

## DAMAGE OF THIS 'DARKEST HOUR' COULD WELL BE IRREPARABLE

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(English Version)

The new dimensions to this pre-planned hate crime have brought shame to India all the world over — even in countries where rapes are not uncommon — and has been showcased among billions of Muslims abroad as how their brethren here are tormented in Hindustan.

When a retired DG of Police feels that 49 retired IAS, IPS and Central Service officers have over-reacted to the Kathua rape case — of an innocent Muslim girl of just eight years — clarifications are inescapable. We refer to an Op-ed article in the Indian Express on May 12, 2108: A Case of Selective Outrage. Comparisons of the heinousness of crimes are messy and subjective, but if we look for defining moments in India's media history in recent memory, one could break down to two, straightaway — Nirbhaya's rape on December 16, 2012 and Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement.

The rape case is the one we refer to, because where the latter movement is concerned, all that emerged from a million flashbulbs and months of headline-hogging is that its leaders were catapulted to power. One landed into a Chief Minister's seat and another was rewarded with a Lieutenant Governor's post. Fine. Nirbhaya, however, remains a metaphor for bestial violence on a hapless woman — sick, in all respects — but the murdered victim was not selected for unimaginable horror because of her religion. We need not labour the other points like the cool, calculated manner in which a minor girl was gang-raped over a long period — and that too, in the hallowed premises of a place of worship. The new dimensions to this pre-planned hate crime have brought shame to India all the world over — even in countries where rapes are not uncommon — and has been showcased among billions of Muslims abroad as how their brethren here are tormented in Hindustan.

The retired DGP appears quite satisfied with the prime minister's "distress" that was both cryptic by his own loquacious standards and issued mechanically, so dreadfully long after the tragedy. Our colleague must surely be very optimistic in voicing his satisfaction also with the "assurance" given by the PM, but however much he castigates us, we are twice shy. We have been bitten by earlier promises, which are now laughed off as 'jumla' by the PM's able alter ego. Among these are the assurance of bringing black money from abroad — but in reality, the present regime has set an all-time record of letting notorious bank-swindlers escape abroad with impunity. After the horses — like Mehul Choksi — had safely bolted, we were presented with some swash-buckling legislative showpieces. We have also not forgotten the promise to double farmers' income in five years — though in reality the farm sector is hurtling from crisis to crisis. The numerous jobs that he promised are nowhere in sight while the emperors of jobless economic growth never ever had it so good. Even the International Labour Organisation estimates that over 60 per cent of India's workers are now very 'vulnerable'. The promise to act against corruption sounds so hollow when we see the kingpins of the mining mafia of Karnataka standing next to the PM in full public view — even as their humongous scams are constantly vexing the Supreme Court so much.

The article ridicules our letter to the PM and the writer declares that "a few incidents of rapes" surely cannot threaten the country's existence. His slant becomes visible when he refers to the Babri masjid as "a dilapidated structure" and imputes that we are oblivious to "damages to Hindu temples in J&K". No, we are not. We are equally concerned at all assaults on the freedom of faith and demand action on proven perpetrators — but not through lynch mobs to whom communal governments appear to be 'outsourcing justice'. We are certainly not "blind to the atrocities committed by Muslims" — whatever that means after 2014 — but certainly abhor this distasteful "communalising of crime".

Our former DGP-friend cherrypicks a comment that 49 retired officers had used in the open letter to the Prime Minister — by which we stand firmly. We have described the present crisis as the "darkest hour.... in post-Independent India". He mistakes our anguish and limits it to just "two incidents of rape" — whereas we are deeply distressed with the impermeable gloom and the wilful destruction

of the plural structure guaranteed by our Constitution. He cites other contestants for this 'darkest hour' phase, like the Mahatma's assassination, the 1962 war, the massacre in Nellie in 1983, the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984 and so on. Only colour measurement spectrometers can decide this, but we have no desire to compare any of these painful examples in terms of their relative 'darkness'.

Our submission is based on the after-effects of such man-made crisis as the crises referred to did not leave behind, other than rancour and continuing injustice, any cancerous cells within our body polity — which the present dispensation is injecting. The dogs of religious war have now been let loose with the cold-blooded acquiescence of State power — as never before — and minorities are being handed 'punishments for retrospective crimes', i.e, for any excesses that some of their co-religionist rulers may (or may not) have committed on Hindus, many, many centuries ago. It is as ludicrous as attacking Kazakhstan today because the ancient Sakas came out of that region to conquer northern India 2,000 years ago and killed many of 'our forefathers'. Or Odisha attacking Bihar for the massacres at the Battle of Kalinga. Avenging 'historic wrongs' is a very dangerous game that Hitler practised and frankly, in the absence of detailed DNA maps and genetic identification, it is impossible to establish who was actually what and when. This business of labelling 'we' and 'they' surely gets the targeted votes but it spreads poison — based of dangerous oversimplification.

The short point is that our group is gravely worried that the damage this 'darkest hour' is causing could well be irreparable and permanent — which no other previous crisis created. It is really doubtful whether any amount of chemotherapy on Indian society in future would ever be able to rid it of the cancerous cells that are deliberately being injected at present, on such a large-scale in such a well planned manner.