

# BJP insults India

Candidate Pragya Thakur



[Swami Agnivesh](#), APR 26 2019, 21:32PM IST | UPDATED: APR 26 2019, 21:36PM IST



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**I**n May 2013, I visited ‘Sadhvi’ Pragya Thakur in the Bhopal jail. I did so because she was, I was given to understand, suffering from a life-threatening illness and proper medical attention was not extended to her. I was also given to understand that her followers and patrons had deserted her.

This landed me in a huge embarrassment. Pragya accused me of being in collusion with the UPA government, in particular with the then home minister, P Chidambaram. I was alleged to have mounted pressure on her on behalf of the ruling dispensation. This surprised and saddened me. I met her in the office of the jail superintendent who, as also a few others, were present throughout our conversation. Mine was a humanitarian initiative. I don't regret extending a hand of support and solidarity to Pragya at that time, irrespective of how she embarrassed me for it. The nature of a humanitarian act does not change because it evoked ingratitude and callousness. I would visit her again, if she finds herself in similar circumstances.

But that does not mean that I would be too sentimental to disapprove of her pretensions and falsehoods. I am free to be silent about my personal embarrassment, but not so when a true martyr — Hemant Karkare — is vilified and demonised. The issue here is not of personal animosity: Pragya versus the late Karkare. There are larger issues in this episode that compel me to speak up, upholding my commitment to the constitutional democracy that India is, which all of us have a duty to defend and strengthen.

I am a swami. The core discipline of being a swami is religious transcendence. A swami, if he is genuinely one, cannot be religiously partisan. He is a citizen of the world, as the vision of 'vasudhaiva kutumbakam' mandates. The same applies to the spiritual discipline of being a sadhvi. A lady who is virulently partisan, who believes in or practises violence, who advocates hate towards a section of our people, who readily becomes the mascot of communal politics, and has no consistent commitment to truth, cannot be a sadhvi by any stretch of imagination.

It is not Pragya that worries me. It is the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah agenda. The installation of Yogi Adityanath as chief minister of the politically-decisive Uttar Pradesh was the first significant trial balloon floated by them in turning state after state into laboratories — akin to the state of Gujarat — of Hindutva politics. Never before in our history has India had a religious functionary heading the administration of a state.

Of course, Adityanath has had an established parliamentary track record and he is, in that sense, not a political novelty. But being the chief minister of a state is a different proposition from being a law-maker. The scope of communal bias and animosity is so much less in case of a law-maker, whereas it is virtually unlimited in the case of a CM. Once a religious functionary like Adityanath becomes the 'CEO' of a state, the prescription in the Representation of People Act that votes shall not be sought in the name of religion becomes meaningless. This is a serious blow to the very idea of secular democracy.

Pragya has been chosen by Modi-Shah to spread the same phenomenon into Madhya Pradesh. Already, Shivraj Singh Chauhan had prepared the ground for it during his tenure by appointing five Hindu swamis in the state administration. That step had evoked mild expressions of anxiety at that time. No one in India will believe that the projection of an undertrial like Pragya Thakur as a potential law-maker is an investment in 'good governance'. It is a determined push towards the establishment of 'Hindu rashtra'. It is in this light that Pragya's statement on Karkare needs to be understood.

What is the pattern that a common sense analysis of the BJP's Bhopal candidate's statement about Karkare's untimely death reveals? Well, it is simple, though it is not being talked about as it needs to be. Pragya is counterpointing forces of two kinds: State and religion. Karkare acted against her under the authority of the State, which is secular and democratic. It worked to her detriment. So, she hurled her power — drawn from religion, the power to curse somebody to death and damnation — at him. Which prevailed? The religious power had the last laugh!

It is naïve to discount statements of this kind as casual and immature. No, they are intentional and purposive. The assertion of the death-dealing power of religion vis-à-vis State power is made, let us not forget, in the context of

repeatedly that the popular mind works in terms not of ideas or ideologies, but of raw power. A believer, for example, will choose the mightier of the two gods available to him.

Pragya's electoral adversary — like her anti-terror adversary — is a secular man. He is vastly superior to her in political and administrative experience, just as Karkare was superior to her in terms of the authority of the State under which he dealt with her. On merits, Pragya stands no chance against Digvijaya Singh. The only aspect in which she can claim superiority over him is that of supernatural powers — which, she knows, has immense mass appeal.

Ironically, for the BJP, it is its contrived monopoly over patriotic, nationalist and anti-Pakistani sentiments that makes Pragya's statement a greater liability than it needs to be. So, a way out has been improvised. Pragya withdraws her obnoxious statement, not because it is unfair and unpatriotic, but because it afforded some laughter in Pakistan! She doesn't want Pakistanis to laugh. So, Karkare will be spared, even as she refuses to renege from what she said. The shocking thing is that the BJP believes that this will wash away the poison from Pragya's calumny.

*(The writer is a scholar, social activist and founder-convener of the Parliament of All Religions-India)*

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