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**MAHATMA GANDHI'S SPEECH AT PRAYER MEETING,
November 27-28, 1947**

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**Segregation in democracy
Kuldip Nayar**

**Greatest Message of Equality Was Given By
Prophet Muhammad
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**No discussion on who killed Mahatma Gandhi is complete
without addressing idea of a Hindu Rashtra
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Founder Editor:

M.N.Roy

Advisors:

Dr. Narisetti Innaiah

Editor:

Mahi Pal Singh

Editorial Board:

Ramesh Awasthi, Dr. Deepavali Sen, Vidya Bhushan Rawat, Qurban Ali, N.D. Pancholi (Ex-officio Member)

Publisher and Printer:

N.D. Pancholi

Send articles and reports to:

Mahi Pal Singh at Flat No.F-6, Plot No. 625, Shalimar Garden Extension I, Sahibabad, Ghaziabad-201005. (U.P.) Ph. 09312206414

or E-mail them to:

theradicalhumanist@gmail.com or mahipalsinghrh@gmail.com

Please send Subscription/Donation Cheques in favour of

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N.D. Pancholi, Administrative Office, Flat No.F-6, Plot No. 625, Shalimar Garden Extension I, Sahibabad, Ghaziabad-201005. (U.P.) Ph. 0120-2648691, (M) 9811099532. Email ID: ndpancholi44@gmail.com

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MAHATMA GANDHI'S SPEECH AT PRAYER MEETING

(November 27-28, 1947)

(INTRODUCTION: It is a well known fact that on the night of December 22-23, 1949, idols were put under the central dome of the Babri mosque, at Ayodhya by some miscreants and an FIR was lodged by the police constables posted there at that time. The 1949 violation was a result of premeditated collusion between bigoted sections of the then rulling Congress party and the local Faizabad bureaucracy led by a deputy commissioner whose blatant partisanship was proved by his subsequent admission to the Bharatiya Jan Sangh.

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru expressed his distress at the 1949 incident in a series of letters, to Deputy Prime Minister Vallabhbhai Patel, to Governor-General C. Rajagopalachari, to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Govind Ballabh Pant and to close friend K.G. Mashruwala (The Babri Masjid, edited by A.G. Noorani). In a December 26, 1949, telegram to Pant, he presciently described the installation as a "dangerous example" that will have "bad consequences". To Mashruwala (letter dated March 5, 1950), Nehru confessed that the district officer in Faizabad "misbehaved", further that while UP CM Pant "condemned the act on several occasions" he refrained from "taking definite action". In a letter dated April 17, 1950, to the U.P. Chief Minister, the Prime Minister Nehru poured out his anguish: "... U.P is becoming an almost foreign land to me ... I find that communalism has invaded the minds and hearts of those who were the pillars of the Congress in the past. It is a creeping paralysis and the patient does not even realize it ... It seems to me that for some reason or other, or perhaps mere political expediency, we have been far too lenient with this disease ... These

exchanges conclusively nail the lie that the 1949 installation of idols was an act of faith on the part of the Hindu masses.

In this context here is an important speech delivered by Mahatma Gandhi in Delhi on 27-28th November 1947, well before the Ayodhya controversy erupts. – **Qurban Ali**)

BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

Yesterday I wanted to mention one point but since I had to talk about many other things, it was left out.

I have received many telegrams from Kathiawar. I have already told you about what I heard and what subsequently appeared in the Pakistani newspapers. Those papers are read by thousands of people there. May be some ten thousand or so. I do not know how many people must be reading them. But nothing would be achieved if I started thinking whether those things had really happened. Hence it was good that I placed before you what I had read in those newspapers. I do not know if all those things are true. If they are true, they are a matter of great shame for Kathiawar. And if they are not true, it is a matter of shame for the newspapers. Thus it is a matter of shame for either side. I have also told you what the Sardar has to comment on the matter. He came today also and told me that whatever reports came from there were not worth mentioning. They were highly exaggerated. But the telegram I have received from Rajkot is worth noting. It is a fairly long telegram and I would like to mention it to you in brief. After all, I know the Muslims of Kathiawar. I do not know them individually, but I know the Khojas, Meenas, Vaghers and

some Kumbis among the peasants, and Mahers. After all, I was born there and lived there for almost 17 years. In fact I lived there for full 17 years, because I did not go out to study anywhere. My father never sent me anywhere. I completed my studies there and attended college for a few months, and that too at Bhavnagar. Even for the examination I could not go beyond Ahmadabad. That was my condition. I saw everything that happened there and, later too, kept contact with the people by visiting them. So, the sender of that telegram says that I am greatly worried on their account, and, in turn, my worry has become their worry. He says it is true that some Hindus in Kathiawar had lost their balance, but is there any place where this has not happened. They resorted to violence and even harmed some Muslims. They destroyed their houses and even burnt them down.

But, he says, the Congressmen did not let the situation go far. They were under the leadership of Dhebarbhai. I know him very well. He went forward to protect the Muslims and succeeded to a great extent. Not all Hindus were involved in those acts of loot and arson. Had that been the case, all Muslim houses in Rajkot would have been set ablaze, there would have been large-scale violence and some people would have been killed. But things did not reach that point. The Congressmen and others took every precaution. Dhebarbhai was abused and manhandled. Even though he is a big man and also a lawyer, when the mob gets excited all considerations of big and small are forgotten. They harassed him because he was trying to protect the Muslims. Some people who accompanied Dhebarbhai write, that, though some injury was caused, Dhebarbhai was saved by other people. The telegram also mentions help from the Thakore Saheb and the police. In that case, who are left to be suspected of creating the trouble? They say "the *Hindu Mahasabha* and the *Rashtriya*

Swayamsevak Sangh— these organizations have certainly done some mischief—their aim was to drive out the Muslims at least from Rajkot. However they could not do so. But now we have nothing more to worry and there is no danger to the Muslims. So you also should not worry. We are watching the situation elsewhere too and we would send you another telegram." I have received a telegram from a Muslim gentleman from the same place. He expresses his extreme gratitude to the Congressmen and others who tried their best to save the life and property of the Muslims. But there is yet another telegram from Bombay also sent by a Muslim gentleman. He states that what I had said earlier about Kathiawar was correct but what I have been told later about it is not correct. That lots of things have happened there and are still happening. I do not know whether I should believe the telegram from Bombay or the one from the other Muslim gentleman. But I doubt the truth about the telegram from Bombay because it has been sent from Bombay, while the other one has been sent by those who are right in Kathiawar. Moreover, the people of Kathiawar cannot deceive me. Where would they escape after deceiving me? Hence I feel that the telegram from Bombay gives an exaggerated version. The actual situation would be known to me in due course. For the present, let me at least put all this before you.

There is also a telegram from Bhavnagar. It is from the Maharaja of Bhavnagar. I know him too, because I have lived there for three or four months. So he felt concerned about me and wondered why I was so much worried. He has said in the telegram that I need not worry. He says that they are all vigilant. The Hindus also are vigilant. They would not let any harm come to the Muslims and I should have no doubt at all about it. But there is a telegram from Junagadh sent by some Muslims. They say that I am being deceived, and I should set up a commission and

inquire whether the Muslims are being harassed or not. Similar telegrams have also been sent to Jawaharlal, the Sardar and others. I would like to say that it is not possible to appoint a commission for anything and everything. Setting up a commission is no joke. Where is the need for having a commission even though some harm might have been done? As for Kathiawar, I am like a commission myself. If anything comes to my notice, I can check it. I can handle the Princes as well as the people of Kathiawar. I do not claim to succeed in everything I undertake or that they abide by everything I say. But is not Kathiawar the same as Bihar? If someone wants me to set up a commission in Bihar, do you think I would oblige? I am at their disposal myself. People there love me and listen to me. And so, it would not be proper to set up any commission there. I have also received several letters from the Muslims in Rajkot. Many of them are friendly with the Hindus and also happy with the Congress. Then, who belongs to the *Hindu Mahasabha* and the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*? I can have no enmity towards them. They think theirs is the only way of saving Hinduism. But I believe that Hinduism will not be saved in that manner. They believe in violent opposition to those who commit an evil act. But I would ask how fighting an evil by another evil will help. We have got our own Government. Take it to task and demand an explanation as to why such things are happening. Moreover, our Government is vigilant and it is trying its best. And so I would like to tell the *Hindu Mahasabha* and also the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*—both are Hindu organizations and many influential and educated people are associated with them as in other organizations—that they cannot save Hinduism in this manner. Is it true that they have harassed the Muslims? If not, who has? The Congress has not harassed them, nor has either of the Governments done it. Who then are the

other Hindus who did it?

Today all the Hindus and Sikhs are to be blamed for this just as in Pakistan all the Muslims are to be blamed, and rightly so. That is why I would suggest that those who are innocent and yet are accused should clear their names. The Muslims in Junagadh can get justice if they want. Why then should we set up a commission? Having talked about the situation there let me also talk about the situation here. The Sardar has made some arrangements and he is going to protect all the mosques we have here. You must have read the notice sent by him in the newspapers that the occupied premises of the mosques should be vacated in a week's time otherwise they will be vacated with the help of the police. But I ask you what will he gain by sending the police? If some Hindus have installed an idol in some mosque—the idol may be of gold or silver or brass or earth or stone—but it is said, and I also believe, that so long as it has not been sanctified and not worshipped by pure hands, in my view it is not an idol but a mere piece of stone or gold.

Such idols have been installed in the mosque at the corner of Connaught Place (in New Delhi). In my view, there is no Hanuman in those idols. To me it is a mere piece of stone which has been shaped like Hanuman and to which some *sindoor* has also been applied. In my view it is not worthy of worship. It can be worshipped only if it is legitimately installed and sanctified. But all this was not done. Hence it is the duty of those who have installed the idols to remove them from there at daybreak and then keep them wherever they choose. By thus installing idols in the mosques they are desecrating the mosques and also insulting the idols. As followers of Hinduism we are idol-worshippers, but worshipping any idol in this manner is not religion but the opposite of it. So, why should the Sardar send the police there? Those who

are Hindus among you should become watchmen and remove the idols so installed. We should offer to repair the mosques which have been damaged. But the Sardar says that the Government would bear the expenses of the repairs of those mosques. Why should the Government do it? Is it not because we are not doing it ourselves? The Government has to protect everybody. But it would be a matter of shame for us all—Sikhs and Hindus today.

Of course I have not heard about any Sikh having installed the idols, for the Sikhs have only one idol or, say, the holy treatise, that is, the *Grantsaheb*. I have not known of any Sikh having kept the *Grantsaheb* in any mosque. Even if any of them has done so he has insulted the *Grantsaheb*. The *Grantsaheb* can be kept only in a Gurudwara. Only the holy Sikhs keep it on a high pedestal after nicely decorating it. Somebody like me would wrap it in a nice *khadi* cloth.

But today, even though people do not think in terms of *swadeshi* or foreign things we do manufacture beautiful woolens and silks by hand. If we spread such silk cloth and keep the *Grantsaheb* on it, it would be worthy of worship. And if any Sikh goes and keeps it in a mosque, he insults the *Grantsaheb* and then it cannot be worthy of worship. A Muslim gentleman came to see me today. I could not make out what he wanted to say. But he was holding a copy of the Koran which was half burnt. Even that was sacred for him and so he

had wrapped it in a very clean cloth. He opened the cloth and showed the burnt Koran to me. He did not say anything but looked at me with tearful eyes and then went away. He talked a few things with Brajkishan, since I was busy with my work. Similarly, if any Muslim comes here and installs the Koran here and beats you and me up, I would say that he is insulting the Koran. The Koran does not ordain that people should be compelled to accept it. That is why I very respectfully wish to tell the *Hindu Mahasabha* and the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* and others who wish to listen to me and also the Sikhs that the Sikhs are great and if they turn good and become true followers of Guru Nanak, the Hindus would then automatically become good. I have great respect for the Sikhs in my heart but today, everybody, whether Hindu or Sikh is going astray and India is being destroyed. Are we going to drag India into dust after raising her high? Are we going to destroy our religion, our achievements and our country? May God save us from all this. [From Hindi]

*Vide “**Speech at Prayer Meeting**”, 27-11-1947 and “**Speech at Prayer Meeting**”, 28-11-1947. *Prarthana Pravachan—II*, pp. 144-50 (Abridged)

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF
MAHATMA GANDHI

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DECEMBER, 1947

“I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if it needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

— Nelson Mandela

Segregation in democracy

YET another Dalit family was hacked to death because it was suspected to have eaten beef. The laboratory tests of the “beef” showed that it was some other cattle. Some time ago, the Kerala House in Delhi was attacked by *gau rakshks* because beef was served there. But the most shameful aspect is that there was no repentance among the upper caste and even the leaders of the RSS, who are supposed to work for the social upliftment, did not utter a word of either condemnation or sorrow.

All religions indulge in social, economic or political discrimination but it is not the part of the religion itself as it is among the Hindus. And for centuries, it is going on without much challenge. There are still certain parts of India where the Dalit cannot use the road or well which are frequented by the upper caste. The worst part is that the funeral ground which the upper caste use is exclusive for them.

Islam which teaches equality has also been affected and the burial places of those placed high in life cannot be used by ordinary Muslims. In fact, a different kind of caste system prevails in Islam. For example, Sayyids are considered the Brahmins of the community and they practise the same kind of discrimination as the Hindus do when it comes to marriage or death. They refuse to consign the bodies at the common burial ground.

