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Venezuela and Bangladesh: Two Theatres, Same Actor

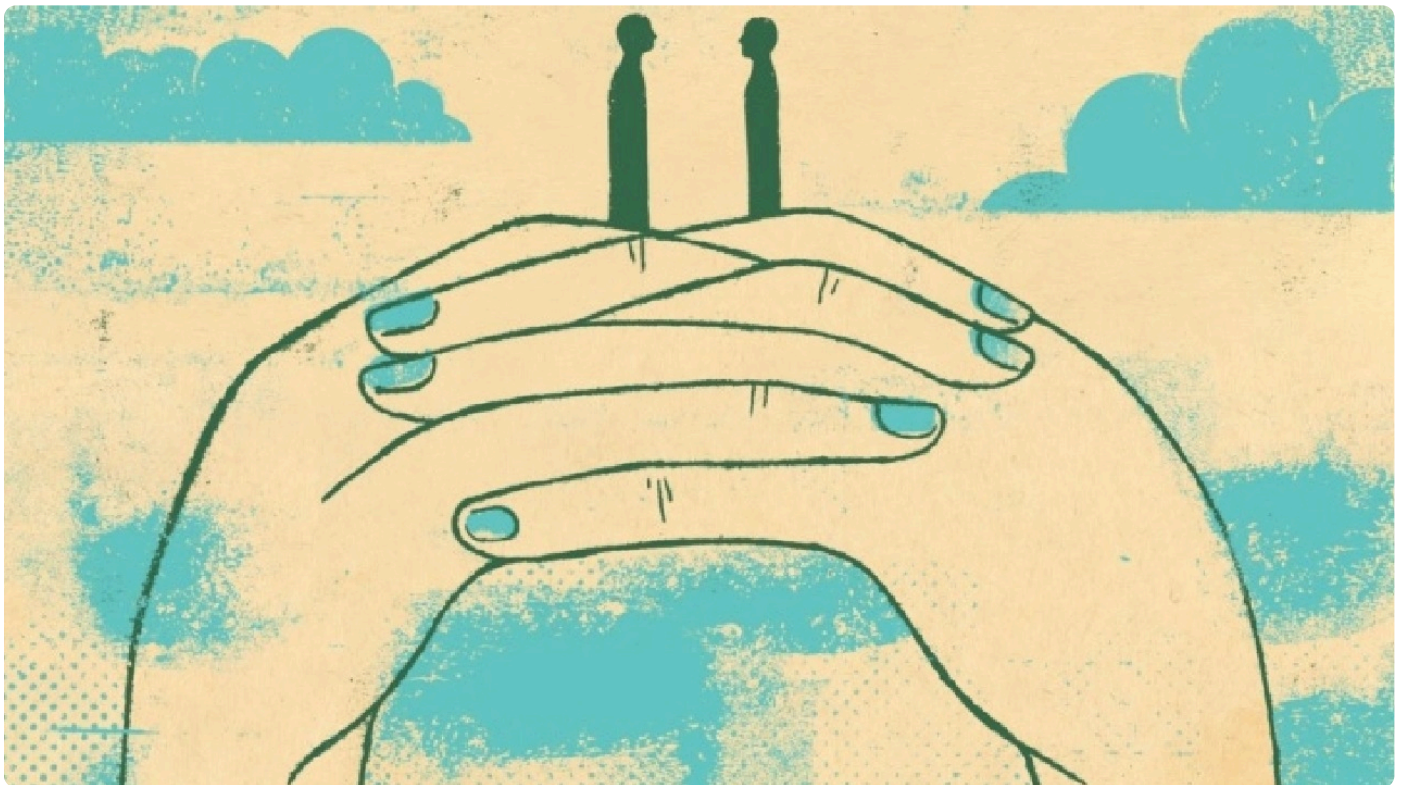
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By Acharya Prashant



Violence never arrives announcing itself as violence. It arrives wrapped in reasons and slogans, in duty, in faith, in law, in nation, and demands that you honour it as necessary. It extracts your moral consent first, and only then does it spill blood.

The actor I'm pointing to is not a that converts harm into virtue. The seed of mischief is always the , long before it becomes a flag,

a party, a scripture, or a border.

