

Irom Sharmila to offer hope in Kashmir - who are we fooling?



By: Sanghamitra Baruah
Courtesy - Daily O

Many, including the UN, feel that the media needs to take a "more constructive" approach to news to combat "apathy and indifference". That the public gets turned off by overwhelmingly negative news.

So, first the good news: Irom Sharmila — the Iron Lady of Manipur — after having "fallen off the radar" as a result of breaking her 16-year-long fast and suffering a disastrous performance in the last Manipur elections, has "staged a comeback". Now, some more good news: She is the brand ambassador of Aaashh (hope), an initiative of a Pune-based NGO, Sarhad, for violence-affected women weavers and artisans of Jammu and Kashmir.

And if that's not heart-warming enough, this headline would surely pass muster as constructive journalism — "Iron Lady offers hope to J&K violence victims".

Almost two years after she ended her fast demanding the repeal of the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), Irom on her maiden visit to Kashmir, compared stone-pelting with "using eggs to smash stones", according to this *Outlook* report.

"Pelting of stones is just using eggs to smash stones. It is an egg-versus-stone fight. That will result in more violence, hatred and degradation," she said.

The 46-year-old rights activist urged the youths in the Valley to resort to non-violent demonstrations, which could prove to be a better way to resist the powerful. Irom, like always, said all the right things, never wavering from her intention. "The people are not afraid anymore; they are very angry. They haven't found a more effective way to challenge the system. They don't care what happens to them. They are so angry. They are fed up with talking now." But such non-violent methods of struggle are strong, she added, reminding the youths of the non-violent struggle against the powerful British that ultimately freed the country. She also expressed surprise over the "overwhelming support" from the Mehbooba Multi-led PDP government for the revocation of the AFSPA. "I find that your chief minister and the police heads here are against the

AFSPA. That is contrary to (the stand of the) Manipur CM."

However, not everyone saw much reason in her argument. The same report quoted human rights activist Khurram Parvez expressing displeasure over Irom being "escorted by an NGO that is pro-establishment and bore doubtful credentials". According to Parvez, Irom's demand for repealing AFSPA "never attracted the imagination of the people of Kashmir, because it was seldom a demand in the Valley".

"People here understand that impunity in Jammu and Kashmir persists not only because of draconian laws, but because of the moral impunity and absolute lawlessness," he said. "The J&K police are not covered under the AFSPA, yet they have also enjoyed impunity. Irom's demand did not find enough resonance even when she was on hunger strike for years, also because the demand in Kashmir is for demilitarisation and resolution of Kashmir dispute."

While there were poignant moments during her interaction with the media — she caressing her long scarf and revealing that the cloth was manufactured by the Kunan Poshpora rape victims, lamenting that she really doesn't know how to help out people — the visit is significant for reasons that the Indian media is perhaps uneasy to highlight.

Sadly, Irom Sharmila is not a picture of hope. A desolate hero of resistance who found no support from either the state or her own people who deserted her the moment she announced her decision to break her decade-and-a-half-long hunger strike.

Until July 26, 2016, she was Manipur's symbol of self-sacrifice. That was the day when she said she wanted to break her fast and immediately came under severe scrutiny.

While many urged her to continue the fast, some radical groups threatened her. Ironically, those were the very people for whom she stood up and now, they were ready to sacrifice her on the altar of tolerance. At that time, she had also expressed her desire to get married (to her long-time friend Goaborn British Desmond Coutinho, with whom she eventually tied the knot last year) and announced that she would join electoral politics to continue the fight against AFSPA. Many even blamed "outsider" Coutinho for

"influencing" her decision to end the fast. There was so much resistance against her decision that people openly expressed apprehensions that Coutinho was a state agent trying to divert her democratic struggle. So, as expected, the day she broke her fast — on August 9, 2016 — most people turned their back on her. It broke her heart to see how all those who idolised her for years, literally shut the door on her. This is how her brother had reacted. "I am not happy to know that she has decided to end her fast. What upsets me more is that she did not consult me or her mother before taking this important decision. My mother always told her to fight till the end — till the demand to repeal AFSPA is met."

