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India

Mobilise On the Streets first, to Resist Normalization of Communal Murders

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Mohammad Afrazul, from Malda's Sayadpur village, worked as a labour contractor and lived with twenty-four other labourers in a four roomed, single storey house in Rajsamand's Dhoinda, some 300 kilometres from Jaipur. He was first attacked with an axe, then burnt to death, and the entire process recorded on video and uploaded with pride with the assertion that as a Hindu, the perpetrator was preventing a love jihad. This episode in Rajasthan on 7th December shows exactly the distance travelled in a quarter century in India, by the forces of Hindutva.

When in 1992 Advani and the others of his criminal gang led the attack and destroyed the Babri Masjid, the action was widely treated as a crime. A quarter century later, not only are they proclaiming 6th December as a Day of Valour, but have been able to push their agenda a great deal.

Much of the debate over how to resist these forces have focused on exactly how fascistic they are, but the real issue today is more on recognizing that regardless of whether we see them as fascists or as aggressive communalists, it is essential to understand that this is a political force that maintains an autonomous agenda and constantly strives to push it forward. It is necessary, as always, to stress that the RSS and its whole network is not a simple instrument that the ruling class creates, to keep in readiness for bringing out whenever rulers feel the need. Historically, the relationship between fascism as a political movement and the bourgeoisie is more complex, and varies from country to country. In the case of India, the Sangh combine has spent nine decades building an ultra-nationalism through the valorization of a chauvinist Hindutva, presenting other religions as enemies, especially presenting Muslims as sub-human beasts and eternal enemies of Indian culture and tradition. There is nothing in a purely capitalist rationality that would push this outlook. But the terms that the RSS and its various branches collectively have set out is, in return for their delivering certain highly needed profitable steps for the ruling class and international capital, they will be given freedom to pursue their politics of hatred. The murder of rationalist secular activists like Dabholkar, Pansare, Kalburgi and Lankesh; the murders of ordinary Muslims for no crime other than being Muslim, with allegations of cow slaughter, "love jihad", being agents of the Isis, etc., in cases ranging from Mohammad Akhlaq, Pehlu Khan, Junaid Khan to Mohammad Afrazul, present this politics of hatred in its open form.

The accusation behind attacking and murdering Mohammad Afrazul was a by now routine one, of being a participant in a "love jihad". It is significant that the man was a Muslim labourer from West Bengal. Bengali speaking Muslims have been repeatedly targeted and accused of being Bangladeshi infiltrators. Each of these points must be noted. That immigration, which happens all over the world primarily due to economic hardships, are now being declared terroristic plots. Secondly, that unless they can prove their Indian-ness, Bengali speakers, especially if Muslims, are being accused of being foreigners. This too is part of the larger fight to impose the Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan design all over India. And any Muslim, anywhere in India, is seen as fair game.

From mid November, a pamphlet on the so-called love jihad was distributed in Jaipur. Instead of immediately halting it, the police merely carried out an inquiry. Love Jihad is a lie, but one that has a long pedigree. It asserts that Muslims pretend to love Hindu women in order to make them convert to Islam. In the recent notorious case of Hadiya, the Kerala High Court had set aside her marriage, despite all evidence that she had converted of her own, and had only then met her future husband and married him, and above all that she is an adult. Even the Supreme Court has been far from clear, so far, in her Case, with the NIA having been asked to investigate if it was indeed a case of love jihad at one stage.

In the case of Afrazul, who has a family, the entire horrifying episode shows how murdering Muslims has become a near normalized event, with the Hindu upper caste communities ignoring it, or taking to the social media to drag in

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killings in Bangladesh, Syria and elsewhere to dilute the gravity of the situation in India. Resistance by all democratic forces, by all those who seek to retain all the colours of the rainbow in a pluralist India, is essential. And we must be aware that such resistance has to be completely free of all rightwing parties, not just the RSS-BJP. Even as protests erupted, in Kolkata, about twenty-five protesters were arrested by the police for demonstrating close to the Keshav Bhavan, the RSS Headquarters in the City. The government of West Bengal, under Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee, is showing that its verbal fencing against the BJP is not serious, and that it is keen to break up any independent protest.

It is only by as combined struggle on the streets, in courts, and in the electoral space, that responses to these can be made. There is certainly a need to fight electorally. But those who make that the principal terrain can only end up as fifth wheels to a Congress led alliance where social issues will take a back seat. It is important to note that with the Gujarat election campaign in full swing, the Congress is keen to prove that Rahul Gandhi is a good Hindu, and hence it has not gone out for a forthright condemnation of the murder of Afrazul, with the stress on how the official Hindutva campaigns are empowering such individual murders as well. And as the Supreme Court has repeatedly shown, any tactics of court battles without social struggles are fraught with uncertainty as the court may take poor stances. Mass mobilisations, public resistance, thus remain the starting point.

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