newspapers in this study. Also, the study tried to analyze the quotations from different opinions and information sources used in the news stories to get the essence of public discourse on the Avijit killing issue.

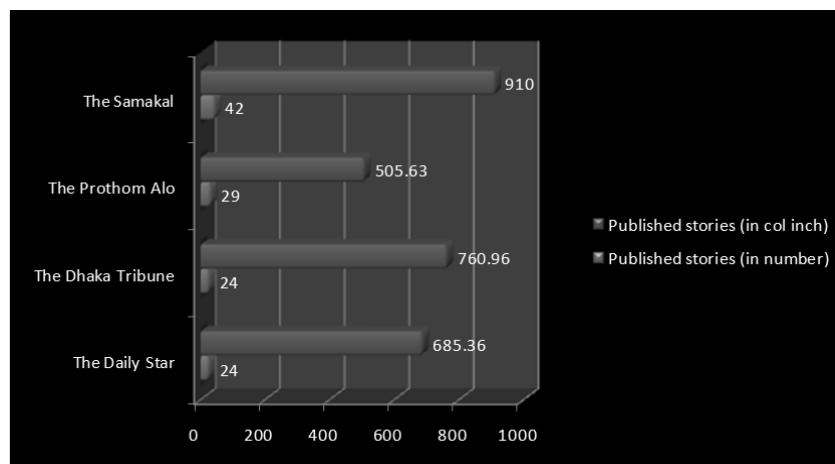
Findings and Discussion

Figure 1 shows that the Bengali daily *Samakal* used the highest number of sources of all categories (62 sources) for news and views stories on the Avijit killing. This newspaper used sources for opinion for the maximum items on the issue to have analysis and interpretations and the opinion of the public. On the other hand, *The Daily Star* used the lowest number of sources (36 sources) for stories related to Avijit's killing. For the relevance of the study all the sources used in news have been categorized as '*Opinion source*' (sources that are not directly related to the event but holds social and political importance in the society as members of civil society); as '*Information source*' (sources that are directly related to the incident as the survivors of the accident or those who were rescued alive, persons related to the investigation of the incident, as member of the law enforcing authority, as members of government departments); and as '*Others*' (sources that are non-personal, statements of political, social and civil society forums, written documents, comments not directly coming from any person, social media texts, quotations and reports from published sources). It was evident from the analysis that most of the newspapers (3) namely the *Prothom Alo*, *Samakal*, and the *Daily Star* used 'opinion sources' more frequently than all other news and information sources. Only the Dhaka Tribune used 'information sources' more in numbers than any other sources it used.

Figure 1 - Categories of sources used in the selected newspapers

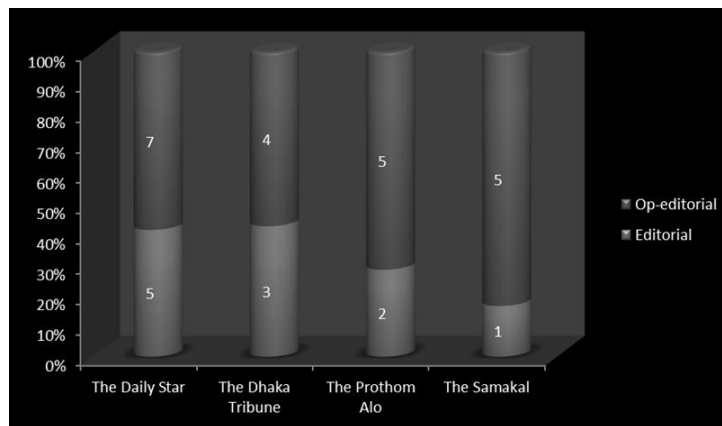
Source: Data collected from newspapers namely 'Prothom Alo', 'Samakal', 'The Daily Star', and 'Dhaka Tribune' of 2015.

