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K O V I E W

Arrest of Davinder Singh

The arrest of senior J&K Police officer Davinder Singh along with two top Hizbul Mujahideen militants has sent alarm bells ringing in the security establishment of the country. The three, along with a lawyer, were caught on their way to New Delhi just days ahead of the Republic Day. On its face, it is unimaginable that a decorated police officer will be caught accompanying the militants. This has triggered a lot many speculations which the ongoing investigation into the development by the NIA will hopefully be able to answer.

Incidentally, days before being caught with militants, Singh was part of the security team who had received the 16 foreign envoys at Srinagar airport. He was filmed standing right behind one of the convoys.

There is not much that is known from the preliminary investigation except the unconfirmed reports that Singh was taking the militants to New Delhi for some cash. But the way the development has exploded right before our eyes, few people are ready to believe any facile-looking explanation. Singh's controversial past gives reasons to believe that there is much more here than meets the eye. The controversies surrounding Singh begin with the letter of the hanged parliament attack convict Afzal Guru in which he accused the police officer of forcing him to accompany one of the attackers of the parliament to New Delhi and arranging an accommodation for him there. The attacker "Mohammad" was subsequently killed during attack on the parliament. The accusation was never investigated, although in an interview to media in 2006, Singh had admitted to torturing Guru in custody but denied sending any militant with him.

Singh has also faced allegations of extortion and had once also been accused of having sold contraband from a drug peddler after nabbing him. But he was always let off the hook. His record in counter-insurgency always helped him emerge unscathed.

Recruited as a sub-inspector in J&K Police in 1994 Singh came to be inducted in the Special Operations Group (SOG) of the police which was exclusively tasked to combat militancy. His exceptional performance helped him soon become the Deputy Superintendent of Police. But following complaints of extortion, Singh was removed from the SOG and posted to traffic department. But he continued to be important, nevertheless and soon got prize postings in the department. When Singh was arrested with the militants, he was posted at the anti-hijacking unit of Srinagar airport which has only further raised the level of alarm over his motives.

On its part, J&K Police has done well to arrest him just when he was on way to New Delhi along with militants. The NIA is now expected to reveal the motive behind Singh's action. And there is much that is at stake in the answers to this motive.

OTHER OPINION

Students are protesting because of our education, not despite it

NOUMAAN ANWER / DECCAN CHRONICLE

"Good" students have voiced their dissent on many occasions, including against the abrogation of Article 370, the Transgender Bill and the NRC in Assam. While there is no denying that protests of the scale and significance of the recent one at St Stephen's rarely happen on such campuses, the idea that it represents a moment of awakening among overachievers generally engrossed in academics is a dangerous mischaracterisation. It allows the casting of campuses that are centres of robust opposition as ideologically-motivated "anti-national" spaces. In the government's opinion, the long-present culture of protest at institutions such as JNU and JMI represents the dangerous degradation of these universities. This argument is confirmed by repeatedly stressing that the duty of a student is to study and succeed professionally.

Through this logic, the government seeks to divide students, especially when its platform and policies are being so widely questioned. That students at institutions such as St Stephen's are participating in and organising protests is worrying — the "good" student is now out on the streets, using the mechanism of the protest, alongside the answer script, to express her opinions on the nation's politics.

Challenging this narrative is crucial for the continuing unity of students in the face of an increasingly repressive government. I believe that meeting this challenge must also involve changing the way in which many Indians think about higher education. Universities cannot simply be seen as imparters of formal knowledge. Education shapes one's worldview, and therefore, plays a fundamental role in constructing a student's perspectives, including on politics. Those committed to understanding Indian business, economy, and history must channelise what they learn in classrooms into their views on the nation and its current state of affairs. That students are on the streets, leading fellow citizens against divisive, fearmongering forces is majorly because their education has imbued in them an unbreachable sense of justice, of equality, of morality, and of the right to dissent.

It is extremely important that the larger populace understand the fundamental link between the classroom and the protest. The student protest slogan "lado padhai karne ko, padho samaj badalne ko" demonstrates that this demand has long been a component of what higher education ought to be. That eminent institutions are protesting should not be an anomaly that arises only when circumstances are extremely dire — it should be seen as an inalienable consequence of young citizens' advanced understanding of their political environments.

The concern that the country is being divided has been voiced most strongly by young people. No concerned observer ought to weaken their voice. Be they from JNU or IIT, Jamia or St Stephen's, students should be seen as equals leading the long march against discrimination, disunity, and repression as a consequence of their education.

FOR the first time in six years, the NDA government appears to be rattled, if one goes by its reaction to the protests that have erupted across the country against the Citizenship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizens.

Try as it might, the government is seemingly unable to convince the people that its decisions to amend the citizenship law and conduct the NRC across the country are in their larger interests.

For a juggernaut that had levelled everything in its path over the past six years, being stopped by the common man is something the government never expected. In the common man, the Narendra Modi-led government has found its toughest adversary yet, one that is refusing to be subjugated, refusing to be overawed, refusing to be convinced on the CAA or NRC.

