

PAID NEWS

Ram Unmasked

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ON 15 MARCH AT 3.40 PM N Ram alighted from his vehicle in front of Kaveri Mess, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) for the meeting on "Paid News" organised by the SFI. The students, who were informed earlier of Ram's participation in the deliberations, had gathered at the venue in large numbers. Ram smilingly stepped down from his car only to be welcomed warmly by the students with slogans in Hindi, English and Tamil. *Mass murderer Rajpaksha ka dalal N Ram murdabad, Hindu fascist Sankracharya ka dalal N Ram murdabad, Media fascist N Ram murdabad* were the slogans directed at him. The shock was evident on Ram's face and surely, this is one welcome, which he will never forget in his life.

Students continued sloganeering until N Ram commenced his lecture. Initially the protesting students were denied entry to the hall, but after the persuasion by other students, they were allowed entry. N Ram's oratorical skills were in full display as he discussed in detail the problems in Indian print media. He lamented on the state of the print media, that it gives more importance to trivial issues and sidelines burning issues that need to be addressed. To prove his credentials and supposed ethics in journalism that *The Hindu* stands for, N Ram defined what should be the standard of media reporting and expressed concern at the way the journalists covered the election. He referred to the large-scale violation of election norms in the recent assembly elections held in different states. He lamented the degradation of media standard, collision of big corporate and media, concentration of ownership that facilitated the culture of bribery in the form of paid news. However, to make claim for *The Hindu*, he appreciated the apparent courageousness of journalists who have been writing on socio-economic issues that concern the people at large.

Extending his lecture to the international issues like Iraq and Afghanistan wars led by the US, he commented on the international media in the way they responded to the war. Referring to the concept of manufacturing of consent by Chomsky, he said the media also worked with big powers to influence opinion in their favour. In all these pompous talk; N Ram conveniently forgot the role played by *The Hindu* in manufacturing consent for the Indian State and Rajapaksha on the inhuman atrocities committed in Sri Lanka.

The students who listened to his otherwise theoretically sound lecture did not fail to see through this duplicity. When they started asking questions on his own position and *The Hindu's* coverage on various issues pertaining to the oppressed masses, the orator was fumbling for words. His smiling face, which had turned red by then, was a dead give away. When confronted with questions on his complicit role in the Lankan war and his rescue operation of *Sankaracharyas*, Ram was left without any defence. Knowing the outrageous statements made

by *Sankaacharyas* on women, caste, rape and murder cases, the students questioned N Ram as to how he could defend such people so openly and so much that he escorted them from Bangalore border to Chennai in 2004. The only answer he managed in the face of this tirade of questions was that "I am not a believer of *Sankaracharya*" as if this statement alone is sufficient to justify his actions. The students responded saying that 'yes, yes, the whole of Tamil Nadu knows that'. He had no answer when students asked about *The Hindu* justifying the Batla House encounter. Then the speaker, who was intent on exposing other media houses, became uncomfortable when the students exposed his daily and his position. Many students, who did not know of N Ram's exploits were shocked to see the dark side of this lauded editor of the "unbiased" daily and gladly joined in forcing him to answer the questions.

A Student, referring to the defacto spokesperson role of N Ram to Rajapakse regime in the Lankan war, asked Mr Ram, 'you are talking of Iran and Afghanistan war led by US, what about your own role in genocide of Tamils, particularly mass killings and rape of civilians in the war?' Surprisingly instead of throwing light on the queries of the students, he asked them 'Have you ever been to Sri Lanka?' Hoping that he will be only person present who has ever been to Sri Lanka and so he can spread lies about "uplifting experience" in the concentration camps. When a student in the audience replied in the affirmative, N Ram just said 'good' and refused to answer the questions. The students were astounded by his suppleness in evading questions when questioned about the war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan army on innocent civilians, he completely ignored the question and started preaching about the apparent excesses of LTTE in detail and ended with mild criticism of the Sri Lanka state.

The students not convinced with his answer started shouting slogans, SHAME SHAME! SHAME ON YOU (Ram). The students were hell bent on unravelling the mystery behind the *Lanka Ratna's* visit to the (concentration) refugee camps immediately after the war, even when international human rights organisations were being denied entry. Many talents and expertise of N Ram, which were hitherto unknown, came to light. It seems he is also an expert on the credibility of international organisations and denounced the UN as a credible organisation, when he was confronted with the UN report on war crimes in Sri Lanka. He simply rubbished the claims of human right violations and war crimes mentioned in the UN report.

The students become furious when Mr Ram continually attacked LTTE without uttering a word on the Lankan Government and the genocide of Tamils. He was not content with simply hurting the sentiments of Tamils, he went on to infuriate the Kashmiris and Muslims by openly praising Pravin Swami, a senior journalist of the *Hindu* who is responsible for biased reports on communalism and fake encounters. When asked why the *Hindu* stereotypes the Muslims and its reports are biased on fake encounters, one more of his exceptional talents was revealed : the ability to suddenly lose the faculty of hearing and speaking. But his silence exposed him more than his false justifications.

The meeting ended with the students shouting slogans 'N Ram get lost', 'Hindu fascist, the agent of *Sankaracharya* get lost'. "Agent of Sri Lankan government N Ram get lost'. Exhausted

by this gruelling interrogation, he left embarrassed and red faced, leaving behind many unanswered questions. N Ram who had come to expose the nexus on paid news would have surely not expected his own unmasking. □□□