Figure 2 shows that *The Samakal* published the highest number of stories (42 items) on Avijit during the sample period. It also gave the highest space allocation to this event. On the other hand, *The Daily Star* and *The Dhaka Tribune* published the same number of stories (24 items each) on the Avijit killing but *The Dhaka Tribune* allocated more print area for the item. The Bengali daily *Prothom Alo* allocated the lowest amount of space for this event. But both the Bengali newspapers published a greater number of news on Avijit than the English dailies.

Figure 2 - News stories on the Avijit killing published in the selected newspapers

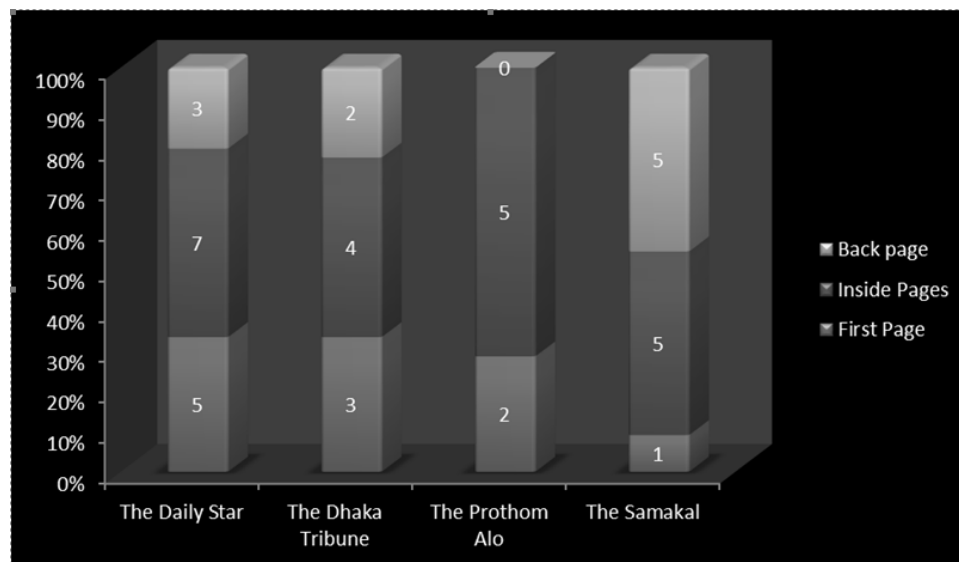
Source: Data collected from newspapers namely 'Prothom Alo', 'Samakal', 'The Daily Star', and 'Dhaka Tribune' of 2015.

It is seen in Figure 3 that *The Daily Star* published the highest number of editorials and op-editorials on the Avijit killing story. It is also evident that the newspaper gave more space (403.99 col inches) for editorial and op-editorial than space allocated by the other three newspapers under study.

Figure 3 - Editorial and Op-editorial published in the selected newspapers

Source: Data collected from newspapers namely 'Prothom Alo', 'Samakal', 'The Daily Star', and 'Dhaka Tribune' of 2015.

It is seen in Figure 4 that the Bengali daily *Samakal* gave more importance to the incident by publishing the maximum number of stories on the front page (16 stories) and also publishing the maximum number of stories altogether. It is evident that all four newspapers published more news on the inside pages compared to the first page and back page.

Figure 4 - News published in different pages of the selected newspapers

Source: Data collected from newspapers namely 'Prothom Alo', 'Samakal', 'The Daily Star', and 'Dhaka Tribune' of 2015.

Furthermore, Table 1 shows that *The Daily Star* used the highest number of pics and gave the highest amount of space for pics on this item. On the other hand, *The Prothom Alo* used the lowest number of pics and allocated the lowest amount of space for pics of Avijit killing during the sample period.

Table 1 - Use of pics by the selected newspapers

| Name of newspapers | Number of pics | Space given (in col inch) |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| The Daily Star | 43 | 440.94 |
| The Dhaka Tribune | 19 | 288.84 |
| The Prothom Alo | 14 | 112.66 |
| The Samakal | 21 | 192.97 |

Source: Data collected from newspapers namely 'Prothom Alo', 'Samakal', 'The Daily Star', and 'Dhaka Tribune' of 2015.

