

India: The Assault on Scholar and Social Activist Swami Agnivesh

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Global Research, July 18, 2018

Region: [Asia](#)

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The International Movement for a Just World (JUST) is shocked to learn that the prominent Indian social activist, Swami Agnivesh, was assaulted on the 17th of July 2018 in the Pakur area of Jharkhand State while leaving a hotel where he had participated in an event.

The assassins are allegedly from the youth wing of the BJP, the ruling party. They had torn his clothes and hurled abuses at Agnivesh. They were angry that the activist had made a statement defending the consumption of beef. In recent months, the consumption of beef in a society where the cow is venerated has become a volatile issue with cases reported of Muslims being killed because they had eaten the meat of the animal even within the confines of their homes.

The BJP has denied that its youth workers were involved in the Agnivesh assault. One hopes that a fair and unbiased investigation will be carried out by the authorities. The culprits should be severely punished according to the law.

It is a shame that intolerance and aggressive bigotry of this sort is gathering momentum in parts of India. It has been facilitated according to certain sources by the increasing legitimization of a narrow notion of religious identity which in a sense is a travesty of the universalism and inclusiveness of the Hindu faith. Those who wield power and influence in politics and religion should not lend credibility to such gross misinterpretations of the sacred beliefs of the majority of the populace.

Swami Agnivesh is one of those few Indians who has always sought to combat bigotry and hatred propagated in the name of religion, any religion. He has adopted principled positions on major controversies in his country with courage and integrity for many decades. A multi-religious, multi-cultural democracy should eulogise – not assault – such individuals.

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