In fact, an ordinary Muslim suffers from both sides—one because he is poor and, two, because he is considered not at par with the well-placed Muslims. Here, the economic factor has come into play. And then it has got mixed with preferences and prejudices, making the poor Muslims’ plight still more pitiful. True, the Indian constitution does not allow discrimination on the basis of religion. But it is practised all over and even the police force has come to be

contaminated and it connives at the violation of the upper caste without a demur.

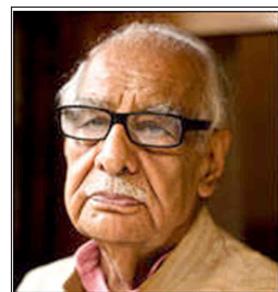
The practice has become more glaring and persistent since the advent of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s regime. That the upper caste people have been

appointed to key positions in universities and other institutions at the behest of the government make some of the best brains rot. The RSS makes it sure that the people appointed are from the “right” background to ensure the Hindutva philosophy is taken as the guideline.

Not long ago, the Pune film institute went on strike for months together when its head was replaced by a television artiste who had the blessings of the RSS. The government did not change its decision even in the midst of widespread discontentment. Ultimately, the students had to give in because their career was at peril.

Time has come for introspection. The upper caste has not accepted the presence of Dalit or even members of other backward classes in their midst. The numerous agitations in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh or, for that matter, in other parts of the country have not jolted the conscious of the upper caste. These are the results of the government pursuing with reservations despite the 10-year time-limit set by the Constituent Assembly way back in 1950.

I recall that during the debates of the Constituent Assembly when Dr B.R. Ambedkar, a revered Dalit leader, declared that they did not want any reservation. He was persuaded by the assurance that the period will not be more



Kuldip Nayar

than 10 years. Now the situation is such that as soon as the period is over, parliament unanimously extends it to another 10 years. No political party, including the communists, has stood up to resist and say enough was enough.

Now that elections in Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in the country, are scheduled to take place in 2017, Dalit leader Mayawati is being wooed by all political parties. She has said that her party would go it alone and there is every possibility that she might return with a majority. Her advantage is that the Dalit voter obediently follows her instruction. She is the only one who can get the Dalit votes transferred to some other community. Even though the Congress has traditionally fought for social justice, Mahatma Gandhi was the only leader who believed in giving equal status to the Dalits. True, they did not like the title "Harijan" (son of God) given by him because they thought it was too patronizing.

Dr Rajendra Prasad after finishing his task as the president of the constituent assembly was appointed as the food minister. He went to Gandhiji to seek his advice on his accommodation. The Mahatma, who was living then in a *bhangi* (sweeper) colony told him to live in the cottage next to the one he was residing. Dr Rajendra Prasad was so horrified over the idea that he went to the then Prime

Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and complained on Gandhiji's suggestion.

No legislation is going to help, as has been India's experience. Ultimately, it depends on the upper caste to change its attitude. They believe in democracy but not in equality which is the integral part of the system. People in the world feel hard to believe that the country which has sent rocket to the Mars, something which the advanced countries envy, practise discrimination against human beings.

Their horror is glaring when they see that a democratic country where people queue before the ballot box to choose their leader cannot get over the prejudice which they have inherited from the time even before the British who divided the society caste-wise and religion-wise to make their rule easy.

Whatever parliament does to eliminate this malady will not help until the upper castes realize that what they are doing is against the democratic polity which they cherish. The sooner this realization takes place, the better it would be for the country and its polity.

2.8.2016

(Kuldip Nayar is a veteran syndicated columnist catering to around 80 newspapers and journals in 14 languages in India & abroad. kuldipnayar09@gmail.com)

The Radical Humanist on Website

February 2015 onwards 'The Radical Humanist' is available at <http://www.lohiatoday.com/> on Periodicals page, thanks to Manohar Ravela who administers the site on Ram Manohar Lohia, the great socialist leader of India. Only the logo/the name of the magazine needs to be clicked for opening it.

Now the books by M.N. Roy are available at this website under the section 'Socialist Movement' and then going to the dedicated page for "collected works". They may be downloaded from there and read.

- Mahi Pal Singh

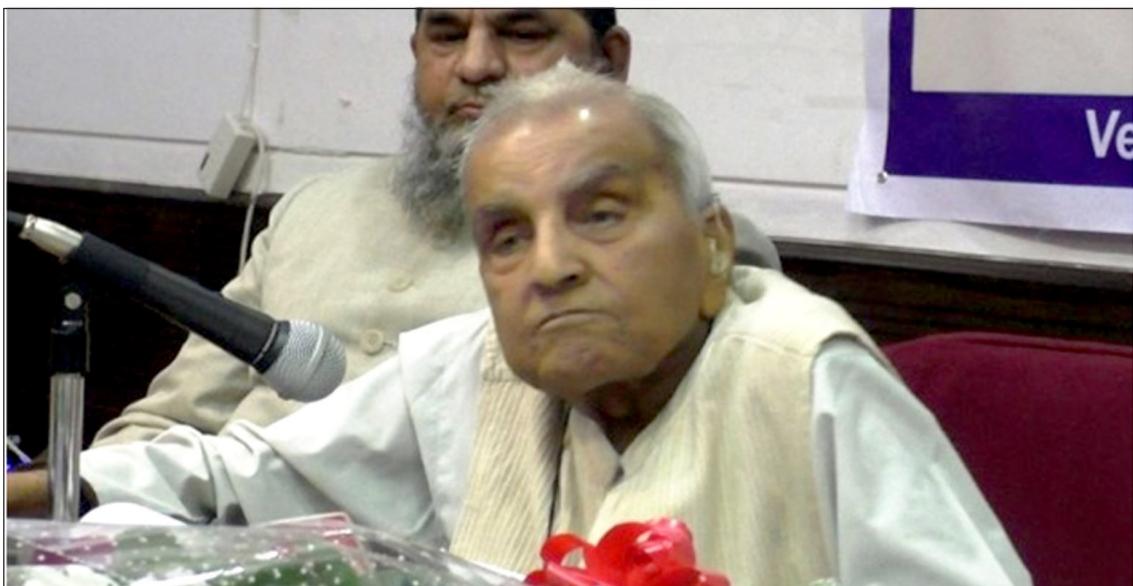
Greatest Message of Equality Was Given By Prophet Muhammad

Rajindar Sachar

(Justice Rajindar Sachar spoke in a symposium in Jamia Millia and said, “Greatest Message of Equality Was Given By Prophet Muhammad”. In that context I would like to draw attention to the following quote:

M.N. Roy, in his small book “Historical Role of Islam” written during 1931-35, amongst many of books he wrote when he was in British jail sentenced under ‘Sedition’, has written:

“....In view of this realistic reading of history, Hindu superciliousness towards the religion and culture of the Muslims is absurd. It insults history and injures the political future of our country. Learning from the Muslims, Europe became the leader of modern civilization. Even today, her best sons are not ashamed of the past indebtedness. Unfortunately India could not fully benefit by the heritage of Islamic culture, because she did not deserve the distinction. Now, in the throes of a belated Renaissance, Indians, both Hindus and Muslims, could profitably draw inspiration from that memorable chapter of human history. Knowledge of Islam’s contribution to human culture and proper appreciation of the historical value of that contribution would shock the Hindus of their arrogant self-satisfaction, and cure the narrow-mindedness of the Muslims of our day by bringing them face to face with the true spirit of the faith they profess.” – N.D. Pancholi)



Justice Rajindar Sachar speaking at a symposium entitled Islam and Modern Age at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi on 17 Aug 2016.

New Delhi, August 17: By saying that Arabs have no superiority over non-Arabs and Whites have no superiority over Blacks, Prophet

Muhammad delivered the greatest message of equality centuries ago, said Justice Rajindar Sachar, former Chief Justice of Delhi High

Court while speaking at an event here on Wednesday.

Speaking as Chief Guest at a symposium entitled “Islam and Modern Age” organized by Maulana Azad Ideal Educational Trust at the Nehru Guest House of Jamia Millia Islamia, Justice Sachar mentioned the last Haj sermon of Prophet Muhammad.

“I always say that when Prophet delivered his last sermon, he said that it was his last sermon and he would not be among them after that. In that sermon he said that non-Arabs were not superior to Arabs (and vice versa) and white person was not superior to black (and vice versa). It is understood that his message was to consider everyone equal,” said Justice Sachar.

Explaining the context and greatness of Prophet’s message, Justice Sachar said: “At that time there was slavery in Arab and slaves were black. When Hazrat Sahab (Prophet Muhammad) said that non-Arabs were not superior to Arabs and when he said that white is not superior to black, how greatest message of equality he was giving.”

In his last Haj sermon at Mount Arafat in Saudi Arabia in 632 A.C., Prophet Muhammad had said:

“O People, listen well to my words, for I do not know whether, after this year, I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore listen to what I am saying to you very carefully and take these words to those who could not be present here today.... **All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action...**”

In his speech, Justice Sachar said that the

United States is taken as an example of equality but the Prophet had given the message of equality in 7th century itself.

“Today, we take USA (as an example of equality) that Barak Obama (became president), since there was a fight for equality. But his (Prophet’s) message of equality spread in 7th century that no one (white) is superior to black. I believe the beginning of Islam was based on equality of all citizens,” said Sachar who in 2004-2005 headed Independent India’s first government panel that looked into the socio-economic backwardness of the Muslim community. The committee is known as Sachar Committee.

In his speech, Justice Sachar mentioned a UN report of 2011 on tolerance and said that Prophet had talked on the issue centuries ago.

”There is a UN development report published in 2011 by United Nations which states nothing can be more absurd than to say that tolerance is a notion associated with West only. The report gave three examples; first it illustrated (Emperor) Ashoka as to how he behaved to be equal. Then it illustrated Emperor Akbar for saying ‘to be with your religion’... I beg your pardon if I am wrong, Prophet (Muhammad) also said the same thing — ‘to you be your religion, and to me my religion’,” said Justice Sachar.

The line referred to the Prophet is actually a Quranic verse in Chapter 109.

Justice Sachar said that there is a continuous role of Islam in spreading the message of equality.

Courtesy IndiaTomorrow.net

(Justice Rajindar Sachar has been Chief Justice, High Court of Delhi and President, PUCL, India. rsachar1@vsnl.net; sachar23@bol.net.in)

No discussion on who killed Mahatma Gandhi is complete without addressing idea of a Hindu Rashtra

Teesta Setalvad

Scroll did a disservice by being carelessly selective in its recent article, says the activist lawyer.

The murder of Mahatma Gandhi, or more dramatically put, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi was the first act of terror committed in independent India, as I wrote in the introduction to the volume, Beyond Doubt-A Dossier on Gandhi's Assassination (2015, Tulika). It was also, I wrote, a declaration of war and a statement of intent.

It was a declaration of war by a section of society which remained largely on the fringes during the independence struggle and was committed to religion-based nationhood, and wanted India to become a Hindu rashtra. This was a section that bore visceral dislike toward the idea of composite culture and inclusive nationhood advocated by the Mahatma.

It is this ideology that unashamedly rules India today.

Any discussion on the assassination, therefore, needs to address the issues around the killing, the motives of the assassins. It should also examine further why Gandhi and what he stood for posed such a dire threat to the worldview of the killers.

Whenever the murder is discussed, and the factors responsible for the killing tossed around, public memory can often become carelessly selective, unwarrantedly perhaps spawning a dangerous ambivalence. I refer here specifically to the July 21 article that deliberately or otherwise skips crucial bits of the event. There are also several inaccuracies in the report that has carelessly quoted from earlier published articles.

Setting the record straight

There is need to set the record straight. The killing of Gandhi was not an isolated act but the last successful one of a series of attempts that began as early as 1934. Since the first attack on June 25 1934, there had been a total of five attempts on Gandhi's life: in July and September 1944, September 1946, and January 20, 1948, ten days before he was actually shot dead.

Nathuram Godse was involved in two of the previous attempts besides the last one – that is, in a total of three, completely upsetting the comfortable narrative of Godse's actions not being pre-meditated and coldly and carefully planned.

This aspect is completely missing from the article that fails to ask (while superficially relying on a sinister justification for the killing that Godse's belief that "Gandhi helped create Pakistan" was the reason behind the killing) why some groups of persons found Gandhi and his beliefs so thoroughly repugnant that they had to eliminate him.

It was Gandhi's commitment to composite nationhood as opposed to a religion-based state (Pakistan or Hindu Rashtra) and his support for the law against untouchability (he made a historic speech in the Central legislature in 1935) that made him enemy No 1 for all those who dreamt then – and conspire even today – to convert India into a Hindu Rashtra.

One of the crucial reasons for editing the volume Beyond Doubt was to bring to readers in English the seminal work of senior journalist

and writer Jagan Phadnis who researched the killing back in 1998 as also the important contribution of Chunibhai Vaidya from Gujarat. These works along with historian YD Phadke's analysis of the Kapoor Commission Report published in Communalism Combat are crucial reading for serious readers on the subject, and are included in the volume.

That the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was banned by the government of India within two days of the assassination, through a Government Resolution dated February 2, 1948, is surely a critical part of the narrative, which is absent in its recounting 68 years later. The language of this resolution, reproduced in Beyond Doubt, is unequivocal when it speaks of the determination of the government of India "to root out the forces of hate and violence that are at work in our country and imperil the freedom of the Nation and darken her fair name. In pursuance of this politics [the GR says] the GOI has decided to declare as unlawful the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in the Chief Commissioner's Provinces. Similar action is also being taken in the Governor's provinces."

