

# Minorities in INDIA





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*CRPF men standing amid the debris of Babri Mosque in Ayodhya.*

## Appeasing Hindutva

*N. Ram*

The disease of communalism (“unknown almost anywhere else in the world”, according to the historian Sarvepalli Gopal) that is upon India has been long in the making, and many factors and sources — political, social, economic, ideological and institutional — explain its quite complicated malignancy. But politics provides the key to understanding, or diagnosing, the disease and also to working out a strategy to combat it.

What is clear is that while the overall national situation has turned murky with a vengeance, we can discern behind the murk the reality of a profound and exceedingly nasty socio-political crisis that is likely to get worse before it can be resolved.

The politically organised forces of *Hindutva* which have all regrouped behind the cover of the BJP — the official Opposition party — are on the rampage in the North and are trying to build up strength elsewhere in the country. The savagery of the alliance of the anti-secular and the criminal in politics has recrudesced for a horrible second round in Bombay; there Shiv Sena elements are on the rampage against Muslims. The phenomenon of saffron fanaticism and extremism seeking to dictate the political agenda in the post-December 6, 1992 situation imparts to the political situation a new gravity and this is analysed in Manini Chatterjee's lead article in this issue.

On the other side, the Narasimha Rao Government's substantive response to semi-fascist *Hindutva's* challenge is to unfurl a pale saffron programme; this is analysed by Sukumar Muralidharan in this issue. The party of Central Government is in big, and deepening, trouble. With its credibility in tatters, its top leadership a pathetic spectacle, and a crisis of governability manifest in much of the North, the best that can be said of the ruling party is that it seems caught in Trisankuland — that is, between a substantive response of appeasement of the semi-fascist aggressors and a stance of proceeding against politically mobilised communalism.

The official policy of appeasement and compromise was put into effect with a vengeance in the run-up to December 6, 1992. In the immediate wake of the catastrophe, the Narasimha Rao regime went into a kind of stupor. Subsequently, it seemed to recover its wits a little, continued to cover up its criminal dereliction of duty, but indicated (for reasons of political survival) that it was willing to go after Hindu communalism and defend secularism. But the 'strategy' to do this, discussed endlessly and fine-tuned in ruling party and government conclaves, has proved fraudulent and hollow.

The latest Ayodhya package unveiled by the Centre on January 7 through an ordinance represents a disgraceful surrender to the *Hindutva* forces which are on the offensive in the North. The groundwork for this sellout of secular principles was laid through the decision taken by the Centre, in the name of the Faizabad district administration, to allow *darshan* at the makeshift 'temple' housing the Ramlila idols. These idols, it bears secular emphasis, were surreptitiously planted within the heart of the sixteenth century Babri Masjid on December 22-23, 1949 as

a staged “miracle” (an act which resulted in a criminal case being filed by the local police but which was not undone despite the remonstrations of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel with the U.P. State Government), were taken away in time in honour of the destruction of the Babri Masjid, and were illegally planted back by the kar sévak terrorists in the wake of the demolition.

Whatever be the rationalisations and excuses provided, the political act of rewarding those who committed the vile and barbaric act of reducing to rubble the sixteenth century mosque deals a grievous blow to all principles of secularism, democracy and modern civilised nationhood. Unfortunately, the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court has endorsed this course and ruled that *darshan* should be permitted.

The other key components of the latest package are the acquisition of an area of some 67.70 acres including and surrounding the site where the Babri Masjid stood; the decision to construct a “complex” on the acquired land through the agency of trusts and, so far as the site of the Babri Masjid is concerned, to construct either a temple or a mosque depending on the opinion of the Supreme Court; and the Presidential reference to the apex court, under Article 143 of the Constitution, on the question “whether any Hindu temple or whether any Hindu religious structure existed prior to the construction of the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid (including the premises of the inner and outer courtyards of that structure) in the same area.”

As *Frontline* pointed out in its last issue, all this appears very much like a political decision taken at the top to load, if not rig, the package in favour of the *Hindutva* forces as a way of tackling their aggression! The apex court has been asked to do the impossible — that is, pronounce, without going into a dispute in the established judicial way, an opinion on a matter relating to archaeological proof. This is against a background of various experts finding not a jot of scientifically-acceptable evidence that there was any temple on the site where the Babri Masjid stood between 1528 and December 6, 1992. On the other side, which judicial body worth its robes can accept the “finds” of kar sevaks or fundamentalist archaeologists or historians as admissible evidence? One hopes the Supreme Court of India will refuse to



entertain the dishonourable reference pressed by the Central Government, under Article 143, on the grounds that the question referred is a political one and is also incapable of being answered in this way.

If there is one 'theory' that Narasimha Rao, the fervent devotee of drift, has contributed to national political life, it is the non-secular rule of not opposing 'Hindu religious sentiment' under any circumstances and of avoiding 'confrontation' with the saffron gentry and their lay allies. This is the Prime Minister's fallback position whenever the going gets sticky or challenging.

Like the Bourbons of France, the Congress 'high command' seems capable of learning nothing and forgetting nothing from history. In the Indian case, this reiterated incapacity relates to responding to the wretched phenomenon of communalism which has plagued India for much of the past century and has come to the fore with unexpected ferocity and potency over the past decade. It is, way and ahead, the nation's No. 1 problem today, and the party of Central Government is very much part of the problem.

*Courtesy*: Fortnightly, 'Frontline',  
Madras,  
January 29, 1993.

# Building Myths

*The Hindutva combine's next targets.*

*Venkitesh Ramakrishnan*

Begin with a myth, add bits and pieces of historical facts, culling out only the convenient ones, mix it with folklore, and let it simmer in communal rhetoric. This is the *Hindutva* combine's recipe for the potent concoction to precipitate disputes over places of worship. This mix was "successfully" tried at Ayodhya, and now Mathura and Varanasi are on the burner.

As at Ayodhya, the "disputes" at Mathura and Varanasi have their basis in myths. At Mathura it is said there was a temple at the spot where Krishna was born and this was demolished by Mughal invaders who built a masjid there. The story is the same at Varanasi. The only difference is that the "birthplace question" is not involved.

According to the *Hindutva* combine's version, the first temple at the Krishna Janmasthan was built by Vajranabha, great-grandson of Krishna, between 80 and 57 B.C. and was demolished by Muslims (it is not able to say when exactly this happened). A second temple was built at the site around A.D. 400, during Vikramaditya's rule, and this was demolished by Mahmud of Ghazni in A.D. 1018. Another temple was built at the same spot in A.D. 1150, when Vijayapal Dev was the King of Mathura, and this was razed in the early 16th century by Sikandar Lodi. The temple was reconstructed 125 years later, during Jehangir's rule, by Raja Vir Singh of Orcha. This was demolished by Aurangzeb in 1669 and the present idgah, adjacent to the temple complex, was built on a part of its base. The complex remained under the Mughals for a long time. When the British took control of Mathura, the king of Varanasi, Raja Patani Mull, bought the site from them. After his death, it became the subject of a legal dispute between Hindus and Muslims — an issue of property rights. There were numerous cases, and these continued for more than 100 years — even after Independence.

In 1951 the Sri Krishna Janmasthan Trust was formed and this took up most of the cases from the Hindu side. Almost at the same time

Muslims formed the Idgah Trust, which took up the cases on Muslims' behalf. The legal wranglings continued till 1968, when both the parties agreed for an out-of-court settlement, thanks to the intervention of Congress leaders such as Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya.

As per the compromise, the mandir and the idgah would exist side by side. The Muslim settlements near the temple would be shifted to the idgah side. Drainage water from one side was not to seep to the other side. The compromise had a provision against further recourse to legal proceedings. It provided for the construction of 20-foot high walls on the northern and southern sides of the idgah and said no windows should open from the idgah to the temple side.

The *Hindutva* combine is now trying to create tension over the last two clauses. Apparently the wall is less than 20 feet at many places and is in a dilapidated state on several stretches. According to local BJP-VHP leaders, if the wall falls down on the temple side it will be sacrilege. Another argument is that two windows of the idgah face the temple complex. (This is not correct as anyone can make out that the windows do not face the main temple structure, the Bhagavath Bhavan.)

Representatives of the Idgah Trust admit that the walls need repairs. Now we are facing a financial crunch. We will do it at the earliest," they said. But VHP-RSS-BJP activists, including representatives of the Sri Krishna Janmasthan Trust, are not willing to wait. Some of them, who went to Ayodhya for kar seva, had even suggested that they bring down the walls before going. Fortunately, the suggestion was rejected by the majority.

If the wall is the current focus, the long-term aim of the *Hindutva* combine is the demolition of the idgah itself. According to the combine, the idols of the *garbha griha* (*sanctum sanctorum*) of the first temple are there somewhere in the idgah. A door opens through the common wall of the idgah and a structure in the temple complex called the *garbha griha* or the Krishna Janmasthan. There are no idols in this structure and, therefore, technically it is not a temple. But the Janmasthan Trust and the *Hindutva* combine maintain that this is part of the original temple structure. The door on the common wall is closed from the idgah

side. According to the combine, many idols and pictures would be discovered if the door is opened and the basement dug up.

“Our final aim is that,” said a Bajrang Dal leader of Mathura. But even if that is done and even if the idols are discovered, will it prove that this was the birth place of Krishna? This question has no real answer in the absence of historical evidence. But, for the *Hindutva* combine, that does not matter. “We know that the precise birth spot of Krishna is beneath the idgah,” said the Bajrang Dal leader. Representatives of the Krishna Janmasthan Trust, such as Vijay Bahadur Singh, a security officer who went to Ayodhya, also echo these words. At the time being, the Trust maintains there is no dispute with the idgah.

However, indications are that this will change. The Trust president is none other than V. H. Dalmiya, VHP president, and the trustees include Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia and Jagmohan, former Governor of Jammu and Kashmir. The day may not be far off when the Janmasthan Trust becomes something like the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas of Ayodhya.

At Varanasi, the *Hindutva* combine’s main argument is that the Gyanvapi mosque, adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple, was built after demolishing the original temple. There is no clear proof as to where exactly the original temple was located. Even the mahants who managed the temple till 1983 are not unanimous about this. According to Pandit Ram Shankar Tripathi, the original temple was at the spot where the Razia Begum mosque now stands, nearly 2 km from the Gyanvapi mosque. But another former mahant, Pandit Kailashpati Tiwari, insists that the original temple was at the site of the Gyanvapi mosque.

While cross-checking the *Hindutva* combine’s claims with historical facts, more bewildering facts emerge. Legend has it that the first — and therefore the original — Kashi Vishwanath temple was built in the 8th century A.D. There are no historical records to prove the existence of the temple or the spot where it stood. But it is being propagated that Mahmud of Ghazni demolished this temple in 1018. It

is also claimed that Mohammed Ghori demolished the “original temple” in 1194.

