

**By Sidharth Mishra**



The murder of Gauri Lankesh in Bengaluru earlier this week and the scavenging by the political parties over her death is one of the saddest events that I have witnessed in quarter of a century as a reporter. Early in my career, I had felt very peeved covering the funeral of Indian Air Force helicopter pilots killed during the Kargil conflict at Sarsawa air base. The cause for feeling peeved was not the war but the way a colleague from television had forced the toddler of the dead soldier pose with his father's coffin. A thought had then occurred to me, will those in the business of news prey on the dead. The advent of social media has made it worse; the death of a newsperson is being preyed on. What is not being discussed is the sensational manner in which Gauri was gunned down but what is being addressed is what she spoke before her death, and what others spoke after her death. Having started my career as a crime reporter, I have in the past three days yearned to read a report on the crime scene description; what I have got in bargain is clatter of the war-mongers on the twitter.

The endless investigation which a television channel has done on who killed Sunanda Pushkar, could have used its resources to find who killed Gauri especially when its promoter comes from the state of Karnataka. But didn't I hear this promoter say a few days back that what mattered in journalism was market-share; and for grabbing the squinted eyeballs (especially when following news on smartphone) aka market-share what was important is to create a clatter, a noise, kick dust and let truth get buried in it.

A newspaper report said, "Ms Lankesh, 55, known for her Leftist views and anti-establishment writing, was shot dead at the doorstep of her Bengaluru home last evening." Was it necessary to say that she had Leftist views and then stretch it as far possible to get Narendra Modi's name figure in the FIR. Those opposed to the personality and politics of Narendra Modi, help him by such theatrics which have followed the murder of the magazine editor.

What surprises me is that the media houses which could not produce a good crime scene copy have spent hours of airtime, tonnes of newsprint and several kilobytes on social media to discuss the Right and the Left angle to an incident which essentially should have been first approached as a case of gruesome crime. Whether this crime was fallout of an ideological line which Gauri Lankesh followed should be probed later.

If Gauri Lankesh was an anti-establishment journalist, as her mourners have made her out to be, she must have used this trait to make the government closer home in Bengaluru led by one Congressman called Siddaramaiah feel uncomfortable rather than breathe down the neck of the one headed by RSS-protégé Narendra Modi in New Delhi. How the editors' guild in its resolution decided to ignore this fact is something which needs to be explained.

I recall a scholar once writing that "manufacturing dissent could be far more disastrous for societies and nations than manufacturing consent." He had said that "the same media which (Noam) Chomsky bitterly criticises for manufacturing consent through propaganda, might as well in liberal democracies be manufacturing dissent." Siddaramaiah today runs a discredited Government and by raising issues like a separate flag for Karnataka and safety of 'progressive' journalists is not going to take him very far in the upcoming state assembly polls. The blabber of Siddaramaiah's boss, Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi is also not going to help matters. This is not to say that Narendra Modi government believes in pampering media. The Prime Minister's entourage, when he travels abroad, has no media component. His government has followed a tough advertising policy, wherein several media organizations have been forced to shut shop. One cannot say for sure how much does the Government 'threaten' a media house critical of its policies but it certainly has started the practice of drowning criticism through surfeit of pro-government information on social media and internet.

Thus playing the role of fourth estate has become a wee-bit tougher. The 'social divide' in the ranks for media which is getting reflected in the narrative which has followed Gauri's murder is a sad development. Journalism has always been a high risk job coming with very low remuneration. What gave journalists elixir was the power of the pen, scripting a well-researched report, which has now been overpowered by the din created by the microphone.

And the challenge posed by Modi government, and the Siddaramaiah government, and the Kejriwal government, cannot be overcome by manufacturing dissent but actually create dissent, probably not the way Gauri Lankesh did it. The nation needs editors who would quietly but firmly pilot hard news and not create fury of hollow words.

(Sidharth Mishra is Editor, Capital Khabar. This piece first appeared in DBPOST, Bhopal)