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# Why I have been assaulted

My ideal of social justice runs counter to the casteism of Sangh Parivar. But my disagreements are spiritual, not political.

Written by **Swami Agnivesh** | Updated: August 18, 2018 12:45:26 am

Swami Agnivesh after he was attacked in Pakur.

On Friday afternoon, exactly a month after I was assaulted in Pakur, I was set upon by a group of BJP activists outside the party headquarters in New Delhi. I had gone there to pay my respects to the mortal remains of former prime minister, **Atal Bihari Vajpayee**. I was walking towards the building when they surrounded me and grabbed my shawl and turban. They kept calling me a traitor while beating me. The people who thrashed me were insulting the memory and legacy of Vajpayee.

Soon after the attack on me in Pakur on July 17, C P Singh, a minister in the BJP government in Jharkhand, sought to justify the crime by branding me a “fake swami” who thrives on foreign funding. This was an awkwardly transparent public admission of complicity. Even otherwise, it is axiomatic that orchestrated violence against a citizen can happen in broad daylight only with assured political patronage. It is a lie that violence is spontaneous. Love can be spontaneous, as in love at first sight. But there is no violence at first sight. Violence being unnatural, it can be resorted to only after suppressing the protests of rationality, compassion and one’s sense of fellow humanity. That is why violence, especially directed against unarmed fellow human beings, is felt as an outrage against humanity itself. The minister’s statement was echoed by several BJP mouthpieces subsequently, in effect adopting it as the party line, which the present attack serves to confirm. None of the eight assailants named in the FIR lodged in the Pakur outrage has been arrested even after a month.

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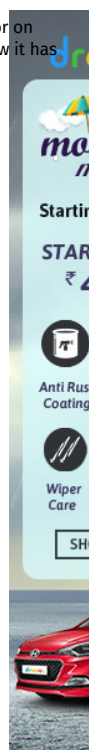
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I have been an eyesore to the RSS for long because of my life-long commitment to social justice. The ideal of justice is an irritant to the RSS. It runs counter to the Sangh's casteist creed of keeping the lower castes and tribals as barely-tolerated second-class citizens. Justice presupposes equality and the RSS ideology is anything but egalitarian. From its inception, inspired by the un-Indian ideology of cultural nationalism borrowed from Hitler's Germany, the RSS has endeavoured to keep India anchored to its feudal past, marked by unjust and unmerited advantages to the upper castes to the detriment and degradation of the rest of the society. I have never been in any doubt that the RSS is a sinister threat to the Vedic heritage and the core ethos of Indian spirituality. My disagreement with the RSS is spiritual.

My spiritual work has been to rid the Indian society of its superstitions (as in the case of sati), to end caste oppression, the exploitation of the poor and the downtrodden (as in releasing and rehabilitating those withering away in bonded labour), to stand up for the rights of the Dalits and adivasis, and to make the spiritual light of the Vedas shape our public life. For this, my colleague Swami Indravesh and I, have been described as Marxists, Maoist-sympathisers, minority-loyalists, fraud swamis, agents of un-identifiable foreign powers, and so on.

I am aware that there exists a spurious chasm between spiritual enlightenment and social action. It legitimises the notion that those spiritually enlightened should renounce social responsibilities and live in isolation on mountain-tops or forests. Yet, we also have the idea of the avatar, where the divine is believed to respond remedially to the adharma that prevails from time to time. So, the idea that spirituality and social realities are linked is not alien to us. Yet, thanks to the ascendancy of upper-caste mindsets over the religious domain, a pro status-quoist religiosity, evidently advantageous to the dominant castes and classes, has been foisted on the people. This has effected a split in our spiritual vision.

Vasudhaiva kutumbakam, for example, is a spiritual vision that encapsulates the essence of Indian spirituality. It is Vedic in its core. If brahman is the ultimate reality and all forms of life are expressions of that reality, how can a socio-economic, religious and cultural scheme of things riddled with discrimination and oppression, ever be justified? So, it became necessary to draw a religious LoC (line of control), so to speak, between ritualistic religion and spirituality. Those who have bothered to acquaint themselves with the Vedic texts will readily agree that spirituality, with its emphasis on love, justice, truth and compassion, is the core of spirituality. Regrettably, this has been obscured with caste-ridden, superstition-mongering religiosity that is deaf and blind to the ideals of humanity.

My solidarity with the political struggles of the adivasis is spiritual, not political. I emphasise this not because I hold politics as unspiritual. On the contrary, I believe that politics needs to be spiritual. My spiritual mission is to bring about a re-vitalisation of the Indian society. I believe that we insult the spiritual genius of India by fighting in the name of religions. Religions must serve as catalytic influences for creating a noble society and a vibrant nation. This can happen only if citizens are empowered to function at their noble, spiritual best, as envisaged in Gandhi's idea of Ram Rajya. So long as India harbours injustice, violence, inhumanity, caste-based discriminations, we shall fail to do justice to our true potential.

We can progress only together. The alternative is to perish together. Either way, the reality of a shared destiny is the bottom-line. This vision, however, seems offensive to the RSS. The irony is that the RSS is trying to realise in India what the German hotheads tried to foist on Hitler's Germany. It is hard for me to believe that the RSS agenda has anything to do with Hinduism. Surely, even the RSS would not believe that I was attacked for my aberrations! While it is traumatic in the extreme to go through what I had to, now a second time, I would feel healed in my spirit if my hurt and humiliation serves to alert fellow Indians to the perils that stare us in our face today.



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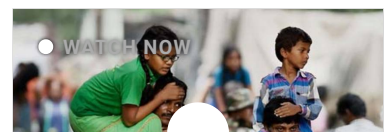


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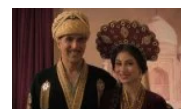


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