If it was first demolished in 1018, how could it be razed again in 1194? Was it rebuilt in between? The combine has no answer to this. According to Aadya Prasad Pande, convener of the Pragma Bharathi, a *Hindutva* combine-controlled intellectuals’ forum, in the absence of historical records the popular belief is the most important thing. But even this is not uniform. According to some mahants, the original temple was at Visweshwarganj, 2 km from the present site. A few say it was at Annapoornaganj, now called Dara Nagar, again some 2 km away from the present site. The third opinion is the one put forward by Ram Shankar Tripathi. The combine is trying to mobilise opinion for displacing the Gyanvapi mosque, sidelining other viewpoints.

According to recorded history, the first temple was demolished by Mohammed Ghori in 1194. Motichandra’s “History of Varanasi” says this temple was rebuilt by Vastupal, a trader from Gujarat, during the reign of Shamsudin Iltumish (A.D. 1211—1226). This was razed by Sikandar Lodi.

According to “Kashi Khand” and Motichandra’s book, the original temple was rebuilt during Akbar’s reign by Raja Todar Mall. Sudhakar Pandey, president of the Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha, says “Jehangir Nama” mentions that this was funded by Akbar to the tune of Rs. 10 lakh.

Whether this temple was replaced by the Gyanvapi mosque or the Razia Begum mosque, there are no conclusive answers. The general belief is that a Vishwanath temple was demolished by Aurangzeb in 1669. This Mughal emperor had generally good relations with the sants and pandits of Varanasi. If this was so, why did he demolish the temple ?

One theory is that the demolition occurred at the time of his confrontation with the Marathas under Shivaji and that around 1669 there was a big Maratha garrison at Varanasi, across the Ganga. Aurangzeb wanted to prevent the spread of Maratha influence, and the demolition of the temple was a political offensive.

Another theory propounded by freedom-fighter and former Orissa Governor B.N. Pande in his “Islam and Indian Culture” is that the Maharani of Kutch, who was part of an entourage led by Aurangzeb to Bengal, was molested in the temple premises by some mahants. Seeing that the temple’s precincts had been despoiled, Aurangzeb ordered the removal of the idol of Vishwanath to some other place and the demolishing of the temple.

Yet another theory is that Aurangzeb ordered the demolition of all temples in Varanasi where Brahmins were teaching “unholy books” and “wicked sciences”. And in pursuance of this policy the Vishwanath temple was razed.

The temple was rebuilt by the Maharani of Indore, Ahalya Bai Holkar, in 1777. Then there was a suggestion to demolish the Gyanvapi Mosque, and the maharani consulted the pandits of Varanasi. According to Lokpati Tripathi, Congress (I) leader, the pandits were against this, for, according to them, a mandir could not be built by demolishing another community’s place of worship. This put an end to the move.

After this the temple and the masjid co-existed. In 1839, Maharaja Ranjit Singh sent 22 maunds of gold for plating the temple’s domes. During British rule there were some legal wranglings between the management committees of the temple and the mosque; these were over property rights, with the masjid committee demanding control over a larger area. The Varanasi civil court struck down the claim but allowed the mosque to function with rights of worship inside the structure, in the courtyard and on the roof. There were appeals against this in the district court and the High Court but both upheld the civil court order. The last of the orders came in 1942 from the High Court. After that there has been no dispute.

But the effort of the *Hindutva* combine is to rake up the issue and “set right the wrong done by Aurangzeb”. But on what religious basis it is doing so when the original Kashi Vishwanath temple’s site is still in doubt is a question that has no clear answer. Its argument continues to be that the original site is beneath the Gyanvapi mosque.

As per the representatives of the Anjuman Intazamiya Masajid,

the management committee of the Gyanvapi mosque, no temple existed at the spot. According to them, the mosque has existed right from Akbar's time.

How far these assertions are valid historically is to be studied. But, for the *Hindutva* combine, history does not matter. For it, the fact that both the Mathura and Varanasi mosques are protected by the Places of Worship Act is also not a matter worth consideration. "There can be no *status quo* in the case of these sites. Anyway the Act is not applicable to us as we had objected to its package in Parliament," said Aadya Prasad Pande.

Indications are that it is trying to break the peaceful co-existence of the temple and the mosque which has stood the test of time.

*Courtesy*: Fortnightly, 'Frontline',  
Madras,  
January 29, 1993.



*Sants arriving for the Marg Darshak Mandal in Ayodhya in July 1992,.....threat to a modern republic*

## Whither Secularism ?

*Pradhan H. Prasad*

The demolition of the Babri mosque, built in 1528, on December 6, 1992 by a frenzied crowd of thousands of fanatic Hindus, shattered the secular image of this country which the Indian ruling class has been taking pains to present before the world since August 15, 1947. Just after independence the Indian rulers rather immodestly projected themselves as champions of self-reliant growth with social justice, non-alignment, secularism etc. The last of these, that is, the arrogance of being secular has also now crumbled.

Can the ruling class, particularly its edifice in the form of



Government of India and other related institutions, shun their responsibilities of saving the historic shrine under the pretence that they were betrayed by the leaders of the BJP, VHP, RSS, Bajrang Dal, etc. ? Taking this to its logical end, cannot these leaders too (who are accused of being betrayers) in their turn, escape their responsibilities saying that they were betrayed by the lakhs of *kar sevaks* assembled in Ayodhya ? Will the Indian leaders ever realise that while it may be easy to have acquired the sceptre of leadership by appealing to the religious passions and emotions on the minds of masses who are ignorant of the material conditions of their living and inherent contradictions therein, it may be difficult to control and discipline the followers ? Nobody will deny that these questions are important. But even before these questions are answered after a thorough probe, one can assert without hesitation that the ruling class and all its elaborate edifice and paraphernalia stand condemned, not merely because the secular image of the country has suffered but because thousands of innocent lives were lost while the leaders, wedded to parliamentary democracy under the Indian Constitution, continued to play the game of power politics with ease and enthusiasm and probably without much qualm. Not much earlier, in October 1990, though the Babri mosque accidentally (rather narrowly) escaped destruction, nonetheless many lives were even then lost in this Mosque-Temple controversy.

In this context the role of the Indian people is no less important. After demolition, it was natural for some Muslim groups (whose passions were aroused around the slogan "Islam is in danger" by the Ulemas, Maulanas and other leaders who have considerable appeal among ignorant masses) to react violently, to come out on the streets with angry black flag demonstrations, attacking temples etc. It was equally natural for some Hindus to retaliate. The country witnessed an orgy of Hindu-Muslim riots to an extent which was not experienced since India became a republic. The law and order machinery swung into action. To restore the secular image of the ruling party and also to atone for its failure to protect the shrine, the Union Government dismissed the BJP Governments in all the four States, promised to rebuild the Mosque, banned five communal bodies, etc. This is being vigorously protested by leaders owing allegiance to the cause of *Hindutva*.

A large section of Hindus were saddened by the demolition of the shrine. Even some of the leaders of the BJP and VHP were not happy.

with the event, so much so that the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, L.K. Advani and the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Kalyan Singh, resigned from their respective posts owning moral responsibility for the unhappy event. The only weakness witnessed among secular-minded Hindus was that they did not show their anger. The least that was expected of them was to join their Muslim brethren in the black flag demonstrations in protest against the demolition. A large number of *sadbhavna* rallies were, of course, jointly organised by Hindus and Muslims but these were for Hindu-Muslim unity and against riots, not particularly against the demolition of the mosque.

The issue of Hindu-Muslim unity is important and has remained the cornerstone of secularism since the British days. It was to achieve this delicately balanced Hindu-Muslim (unity that is, to bring Muslims under his banner) that Mahatma Gandhi plunged wholeheartedly into the Khilafat Movement (a movement for Pan-Islamism) in the company of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Shaukat Ali, the Ulemas, Maulanas and other Muslim religious leaders. Gandhi failed to achieve the much required Hindu-Muslim unity; on the contrary, he helped to unleash the forces of fundamentalism in the Muslim masses.

The other opportunity was lost when the Motilal Nehru Report of 1928 and subsequently Mohammad Ali Jinnah's "Fourteen Points" document, as a response to the Nehru Report in 1929, could not be reconciled even though the differences were not of a fundamental nature. A negotiated settlement between the Congress and the Muslim League was possible but that was probably not seriously tried.

The third opportunity came when the Cabinet Mission Plan was accepted by the Muslim League on June 6, 1946 and the Congress Working Committee accepted it with some minor modifications on June 25, 1946. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad the then Congress president, writes in his autobiography on page 150 :

*In our discussions in the Working Committee, I pointed out that the Cabinet Mission Plan was basically the same as the Congress had accepted. As such the Working Committee did not have much difficulty in accepting the main political solution contained in the Plan.*

But Gandhiji had not accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan and he

was not the man to take this defeat quietly. The assumption of the Congress Presidentship thereafter by Jawaharlal Nehru and Gandhi's full and formidable support to the objection of Congress leaders of Assam to enter in a grouping with Bengal (a Muslim majority province notwithstanding the fact that Gandhi's mission was a united India and Hindu-Muslim unity) undermined the prospect of a united India and Hindu-Muslim unity.

The final blow was delivered by Jawaharlal Nehru (who was installed as the Congress President due to the personal intervention of Gandhiji) when he made the ominous statement in winding up his speech in the AICC :

*We are not bound by a single thing except that we have decided for the moment to go to the Constituent Assembly.*

Thereafter, Jinnah who had been working for Hindu-Muslim unity since he joined politics, lost complete faith in the Congress and most of its leaders. He fixed August 16, 1946 as the Day for Direct Action for achieving the goal of Pakistan. Hell was let loose in the form of the worst ever Hindu-Muslim riots in 1946 and 1947, millions of innocent lives were lost, many were uprooted and became refugees and the country was partitioned.

There was hardly any change in the understanding of the people in the post-independence era. The Left Parties in India could have educated the masses on the issues related to their material conditions of living and inherent contradictions therein; but they abdicated their role. Therefore, the politics of vote-catching in India remained, by and large, confined to the arena of pseudo-secularism and communalism. The policies of appeasement of Muslims in the name of secularism strengthened Hindu communalism, enlarging the communal base; and strengthened the BJP. The non-development syndrome which developed during these years (see the author's articles in the *Mainstream* issues of October 19, 1991 and March 28, 1992) further aggravated the situation. The Union Government's policy to assuage the feelings of Muslims following the demolition is also seen as a policy of appeasement of Muslims by a large section of Hindus and therefore weakens the cause of secularism.