However, the worst came when she announced to make a political debut in last year's Assembly elections. It was as if almost everybody wanted to exact their revenge from her for "giving up the hunger strike". And they won: Irom lost the electoral battle by bagging just 90 votes. The message for Irom was clear — her people had disowned her. Heart-broken and rejected, she left Imphal for Kerala after a few days and is now based in Kodaikanal. As she filed an application to tie the knot with Coutinho at the sub-registrar's office in Kodaikanal last year, Irom declared that she doesn't want to return home (to Manipur) ever again.

So, now when she finds herself amid an equally broken people in Kashmir, what kind of "positivity" do we hope to offer? That this is what happens when you choose to take on the might of the state with non-violence?

All those who are expecting Irom to stand tall as a symbol of non-violent struggle have to be blinded by the chimera created by the "eat-pray-and-eulogise" club. It's the same people who are guilty of offering false hopes and homilies on pluralism and tolerance.

There is no way to make this piece of news "balanced" and "constructive". The broken images and dreams simply don't fit in the big picture of positive political discourse. Indians, like everyone else in the world, are suckers for "true" stories that offer hope. We lap them up instantly and start revelling in the possibility of a better, brighter tomorrow. But we forget there are always two sides to a story. And the other side of hope is not something that you would want to know.

Gauri Lankesh murder case: Key accused points to leader of Hindutva outfit

Courtesy Indian Express
Bangaluru, June 11,

At least one senior Karnataka office-bearer of the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, an affiliate of the Sanatan Sanstha, knew about the existence of an "extremist unit" in the parent organisation, according to a probe by a Special Investigation Team of Karnataka Police in the killing of journalist Gauri Lankesh. Investigations have found that a Bengaluru-based co-ordinator of HJS, Mohan Gowda, allegedly put key accused, K T Naveen Kumar, in touch with this Sanstha unit in the planning phase of the Lankesh murder. Gowda allegedly connected Naveen Kumar last year to Sujet Kumar alias Praveen, a 37-year-old Udipi resident, who was part of this unit and was arrested on May 31.

Much of the information pointing to this link has emerged from "a signed voluntary statement" given to the SIT by Naveen Kumar. The Maddur resident was arrested on March 2 for allegedly providing logistical support to a group that came from outside Karnataka to shoot Lankesh at her Bengaluru home on September 5, 2017.

When contacted by The Indian Express, Gowda said: "It is a police conspiracy. We will hold a press conference soon on behalf of the HJS to speak on these issues."

Investigations have found that a Bengaluru-based co-ordinator of HJS, Mohan Gowda, allegedly put key accused, K T Naveen Kumar, in touch with this Sanstha unit in the planning phase of the Lankesh murder.

In his statement, Kumar refers to an annual convention of the Sanstha he attended in Goa's Ponda in June 2017.

"On the second day, there was a discussion on the protection of the Hindu dharma... I participated in the discussion and expressed my personal view that the use of weapons and arms is necessary to protect the Hindu dharma... Impressed by my speech, many people congratulated me. Mohan Gowda praised me a lot. I told him I can procure guns and bullets. He told me there were many like-minded people and they would be contacting me in the coming days," he claims.

According to the statement, a few days after the convention, Kumar received a phone call

seeking a meeting from a man who identified himself as "Praveen" — the call was from a public booth. "He told me that my phone number had been provided by Mohan Gowda from Bengaluru," claims the statement.

"I called up Mohan Gowda and asked him about the call... He (Mohan Gowda) told me the caller was part of his organisation and a person with my mindset. He told me to carry on working with the caller," Kumar claims.

A few days later, the statement claims, the caller visited Kumar and his wife at their home, stayed the night and collected a few bullets that were in his possession to verify whether "they could be useful". On August 19 and 20, 2017,

the statement claims, the HJS organised an event in Bengaluru, which was attended by the man identified as Praveen. On the last day of the event, Praveen took Kumar to a park near the venue in the Vijayanagar area of Bengaluru and told him that he needed assistance to kill Lankesh, claims the statement. "He told me Gauri Lankesh had been speaking in an insulting manner about Hindus and Hindu Gods, and that they had decided to kill her," Kumar claims.

