# Journalist who exposed Hindu right assassinated in Bangalore

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Gauri Lankesh, a 55-year old former *Times of India* journalist and the publisher/editor of a Kannada-language weekly named *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*, was assassinated Tuesday night as she was entering her home in Bengaluru (Bangalore). Two motorcycle-borne assailants, aided by a third who was waiting near her house, reportedly shot seven bullets at Lankesh, three of which struck her head, neck and chest.

Lankesh had used her publication to expose and denounce the Hindu right and its Hindutva ideology, which are the political bedrock of India's BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) government led by the arch-communalist prime minister, Narendra Modi. She was also reportedly in the process of writing a series of articles exposing the corrupt nexus between big industrialists and Karnataka state politicians in the run up next year's state assembly elections. Bengaluru is the capital of Karnataka, India's eighth largest state.

Lankesh had become the target of seething hatred from powerful BJP politicians and Hindu communalist and fundamentalist groups. Two state BJP leaders had sued her in court for "defamation" over an article she had written in 2008 about their involvement in corruption. Last year, Gauri Lankesh was sentenced to six months in jail on these trumped-up charges, but was allowed to post bail pending an appeal in a higher court.

Lankesh's murder bears all the hallmarks of the Hindu extremist right. There has been a surge in Hindu right vigilantism and violence since Modi and his BJP came to power in 2014, exploiting mass disaffection with the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government and the Stalinists who propped up the UPA for its first four years in office.

That a journalist could be stalked and killed in such a cold-blooded manner has provoked widespread shock and revulsion. Hundreds of people took to the streets of Bengaluru and other Indian cities to demand justice for Gauri Lankesh and other targets of Hindu-supremacist groups.

Lankesh is the fourth victim of such a targeted assassination in the past four years.

On August 20, 2013, Dr. Narendra Dabholkar—a medical doctor and crusader against self-styled "godmen," an endemic phenomenon in India—was shot dead during a morning walk in Pune, the second largest city in Maharashtra, Karnataka's neighbor state to the north. Dabholkar had played a leading role in the campaign for an anti-superstition bill banning various activities religious hucksters use to exploit popular superstition. Right-wing Hindu groups have denounced even the highly-watered down bill the Maharashtra Assembly passed in the aftermath of Dabholkar's death as "anti-Hindu".

Then on February 10, 2015, Communist Party of India (CPI) national executive member Govind Pansare and his wife were shot at close range by two men on a motorcycle when they were returning home from their morning walk. Pansare, who had come in the cross-hairs of Hindu-supremacist groups for being a strident opponent of the caste system, died from his gunshot wounds, but his wife survived. Pansare's daughter, Smitha Pansare, has blamed the BJP and the RSS—the shadowy Hindu nationalist "cultural organization" from which Modi and much of the BJP's leading cadre have emerged—and their relentless promotion of Hindu extremism and intolerance for her father's death.

Six months later, on the morning of August 30, 2015, Dr. Malleshappa Kalburgi, a 76-year old retired professor and vice-chancellor of Karnataka's Hampi university, was shot dead by two assailants who came to his home posing as students. Kalburgi had been vehemently denounced by violent Hindu-supremacist groups such as the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad or World Hindu Council) and the RSS, after having declared his opposition to idolatry during a June 2014 seminar in Bengaluru. He then recollected how "as a curious child" he had urinated on idols of various Hindu gods "to see if it would elicit instant divine retribution."

The assassinations are widely recognized to be a product of the noxious communalist view of Indian society promoted by the RSS-led network of Hindu supremacist organizations

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which the BJP government has been promoting, including through the systematic naming of Hindu chauvinists to leading positions in educational, cultural, and scientific organizations.

Modi, a self-styled autocrat who gained notoriety as the chief instigator and enabler of the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, relies upon Hindu bigotry and bellicose nationalist appeals to rally popular support for his government and its unabashed pro-business agenda.

Earlier this year, Modi appointed Yogi Adityanath, a Hindu high-priest who commands his own Hindu communalist militia, as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state.

Since taking office, this retrograde, saffron-clad swami has used various pretexts to order the wholesale shutting down of slaughterhouses, putting large numbers of Muslim and Dalit laborers out of work. He has also threatened to book Muslims under the "Gangster Act" if they slaughter cow, buffalo, camel or ox during the Muslim *Bakrid* festival.

In the aftermath of Modi's election, BJP state governments either adopted or began to more aggressively enforce "anti-cow slaughter" legislation. Emboldened by this, and sometimes with the active support of BJP politicians, the BJP's Hindu right allies intensified their anti-cow slaughter campaigns, setting up vigilante "cow protection" groups. Lynchings of poor Muslims and Dalits soon followed.

Only after months of public outcry did Modi make a pro forma statement condemning the violent attacks on villagers alleged to have eaten beef or to be engaged in cow-slaughter. Not only are beef and buffalo meat an important source of protein for many poor Indians, the leather-industry is a major source of employment.

Some have suggested that the primary motivation for Lankesh's murder could have been her impending e*xposé of political-corporate corruption. But even if that was the case, BJP politicians through their ties to the RSS, have links with all sorts of extremist and criminal elements.*

Many of Gauri Lankesh's friends and journalist colleagues have said there is much evidence pointing to the involvement of a Hindu extremist group named Sanatan Sanstha in her assassination. All the named suspects in the murders of Pansare and Dabholkar were linked to this organization. However, neither of these murders has been solved.

India's police are notoriously incompetent and corrupt. But the Indian state has consistently failed to seriously investigate, arrest and convict those responsible for acts of Hindu communalist terror, whether it be the orchestrators of anti-Muslim riots or the killers of opponents of the Hindu right.

Last month, India's Supreme Court ordered the release on bail of Lieutenant-Colonel Shrikant Purohit, an Indian Army intelligence officer accused of supplying the military-grade RDX explosive used in the 2007 Samjhauta Express train bombing, which killed 70 people, and bombings in 2008 in Malegaon and Modasa that killed 8 people.

These bombings were all initially blamed on Islamists, but subsequently authorities conceded they were the work of Hindu terrorists with ties to the military.

All this came out almost a decade ago, yet no one has been convicted in any of the bombings and all the alleged leaders have been released. In Purohit's case, India's highest court said there was a "contradiction" in the charges two different investigative agencies had filed against him.

One of the lead prosecutors in the Samjhauta-Malegaon case has said that she was instructed by higher-ups to "go soft" on these Hindu terrorists after the BJP came to power in 2014.

The discredited Congress Party and the Stalinist parties—the CPI and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM—bear the primary politically responsibility for the rise of the Hindu right, which until the 1980s was a marginal player in Indian politics. The Stalinist parties have systematically suppressed the class struggle, including by propping up corrupt Congress governments that have connived with Hindu right (as in the Dec. 1992 razing of the Babri Masjid) and implemented socially incendiary neo-liberal reforms.

The rise of the BJP is the Indian expression of a global phenomenon whereby the crisis-ridden bourgeoisie is vomiting up social reaction and increasingly employing authoritarian methods of rule. Only through the development of a mass working class-led political movement for socialism uniting India's toilers across caste, religious, and ethnic lines can the depredations of the BJP and its cohorts be defeated.

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