The coming together of non-communal leaders to fight

communalism jointly is commendable, but have they examined their mass bases? Can we then be confident that there will not be a split in the Congress-I in the wake of the emerging communal syndrome? Can we then rule out a mid-term poll in the country as a whole? Is there no possibility of an authoritarian non-secular state in this land of ours? Therefore, it seems that the transition to secular, socialist, self-reliant, decentralised and democratic state remains a far cry and may not be able to skip the semi-fascist stage.

*The author, a former Director of the A. N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna, is an Emeritus Professor at the same Institute.*

*Courtesy: Weekly, 'Mainstream',  
New Delhi,  
January 9, 1993.*

# Facets of Communal Fascism

## *Post-Ayodhya Pogroms in Ahmedabad-Surat-Bombay*

*Weeks after the December-January mayhem, scars still run deep among the traumatised people in Ahmedabad, Surat and Bombay—the three urban nerve-centres of western India which had witnessed the worst post-Ayodhya orgy of communal violence. To have a first-hand assessment of the situation in these areas, an IPF-CPI-ML fact-finding team, comprising civil libertarian and member of IPF Advisory Council, Prof. Dalip S. Swami, IPF General Secretary and member of CPI-ML Polit-Bureau, Dipankar Bhattacharya, CPI-ML Central Committee member, ASDC Secretary-General and Member of Parliament from Assam, Dr. Jayanta Rongpi, IPF Central Working Committee member, Shahid Akhtar, and veteran Communist leaders of Gujarat, Dr. J.D. Vohra and Ms Damayantibehn Parekh, visited these centres from March 27 to April 4 and talked to a wide range of people including victims, common citizens, local as well as migrant workers, trade unionists, doctors, journalists, relief workers, political activists, cultural personalities and social scientists. The following report is based on their impressions.*

—Editor.

Organised savage gangs and a collusive state; a medieval mindset and modern means of domination; opportunist politics and a divided, disorganised people; a ruthless market economy and its huge army of victims—the list may sound like a classical enumeration of factors from any textbook analysis of rise of fascism. But then, all these elements were in full play in post-Ayodhya Gujarat and Maharashtra, especially in the three cities of Ahmedabad, Surat and Bombay which witnessed the most sordid and savage ‘celebration’ of communal fascism all through December and January. There has been little element of spontaneity in this violence which can only be described as a meticulously planned and methodically executed series of anti-Muslim pogroms, much like the November 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom in Delhi.

While riots have been a more or less recurring feature of the Indian political scene since the forties and increasingly so since the eighties when unable to sustain the old anti-imperialist nationalist spirit of the freedom movement days or the short-lived aura of chauvinistic pride of the seventies, the Congress too chose to fall back on the 'Hindu' plank, thus unleashing a process of competitive communalisation of the socio-political environment, the violence that rocked Surat and Bombay in December-January has thrown up a much more disturbing pattern. The fascist gangs of Shiv Sena and other communal outfits have been able to show that even without holding official power, they can hold the country's crucial industrial Centres to ransom for weeks together and slaughter people at will.

### *The State Succumbs to the Fascist Offensive*

Central to the December-January anti-Muslim pogroms was the virtual collapse of the state conceding enough space to the fascists to carry out a takeover of sorts. Both in Surat and Bombay, lumpens of the saffron brigade could be seen carrying out well-identified assaults on Muslim houses with the help of electoral rolls. In Vijaynagar-II area of Surat, Hindu houses still carry the label "*Jai Sri Ram—Hindu ka ghar*", the only qualification which saved these houses and their occupants from the savage assaults faced by their Muslim counterparts. In Bombay, the Muslims had to face the brunt of violence twice—in December, scores of Muslim youths were killed primarily in police firing, while in January the attacks were carried out by rampaging Sena squads with the police just looking on.

For any alert and sensitive administration, the outburst of Muslim anger and anguish on hearing the news of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, should not have been difficult to anticipate. The situation was certainly not beyond control and could have been contained easily with sympathetic handling. Yet, the state behaving in a most communal manner, chose only to aggravate the situation by shooting down agitated Muslim youths at will. In most cases, there was no warning or little attempt at controlling the crowd without resorting to gunfire. Moreover, as a group of doctors in KEM Hospital told us, while the first few victims had bullet injuries on their legs, all subsequent cases reported chest and abdominal injuries which shows the police were

shooting to kill, something called 'effective firing' in police parlance. There were also instances of people having been fired from behind or simply called out and shot at.

With the state showing the way, fascist gangs took full advantage of the situation and let loose a systematic campaign of persecution not sparing even well-off Muslim houses and establishments in the posh and elite localities of Bombay. In many a case, the injured had to stay indoors without any treatment, for outside the Sena people were setting ambulances on fire. There was even this shocking case of a Sena gang storming into the KEM Hospital and stabbing a patient to death right outside the operation theatre. Ironically, it turned out to be a case of mistaken identity—the bearded patient was actually a Hindu !

### *Communalisation of the Police*

In Ahmedabad, Surat or Bombay, there are very few reports of any effective intervention of the state, at least before sufficient damage was already done. On the contrary, almost in all affected areas of these three cities we heard almost everybody complaining of collusion between the police and gangs of fascist marauders. In several areas, the police using the curfew schedule as a veritable lever played an instrumental role in spreading and aggravating the violence. More than a month after December 6, on the morning of January 10, the Gomtipur area of Ahmedabad, an area which, we were told, generally remains free from disturbances, was drawn into the vortex of violence when the local police inspector C. H. Chauhan opened fire without any provocation on Muslim workers in Hazi Gaffar Chawl, killing four and injuring 10. The predominantly Muslim hutments in these lanes are encircled by a number of three-storeyed buildings belonging to Hindu families with BJP-VHP connections engaged in hotel and liquor business and underworld activities. Protected by the police, these houses were used by the communal fascists as vantage points for showering bullets on Muslim hutments. In Vijaynagar-II area of Surat, the scene of the most ghastly killings and rapes, the police took hours to reach and intervene and that too, only to gun down two Muslims who were rushing for safety to the nearby Muslim-dominated locality of Vishramnagar.

No wonder then that cutting across religious divisions and

political loyalties, the people from various walks of life we talked to, were almost all extremely critical of the role of the police in Ahmedabad, Surat and Bombay. What has irked the people more is the complete lack of punitive action against the guilty police personnel. And if in any case, action has been taken against any police official, it is not on the basis of public complaints, but only to settle the force's own internal scores and reassure vested interests. Thus, while the Police Chief of Surat, P.K. Datta, who had incurred the wrath of the notorious police-bootlegger nexus, has been eased out, Inspector Chauhan of Gomitpur, Ahmedabad remains firmly entrenched despite a barrage of petitions from the local residents. (The women of this area who came to the April 14 rally in Delhi, however, reported with satisfaction and pride that while the government refuses to take any action, they have recently given a solid drubbing to Chauhan when he had dared enter the *chawl* to terrorise the residents.)

### *Complete Capitulation of the Congress*

If the communal conduct of police constables and inspectors at the lowest level reveals the growing communalisation or at any rate the increasing communal susceptibilities of the police force, no less revealing is the much-lamented 'paralysis of the government or the political leadership'. The role of the two Congress Governments in the two crucial States of Maharashtra and Gujarat has irrefutably exposed the utter unreliability and vulnerability of the Congress in facing the fascist onslaught of the Hindu Right. But for the complete inaction of the Congress Governments in these two States, the death toll could not have been so high in Bombay, Surat and Ahmedabad and there could not possibly be this second bout of killings in January. While the governments exhibited inaction, there were definite evidences of active collusion at the ground level. In many cases, local Congress leaders, including MLAs and municipal corporators and councillors vied with their BJP-Shiv Sena counterparts in directing the pogroms. In Vijaynagar-II area of Surat, the scene of the most savage violence, the marauding mob had the active patronage of both Devsi Singhala and Soma Damsawala, local bosses of the Congress-I and BJP respectively.

In Bombay, signs of the Congress-I's capitulation to the Shiv Sena were evident since the fateful afternoon of December 6 itself. The



Sena supremo, Bal Thackeray, was allowed to get away with all sorts of inflammatory public statements and extremely provocative writings in the Sena mouthpiece, *Samna*. In Assam, the Saikia Government books journalists under TADA on charges of publicising the activities of the outlawed ULFA, but not a finger is raised against Thackeray and his men for fomenting communal passions day in and day out. And this, when Maharashtra is paraded as one of the remaining strongholds of the Congress and have delivered a big blow to the Shiv Sena by splitting it.

### *Communal Carnages in Capitalist Centres*

The facile view that communal violence in independent India is only an anachronistic persistence of a medieval Hindu/Muslim hiatus and hostility and will be eliminated through 'modern development' has long been exposed as untenable and false in the Indian context. Once again, in the post-Ayodhya spate of violence, it is Bombay, India's commercial capital and Surat, one of the fastest growing industrial centres in the country, which emerged as two of the worst affected cities. Moreover, it is not just the pauperised scum of the society, the lumpen proletariat, which took active part in the rioting, what is more striking is that the upcoming middle class, the success-story of the new economic policy, has also shown itself to be one of the key constituencies of communal fascism.

Though in Surat we heard reports of workers too indulging in loot and arson, it is quite clear that both in Bombay and Surat, the working people were basically at the receiving end of the whole violence. And this includes both Muslim and Hindu workers who have migrated to Maharashtra and Gujarat from States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Large contingents of migrant workers in Surat who had fled in the wake of the December carnage had not returned till March. In Bombay, non-Maharashtrian workers, Hindus and Muslims alike, rediscovered the Sena's real identity as organised fascist thugs promoted by the big business of Bombay to crush the working class. Since December, Bombay has witnessed a wholesale flight of migrant workers to their native States. These workers are victims of the Shiv Sena's version of "exist policy" and perhaps many of them will never be able to return to their workplaces in Bombay.

The Hindu Shiv Sena and the so-called Muslim mafia in Bombay are two sides of the same coin, both are offshoots of the Indian version of capitalism where speculation and violence remain the hallmarks of corporate culture. Perhaps there is nothing inherently communal about this crime-capital nexus, but the communal bias of Indian democracy does manifest itself in the double standards it applies to the two sides—the Muslim mafia belongs to the underworld while the Hindu Shiv Sena enjoys full political legitimacy !

