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India

Radical Socialist Statement on Hathras Caste Atrocity and the Babri Masjid Verdict

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On the 14th of September, a 19 year old woman of the Valmiki caste, was gang-raped and brutally assaulted by four Thakur men in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh. Her spine was broken, and her tongue cut out. Days later, she died in a hospital from the severe injuries sustained during the attack. The police and local administration have protected the accused upper caste men with characteristic alacrity. The police burnt her body in the middle of the night, without any of her family members present. Immense pressure is being brought to bear on her family members in the hope of silencing them.

Yogi Adityanath's regime claims that no rape has occurred, and has even hired a PR firm to push this disingenuous narrative. The Sangh Parivar's disinformation machinery is working overtime to frame the victim's death as an 'honour killing', and paint her family as the 'real' perpetrators. Upper caste groups and political figures have rallied around the accused, declaring them 'innocent' and openly threatening those calling for justice. BJP's Rajveer Pahalwan, former MLA from Hathras, hosted one such gathering at his house, which was attended by members of the RSS, Bajrang Dal, Karni Sena, Rashtriya Savarna Sangathan, Kshatriya Mahasabha. The shifting of the case to the CBI, which has a notorious pro-BJP record, is further cause for alarm.

This case forces us to confront once again not only the cultures of cruelty and violence that pervade the lives of Dalits, women and minorities in India, but also the impunity afforded to upper caste men by the nexus between dominant caste lobbies, state institutions and the ruling political regime. Figures from the National Crime Records Bureau indicate that every day three Dalit women are raped, two Dalits are murdered, two Dalit houses are burnt and eleven Dalits are beaten. Public discussion in India is dominated by an upper caste commonsense that runs the spectrum from outright devaluation of Dalit lives to purported caste-blindness. The social power of upper castes is based on a disproportionate control over land or other assets, and proximity to political power through their caste networks. There can be no doubt that this Hathras rape and murder, like countless other atrocities, is the consequence of the relations of caste domination to which Dalits continue to be subject, with little respite. Describing the victim as 'India's daughter' is a jaundiced, even if in some instances well meaning, attempt to downplay the centrality of caste.

Upper castes loyalties structure and pervade virtually all mainstream political formations in India, and cover ups of this sort are a matter of routine. What is distinctive under the ruling-BJP is the sheer brazenness of the cover up, and the stridently unapologetic tenor of the upper caste backlash. This points to the reactionary character of Hindutva: it is an elite revolt, a 'rebellion' of Hindu India's upper caste, upper class elite against the concessions sometimes significant, often meagre, and always hard-won forced by liberation movements. Recent attempts to dilute the SC-ST atrocities act, and end caste-based reservation are two examples. While the Sangh Parivar claims Dalits as its own (after all, how else could upper castes, around 26% of the population claim to speak as a 'majority?'), it is committed to maintaining them in a position of social, political, economic and ritual subordination. The logic of the Sangh Parivar's programmatic commitment to communalism is laid bare the demonisation and brutalisation of India's Muslim minority has a unifying function for the construction of the 'Hindu' body politic.

Elsewhere in UP, a CBI special court acquitted all the current accused in the conspiracy to demolish the Babri Masjid. That criminal act, carried out on December 6 1992, was given a stamp of legitimacy by the Supreme Court last year, when it ordered the construction of a temple on the site where the mosque once stood. In doing so the court signalled that it too now participates in the process of consolidating Hindutva hegemony. The BJP's mass mobilisation around the Ram Mandir explicitly aimed at bringing down the mosque was directly responsible for weeks of violence preceding the demolition. Following the demolition, Hindutva stormtroopers led riots in cities across the country. Numerous commissions, not least the Liberhans and Srikrishna commissions, have established

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this. The leadership of the Sangh Parivar has explicitly, repeatedly and with great pride claimed their responsibility for these acts. For a court to now declare them innocent, after 28 years of a wishy-washy non-investigation, is a travesty.

The political aims of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement have been ticked off one by one: a belligerent and communal nationalism, given ideological cohesion by a loose Brahminism, articulated through an extreme centralisation of power, over a citizenry denied any opposing political voice. The Hathras case is a manifestation of this same reactionary backlash, unafraid to stand in the light. The current political opposition, on whose account must rest decades of inaction and complicity in caste and communal violence are junior partners in this revolt. The media has proven more than willing to amplify the voices of those in power, and to silence the voices of the marginalised. The police and other branches of the executive are now fully paid up participants in this 'rebellion'.

We confront a Hindutva political movement that controls state power. To end this brutality and discrimination progressive and democratic forces must recognise that we have to build social power to counter it. The times demand that all progressive and democratic forces come together to lift us out of this crisis. This is the only way to win equal rights and inclusive democracy for every citizen today. Political opposition to Hindutva must be a principled one. All opportunistic political formations, including Dalit formations allied with or hoping to ally with the BJP must realise that they are contributing to the growth and legitimisation of this upper caste rebellion.

9 October 2020

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