

SAFFRON FASCISM

Fake Killings : People as Trophies

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Truth is finally pot. People who had a faint glimmer of hope about Kausar Bi's whereabouts finally know that she is no more. As the counsel for the Gujarat government himself admitted before the Supreme Court, she was killed, burnt and her ashes were thrown in some field. But it does not throw light on who killed her?

It appears that Gujarat government wants to buy time to divulge the information. But the CID report filed by Ms Geeta Johri is very clear on this aspect. The interim report of the IG(CID) Geeta Johri—who investigated the case as per instruction from the Supreme Court—knew that Kausar Bi was personally strangled to death by D H Vanjara.

Imagine the head of the Anti-terrorism Squad, who till the other day functioned as DIG killing an innocent woman and using his position to cover up the crime.

As things stand today the story of the encounter killing of Soharabuddin Sheikh in cold blood, followed by similar killing of his friend Tulsiram Prajapati and later his own wife Kausar Bi is getting murkier everyday. Thanks to Ruhabuddin Sheikh who persisted in his attempts to get justice and ultimately approached the Supreme Court to intervene in this matter in which his brother was killed in a fake encounter and sister-in-law had gone missing. Today three senior police officers—two from Gujarat and one from Rajasthan are behind bars charged with kidnapping and murder of an innocent citizen, if the Gujarat government is compelled to follow the leads then it will have to apprehend more than two dozen other police officials from both the states who participated in the whole operations at some level.

The manner in which the fake killing(s) have snowballed into a major embarrassment for the 'invincible looking' Modi regime is for everyone to see. Independent analysts have rightly pointed out that Amit Shah, a close buddy of Narendra Modi and in charge of the Home Ministry, who supposedly went all out to save the guilty officers, may also be sacrificed to save his mentor from further discomfit. And looking at the evidence which is ranged against his buddies, the day is not far off when 'Hindu Hriday Samrat' Modi may also have to personally face the music.

Of course few things are crystal clear about this killing of an innocent citizen and packaging it as the killing of dreaded terrorist belonging to Lashkar-e-Toiba.

Firstly, the killing of Soharabuddin Sheikh was a joint operation by two states—Gujarat and Rajasthan- both ruled by Sangh-BJP people- executed by officers who happened to be very close to the top echelons of the people in power. It was not for nothing that Gujarat government asked Ms Geeta Johri to hand over her charge to another person, when she was to present the final report and Gulab Chand Kataria, the home minister of Rajasthan personally flew in a special plane with his other officers, to plead the case for Dinesh Kumar, a senior police officer with his government who is behind bars for this encounter.

Secondly, if one were to believe the journalist who played a pivotal role in exposing the killing, then the task of eliminating Soharabuddin was allegedly undertaken at the behest of the rivals of the deceased and crores of Rs were exchanged for this purpose.

Thirdly, it was not for the first time that Gujarat police have organised an encounter killing and presented it as killing of terrorists who had come to kill Modi, Togadia or any other similar rabble rouser from the 'Hindutva Brigade'. Does anybody remember the killing of Isharat Jahan, a college girl from Bombay along with three other persons a few years ago or the killing of Sami Ali Pathan and packaging it as another 'victory' of the Gujarat police over 'terrorists'.

While the opposition has claimed that during Vanjara's tenure at the Anti-Terrorism Squad 15 people were killed in 9 fake encounters. 'Asian Age' (30th April 2007) states that the 'Rogue Gujarat Cop Killed'. But it would be opportune to have a look at the manner in which he went about it.

'Ahmedabad, April 29 : Controversial Gujarat IPS officer and "encounter specialist" DG Vanjara, now under arrest for the death of one Soharabuddin in November 2005, has killed at least 13 people in the past few years on the alleged grounds that they were plotting to kill Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi and other senior BJP leaders. He has also arrested scores of "terrorists" on similar charges.

To his colleagues and others he has depicted these fake encounters as "patriotic acts" which were evidence of his "deshbhakti". The alleged "terrorists" who he had caught and killed, claiming that there were members of international terrorist outfits and engaged on deadly missions to kill Mr Modi and others, were all, barring one exception, armed only with "laman-chas". These indigenously-made weapons are usually not the assassination weapon of choice employed by terrorist outfits. Mr Vanjara did this to justify the absence of injury to policemen while they were on such encounter missions.'

