



Ram Navami processions: Reality, Myth & Propaganda

Pankaj Singh

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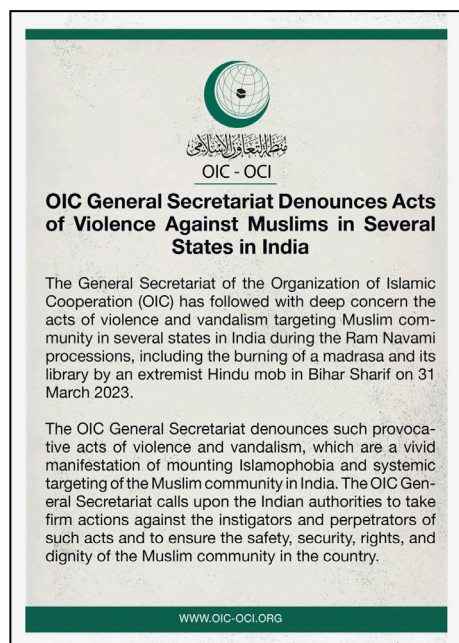
Peddling falsehoods, upping the ante on Hindutva, doing a professional hit job spewing venom against peace-loving devout Hindus falls into established pattern

Citizens & Lawyers Initiative, a relatively unknown organization or forum of any consequence in a bundled voluminous report on 'Ram Navami' and 'Hanuman Jayanti processions has the audacity to describe these festival marches that are in vogue for millennia as 'Routes of Wrath'.

Justice Rohinton Nariman, a former judge of Supreme Court of India has lent his name with the foreword to this 'hit job' of an 'agenda driven' report that's full of falsehoods, half-truths and propaganda to drive 'Hinduphobia' globally and further divide an intrinsically sensitive socio-economic groups that constitute Indian society.

Divisiveness is the narrative in this report. Agenda is to 'criminalize' the over one billion Hindus in India and elsewhere. Break the social fabric that's delicately balanced and stir up communal divide apart from weakening India in perceptions and narrative battle waged by a few self-centered individuals, organizations and groups that are well funded, groomed and motive under question.

The 176-pages report "Routes of Wrath" on communal violence during Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti (April 2022) published in March 2023 is in circulation with global non-government organisations, Inter- Governmental Organisations such as the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).



OIC secretariat seems to have monetized such reports with allegations that Muslim community in several states in India were targeted during the Ram Navami. India's Ministry of External affairs recently rebutted OIC statement for its "communal mindset" and "anti- India" agenda.

Individuals associated with the report have completely whitewashed the violence instigated and perpetrated by Muslim minorities in India which was a consequence of hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation of its political and religious leadership that failed the community.

The Report relied only on fact-finding mission of purported independent journalists who were "activist"

and “anti-establishment” and used the freedom of speech and expression argument to thwart and throttle peaceful democracy in India.

The report with innuendos claimed that Muslims were the only victims and Hindus were aggressors in clashes. For instance, stone pelting and ensuing mayhem during Shree Ram Navami Shobha Yatra in 2022 in Khambhat, Gujarat was preplanned by the mullahs and maulvis.

In fact, maulvis arranged for people from Bharuch and Ahmedabad to come to Khambhat and participate in violence. Islamists, minor in number but vocal aggressors justified that they were provoked by music and slogans in the Ram Navami procession.

In fact, Khambhat police clearly stated that the conspiracy was hatched to instill fear in the Hindus so that Hindus cannot participate in the Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti processions in future.

Similarly, in the Lohardaga (Jharkhand) Violence of 2022, fact-finding report is far from ground reality. During Ram Navami procession was passing through an area with a mosque. Muslims instigated violence by pelting stones and attacked the procession where dozens were injured. Many vehicles were set ablaze and vandalized by the Muslims.

On Jahangir puri violence of April 2022, then Delhi Police Commissioner had stated that no attempts were made by the Hindus to hoist any flag at the Jahangir puri mosque during Hanuman Jayanti procession that led to violence. On Khargone violence of April 2022, several Muslims pelted stones at the Shobha Yatra.

Intolerance and instigation by Muslim clergy seems to have failed the 210-odd million community in India. This abject failure, arms and ammunition links apart from drugs, business deals and money pumped in from outside have been the source that triggered violence. If Hindus were to be aggressors, why's it that no Muslim congregation got ever targeted and violence happens only during Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti festivities? There's possibly no plausible explanation from authors of this report preferred to stay under cover.

