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The Muslim right's latest assault on Taslima Nasreen: reports, statements and opinions

Saturday 11 August 2007, by [CNN-IBN](#), [DUTT Barkha](#), [SAHMAT](#), [The Times of India](#) (Date first published: 9 August 2007).

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Taslima Nasreen attacked in Hyderabad during book launch

The Times of India, 9 August 2007

HYDERABAD: Taslima Nasreen, the controversial Bangladeshi novelist, was attacked on Thursday by Majid-Ittehad-ul Muslimeen (MIM) activists in Hyderabad Press club.

The attack took place during the launch of her latest book.

TV grabs showed MIM activists throwing chairs at the controversial writer.

However, no injuries have been reported. The police and journalists came to her rescue and avoided any major mishap.

Taslima is facing fatwas which were issued against her for her radical views against Islam.

The author has been living in India due to Islamic backlash in her native country.

Andhra MLAs lead mob attack on Taslima

CNN-IBN

August 09, 2007 at 14:13

Hyderabad: Local political activists in Hyderabad on Thursday attacked the car of author Taslima Nasreen when she was attending the book release of the Telugu translation of her latest novel Shodh.

A group of 20 MIM workers, led by MLAs Afsar Khan, Ahmed Pasha and Mozum Khan, stormed the Press Club premises and raised slogans against the author.

At the concluding session of the book release, the MIM activists barged into the conference hall, attacked the press photographers, damaged the furniture and glass panes and some of them reached the dais and roughed up the novelist.

The police later took the legislators and their supporters into custody.

Later on, she was safely escorted to the airport with the help of journalists and the organisers of the function.

Nasreen is a controversial figure in the world of Literature. Her books Lajja and Dwikhondito are banned in Bangladesh.

Nasreen talks about the torture of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. She has been living in exile for more than 10 years now.

SAHMAT

8, Vithalbhai Patel House, Rafi Marg

New Delhi-110001, India

Tel- 23711276/ 23351424

e-mail-sahmat vsnl.com

9.8.2007

Press Statement to Condemn Attack on Tasleema Nasreen

SAHMAT strongly condemns the violent attack on Bangladeshi Novelist Tasleema Nasreen in Hyderabad on August 8, 2007 at a function to release the Telugu translation of the novelist's latest novel Shodh.

It is reported that around 20 MIM workers led by MLAs Afsar Khan, Ahmad Pasha and Mozum Khan stormed the Press Club premises and raised slogans against the author. They attacked her with bouquets, flower pots and virtually anything they could lay their hands on at the concluding session of the book release.

Tasleema Nasreen has been a target of attack from fundamentalist forces both in India and Bangladesh and SAHMAT has always defended her freedom of expression.

We appeal to the democratic minded people in India to join in the condemnation of such attacks and isolate those who preach intolerance and violence.

Ram Rahman

M.K.Raina

The secular silence

Hindustan Times, August 10, 2007

by Barkha Dutt

Where are the placard-waving protestors this time? What happened to the street marches, the irate editorials and the lament for creative freedom? Does our outrage choose sides this selectively? Three legislators and a sundry assortment of political workers from a right wing Muslim party force their way inside the Press Club of Hyderabad, assault Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasreen, vandalise the venue, and then defiantly refuse to apologise, because after all they were God's own warriors, or so they claim.

And yet, apart from the media's clichéd fallback on interviews with the usual array of "moderate" Muslims, there's no real evidence of anger or disgust.

So, does the fight against fundamentalism go into battle mode only when the enemy is the Hindu Right?

Yaqoob Qureshi or Akbaruddin Owaisi are no different from Praveen Togadia or Bal Thackeray. All of them represent the dangerous politics of intolerance and bigotry.

This isn't really about the author or her literary worth. Every time that zealots clash with the zany and Religion and Freedom take opposite positions across the trenches, the issue becomes larger than the individual. So, yes, perhaps Taslima Nasreen is a somewhat overrated writer, more famous for her contrarian politics than her turn of phrase. And yes, there are those who argue, with good reason, that she is shrill, clamorous of attention and somewhat obsessed with writing kiss-and-tell accounts of her sexual history. But none of that is really the point.