Fourthly, it is clear that the top bosses of the state were complicit in what was being done at the ATS level. Any layperson can gather that the killing spree engaged in by these rogue cops helped enhance the threat perception of 'Hindu Hriday Samrats' inside as well as outside Gujarat and add glory to their image. It was not for nothing that they saw to it that not a single complaint reached the State Human Rights Commission against him. The clout which Vanjara enjoyed with the political masters can be gauged from the fact that he even managed to get his younger brother Vanraj Vanjara, who was with the state forest department, sent on deputation to the Gujarat State Human Rights Commission. It is not surprising to note that till date, the state human rights commission has not received any complaints against Mr Vanjara.

It is worth noting that BJP, which finds itself on a sticky wicket in these fake killings has devised multiple lines of defence to avoid further embarrassment to its 'poster boy' Narendra Modi. Chances are that if the interim reports of the IG(CID) becomes public or CBI or any other investigation into the case is taken up at the federal level, then it would become further impossible for it to defend Modi.

They understand it very well that if investigations proceed in this fake killings case, it would be incumbent upon the agency to have a look at similar encounters in the state which happened in recent past, to look for any 'method in this madness'. It will have to unravel the mystery where similar sounding post-facto justifications for the killings were peddled and pliant media was further used to add to the aura of Narendra Modi or his other buddies.

Another important aspect of this investigation would be revisiting all those cases where people were apprehended on the suspicion that they were plotting to finish any of those Hindutva bigwigs and put behind bars under any of those draconian laws which are there in the kitty of the government. The recent acquittal of four innocent persons who had to languish in jail for around four years on similar trumped up charges is a case in point.

The BJP has suddenly discovered that the concern expressed by justice loving people over the encounter killing of an innocent citizen is 'glorifying criminals'. They have dished out a number of charges filed against the people who were killed which were filed supposedly in different police stations in the two states. But in their overenthusiasm to save their skin, they forgot the basic constitutional premise which has devised mechanisms to deal with criminals in a legitimate manner. And it was not surprising that when cornered by the media, whether it believes in the rule of law, it was found fumbling for words.

It has also taken a position that fake killings are a norm everywhere in today's times where the justice delivery mechanisms are already cracking under its own weight. They are thus of a considered opinion that it is not proper that Gujarat or for that matter Rajasthan should be singled out for that.

Following the old dictum that offence is the best defence, they have rediscovered that other parties are soft towards terrorism and BJP is the only party which is supposedly playing a no nonsense battle against terrorism. There was a news in a section of the media that after lying low for some time Mr Narendra Modi is planning to go on the offensive on this issue. It is learnt that he has asked his colleagues to make a plan where the killing of Sohrabuddin could be projected as the Saffron Party's resolute battle against terrorism. It wants to project that Congress as well as left as supporters of criminals/terrorists. The only lacunae in this whole plan is the killing of Kausar Bi as well as Tulsiram Prajapati, a backward caste Hindu.

One hopes that further details would come out in the ensuing investigations and people would get to know the real culprits in the whole case. But the moot question is that can the fake encounter killings could be reduced to the deprivations of few officers who were out to make some fast buck or gain greater proximity to their political masters or one should look for the larger gameplan hatched by the powers that be which made such killings inevitable.

Perhaps one should look at the three year-old-plan made by the Gujarat government supposedly to 'counter terrorists'.

It sounds surprising that the 'reveals about the counter terrorism plan of the Gujarat police' (*The Rediff Special*, Sheela Bhatl in *Ahmedabad, How Gujarat plans to counter terrorists, July 15, 2004*) which sent shivers down the spine of the religious minorities in the state especially the Muslims then who were yet to recover from the trauma and tribulations of the post-Godhra carnage could not become a matter of debate at the national level then also.

The implicit understanding (as per the Gujarat government) behind this plan was that the 'state has become a haven for terrorists' (read Islamic terrorists). In an interview to the same e-mag the additional CP of Ahmedabad Mr Vanjara had hammered this point home in no uncertain terms plainly stating that...*After the Godhra carnage and the subsequent riots terrorists of a variety of types and shapes are*

aiming at Gujarat. Gujarat has become the destination for terrorists. (The Rediff Interview, July 27, 2004).