During material time of the report's publication by Citizens and Lawyers Initiative, its fellow traveller Citizens for Justice and Peace of Teesta Setalvad approached the Honorable Supreme Court of India in May 2022 through lawyers Aparna Bhatt and Chandra Uday Singh. Chandra Uday Singh is the editor of the aforesaid report.

They filed a petition to regulate religious processions in the country and portraying that religious festivals were source of riots, relying on their Report of April 2022.

The matter before the Honorable Supreme Court of India was called for hearing on December 9, 2022. Targeting Hindu festivities and processions, the two activists aligned with minorities sought a complete restriction or ban such route marches.

Citizens for Justice and Peace invoked jurisdiction of the Supreme Court under Article 32 of the Constitution to seek a complete ban or restriction on religious processions through an issue of a mandamus.

Supreme Court of India not only dismissed this ill-intended petition to restrict Hindus but refused to entertain any of the arguments.

Supreme Court had observed, "... the petitioner seeks the issuance of a roving writ of mandamus by this Court. That apart, the subject of public order pertains to Entry I of List II (State List) of the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution while the subject of police pertains to Entry II of List II.

"State governments are empowered to legislate upon these subjects and their executive powers extend to those subjects. State officials would be aware of the interplay of various factors which are specific to the local landscape and which must be considered while dealing with such issues. The state government's response may take the form of regulations.

"Alternatively, it may choose to respond on a case-by-case basis while granting permissions for religious processions in accordance with law or while responding to conflicts which have already arisen".

The Supreme Court dismissed the petition by observing that religious festivals were not source of riots. "In Maharashtra, during the Ganesh Puja lakhs of devotees gather but there are no riots. Why do you have to portray that religious festivals are a source of riots?

"Let us look at the good that is happening in the Country. Our Country is diverse from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari, the conditions that prevail in a district of a state are different from another district in the same state. The states are provided powers to devise diverse standards... The reliefs sought are not within the judicially manageable standards" the Court observed.

WPR.D.14630/2022

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ITEM NO.40 COURT NO.1 SECTION PIL-W
SUPREME COURT OF INDIA
RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

WRIT PETITION (CRIMINAL) Diary No.14630/2022

CITIZENS FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE Petitioner(s)
VERSUS
UNION OF INDIA & ANR. Respondent(s)
(With FOR ADMISSION and IA No.176575/2022-CONDONATION OF DELAY IN REFLILING/CURING THE DEFECTS)

Date : 09-12-2022 This petition was called on for hearing today.

CORAM :
HON'BLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE
HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE PAMIDIGHANTAM SRI NARASIMHA

For Petitioner(s) Mr. Chander Uday Singh, Sr. Adv.
Ms. Aparna Bhat, ADR
Ms. Karishma Maria, Adv.
Ms. Viddusshi, Adv.
Mr. Zubin N. John, Adv.
Ms. Bidya Mohanty, Adv.

For Respondent(s)

UPON hearing the counsel the Court made the following
O R D E R

1 Delay in refiling the petition is condoned.

This decisively demolishes entire claims made in the report 'Routes of Wrath' which is based on misinformation and disinformation, and to mislead the Honorable Supreme Court.

There was a clear attempt to sabotage the federal structure and the separation of powers. The intention was only to target Hindus and restrict harmless processions during Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti and mislead the Muslims at large. Polarization based on faith, defining the target group and the aggressor in such hostility and conflict seems to have been attempted with an ulterior motive that may be called out.

Ram Navami festival is significant for Hindus and celebrating the festival 9th day of Chaitra month indicates onset of divine power to cleanse the humanity on earth. The procession of Shri Ram Navami is organized with great enthusiasm across India for centuries. The Shoba Yatra of Shri Ram Navami is the part of 'Sanatan Sanskriti', devout Hindus express this very message peacefully and patriotism is often a theme of the Shobha Yatra.

There are few states in India that witnessed unprecedented violence during Shri Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti on March 30, 2023 and April 6, 2023 and later.

In fact, Hindu population was targeted by miniscule aggressive Muslim fanatics, violent extremists and not spare even women and children. Many of them were forced to flee. Hindu population were systematically targeted in West Bengal and Bihar, ill-treated and abused. This also led to death, physical abuse, arson, armed robbery etc. In fact, many Hindus have disappeared incommunicado in Bihar. They have not been traced till date.

Muslim fanatics have often been seen and used as dispensable 'cannon fodder' by instigators of such violence. Muslim leadership, both religious and political, used violence for polarization.

