

The 'Disappearance' Syndrome

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Civil disobedience is not our problem. Our problem is civil obedience. Our problem is that numbers of people all over the world have obeyed the dictates of the leaders of their government and have gone to war, and millions have been killed because of this obedience. Our problem is that people are obedient all over the world in the face of poverty and starvation and stupidity, and war, and cruelty. Our problem is that people are obedient while the jails are full of petty thieves, and all the while the grand thieves are running and robbing the country. That's our problem

—Howard Zinn, from 'Failure to Quit'

Three-month-old Babu who is affectionately called Yuvraj also is not in a position to read the changes in his mother's face nor can comprehend why everyone in the family has suddenly started looking tense these days. For the kid the world remains the same, but for his family members it has rather changed a lot.

When Babu aka Yuvraj grows up, possibly he would be told that how his father Vinod Yadav—an activist of the human rights movement—was one day 'kidnapped' from Lucknow (24th Oct 2008) by personnel supposedly belonging to some anti-terrorist squad of UP and later handed over to the police after three days of interrogation which booked him under charges of swindling people (IPC 419/420). Perhaps he would also find out that the arrest happened on the eve of Diwali when grand preparations were on supposedly to celebrate his arrival in this world.

There is no doubt that the manner in which Vinod Yadav, a young activist who was also President of a NGO 'Karvan', was bundled out portends serious challenge before the human rights movement in the country. It is rightly asked that if a human rights activist is treated in such a manner then one can just imagine the fate of the ordinary people who find themselves at the mercy of the police on every other occasion.

As of now Vinod with few of his friends have been booked under section 419 and 420 of the IPC by the Lucknow police. (*Jansatta*, 28th Oct 2008) The report which appeared on the first page tells the readers about 'Arrest of leaders of People's Union For Human Rights under charges of forgery'. Vinod's sudden disappearance on 24th morning after talking to his wife last and his 'appearance in the Lucknow court' reminds one of similar incidents in the recent past for which the activities of the Special Task Force (STF) and Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) have come under lot of cloud.

May it be the case of Aftab Alam Ansari, the electrician from Kolkatta who was nabbed as the 'mastermind' of the blasts in courts of UP or the arrest of Mohammad Khalid Mujahid and Mohammad Tariq as perpetrators of the Lucknow blasts, the STF/ATS has not covered itself with glory. It may be noted that with growing outcry of the people over the arrest of Khalid Mujahid and Md Tariq the Mayawati government was forced to establish a committee headed by a retired judge. (Its report is yet not ready) And as far as arrest of Aftab Alam Ansari was concerned, the ATS received lot for its handling of the case and Ansari was released within 22 days. The court reprimanded the police for its shabby investigation. Aftab later revealed the modus operandi of the ATS/STF where he told how he was literally 'kidnapped' from Kolkatta on 29th December and was tortured badly so that he confesses that he is the area

commander of HUI named Raju Bengali and has received training in Bangladesh, Pakistan etc and has been instrumental in putting bombs in Varanasi and other places. He was even threatened with encounter if he did not agree to their proposal.

Coming to Vinod's case the question naturally arises about the *raison detre* for his arrest. For one thing Vinod, was very active and instrumental in the HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENTS that took place in Azamgarh recently. He was also targeted by the local police on 6 Oct 08 when the police attacked a peaceful protest of human rights activists. (see *JANSATTA* 07 oct 08).

Another important recent incident which was reported (*Hindustan*, 25th October. Allahabad Edition) in a section of the media involved the manner in which these human rights activists had foiled an attempt by the ATS people when they were involved in nabbing two youth from Azamgarh—Azfar Jamal and Rashid —when they were travelling by Kaifiyat Express on 23rd night.

Of course an added reason behind Vinod's 'disappearance' seems to be the role which is being played by his younger brother Rajeev Yadav, a promising journalist and an uncom-promising human rights activist. Many of his despatches detailing the STF's and ATS's 'atrocities in the name of fighting terrorism' have received wide publicity. A notable fact that Rajeev and his friends—Shahnawaz, Laxman and others—did not remain content with mere publication of reports but also organised public meetings/ public hearings to let the outside world know what was happening under the name of fighting terrorism.

It is learnt that focus of Vinod's interrogation when he was in the custody of his 'kidnappers', was on Rajeev and his other co-workers only. It would not be surprising that in coming days people would similarly hear about the 'disappearance' of these activists and their sudden appearance on some serious charges in some far off courts.

The manner in which things are unfolding everyday this possibility cannot be completely discounted. Look at what happened with Dr Binayak Sen for daring to defend human rights of the marginalised, who is still languishing in jail for more than one and a half years under some draconian law of the Chattisgarh government. Or look at how Lateef M Khan of the 'Civil Liberties Monitoring Committee' who fought not just state repression, but gender injustice within the Muslim community, against ageing Arab Sheikhs who bought young girls as wives etc being declared as a member of the "jehadi" terrorist outfit by the A P police.

It has been more than 18 months that 'Dalit ke Beti' Ms Mayawati rode to power in the state promising end to 'goondalism' of the earlier regime. Little could people have the premonition that under the new dispensation the police itself would become another 'synonym for terror'. A report in *Jansatta* (26th Oct 2008) narrates that since her assumption of power 'more than 15 thousand cases have been clamped against leaders and workers of opposition parties. Most of the cases are fake. If during times of emergency cases were clamped against 32 thousand people, within a span of one and a half years more than 80 thousand people have been affected.'

Perhaps it would be more apt to say that the sudden disappearance of a human rights activist and his friends and their 'metamorphosis as petty swindlers' is just the tip of the iceberg. □□□