### *Saffron Brigade's War Against Women*

One of the most disturbing features of the Surat and Bombay carnages has been the use of rape as a weapon or symbol of communal domination. The reports we heard in Vijaynagar-II area of Surat were the most revolting. The fascist faithfuls of the *Hindu Rashtra* used the bodies of Muslim women as the foremost battleground to wage their 'holy *dharmyudh*'. To complete the humiliation of the 'vanquished Muslim subjects', we were told, some of these rapes were committed under floodlight with video cameras documenting the 'holy crusade'! We also visited a *madrassa* at Kantharia, some 10 kilometres from Varuch, where teachers and staff-members of the adjacent welfare hospital confirmed the report that many girls and women belonging to the Khoja community of Muslims were miraculously rescued by a Sikh truck driver. These dazed women would have been raped to death but for the intervention of this truck driver who picked them up from the roadside of the Vericha Road and took them to the safe custody of the welfare hospital and from there to a Muslim village called Wahulu.

Another alarming aspect of the Bombay-Surat pogroms is the active involvement of sections of the rising middle class. In Bombay, people came in Marutis to loot the Muslim shopping establishments on Mohamammad Ali Road. These Maruti-borne middle class marauders in fact raised the loot to the level of an organised barter with people clamouring for bigger and more favourable shares in the booty, which became 'riot souvenirs' in their perverse parlance. In Bombay, some doctors told us that even their enlightened community is now so badly afflicted with the communal poison that surgeons could be heard abusing Muslim riot-victims right while operating on them.

According to the official media and the political establishment, the situation has returned to normal. Their barometer of normalcy is the Bombay Stock Exchange and the people they want to reassure are the IMF-WB officials, foreign multinationals and business delegations and our own 'investing public'. For people outside the orbit of stock-market society, particularly for the lakhs of workers who have fled Bombay, who have lost their limbs and livelihood, who have been thrown out of the 'security' of their slums, for them and their near and dear ones, it is a new world of 'normalcy'.

The pogroms have stopped, but they stopped only when Bal Thackeray felt his men had taught 'sufficient lessons' to the Bombay Muslims. The blasts have mercifully not been followed by a third bout of riots, but to be sure, these unfortunate events are being systematically utilised to malign and terrorise the Muslim community. Khomeini's men may not have succeeded in executing his *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie, but the Sena people are able to erase A.K. Hangal from the print of the popular Hindi film *Sholay* for Hangal's alleged presence in a function at the Pakistan Consulate in Bombay. The Sena is also preventing Hindu workers hitherto staying in Muslim-dominated or mixed localities from returning to their places so as to physically split the working people of Bombay on Hindu-Muslim lines. In Baroda, the saffron brigade even stormed the proceedings of a seminar on secular democracy on March 28. The Advanis and Thackerays, the Raos and Pawars and their men in the media, however, want us to celebrate this new 'normalcy as long as the dollars continue to flow in and the temperature in Stock Exchanges does not decline dramatically.

### *Secular Camp in Disarray*

Gujarat and Maharashtra are understandably two crucial States in the saffron scheme of things. And for the BJP and its lumpen-military ally, the Shiv Sena, the shortest route to power lies through riots, the most trusted and tested means through which the saffron brigade not only demonstrates its social strength and military might but also consolidates its political base and financial clout. From the BJP-Sena point of view, the rationale of the December-January pogroms is thus

absolutely clear. The collapse of the state and the capitulation of the Congress in this region are only symptomatic of the larger crisis of the Indian state and the rise of Congress-BJP collusion. The fascists were also emboldened by the near-absence of the Centrist Opposition in these two States which again is quite representative of the general state of affairs in the Centrist camp barring perhaps Bihar and, to an extent, Uttar Pradesh.

Other political trends like the once-powerful Dalit movement, trade union struggles and farmers' agitations have either degenerated or are too weak and disoriented to have any impact on the overall situation. In Bombay, two RPI corporators are said to have actively sided with the aggressive Sena brigade. One of them—a lady corporator named Shanti Waria—was reportedly bought over by the Sena to secure the collusion of her Gujarati Harijan base while the Sena attacked a neighbouring Muslim slum in the Tardev area of Bombay. She was later killed in police firing. It is also alleged that large sections of industrial workers have also succumbed to the social pressure of the Sena. In fact, the first major TU demonstration in Bombay since December took place only on April 8. Sharad Joshi's once formidable farmers' movement is apparently on a decline and Joshi is too busy upholding the Dunkel proposals and demanding agrarian liberalisation to bother about the Sena-BJP fascist threat.

### *Towards An Effective Secular Resistance*

The only exceptions to this all-pervading inertia and paralysis of secular forces in Bombay were the forces of the Left, particularly radical Left-leaning groups and individual activists and Left-oriented secular intelligentsia. Activists of the Nivara Hakk Samiti have fought hand in hand with the riot-displaced slum-dwellers in Yogeswari and other areas, playing a highly active role in terms of relief work among riot victims and rehabilitation and resettlement of riot-affected people. A group of doctors with the KEM Hospital and activists of the Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors displayed exemplary courage and dedication not only in fighting against the communalisation of the medical community and campuses but more importantly through initiatives like setting up of relief camps right in riot-ravaged slums and reaching out to the injured who did not dare come to the

hospitals in the prevailing atmosphere of terror and insecurity. Among the Left parties in the State, the Lal Nishan Party-Leninist has launched an organised anti-communal campaign in Pune, Satara, Kolhapur, Jalgaon, Sholapur and some other districts, but such efforts are yet to crystallise into any effective political resistance to the communalised climate and Right reactionary domination in State politics.

During our visit to Gujarat and Maharashtra we could talk to a wide range of Muslim people—men and women, young and old, from urban toilers and shopowners to students and thinkers. Like in other parts of India, here too, we could feel the total disillusionment of the community not only with the state system and the political establishment but also with the so-called leadership and representatives of the community itself, from the Shahabuddins and Imam Bukharis to the Haji Mastan and Dawood Ibrahims. Despite all sorts of provocations, the community has kept its cool and there is greater urge than any time before among the Muslim youth, intelligentsia and working people to align themselves with the Left movement and the revolutionary quest for a secular democratic India.

Apart from being the worst theatre of communal fascism, Gujarat and Maharashtra also have the dubious distinction of being key laboratories for the IMF-WB sponsored new economic order. The once renowned textile industry of Bombay and Ahmedabad is caught in an acute crisis and in the land of salt satyagraha, 15,000 acres of Kandla land are being leased out to the Cargill Corporation of USA for salt production. Faced with the combined onslaught of communal fascism and imperialist economic offensive, popular resentment is naturally on the rise and the governments of both Sharad Pawar and Chimanbhai Patel, the notorious target of the 1974 Nav Nirman movement, are too discredited to contain this growing mass resentment.

While the saffron fascists are trying hard to cash in on this restlessness and strengthen their vicious grip over the masses, the disillusionment has also led to the rise of sustained grassroots activism on various issues in different pockets, not only under the banners of all-India Left parties but also of organisations like the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the Lal Nishan Party-Leninist and certain socialist and Dalit formations. An effective secular resistance against the current upsurge

of communal fascism and Right reaction demands closer coordination among these forces, of course, with a Left-oriented political perspective. And the present crisis does also contain this possibility.

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# The Way of the Law

*Wanted, legislation to counter Hindutva*

A. G. Noorani

“It would be wrong to call the BJP a Hindu party” the Bharatiya Janta party’s then president, L. K. Advani, proudly told the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in London (*Organiser*, August 5, 1989). A year later, he earmarked on his blood-trailed yatra whose ruinous consequences are there for all to see. Its end is yet in sight. Indeed, after the recent lull, it is to be resumed for the final bid for power.

Thanks to the media build-up, Advani’s pronouncements have escaped scrutiny by the tests of the law. He categorically said in Bombay on September 30, 1990, in the inspiring company of Bal Thackeray: “We feel that they (the minorities) must accept India as their nation and must accept the culture (read: religion) here.” He clearly implied two things; first, that they had not accepted India “as their nation” and, next, that his concept of nationalism and loyalty to India necessarily entailed acceptance of *his* conception of “culture”.

Both propositions are clearly violative of Section 153B of the Indian Penal Code — “any imputation that any class of persons cannot by reason of their being members of any religious...group...bear true the true faith and allegiance to the Constitution.” This is clause (a) of the Section. Clause (c) goes further to penalise “any assertion, counsel, plea or appeal concerning the obligation of any class of person, by reason of their being members of any religious...group...and such assertion, counsel, plea or appeal is likely to cause disharmony...”

You have in the BJP not a political party with a political, economic and social programme, but a hate group which is itself controlled from outside by a notorious, fascist body which has been repeatedly indicted by commissions of inquiry for instigating riots against Muslims as well as Christians — the Rashtriya Swayamsewak

Sangh (RSS). It is as if in the United States the John Birch Society were to emerge as the leading Opposition party and its leaders paid obeisance to the chief of the Ku Klux Klan.

Can the law combat such people? Both extreme answers would be wrong — to dub the law futile, or to rely entirely on the law. Recently, leaders of the Government, Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao and Minister for Human Resource Development Arjun Singh, have pleaded for legislation. Their pleas acquire added force when viewed in the historical context. *The plea for legislation to combat the BJP's poisonous cry of Hindutva to reshape the secular Indian polity is akin to the successful plea for legislation 25 years ago to combat the Jan Sangh's identical cry in the name of "Indianisation". That experience is very relevant today.*

Then, as now, the Sangh *parivar's* motivation was purely electoral politics. After Independence, the number of communal riots declined steeply. The first major riot occurred in Jabalpur in 1961. Their frequency increased from 1964. The Jan Sangh prospered. Its membership of the Lok Sabha jumped from 14 in the 1962 elections to 35 in the 1967 elections. It fell to 22 in 1971 because of Indira Gandhi's campaign against it. The Jan Sangh won respectability when Jayaprakash Narayan accepted its support and that of the RSS to fight Indira Gandhi's creeping fascism and thus became a member of the Janta Party Government. She and the Sangh made each other respectable. On her return to power in 1980, she decided to steal their Hindu ethos. Rajiv Gandhi tried to follow this line and lost both ways.

The political lessons must not be forgotten in the quest for legislation. *A sound, secular, political and economic programme based on social justice of the kind Indira Gandhi promised in 1971 is the best weapon against the Sangh parivar. Sadly she failed to deliver and turned fascist. The parivar's rhetoric today is only slightly bolder than in the 1960s. The consistency is as impressive as the challenge is grim. It bears recalling.*

Although the Indianisation resolution was adopted by the Jan Sangh in 1969, its leaders had been propagating the theme much earlier. The resolution spoke of a revival of the "sense of nationalism"—as



defined by the party, of course. Nationalism was identified with culture and culture with Hinduism. A.B. Vajpayee expounded the concept enthusiastically in his presidential address in 1969. Balraj Madhok, his predecessor, was another exponent.