Thus far, the Narendra Modi government has been able to either woo its political rivals or subjugate them with the help of pliant courts and browbeat officials. If these didn't work, the threat of the investigative agencies breathing down their necks did the trick. However, the government hasn't been able to do the same with the anti-CAA protesters, and not for the lack of trying. It may have expected violence and also the average Muslim to take to the street and protest against the CAA, but did not obviously expect non-Muslims too to hit the streets.

The absence of violence (aside from that reported in BJP-ruled states) has deprived the government of an opportunity to raise the bogey of "Hindus under threat because of such people who are violent and don't belong here".

Non-Muslims too joining the protests have meant that it is unable to disregard or discredit the rallies by relegating them to one community. Also, non-Muslims joining the rallies have led the government to realise that it is now a people's protest.

It can safely be assumed that not all those who are protesting today are solely against CAA; their angst has been building up over the past few years.

They kept quiet while waiting for hours in queues to withdraw their own money, and did not murmur even when the government kept shifting the goalposts to justify demonetisation.

They were silent when leaders of the ruling party tried to distort history; when it fielded a terror accused for the Lok Sabha, when a state was placed under lockdown for months; when the cops were given a free hand to "encounter"

Only The People Will Prevail

M Q ALI SHAH ABUL-ULAI | DECCAN CHRONICLE

anyone they pleased; when an attempt was made to malign a dalit student who committed suicide; when people were lynched at will and the accused felicitated publicly and when they were given many other reasons.

Perhaps it was the police brutally beating up Jamia and AMU students protesting against it, or perhaps the government's attempt to obfuscate its ineptness at handling the economic slowdown by communalising society, the people finally resisted.

And history tells us that when resistance becomes a people's protest, only the people will prevail.

This was proven when one man

name will these days print a photograph of cops bodily lifting and dragging men into waiting vans. He knows that this is now limited to TV cameras and the scene is forgotten the moment a viewer changes the channel.

These days, the focus is on innovative, witty messages that will later be shared on the social media and proudly displayed on the protester's Facebook / Instagram account.

The two major rallies in Hyderabad recently against the CAA have seen the famed Hyderabad wit at its best. Like the other protests across India, they had innovative messages, slogans and pamphlets drawing one's attention. However, the Hyderabad humour involv-

These days, the protesters invariably gather at a predetermined place, read the Preamble to India's Constitution, their voices getting slightly louder when the word "secular" is mentioned. Quite a few carry photographs of the Constitution's drafter, B.R. Ambedkar.

led thousands to brave the lathis of the British and stand resolute to bring the mighty British Empire to its knees. This was also proven when a Prime Minister as dominant as Indira Gandhi was swept out of power after her tryst with the Emergency and Jayaprakash Narayan emerged on the political horizon.

While the recent protests may be quite distinct from the satyagrahas led by the Mahatma or the post-Emergency scenario in the way they are conducted, the goal is the same: India's future.

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Invariably, the protesters sing the national anthem as one, be it on the footsteps of a mosque, in a park or on the road. Also, the average protester has realised that public memory is short and has adapted accordingly.

The style of protest has undergone a sea change; the protester is aware that no newspaper worth its

ing the humble "baigan" (brinjal, or eggplant) making the otherwise dull protests more interesting deserves particular mention.

Savour this slogan during an anti-CAA protest: "Yaha biryani ke saath piyaz dhoonde toh nai milri, 50 saal ke documents kya milte baigan, hau re haule?" (It is impossible to find onions in biryani, how can one find 50-year-old documents baigan, you idiot?).

The slogans and placards display far more creativity, humour and mockery and ensure the message is conveyed quite clearly.

Earlier, protests were fairly monotonous, and desperate, with only slogan shouting or walking, holding placards, save for someone like the late Naramalli Sivaprasad, who made protesting an art form. His protests are legendary, sometimes dressed like Lord Ram or Lord Krishna or anyone else. Being a former actor helped him draw attention and make a point.

Some political leaders adapt to the situation while staging their protest: who can forget Lagadapati Rajagopal going on a "fast" to prove KCR wrong and even donning a bur-

kha to dodge the cops?

But these people have or had a support system in place, an entire army of assistants and party cadre.

The common man has adapted too, and has taken recourse in his native intelligence and wit to make his point, and of course stay within the ambit of law. These days, the common protester is aware that police intolerance to peaceful protest is high across India, quite the opposite of the Anna Hazare days.

The common protester is very careful not to allow matters to get out of hand; not shout provocative slogans; not give the authorities any excuse to deny permission or take to the baton.

These days, protesters dance and sing and generally behave as though they are enjoying themselves. This is a new language the average policeman is unable to comprehend.

The police traditionally have loved psychological games, but this new type of protester is leaving the cops, like the government, confused. The reaction of the police, most of the times, is to take to the lathis or resort to arrests. Here too the cops are facing a dilemma, particularly with the younger lot who are increasingly aware of their rights. These protesters are far more adventurous, and relaxed, even in custody.

