

The fascist onslaught and the secular backlash

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On October 12, Sudhendra Kulkarni, journalist and aide to former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, was forcibly painted black by Shiv Sena goons for attending the release ceremony of Pakistani politician Khurshid Kasuri's book. Kulkarni is the head of the prestigious thinktank Observer Research Foundation, which had organised the book release in Delhi and Mumbai. The Delhi release was attended by former PM Manmohan Singh and former Deputy PM LK Advani.

The paint attack on Kulkarni was not the first of its kind. Other writers have been attacked in the recent past. Some have got threats of elimination. Over a relatively short period, three writers of repute have been killed by Hindu right for their views. In their blood thirst all Hindu right organisations are similar.

In Maharashtra, Shiv Sena and BJP are allies and there is no difference in their intolerance, but the BJP is trying to distance itself from Shiv Sena's hooliganism in a bid to show itself as more tolerant about religious affairs. The fact remains that much of north India is seething with anti-Muslim hatred being fanned by BJP for electoral gains in Bihar.

We will come to the hollow claims of BJP about tolerance later. First, let us see how the writer-artist community is responding to the Hindu right threat to their life and limb. So far, nearly 25 writers-artists have returned their Sahitya Akademi awards, one of the highest literary awards from the Indian state on par with Gyanpeeth award, Maitridevi award and Saraswati award, which are privately instituted. Some are resigning from different committees of the Sahitya Akademi.

The protest is against the rampage of Hindutva fascists across the country and the Modi government's silence on it. The avalanche of protests began with the return of their awards by acclaimed Hindi poet Ashok Bajpai and English writer Nayantara Sehgal, daughter of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit.

BJP and RSS leaders tried to pooh-pooh Sehgal's decision saying she had done it to promote her first cousin Indira Gandhi's daughter-in-law Sonia Gandhi and grandson Rahul Gandhi's party. They were soon reminded that Sehgal was the harshest critic of Indira Gandhi's Emergency and her toughest opponent on that issue.

Sehgal later explained that the present regime was more sinister than the Emergency's as the Emergency was declared legally by the President of India under constitutional provisions, but the present situation was worse as it was an undeclared emergency. The country had been taken over by fascist thugs who are killing with impunity as the Prime Minister chooses to keep silent.

The situation has become so hopeless that the President of India had to issue a statement asking citizens to maintain communal harmony. Over a large swath of the country, Muslims have been attacked, wounded and killed on the pretext of cow protection. The Dadri lynching of a Muslim and almost fatal attack on the victim's son has got wide coverage, but there have been lesser-known attacks and murders in the name of cow at other places. Dadri is barely an hour's drive from the Prime Minister's and President's offices.

Sheer anarchy has been let loose on the country and the figure of hate in this drama is the Muslim. Even

the Booker prize winning writer Salman Rushdie, who is a great favourite of Hindutva votaries because of his criticism of Islam, has denounced the Hindu right's fanatical attacks on writers. He has written that he does not support any Indian political party, but he condemns the attacks on, threats against, and murder of writers.

India is passing through a difficult patch, a period in which our freedoms and Constitutional guarantees are under great stress. I hope to get back to you with these issues soon.



About the Author Dr. Mohammad Manzoor Alam Dr. Mohammad Manzoor Alam is an erudite Islamic Economist and Social Scientist. He has been associated with Institute of Objective Studies (IOS) as its Chairman for over 25 years now. Dr. Manzoor Alam, a Ph.D. in Economics from Aligarh Muslim University, has held various high-ranking positions in many international organizations such as Economic Advisor in the Ministry of Finance and National Economy, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Associate Professor Deptt. of Islamic Economics, University of Imam Mohammad-bin-Saud, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Chief Coordinator for the Translation of Meaning of the Holy Quran in different languages of the world at King Fahd Holy Quran Printing Complex, Madinah Munawwarah, Saudi Arabia; Chief Representative of International Islamic University, Malaysia (IIUM) in India; Member of the General Committee of the IDB Scholarship Program for Muslim Communities in Non-Member Countries, Islamic Development Bank, Jeddah, K.S.A.; Consultant of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, USA in India; Founder Member of International Islamic Charitable Organisation, Kuwait; and Member, Steering Committee, Istanbul Talks, Civil Solidarity Platform, Istanbul, Turkey.

Dr. Manzoor Alam holds membership on the board of many international journals as well. He is Member of the Advisory Board of MEDAD, published from the KSA; Member of the International Advisory Board of American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences, published from the USA; and Member of the Advisory Board of Awqaf, published from Kuwait.

In India, apart from being Chairman of Institute of Objective Studies (IOS), Dr. Manzoor Alam is ably guiding the Indian Muslim community with his vast experience by serving in different capacities such as General Secretary, All India Milli Council, New Delhi; President, Indo-Arab Economic Cooperation Forum, New Delhi; President, Indian Association of Muslim Social Scientists, New Delhi; and Member of All India Muslim Personal Law Board.

Under his stewardship, Dr. Manzoor Alam has successfully transformed the Institute of Objective Studies to being India's foremost, pioneering and only organization in the country engaged in generating knowledge in Islamic Perspective, Educational development of Indian Muslims, Research, holding Conferences, seminars and workshops on vital issues, Publications and Advocacy for Muslims and other weaker sections' causes.

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