Table 2 shows that *The Daily Star*, *The Dhaka Tribune*, and *The Prothom Alo* used comments and opinions from the 'members of authority' like heads of organizations, and representatives of government and non-governmental organizations as for most of their opinion sources. On the other hand, *Samakal* used comments and opinions from politicians as their major sources of opinion. Activists like human rights activists, activists of social rights, and women's rights have been used as opinion sources by all the newspapers. Most of the opinion sources appear in stories several times but for this study, one single opinion source has been counted only one time.

Table 2 - Categories of opinion sources used by the selected newspapers

| Categories of Opinion source | Name of newspapers | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| | The Daily Star(n) | The Dhaka Tribune(n) | The Prothom Alo (n) | The Samakal (n) |
| Politician | 4 | 2 | 3 | 13 |
| Journalist | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Activist | 5 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Educationist | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 |
| Relatives | 3 | 2 | 5 | 4 |
| Eye witness | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Member of Authority | 7 | 4 | 9 | 4 |

Source: Data collected from newspapers namely 'Prothom Alo', 'Samakal', 'The Daily Star', and 'Dhaka Tribune' of 2015.

Table 3 shows that all four newspapers used a range of different sources which are categorized as 'others' in this study. All four newspapers used *Facebook* posts, *Twitter* posts, and blogs from different sources. Also, all four newspapers used statements from civil society organizations, political parties, journalists, associations, and statements from the foreign embassy in Dhaka. The Bengali daily *Samakal* used reports published in other

foreign dailies and news agency reports like quotes from *Washington Post*, *Guardian*, *BBC World Service*, *BBC Bangla Service*, and reports from *AFP* and *AP* sources and quoted from them. Again, *Samakal* used reports of different foreign news agencies more in number than all three other newspapers. Also, *Samakal* used Facebook posts more in number than all three other newspapers.

Table 3 - Categories of ‘other’ sources used by the selected newspapers

| Categories of ‘other’ ‘source’ | Name of newspapers | | | |
|--|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| | The Daily Star(n) | The Dhaka Tribune(n) | The Prothom Alo (n) | The Samakal (n) |
| Facebook post | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Twitter post | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Message published on the Facebook page of organizations | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Blog | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Statements /letters of authority | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Newspapers /news agency reports | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |

Source: Data collected from newspapers namely ‘Prothom Alo’, ‘Samakal’, ‘The Daily Star’, and ‘Dhaka Tribune’ of 2015.

As the study analyzed the news published in the four national dailies of Bangladesh from February 27 to March 13, 2015, as a sample of content, it is evident in the treatment of news and views by the four dailies that the dailies published the incident of killing of Avijit Roy with top importance during the first couple of days. All gave the incident big coverage with several editorials and open editorials on it. The *Daily Star* (01.03.2015) and *Samakal* (02.03.2015) published open editorials on the killing of Avijit Roy on the first pages. *Samakal* gave more coverage with news than the other three newspapers in this incident and *The Daily Star* published more pictures than others. *Samakal* also provided a large number of information sources with versatility.

Analyses of the sources of the news published in the newspapers show that most of the information sources were high officials working on the investigation of the killing. Information was collected from Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), the Detective Branch (DB) of DMP, and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) officials as they were working on it. Individually, Professor Ajay Roy, father of Avijit Roy; Monirul Islam, joint commissioner of DB and Rafida Ahmed Bonna, wife of Avijit Roy, were used as info sources several times and became regular sources of information and opinion for the four dailies.

It is necessary to mention one of the important findings of this study that the use of ‘opinion source’ and quoting their opinions more in news stories by the three newspapers of this study (the *Prothom Alo*, *Samakal*, and *The Daily Star*) reflect the effort to encourage and initiate the public discourse on the ethics and anti-ethics juxtaposition of opinion and freedom of speech and how people expressed their dissatisfactions regarding the killing of Avijit.

Another finding is that newspapers in this survey published news on the development of the investigation conducted by the law-enforcing agency and about the steps and measures to capture and identify the culprits at regular intervals. All the papers even protested the incident in editorials, but none of the four newspapers published any investigative news about the incident initiated by them. They just published whatever their sources told and whatever the official investigating authorities were providing as information or whenever some development occurred in the investigation process.

