

## Is the Media Imbalanced?

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In December 2012 a young lady was raped in a moving bus in Delhi and severely injured in the process and ultimately died despite the best medical care possible. The media, especially the electronic media, went berserk. Street protests took place all over India and in Delhi a grave law and order situation developed. In all the media coverage I did not find a single person who supported rape as being legitimate.

Let us track forward to 25<sup>th</sup> May 2013. A convoy of senior Congress leaders of Chhattisgarh who had gone to Sukma in Bastar Division for a legitimate political rally was attacked on the way back by a large group of heavily armed Naxalites. The thirty policemen escorting the convoy fought back, but ran out of ammunition and were overwhelmed. Very senior Congress leader Vidya Charan Shukla was hit by three bullets and was thrown by the Naxalites on the road as dead. His security officer fought to the last bullet, which he used to commit suicide out of shame that he was now not in a position to protect V.C. Shukla. The Naxalites killed a total of twenty-eight people, including policemen, but their main target was the Congress leaders. Nandkumar Patel, the State Congress Chief and his son were led into the forest and shot dead, a former MLA, Mudaliar and a sitting MLA, Laxman Karma were both killed and Mahendra Karma, the former Home Minister of Chhattisgarh, was pulled out, identified and virtually stabbed to death with his face and upper torso being totally mutilated. The only person to escape was Ajit Jogi who had travelled to and from Sukma by helicopter. At some appropriate time a question should be asked why the same helicopter could not ferry the other top Congress leaders. At one fell blow virtually the entire senior leadership of the Congress has been wiped out in Chhattisgarh. The Naxalites have now threatened to kill Chief Minister Raman Singh's associates for participating in his Vikas Yatra. How much the Naxalites represent tribal interest is proved by the fact that they feel threatened by a Vikas Yatra and Parivartan Yatra, both politically aimed at betterment of the tribals.

The Naxalites are not fighting for the interests of the tribals. They are trying to annihilate the Indian State and they are in a state of war with the Indian Union. They are murderers and one sees no reason why they should be treated as anything else. They are traitors and should be recognised and dealt with as such. Any sympathy for them is totally misplaced because how can one sympathise with people who kill seventy-six policemen in one ambush, the top leaders of a political party in another ambush and, as has happened in one case in Dantewada District, a contractor who had already paid them Rs. 20 lakhs as protection money.

I started this paper with a reference to the role of the media in the Delhi rape case. In exposing various financial and other crimes committed by government and by organisations such as the cricketing establishment the media has played a commendable role. Then why is it that when it comes to terrorism as a whole and Naxalite terrorism in particular the media is playing a role which gives the supporters of the Naxalites a platform to air not only their political views but also their justification for murder and worse? The supporters of Naxalism are people such as Agnivesh, the Sen Couple, Nandni Sunder, Prof. Hargopal, etc. I know Bastar both because it was a part of my beat and because my brother has been both D.C. and Commissioner of Bastar in the good old days. This is not an article on Bastar and tribal grievances, if any, but in all my extensive tours of the district I have never come across more lovable or peaceable tribals than

the various shades of Gonds residing in that region. This includes the Maryas, Mudiyas, Dandami Maryas and hill Maryas of the Abujmarh. In a follow up paper I will comment on the people of Bastar and its problems, but land is certainly not one of them. The entire Naxalite leadership in Bastar consists of nontribals from elsewhere, especially Telangana where the Andhra Pradesh Police brought them under immense pressure so that they have moved into Bastar and into Chandrapur and Gadchiroli Districts of Maharashtra. Vidya Charan Shukla's driver pleaded with the Naxalite leaders in Telugu and more or less convinced them that he was Telugu speaking and that Vidya Charan Shukla was actually a businessman. That is why both the driver and the master suffered bullet injuries but they were not killed on the spot. The Gonds of Bastar speaks Gondi and, therefore, the fact that the driver spoke to the Naxalites in Telugu more or less proves that the leaders at least were not from Bastar.

One thing we were taught in the IAS when I joined it in 1957 was never to lose one's presence of mind, never to succumb to anger, never to react to situations with emotion. But when I heard Nandni Sunder and Prof. Hargopal defend these murderers after the Darbha Ghati killings I almost felt like taking a gun and shoot these people, as also the television anchors who gave them time and space. If these killers were justified in what they did, why did we hang Kasab and Afzal Guru? Why do we have section 302 IPC on the statute book?

My plea to the media is that whereas this country can never accept censorship the media also has to be selective in giving space and time to persons who are advocating the overthrow of the Indian State and actively justifying murder. How would the media react if people who favour rape were to ask for equal time?

The only member of the police force in India whom certain TV channels seem to favour is Kiran Bedi who, even in the case of Bastar, was spouting away like a geyser overflowing. The only time that she ever served in an afforested State where at one time there was an insurgency is when she was posted as DIG in Mizoram. She ran away from that State post haste. She knows nothing whatsoever about jungle warfare or operating in a hilly and densely afforested region such as Bastar. If the media wants expert police opinion I would suggest that they call A.N. Pathak, IPS, who retired as DGP, Madhya Pradesh and who ran a very successful anti Naxalite operation in Bastar as Zonal IGP. The media should also invite Narendra Prasad, IPS, who, as Additional DGP Intelligence, ran a very successful intelligence operation against the Naxalites. He also has hands on experience of commanding a battalion of the Madhya Pradesh Special Armed Force in Nagaland when insurgency was at its height. The Thirteenth Battalion, SAF was not ambushed successfully even once by the Nagas because it developed a high skill in dealing with guerilla warfare. These are officers who can comment on anti Naxalite operations with a high degree of knowledge and experience. Let Kiran Bedi confine herself to traffic management in Delhi.

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