

# A Political Journalist's Sting-Operation: Ethical, Methodological and Political Implications

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## ABSTRACT

The book under review is an attempt to throw light into the sensational Gujarat political persecution against Muslims in the year 2002. Rana Ayyub (2016) brought out interesting facts and information about Gujarat 2002 year's political persecution. Based on the present investigative sting operation, further investigation can be carried out into the Gujarat 2002 year's heinous crime. Rana was into eight months of 'sting operation' cover-up to unearth and establish possible links into the over shaded crime episode. The present review goes on in a 'review and discussion style', and projects how methodological, ethical and political implications lay behind Rana's revelations.

### The book under Review Details:

Ayyub, R., 2016. *Gujarat Files: Anatomy of a Cover Up*. : Rana Ayyub, pp. 204 + X, Rs. 295/-.

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## 1. Professional and Political Prologue

Rana Ayyub was a lady journalist associated with the sensational Tehelka web portal news agency. Professionally she acquired a journalism degree and started to have her maiden venture into the much cherished professional field. Her professional enthusiasm and social identity had made her accept and undertake probe into the sensational 2002 year's Gujarat political persecution against Muslims. As part of this professional assignment, she indulged in intensive 'sting operation' cover-up. A sting operation is a well-recognised popular journalistic research tool and method. The name of the investigator and author - Rana Ayyub, poses a serious doubt whether she is a Hindu or Muslim? However, as per her revelation, she was a practising Muslim.

The year 2002 Gujarat riots against Muslims led to the brutal massacre of around two thousand innocent Muslims. The large scale failure of Gujarat state machinery and human rights violation had brought negative remark against the then Chief Minister Narendra Modi, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) shared ideology. The BJP and RSS shared ideology have deep roots in majoritarian Hindu nation construction, which debunks from the modern shared liberal, secular and democratic values. (Jafferlot, 2011) (Graham, 2008) As a result, on political-ideological terms, the BJP and RSS are branded and recognised as fascist organisations, by most of the other political parties and progressive civil society organisations in India.<sup>1</sup>

Massive range of accusations and counter-accusations went on concerning pin pointedly fixing responsibility against those involved in the year 2002 en-mass massacre of Muslims. Such accusations and counter-accusations were political, administrative, ideological, judicial and moral in nature. As a result, the true spirit of investigation and culprits fixing process went-on in an unsatisfactory manner. In order to bring

coherence into the year 2002 mass riots against Muslims, the present sting operation was undertaken.

## 2. Understanding the Context of the Text

Though Narendra Modi politically benefitted after the year 2002 Gujarat riots and won Gujarat Legislative Assembly State elections in subsequent terms during the years 2002, 2007 and 2012; at some other level, BJP and RSS had lost political ground. BJP lost political power at the national level for two consecutive terms, i.e., 2004 and 2009 Lok Sabha elections. It was at some level, believed and reported that the large scale violence against Muslims in Gujarat in the year 2002 could also be one of the prime factors behind this political loss.

Anyhow, BJP and RSS had ensured that Narendra Modi's political image gets enlarged by keeping in view next Lok Sabha elections due in the year 2014. Towards this end, BJP's leadership was steered towards Narendra Modi's direction. Furthermore, a sustained political wave in favour of Narendra Modi's leadership was created since the year 2012-2013 keeping in view upcoming 2014 year's Lok Sabha elections. (NP, 2016) (Singh, 2019) Thus, at some level, the hardcore Hindutva title earned by Narendra Modi due to the range of the year 2002 violence against Muslims had made him ascend to the national level politics. Though Narendra Modi faced awkward position from 2002 to 2012, from various quarters nationally and internationally; from now onwards, he was made as an icon by the BJP and RSS for political benefits.

