

MUZAFFARNAGAR RIOTS- ‘BEING INHUMAN’

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ABSTRACT- With atrocities varying from political interference in police matters, apathetic attitude towards the mass sufferings of public, provocative communal speeches and unpardonable kind of treatment of women yet again, we stood witness to the Muzaffarnagar tragedy which started in September 2013. With many unresolved issues and still unanswered questions in our minds, we try to make one more effort to understand why India, our ‘motherland’ is so incorrigible and why the ones who sit at the threshold of power refuse to mend their ways and start behaving like ones made of flesh and blood. Where humanity has become something as negotiable as buying grocery one falls into deep thought before trying to blame ministers who say that death is inevitable and people die in palaces too and so people dying in relief camps without adequate facilities is but normal- because only a stony-heart can think this way. And for these ministers, ‘sky is the limit’. They know no end to such statements. We have heard more damaging things being said about different sections of the society on various occasions, the most recent occasion being that of December 16, 2012 where unbelievable things were said about women at large and many such about the rape victim as well. How many more incidents of such horrendous violence need to emerge to the surface to fill government seats with human beings instead of political animals is one of the biggest questions today.

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Key Words- Communal violence, apathetic police attitude, propaganda and religion.

The Sad Social Situation

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It all started on August 27, 2013 when once again, a woman was thought of as a sex-commodity and molested. This punishable crime was given a communal colour by the very authorities in whom faith is put for ensuring law, order and harmony. The simmering discontent over the molestation turned to blazing fire after provocative state-intervention led to severe and uncontrollable communal clashes on September 7, which we now know as the Muzaffarnagar riots. The 62 lives claimed and the 40,000 displaced count for nothing in the eyes of the UP government which tried to cash every bit of the event to its advantage.

The UP government started with inciting citizens and then later talking of compensation for Muslim victims only leading to further complication on the table and also showing its old habit of blatant minority appeasement yet again. The rapping they received from the Supreme Court was certainly not the first one they have received. On an issue where citizens of both communities have been affected equally, faced equal amount of trauma and lost almost equal amount of people who they loved and could not have imagined life without; compensation also stays due to both.

But what is necessary for us to see is that it is not just the rape and killing that makes this entire unfortunate incident so violent. It is the emotional trauma, the feeling of fear, the sleepless nights spent in wetting one's sleeves with tears over the sudden loss of everything including family and honour that gives this violence another dimension. On September 30 '2013, 3 women of Fugana village filed reports saying they were gang-raped and their houses burnt during the riots. These were those few 'fortunate' women whose stories reached our ears. Many more were buried deep down under the weight of numerous other files in different quarters. The thought of safety of their daughters compelled many parents to marry them to boys within the relief camps who would have perhaps otherwise raped them in a day or two. The plight of those girls is beyond what we can think. The anger, the frustration, the helplessness would have given them just as much pain as a bullet shot would have given to someone who was mercilessly killed. To be saved from a certain stigma, they were unwillingly pushed into a situation where everything else would be the same just that it would be 'legal'. So if we recall Shaw's statement about marriage being legalised prostitution today, it would fit into the picture perfectly.

Meddling with information, manipulating it or making its own functioning as opaque as possible is what the government does when it finds itself in a soup. On October 3, 2013 ten cases of

missing persons were covered under the garb of 'kidnapping' because their whereabouts could not be ascertained. Police said that giving false information was not their idea. Killing of two young boys for whom life and its challenges would have just begun to start, by bike assailants who could never be found, were again used to fire aggression with allegations that those murders too were communal incidents. And these, needless to say are just an iota of the cases of mass-killings of several people who were someone's parents, children, spouses or siblings. Some were the sole bread-winners of the family.