In early January 2026, Venezuela woke up to the language of force. Explosions in and around Caracas, helicopters over a guarded compound, and by the end of it Nicolás Maduro is no longer in his own capital, he is in American custody, headed to a New York courtroom to face charges. Washington calls it law, executed with military muscle. Caracas calls it a violation of sovereignty. The slogans clash, the flags argue, and ordinary people bend down to lift stones, sweep glass, and count bodies.

In the same week, in Bangladesh, a Hindu shopkeeper closes his pharmacy on New Year's Eve and starts for home. On the road he is stopped, stabbed, beaten, drenched in petrol, and set on fire. To live, he throws himself into a pond. Later he dies. That is how thin the line is between daily life and organised cruelty. Another man, a garment worker, is beaten and burned by a mob over a blasphemy allegation that even the police reportedly did not find evidence for. The Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council says there have been over 2,400 incidents of violence against minorities since August 2024.

One situation comes wearing the badge of the state, the chain of command, the paperwork of law. The other comes as a neighbourhood crowd, fed by rumour, intoxicated on collective conviction. The scale differs, the method differs, the language differs, but the inner permission to hurt is painfully familiar.

The point is not to equalise the outcomes. A state with aircraft carriers is not the same as a mob with petrol cans, and legal process is not the same as lynching. But the point is to recognise the same inner move, the one that converts harm into duty and cruelty into virtue.

Violence Never Arrives Calling Itself Violence

The Crusader did not march announcing greed; he marched to "save" a sacred site. The Inquisition did not call itself terror; it called itself salvation. Colonial conquest did not describe itself as plunder; it called itself a civilising mission. Partition did not call itself ethnic cleansing; it called itself freedom. The pattern is old, and it keeps repeating for one simple reason: the ego borrows noble words and then does ignoble things.

In Bangladesh, nobody says, "We chose them because they are vulnerable." They say, "We are defending faith," "We are punishing blasphemy," "We are protecting honour." In Washington, nobody says, "We are enforcing interests." They say, "We are fighting narco-terrorism," "We are restoring democracy," "We have" vocabulary is local, the grammar is universal. The costume changes, the permission remains.

The danger is not hypocrisy. Hypocrisy at least knows it is lying. The real danger is self-deception. The mob member can genuinely feel holy, the official can genuinely feel civilised, and the ego keeps its heroic self-image intact while bodies burn and buildings collapse. Self-deception is cheaper than change. It lets me keep my violence and my virtue both.

The Weak Are Chosen, the Strong Are Invoked

Notice the selection: violence is rarely random. It has preferences.

In Bangladesh, the targets are those with little protection and little power: a worker, a shopkeeper, a minority family. In Venezuela, the target is a nation that cannot retaliate in kind, cannot impose equivalent costs, cannot match the machinery brought against it. Violence prefers the exposed. It calculates before it moralises.

This is where righteousness is recruited as costume for asymmetry.

Empires seldom "liberate" equals. They move where resistance can be managed. Mobs seldom punish the well-armed. They punish the exposed. The imbalance is not incidental, it is the condition that makes harm convenient, and then morality is brought in to make cowardice look like courage. Later, history is written to make the weak deserve what they got.

Identity Before Truth

How does a human being reach a point where burning a neighbour feels like sacred duty, and bombing a foreign capital feels like humanitarian service?

Truth demands inquiry. Identity demands loyalty. The two cannot coexist for long. The moment identity becomes sacred, inquiry becomes betrayal. When inquiry ends, violence starts looking like common sense.

In Bangladesh, identity says, "This land belongs to us; they are outsiders; their presence is provocation." In Washington, identity says, "We are custodians of global order; resistance to our vision is resistance to progress; the leader we oppose is soon recast as criminal." The statements differ, the structure is the same. The world is split into those who belong and those who do not. Once the other becomes a symbol, harm stops feeling like harm, it starts feeling like defence. Even killing begins to feel like hygiene.

This is *avidya*, the basic ignorance that makes me confuse identity with existence. The confusion runs deep: I start believing that a challenge to my group is a threat to my survival. Put it in plain language: when identity

feels threatened, I stop seeing human beings and start seeing targets. The believer fears diminishment, the superpower fears decline. An enemy is the fastest way to make identity feel real, and fear is then precisely what turns cruelty into sacred duty.

The ego is a restless, incomplete thing. It needs constant proof of its own existence. And nothing proves existence like an enemy. Without the other to hate, the self feels hollow. So it keeps manufacturing others: the infidel, the invader, the rogue state, the terrorist. These are not just political categories. They are psychological necessities. The incomplete self cannot rest; it must constantly assert, defend, attack. Violence is not an aberration of the ego. It is the ego's natural expression when it feels cornered.