The banning of the RSS within five months of India becoming independent and within two days of the dastardly killing of Mahatma Gandhi has been linked to the 'undesirable and even dangerous activities carried out by individual members of the Sangh who have indulged in acts of violence involving arson, robbery, dacoity and murder and have collected illicit arms and ammunition. They have been found, "circulating leaflets exhorting people to resort to terrorist methods, to collect firearms, to create disaffection against the government and suborn the police and the military....The objectionable and harmful activities of the Sangh have, however, continued unabated and the cult of violence sponsored and inspired by the activities of the Sangh has claimed many victims. The

latest and the most precious to fall was Gandhiji himself." The GR was first published in the August 2004 issue of Communalism Combat, as part of the cover story, titled Hey Ram.

Ban and lifting the ban

The story does not end here. The communications between the Government of India through then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel with the RSS also show up the falsehoods perpetrated by the Sangh, which has tried to distort even this part of history.

On September 11, 1948, the famous letter written by Patel to RSS chief MS Golwalkar strongly decries the systematic hate tactics of the Sangh before and after Gandhi's assassination. This letter has been quoted in full in Desraj Goyal's Rahstriya Swayamsevak Sangh (First published in 1979, Revised edition in 2000, Radhakrishna Prakashan Pvt Ltd, New Delhi).

More importantly, this and another letter written by Patel to the founder of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee dated July 18, 1948 make clear the links between the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha.

The September 11, 1948 letter is of particular significance as it outlines the kind of activities the RSS was observed to indulge in.

"But the objectionable part arose when they, burning with revenge, began attacking Mussalmans. Organising Hindus and helping them is one thing but going in for revenge for its sufferings on innocent and helpless men, women and children is quite another thing.....All their speeches were full communal poison. It was not necessary to spread poison and enthuse the Hindus and organise for their protection. As a final result of the poison, the country had to suffer the sacrifice of the valuable life of

Gandhiji. Even an iota of sympathy of the Government or of the people no more remained for the RSS. In fact the opposition grew. Opposition turned more severe, when the RSS men expressed joy and distributed sweets after Gandhiji's death. Under these conditions it became inevitable for the Government to take action against the RSS."

A government of India press note of November 14, 1948 relates to the outright rejection of a representation by Golwalkar to lift the ban on the RSS by the Home Ministry, refers to the "anti-national, often subversive and violent activities of the RSS".

This press note, also obtained from the archives of the government of India, was first published in the August 2004 issue of Communalism Combat, as part of the cover story, titled Hey Ram.

The government of India took into account the considered opinion of provincial governments before arriving at its decision to ban the RSS. An article of The Indian Express dated February 7, 1948 reports that an RSS leader from Nagpur who had presented Godse with the revolver

with which he killed Gandhi had been arrested. Other persons arrested included Professor Varahadpande of the City College, Nagpur.

This news report states that another professor of Nagpur had told his students a day before the assassination that "Gandhiji would be murdered". An associate of the gang of conspirators, Devendra Kumar, was reported by the same newspaper to have surrendered to the District

Magistrate, Mirzapur and taken to Lucknow under armed escort.

There is more such material which forms part of the annexes to the Kapoor Commission which will form part of the second volume of Beyond

Doubt that I am currently annotating and editing. For the record, towards the end of the judgement in the Gandhi Murder case, Special Judge Atmacharan made the following remarks in regards to the conduct of the police with relation to the bomb attack on Gandhi on January 20, barely ten days before the day he died.

" I may bring to the notice of the Central Government the slackness of the police in the investigation of the case during the period between January 20-30, 1948... Had the slightest keenness been shown in the investigation of the case at that stage, the tragedy could have been averted."

The terms of reference to the Kapoor Commission clearly show that it was not within its ambit to investigate whether or not the RSS was involved in the murder. It would be pertinent to again quote from the Government communiqué dated 11 July, 1949 provided in Appendix IV to Desraj Goyal's Rahstriya Swayamsevak Sangh which laid down the conditions for lifting the ban on the RSS.

"The RSS leader has undertaken to make the loyalty to the Union Constitution and respect for the National Flag more explicit in the Constitution of the RSS and to provide clearly that persons believing or resorting to violent and secret methods will have no place in the Sangh.."

Among other conditions was that the RSS would function only as a cultural organisation.

Hindu rashtra

A genuine understanding of the motivations behind the ideology that killed Gandhi cannot skirt around the fundamental issue of religion-based nationhood. The contempt for the Indian Constitution is writ large in MS Golwalkar's Bunch of Thoughts, which is proudly available on the RSS website even today (for example, see Page 119).

Despite its assurances to the government of India, the Indian tricolour remained anathema to the Sangh for 52 years after India became independent. It was only on January 26, 2002, that the RSS hoisted the tricolour on its headquarters. Until then it was always the bhagwa dhwaj, representing the Hindu nation.

In fact, the English organ of the RSS, *Organiser* (dated August 14, 1947) carried a feature titled “Mystery behind the bhagwa dhawaj” which, while demanding hoisting of the saffron flag at the ramparts of Red Fort in Delhi, openly denigrated the choice of the Tri-colour as the National Flag in the following words:

“The people who have come to power by the kick of fate may give in our hands the Tricolour but it never be respected and owned by Hindus. The word three is in itself an evil, and a flag having three colours will certainly produce a very bad psychological effect and is injurious to a country.”

It became even more brazen once the first RSS-driven government in New Delhi under

Atal Behari Vajpayee came into power as the organisation’s mouthpiece *Organiser* proudly advertised the books published by Surya Bharati Prakashan, Gandhi Ji’s Murder and After by co-accused and brother of the assassin, Gopal Godse, as also May It Please Your Honour, by Nathuram Godse.

Both the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha have made money by glamourising the killer of Gandhi and claimed proud privilege for the reasons for the killing.

The crux of the issue for the Sangh and those who have opposed its supremacist ideology has always been about who has or has not the right to equal rights and citizenship in the India of today. On this issue Gandhi and the RSS stood on the extreme opposites ends of the spectrum. Not only can no one deny this, but it is this crucial issue that remains central to the debate around which forces were responsible for the murder of the Mahatma.

Teesta Setalvad is co-editor, *Sabrangindia*.

Anti-fascism and a free society

We stand for a thorough reconstruction of the national life. Our political objective is the establishment of democratic freedom which will mean effective political power for the people. We strive not only for national freedom, but also for the social emancipation of the toiling masses. Our task is to spread enlightenment which will dispel obscurantism in the political and the spiritual life of the country. We advocate modernism in every walk of life against revivalism. We want the disinherited to come to their own and enjoy the richness and fullness of life on this earth. We want man to be the master of the world and the maker of his destiny.

This is why we radicals favour India’s active participation in the war against Fascism. Fascism stands for the destruction of the political, social and cultural ideals of democracy...The war against Fascism can be won only by rousing in the people their urge for freer and fuller life. The supreme task of our movement is to develop that urge, and thus while defeating Fascism, to lay securely the foundations of a free society which is not only free of foreign rule, but also free of native tyranny, exploitation and injustice. - **M.N. Roy**

(The above statement was issued during the Second World War 1939-1945)

Radical Humanism and M.N. Roy:

A Country of Poor People but Not For Poor People

Sukumaran CV

We seem to think that our fight for freedom is over...In any real sense of the word, this fight for freedom is not over, though we may be politically free.—Jawaharlal Nehru

We are celebrating the 70th Independence Day today and let's have a look at the condition of the poor in our country. "We are a country of poor people but not for poor people," the Delhi High Court bench of Justices Badar Durrez Ahmed and Ashutosh Kumar said on August 3, 2016 while hearing the PIL on rehabilitation of manual scavengers in Delhi. "A statement was made by the authorities concerned that there were no manual scavengers in Delhi. But the report of Delhi State Legal Services Authority (DSLSA) shows that there were 233 manual scavengers in the city," the bench said.

"What are we doing in this country? Smart cities?" asked the Bench, completely shocked by the photographs and the report presented to it by the DSLSA.

We have made a law preventing manual scavenging only after 65 years of independence—Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act of 2013 and the government agencies like the Delhi Jal Board and municipal corporations stated on oath before the High Court bench that there were no manual scavengers. The bench asked the DSLSA in May 2016 to check the veracity of the claim and the DSLSA report says that thousands of people were working as scavengers for DJB, municipal corporations, Railways or for contractors hired by these agencies and according to the report there is even a post-graduation degree holder among those engaged in cleaning human faeces with

bare hands from unsanitary places.

What are we doing in this country? Smart cities?

Even after 25 years of liberalisation and 69 years of independence India is home to the largest number of illiterate people in the world. And the record of having the largest number of undernourished people in the world also is in India's credit.

And since 1991 Indian farmers have been killing themselves as the corporate servile policies of the Indian State make them a hapless lot.

What are we doing in this country? Smart cities?

And we see the murder of people like Kaburgi for being progressive, the lynching of Muhammad Akhlaq for eating beef, the flogging of hapless individuals for the 'crime' of skinning a dead cow. What is happening to our democracy? More than 60 years ago the radical humanist M. N. Roy said: "In so far as democracy is not government of the people and by the people, it is not democracy. With the rise of the party system, the idea of popular sovereignty became a constitutional fiction and politics became a scramble for power." As far as Indian democracy is concerned Roy's observation stands vindicated fully.

Together with the Una incident of the heinous flogging, another incident in which too Dalits were at the receiving end comes to my mind. Immediately after the LDF government came to power in Kerala, two Dalit ladies in Kannur were

arrested and remanded. They were accused of forcefully entering into the CPI(M) party office which is adjacent to their home and (wo)manhandling two party cadres! Both the incidents were/are treated as atrocities against Dalits. I think that such incidents are not atrocities against Dalits but human-right violations under a democracy which is not democratic in spirit and generously abets human-right violations.

As Stanley Maron says in his essay “The Political Philosophy of M. N. Roy” published in *The Radical Humanist* (January 25, 1966): “Political parties are the chief evil in modern democracy, for they are the main cause of the concentration of power... The primary interest of political leaders once in office is that of remaining in office, for that is the only way in which they can have the power which is their objective... Their primary interest becomes that of protecting their power against those who have given it to them, and only secondarily of using that power on behalf of those who have given it to them.”

The Una incident would have happened exactly like how it had happened even if those who skinned the dead cow had not belonged to Dalits; and the Kannur incident too. The basic problem is the concentration of power and its misuse. Electoral democracy helped the BJP to have the concentration of power in its grip and the Una incident took place because the culprits are those who enjoy the benefit of the concentration of power. The Kannur incident took place because those who enjoy the concentration of power after May 19, 2016 have had some grudge against the family and the moment the power equations changed, the party which is in possession of the concentration of power ‘taught’ them a lesson.

If the *gau rakshaks* committed/commit atrocities on the hapless, standing firmly on the collective ego of the nation, the Marxists and

Maoists do it standing firmly on the collective ego of the party.

That is why the radical humanist M. N. Roy said that “Society must be based on the individual and not on abstractions. Communism, by losing itself in the abstraction of the collective ego of the proletariat, had gone the way of Fascism which builds on the collective ego of the nation. Communism is no longer the road to freedom and revolution must take place under another flag.”

Under which flag that revolution will take place? We are in dire need of that revolution which enables us to rise above caste and religious and gender discriminations, the revolution that abolishes vested interests and privileges, that destroys violence, wars, fanaticism, poverty, illiteracy, nepotism and every kind of inequalities.

Let’s hope, as M. N. Roy hoped 60 years ago, that ‘the time will come when the voters of a locality will tell candidates of all parties to leave them alone; amongst themselves they will find candidates in whom they can have confidence and who will remain responsible to them between two elections. Once that happens, the end of the party system will begin, and with the parties, the main cause for concentration of power will disappear.’

You may think that this is pure utopia. Of course I too think it is, but we must strive to realise such utopias to escape from the present world in which, as W. B. Yeats says in his poem *The Second Coming*:

“The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere The ceremony of innocence is drowned.”

Sukumaran C. V. is a frequent contributor to Countercurrents.org

Courtesy **Countercurrents.org**, August 15, 2016

BJP's faultline stands exposed: Hindutva preaches Hindu unity, yet attacks Dalits in the name of cow protection

Pavan K. Varma

A major fault line in BJP-RSS's project of Hindutva, always present but relatively camouflaged, has come to the fore explosively. On July 11, in the town of Una in Gujarat, four Dalit men were stripped, paraded, tied to an SUV and publicly flogged by a group of gau rakshaks or self-anointed cow vigilantes on the suspicion that they had killed a cow (when actually the culprit was a lion). The irony was that these were Hindus attacking Hindus in the name of 'protecting' Hindu dharma.

Attacks by cow vigilantes have spread like an ugly rash ever since NDA came to power at the Centre in 2014, and particularly in BJP-ruled states. The Dalits are being punished for pursuing their profession of skinning dead cattle to provide hide to the leather industry, which has a turnover of Rs 80,000 crore. Dalits do this job because no other Hindu caste will do it. For them it is their livelihood. Cattle slaughter is banned in many states of India, but skinning dead cows is not. India has the world's largest cattle inventory. According to official figures, Gujarat alone has nearly one crore cows and buffaloes. Their mortality rate is reportedly 10%. When cattle die, their carcasses have to be disposed off. Their skin is the raw material for the thriving leather industry. In fact, the real irony is that those in Una who were flogging the Dalits could well be wearing leather footwear, made from hides provided by their victims.