A certain Inquiry commission that was to begin its probe on October 6, 2013 and show results in two months conveniently bought an additional period of six months for the job and now we are yet to see what the denouement to this will be. It used fancy politically correct words like "administrative lapses" and said that it would look into the same "if any". What is right in front of our eyes still remains a matter of a six month speculation for the Commission. The 7 crores facade of the UP government saw officials coming up and saying that many victims had been compensated whereas maximum number of victims told the media that no such thing had been done. A compensation of Rs. 5 lakh still is not less in a country like India and if that amount of money had been given to families the change would have been visible. Or maybe we could understand all this mess as yet another scheme of buying the poor and vulnerable class's loyalty by bribing them to pass different statements on different occasions for different parties. This exploitative state which we find the mass victims in just shows how huge a 'leviathan' the government is and how getting out of their vicious traps that buy helplessness is a game lost even before it can start.

The Panel that was asked to probe TV sting involving Azam Khan on October 14, 2013 showed police and administrative officials in riot-hit Muzaffarnagar who said that they had orders from influential people in Lucknow to "let things happen". The truth and credibility of everything in India is questionable but just the fact that such ideas do crop up and witnesses are arranged to support the idea show us the deep dirt everything is stuck in here and this dirt is given a name that makes all that is done here forgivable- politics. And what we do not have to forget is that a considerable amount of all such news is true as well and not just pit-digging done by one party against another. But the binary between the truth and what is made up is just as flexible as rubber-bands in this context. After members of BJP were arrested for giving inflammatory speeches early in September, the Party spokesman Vijay Bahadur Pathak stood up on October 17, 2013 and accused the Samajwadi Party government of trying to "keep the Muzaffarnagar incidents alive" for political concerns. They all have skeletons in their closets and they are all ready to point fingers at the first opportunity available. With not one party being genuinely concerned about the welfare of the suffering victims everyone got busy in settling scores and trying to appease certain segments with one shameful strategy or the other. While the police said that Special Investigating Teams (SITs) were doing their jobs, taking action against those involved in rioting and letting the innocent go, villagers alleged that police was hounding them endlessly. In this blame-game of politicians clad in thermals, sweaters and coats the ones left to

find for themselves were those who slept without the cheapest of blankets in these months of biting cold when weather is at its violent most zenith.

A National Human Rights Commission team visited the relief camps of violence affected Shamli and Kutba village and described the condition there as appalling. The displaced thousands were living in make-shift tents, unprotected against the vagaries of nature. On October 11, 2013 there were morning showers which led to water logging of tents. The dwellers of the camps complained of scanty ration supply, inadequate medical facilities while some also expressed indignation over the partisan attitude of police. The team found the medical staff to be "quite incompetent" while some inmates also complained of only four or five generic medicines being provided at the camps and the same medicines being administered for all sorts of diseases. During interaction with NGOs, it was reported that eight people had died in Loi camp but the CMO, Muzaffarnagar stayed in complete denial of any such news. On visiting the camp, however, the team found that two new born lives who had breathed for just about 400 hours and 5 other helpless victims, who would have given anything to live, actually died. Among several other inadequacies reported by various media outlets, it was also suggested that the conditions, under which relief has been provided to the inmates of the camps, were themselves problematic. As an example, one of the clauses which the camp dwellers had to agree to said that they would be provided relief only if they did not plan to go back to their villages anytime soon. It also adds the following:

"That in the condition of receiving lump sum financial help amount, me or members of my family will not demand compensation relating to any damage to any immovable property in my village or elsewhere."

It was also revealed that relief materials were not being distributed through the state agencies. They were being handed over to community organisations like Jamiat-Ulema and Hind of Deoband, who then distributed it to people. It goes unsaid that such steps are fraught with risks of nepotism and unequal distribution of goods. Why in a situation of such communal crisis was the state taking such actions is a question that we do not even need to ask.

And just when we were wondering if there was any end to insensitivity towards fellow human beings four private relief camps functioning without authorisation of State in Shamli district near Muzaffarnagar were asked to close their operations and around 2,877 riot-victims living in these camps asked to leave. Where, may we ask were those people expected to go and where did they go indeed? Where authorised camps were in just as bad a shape as any 'unauthorised' one how could it matter if people pitched their own tents nearby for whatever little safety they thought the area could provide. But the authorities stayed indifferent to such ideas and human angles and asked 2,877 living, breathing beings to wander away from unauthorised camps and see what fate had in store for them. After all, political ethics, legality and fair play have been one of the prime fundamentals on which Indian authorities and Indian politics have always functioned on.

