

An appeal to a Naroda convict



by Najeeb Jung

Dear Mayaben,

I AM encouraged to write this open letter to you deriving inspiration from Sanjiv Bhatt's letter to the Chief Minister of Gujarat. Communal violence has been our bane but normally those participating in it are the lumpen of society. But, you are an educated professional, a gynaecologist, a mother and a loving wife, so your willing participation in the gruesome large scale murders at Naroda Patiya stunned us.

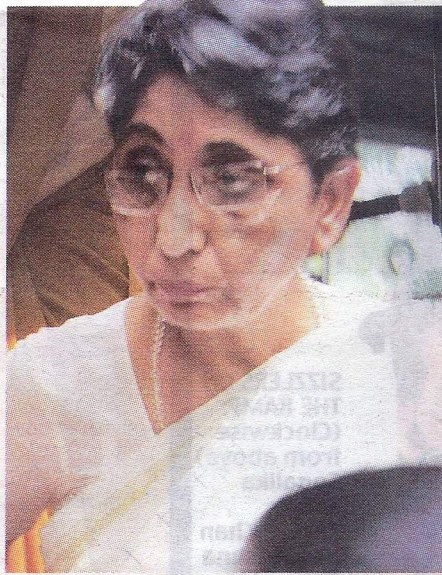
What struck me was that through years of your practice as a gynaecologist you have given life and birth to our species. You have looked after sick women and children who may otherwise not have survived. Then what happened?

Message

But now I am sure you will reflect on your actions. Hatred can get us nowhere, and the only way to stop such gruesome behaviour as perpetuated by you and your friends is to bury the politics of so called grievance. This can be done either through individual restraint or where that restraint is absent through the dispassionate and swift action of the law in imposing sanctions on the violent.

Therefore I salute Judge Jyotsana Yagnik. Too often in India, the powerful and the politically connected have been allowed to get away with murder. By sentencing you for nearly 30 years in prison Judge Yagnik sent out two very important messages. First, that the history of impunity that has scarred this republic, where men have killed in full public view without punishment, is not something people should take for granted. Judge Yagnik has proved that when judges and courts commit themselves to measured justice, the impunity that makes this violence possible vanishes.

The second very notable thought that comes through the judgment is that Judge Yagnik refrained from exacting the death penalty on you and your comrades even though Naroda Patiya met



the criterion of "the rarest of rare" crimes: because she was opposed to the death penalty. This judgment was about due process and punishment, not blood vengeance. The concept of an eye for an eye would make us all blind and that is the significant difference between you Mayaben and Judge Yagnik. Overtaken by naked ambition and hatred for other humans you betrayed professional modernity and your medical oath for barbarism, while the judge tempered justice with mercy.

I do not wish to make a point on, and I presume no one in India wants to revisit the details of the gruesome story of Naroda Patiya and the events in Gujarat of 2002. We loath the likes of Bajrangi who wallowed in pleasure while describing his actions during those dark days. In contrast the man whose pregnant wife was savagely killed refuses to talk about it. As do so many others who relive the nightmare every day of their lives, their tragedy evident in their eyes.

Justice

We wish to purge ourselves of the prison of this memory by confronting it, by bringing the guilty to book, by doing what the South Africans did, by walking the path of truth and reconciliation. To quote Nelson Mandela, "As I walked out of the door toward my freedom I knew that if I did not leave all the anger, hatred

and bitterness behind I would still be in prison". But truth first: no real reconciliation can come from the sort of willed nostalgia that the apologists for Gujarat government wish to inflict upon us.

Through this open letter to you Mayaben, I also wish to address the champions of Indian Industry who hailed Gujarat as a modern miracle. It's really sad that these champions, for 30 pieces of silver and a few acres of land, wish to forgive mass murder of a kind that makes humanity hang its head in shame. I would expect no responsible human being to be encouraging us to "move on" from Naroda Patiya and the Gujarat killings without justice being done.

Atonement

It's also amazing how with your record of actions in 2002 you continued to receive patronage from the highest in your party. Despite your obvious involvement, and now proven guilt, you were made a minister. But then yours is not an individual case and the fact represents two things, one the never-ending violence of bigotry and two the belief of the criminal and the powerful that they will get away with anything. The Naroda Patiya verdict is a reminder that this belief is misplaced.

I also take this opportunity to address all those so-called educated young men and women — the young professionals (now coming from all religions and faiths) who recently have been found indulging in plans to perpetrate terrorist violence. Let them transform their thinking. Let them seek out love and hope that like the monsoon rain will nourish our beloved land and banish the angry vicious heat of mutual disrespect and dislike. It is not religious pride or the construction of mosques, temples and churches that is important. Nor are notions of persecution, and jihad but the fact that we as a nation need now to seek out a fresh dimension to our lives. Targeting government installations, killing prominent people of other faiths or flinging bombs here and there will not build India but scar all of us.

Frankly, Mayaben, I feel for you as I feel for all those families who suffered by your actions as also for those families whose loved ones are now in jail, misled by the likes of you and your ideologues. So there is only one 'praischit' for you. You must reveal the names of your handlers, those mysterious men who planned these riots and inspired you to such madness. While Judge Yagnik may have punished you under law, the Lord will forgive you only if you reveal the full truth.

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