RSS has always seen Hindus as a monolithic bloc. RSS ideologues believe that the concept of 'Hindu Rashtra' overarches all intra-Hindu contradictions and unites Hindus against the

'other', the non-Hindu, who in this case is primarily the Muslim. For them, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam essentially means the Hindu Undivided Family.

The assumption is that this family is, through a xenophobic loyalty based on faith, undivided. But the very public spectacle of Hindus attacking Hindus has shown that this assumption is flawed. Hindus may be vertically unified by religion. But they are horizontally divided due to the millennia old inequities of the caste system. The fault line of the Hindutva project is thus starkly exposed.

In the past, the Hindu right could occasionally eclipse the issues of inequality. We saw this during the Ram Mandir-Babri Masjid mobilisation in 1992, in the Gujarat pogrom of 2002, and in the more recent love jihad and ghar wapsi campaigns. But, while these deliberately planned attempts at Hindu-Muslim polarisation succeeded at varying levels, the increasing political empowerment of the Dalits and other backward classes could never demolish their parallel attempts to secure greater equality from the very same people who were asking them to unite in the name of Hindu faith.

RSS has always had an upper caste leadership and bias. Until recently, when the politically inspired project of Dalit co-option began, RSS was consistently critical of Ambedkar. On February 6, 1950, just a few days after the Constitution was promulgated, RSS mouthpiece Organiser carried an article by Justice Sankar Subba Aiyar, titled 'Manu Rules our Hearts'. Aiyar was explicit: 'Even though Dr Ambedkar

is reported to have recently stated in Bombay that the days of Manu have ended it is nevertheless a fact that the daily lives of Hindus are even at present day effected by the principles and injunctions contained in the *Manusmriti*.' Anyone even remotely familiar with *Manusmriti* knows with what contempt it treats Dalits and women.

Muslims too have been targeted by gau rakshaks. On September 28 last year, in the village of Bisara in UP, Mohammad Akhlaq was publicly lynched and his son severely beaten by a mob of cow vigilantes on the suspicion of eating beef. Just this week, two Muslim women in Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh, were brutally attacked on suspicion that they were carrying beef for sale.

Thus, both Dalits, who are Hindus, and Muslims, who are the 'other' in the Hindutva project, have become the common target of gau rakshak hate. It is no coincidence that both Dalits and Muslims are at the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder. What does this mean for future Indian politics, and for the Hindutva project of Hindu unity against Muslims?

Laws banning cow slaughter, where applicable, need to be followed scrupulously. But cow vigilantism, where largely upper caste Hindus take the law into their own hands and attack Dalits and Muslims on the mere suspicion that they have killed a cow, has become a pan-Indian metaphor for the ugly face of a newly resurgent lumpen Hindu fanaticism. This is happening with such widespread impunity because the perpetrators believe they have the benign protection of the authorities. In this context, our PM's complete silence is truly regrettable.

The anger of Dalits is palpable. In Gujarat they resorted to the unprecedented step of leaving cattle carcasses in front of government offices. Others attempted suicide. Many, in protest, are leaving carcasses to rot, raising both a stench and the spectre of disease. What gau rakshaks and their fundamentalist masters don't realise is that, ultimately, their lawless and violent behaviour devalues Hinduism itself, the very faith they are seeking to defend.

Courtesy timesofindia.indiatimes.com, July 30, 2016

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Stung by Dalit Backlash, Modi Eats His Own Words on Cow Slaughter

Siddharth Varadarajan

After warning of a ‘pink revolution’ in his election speeches, the prime minister now tells vigilantes the danger to cows come not from slaughter but from plastic.

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks at the 2nd Year Anniversary celebrations of MyGov, in New Delhi on Saturday.

Nearly 11 months after a mob lynched Mohammed Akhlaq in Dadri, Uttar Pradesh on suspicion of having killed a cow, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has finally broken his silence on the violence that ‘gau rakshaks’ – ‘cow protectors’ – have unleashed in different parts of the country.

“I feel really angry at the way some people have opened shops in the name of cow protection. I have seen that some people commit anti-social activities through the night, but act as cow protectors by day”, the prime minister told an audience at a ‘town hall’ style interaction with an invited audience in Delhi on Saturday.

While Modi was careful not to refer to any one incident in particular, the trigger for his remarks appears to be the recent shocker in Una, Gujarat, where a group of Dalit men were brutally flogged by upper caste vigilantes for skinning a dead cow. A video recording has relayed the crime to every home across the country, to devastating effect. It has stoked Dalit anger and upset efforts by the Bharatiya Janata Party to attract Dalit votes in the run up to crucial elections in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.

True to form, Modi stopped short of saying that the vigilantes ought to be prosecuted and punished, instead urging state government to prepare “dossiers” on these “cow protectors” and keep them under control. “It will be found that 70 to 80% are people who commit the kind

of bad deeds which society does not accept. To hide their bad activities, they don the mantle of cow protectors,” he said.

Volunteer organisations, said Modi – using the word ‘swayamsevak’ for volunteer – are not meant to “terrorise and brutalise people” and should concentrate instead on social work. More cows died from consuming plastic than from slaughter, he said, adding that those who want to serve the animal should work towards stopping cows from eating plastic.

The point he made is an important one, so important, in fact, that one wonders why he has never made it before.

Plastic politics

The documentary Plastic Cow, made in 2012 by Kunal Vohra for the Karuna Society for Animals and Nature has captured in graphic detail the horrible fate that cows in India are condemned to once they stop producing milk. “The recent comments of politicians and others in TV debates and newspaper reports on the need to protect the cow in India make me laugh at their hypocrisy. It is the poor animal that has become a pawn in these discussions. The biggest loser on the issue is the animal; nobody seems to really care,” Rukmini Shekhar, associated with the documentary, told my colleague Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty last year when The Wire wrote about Plastic Cow.

Now, Modi has delivered several fiery speeches since 2014 on how slaughter for meat is a major threat to cows in India. He attacked

the Congress during the Lok Sabha election campaign for introducing a ‘pink revolution’ in India based on cow slaughter. He raised the beef issue again during the October 2015 election campaign in Bihar, and the BJP took out newspaper advertisements in that state on the eve of polling to urge voters to back the party if they wanted to save cows from slaughter.

I don’t recall any speech Modi made at a rally on the threat plastic poses to cows. Indeed, a Google search produces no examples of statements by Modi – before his ‘town hall’ on Saturday, that is – about the need to save cows from eating plastic.

Speaking about his own work in the service of cow, the prime minister claimed that at a camp he had organised for bovines, “at least two buckets full of plastic were removed from the stomach of one of them.”

Modi did not say when and where he had organised this camp but his description of the amount of plastic removed from a cow sounds suspiciously similar to the surgery shown in the Plastic Cow documentary film. Be that as it may, if today Modi is upset that cow protectors want to save cows from slaughter and not from plastic, he has only his own toxic words to blame. Go online and read his speeches. You will find him speaking darkly about a ‘pink revolution’ and not a plastic one. The reason is obvious. When you talk about cow slaughter, you are polarising the electorate on religious lines. Talking about the dangers of plastic is not so useful when the idea is to divide and rule.

What the BJP’s priorities are

Vigilantes also have a way of picking up signals from the laws that Modi and his colleagues have passed on cow slaughter. No law has even been considered by Modi and the BJP to help protect cows from plastic. A 2012 PIL by the Karuna

Society to ban plastic bags and save the cow was finally disposed by the Supreme Court last month. Accepting that the situation is ‘very alarming’, the court directed the central and state governments to consider banning the use, sale and disposal of plastic bags. Till now, there is no sign the Modi government is prepared to act.

Since the BJP came to power in the Centre and in states like Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand, not only have party-run governments tightened laws against cow slaughter but senior leaders have often used the beef issue as an emotive political tool without being censured by the prime minister.

Apart from Akhlaq, several Muslims have been murdered or attacked by cow vigilantes, including a man and boy in Jharkhand, and a Kashmiri truck driver near Udhampur. On none of these occasions did Modi make a public statement condemning the violence. Indeed, senior BJP leaders, including Union culture minister Mahesh Sharma, the chief ministers of Jharkhand and Haryana, minister of state Sanjeev Baliyan and others, have either soft-pedaled these crimes or provided oblique justifications for them.

However, ever since the vigilantism of the ‘gau rakshaks’ started affecting the Dalits – who are an important voting group that the BJP hopes to tap in the upcoming elections – Modi and his advisors have moved to limit the political fallout from their campaigning over the beef issue. The sacking of Anandiben Patel as chief minister of Gujarat was the first indication of damage control; though her exit was the product of internal wrangling within the BJP, the timing was such that Dalits could be told the the CM was being punished for the Una incident.

Modi’s angry comments are a desperate attempt to placate Dalits and send a message to the vigilante groups – whose ‘anti-social’ foot-soldiers are drawn from the same political eco-

system that the sangh parivar inhabits – that they should be more careful about their actions lest they end up hurting the BJP politically.

After his ‘town hall’ event, Modi took to Twitter to say: “The sacred practice of cow worship & the compassion of Gau Seva can’t be misused by some miscreants posing as Gau Rakshaks... There is absolutely no need for anyone to take the law in his or her hands & disturb the spirit of harmony & togetherness.”

In June, Baliyan, who is a member of Modi’s council of ministers, BJP MP Yogi Adityanath and BJP MLA Sangeet Som batted for the killers of Akhlaq by demanding action against the dead man’s family for the ‘crime’ of eating beef. “A

cow weighs nothing less than 150 kg and one person alone cannot consume it. There should be a probe into what happened and who were involved in the crime,” said Baliyan.

The prime minister did not say or do anything to condemn them for their endorsement of vigilantism. And today, when the worst that thugs who attack Dalits have to fear is to be part of a “dossier”, I don’t expect the lumpens who’ve been baiting Muslims in the name of the cow to feel the least bit unnerved.

Note: The article has been edited to include details of the July 2016 Supreme Court judgment on the need to ban plastic bags.

Courtesy thewire.in

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Pitiable Condition of Dalits in the midst of incidents of atrocities

Gautam Thaker

In Gujarat, incidents of atrocities on Dalits are on the rise year after year instead of reduction in it. On an average, every year in Gujarat, about 20 dalits are killed and some 45 No. of dalit women become victims of rape. As per statistics furnished by Govt. itself, during the period of 2010-15, incidents of 130 No. of murders of dalits, 336 No. of rapes on dalit women and 5628 cases of victims of atrocities had been registered. Thus, on an average, every year, 1100 Nos. of dalits become victims of atrocities. Rape cases numbering 39 (2010), 51 (2011), 44 (2012), 70 (2013), 74 (2014), 58 (2015) and until April 2016, 27 have been registered. These can be treated as the statistics of dalit women and their family members who mustered courage to lodge complaint with the Police Station. On going through the figures of rape cases against dalit women, one wonders, as to which path the society is treading?

During last five years, in Gujarat, incidents of atrocities against dalit have been increasing every year instead of reduction therein, which becomes evident from the above figures. Besides the episode at Una, during 2012 three youths had lost their lives in police firing in Thangadh of Surendranagar. The report of inquiry committee headed by Additional Secretary should be released with immediate effect because the C.I.D. Crime to whom this inquiry was entrusted had told while presenting a summary report before the Gujarat High Court that in this matter no one is found guilty of crime. On 22nd May 2016 a team of "Gau-Rakshaks" had made an assault on dalits in Rajula town of Saurashtra, on 6-7-2016, dalit, Ramabhai Singarakhiya was murdered at Sodhaana near Porbandar. Moreover, on 10-7-

2016 a dalit under-trial prisoner, named Sagar Babubhai Rathod had died due to atrocities by the police. These incidents also need to be inquired into.

For improving condition of dalits in Gujarat, special courts to deal with cases of atrocities on dalits should be setup, reservation policy in the state be implemented and entire fund allocated in the budget for welfare of dalits should be fully utilized. Moreover, "Gau-Raksha" (Cow-Protection) Committees should be declared as illegal. The Govt. should form a Task Force / Committee in Gujarat to thoroughly look into the hardships meted out to the dalits. This Task Force should be comprised of Collector, S.P., dalit Leaders and representatives from activists etc.

PUCL conducts spot inquiry by personally visiting Una to inquire after dalits who became victims of atrocities.

While the State and the nation are celebrating 125th birth anniversary of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, to make an on-the-spot inquiry in to the incidents of atrocities against 7 Nos. of dalit youths in broad day light and in presence of police and the public, which took place on 11th July 2016 at Samadhiyala (Una) in Gir-Somnath district of Gujarat, a team of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL-Gujarat), under leadership of Manjula Pradeep (Navsarjan Trust) paid a visit on 25th and 26th July. In this team, Neeta Mahadev (Gujarat Lok Samiti), Meenakshi Joshi (M.S.D.), Govind Parmar (Advocate and Activist), T. P. Babaria (Activist and Local Leader) had joined. To assist them, Kantilal Parmar, Deena Vankar, Madhu Koradiya etc. had joined in this team. After

making spot inquiry, they had presented a detailed report and had made special demands and recommendations before the National Human Rights Commission. Moreover, they had also presented their demands before the Gujarat Govt. and also before H.E. the Governor of Gujarat.

