

ATTACK ON TASLIMA NASREEN

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I may disagree with what you have to say, but I shall defend, to death, your right to say it—Voltaire

August 10 happened to be the blakest day for Indian democracy as that lunatic fringe of cowardly, undemocratic and waspish legislatures of Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen made a travesty of law. While the country is on the verge of its 60th Independence Day achieved as a result of interfaith concord, the barbaric hoodlums have again proved what havoc organized religion can create. Owing to that, the image of India has been tarnished in the world. The attack by the lawmakers is a shame on the values of democracy. As elected MLAs, they are expected to respect and protect the freedom of expression as enshrined in the Constitution.

These legislatures have brought shame to the nation. How do they justify the attack on a woman? What precedent are they setting for the Muslim youth? Their statement after the attack shows that they have no respect for the law, let alone the women.

The loony MLM activists and their ilk represent the intolerant sections that do not believe in values of amnesty and mutual coexistence. They are in a minority now but if they go unpunished, the malaise of violence against voices of dissent will spread like a weed very rapidly.

Their leader Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi, went a step further patting on the back of the three vandalizing legislatures and threatening that: if she would ever step in Hyderabad, she would be killed by them, a similar comment that was uttered by Alia Andarabi in her burqa-clad appearance on the CNN-IBN programme.

Before the ghastly act of terror is faded out of public memory and anything else becomes the "breaking news", the MLAs must be tried under law. Another problem with the community and the media is that no platform is given to the voices of sanity in the community and only patented brands representing (who actually never represent) Muslims are encouraged in television debates.

Targeting writers and artists by the fundamentalist fringe is not new but the horrendous attack on Taslima is a first on several counts. Till now, the orthodox clerics only had stopped short of violence against celebrities like Shabana Azmi, Sania Mirza etc and their ire was directed against the police, innocent civilians and public property, now the trend has become a really dangerous one after the entry of the educated ones like Glasgow famed doctor suicide bombers and now legislatures. Muslim community today has been like a rudderless ship.

It is true that Taslima did write some derogatory remarks against the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) but Muslims must realize that respect for him can never be reduced by people who do not realize that the freedom of expression and press is applied equally on both sides and with it also comes the responsibility of not hurting the religious sensibilities of others.

For a law abiding Muslim, it was so embarrassing to see a lone woman in a foreign country being manhandled by the so-called custodians of Law and Islam as well! Eminent Muslim lawyer M Atiyab Siddiqui states that true, her

lifestyle statements may not be in line with Islamic injunctions on women, but she is well within her rights to do so.

Dr Aziz Burney, the learned Muslim scholar and editor *Rashtriya Sahara Urdu* daily opines that the best treatment to works like *Lajja* or *Satanic* denouncing religion is to ignore them and leave the matter between the writer and God rather than taking law in hands. Such protests actually render popularity to otherwise sub-standard literary work. He said that Prophet Mohammed actually invited dissent rather than punishing those who spoke against him or Islam. He believed in convincing.

Muslims have been put to shame by this remark of Akbaruddin Owaisi, MIM, legislature when he said, "We are least concerned about our MLA. We are Muslims first and it is our responsibility to punish all those in any manner who have said anything against Islam." Certainly such acts do not help Islam. What authority or which Hadith asks for the murder of dissenters, the Owaisis should explain as everyone knows that Islam was not spread by the likes of Owaisis but by the Sufi saints whose life was generous like a river. The honourable Owaisis overlooked the fact that India is not a totalitarian but secular country. Truth is whether it is Gujarat, Hyderabad or Mumbai, legislatures of all parties, have been known for violent expressions regarding religious and ethnic loyalties and they know how to get out of it.

Such people fail to understand that these blatantly violent and anti-democratic expressions are the worst possible publicity of their faith and owing to their zealous misdeed, a common Muslim who is in majority, has to pay dividends. As reaction to this, without ado, the media will brand the entire Muslim fraternity as a lot of extremists.

The legislatures defied not only all democratic norms but even the Islamic ones as the religion doesn't allow such cowardly attacks on women and other people. One may like or dislike what Taslima Nasreen writes but when on Indian soil no one has the right to attack her.

Such people neither read nor understand the humane attitude of the Prophet Muhammad, who did not attack those who insulted him, and there were many in Mecca at the time, who did. He returned the insults with visits to the sick with kind words. When he returned triumphant to Mecca, he did not punish anyone who had not been guilty of cruel violence.

Is it left to the MIM fiefdom of honourable Owaisi and sons to decide for Indians as to who should be allowed a visa and who should not - depending on their understanding of blasphemy and heresy?

It seems that the kind of attacks in one of which Taslima Nasrin had been subjected to in the Press Club of Hyderabad by the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimin legislators turned extremists, will never let Islam and Muslims have a peaceful existence. It is time that all right thinking Muslims condemn the attack on Taslima that actually is an attack on amnesty, humane attitude and the basic democratic and secular foundations of the Indian nation.

Quite interestingly, the attack wasn't planned by the clerics but by the legislative members sworn to uphold the Indian constitution. The machinations behind the heinous act smack of attaining cheap political publicity at the cost of Islam and Muslims who both felt embarrassed by these annihilators of law and order. These zealots proved more dastardly than even the clergy of Lal Masjid in Islamabad. These legislators should thank their stars that India has no Musharraf to crush such attackers.

In India all are Indians, Hindus and Muslims and all the others know that Indian culture and ethos is based on the foundations of a unique secularism.

Well, the tragedy with Taslima is that she had been exploited by some people who were Muslims in name. Her experiences in Bangladesh had been unpleasant and rather than following the right track since her *Lajja* in 1993, she has been found wayward. But the fact is that the best advocates of the religion are the acts by its followers. In case of Islam she had come into contact with drastically morally depraved Muslims. The solution is not in casting allegations against the Prophet or being vitriolic regarding Islam but in interpreting the religion the Sufi way. □□□