As Madhok put it, Indian culture “is essentially Vedic Hindu culture,” and “every Indian whatever his religion may be, is a Hindu.” The Sanghs nationalism is not territorial but cultural in basis. “The Indian nation is basically a cultural unit and not a political unit.” Not everyone born in India is an Indian. He is an Indian who subscribes to Indian culture, which is “the essentially Vedic Hindu culture” and such an Indian is a Hindu “whatever his religion may be.” There was no room for any other culture. The Jan Sangh’s policy statement declared “any talk of composite culture.....is not only untrue but also dangerous for it tends to weaken national unity and encourage fissiparous tendencies.”

This is the hub of the matter. *Acceptance of India’s composite culture is at the heart of the concept of secularism.* Without it, secularism is reduced to a husk. RSS supremo M. S. Golwalkar was blunt: “The one hope of redemption is nationalism which, in the case of Hindusthan, is Hinduism. he said on February 22, 1970. Madhok wrote a book, *Indian Nationalism*, in 1970 when he was still a leading member of the Jan Sangh, as a founder and former president. “There is no sense in making a fetish of the word Hindu. Instead of forcing it on those who do not like it today, it should be popularised as a synonym of ‘Bharatiya’ in writing and speaking. But that can be possible only when the enthusiasts of this world themselves grasp the broad national content of this and stop talking of Hindu religion and Hindu community which lowers it to the position of Islam or Christianity. Christians and Muslims living in India are also Hindus if India and Indian culture command their first and foremost allegiance. They all form part of Hindu Rashtra or the Indian Nation.” This is precisely the BJP’s line today.

It was in this clime that the National Integration Council was revived on June 20, 1968 and went on to make recommendations for legislation to combat such propaganda. That legislation struck at the grosser forms but did not touch the key issue—denial of India’s composite culture.

On April 4, 1980, the Jan Sangh members of the Janata Party agreed to a formula which pledged them to accept *unconditionally* and strive to preserve the composite culture and secular state established in our country and nation not based on religion". It was drafted in the light of the Jan Sangh's record. The juxtaposition of "the composite culture and secular state" was deliberate. The two go together. Eight years later, on April 8, 1988, Advani said "emphasis on the composite character of Indian culture is generally an attempt to disown its essentially Hindu spirit and content". In May 1990, at an RSS conclave in Coimbatore, he said "India's culture is essentially a Hindu culture."

It is one thing for a person to express this opinion. It is another for him to impose it on others and worse still to seek votes on that basis and on the programme that if voted to power, this view "should be reflected in the various policies, programmes, attitudes and positions we take" (*BJP: New Insights* by the writer, *Frontline*, October 13, 1990).

This is not a matter of religion. It is purely electoral politics. Immediately on the passing of the Palampur resolution on Ayodhya on June 11, 1989, Advani said, "I am sure it will translate into votes." In December 1989 after the general elections, he expressed satisfaction that the issue had contributed to the BJP's success. On February 24, 1991, as India teetered towards another election, he was confident that the issue would "influence the electoral verdict in favour of the BJP." On June 18, 1991 he made this pathetic confession: "*Had I not played the Ram factor effectively, I would have definitely lost from the New Delhi constituency.*" In July 1992, he shocks a meeting in the Lok Sabha Speaker's chambers by saying, "You must recognise the fact that from two seats in Parliament in 1985 we have come to 117 seats in 1991. This has happened primarily because we took up this issue."

Must the law be powerless to check such shameless exploitation of "the Ram factor" for electoral ends? A recent article in the RSS' *Panchajanya* reveals the line the Sangh *parivar* will follow in the next elections. It deserves to be set out *in extenso* because it bears on the proposed legislation — India is a Hindu *Rashtra*; those residing in the country are Hindus even if many of them believed in different religions; those following Islam are 'Mohammadi Hindus', Christians are 'Christian Hindus', while Sikhs are Sikh Hindus. If the Muslims do

not accept the concept of Hindu Rashtra, he would tell them that there was no difference in the three terms : Hindu Rashtra, Bharatiya Rashtra and Indian nation.

*This is a clear admission that the BJP does not believe in an Indian nationalism superseding communal loyalties be they of the majority or any of the minority communities.* For good measure Advani wrote that if Muslims were to identify themselves with the concept of *Hindutva*, there would not be any reason for riots to take place. (*The Times of India*, January 30, 1993). This exposes the game completely. It is sheer blackmail. He is confident the game will work. On February 21 he said the BJP has the organisational machinery to turn the “pro-BJP wave” into votes. Advani is obsessed with votes and the Prime Minister’s office and will not hesitate to exploit religion to that end even if it means bloodshed.

Though Jayaprakash Narayan had accepted the Sangh’s support in 1975, in 1979 he woke up to the Sangh’s menace. His warnings in the 1960s are relevant. A National Convention against Communalism over which he presided in 1969 said of the RSS: “A secret paramilitary organisation like this is inconsistent with the mores and norms of a democratic society.” In his presidential address he warned, “Some like the RSS might do it openly by identifying the Indian Nation with the Hindu Rashtra, other might do it more subtly. But in every such case, such identification is pregnant with national disintegration because members of the other communities can never accept the position of second-class citizens.”

The reasons he cited in denunciation of the RSS and the Jan Sangh have a contemporary relevance: “*Apparently emboldened by the timidity of the secular forces*, it has thrown its veil away and has emerged as the real power behind and controller of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh. The secular protestation of the Jan Sangh will never be taken seriously unless it cuts the bonds that tie it so firmly to the RSS machine. Nor can the RSS be treated as a cultural organisation as long as it remains the mentor and effective manipulator of a political party.” Every word of this indictment holds true today.

JP was a member of the NIC. In his speech to the first meeting of

its Standing Committee on October 26, 1968, he criticised the secular parties for not taking up the challenge of the Jan Sangh and the RSS. JP emphasised “the composite character of Indian nationhood,” to quote from the official minutes, and urged the NIC to take up the matter. The Standing Committee approved of a mass movement. The National Integration Samitis set up in universities and public sector undertakings were pledged to accept “that Indian culture is a composite culture down from many streams and developed over many centuries.”

The NIC adopted in 1968 a Declaration of Objectives rather like a National Charter. Its Standing Committee issued a statement on October 16, 1969. The Jan Sangh’s representative proposed amendments which nobody could accept. He walked out. The Committee’s statement endorsed “joint mass campaigning” by all political parties in favour of communal amity and said : “We are firmly opposed to the denunciation of any minority community as being unpatriotic or an agency of any foreign power. Equally, do we condemn the spread of the idea that any community requires to be Indianised or else it should be forced to leave the country.”

An all-party conference was convened under the auspices of the NIC on November 3, 1969. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi presided over it. It adopted a statement reiterating denunciation of the Jan Sangh’s Indianisation plan, and set up an organisation committee “to carry forward this joint mass campaign” in support of the themes set out in the statement.

*Legislation followed as part of this process in the implementation of the recommendations of the NIC.* Two statutes were enacted. One was the Criminal and Election Laws Amendment Act, 1969. It substituted for Section 153 A of the Penal Code another provision in two clauses which make it an offence to promote inter-group disharmony on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, language, caste, and so on , or to commit any act “which is prejudicial to the maintenance of harmony” between them “and which disturbs or is likely to disturb the public tranquility.” This latter clause certainly covers Advani’s rath yatra and the BJP’s current campaign as well.

To Section 505 of the Penal Code was added a clause penalising circulation of any statement or rumour which is likely to promote ill-will

between the groups. Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 was amended to make conviction of offences under Sections 153A and 505 grounds for disqualification for membership of legislatures — but *not* conviction under Article 153B.

Next came the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1972 which added one more clause (c) to Section 153A to punish persons who organise drills to train participants in the use of criminal violence against other communities. A new provision was added — Section 153B. It punishes anyone who makes imputations against any community of disloyalty to India on grounds of membership of that community or advocates denial of citizenship rights to them or makes any plea or offers any counsel to a community which is likely to cause inter-communal disharmony.

The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 was enacted to ban organisations which preach secession and to punish their members individually. The definition of “unlawful association” was widened by the Act of 1972 to include any organisation “which has for its object any activity which is punishable” under Section 153A or 153B of the Penal Code “or which encourages or aids persons to undertake any such activity, or of which the members undertake any such activity.”

The background bears recalling. On April 3, 1948, the Constitution Assembly passed a resolution expressing the opinion that “no communal organisation which by its constitution or by the exercise of discretionary power vested in any of its offices or organs, admits to or excludes from its membership persons on grounds of religion, race and caste, or any of them, should be permitted to engage in any activities other than those essential for the *bona fide* religious, cultural, social and educational needs of the community, and that all steps, legislative and administrative, necessary to prevent such activities should be taken.”

In July 1948 the Union Cabinet decided: 1. to take no notice of petitions by communal bodies, 2. grant no interviews to them and, 3. not to confer state grants or patronage on them. In 1953 the constitutional position was considered and it was felt the matter was best left to the States. An Unlawful Associations Bill was drafted in 1955 but was not moved in Parliament. Its emphasis was on acts of violence. On June 1,

1961, in the wake of the Jabalpur riots, the Chief Ministers considered the matter anew, but nothing came of it.

The Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 1989 recast Section 8 of the parent Act of 1951 but did *not* add conviction under Section 153B as an electoral disqualification. *The lacuna remains, still.* Conviction under Section 125 of that Act is a ground for disqualification. *But Section 125 has remained unamended since it was inserted in 1961.* It reads thus: “Any person who in connection with an election under this Act promotes or attempts to promote on grounds of religion, race, caste, community or language feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of the citizens of India shall be punishable with imprisonment...” This provision is narrower than even Sections 153A and B of the Penal Code. There is clearly a case for a second look at the law.

The British Public Order Act, 1936 was amended in 1976 to punish any person who publishes or “uses in any public place or at any public meeting words which are threatening, abusive or insulting in a case where, having regard to all the circumstances, hatred is likely to be stirred up against any racial group” by those words.

As Prof. David Riesman pointed out, “in the fascist tactic, defamation becomes a form of verbal sadism to be used in the early stages of the conflict, before other forms of sadism are safe.” Advani’s utterances, exemplified in his *Panchajanya* article and in his speeches, reflect this very tactic. The issue is how to make such utterances illegal before worse befalls you. Is it not “insulting” to any group to be asked to shed its identity? Even in the worst days of princely rule in India, not one Hindu ruler asked his Muslim subjects to call themselves Hindus. That was left to the BJP upstarts inebriated by the mere prospect of power. Whether this form of insult leads to hatred between different classes, as British law provides, is less relevant in India than that it does offend the sentiments of the targeted group and makes it feel insecure. Is the law so devoid of resource as not to be able to reach such disgraceful utterances?