- 1) To review the atrocities committed against dalits during last ten years, National Human Rights Commission should constitute a Task Force. A public hearing should be arranged on the atrocities committed against dalits in Gujarat by the NHRC only. The NHRC should ask the Gujarat Govt. to present a report showing the present condition of dalits. Moreover, NHRC should instruct the Gujarat Govt. to present a report on implementation of laws framed for protection of dalits.
- 2) Cow Protection Forces working in Gujarat and all over the country should be declared as “illegal” and should be banned.
- 3) NHRC should give direction to the Gujarat Govt. to present an action plan report about actions initiated and “Action Taken Steps”, for prevention of atrocities in 11 districts which have been declared by the Gujarat Govt. as “atrocious-prone”.
- 4) For the episode of Una, Gujarat Govt. should form an inquiry committee consisting

of two No. of honorable sitting judges of the High Court.

- 5) Inquiry of this incident should be completed within sixty days and charge sheet be filed before the Court. For expeditious action, a special court may also be set up.
- 6) In the Court, for defense on behalf of affected dalits, at least two Nos. of reliable and expert lawyers should be engaged. Simultaneously police protection should be provided to the victims and their family members.
- 7) For collecting of important evidences, a special committee - Special Investigation Team should be constituted by the N.H.R.C.

It is hoped and expected that if the Gujarat Govt. indeed wants to provide justice then it should sincerely resolve the issues such as migration by the dalits, encroachment on land, offering land rights, and to end the evils like untouchability in the schools, refusal to fetch water, ban on entry in temple and situation like carrying of night soil over the head etc.

(The Author is the National President of Indian Radical Humanist Association and General Secretary of People's Union for Civil Liberties - Gujarat). M – 09825382556, Email: gthaker1946@gmail.com

Respecting others' view-point

I have repeatedly observed that no school of thought can claim a monopoly of right judgement. We are all liable to err and are often obliged to revise our judgements. In a vast country like this, there must be room for all schools of honest thought. And the least, therefore, that we owe to ourselves as to others is to try to understand the opponent's view-point and, if we cannot accept it, respect it as fully as we expect him to respect ours..

-Mahatma Gandhi

Enraged Kashmiri Youth Will Not Be Brought Around Easily

(Editor's Note: Congress leader and former union minister Mani Shankar Aiyar and journalist Prem Shankar Jha faced a hostile crowd at Srinagar's Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital, when they went to meet the civilians, injured during the ongoing protests, on Thursday ,18th August, 2016 but were forced to leave the institute after protests from volunteers and attendants. The hospital corridors reverberated with slogans like "Go India Go Back" when the ten-member group including social activist Shabnam Hashmi, former Air vice-marshall Kapil Kak and others were in the hospital. "We just want azadi and nothing more," the attendants told the delegation. However journalists and other members of the delegation were allowed to meet the patients in the wards. Following article is written by Mani Shankar Aiyar. – N.D. Pancholi)

I have just been to Srinagar with a disparate group of interested individuals put together by an NGO called LEHAR, attempting to familiarize Indian opinion with what is going on in Kashmir.

The first thing that struck one in all the conversations we had was the consensus in Kashmir on the Valley's three principal objects of fury: Narendra Modi, an anchor on a TV channel whose identity you can easily guess, and, coming a distant third, the National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval. Chief Minister Mehbooba is generally dismissed as irrelevant, the focus of anger being on the BJP government at the centre and the BJP as the dominant and



Mani Shankar Aiyar

dominating element in the state government. Not that the Congress or the National Conference are not excoriated. They are, and held responsible for much of what has gone wrong these last seven decades. But the current BJP dispensation is regarded as the last straw, with no residual trust or hope vested in it.

Our visit happened to fall in the immediate aftermath of the Prime Minister's Independence Day address to the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort. The Kashmiris we met said they were glued to their TV and radio sets expecting to hear something of their plight. They felt deeply let down, slighted at the Prime Minister's callous indifference to their condition. What, they demanded to know, has Balochistan to do with their fate in Kashmir? Why this diversion of attention to Pakistan when the core of the problem lay in Kashmir and not outside? Why was there no reference at all in his long address to the suffering of Kashmir and the Kashmiris? Why could he not have spared a word of sympathy for the children lying blinded and amputated in the hospitals? Why not the least show of regret, the least apology for the mistakes made? It was a cry of both pain and

anguish.

Pressed to explain what could be done to ameliorate the situation, the initial reaction was anger at the question, despair, and a complete absence of hope that there could be any way out. The question, they said, had been put to them times out of number, but nothing ever came out of all-party delegations, round-table conferences, interlocutors' reports. They firmly believed India was out to keep their land and not conciliate their people. There was no sincerity, they thought, in the pretense of a search for a political situation; indeed, New Delhi did not even consider the problem to be political, they viewed it as a matter of law and order to be ruthlessly crushed by brutal police action and, where that failed, by the armed forces enjoying the impunity of AFSPA.

One particularly intelligent, well-informed and articulate intellectual said it was quite wrong to say there was no dialogue going on between Delhi and the Valley. There was a dialogue - between stones and pellets. That was the only language conceived by the central government. New Delhi, he said, understood "peace and tranquility" to mean wearing out the agitators to exhaustion so that the central government could claim the restoration of "normalcy". Normalcy, he stressed, was not peace; the anger continued simmering between bouts of acute tension. So, the agitation must be seen as continuous, not sporadic, irrespective of whether, from time to time, street demonstrations ebbed or surged.

Many also said that the time for "dialogue" had passed. Street protests had passed out of the control of the elders and become the spontaneous expression of anger and resentment by a generation born and brought up through the violence and oppression of the 90s and the first decade and a half of this century. One university teacher illustrated this

by saying his little daughter in LKG was asking what is meant by "stone pelting" and "pellet guns". We saw on the curfewed streets one seven-year old taking her younger brother's arm to help him leap over concertina barbed wires as they negotiated their way home past the sullen security forces. It seemed to symbolize the era.

It had to be further understood, said those we spoke to, that while the agitations of 2008 and 2010 could be traced to specific grievances, the agitation of 2016 was not caused by a single incident like the killing of Burhan Wani, but by the explosion of an anger that had been building up over the entire lifetime of the kids on the street. Even AFSPA was no longer the critical issue. It was generalized resentment that was finding expression in what these children, who had seen nothing but violence through all their young years, were up to. Neither Pakistan nor the mosques were stoking the sacrifices; it was a genuine young people's movement directed only by an inner fire and not directions from anyone, indigenous or external.

Yet, once they had got their swelling resentment off their chests, our interlocutors were willing to talk further. No one that we met even mentioned Pakistan. "Aazadi", yes - that was the leitmotif, but "Pakistan" as the preferred option, no. The catch came when we asked whether "*aazadi*" meant sovereign independence or genuine autonomy. The furious young men who blocked our way at the hospital had no doubt that "*aazadi*" meant, "Go, India". But others who had thought through this question put it another way: "What alternative is there to *aazadi* if not autonomy?"

When I pointed out that a former Congress Home Minister had suggested that we begin with 1947, when the state's accession was accepted with only three subjects allotted to the centre, and then work our way over the next seven decades to determine what Indian

legislation they wanted withdrawn and what left operational, there was skepticism, saying Chidambaram was saying this only because he no longer held office. On its being pointed out that it had been revealed that this suggestion had in fact been taken by the minister, when he was minister, all the way to the cabinet committee concerned and was, therefore, not a sudden afterthought, there was pause for reflection, especially when it was followed up by the query as to whether they did not indeed wish to benefit from legislation and programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the Right to Education Act, the Right to Information Act, the National Rural Health Mission.

There was then a grudging acknowledgement of the possibility of such an approach. But we were asked not to make the mistake the BJP was making in trying to portray the Kashmir problem as an economic problem, a problem to be papered over by pledges of "development". It had to be understood that the problem was quintessentially political, not even a matter of ensuring that the democratic and human rights of the Kashmiris were assured, but of doing so on the basis of "self-determination". It also needed to be recognized by Delhi that when even Syed Gillani confessed to not being able to rein in the kids, and the Hurriyat had thrown up its hands because the youth were so adamant about sacrificing their all till their goal was attained, what could any voice of moderation do to defuse the anger and frustration? Gen Next had taken over. They mocked the older generation over their falling prey to false Indian promises - a case in point being that after PV Narasimha Rao's promise of "the sky as the limit" for autonomy, neither the Vajpayee government, for all its poetry about "jamhooriyat, insaniyat and Kashmriyat," nor successive later governments, had accepted a word of the unanimous J&K

assembly resolution on state autonomy. How to impart any faith in the youth, the 16-20 year olds who were throwing themselves into life-threatening agitations, that anything meaningful would come out of talking to those who would not keep their word?

The only possibility of persuading the youngsters to come around, we were told, might be through the *masjid* and *mohalla* committees that were looking after the youth as they took to the streets. But first these committees and the elders in the community had to be approached and their cooperation obtained - a monumental task in present circumstances.

Yet, there is no alternative to undertaking this gargantuan task if an entire generation of Kashmiris is to be retained for India. Those we talked to insisted that as of now, there was no communal colour to the agitation, no Hindu-Muslim issue involved, but if Hindutva slogans reverberated within and outside the state (Jammu included), there was the danger that religion might get dragged into the cause by ideological mischief-makers.

None of this will come as news to those who are for the moment running this country and the state. The absence of any outreach from them to the people of Jammu & Kashmir, the paralysis in governance evidenced by empty hotels, stranded houseboats and forlorn *shikaras* bobbing on the waters of the Dal Lake, the ominous silence on the streets enforced by 40 days and more of uninterrupted curfew, and the atmosphere of fear and distrust are reflective of the atmosphere being vitiated by the playing out of the Hindutva agenda. This is not the way to keep the country together.

(Mani Shankar Aiyar is former Congress MP, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.)

Courtesy NDTV

Is Superstition limited to Hindus?

K.S. Chalam

Karnataka state is in the News once again for all the wrong reasons, this time for differing on the proposed Anti-superstition bill. Karnataka is perhaps one of the few states in the country, may be a lone region that has been championing the cause of reason and rationality not only during the modern period, but also for the last more than a millennium in this part of the country. The revolt initiated by Basava, a traditional Brahmin against the inhuman and barbarous practices, particularly in relation to caste and the solution provided by him against the caste prejudices had eventually ended him to vanish in oblivion or might have been butchered by the sanatana dharma purveyors. Therefore, one need not be surprised to learn that the conflict between orthodox barbarians and followers of reason in the present Karnataka in the episodes of Kalburgi, Dhabolkar, and Pansare are not new. In fact the intellectual influence of the present state of Karnataka was not confined to its present boundaries, it had a wide spectrum of whole of the South including the Deccan (Maharashtra). Therefore, the entire country is looking for a solution to come out of superstitions through the proposed bill, though there are states that passed Acts against superstition to show off that they are modern, but encourage myths in practice. Dr Narasimhaiah and several others in Karnataka have laid the foundation for the present bill.

The Siddaramaiah Cabinet discussed, “Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifices and other Inhuman Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Bill, 2016”, in detail and it seems no consensus reached due to difference of opinion on certain practices. In fact the discussion in the cabinet should have been made public to initiate a debate in the country on an important national issue that involves the

prospects of our ethos and the constitutional provision to promote scientific temper. I am told that there are several reasonable individuals even in the Hindu Parivar who could support this if a public debate is organised. In fact, the issue is so porous that the debate within the cabinet and in informal circles was perhaps confined to the practices that are by tradition related to the lower castes while the practices of the upper castes, sanskritised sudras, and the converted elite are not touched at all. I think this is the crux of the problem of not able to arrive at a consensus on defining what is superstition?

The Western or occidental reasoning is different from Oriental orientation. I have come across a recent study on the differences between these two systems of reasoning in mathematics, the simple approach for scientific reasoning, and the authors classified the two systems briefly as follows:

Occidental Reasoning

1. 1200 algebra: no formalisation
2. Paradigm of geometry, Equations
3. Aprioristic formulas that hide the processes, favouring, with the result, determinism

Reductio ad absurdum in a potential infinite **Oriental Reasoning**

1. 200 B.C. algebra: no formalisation
2. Positional system, matrices (system of the rods)
3. Solving equations by means of algebraic manipulations with the strategies: 1) making equals, 2) making homogeneous, 3) research for fundamental algorithms.
4. Existing infinity of operations

The basic point is that, “the aspirations of ancient Greek tradition represented by Euclid,

which proposed deducing all mathematics from a single set of indemonstrable but evident axioms, were not shared by the Chinese at least until the modern age. In China, as a matter of fact, the goal was not axiomatic-deductive demonstration, but gathering unifying principles from all of mathematics.” Though the article is related to comparison of Greek and Chinese traditions to represent Occidental or Western, and Oriental or Asian, the Chinese example is to a large extent true in the case of India. We had a tradition of Materialism not only in the so called Lokayata or Charvaka schools of Brahminical thought, but the doctrines of Ajivikas who were the pre-Jain-Buddhist sects (see A.L. Basham) that had deep roots in the native Indian epistemology. The native Indian episteme was different from the alien or Aryan. In fact the alien practices were rooted in the Sumerian soil had a direct influence on the pre-Abrahamic and Brahmic (Vedic) religious pantheon that carry some remote memories in the epics. That is why it is said that Christianity had a hidden Vedanta and Hindu and Islamic faiths had in common several heretical practices. The Hindu bug on the net in recent times produces blogs to show that Islam and Christianity had derived their theology from Vedas. In a way they are arriving at the idea of Vasudhaivakutumbakam to justify their hegemony. This is fabulous. Then why is it that the practices of the lower castes alone are subjected to scrutiny and the beliefs, traditions and customs, while old callous dogmas of the elite are either respected or preserved?

