

India: Rising Saffron Offensive in Bihar

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The Forbesganj (Bhajanpura) firing in Araria district, on poor villagers protesting land grab, which took four lives including a woman and a child, is fresh in everyone's mind. In horrific video footage, a policeman was seen viciously stomping on an injured man till he died. That incident undoubtedly reeked of communal hatred. In spite of this, the SP and SDO are yet to face disciplinary action.

In December 2010, in the same district, Sashatra Seema Bal (SSB) killed four Muslims in firing at Batraha village. The firing took place when Muslims came to the SSB camp to protest that SSB jawans had entered their village the previous night and attempted to rape a woman.

In Muzaffarpur, within three months of the Forbesganj firing, a trainee sub-inspector (SI) in the Town police station of Muzaffarpur beat a 50-year-old tailor, Shamsuddin, to death. The SI was enraged when Shamsuddin intervened to save two Muslim youths who were being beaten up by plainclothes police led by the SI during 'questioning' in regard to suspected arms hoarding. The SI and two other cops turned on Shamsuddin and beat him up in the thana till he died.

These atrocities by police on Muslims point to a growing saffron offensive in the state. The Seemanchal area (near the Indo- Nepal border) which includes Araria district is a main centre of this offensive.

In this border area, the SSB camps are located in mostly in civilian areas, and if the jawans misbehave with the people, any protest is met with threats of a Batraha-type incident. The minority community is at the receiving end of the communalised SSB and police. The three MPs in the Seemanchal region are BJP and most MLAs too. It is said that BJP's Sushil Modi, the Deputy CM, is the de facto CM of Seemanchal. Nitish Kumar has given the BJP a free hand to use the region as a Sangh laboratory.

Sushil Modi is directly implicated in the Forbesganj firing, where villagers had been protesting when BIADA land had been allotted to a BJP MLC's son for his factory which encroached on to a public road. The BIADA allotment itself is now suspect, since it is part of a series of arbitrary allotments of land made to close kith and kin of JD(U) and BJP leaders, without any pretence of proper process.

In the Seemanchal area, the ABVP-RSS campaign against 'infiltrators' directly targets Muslims. They target the 'Bhatiya' Muslims as 'outsiders.' This community is said to have settled here since Sher Shah Suri's time and to have taken agriculture and cattle-rearing in the Seemanchal region to new heights, braving the floods in the Kosi and Mahananda.

It is said of them that they do not eat till they have given fodder to their cattle. The health and strength of cattle tied at the door indicate that it must be a Bhatiya Muslim household. Now there is a deliberate communal ploy to evict them from land, water and grazing areas.

Another recent instance of communal mobilisation has been the ABVP's violent opposition to the proposal to set up an Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) branch in Kishenganj. In the face of this blatantly communal campaign, branding AMU as a 'terrorist' threat, the Nitish Government has opted for silence and vacillation.

In August first week, CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya visited Araria with other CPI(ML) leaders including CCMs Comrades KD Yadav and Dhirendra Jha, and Naval Kishore Rai. The team met victims of the Forbesganj firing, and found that without removal of the SP and SDO, the judicial enquiry into the Forbesganj firing is a farce.

The team also found that the BIADA land was acquired from peasants at throwaway rates. In 1985, 86 acres of land was acquired at Rs 10,000 per acre, while even back then, the market rate was Rs 1.5 lakh per acre! The irony is that most of the peasants are yet to receive even this meagre compensation for their land! Peasants had on 8 February 2011 formally registered their protest at the BDO office and thana against allotment of the land to the BJP MLC's son when compensation was yet to be paid to them. The administration took no action on the complaints.

The team led by the CPI(ML) General Secretary demanded justice for the Forbesganj victims, return of BIADA land to peasants forcibly evicted, or else payment of compensation at today's market rates, and a CBI enquiry into the BIADA land scam.

The Nitish Government's pro-minority and pro-peasant claims are being exploded in the face of the blatantly communal behaviour of his police and administration, and his tolerance and approval of the BJP-Sangh's growing communal offensive against minorities.

Dhirendra Jha

P.S.

* From Liberation September 11, 2011.