

This Pain Should Become Anger

By Varavara Rao

Shocking news! How much shock it would be for friends of Gauri Lankesh in Bengaluru – a friend enquired whether I knew the news tweeted by Rajdeep Sardesai. Immediately I tried to contact Babayya, another friend from Bengaluru. But couldn't get him on phone, perhaps sharing his agony with other friends. He returned the call after two hours. But what happened is not quite unexpected. Since the destruction of Babri Masjid, she has been fighting against the saffron brigade. She is a brave woman in the heroic tradition of Lohia's followers fighting against dominant ideology since the days of Nehru.

What is fascism if not this? This is worse than the murders of Dabholkar, Pansare and Kalburgi. For she fought as much against Hinduisation as globalization with equal determination. The followers of Lohia fought against mining at Kudremukh and Bangalore-Mysore Expressway along with AIPRF. They also participated in the activities of Joint Action Forum of Indian People (JAFIP) and Mumbai Resistance 2004. It is heart rending to remember the privilege of enjoying the support of democrats like her in Bengaluru in connection with our struggle against state repression and fake encounters in Andhra Pradesh.

We felt enraged hearing of the murders of people like Aqlakh and Kalburgi by the Sangh Parivar. We might not have heard about Aqlakh and Junaid before they were murdered. Even Najib of JNU who disappeared after kidnap by the Sangh Parivar might be living somewhere amidst us. We might have felt respect for Dabholkar, Pansare and Kalburgi because of their activities in various fields and the news of their assassination might trigger rage in us. But without any acquaintance, if we respect somebody just because of their participation in movements, our response tends to be objective. If we get acquainted as part of the movements and that develops into friendship, the response would turn to be subjective also. There will be a tender bond. We feel proud in claiming that we personally know this activist. We recall the experiences only to convert this pain into anger. This is not a time to shed tears. It is a time to march against the fascist forces.

Ole Soyinka called his jail diary 'Man Died'. The condition of an active individual is described as death when he is rendered unable to speak. Gauri Lankesh did not care the threats to her life. To the well-wishers who cautioned her, she replied "Our silence is the strength of the reactionaries". She was the lone figure in the crowd. She lived alone in her house in a posh locality of Rajarajeswari Nagar in Bangalore. Enemy very well knows when she goes to office and returns. She was an easy target. As in the case of Kalburgi, she was also fired from point blank range. The bullets that pierced her head and chest felled her on the ground where she bloomed like a flower in blood. The Congress government of Siddaramaiah knows that death warrants are issued against all secular, democratic and active intellectuals like Gauri. She became Gauri Lankesh as she was fighting for those who are in trouble, unmindful of her own situation. Even Siddaramaiah was a follower of Lohia once. Now what is the use of grieving the loss of a valuable friend?

I met her last time when I happened to visit Bengaluru in 2005 after the 'encounter' killing of Saket Rajan, the State Secretary of CPI (Maoist). He was senior to Gauri in Bangalore University. She

wrote a long essay on him at that time. I went there along with Gaddar to receive the body of Saket. By the time we went there the body was secretly cremated and we were given his ashes only. Those two days all of us including her moved together. She has also come to Hyderabad to participate in such movements.

I started from Mumbai on 1 December, 1992, to reach Sringeri the next day to participate in a cultural workshop. I took with me the documentary 'He Ram' produced by Anand Patwardhan to show at the work shop there. Ekatmata Yatra undertaken by Advani in 1984 culminated in the destruction of Babri Masjid on that December 2. If that were an attempt to destroy a faith, the violence planned and executed by Modi from Gujarat to Mujaffarnagar and Karnataka is its extension. In the cultural workshop of Sringeri it was revealed that the next target of the Sangh Parivar is a Dargah at Baba Budangiri. After destroying Babri Masjid in the north to secure Hindu votes, this Dargah was selected in the South. Baba Budangiri is a place named after the Sufi saint who reached the hills in Chikmagalur district about 500 years ago. The movement to protect Baba Budangiri might not have prevented the BJP led by Yadyurappa coming to power. But for the present, minorities, Dalits, Socialists and revolutionary forces in Karnataka could prevent the Sangh Parivar from occupying the Dargah in the name of Dattatreya Peetham. They fought many struggles against caste and Hindu fanaticism. Death warrants were issued against many of them. We do not like to advertise the list lest the names be known to the reactionary forces. Because of the legacy of Lankesh, the paper run by Gauri has become the center for those agitations. That is why it has become the target of enemies.

Immediately after hearing of the assassination of Gauri, the name of Snehalata Reddy came to my mind. She was the companion of Telugu poet Pattabhi (of Fidel Raagaala Dozen fame) and played the lead roles in 'Samskara' based on U R Anantamurty's novel as well as in 'Chandamaruta' based on the Naxalite movement. There is a strong group of intellectuals in Bengaluru dedicated to Lohia's ideology. It was very active led by George Fernandez. It is from that group that activists like Pattabhi, Lankesh and Ananta Murty originated. But now we are facing an undeclared Emergency. It would target you if you prefer to speak out like Gauri instead of keeping mum like a living corpse. It is a clandestine mystery of darkness that could come to annihilate you as per plan. It cannot tolerate light, transparency or democracy. That is fascism. As Kaloji said, it is the force that will silence any voice that does not conform. But how many voices could they silence if all the dissidents join together?

During the Spanish Civil war, students, intellectuals and writers who fought with arms against Fascism were eliminated mercilessly. They did not even leave democrats who were hiding without fighting. Imperialism itself is enemy, war and death. Similarly fear, silence and sense of insecurity are also death. This Fascism of Brahminical Hindutva is just the beginning of that imperial Fascism. Shall we search for any safe place left where at least we can talk freely about Gauri Lankesh!

(Translated from Telugu original published in Andhra Jyothi daily, September 9, 2017)