The realisation of the inadequacy of the existing law led Narasimha Rao to make his famous remarks at Tirupati on April 16, 1992. Participants in an election “must present a secular face and a

secular choice,” he said. “It is only logical to expect that a regular democracy should be run by secular political parties. Non-secular parties should have no place in the conduct of a secular democratic state. Any electoral contest between secular and non-secular parties goes against the spirit of the Constitution. Besides, such a contest is neither fair nor healthy.” He added: Any election in which an issue tends to wage one community against another is an anti-thesis of secular democracy.”

By his own words, the Prime Minister has his work cut out for him — amend Section 125 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, to make it an offence to advocate superiority or imposition of one culture over another, or question the identity of any group or propagate in any form a state which would reflect the ethos or culture of one community alone. Sections 153A or 153B of the Penal Code should also be amended on these lines and so should Section 8A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

In his famous speech in the Lok Sabha on March 11, 1993, the Prime Minister admitted that steps taken in the past to check the influence of religion in politics had not been very successful. He pledged himself to take whatever constitutional or legal measures were necessary to that end. At Surajkund on March 27, he announced that the Government proposed to bring forward a comprehensive legislation “to prevent the use of religion for political purposes. The principal is incontestable.

Arjun Singh made the same point in his note to the Congress Working Committee on “Specific Points for Combating Communalism.” The procedure he recommended — disqualification by a judicial inquiry before the date of the poll — is a matter of argument.

Section 123 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 lists ‘corrupt practices.’ One of them, clause (3), is an appeal to the electorate to vote on grounds of religion or use of religious symbols. Another, clause (3A), replicates Section 125 — promotion of communal enmity. These provisions should be recast on the lines mentioned above for amending Section 125.

In his judgement on April 8, 1991 Justice Hosbet Suresh of the Bombay High Court set aside the election of Shiv Sena candidate

Subhash Desai and disqualified him. He also censured Bal Thackeray : “His appeal is to Hindu communalism in the name of Hindu tradition. The idea is to divide the society on the basis of communal politics, all Hindu uniting together to support the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance, as against the others who might support the other parties. All those who support him are nationalists and all those who are opposed to his idea of *Hindutva* are anti-nationalists.”

There were a few such good judgments. If the Supreme Court were to hear the pending appeals and pronounce its judgment urgently, now that two years have elapsed, it would facilitate legislation. The Government must urge the court to do so.

Such legislation should be capped by a parliamentary resolution reiterating acceptance of India’s composite culture as an essential part of its secular polity. To sum up, Sections 153A and B of the Penal Code, and Sections 8, 123 and 125 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, should be amended suitably to bring within their ambit speeches which plead for *Hindutva*.

Legislation alone will not suffice, however. A constitutional amendment is also necessary. The concept of India’s composite culture as an inseparable aspect of its secularism should be woven into the Constitution by defining the essentials of secularism as a directive principle of state policy.

In 1963, the form of oath of affirmation to be made by candidates for elections to legislatures and for all holders of public office, was amended to make them pledge themselves to uphold “the sovereignty and integrity of India.” To this should be added its “composite culture comprising the diverse and distinct contributions made to it by the various regions and communities, linguistic and religious, in India.”

On April 18, M. M. Joshi said *Hindutva* would be the basis for the establishment of a powerful India. That is the kind of plea which the law should strike at.

*Courtesy*: Fortnightly, ‘Frontline’,  
Madras,  
June 4, 1993.



# Protean Forms of Communalism in India

*N. A. Karim*

A nervous calm has slowly returned to the cities and towns that were rocked by riots in the wake of Ayodhya. The embers of suspicion and hatred are still smouldering while the issues remain unsolved to ensure a lasting peace in the country.

Considerations of internal conflict and power-game prevented the Congress Working Committee meeting which was calculatedly diluted thin by inviting a large number of other functionaries, from making a close analysis of the whole episode and finding out as to what went wrong and where. Even in the plan of action of the Committee to fight communalism there is little sense of direction to inspire secularists. The meeting was more concerned with reiterating trust in the leadership of Narasimha Rao than making an objective study of what happened in Ayodhya on December 6 and all over the country as a consequence of it. The pro-Rao group succeeded, at least for the time being, in silencing Rajn Singh and his supporters in their ill-concealed objective of crediting the Prime Minister on this issue though he stands self-posed as a weak-willed, pusillanimous person.

Therefore, the curtain does not seem to have finally rung down on the tragedy of Ayodhya. Those who think otherwise have not read the full script of this well-crafted political play. What we witnessed immediately after the demolition at Delhi were scenes of comedy, and provide the necessary comic relief to the mounting tragedy. But the play is by no means ended. When the curtain rises again the scene might be Mathura. It can possibly be Varanasi. This play with a minimum of three Acts might end with the coronation of Advani at Delhi.

This is not to be construed as imagination of a fevered brain. The announcement of the drama will be the same if strong secular forces capable of confronting and deflecting or defeating the unprincipled and unscrupulous combined forces of communalism from the highly

destructive path along which they triumphantly march forward, do not emerge and empower themselves quickly. Because their destination is clear. The Ayodhya incidents on Sunday (December 6, 1992) have proved beyond any shadow of doubt that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the *RSS Parivar* will go to any length to achieve their ultimate goal. The BJP's behaviour on what is now known as Black Sunday at Ayodhya was a shocking revelation for all those who fondly hoped that the BJP might not travel the whole distance with the *Sangh Parivar*. What was destroyed first in Ayodhya was not the Babri Masjid but the whole credibility of the BJP. Now, therefore, there are no illusions about their intentions and behaviour.

But what is not known is the extent to which those secular parties and the self-styled secular ones will go to meet this growing menace of communalism. Serious doubts have arisen as to the distance the Congress, which is the oldest political party in this country that rules at the Centre and in several States, would travel to meet the threat of communalism. One thing seems to be absolutely clear. They are not prepared to go fully along with the Left parties like the two Communist parties. The Prime Minister could, like others, only watch the hourly developments at Ayodhya on Sunday with bated breath till it disastrously exploded. This inexplicable inaction of the Prime Minister at the decisive moment was more a matter of surprise than anger for many in this country. More than the destruction of the mosque this utterly passive attitude of the government pained them most.

What was the political calculation behind such a stolid stand of the Central Government, people are still at a loss to imagine fully. The constitutional proprieties and niceties that the Prime Minister was particular to observe in this case, had been cheerfully given the go-by on a few occasions in the past. That he fearfully dithered on the brink of this tragedy was there for all to see. This, in a matter for which he had the clear mandate of the National Integration Council (NIC) and the wholehearted backing of all the Opposition parties except the BJP, is a little incomprehensible. Moreover, the orders of the Supreme Court were unambiguous and iron-clad.

Apparently the Prime Minister enjoyed the support of his Cabinet colleagues, and the whole Congress Parliamentary Party was

hind him. If there was any subdued dissent in the ruling party it was gely on the score of lack of nerve on the part of the Prime Minister in aling with the impending situation. That the tragic happenings at odhya on Sunday which created communal tremors all over the untry could have been avoided, in the feeling of a large number of ople.

The destruction of the mosque and the installation of the idols thin a short time was undoubtedly the result of meticulous planning d ruthless execution. Nobody is in any serious doubt about the llusion of the Uttar Pradesh Government with the VHP, RSS, jrang Dal combine in this diabolic plan to destroy the structure. The moving attitude of the District Magistrate to allow the police and ra-military forces to try to prevent the assault, in spite of repeated quests, reinforces this suspicion. Later a good number of them ned to cheer leaders in the 'operation demolition'.

It was a political 'harakiri' that the Kalyan Singh Government of ttar Pradesh committed. But the calculation of the BJP was that this 'lf-immolation' would pay rich dividends of votes in all the States in the ys to come. And more important, the fulfilment of the promise of odhya would enhance their credibility with their constituency and ight derive wider support which would propel them to the seat of wer at Delhi. Whether this calculation will come true depends on rious factors. However, Indian politics will not be the same as it was fore December 6, 1992 at Ayodhya which is a watershed in the long ntinuing fight between the none-too-insignificant forces of secularism d the fast proliferating communal elements.

When normalcy of a lasting kind is established, the question at will arise is whether the government at the Centre would take steps redeem the pledge of rebuilding the demolished mosque. The strident omise, though given in panic, was hailed as the right response of such a spicable desecration and destruction of an old place of worship. The osque was demolished on the specious argument that a temple dicated to Lord Ram stood on the same site. The idols that were rreptitiously placed under the dome of Babri Masjid in 1949 have now en promptly installed under a makeshift roof erected on the heap of bble of demolished mosque. This was evidently done to pre-empt any

attempt to rebuild the mosque on the same site. More than the demolition it is this symbolic erection that has complicated the problem.

If it is to be rebuilt as promised by the Prime Minister on the same site within one year along with a magnificent Sri Ram temple in the vicinity, all sections have to be persuaded first in a better climate of understanding and amity among all religious groups. This is an ideal that is to be sedulously worked for, making use of the present mood of indignation and regret in a large section of the people. Without that goodwill it is impossible to redeem the pledge of the Prime Minister. Otherwise the see-saw between Hindus and Muslims of the country on the Masjid-Mandir controversy will continue indefinitely and become a festering wound on the body politic.

What are the root causes for this tragedy at Ayodhya on Sunday (December 6, 1992) that was a shocking manifestation of an acute illness which has gripped our polity? 'Rabid communalism' might be the answer of many to this question. On a deeper probing of the causes of this tragedy it becomes clear that it is a deepening crisis of political morality that brought about this shameful episode. People are not inclined today even to think of any morality in the context of politics. Even thieves have their own morality, but what we see today in Indian politics is its total disappearance and the consequent darkness. Not even the top leaders care to stand by the words they publicly and solemnly utter. On the other hand, many of them are willing to act against what they professed and pronounced in public.

The statements of the top BJP leaders in the last one year on the question of Ayodhya are a bewildering maze of truths, half-truths and utter lies issued to suit the expediency of the situation. This brazen-faced self-contradiction, both in words and actions, point to the abysmal depth of immorality into which our politics is hurtling. Therefore, politicians as a class have lost their credibility. The temerity to speak and act against the undertakings solemnly given in affidavits to the highest court of judiciary of the country is the result of this total lack of morality in politics. How can we hope to have rule of law when Chief Ministers and Ministers who have ceremoniously sworn to uphold constitutional ideals and principles themselves give the lead to defy and trample upon them? Anarchy is the natural consequence of this. India even before

adhyas has been described by an eminent person as a “functioningarchy”. If the present dangerous drift is allowed unchecked India willn fall into a state of unqualified anarchy.

