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India

# **Against Sexual Violence and Rape, Against State Terror, Against Communalist Violence and Intolerance**

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**This is an edited version of Soma Marik's speech at the Press Conference on 4th December and that given at the Das Theke Das Hajar meeting of 7th December 2015.**

We have marched today, the 7th of December, as we have been marching time and again, condemning rapes and sexual violence cases. We all remember 16 December 2012, when there was the gruesome rape and murder in Delhi. We in West Bengal also remember too well the cases like Suzette Jordon's rape (Park Street, 6th February), Kamduni, Katwa (25 February). We came out in the streets so many times. On the same route as today, nearly 2000 people demonstrated on 19 March 2012, condemning the West Bengal based cases and demanding that the chief Minister must apologize for the attacks on the Park Street Rape Case victim, as she was still being called. But till now, not a single minister has expressed regrets for the foul and sexist languages in which she was attacked. The survivor of Katwa is today living in terror, because the trial court has rejected her testimony all together, has said that there is no evidence of rape, and has found every one of the accused of the rape case "not guilty". And because of this, we await the forthcoming verdict of Suzette's case, due on 10th December, with some concern.

The fact that 19 March 2012 was followed by 19 March 2015, and again by 7 December 2015, was due to the fact that in this province, and in this country, the police, the administration, the major political parties and their leaders all ignore or marginalise sexual violence. When there is a violence on working class women, that is routinely ignored. Yet oppression on grounds of gender are added to exploitation as members of a class routinely for working class women. Unless we recognise this, we will be marginalising these women, both when we are campaigning for "women's rights", where the specific class component is unrecognised, and when "call" campaigns are mounted, without looking at the way class is fractured by gender. Yet in the unorganised sector such a large proportion of the workers are women. So unless we look at the concerns of those women, unless we can persuade trade unions to put sexual violence right at the top of their agenda, how can we focus on the sexual violence on all women?

In the same way, we need to look at certain equally important issues. Like the easy accusation against rape victims that they are sex workers, which is a way of saying, if you are a sex worker then you have no right to complain of rape.

The point is, however, we cannot take up rapes and sexual violence in a way where we detach them from other social concerns. We cannot see them as women's issues, delinked from the role of the state, from state terror, from political parties, from class violence, from caste and communal politics.

Let us remember that yesterday was 6th December, anniversary of one of the most violent days in the history of independent India, when a knife was thrust into the fabric of our democratic and secular constitution. The destruction of the Babri Masjid and the formation of aggressive Hindutva had behind them a firm politics. The central goal of Hindutva is to make people abandon all other identities, take their religious identity to a feverish communal pitch, and agree to wage desperate battles to destroy the secular and democratic promises of the constitution, however may they be limited in practice, till they do not exist at all. In order to ensure the necessary ugly, communal, violent mobilizations, rape and sexual violence has been a key instrument. The campaigns of V. D. Savarkar got living form in the 1990s and thereafter. He had called upon Hindu men to show their masculine prowess by raping women of minority communities. So we saw Surat in 1993, Gujarat 2002, Jhabua, Kandhamal, and other cases, where rapes, gang-rapes, rapes followed by murder, all happened. In the name of combating so called Love Jihad, we have seen similar patterns of violence erupting all the way to Muzaffarnagar in the name of "love jihad".

But what about those who were protesting yesterday, 6th December, on the anniversary of the Babri Masjid

destruction? How clean are their hands? How clean is the Indian state as a whole? In 1984, we had the countrywide attack on Sikhs, especially the terrible violence in Delhi. Does it not show that the Congress had done the same thing?

And we need to understand that the state does not merely protect certain powerful groups. It also commits violence. In the interests of the dominant groups. Not only does the Armed Forces Special powers Act operate in Manipur. We recently observed, all over Kolkata, as with people across the country, the completion of Irom Sharmila's fifteen years of hunger strike. In Kolkata, DTDH, Maitree, WSS and others observed the day with a series of meetings. We know, due to her incredible struggle, what it is like, to be a resident of Manipur. We know what it is like, to be a woman in Manipur, who can be raped and then killed. We know how protests can be brutally silenced.

And how none of this can lead to trials, because due to the AFSPA there will be no permission to try the people presumed to have done the deeds. But as I said, Manipur does not stand alone. Recolonization is going on in Kashmir too which was never a part of British India. We are still fighting for justice over Kunan Poshpora, where on February 23, 1991, the armed forces are thought to have raped at least 32 teenaged, adult and elderly women. In 1992 alone the Indian security forces gangraped, according to a UN report, 882 women. In 2009, in Shopian, two women were raped and murdered. Villagers claim it was done by the armed forces. The CBI covered up the crime, saying the two women died of drowning.

In other words, the state does not only assist in cover ups, but itself rapes and commits sexual violence and legitimizes them as political weapon. Rape and sexual violence occur all the time in custody. The Soni Soris are brutalised because a class war is going on when state cater to needs of capital. And then the Ankit Gargs are awarded.

And if violence on women is at least occasionally identified, violence on LGBTQ communities is simply not. We saw that right here at Hazra Crossing in Kolkata, with the attack on Anurag Maitreyee and her friends. We were told by the police that they will take action within ten days, after a large number of us had staged a protest. But the ten days have become more than a month. And the DC South told us that they will not tell us what they have done. Unless we can link up all these oppressions, unless we can forge alliances and fight together, there will be no positive response.