At a time, when the BJP, RSS and Narendra Modi were on political ascendance, the Tehelka and Rana Ayyub undertook the present sensational sting operation cover-up. The duration involved in conducting the sting operation was crucial. Though Rana Ayyub was intensely involved in conducting the sting operation, the Tehelka took a back step to stop the operation. Tehelka team suspected, feared and firmly believed that the BJP, RSS and Narendra Modi might win over

the 2014 Lok Sabha election. As a result, in such a case of an electoral victory tilt towards the BJP; Tehelka team feared that they would face intense witch hunt from the BJP led government. When BJP was in power at the national level, during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's tenure as Prime Minister – Tehelka conducted a successful sting operation on BJP's national President Bangaru Lakshman and faced intense witch-hunt. This sad trauma hunted them this time too. (p.203)

Due to Tehelka's back step, there emerged sharp differences of opinion between Rana Ayyub and Tehelka management over the withdrawal of sting operation in a midway. Moreover, Rana Ayyub was much more annoyed with Tehelka for its failure in not publishing the already conducted sting operation results. As a result, Rana Ayyub faced mental trauma, as she worried that the sting operation results were failing to see the light of the world. She had deep mental agony that the truth conceived through sting operation was failing to see the light of the world and get the culprits booked. As a result, a final resort was taken by her to publish the present work on her own, by revealing the present sensational results of the sting operation.<sup>ii</sup> Thus, the present work is a self-publication, but not conceived from any significant publication division!

### 3. Anatomy of Sting-Operation Cover-Up

Though Rana Ayyub had considerable prior exposure in Gujarat region as a journalist, she took required prior well-prepared rehearsal exercise to modify her persona visibly. Towards this end, she incarnated herself as a Non-Resident Indian (NRI) associated with the American Film Institute Conservatory (AFIC). She took 'Maithili Tyagi' as her pseudo name to successfully conduct the sting operation for about eight months duration until it was midway called off by the Tehelka management. Rana Ayyub's pseudo incarnation as Maithili Tyagi is a fascinating narration throughout the present sting operation. Rana Ayyub was good at turning Maithili Tyagi character in a dramatic mode. Her exposure to Bollywood was much helpful in this regard. Rana Ayyub minced no words in describing her emotional commotion at times when she feared; what could happen if she was caught as a Tehelka agent?

The eight months-long operations under Maithili Tyagi's pseudo incarnation was a successful one. The operation primarily targeted high-level bureaucrats, especially those who were at the high level of the realm and helm of Gujarat State affairs, when inhuman 2002 year riots occurred against Muslims. Maithili Tyagi was successful in meeting various Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Indian Police Service (IPS) high profile bureaucrats. Also, she was shrewd in meeting various top-level politicians too, like Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi and Gujarat ex-Home Minister Amith Shah. She was successful in using one established intimacy and contact when she moved on to the next contact person. Thus, a kind of trust in a conscious snowball effect mode was established by Maithili Tyagi visibly, when Rana Ayyub guided her invisibly.

Maithili Tyagi had three secret cameras fixed to capture the opposite person's revealing conversation and narration. One camera was fixed to her front portion of *kurta/churidar*, the

second to her wrist-watch and third were to her accompanied diary. Thus, she took conscious steps to record the conversations in all possible ways, to better capture for the broader establishment of facts in due course of time.

### 4. Methodological Dynamics and Style

The unique style adopted by Maithili Tyagi is engaging. She befriended with a male European guy visiting India and took him along with her for most of the cover-up sting operations. His false name was Mike. Mike was well interested in helping Maithili Tyagi in this respect, even after knowing her intentions and involved sensitive under operation cover-up. Especially she ensured that Mike accompanied her on a few initial visits until she developed a rapport with the visiting family members. Maithili Tyagi met both in-service and retired officials and presented their revelations.

Rana Ayyub well-practised how Maithili Tyagi's body language, conversation style should be moulded to impress as an NRI. She even showed devout faith towards Hindu religion. Her intimate style and befriending nature, along with conscious attempts to erase Rana Ayyub's identity were ultimately successful. Nevertheless, the inside Rana Ayyub had agony and fear on ethical and pragmatic grounds at times, for what was done under Maithili Tyagi's incarnation.

The uniqueness of the present sting operation revelations is significant on various accounts. Various investigative agencies like Crime Investigation Department (CID), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Intelligence Bureau (IB), etc. conducted in-depth investigations into the year 2002 Muslims persecutions. As part of that elaborate investigation process, various officials, public persons, politicians, etc. were also investigated. The media also covered occasionally shared public revelations of various politicians and officers shared testimonies into the year 2002 en-mass riots against Muslims. The Gujarat government had also appointed a famous 'Nanavati Commission' to probe into the year 2002 persecution. However, such revelations were contradictory, contested and seen in ill-light with disbelief by some sections of the society.