Our legislatures often make laws which are sometimes allowedust any honest attempt at implementation with all the seriousnessected of a state which means business in administrative matters. vs like the TADA and NSA made for specific purposes are etimes misused to settle scores with political enemies. This is indeed ct of Indian political life. This irreverent and cavalier attitude of our iticians to law is the bane of our public life. Even the traffic rules are re honoured in the breach than in the observance in this country. In developed societies we see greater adherence to existing rules and s, and those who violate are seriously dealt with. This respect for is a clear index of the state of civil order and civilisation of any dern society.

That we are indulging in this very costly communal conflict at a e when the economic life of this country is passing through the most icult period since independence is the unmitigating tragic aspect of whole developments. For those who failed in delivering the good to people this is a highly effective diversionary tactic. The Kalyan Singh vernment that failed to solve the serious problems facing the State ame something of a ‘dry martyr’ overnight. This halo might help him tage a came-back with greater glory and power if the highly charged imunal atmosphere does not change for a better and saner climate.

the tax-paying, law-abiding, honest-working citizens this imunal politics is a curse that withers all their hopes for a better ire—reasonable education for their children, better food and shelter , above all, a peaceful life which is constantly threatened by violent ns of politics. Violence on the part of political parties invites greater ence from the law and order machinery, the victims of which are ays the innocent poor. Therefore this vicious situation created by the r disregard for laws and scant respect for morality in public life must nded in a long-term effort to cleanse Indian polity of its accumulated imunal filth.

In communalism, as in pornography, there are soft and hard ns. The soft variety which can be called “liberal communalism” has

been in existence in this country all the time. It is perhaps in all other multi-religious societies where the followers of a particular faith feel that they are a distinct group in the matter of religious belief. They might even consider themselves as the followers of the only true religion in the world. The awareness, the degree of which may vary depending on the intensity of the faith, does not prevent them from joining together in all social and political matters of the nation as equal partners. Matters regarding religious faith and observance are strictly confined to homes and places of worship of the respective communities. This is what I mean by "liberal communalism".

But there is a second variety which promotes the idea among various religious groups that since they belong to a particular religion their social, economic, political and cultural environments are also different from the followers of other religions in the same country. This false ideology gives rise to sectarian politics like, say, in our country, Hindu politics, Muslim politics, Sikh politics, etc. This stage of communalism can be called "sectarian communalism".

There is yet a third stage which is a natural development of the second sectarian variety. This inculcates in the minds of the followers of separate religions the idea that not only their religious interests but also their other political, economic, social and cultural interests which are unique can never be fully protected as long as other religious faiths exist. Therefore they are to be treated as hostile forces and fought against. Based on the philosophy of hatred for other religionists, this virulent form of communalism takes the garb of crypto-fascism. This can be termed as "fascist communalism." The free play of this kind of communalism disrupts society and pushes the country into a state of continual civil strife and might result in genocide.

To avoid this fate befalling our country we have to make necessary changes in the Constitution so that the electoral process does not churn out the poison of communalism along with the nectar of democracy. Even the politics of struggle for independence produced that poison of communal hatred which resulted in the partition of the country. But then there was Mahatma Gandhi to save us from the catastrophe and heal the wounds in the minds of the people in the process of which he sacrificed himself at the altar of communal harmony

which was a cherished ideal of the Mahatama. Then there was Pandit Nehru who with a rare vision and courage nurtured the new-won freedom to its full democratic health.

With the disappearance of these stalwarts from the scene our democratic polity lost its old vitality and politics became a game of numbers devoid of any idealism or commitment. To capture power all kinds of unprincipled alliances were entered into making all kinds of promises to the people which were as easily forgotten as they were made.

When political parties lost their credibility by failing miserably in fulfilling the promises made to the people, they began to appeal to their religious sentiments and exploit them in the most cynical manner. In a country where two thirds of the people are illiterate and steeped in ignorance and socio-economic backwardness, this was easily possible as 'folk history' full of prejudices and social distortions came handy to their ignoble purpose of misleading the people. Will we able to reverse this trend? The future of this country depends on the answer to this question.

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*Courtesy: Weekly, 'Mainstream',  
New Delhi,  
January 16, 1993.*

# Kashmir and Conscience

*Nikhil Chakravartty*

In the brochures and posters of Indian tourism, Kashmir still figures with its enchanting attractions. In reality, however, the picturesque Valley of Kashmir is becoming out of bounds for the peace-loving citizens of this country.

In a sense, Kashmir today represents the gravest challenge to Indian democracy—perhaps much more than what happened at Ayodhya on December 6 and all that followed. If the bomb blast in Bombay on March 12 and the blow-up of the bomb storage in Calcutta that came in its wake, announced the arrival of the mafia to disrupt our democracy, don't the bloody clashes in the Kashmir Valley presage the departure of its most significant part from our Republic?

The crisis in Kashmir has been worsening year after year. Without going into the protracted history of neglect, high-handedness, corruption and systematic subversion of the democratic order which the Centre has perpetrated in that State for forty years now, one may take the unseating of a duly elected government in 1984—planned and carried out with cold-blooded precision by people some of whom today claim to be specialists in the subject—as the last milepost along the dismal trail of progressive alienation of the people of the Valley from the rest of this country.

This 1984 coup by which Farooq Abdullah's duly elected government was overthrown by the minions from the Delhi Durbar blatantly arranging defection of MLAs with a Governor specially sent out for the operation, shattered the confidence of the common people in the Valley in the Centre's commitment to democratic functioning in Kashmir. And it was during the rickety administration of the Centrally-propped up regime of Ghulam Shah that the first outbreak of communal violence took place in the Valley.



While this monstrosity of a Ministry could not hold out for long and the Governor's Raj resumed in this sensitive frontier State, a patch-up between Farooq's National Conference and the Congress brought into office a coalition Ministry which could neither forge a unified front nor win the confidence of the people. Inevitably the militant groups gained in influence and the first serious threat of secession could be discerned. The illumination on the Pakistan Day (August 14) and black-out on Indian Independence Day (August 15) in 1989 should have opened the eyes of the political leaders, but the Kashmir crisis was hardly examined in detail by either the Congress or the Janata Dal Governments. By the time of the Republic Day January 26, 1990, the crisis had reached the boiling point, and the only thing that could be achieved was the hoisting of the tricolour. Meanwhile, no elected government could be restored as the State Assembly itself had been dissolved, and since then the Governor's Rule has continued uninterrupted requiring enabling constitutional amendments being periodically passed by Parliament. In other words, it has turned out to be an open confrontation between New Delhi and the people in the Valley, with the militants assuming their leadership.

The last three years has been one of unrelieved unwisdom in the Centre's dealing with Kashmir. Even when the Pandit families began to leave their native place in the Valley, there was no waking-up on the part of the Centre neither at the government level nor at the political party level. The accretion of strength of the militants was ascribed to the Pakistan Government's generous backing of them and at one stage, the Central leaders accused Pakistan of waging a proxy war against India in Kashmir. But what steps were taken by the government and the political parties to retrieve the fast dwindling faith of the people of the Valley in the Indian leadership?

The only tangible evidence of New Delhi's concern and interest in Kashmir was the despatch of forces, more and more in greater numbers. The para-military forces as they are called, are for all practical purposes engaged in waging a virtual war in the Valley. For sometime, the public in this country was made to believe by the government that all the strident outcry by the human-rights activists was inspired by interested circles in the West which back Pakistan and run down India. But when many of the atrocities began to be exposed in the Indian media

by a whole body of intrepid Indian journalists, that official alibi could hardly hold water. Isolated cases of exaggerated reporting were highlighted by official circles to desperately cover up the shocking state of affairs in the Valley.

Today, the government seems to be living in a pathetic world of unreality insofar as Kashmir is concerned. At the beginning of this year, it was given out that the government would be coming out with a new set of proposals for Kashmir. In fact, the Prime Minister had earlier hinted in a “package” for Kashmir. It was given out that Farooq Abdullah was being brought back as this might help to win over at least a sizeable section of the public which alone could be turned into a foothold for resuming the political process.

Farooq Abdullah himself stated on March 15 that there was “definite rethinking in Delhi for a solution to the Kashmir problem”. It was changed and General Krishna Rao was brought back to hold the post from which he had stepped down in 1990. Farooq might have been useful in establishing contact with the militants, as he is known to have had personal rapport with some of the JKLF leaders abroad. But New Delhi did not wake up and Farooq Abdullah got fed up and just within a month of his optimistic statement, he withdrew from the scene bitterly attacking the Central Government for being “unable to understand the gravity of the situation”; and “even if they do, they are clearly incapable of taking any firm decision.” It is worth noting that this statement by Farooq Abdullah came three days after the Union Home Minister’s assurance to the press in Chandigarh on April 15 that the government was in the process of framing “a definite policy” on Kashmir.

Farooq Abdullah might have slunk away to hibernate abroad, but what is the record of the government since then? The security force bosses in Srinagar have been claiming that their relentless operation had crippled the militant outfit and soon there would be a turn for the better in the situation. The crackdowns are being conducted with a degree of ruthlessness never resorted to before by the Indian forces, not even in Nagaland. Young and old, men and women nobody are spared as Indian reporters have reported in recent weeks in our media. The criminal record of the para-military forces in Sopore in January would have inflamed the wrath of any people anywhere in the world. And in the

very week of the Home Minister's statement promising a "definite policy" in Kashmir, in that very week the security forces indulged in another round of beastly incendiarism destroying a good part of the historic Lal Chowk in Srinagar.

This had its inevitable repercussion within the administration itself. The State police force revolted when one policeman was killed in custodial death by the Centre's paramilitary forces on April 22. The police took out a protest march to make a representation to the UN office in Srinagar, and the next day the revolt of the policemen was joined by their Kashmiri officers. Could there be a more glaring proof of complete alienation of the people from the Central authority—alienation assuming the character of active antagonism?

We, all of us, have to hang down our heads in shame for all the follies and crimes that are taking place in Kashmir today. Not only the government but it is amazing, the leaders of different parties in Parliament have not cared to demand even a full-scale discussion on the grave situation in Kashmir. What do we gain by pleading with the USA to declare Pakistan a terrorist state when we ourselves have forfeited the trust of the people of the Kashmir Valley who on the very morrow of independence had fought with bare arms to push back the armed marauders from Pakistan?

India's democracy can never sustain itself by stamping the jackboot on the people in any part of this far-flung republic of ours. Kashmir summons us to heed the voice of our conscience.