At the heart of the matter is a larger debate on whether political correctness has twisted our response to the principle of individual liberty. Have our politicians in particular been shaped by a kind of hypocrisy that makes their utterances on creative freedom just humbug and little else?

To compare the difference, think back to how the secular and liberal establishment reacted when goons from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal attacked the faculty of arts in Vadodara. A young student was arrested for painting Jesus Christ and Lord Vishnu in a style that employed sexually explicit visual metaphors. The dean of the school was suspended, but no action was taken against those who trespassed the university, infiltrated a private exhibition and used brute force to gag artistic expression. The opposition and outcry at that time was spontaneous, vocal and unrelenting. Most of us protested against the idea of fettering imagination with do's and don'ts. We didn't really care or even know whether the art in question was of a commendable quality. It's the principle we stood up for.

Yes, fear and repression may be permanent

citizens in Narendra Modi's Gujarat. But the fact is that this attack on Taslima Nasreen doesn't get to be played by different rules just because it took place on Congress turf or because the mob was led by Muslims instead of Hindus. The two incidents are inarguably mirror images of each other. Like in Gujarat, here too, the perpetrators of violence are not just out of jail, they have already issued fresh threats to the writer to get out of India or face the consequences. If a political party was seen to sanction the assault on art in Gujarat, in this case the mobsters belong to a political party that is an ally of the UPA at the centre. Yes, unlike the BJP, which was brazen enough to defend the use of violence in Gujarat, the Congress and the Left have been quick with their condemnation. But over the years both parties have tiptoed their way around the many issues that Taslima Nasreen represents. They have looked for covert exits from the controversies that trail her and have sometimes succumbed when it all gets too hot to handle. The UPA, for example, seems unable to decide whether Taslima Nasreen should get permission for long-term residency in India. For now, she survives on a piecemeal arrangement whereby she counts on a six monthly extension of her visa (the latest extension was announced on the same day she was assaulted.) And it was the 'progressive' Marxist-ruled state of West Bengal that first banned her autobiography in 2003 because it feared that the book "slandered Islam and would incite communal violence." The Chief Minister, known for his love of literature said he reached the decision after he himself read the book "several times over." The state unit of the Congress branded the book a "piece of pornography," and supported the ban. Ironically, but not surprisingly, the only party that called the censorship of Nasreen's work "undemocratic" was the BJP. A party that has unapologetically hounded artist M.F. Husain out of India for "hurting Hindu sentiments" saw no contradiction in suddenly playing the torchbearer for artistic liberty.

But this is exactly what happens when political double standards define the clash between religious sensitivities and democratic rights. We have seen the hypocrisy play out before when a state Minister in Uttar Pradesh called for the

controversial Danish cartoonist's head and even announced a bounty of Rs 50 crore for whoever delivered it to him. The man in question (Haji Yaqoob Qureshi) is no longer a minister after the change of regime in the state, but is still an elected member of the assembly and seems to face neither political nor social ostracisation. And in keeping with the pattern, his party, the self-appointed messiahs of Muslims in UP has gone as far as defending the outrageous and obnoxious behaviour of the MLAs in Andhra Pradesh.

As far as I'm concerned, Qureshi or Akbaruddin Owaisi (the Hyderabad MLA who led the attack on Taslima) are no different from Praveen Togadia or Bal Thackeray. All of them represent the dangerous politics of intolerance and bigotry. The fact that some of them have popular support doesn't give them legitimacy; it makes them even more frightening and insidious. And to treat them differently is to embolden intolerance on either side.

So, protest peacefully by all means against the writings of Taslima Nasreen. Let there even be a genuine debate over whether India should get entangled in giving her political asylum. After all, the right to dissent is as sacred as the right to express. Call her lowbrow, offensive, inflammatory and an incendiary agent if that's what you think she is. But draw the line at both assault and censorship.

And let's make sure we tell those who treat human beings like fatwa fodder that they have no place in a truly secular society.

** Barkha Dutt is Managing Editor, NDTV 24x7*

P.S.

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