

## Silencing a Critical Voice

AND OTHERS, D N JHA, GEETA KAPUR, IRFAN HABIB, M K RAINA, RAM RAHMAN, SASHI KUMAR, SOHAIL HASHMI, SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN, UTSA PATNAIK, VIVAN SUNDARAM

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The murder of M M Kalburgi in Dharwad in Karnataka is a part of an intensifying war against critical thinking by social forces that use obscurantist belief in the quest for political hegemony. The eminent Kannada writer, scholar, educationist and social campaigner was for long associated with rationalist views which he did not hesitate to voice in public. His sharp and often acerbic comments were mostly targeted at efforts to seek advantage from the retelling of history and myth for purposes of modern identity politics.

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Like the killing of Narendra Dabholkar, two years ago and Govind Pansare earlier this year, the assassins have struck in broad daylight but left few physical traces. Preachers of the new religious bigotry though have left a trail of ill-intentioned and inflammatory statements that could be regarded as incitement.

The local head of the Bajrang Dal in a town of Dakshina Kannada District has issued a celebratory statement at Kalburgi's murder, likening it to last August's death from illness and old age of eminent Kannada litterateur U R Ananthamurthy and holding out a warning to the well-known rationalist thinker and writer based in Mysore, K S Bhagwan, that he could be the next target.

We see the speculative remarks from local police in Dharwad about a supposed property dispute involving Kalburgi's widowed daughter as an effort to distract attention from the heinous crime and prepare a prospective alibi for their inability and lack of will in pursuing the murderers.

Kalburgi's killing comes even as police report a complete lack of progress, or even of credible clues, in the Dabholkar and Pansare murders. It comes as individuals accused of

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terrorist crimes and murderous rioting are being shown undue leniency by both prosecutors and the judiciary, because the colour of their violence accords with the political ideology that today rules the country.

We condemn the heinous killing of Kalburgi and call on all forces that stand for a sane and just social order to mobilise in the quest for justice.

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