Kumar claims he subsequently travelled to a Sanstha ashram in Mangalore on the invitation of a local HJS leader on September 5, 2017, and learnt the next day from TV reports that Lankesh had been killed in Bengaluru. On May 31, the SIT also arrested Amol Kale, 37, from Pune; Amit Degwekar, 38 from Ponda; and Manohar Edave, 29, from Vijayapura, in connection with the Lankesh case.

Mohan Gowda has previously acknowledged that Naveen Kumar was associated with the HJS. "He is known to us. He attended our adiveshan in Goa last year on our invitation. He has attended dharma sabbas in Bengaluru and a programme on Bhagat Singh. He was also part of a programme held in his own hometown Maddur," Gowda had told The Indian Express earlier.

Former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee admitted to AIIMS



Agency
New Delhi, June 11,

Former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was on Monday admitted to All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stalwart has been admitted to AIIMS for routine check-up and investigation.

Vajpayee was taken to the hospital on the recommendations of doctors. He will undergo the check-ups under the supervision of Dr Randeep Gulera.

Vajpayee was the first person from the BJP to have become the prime minister of India. In the 1996 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP had emerged as the single-largest party. Congress had won 140 seats while BJP had 161 in its kitty. Vajpayee was thus sworn in as the 10th PM of India.

The BSP had promised support to Vajpayee but minutes later in the House, Mayawati rose to speak and said that she would be opposing the government. The numbers went against the government and Congress

extended its support to the third largest party Janata Dal, led by HD Deve Gowda. Vajpayee was left with no choice but to submit his resignation to the President. In a stirring speech then, he had said: "The seats we won are not by a stroke of luck. We reached out to the people and worked hard to spread our message. And today we are suddenly being judged because we couldn't get just a few more seats? Ok, I agree that was a little bit of our own weakness."

"President gave us the opportunity (to form government) and we took that opportunity. We could not succeed but that is a different matter. But we will still sit here as the largest opposition party and you will have to take our support to make this House work. Don't ever forget that. And I assure you, we will support you in running the House properly. We assure you that while you want power, we want to work for this country and we will never sit and rest in this endeavour," he had said in that famous speech.

Pyongyang could establish new relationship with US

Agency,
Phongyang, June 11,

North Korean State media has raised the possibility that Pyongyang could establish a new relationship with the United States. It comes a day before North Korean leader Kim Jong-un meets US President Donald Trump for historic talks. The editorial in Rodong Sinmun newspaper confirmed that Mr Kim had travelled to Singapore to meet Mr Trump and that the country will establish a new relationship to meet the changing demands of the new era. The comments mark a shift in tone from North Korea after decades of animosity towards the US.

Commenting for the first time on the agenda of the meeting, North Korea's state-run KCNA news agency said the two sides will exchange wide-ranging and profound views to re-set relations. It said discussions will focus on the issue of building a permanent and durable peace-keeping mechanism on the Korean peninsula. Meanwhile Donald Trump has said he has a good feeling about the much-anticipated summit. In a tweet this morning, he said there was excitement in the air in Singapore ahead of the summit. He hopes the meeting will kick-start a process that eventually sees Mr Kim give up nuclear weapons.

EU to implement counter measures against US tariff on steel & aluminium

Agency
England, June 11,

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has said European Union (EU) will implement counter-measures against US tariffs on Steel and Aluminium just like Canada. In an interview to a public television, ADR following the G7 summit, Merkel said the European Union is preparing counter-measures against US tariffs on steel and Aluminium imports, in line with World Trade Organisation rules.

She said European Union won't let itself be ripped off again and again, instead EU act then too. Merkel also said, the G7 leaders had agreed to review their trade ties and assess the scope of existing tariffs to

avoid further trade barriers. Earlier the United States had imposed a 25 percent of tariff on steel imports and 10 percent tariff on aluminium imports from the EU, Canada and Mexico. Voicing regret about President Donald Trump's abrupt decision to withdraw support for a G7 communique she said the withdrawal, via tweet is of course, sobering and a bit depressing. Mr Trump's announcement on Twitter that he is backing out of the joint communique, torpedoed what appeared to be a fragile consensus on a trade dispute between Washington and its top allies. Merkel also brushed aside Trump's suggestion that Russia should be readmitted to the group of the world's leading economies.