Interestingly, very few of the modern rationalist or western (including Christian rationalists) new Atheist thinkers including a section of the dialectical materialists never looked at the literature produced by great scholars like D.P. Chattopadhyay, N.N. Bhattacharya, and A.L. Basham (to name few). Nevertheless, the literary interpretations of D.D. Kosambi did not enhance our understanding of the continuous existence of

cults of lower classes. In a way the present trend demonstrates the alleged presence of the kind of discrimination and deceit against the native traditions even in the intellectual exercises of modern India. All of us who are trained in the traditions of “rational man” are guilty of neglecting this very important and foundational tradition of India. Now, the debate on the Karnataka superstition Bill has opened a new vista in to the cosmos of life and living conditions of the poor and the wretched of India.

It is very easy to dismiss the cult practices of the lower castes as “sigh of the oppressed”. But, they have been in existence much before the emergence of pre-class society and are being used as identity, though the core of it was appropriated by the Brahminical or Sanskritised Hinduism and are being treated with respect. Similarly the Abrahamic and Brahmic (Vedic) faiths have several beliefs that are common and touted as spiritual as long as they are practiced by the elite. The Christian missionaries in their strategy to attract the lower castes deliberated and found that the lower castes have certain strong beliefs that should be made blasphemous and superstitious so that the space created can be filled with Jesus (see Henry Whitehead). They have started belittling the traditional practices of the untouchables as superstition and persuaded some of them to convert. The Hindu, Muslim and other alien faiths have never resisted the treachery. In fact they are together in denouncing the Native Indian traditions. The practice, it is reported is still prevalent in Andhra Pradesh and it is alleged that majority of the S.Cs and some artisans are converted and the dalit leadership lament that the masses are not available for any social movement, except their leaders. In the Muslim dominated Kerala districts, the belief/propaganda that vaccines are essentially *haram* took away the life of Mohammad Afzaz (14) who was not allowed the administration of vaccine for diphtheria, is being reported in the media as

victim of superstition today. The so called godless Dravidian movement seems to be in distress in this respect.

Interestingly, the so called rational missionaries including those intellectuals who are critical about other faiths do not look at the superstitions like No13, wine as blood of Jesus, faith healing, remarriage, contraceptives, beliefs in devils, Satan etc. The Muslims do also believe in the same practices as that of Christians and have their superstitions about certain Nos, black cat, biting nails, glass breaking as good omen, owl as bad (some may be typical to India) etc. We may also find comparable beliefs among the Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and others. In fact all the faiths including Brahminical Hinduism believes in horoscopes, date of birth, paying huge money as zakat/donation to places of worship etc. Not all customs of the alien faiths are unscrupulous and superstitious; some are institutionalised for the betterment of the society. The point is that there are several such practices among the lower castes that were used in the past as norms and practices of a traditional society at its primitive stage or proto-scientific stage have remained with them as residuals as the believers were considered as untouchables. The Pambalas of Telangana is a classic example how their attire, living conditions etc, have remained the same from the time of Tantrism till to date.

The main stream society never looked at the customs of the locals with understanding except smuggling some that are used for therapeutic practices in the name of Ayurveda, Yunani etc. A few years ago there was huge hue and cry reportedly by the so called Brahminical Professors against the method used by a lower caste person called Ramar Pillai in Tamilnadu, who claimed to have produced petrol from leaves. As he was subjected to several elite tests which he never knew, it was alleged that the gentleman resorted to all kinds of tricks to prove it and we

all forgot about it by now. But, the mainstream scientists have drawn massive grants to experiment with Jatropha plant as an alternative source of petrol. The point here is that the kind of traditional practices including some of the belief systems based on the living conditions of the lower castes were never studied scientifically and rationally to weed the grass from grain. Now after the advent of the ICT and media, we are now watching in almost all the channels whether religious or secular, telling us about the rationale behind the so called upper caste or elite beliefs. A separate social class and huge infrastructure and trillions of rupees are behind such arrangements. It does not mean that we should use the so called post-modernist, instrumental rationality to justify all nonsense. Instrumental rationality is often seen as a specific form of [rationality using reason as a tool](#), focusing on the most efficient or cost-effective means to achieve a specific end, but not in itself reflecting on the value of that end. Horkheimer argues that instrumental rationality plays a key role in the oppressive industrial culture of [capitalism](#) as it doesn't bother about the evil effects or negative impact on society. I am not saying here that some of those who are critical about the superstitions are subjecting the practices of the lower castes with instrumental rationality, but I feel that we should look at the practices pragmatically within the social and historical background of India. Otherwise, it would amount to another kind of discrimination and disgrace meted out to the socially disadvantaged, if only the Aghori and other practices of the lower castes are critiqued while Astrology, Palmistry, Numerology, etc practiced by the Brahmin or elite in the places of worship are touted as rational or core of the faith. This is simply double standard or mockery.

(This is only to open a debate on the topic, the note is sent despite some infirmities on references.)

Where does humanism stand at a time of crisis?



Despair, even apocalyptic pessimism, would be an easy response to the state of the world. The news agenda globally is dominated by terrorism. Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan and Syria are far and away the most targeted nations (in 2014, 78% of the deaths and 57% of all terrorist attacks occurred in these five countries, and they remained the top five "highest impact" countries in 2015). Bangladesh has regressed from relative safety into a frequent target in just a few years. Leading European nations such as France and Germany have been targeted repeatedly and grotesquely. It may make no difference to the dead how they were killed, but there is something so calculatedly dehumanizing about attacks such as the truck massacre in Nice that we can only feel sickened, angry and despairing at such monstrosity. While at the same time, many have noted that the media attention and perhaps even the emotional impact of terrorism seems to be declining, as familiarity breeds fatigue.

There is also a broad trend toward populism in many countries. By populism, we don't mean mere popularity, of course. Populism is when courting popularity becomes an ideological goal in itself, through the advocacy of policies which over-simplify the world. These policies usually also scapegoat and dehumanize some people, while flattering others, as well as distorting truth, and making promises which are either vague ("I'll make you safe") or the keeping of which

IHEU President Andrew Copson

would only spawn new evils ("We'll deport them all", "Our sole priority will be our own country" and so on).

Populist nationalist parties and candidates have appeared in many countries in Europe. In the Philippines, we have just seen the election of President Rodrigo "Digong" Duterte, who disparages the very concept of human rights, and who has even incited citizens to murder as a form of vigilantism. Russia maintains Putin's own brand of militating, supremacist populism. In Turkey, President Erdogan's overreaching backlash against "coup plotters", drawing in all potential political opponents, represents a new peak of anti-democratic, anti-secularist and rights-violating oppression on the fringes of Europe. IHEU is politically neutral in the sense of ordinary party political campaigning; but for many humanists the rise of Trump in the US to the extent that he exemplifies this new demagoguery, and the tremors of anti-EU sentiment reverberating across Europe to the extent that they indicate a retreat from internationalist ideals, are further cause for alarm.

How can humanists respond? Who could tell France to stay in good humour after the November massacre or the Nice atrocity, or Germany to stay positive after weeks of repeat attacks? Who could insist to South Sudan or Congo or Yemen or Iraq or Syria that we may be "short-term pessimists but long-term optimists" as the well-worn phrase goes? How do we tell ourselves we believe in building a better world, when merely preserving what we have feels like a Herculean task?

Despite repeated mischaracterization by some critics, the optimism of humanism has never been naive. We do not counter blind faith with blind hope, or replace divine worship with human

worship! Our humanism has long championed rationality and reason, and therefore skepticism and realism, not least about humanity itself. It would be wrong then to cite crisis and terror as reasons to reject that very humanism.

But how does humanism, which we understand as in some sense optimistic about human potential, conceive of itself during a period of global instability and threat?

Albert Camus said, "The purpose of a writer is to keep civilization from destroying itself." In times of crisis, the same might be said of humanism.

I can't tell you exactly how to feel or respond to the new mood of crisis. But there are a few thoughts that we must strive to keep at the forefront of our minds and at the forefront of the debates raging in all our countries:

We must not confuse terrorism with super villainy. It does not take a "mastermind" to murder. That there is anything "sophisticated" about most terrorist plots is media hype. To endow terrorists with these virtues only hands them more power and encourages more lone copycats. Even the most coordinated of attacks are relatively simple compared to the logistics of, for example, running a business. (As proof of this principle, note that while ISIS claims "responsibility" for attacks, it is often debatable whether there is any real connection, and usually takes days or weeks to determine whether a particular attack was carried out with material support, or merely by a copycat acting alone!) We must keep a watch on the language we use, and we must resist the glamorization of terror.

The long-term trajectory really is to the good. Violent and mass deaths, short and diseased lives, even the proportion of lives lived under dictatorship, are all in decline over historical time. This does not license complacency. On the contrary, we must recognise that progress only

comes through real effort. But these longer-term trends do give cause for hope, and they contextualize a line from AC Grayling, specifically speaking about conservative or radical religion and Islamism, that: "What we are witnessing is not the resurgence of religion, but its death throes."

The end is not nigh. Yes, civilization faces various threats, including new existential risks that humanity has created for itself: the possibility of nuclear war, mass bio-terror, or runaway climate change. But a century of world wars and ideological terror must show us that even blitzed cities are resilient, that damaged nations can rebuild bridges, and that even previously mortal enemies can work across borders to put space stations in orbit, cure diseases, and build a network that covers the entire planet. Reports of the death of civilization are greatly exaggerated. The world is globalizing and that has brought new challenges, and maybe even engendered a backlash. But however staggered the progress, whatever the setbacks, this new global civilization is not about to disappear.

So, yes, it is easier to do harm than it is to achieve good. But once we have acquired new goods – new ideas and inventions, new rights and freedoms – they cannot be forgotten. Yes, there are those who will react against this progress, and kill to suppress the liberties of others. But the genie of progress cannot be put back in the lamp. The asymmetry between the ease of doing harm versus the difficulty of doing good, is countered by another asymmetry: the temporariness of destruction versus the longevity of progress and liberty.

Humanists must continue to find hope in this fact, and to act in accordance with this fact — to act bravely, constructively, with hope and with dignity. In a world fraught with hatred and danger, promoting this mindset is the vital role of humanism.

‘Khattar Kaka’: SATYANARAYANA PUJA

Translated by Kata Chandrahas

(‘Khattar Kaka’ is a literary work translated by Kata Chandrahas from the original book “Adarsavyaktulu” written in Telugu. Khattar Kaka is a simple person well-versed in mythological works written in Sanskrit. However, in his outlook he is rational, realistic and scientific and interprets happenings and events accordingly. The second episode appeared in the August 2016 issue of the RH. Following is the third episode. – Editor)

*Savouring a drink of lassi,
Uncle was in an ecstatic mood.*

I went over to him and said, “Uncle, today there’s Satyanarayana Puja at my home.”

“Really? I hope in the name of *satyam*, truth, puja of *asatyam*, untruth, will not be carried on, son,” Uncle said.

I plugged my ears and said, “Rama Rama! Uncle, don’t lampoon the god. It’s not correct.”

“I’m not lampooning god. You’re the one who is heckling god,” Uncle said, grinning.

“How?”

“Look at the puja method and how the sixteen steps in the puja are being performed?

*‘Asanam swagatham
padyamarghyamachamaneeyakam
madhuparkachamanee snanam vasanam
bharanani cha
gandhapushpadhoopadeepanaivedyani
visarjanam’*

“First, the god is invited and offered a seat. ‘*ihamagachha, ihathishta, idamasanam grihana*’ ‘Please come here. Sit here. Please take this seat.’ Then, *padyarghah* (water to wash the feet), *achamaneeyam* (water to wash the face). *Madhuparkam* (light refreshments). *Snanam* (water for bathing). *Nava vastrachhadana* (wrap with new clothes). Offer flowers, garland, sandal, incense sticks,

camphor and other aromatic things. Then, many kinds of *naivedyam*, offering of food.

*‘ghrithapakvam havishyannam
payasam cha sasarkaram
naanavidham cha naivedyam vishno me
prathigrihyatham’*

“Then the god is addressed like this— ‘Tuck in many kinds of sweets made with the flour, *payasam* of rice and milk cooked in sugar and pure ghee’.

“The lucky ones who would tuck them in, of course, are different. Yet, ludicrously even betel leaf and areca nut are kept in front of the idol.

*‘lavanga karpurayutham
thambulam surapujitham
prithya grihena devesa mama soukhyam
vivardaya’*

(I am offering *pan* spiced with camphor and cloves. Accept and relish it and promote my well being.)

“At the end, they rise, give *arathi*, lighted camphor worship, and clang the bell metal signalling people to leave.

*‘pujitho si praseeda. Swasthanam gachha.
Aparadham kshamaswa’* (Now your puja has ended. Be content. Now you may go to your places. Forgive mistakes.)

“Arre! What a farce! And what are the

objects of such respect? Worn down, smooth tiny little black stones of the size of *gulabjam* or blue berries!"

"*Narmadeswaram* and *Salagram* are the symbols of Siva and Vishnu, aren't they?" I asked.