The Violence that took place in Hazaribagh, Chaibasa and Ranchi in Jharkhand, Sambhajinagar and Jalgaon in Maharashtra, Bhadrak in Odisha, Howrah in West Bengal, areas in Vadodra of Gujarat, Sasaram and Bihar Sharif in Bihar.

Incumbent state governments were mandated to take preventive measures to avoid such violent clashes during Shri Ramanavami and Hauman Jayanti processions. Some states such as Maharashtra and Gujarat were able to prevent and did not allow violence to escalate, however others failed miserably.

Media reporting of violence was lopsided and biased. Spread of unverified, fake news, misinformation, and disinformation also contributed to escalation of violence in states like Bihar and West Bengal. Mischievous elements hiding behind the cloaks of newsmen or women, activists, on Twitter and Facebook circulated fake news with

videos and photos – in some cases even morphed or edited --that resulted in sporadic incidents.

There is credible information and reports from the ground about the prevailing situation in states like Bihar and West Bengal. For Instance, a 15-year-old boy was shot dead by Muslim mob during Ram Navami in Sasaram in Bihar. In Hyderabad, a clash occurred between two groups in Charminar area. A few armed aggressors from Muslim community attacked Hindus alleging that the latter raised slogans in praise of Lord Ram during Shri Ram Navami.

In Bengal the Ram Navami processions were marred by stone pelting from roof tops which could have been averted by the State Police. In West Bengal, state government attempted to whitewash the violence perpetrated by Muslims by invoking their faith. In fact, state government had said that the Hindus should not venture into Muslim areas or “disturbed areas” to carry out Ram Navami processions. Hundreds of Hindus have either been taken into custody or have been abused by state police for Ram Navami clashes in Howrah.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that men and women were being targeted due to their imputed political opinion and their faith and beliefs. West Bengal authorities and Administration are fully involved in abetting crimes against Hindus and failing in their Constitutional duty to stop it and protect the people. This failure on part of the State has brought about great suffering and injury to the persons or groups on religious, political, or other such grounds.

These acts are also considered as discriminatory in nature and also amount to persecution of people. The discriminatory intent has many inhuman forms and may not be accompanied by any specific intent. It can show itself in forms such as denial or infringement of a Fundamental Right laid down in the Constitution of India. The perpetrator of these crimes need not have such intent and persecution can be seen in many other forms of inhuman and discriminatory intent other than intent to destroy.

“Systematic” attack refers to a pattern or methodical plan, but it is not necessary that this plan has been formally adopted as a policy of the State. This perpetrator can be an individual, acting in his private capacity, provided that his act(s) find overt or covert support of the State or its instrumentalities. But if the State officials commit this offence acting in a private capacity, there must be explicit or implicit approval or endorsement of the State authorities or at least this offence must fit clearly within such a policy. This is precisely what has happened in the context of Bengal and Bihar. Violence was widespread and continued while there was no succor from the State Police or other State agencies. Hindus faced life threats and violence for political views and faith. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India had issued an advisory to all states in

preparation for Hanuman Jayanti. State Governments were encouraged to ensure maintenance of law and order, peaceful observance of the festival, and monitoring of factors that could disturb communal harmony in society. The situation was serious and grave that the CRPF – India’s para-military units -- were deployed in West Bengal

ahead of the Hanuman Jayanti celebrations after the state witnessed widespread violence during and aftermath of Ram Navami.

Foreign powers, foreign state and non-state actors continue to take up activities that amount to interference in the internal affairs of India with ulterior designs. These foreign actors have deep-rooted nexus with a few influential civil society organizations in India that includes lawyers, NGOs, purported independent media, journalists, and opposition leaders to destabilize democracy in the country.

These individuals and organizations used Freedom of Speech and Expression, misinformation, and disinformation as a tool to thwart and throttle peaceful democracy in India. There has also been a continuing attempt to spread communal disharmony in India and disintegrate India.

‘Routes of Wrath’ is part of this larger and direct attack on India’s sovereignty and integrity by promoting hate amongst communities and society.

“Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance condoned by state governmental policies violate human rights, and are incompatible with democracy, the rule of law and transparent and accountable governance.”

In a world where radicalization, hate and extremism are dividing people, Inclusiveness and cultural diversity in the democracy can unite the world and its citizens. No country can progress without the inclusiveness and cultural diversity.

(Pankaj is an Advocate at the Supreme Court of India and Formerly as an Expert on Mission to the UNHCR Africa Bureau)

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