The present sting operation by Rana Ayyub on behalf of the Tehelka also had disbelief over a few prominent individual's shared revelations and testimonies about the year 2002 riots and their publicly narrated roles, which portrayed their ignorance, innocence, lack of knowledge and authority in preventing a riot. As a result, the present sting operation, at one executive level, attempted to prove how the mainstream aired testimonies of a few prominent officials and politicians about the year 2002 riots were wrong! Thus, the sting operation posed a firm counter to the mainstream circulated and believed views about innocence, ignorance and clean image promoted by a few, directly and indirectly, involved culprits in the year 2002 violence.

Methodologically, the present work is a journalistic way of contribution to the existing stock of literature on Gujarat State politics; the year 2002 en-mass massacre against Muslims; Hindutva ideological practices spread and operation; the pragmatic methodological way in conducting political sting

operations; the backdoor channel to know limitations and loopholes in Indian political governance and bureaucrats dubious nature, etc.

## 5. Critical Remarks

One of the limitations in this work lay at: using Hindi conversation in direct English words, without providing English translation either in brackets or otherwise. This indicates the assumption that Hindi is a simple universal Indian language and can be easily understood by non-Hindi speaking people. But then, this kind of popular conception is a north Indian construct and against the practice of publication ethics and procedures.

Why was Maithili Tyagi believed, entertained and engaged by various persons in this entire sting operation discourse? The success lay here; in how Rana Ayyub incarnated Maithili Tyagi character as an appealing force! At some level, to reflect critically: was there a class consciousness and passion towards NRI descendants among Indians? Is there a kind of soft corner towards female high class posed persons among Indians? Could these be some of the possible factors, in successfully engaging and entertaining pseudo-Maithili Tyagi character by the officials, politicians and others, without firmly suspecting her identity and intentions?

Methodologically the kind and nature of sting operation conducted by Tehelka and Rana Ayyub are acceptable in journalistic discourse. However, morally, it is susceptible and questionable in engaging as Maithili Tyagi and duping various families and individuals. However, this morality is sidelined for the sake of establishing larger truth, in a journalistic manner. Anyhow, the readers can understand, the mental trauma shared by Rana Ayyub in duping a few people on a few occasions as Maithili Tyagi.

Ethically the present revelations should have come from both Tehelka and Rana Ayyub together. Since Tehelka took back a step, Rana Ayyub after a prolonged wait and mental

trauma faced on ethical grounds, decided to go ahead and reveal public the present sting operation findings. That is the reason she even went to the extent of publishing the present work on her own.

The present work interests three sections of professional category, i.e., political, journalistic and literature background. Political, administrative and judicial services category professionals can ponder over how various limitations have crept into the 2002 year's political persecution against Muslims and how Indian State apparatus can be further strengthened. Journalistic professionals can observe prolonged sting operation dynamics and inherently involved ethical dimensions. The literature studies inclined professionals can observe the dubious human nature in prominent self-projection; attempts to manifest self-esteem through media and ideologically held beliefs; and how ultimately the build-up human image may get a decline if situations turn contrary. However, the present work is a suitable lay version to be read by any individual interested to know about the year 2002 Gujarat political persecution and involved contradicting dynamics.

## 6. Conclusion

Though the present work was published in the year 2016 after Narendra Modi assumed Prime of Minister of India position and Amith Shah ascended top position in BJP as national President, no further investigation was carried out based on the present revelations. Moreover, Rana Ayyub also visibly did not face any threat to her life. Under these circumstances, the present work stands as a highlighted political testimony in a unique manner. Will the Indian political State apparatus modify according to the revealed investigative loopholes and protect its citizens well and build a proper political and administrative system?

## End Notes

<sup>i</sup> BJP and RSS were seen as untouchable political entities by the majority of the political sections for a more substantial duration in the Indian democratic process. However, this perspective and view started to take back turn with the increasing spread of BJP's electoral victory.

<sup>ii</sup> The reviewer attended the meeting organised at Lamakaan, Hyderabad, on July 23, 2016, with Rana Ayyub about her 'Gujarat Files: Anatomy of a Cover-Up', where she shared extended details about why the present work was conceived. Thus, the details shared and analysed here are an extension to the book under review, which bring a comprehensive perspective to the understanding of context under which book was planned.

## References

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