Uncle smiled and said, "Arre, Narmadeswara means '*narma parihasam dadathi iti narmadah thathprakarakah esawrah*'. It means 'god of fun and frolic'. Thanks to the puja of Salagram, such entertainment has been arranged for so many people in this big village. Besides, *laddu* will be distributed. This farce costs less than the cinema fare. There's no need to purchase a ticket. And at the end of it, they give the *prasad* too. This is more solemn than the games children play because the elders and even the old people participate in the puja. Further, it doesn't occur to anyone that something ludicrous is happening here. Girls dress up a doll as a bride and play. You make god your guest and play with him as though Salagram is your daughter's father-in-law."

"What does that mean, Uncle?"

"Observe carefully. In the puja, you do the same things as done when the bridegroom arrives with his father. Offer a seat first. Then hand over water. Then, bath, refreshments, garland of flowers and sandal. Then offer sweetmeats, pan, and cloths. And, at the end, seek forgiveness for mistakes, if any. There's just one difference though that the Salagram is bathed with a small quantity of water. The food offered remains intact. In the name of cloth, a cotton strand also would suffice. In one hour, the bell is rung off bidding people goodbye: 'Please go home.' If the groom's father is told, '*Swasthanam gachha*' (now you may go home), what would happen? Hell would break loose.

No? But god is not the groom's father.

Samdhee means 'a person of equal intelligence'. If god has the same intelligence as the householder, then god alone should protect us."

"But along with the puja, a story also is told, isn't it?" I asked.

"Well, if the puja is a play, the story is a novel. The spectators are given a treat both to the eye and the ear."

"Uncle, there must be some latent theory in the story?"

Uncle picked up the *Satyanarayana vratha story* and said, "Let me tell you the gist of the story which the priest will recite tonight after blowing the conch. Once upon a time, in the Naimisa Forest, a conference was held to divine an easy route to remove the misery and pain of mankind in the quickest time, with the least expense, with the minimum of effort and benefiting the greatest number.

*'Swalpashramaih swalpavithhah
swalpakaalaischa satthama*

*yatha bhaveth mahapunyam tatha
kathaya sutha nah'*

"Suta, who presided over the conference said, 'Once in the Vaikunta, Narada too asked Vishnu the same question—

*'martyaloke janah sarvey
nanakleshasamanvithah
thatthkatham sayayennatha
laghupayena thatdwada'*

"That means, 'O Lord! People on the earth are suffering a lot. Please suggest a simple solution to ameliorate their lot.'

"Then the most munificent god revealed this solution—

*'Satyanarayanastaithad vratham
samyag vidhanathah'*

***Kritwa hi sarvaduhkhebhyo mukto
bhavathi manavah'***

“That means, people would overcome all their sufferings if they perform Satyanarayana puja in the traditional manner’.

“That’s not all. The god also told the method of the puja and an account of the prasad as well!

***'rambhaphalam ghritham kshiram
godhumasya cha churnakam
abhave salichurnam va sarkara cha
gudam tatha'***

“That means, make the prasad by mixing bananas, ghee, milk, sugar and wheat flour. If wheat flour is not available, rice flour will do. And if there’s no sugar, use jaggery. God is kind, so kind that he didn’t forget to suggest substitutes for the wheat flour and sugar in case they are in short supply!

“After spending a life time, Bhagawan Buddha found *ashtanga marga*, the eight fold path to mitigate misery. That must be reckoned as *kashtanga marga*, a path strewn with difficulties. But the *mistanga* (eating sweets) path suggested by Lord Satyanarayana, which solves the problem in a trice, is easy for everyone—

***'prasadam bhakshayed bhaktya
nrityagitatikam chareth
Tathascha bandhubhish sardam
vpranscha pratibhojayeth'***

(Everyone has to accept the prasad lovingly. There must be some programme of music and dance. Food must be served to the friends and relatives as also to the Brahmins.)

***'thattkritva sarvaduhkhebhyo
mukto bhavathi manavah'***

(If it’s done like this, man would be freed from

misery)

“Can there be an easier method than this,” Uncle said.

I said, “But...”

Uncle said, “Four proofs have been given in reply to your ‘but’. These strengthen the belief in the minds of the devotees and they inspire them to perform the puja.”

Uncle leafed through the pages of the story book and said, “The first story is about a poor Brahmin of Kasi where God is kindness personified. He saw the Brahmin begging for alms and said—

***'Satyanarayano vishnuh
vanchitartha phalapradah
tasya tvam pujanam vipra
kurushva vrathmutthamam'***

(Satyanarayana, who is another form of Vishnu, fulfills all wishes. So worship him. Perform his vrata, which is par excellence.)

“That day itself, the Brahmin got lot of money after he performed the puja. When he found the puja yielding profit, he began to perform it every month.

***'Sarvaduhkhavinirmuktah
sarvasampat samanvithah
Sarvapapavinirmuktah durlabham
mokshamaptavan'''***

(He was rid of misery and cleansed of all sins and came to own the means to fulfil every kind of pleasure. Finally, he attained salvation too which even the yogis failed to attain.)

Noticing that I was keenly watching him, Uncle said, “There’s no count of the Brahmin beggars roaming about in Kasi. Why then did god show mercy on only that Brahmin? And what did he advise the Brahmin? Not to revolt but to perform his puja. Let that pass. How come

there are hordes of beggars there despite being well aware of the path to overcome penury? Why can't those miserable people have the sense to borrow, if need be, and collect ghee, sugar, and other ingredients and perform the puja once at least? They would surely have mouthful of sugar and ghee everyday thereafter, wouldn't they?"

"Uncle, are these stories all of this kind?"

"Of course, they are. I call this propaganda. A woodcutter performed the puja. Then the wood he sold fetched twice as much!"

*'Thaddine kashtamulyam cha
dvigunam praptavanasou'*

"He acquired wealth, a son, the heaven, *et al* because of the puja, it is said. Likewise, Angadhwaja, a king, also performed the puja. He also got everything.

*'tadvrathasya prabhavena dhana
putranvito bhavath'*

*'ihaloke sukham bhuktya chante
satyapuram yayaou'*

(upon performing the puja, he acquired wealth and a son. He enjoyed all the pleasures of this world and left for Satya Lok.)

"Hey! What's all this but propaganda? It's like the talk of a broker or an insurance agent."

"They all sound like the tales meant for the children, don't they?" I asked.

"Indeed. There's one story which is captivating though. That story holds a mirror to the nature of your Satyanarayana Swamy," Uncle said.

"Is it the story of Leelawati and Kalawati?" I asked.

"Yes. You may have heard it."

I piped up. "I haven't. In any case, it'll be

great fun to hear it from you."

"Then, listen to the story. A merchant performed the puja. Then,

*'ekasmin divase tasya bharya
leelavathi sathee'*

*'Garbhinee sa bhavat tasya bharya
satyaprasadatah'*

"His wife conceived. Due to Satyanarayana's grace, a beautiful girl was born. She was named Kalawati. The merchant vowed that he would perform the puja again at her marriage. But, unfortunately he forgot about the vow. Due to that, the god was angry and cursed him –

*'Vivaha samaye tasyah teva rushto
bhavat prabhuh'*

*'Bhrastapratignamalokya sapam
tasmai pradattavan'*

*'Darunam katinam chasya
mahad duhkham bhavishyati'*

"You play games with me, do you? You vowed to perform the puja and haven't. Just look at what I can do. Let untold sufferings be yours,' he cursed.

"Listen to the next part of the story. The merchant went with his son-in-law over to another kingdom to do business. There was a theft in the palace of that king, Chandraketu. As ordained by god, the thieves left the booty at where the merchant and his son-in-law were lodged. Soldiers recovered the stolen goods from there. Both were arrested. The king relieved them of all their money and committed them to the prison. They both sobbed and pleaded, but,

*'mayaya satya devasya na
srutam kaistayorvachah'*

"No one cared to listen to them due to the maya of Satyanarayana."

"That would besmirch the character and

nature of the god, isn't it, Uncle?"

"How does it matter if the god is besmirched so long as the bags of the disciples are full with the *prasad*? What else is needed? If the god is not depicted in this manner, who would be afraid of god? And if the people are not frightened, why would they offer the puja ingredients? Don't look upon Satyanarayana as an ordinary god. He's like the police inspector, no less. Cry or laugh, but you must pay up what is his. Otherwise, he'll foist some case, put you behind the bars and torture you to death."

"How can there be devotion for such a god?"

"Hey, where there's no fear, there is no devotion. Common people perform puja more out of fear than devotion. If they are convinced that nothing will accrue or nothing will be lost due to the Salagram, they will take the idol straight to the Salagram river and throw it away. Sincerity and rectitude don't fetch anything in the world. That's why Satyanarayana is converted into a vengeful god."

"Then, how did the merchant and his son-in-law come out of it all?" I asked.

"That part is even more interesting. The mother and daughter who stayed at home came to know that their husbands were languishing in jail. One night, Kalawati returned home late. 'Where were you until now?' mother asked. Kalawati replied that she was delayed by Satyanarayana puja. The moment Leelawati heard this, she recollected her vow which had remained unfulfilled. Then, without a moment's delay, she performed the puja and prayed to god—

*'aparadham cha me bhartuh
jamatuḥ kṣhamtumārhasī'*

(Forgive the crime of my husband and my son-in-law.)

*'vratena nena satushtah
satyanarayanaḥ prabhuh'*

The god was satisfied. He appeared in king Chandraketu's dream and said—

*'deyam dhanam cha tatsarvam
grihitam yat tvayadhunā
No chet nasaishyami
sarajyadhanaputrakam'*

(Return the money to the merchants and release them. Or else, I'll destroy your kingdom, your wife and children and the rest.)

"Arre, how could such a person be a god? He could pass off for evil *Saniswara* though. He would think nothing short of complete ruination of anyone who crossed his path. What would poor Chandraketu do? He paid the merchants two times the money seized from them and said, 'O, revered souls! Please return to your homes. Let me live in peace.'

*'puraneetam tu yad dravyam
dviguneekritya dattavan
provacha thou tato raja gachha
sadho nijasramam'''*

"Uncle, what was the mistake of King Chandraketu that the god should be so annoyed with him?"

"He must have suddenly remembered that Kalawati's youth was being wasted away pining for her husband and that her husband had been wrongly imprisoned by the evil king. He forgot that everything happened only due to his maya. Hey, son! How much time does it take for the mighty and the chameleon to change colours?"

Uncle smiled and continued. "Once upon a time, there was a person named Ugradeva Sastry. One day, his wife committed some delay in serving him his dinner. Infuriated, he rushed to throttle her. But when his wife came opposite

him with hot, hot puris, he was immensely pleased and adorned her neck with a necklace. Next day, there was excess salt in the *dal*. He instantly snatched the necklace from her. To me, this god is no better than Ugradeva Sastry. '*kshane rustah kshane tushtah*' (anger at one moment and joy, the next moment.) He got the merchant arrested in a fit of anger. Then he got him released after being pleased with Kalawati's worship. He behaved not like a god but much like a dictatorial feudal lord."

Uncle inhaled a pinch of snuff and resumed. "The story is not over yet. When the merchant got his cargo loaded on the ship and was returning, god appeared before him in the guise of a mendicant and asked him, 'What is there in the ship?' The merchant grew suspicious. He didn't know who he was and why was he asking about the cargo? He wanted to get the stranger out of his way by saying something. He said, '*latapatradikam chaiva vartate taranou mama*' (The cargo contains hay and trash). God waited for an opportunity like this, didn't he? He added a sentence to what the merchant said—'*satyam bhavatu tadavacha*' (May your words come true!) Then what? The entire cargo turned into hay and trash. The merchant was inconsolable. God watched all this, merrily as though saying, 'This is my power, scoundrel! You wanted to deceive me, didn't you? Now enjoy the punishment.'

"God went there like a mendicant, concealing his true identity. This was not deception, it is said. But telling a lie to a stranger in self protection is labelled as deception! Is this god's sense of justice? Now let it pass. Then the merchant promised –

***'praseeda pujaishyami yatha
vibhava vistaraih'***

(I'll perform your puja to my fullest capacity.

Show mercy.)

"Then the god was pleased and returned the goods to him. This god proved himself to be a notch above the sales tax officer."

"So, anyhow he returned home safely, didn't he?" I asked.

"Not so soon! The story is not finished yet! When Kalawati received the news at home, she ran to the river to meet her husband. In her haste, she forgot to take the prasad. '*prasadam cha parityajya gatha sa pi patim prati*'.

"What else? God turned a frightful police inspector again!

***'tena rushtah satyadevo
bhartaram tharanim tatha
Samhritva cha dhanai sartham
jale tatravamajjayat'***

"He was so angry that he drowned her husband, his wealth and the goods. Watching all this, Kalawati fell unconscious. Her parents began to wail loudly. The god taunted, 'O! You have come rushing happily to meet your husband, leaving the prasad behind. You thought nothing of insulting me, haven't you? Now listen to this. Until you go home and eat my prasad, your husband would stay bobbing up and down in the river like this.' What choice did Kalawati have? She ran back home, ate the prasad, and returned to the river bank after somehow satisfying the god's whim."

Uncle cut the nuts and said, "Tell me this. Why should god be so envious of a young woman who rushed to meet her husband? Such sadism is characteristic of the villains in cinemas. Does it behove god? Actually he should be happy that Kalawati worshipped her husband more than the god. Instead he thought of competing with her husband! Finally, Kalawati went to Satya

Lok where the god is stationed. ‘*chante satyapuram yayou!*’ I don’t know how she managed with him there. As for me, terror seizes me when I hear the name Satyanarayana.”