As a precursor to this plan a detailed survey of the number of mosques, madrasas at the state level was done and the various Islamic organisations active inside the state and their alleged linkages with other national-international organisations was also noted. As per the plan every policeperson from the constable level upwards was instructed to keep a close watch on the situation at the ground level. S/He was also asked to keep tabs on meetings at masjids and the goings on in the Madrasas. Activities of the *Tablighi Jamaat* were to be keenly watched under this plan.

It is clear to even a layperson that the neatly designed 'counter terrorism plan' of the Gujarat government at the behest of the state government stigmatised the whole minority community in uncertain terms. The most ironic part was that it did not even bother to mention the extremist elements within the Hindu community at whose behest the post-Godhra pogrom of the minorities mainly Muslims was undertaken. And the need to keep a close watch on the controversial activities of the plethora of organisations of the Hindutva Brigade and its leaders was thus skillfully scuttled. The action plan conveniently missed the warning by the intelligence people which has clearly asked to rein in Hindutva fanatics. To quote: 'intelligence bureau people overseeing the national scene had warned the central government to rein in elements like Praveen Togadia and Ashok Singhal if it was keen to nip the fresh sources for terrorist activities in the bud.' (*Jansatta*, Hindi Daily, 5 th Sep, 2003, Delhi, intelligence bureau warns the government about Togadia and Singhal)

According to the top bosses of the Gujarat police the plan had traced its origins to the murder of former state home minister and senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader Haren Pandya. It is still being said that the murder of Mr Haren Pandya opened up the eyes of the state government that the state has become a breeding ground for terrorists belonging to organisations like the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Tayiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad.

Of course it is another matter that till date Mr Vithalbhai Pandya, father of Mr Haren Pandya has consistently maintained that his son's murder was politically motivated and has pointed his fingers at the higher ups in the state BJP for their complicity in the same. As a mark of protest against the state government's reticence to investigate his charges, in the elections to the parliament in 2004 he even contested as an independent candidate against Mr L.K.Advani.

Looking at the track record of the state government in pursuing matters of governance and the way its whole apparatus unfolded itself in a partisan manner during the 2002 pogrom, the 'counter terrorism plan' did not sound surprising.

It is a fact that the trauma of the minorities has not ended with the pogrom only. The way they were subjected to all round harassment right from relief distribution to apprehending the guilty is for everyone to see. Till date a significant section of the Muslim population in the state is facing economic boycott. Also the way the highly draconian POTA was misused and innocent persons were victimised in the state in post-pogrom times is a fact which has also been well documented. A report filed by the AFP (New Delhi, Sep 03) had said that out of the 240 booked under POTA which carries a death penalty 239 were Muslims and one was a Sikh. While muslims had been booked for three different attacks on Hindus, including the burning of Sabaramati Express at Godhra last year, the attack on Ahmedabad's Akshardham temple and the murder of former minister Haren Pandya, it was clear that despite the

participation of thousands of Hindus in the pogrom none of the cases were found to be fit enough for clamping POTA against him/her.

It need be added that this 'counter terrorism plan of the state police' had come as a sequel to the amended Gujarat Control of Organised Crime Bill (GUJCOC), which was passed by the Gujarat assembly in the beginning of June '04. The Bill had almost all the provisions of POTA, including the authority to hold the accused in jail without trial and provisions giving jurisdiction only to special courts to try the cases under the Act.

It would be naive to think that the said action plan which is partisan in nature and communal in content would have seen the light of the day without the directions from the top bosses of the Parivar. Of course the rationale behind the plan was not difficult to decipher.

Even a cursory glance at the action plan—which largely went unnoticed in the rest of the country—makes it clear that it has provided a free hand to the law and order people in the state to continuously harass minorities as part of their 'mission' of countering terrorism. The next step then becomes catching hold of innocent people belonging to the minority community at regular intervals and bumping them off supposedly to provide a post facto justification of the 'success of the action plan'.

Isharat Jahan, Sami Ali Pathan or Soharabuddin Sheikh and many of their ilk—independent citizens of a secular nation, then merely become 'trophy' which are displayed from time to time to convince the pliant masses the danger such 'other' people present to the tranquility of the state. □□□