Conclusion

The media has its own responsibilities to provide interpretations and initiate investigations to uncover any crime and offense in society. Here the study observed that none of the four newspapers published any news which could introduce Dr. Avijit Roy to common people. People still thought that Avijit Roy was an atheist who criticizes Islam with his writing and it infused dissatisfaction in the mind of the Islami extremists or terrorists. Again, the analysis of the Facebook posts by Avijit Roy clearly and definitely indicates his apprehension about the dissatisfactions of those alleged Islamic extremists and death threats was evident as the price of 'free expression' on socio-religious subject matters. The discourse on any subject of any society could be positively debated and logically expressed and refuted if tolerance towards others' opinions can be practiced. Media as a crucial institution of any society has the duty towards its people to facilitate them with interpretations and evaluation on any conflicting issues. However, to counter hate speech, therefore, legislative efforts to regulate free expression might raise concerns that in the long run, the attempts to curb hate speech may silence dissent and opposition. Thus, the media as the fourth estate can seek to prevent harm and ensure equality or public participation of all through their educative and counter-messages while showing the whole spectrum of hateful expression. The study concludes that the four newspapers under the study could initiate a vibe of public discourse on free expression, tolerance towards others' opinions, and democratic deliberations while keeping the Avijit killing incident in the background.

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[সার-সংক্ষেপ : ২০১৫ সালের ফেব্রুয়ারী মাসে জনপ্রিয় লেখক ও ব্লগার অভিজিত রায়ের হত্যা এবং এ নিয়ে মুক্ত মত প্রকাশের নীতি-নৈতিকতার অবস্থান এবং বোদ্ধাদের তৎপরবর্তী সমালোচনা ইত্যাকার নানাবিধ বিষয় তুলে আনাই এই গবেষণার মূল লক্ষ্য। বাংলাদেশের মুদ্রণ গণমাধ্যম এই আলোচিত ঘটনাটি কীভাবে বিবেচনা করেছিল এবং এই প্রেক্ষিতে গড়ে ওঠা জনমতের প্রতিফলনকে কীভাবে তুলে ধরেছিল সেটাই এই গবেষণার বিশ্লেষণের প্রধান বিষয়। মতামতের মুক্ত প্রকাশ এবং ঘৃণা ও সহিংসতার বহিঃপ্রকাশ কীভাবে জনমতকে বিভাজিত করে সেটাই এই গবেষণায় তুলে ধরার চেষ্টা করা হয়েছে। বাংলা ও ইংরেজিতে প্রকাশিত চারটি জাতীয় দৈনিক সংবাদপত্রের ৫৭টি সংখ্যা এই গবেষণায় নমুনা হিসেবে নেয়া হয়। সমাজের গণ্যমান্য ব্যক্তি মানুষেরা কীভাবে এই ঘটনায় প্রতিক্রিয়া জানায় তা তুলে ধরা হয়েছে। অভিজিত রায়ের কিছু ফেসবুক পোস্ট ও এখানে বিশ্লেষণ করা হয়েছে। এই গবেষণায় দেখা গেছে যে, জনপ্রতিনিধিরা কখনও কখনও হিংসা বিদ্বেষমূলক বক্তব্য ব্যবহার করেন রাজনৈতিক ফায়দা হাসিলের জন্য এবং গণমাধ্যমকে তা প্রকাশের মাধ্যম হিসেবে ব্যবহার করেন। গণমাধ্যমের অধিকতর উন্নয়নের লক্ষ্যে ধর্মীয় উগ্রবাদ, প্রাধান্যশীল সামাজিক রীতি নীতি এবং বিভিন্ন বিদ্বেষমূলক ইস্যু গণমাধ্যমে কীভাবে প্রতিফলিত হয় তা নিয়ে অধিকতর গবেষণার প্রয়োজন বলে এই গবেষণায় বেরিয়ে এসেছে।]