Also, the protester has grown much more aware of his rights, questioning the police, sometimes goading them to cooperate instead of obstructing the protest. The tricolour also comes into play more and more, and the slogans have moved on from the ubiquitous "Inquilab Zindabad" to the more catchy "Azaadi".

Another welcome change in the way the protesters behave after the protest: The sight of protesters cleaning up the venue of the Million March in Hyderabad, shared on the social media and published in newspapers went a long way in countering the aggressive posturing of the ruling party and its army of bhakts.

However, not all protests are about the common man. Deepika Padukone's 10-minute silent act of solidarity with the JNU students protesting against the attack on them may have rattled the government enough for a Union minister to launch a tirade against the actress, even indirectly questioning her patriotism. Deepika, being the star that she is, may have forced the BJP's IT cell to go into overdrive, but the fact remains that the common man who has been protesting across the country ever since Parliament passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, has put the ruling party on the backfoot.

Australia: A Climate Horror Story Told By Walls Of Fire

A climate action that offers benefits to voters is now necessary in Australia

PAUL KRUGMAN | NEW YORK TIMES

In a rational world, the burning of Australia would be a historic turning point. After all, it's exactly the kind of catastrophe climate scientists long warned us to expect if we didn't take action to limit greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, a 2008 report commissioned by the Australian government predicted that global warming would cause the country's fire seasons to begin earlier, end later and be more intense — starting around 2020.

Furthermore, although it may seem callous to say it, this disaster is unusually photogenic. You don't need to pore over charts and statistical tables; this is a horror story told by walls of fire and terrified refugees huddled on beaches.

So this should be the moment when governments finally began urgent efforts to stave off climate catastrophe.

But the world isn't rational. In fact, Australia's anti-environmentalist government seems utterly unmoved as the nightmares of environmentalists become reality. And the anti-environmentalist media, the Murdoch empire in particular, has gone all-out on disinformation, trying to place the blame on arsonists and "greenies" who won't let fire services get rid of enough trees.

If climate denial and opposition to action are immovable even in the face of obvious catastrophe, what hope is there for avoiding the apocalypse?

Climate optimists have always hoped for a broad consensus in favour of measures to save the planet. The trouble with getting action on climate, the story went, was that it was hard to get people's attention: The issue was complex, while the damage was too gradual and too invisible. In addition, the big dangers lay too far in the future. But surely once enough people had been informed about the dangers, once the evidence for global warming became sufficiently overwhelming, climate action

would cease to be a partisan issue.

The climate crisis, in other words, would eventually become the moral equivalent of war — an emergency transcending the usual political divides. But if a country in flames isn't enough to produce a consensus for action — if it isn't even enough to produce some moderation in the anti-environmentalist position — what is? The Australia experience suggests that climate denial will persist come hell or high water — that is, through devastating heatwaves and catastrophic storm surges alike.

Trees scorched by wildfires near Buchan, East Gippsland, Australia, on January 9, 2020. Image Credit: Bloomberg

Effects of global warming

You might be tempted to dismiss Australia as a special case, but the same deepening partisan division has long been underway in the United States. As late as the 1990s, Democrats and Republicans were almost equally likely to say that the effects of global warming had already begun. Since then, however, partisan views have diverged, with Democrats increasingly likely to see climate change happening (as indeed it is), while Republicans increasingly see and hear no climate evil.

Does this divergence reflect changing party composition? After all, highly educated voters have been moving toward the Democrats, less-educated voters toward the Republicans. So is it a matter of how well-informed each party's base is?

Probably not. There's substantial evidence that conservatives who are highly educated and well informed about politics are likely than other conservatives to say things that aren't true, probably because they are more likely to know what the conservative political elite wants them to believe. In particular, conservatives with high scientific literacy and numeracy are especially likely to be climate deniers.

But if climate denial and opposition to action are immovable even in the face of obvious catastrophe, what hope is there for avoiding the apocalypse? Let's be honest with ourselves: Things are looking pretty grim. However, giving up is not an option. What's the path forward?

The answer, pretty clearly, is that scientific persuasion is running into sharply diminishing returns. Very few of the people still denying the reality of climate change or at least opposing doing anything about it will be moved by further accumulation of evidence, or even by a proliferation of new disasters. Any action that does take place will have to do so in the face of intractable right-wing opposition.

This means, in turn, that climate action will have to offer immediate benefits to large numbers of voters, because policies that seem to require widespread sacrifice — such as policies that rely mainly on carbon taxes — would be viable only with the kind of political consensus we clearly aren't going to get.

What might an effective political strategy look like? I've been rereading a 2014 speech by eminent political scientist Robert Keohane, who suggested that one way to get past the political impasse on climate might be via "an emphasis on huge infrastructural projects that created jobs" — in other words, a Green New Deal. Such a strategy could give birth to a "large climate-industrial complex", which would actually be a good thing in terms of political sustainability.

Can such a strategy succeed? I don't know. But it looks like our only chance given the political reality in Australia, the United States and elsewhere — namely, that powerful forces on the right are determined to keep us barreling down the road to hell.

— Paul Krugman is a Nobel Prize-winning economist