

As I read more about the 8 dead “terrorists” from the Bhopal jailbreak case, I uncharacteristically go to Urdu to articulate my thoughts. I have this terrible yearning to write a poem, a nazm, a shaer, an ode to the occasion and the words that come to me first are – Main Khamosh Hoon. I am terribly inept at Urdu poetry and I know full-well that it is not my mother-tongue nor is it a language that I am proficient in. However, the words echo in my mind because the English language cannot do justice to a plaint that is truly Hindustani in nature. No matter how well I try to frame the words, they would just fall flat in English. “I am silent” does not carry the same weight as “Main Khamosh Hoon”. But that is besides the point, because in this instant case it is not my poetry that matters but the angst and the fear that we are headed towards a totalitarian regime and no one is uttering a word about it. Every Indian is presently starting off with the same first line that occurred to me and goes no farther, like me. Hum sab khamosh hain. We are all silent.

So what ails me? What ails the Silent Indian in all of us?

Aakhir is marz ki dawa kya hai....?

Dil-e-Indian, tujhe huwa kya hai...?

I, the Silent Indian, have surrendered my voice. I have refused to speak out in favour of or against anything that happens anymore. I am numb, desensitized (insensitive?) and speechless. What is nationalism? What is patriotism? I cannot split hairs with the intellectuals who wish to make a difference between the two. I grew up believing that I was a citizen of the world. I did not care for the narrow boundaries of nation, culture, religion, caste, language, colour, even time or age. Did I succeed in that? I suppose not. It was not to be. My identity remained limited to my Indian-ness, my caste (which was mostly confused at best), my religion (which was awkward since I was an atheist), my colour and language (Brown and oh, a dozen others of the latter but inept in all of them), and the less said about my age the better.

I had a voice too, once upon a time. I used to vociferously debate everything, mostly for the love of it. I used to challenge people to do better than me with their arguments and their logic. I used to stand still in admiration when a fellow-human would beat me with the precise logic that was required to do so. I would praise those who could silence me with their sensible words and their demolition of my propositions would leave me breathless. If I were to demolish their arguments, in turn, I would still wait for them to retaliate with renewed vigour, with more facts at their fingertips, with even more passion than I could bring to the debate. I would bow before a superior argument and accept defeat and still not feel slighted or ashamed of the defeat. Today, everyone has an opinion and everyone wants to win. It is not like they use commonsense or use logic to win, but he/she, who screeches the loudest and farthest, wins. It is not drowning of opposing ideas with unassailable logic that wins the debate these days, but the sheer volume of diatribe that is heaped upon you that makes you lose. Today, we are told that questioning anything is detrimental to the morale of our soldiers/police/people/nation/leaders and so on. We are told not to raise awkward questions because it might end up embarrassing us when the horrible truth comes out. The nation comes first, we are told. Since when did we become such wusses, it forces me to think. Since when did our soldiers become such wilting daisies that they cannot stand the glare of the sunlight anymore? When people used to hiss at me that I was being unpatriotic, during my college days, I used to laugh at them. “It is because I love my country more than you do, I can see its ills more acutely and more painfully than you do. It is because I see these ills that I am moved to condemn them and exhort people to make a change

for the better. It is because I can see with clarity what is

needed and what is NOT being done, that I speak about these things”, I used to tell them in my defence.

Today, I am told, we must not speak out. It would strengthen the enemy’s hands. We must not question, because it would demoralize our people. Go to Pakistan? Sure, I would, if I could speak out there. I tell my friends now, “mind your own business, do not utter a word. It is of no use to speak out”. Today when I speak I am drowned down by insane voices which speak nothing but nonsense. Do you know history? No. Do you know anything about current affairs? No. Do you know anything about anything? No. But you have every right to shout at me, you have every right to challenge my every single word, regardless of your lack of knowledge about the said topic. You can scream hostile rubbish at me because, well, you CAN. You are empowered today, no matter how little you know, you are the voice of the times. You call me names when you cannot argue with me reasonably. You curse my sister, my mother, my wife, my daughter, my religion, my status – because you CAN. You say it is your freedom of speech, but where is your commonsense, where is your logic, where is your sense of the FREE, let alone freedom? Free speech is not free and we who use it sensibly know better than you, lumpen trolls, what it costs us. We spoke so that sanity may prevail. But, no more. Today I am silent. I shall not speak. Neither will the others, if they have any sense. Today, you trolls may speak freely. You may congratulate each other, sing paeans to your favourite leaders, justify every injustice with your own perverted logic, you can say the worst about the rest of us . But you too shall become silent when we stop speaking. It is because you have no thoughts of your own that you dare to assail those with original thoughts. It is because you REACT and do not proactively create that you have the guts to shame us whenever we utter anything. I ask you, what will you do when you have nothing to react to? What will you do when you have no one to troll? What is it that you can say when there is no one to set off your Prozac-deprived rage? What is it, dear troll, that you can do, on your own? Sing praises of your lords and Masters? Yes, by all means, do so. See what happens to your world when there is this mindless deification and that alone. See what happens when no one questions you. I have said it often enough - Read those words from that famous poem from the Nazi era, by Pastor Niemoller:

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

There is this execrable book which many youngsters swear by, called Atlas Shrugged, written by that arch-hypocrite Ayn Rand (Why be a hypocrite myself? Let me also confess that it was an enamouring thought in my college days to be like the Black-&-White-No-Grey characters of that book as well. So yes, Mea Culpa too). The main character in that, John Galt, declares that he has withdrawn his superlative mind from the world, that he shall exhort every thinking person to withdraw from the mindless world. He apparently achieves that. Never mind the nonsense about how capitalism and capitalists alone prop up the world. But the fact that the thinking minds are removed is used as a moral statement, as a threat to the world that when the thinkers go everything else goes out too. Yes, in this case, I beseech those of you who can still think, to withdraw from the world. Let me live

## Mein Khamosh Hoon

Written by Kishore Tejaswi

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up to my stupid college-days dream of being John Galt in a way, in the leftist and liberal realm, and let it be possible for me to announce to the world that I have withdrawn the best minds from this execrable society.

You may think that you can write long, anguished letters-to-editors, write blog posts and FB posts to mollify your conscience, you may wish to tweet about every new dastardly happening that touches your soul, you may wish to stand in candle light vigils that do not give anyone sleepless night except yourselves, you may wish to shout slogans and march with comrades protesting the state of affair but no one hears you. You may rant, shout, scream, weep, tear your hair out, but all that is for you alone and yours alone. Stop shouting, stop thinking. The meek shall not inherit this earth, not even close. Because this is not an Earth we would wish to inherit. Leave it for the lumpen elements of our society. We are better off not getting into the same sewer as they reside in. Minds, shut down. Tongues, recede. Eyes, go blind. Ears, turn down the volume. The three monkeys? No. More than that. Cut off your ears, stab your eyes, slash your tongue and be still. (I can still see your tail, fold it within your body before they cut that off too, dear monkey).

Main Khamosh hoon. Certainly. I have none of the words to protest, register my anguish, anymore. I, the Silent Indian, withdraw from sight. May you enjoy this silent world that YOU trolls inherit now.

For what it is worth, let me actually try out my lame Urdu (please, no extreme criticisms, I know I am inept in this and I might not even be capable of more, so let it be. If it is bad poetry, so be it. And I know it will be bad. But, ah, words.. and my English is no better, that could turn it into a fantastic poem in that language).

Main khamosh hoon.

Kal tak jo zubaan chalti thi, aaj be-daar o bezaar hai  
Ab khanjhar nahin, talwaar nahin, koi auzhaar nahin  
Kal tak to theeki-meethi-kadwi baaton ka hi daur tha  
Aaj khamoshi ka aalam hai, yeh humara waqt nahin  
Kal tak jo saathi the, aaj humaare hi dushman nikle  
Ab guftagu nahin, aapas mein shikwe gile nahin  
Kal tak to saath chale, aaj do-raahe par hue alag  
Tumhara raasta roshan, ab hum tumhaare saath nahin  
Kal tak to thi duniya yeh meri bhi aur tumhari bhi  
Ab zinda jal rahein hain jabr-e- dozakh mein, tum nahin  
Tumhare Taana-shaahi (ya Amit Shah-i) se dab gaye hain hum zaroor  
khamosh hain, par woh aath(8) - zinda nahin, khamosh bhi nahin  
Kal tak unki aawaazeein goonjengi tumhaare zehn mein  
Khoon ka rang hai tumhare haathon mein, mehndi nahin  
Ab tak kuch nahin kaha maine, aakhir mein khamosh hoon.