“Uncle, why are there four stories in Satyanarayana puja when one would have sufficed?”

“It’s with a view to drive people of all classes to perform the puja that a representative has been taken from each of the four *varnas*. A poor Brahmin became rich. A king got a son. A Vysya got a daughter. A woodcutter got plenty of profit. Is this not the gist of all these stories? Things like this happen routinely day and night all around us, whether or not puja is performed. What is so special about Leelawati becoming pregnant? What puja has our Abdul Miyan performed that he has a dozen children? And Chowdary’s wife isn’t conceiving even though she has got the story recited every month. Would monthly menstrual activity cease because of the monthly puja? Poor Sharma, he has been blowing the conch all his life and yet he couldn’t get a proper roof over his house. On the other hand, thanks to black marketing, Varala Setty has built a three-storied house. Why hasn’t your Satyanarayana seized all his money as punishment?”

“Do you mean to say that there is no *satya*, truth, in the story of Satyanarayana?”

“Think for a while. From the start to the finish, Satyanarayana appears to be a thorough miser, a rogue, one who is selfish and mean. He has been depicted as worse than a human being. In fact, he has been reduced to the status of a monkey, which often with menacing gestures flinches the fruit from your hands and runs away and after a while happily returns the fruit. Could such god evoke devotion and not disgust?”

“But it has been said that the result of the puja would be indeed rewarding, isn’t it?” I said,

Uncle replied, “True. ‘*soubhagyasantatikaram sarvatra vijayapradam!*’”

(One who performs the puja will acquire wealth. He’ll win everywhere.) What I ask is this. If both the contenders perform the puja, who would win? The story says that the desire of the person who performs the puja will be fulfilled. ‘*yethata krite manusyanam vanchasiddhbirbhaved dhrivam*’. Whether the desire of the householder who performs the puja will be fulfilled or not is not known but the priest’s desire will certainly be fulfilled forthwith. Because the scholar who wrote this story didn’t forget to write this—

‘*vipraya dakshinam dadyat katham srithva janaih saha*’

(After hearing this story, everyone must make an offering, give *dakshina*, to the Brahmin.

“If the Brahmin doesn’t get *dakshina*, even Lord Brahma could turn against you.”

“Do you mean to say that the story has been created only to rob the householders of *dakshina* and the *prasad*?”

“What else? ‘If you allow your ear to be pierced, you’ll get jaggery’ is how the children are enticed. Likewise, the householder is enticed. Many things like ‘Distribution of jaggery and banana mixed in milk will beget a son’ are said. Then what? Innocent people will fall for these cheap tricks, much like the children clamouring for a fake watch sold for ten paise. How can people be discouraged from clamouring for fake goods? Even if they are advised against them, would they listen? Likewise, what can be said of people who fill the bowl with milk and mix banana and jaggery in that and expect the birth of a son or a daughter or ascend to the heaven in exchange? The country is known for herd mentality. That’s why in this country adulterers grow wealthy while

the adherents of the truth live in utter poverty.”

“Uncle, what is the solution?”

Uncle said in a tone of finality, “If possible, worship the real Satyadeva. Go where there is untruth, injustice, deceit, gambling, corruption, black marketing, and conspiracy to defeat the truth and blow the conch of truth. Awaken the people. Lead the society towards the truth.

That’s the true satyavratha. That’s the worship of satya. If that kind of worship begins, the heavens will descend on the earth. Then nothing would be impossible.

*‘na kinchit vidyate loke
yanna satyapujanath’*

(When the truth is worshipped, there’s nothing in the world which cannot be achieved.)

Human Rights Section: HOLY COW, UNHOLY CARCASS AND DALITS

PUDR condemns the incident of flogging, stripping and parading of seven men belonging to the *chamar* caste by vigilante *gaurakshaks* on 11 July 2016 in Mota Samadhiyala village, Una taluka, Gir Somnath District Gujarat, which has brought the Brahmanical character of Hindutva cow politics and the caste character of the state to centre stage. It has been widely reported that the assault took place just outside the police station, using the lathis of the on-duty policemen.

There is a spontaneous and widespread outburst of the people across the state against this brutal attack. People have shown their anger in different forms. We support the laudable form of protest adopted by Dalit groups first in Una on 19 July, subsequently in other districts of Gujarat, which reveals the duplicity in the ‘cow politics’ of the casteist Hindutva forces. By dumping carcasses of cows outside offices of state authorities, dalit protestors are challenging the *gaurakshaks*, and the police machinery that supports them, to deliver on their self-proclaimed duty of protecting their holy cow.

Vigilante *gaurakshak* groups, who are attacking Muslims for transporting cattle allegedly for cow slaughter or allegedly possessing or eating beef, are also targeting

members of Dalit communities engaged in skinning carcasses of cattle, tanning or for eating beef. Significantly and ironically these activities are mandated as Dalits ‘traditional’ occupations within Brahmanical Hinduism, and then the same Dalits are being termed as anti-Hindu for carrying out the tasks assigned to them for legitimising the attacks by the Hindutva flag bearers. With rituals of purity and pollution at its core, Brahmanical Hinduism perpetrates structural caste-based violence through division of labour, relegating ‘polluting’ tasks of skinning, disposing carcasses to Dalits, who are already landless. Labour relations around cow and cattle involve a variety of occupations including killing cattle in slaughter houses to supply the meat, or collecting carcasses of cattle that die naturally, skinning the carcasses livelihoods. All these are structured along lines of caste community, *Gauraksha* and beef politics, and now, under the garb of cow protection, RSS and VHP are further perpetrating the structural violence, inherent to the Indian caste system.

The recent protests against the Una incident in Gujarat in which more than 20 Dalits attempted Suicide, many vehicles were torched, highways blocked and 1 policeman died of injuries following stone pelting is the biggest Dalit movement witnessed in the state in the last 30

years, since the community had agitated for reservation in 1985. The force of the agitation has also brought to light other recent incidents of assault on Dalits by vigilante *gaurakshaks* in the area and other parts of the state and country. NDTV has for instance, reported a similar assault against 7 tannery workers in Rajkula, Gujarat on 22 May by *gaurakshaks* alleging that the Dalits had slaughtered the cow. The attack on Dalits by these vigilante groups is not confined to Gujarat but also in other parts of the Country. In Koppa in Chikkamagaluru district, Karnataka a Dalit family was attacked by Bajrang Dal members in Koppa on 24 July, over allegedly cooking beef in their house, when there is no ban on beef in the state. Significantly the police initially arrested the victims on grounds of cruelty to animals and took action against the attackers only after protests by Dalit rights groups. In Delhi, on 24 July, Hindutva supporting 'Singh Sena' members inflicted physical violence and verbal abuse on Dalit groups led by Youth for Buddhist India, demonstrating against the Una incident at Jantar Mantar. On 26th July, two Muslim women were slapped abused for an hour by a vigilante mob in Mandsaur Railway Station, Madhya Pradesh for possession of Beef and have been booked for lack of permit to sell the meat. The failure of the police to protect the Dalits and Muslims and act against the aggressor *gauraksha* groups was the common factor in all these assaults.

The protests by Dalits in Gujarat are a strong indictment of justice system of the state which has failed to provide redress against the high rates of caste atrocity. Gujarat accounts for only 2.33% of India's Dalit population, yet ranks in the top half of country in the incidence of crimes against Dalits. As per 2013 NCRB data, only 2.5% cases registered for crimes against Dalits secured a conviction in the state, when the national average stood at 23.8%. In 2014, this

was 3.5% against a national average of 28.8%. This has only recently climbed up to 6% in 2015, but continues to be weighted heavily against the victims throughout the justice chain, from the police, prosecutors and judges. This dresses atrocities with an alarming degree of impunity, such that the *gaurakshaks* were emboldened to shoot and circulate videos of their own crime, ironically as a 'warning' to others.

The Una incident and the subsequent mass protests across the state compel us to look at caste-based hierarchies, and occupational structures around the cow, that are centrally implicated in Hindutva politics, and underlie the extreme forms of violence perpetrated by vigilante cow protectors on Dalits and Muslims. The current government's staunch endorsement of the politics of *gauraksha*, manifested in the blatant impunity enjoyed by such vigilante groups, reveals a serious threat to democratic rights to life with dignity and livelihood. The protests expose the fact that those who promote the ideology of Hindutva and the rhetoric of a pan-Hindu nationalism, with the cow as its symbol, stand for a fundamentally unequal, oppressive society. And when state authorities promote these the implications for democracy are indeed very grim.

PUDR demands:

1. Strict action against the *gauraksha* groups and 'samitis' under the SC & ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, and for inciting hatred against communities
2. Action against the police personnel for dereliction of duty.
3. Discontinuing all proceedings against the victims of cow protection vigilante groups, be it for possession, transport or consumption of beef, or for cruelty to animals

Deepika Tandon, Moushumi Basu
Secretaries, PUDR.

Drop FIR against Amnesty International India!

PUCL condemns the actions of the Bengaluru Police in foisting a case of sedition, creating enmity and other charges against Amnesty International India and unnamed staff for holding a meeting on 13th August, 2016 in Bengaluru on human rights abuses in Kashmir in which families of victims participated. From the statement of Amnesty it is evident that the police had been informed about the meeting, were present at the venue and had observed firsthand the event and therefore had knowledge that the allegations of the VHP about the meeting were politically motivated and false. That the Karnataka police chose to register a FIR despite all this only highlights the dangers of arming the state with such draconian laws like the anti-sedition laws.

The 13th August, 2016 event itself was in the backdrop of the 2015 Amnesty International report "***Denied: Failures in accountability for human rights violations by security force personnel in Jammu and Kashmir***". The Report focused on the travails of families of persons who lost their loved ones due to excesses by security forces. This report is in the public domain. Families of victims of State violence were present to narrate in first person, the situation in Kashmir and the difficulties in claiming justice and accountability in cases where innocent people are killed in encounters or enforced disappearances. The meeting itself included showing video films of testimonies of other victim families, a panel discussion, musical performance and skit.

PUCL sees the recent registration of an FIR for sedition against Amnesty International, India and the witch hunt into the finances / funding of the organisation as yet another instance in the long string of events where the State has used right wing, majoritarian groups to stifle dissent, prevent discussion and control debate. There is a visible pattern across the country – from the incidents in JNU, Hyderabad Central University, Allahabad University, or the witch hunt against Teesta Setalvad and Javed Anand and their organisation CJP, Indira Jaisingh and Anand Grover of Lawyers Collective, Green Peace and now Amnesty International – where, in every meeting discussing human rights violations suffered by minorities and dalits, or excesses of security forces whether in Kashmir, North East or in Maoist regions, a small fringe group creates a commotion, which is used to first disrupt the meeting and thereafter to harass the organisers by slamming cases against them. Seldom is any action initiated against the individuals who disrupt meetings in the first place.

For instance, in the present incident, the local police were informed and were present at the meeting. Why were the disruptors not removed by the police present in the venue or why was no FIR registered against the persons who appeared to have come prepared to disrupt and actually disrupted the meeting?

It also needs to be highlighted that the repeated invocation of the anti-sedition offence (sec. 124 A IPC) over any other

section of IPC is mainly to create a public opinion that those who demand accountability of the state and its agencies, including the police, para military and security forces, are essentially “anti-national”. This creates a negative image about them amongst common people; the ‘anti-national’ tag, in turn, ensures that the state can further persecute them without much adverse public opinion.

It is in this context that we need to also notice that irrespective of political party in power, most governments tend to abuse the extremely coercive, anti-democratic, anti-sedition provision, sec. 124A IPC to silence dissent and crush criticism. There is little difference between a BJP government invoking sedition provisions against Dr. Binayak Sen in Chhattisgarh or the AIADMK government invoking sedition laws against peaceful, anti-nuclear protestors in Koodankulam in Tamil Nadu or cartoonist Aseem Trivedi being arrested in Maharashtra or the case launched by the TMC government in West Bengal against academics; more recently in the last one year itself, is the sedition case against JNU Students Union leader, Kanhaiya Kumar in Delhi, the Tamil folk singer Kovai in TN for criticising the government’s liquor policy and against Hardik Patel for rallying the anti-reservation struggle involving Patels or Patidars in Gujarat; the latest to join this

long list of infamous sedition cases is the present case against Amnesty International India launched by the Congress government in Karnataka. In all these cases, what weighed were political considerations of the ruling parties and governments dealing a death blow to the rule of law and functioning of the criminal justice system.

It has been a long held position of PUCL that the anti-sedition law (sec. 124A IPC) should be repealed immediately. It is ironical that in Britain itself the sedition clause has been repealed while India continues to retain it.

PUCL appeals to all concerned citizens, democratically minded groups and human rights movement to once again give a call for repealing sec. 124 A IPC and to launch a mass citizen’s campaign to make ordinary citizens aware of the dangerous, anti-democratic nature of this archaic, colonial era provision of law.

PUCL also demands that the Government of Karnataka and the Karnataka Police immediately withdraw the FIR lodged against Amnesty International, India for the meeting organised by it on 13th August, 2016 in the United Theological College in Bengaluru.

Prof. Prabhakar Sinha, President; **Dr. V. Suresh**, General Secretary, PUCL National

Martin Luther King, Jr. noted: “Lamentably, it is a historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily.”

Let us in an upper caste-dominated society acknowledge the vast undeserved space we occupy. Let us cede what has to be ceded.



A Painting, not photograph

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