The biggest thunderbolt however came down on us as India ushered in 2014. The victims of Muzaffarnagar riots found relief camps being wound up following an order from the state government. The move came even as many of the riot victims had not received any compensation. Fearing threat to their lives back home, many headed to other places. With no shelter against rains and cold alike, people started deserting the relief camps. The state government seized the opportunity by hitting the nail on the head and officially winding up the camps. While some received compensation and moved elsewhere, more than 25 families made temporary shelters in Loi itself. So this just simply tells us that the compensation was not enough for actual rehabilitation. Over 100 families from the camp never received any monetary benefit especially those from villages like Kharad and Fugana as these villages were not listed as maximum affected. What needs to be checked here is what the Government defines as 'maximum' and 'minimum.' "We are being forced to leave the camp," said one victim. But the Government denied ill-treatment or forcing of victims.

One 'little' incident that took place in the back-drop of the gory violence witnessed by the whole of Muzaffarnagar was the performances of A-listers Salman Khan, Madhuri Dixit and other actors like Soha Ali Khan and Ranveer Singh at the Saifai Mahotsav of the Samajwadi Party. It takes an insane amount of insensitivity and indifference to what the eye can clearly see to shake a leg for a Party that is making news for its criminal neglect of riot victims. The UP government first passively stood by while its citizens were brutally killed and raped, then left them to tend their dying babies in under-resourced relief camps, and finally evicted them from their only refuge. Then the SP chose to gloss over its unpardonable conduct by holding an extravagant PR event, likely with government funds that ought to have been used to feed and clothe victims. But that leading stars who otherwise make tall claims of 'being human' succumb to such offers for just the right pay-check is indeed very shameful. With Salman Khan the list of wrong-doings is just un-ending but the charity image that he flaunts in public serves as a garb against all else and the mass devotion of fans keeps him going unchecked. The hollowness of all these actors who enjoy a Teflon-like immunity against mass-judgment should be duly noted. Soha Ali Khan who flaunted her secular ideas [at a book event](#) celebrating Jawaharlal Nehru's liberal values and the avowedly apolitical Madhuri who [refused to become](#) the brand ambassador for Maharashtra tourism found Mulayam's invite irresistible to such an extent that all else became immaterial. And who's to blame. We tell these actors that all they do will find forgiveness with us and they know that too well now.

The safe garb under which the government has tried and succeeded in hiding the very traces of its own incited, unpardonable violence has primarily been about unreliable promises of compensation, rehabilitation and a life worth living to the unfortunate victims. The state engineered ruthless evacuation of relief camps in double digits till not a single person who witnessed the feverish violence and its aftermath was left to quote anything to the media after a point. The state then covered all its black deeds under more wraps, this time glamorous ones, by

PR events like the (show-off) Saifai Mahotsav and this truth that thousands of victims witnessed alike is now nothing but an invisible story with some occasional statements coming up here and there where ministers like Atik Ahmed say that Muzaffarnagar victims are “professional beggars”. The Muzaffarnagar incident along with its victims has otherwise got lost in the large attention-demanding crowd of Kejriwals, Rahuls and Modis along with general entertainment. So now we remember it just as ‘some communal thing’ that happened in September 2013. The government has very successfully given our short-lived memory other ‘pass-times’ and has quickly ‘helped’ us forget those faces we saw on news channels and in newspapers. The least bit that we can do is to question, to ask where these homeless lives are, if not in the only refuge they had- the relief camps and why, is the best solution always about erasing traces of victims instead of helping them, devising concerted strategies to make everything visible invisible and physically evicting media and never about accepting faults and working to improve blunders that have been committed.

Dr. Johnson once said and I am quoting him today. He said ‘Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel’. People later replaced the first word with ‘Politics’. This holds most true for the country we live in no matter which word is used. There is no reason that anyone of us has to be proud of this land and politics is just the last extent to which all the filth can be taken. The day we would not have anything substantial left to do in lives we will become patriots. Violence has ceased to be very shocking. What is more shocking is that sensitivity towards issues has flown so far away that it refuses to return home just like the riot-struck victims of Muzaffarnagar.

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