Crowds Outside, Institutions Inside

We draw a neat moral line between the mob and the institution. The mob looks primitive. The institution looks sophisticated. Procedure promises restraint, so we relax. We assume that paperwork slows down cruelty, that chains of command dilute it, that civilisation has built walls against barbarism. Sometimes it has, but often the walls are temporary and decorative.

In Bangladesh, violence is visible. Flames, screams, burnt flesh, a lane that smells of petrol. The cruelty is legible, so the world recoils.

In Venezuela, violence is procedural. It arrives through uniforms, strikes, legal filings, court dates. Words like "precision" and "authority" do a lot of moral work. Press conferences replace confessions of intent. So people argue over jurisdiction and precedent while the human cost recedes into the background.

A life lost is a life lost. A civilian killed in an apartment does not become less dead because the mechanism was "policy" rather than petrol. Sophistication can become camouflage, and what passes for moral reasoning can degenerate into preference for cleaner methods, not commitment to non-violence. The question is not whether the killing was orderly. The question is whether there was a killing.

Some will say, "A state action conducted under law, aimed at a leader accused of crimes, cannot be spoken of in the same breath as a mob burning a man alive." Forms differ, and legality matters. Due process exists for a reason; the alternative is lynching dressed in flags. But legality does not automatically confer morality, and procedure does not purify intent. The question is not whether the tools match. The question is how easily the self converts harm into righteousness, and how quickly by my tribe.

Selective Morality Is the Loudest Lie

Those who condemn attacks on minorities in Bangladesh with full-throated clarity often fall silent when state aggression is discussed, or they celebrate it as justice. Those who defend Venezuela's sovereignty sometimes minimise brutality elsewhere when it serves their camp. Outrage is abundant; consistency is rare.

The test is simple: can you condemn violence when your side commits it? Can you see suffering when it does not serve your narrative? Can you refuse the reward of belonging?

If outrage appears only when the perpetrator belongs to the opposing camp, the outrage is not moral. It is positional. It is identity defending itself while pretending to defend the vulnerable. That is not ethics. That is allegiance. And allegiance will always find a way to forgive its own.

The Core Disease: The Unexamined Self

The problem is not Bangladesh alone, and the problem is not the United States alone. The problem is that the human being has not understood his inner world, and its centre.

The self that needs enemies to feel alive, that needs narratives to justify its craving, that needs identity because it lacks inner clarity, will produce violence whether it holds a stone or commands a state. Fear provides the fuel. Identity provides the target. Power provides the means. Justification provides the alibi. Put these together in any geography, in any century, and the theatre changes but the play remains the same. Only the costumes are updated; the script is ancient.

Laws can restrain outcomes. Treaties can impose costs. Institutions can prevent some horrors. All of that matters, and none of it is enough. The impulse that keeps recreating the horror cannot be legislated out of existence. It must be seen, not as theory, but as a reflex in oneself. External reform without internal clarity is rearranging furniture in a burning house.

The beginning is small and personal. Watch the moment you feel righteous anger, and ask: what identity is being protected inside it? Notice the moment you are tempted to excuse cruelty because it is done by "our side," and ask what you are calling loyalty. Observe the satisfaction that arises when an enemy suffers, and ask who inside you is keeping score.

Self-knowledge is not a luxury for those who seek a solution that can address the root. The self that knows itself cannot be seduced by the promise of violence. It sees the game. It

recognises the fear masquerading as courage, the insecurity dressed as conviction. It refuses to let identity hijack intelligence.

The woman asleep in her apartment, or the shopkeeper walking home on New Year's Eve - they did not die because of a map or a flag. They died because human beings found stories that made killing feel like something other than killing. The least we owe them is honest seeing.

That story will keep finding new believers until the ego learns to inquire into itself. Everything else is rearranging seats while the theatre continues.

Acharya Prashant is a Vedanta teacher, founder of the PrashantAdvait Foundation, and a bestselling author.

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S

Shivam 14 Jan 2026

I read the poem--- Fire and Ice by Robert Frost In this poem he tells that the world will end one day because of fire(desire) and ice(hatred). The same thing happening their people are fighting because of their emotions like desire and hatred.

R

Rantu Baishya 13 Jan 2026

Clarity in depth.