## *Kashmir*

*The pall of suffocating fog has lifted,  
the interminable frost has ceased at last,  
the sun has startled the earthly paradise  
into a sudden awakening.*

*With both her hands  
Kashmir sets aside the snow-curtains,  
and out of her casements*

*scatters handfuls of yellow leaves  
as she welcomes the sun  
and the strong winds of early summer  
which drive away mist and snow.*

*As the sun rises high in the sky  
her sweet face hardens.  
The snow starts melting,  
the runnels become vibrant with life,  
there is touch of the verdant plains  
on her face,  
and the wind of the southern seas  
plays with her hair.  
The pines and deodars of her forest  
nod their heads in acquiescence  
of an impending storm.*

*Kashmir is no more  
an inert mass of congealed snow.  
Sun-awakened, she is become a land  
of thousands of restless rills and runnels  
quickenened by an ardent summer.*

*That is why the pennants of a norwester  
flutter high in the riotous skies of Kashmir,  
and there is mighty heaving  
in the massive heart of the Himalayas,  
portending an awakening  
after millions of years of slumber.*

Sukanta Bhattacharya  
(1926—1947)

(Translated from the original Bengali by Kshitis Roy)

*Courtesy:* Weekly, 'Mainstream',  
New Delhi,  
May 1, 1993.

# A Challenge to Nation's Conscience

*Nikhil Chakravartty*

Autumn has set in—the chinar in its gorgeous robe. But it is an autumn of bitter sorrow for the hapless people of Kashmir. The Valley which was known as the paradise on earth has been turned into a trough of hatred, of blood and tears.

On Friday last week the portals of Hazratbal were barred as the Indian Army had laid siege of the mosque complex in pursuit of the militants. To protest against this siege of the holy of holies for every Kashmiri Muslim, the common folk in the small town of Bijbehara took out a demonstration which was angry in its mood but indulged in no acts of violence. But the defiance of the curfew by the marchers enraged the BSF which went berserk and moved down to death more than 50 and wounded another hundred or more.

These were no armed secessionists, but unarmed citizens. The authorities promptly barred mediapersons from getting into the town—some were beaten up and their cameras seized—but one intrepid among them who could manage to sneak in, has reported that the dead were young boys, including a Hindu boy. The searing poignancy of this act of barbarism was brought out by his reporting that “not even a single family has remained unaffected by Friday’s violence” and when the bodies arrived after post-mortem, “the wails of womenfolk reached a crescendo” as these were lowered into graves.

This way, mourning turns into anger and unwillingly, the security forces instead of quelling the secessionists seem to unwittingly help to swell the ranks of the adherents, supporters and fellow-travellers of the secessionists in the Kashmir Valley. A thousand cordons along the border shall not help to avert the catastrophe as the mounting anger against the armed might of India antagonises the people of the Kashmir Valley.

Six months ago, a very senior office-holder under the government with wide experience of administration was explaining to the present writer that while Nagaland in the sixties had lapsed into insurgency, he would not say the same thing about Kashmir, as according to him, the people in the villages were not offering active support to the militants. After the siege of Hazratbal and its fall-out with such a bloody shooting spree at Bijbehara, are not the security forces helping to breed a state of insurgency?

The government has announced a grant of one lakh rupees for the family of the slain and has instituted a magisterial enquiry into the shooting. Do the government high-ups feel that such rituals would mollify the people at Bijbehara and the Kashmir Valley? What a world of make-believe are our authorities living in! Even in normal conditions, a police firing in any part of the country raises the demand for judicial enquiry. And here after the massacre—a massacre indeed!—at Bijbehara there would only be a magisterial enquiry. The BSF version was that a mob attack on the police station led to the shooting, but the SHO himself denied any such mob attack. Kashmir's Divisional Commissioner visiting the town next day observed: "There was no witness to confirm firing on the BSF at Bijbehara." And with all this, the government is fighting shy of commissioning a judicial enquiry into the gory incident.

No, this is not a matter for quibbling over enquiries, magisterial or judicial. Bijbehara has thrown up a challenge to the conscience of the entire nation. It has brought out that in the name of fighting out secessionist militants, those responsible for the governance of this great country are themselves hitting at the very foundations of our democratic republic. Such acts of folly, leading to insensate violence on the part of those entrusted to govern, do not evoke respect and consent but provoke revulsion and angry insubordination. A republic does not last by enforced submission of its people at gun-point. It has just the reverse effect.

Against this ghastly brutality perpetrated at Bijbehara, it's time for our political leaders to hang down their heads in shame and remorse. For their share, in diverse measure, the guilt for letting things drift into this shocking state of affairs that security forces should be so

dehumanised as to run amuck committing such a crime. And is Bijbehara a solitary case of security forces transgressing into barbarity by the strength of the gun? All these four years, the government told the public that the militants provoked violence and the security forces had to bear the brunt of it. So much so that our government resorted to an ingenious argument that sought to put the security forces on a par with the aggrieved citizens in the matter of many violations of human rights in Kashmir. It's time that the true state of affairs in Kashmir were brought out in the sun and let the nation judge for itself whether the Republic is reinforced or undermined with the way our government is dealing with the people of Kashmir.

Every democrat in this great democracy of ours has to stand by the people in Bijbehara at this moment of sorrow and despair. And our leaders from Kashmir, where are they, what are they doing? Mufti Mohammed Sayeed who became the Home Minister of India, is a native son of Bijbehara. Its lanes and by-lanes, its street-corners and maidans have witnessed Mufti Sahib growing up in the politics of Kashmir. He could not possibly be sleeping in peace, tormented as he must be—at least, should be—by the trauma of his fellow-citizens at Bijbehara. Why don't you go there, Mufti Sahib, at this hour of agony and bring strength to their spirits? And if you stand by them, you will add strength to your own arms and help this Republic of ours. This is the way the views of a nation's morale is built, which no amount of politicings from the distance will do.

In our midst, in virtual exile of political isolation, there is Syed Mir Qasim, whose maturity and experience the Prime Minister could have harnessed with profit if he so desired. Isn't it time for Qasim Sahib to go on his own to his native soil, facing all the hazards thereby? When people are in a state of emotional shock, they look upto their leaders to come and stand by them. Such a moment has come for all our Kashmir leaders. If they miss to respond in these testing times, they will become castaways of history. Forgetting petty squabbles and irritations, if they all join hands and put their heads together, there must come a way out of the tragic impasse into which this picturesque corner of our great subcontinent has been forced into. More than at any time in the past, the people of Kashmir today cry for the healing touch and that alone can

bring back peace and harmony. And if we succeed in the Valley, it will bring back amity with our neighbour, Pakistan.

Guns on either side do not solve crises. What's needed today is the courage to call for peace—the courage that made Gandhi into the Mahatma.

*Courtesy:* Weekly, 'Mainstream',  
New Delhi,  
October 30, 1993.



# External Implications of Hindu Communalism

*Muchkund Dubey*

The principal impact of the recent revival of Hindu communalism in India is going to be felt in the country itself. For, the wide-ranging ramifications of the phenomenon are basically internal. It is going to affect India's polity, economy, national unity and cohesion—in short, the very future of the nation. At the same time, the external implications of Hindu communal revivalism are also going to be far-reaching, affecting not only our immediate national interest, but also our prestige and stature in the comity of nations and the very ability to conduct our foreign policy.

## **India's Image Abroad**

Secularism has been a great positive factor in India's international image. Even though there have, from time to time, been derogations from this principle, secularism has been recognised as a part of the basic political structure of India. India have been one of the few countries in the world—both developed and developing—which has had a genuine secular tradition in modern times and which made secularism an explicitly articulated creed of its nationhood. Not being a major military power, India's prestige in the world was based mainly on its moral authority, and secularism was a bedrock of this authority.

After the Ayodhya incident, the rest of the world is no longer taking our secular claim seriously. This has deprived our diplomats abroad of one of the most effective weapons in their armoury. It will no longer be possible for them to project India's secular image with any measure of confidence or conviction. This is particularly so when after Ayodhya the government's own position on secularism has become suspect because of chronic ambiguity, prevarication and duplicity.

## **Secularism, Democracy and Human Rights**

The rise of Hindu communalism has put in jeopardy both democracy and human rights in India. For, secularism is the cornerstone of democracy and an inalienable element of human rights. The essential ingredients of democracy are social and economic equality, equality of opportunity and equality before law. In a pluralistic society, secularism is the indispensable means of realising these objectives. The rise of majority communalism in India, by destroying this instrument, will denude democracy of much of its real content.

Human rights are the essential feature of democracy, apart from being an innate human aspiration. The Hindu fanatics have violated the human rights of 120 million Muslim minority of India by demolishing the Babri mosque which stood as a symbol of their religious faith, by striking terror in their heart through their wanton acts of violence and atrocity following the demolition of the mosque and by their barely concealed design of reducing the Muslims to second class citizens.

If the Hindu communalists succeed in realising their goal of a *Hindu Rashtra*. India will lose its unique social and political characteristic. It will be no different from a Pakistan or an Iran which, by the very nature of their theocratic regime, can never practice true democracy and guarantee basic human rights to all their citizens.

Experience shows that communalism, violence and authoritarianism go hand in hand. The experience of Pakistan where democracy is still struggling to take roots, is a reflection of this phenomenon. It would be a great tragedy of modern times if, due to the rise of majority communalism, India also gets trapped in this syndrome.

Recently, international thinking on national sovereignty and exercise of human rights has undergone a drastic change. Exercise of human rights is no longer regarded as falling exclusively within the domain of domestic jurisdiction. Any persistent or large-scale violation of human rights has become the concern of the entire international community, particularly that of the major powers. These powers have now come to believe in the principle of intervention on humanitarian grounds, have, more or less, forced this principle upon the rest of world,

and have obliged the United Nations to endorse and support their actions in pursuance of it.

It is, therefore, very unlikely that they will remain a silent spectator of the process of converting India into a *Hindu Rashtra* where the human rights of the non-Hindu minorities will be perpetually violated. Thus the *Sangh Parivar* may not be able to realise its tortured dream of a *Hindu Rashtra*. However, it will inflict untold damage upon the nation in the pursuit of what may well turn out to be a mirage.

It will not be easy for India to bring about a drastic change for the worse in the human rights situation of its minorities also because it is a party to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and has gone along with the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted by the UN General Assembly without vote on December 18, 1992. India ratified the Convention on Civil and Political Rights on March 27, 1979. Article 27 of this Convention recognises the rights of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their religion and to use their own language. While acceding to the Convention, India did not make any reservation to this Article.

The world opinion since this convention was adopted by the United Nations in 1966 has, if at all, moved further towards the recognition of the rights of the minorities. This is reflected in the Declaration on this subject adopted by the General Assembly at its last session. The Declaration in the operative paragraph 3 “urges all states therefore to take all appropriate measures to combat hatred, intolerance and acts of violence...” In the operative paragraph 7, it “calls upon all states in accordance with their national legislation to exert utmost efforts to ensure that religious places and shrines are fully respected and protected”.

## **India's Unity and Governability**

When India became independent in 1947, many in Britain who still entertained imperialistic illusions, did not believe that the country will remain united for long. Some of them fondly hoped that India

would very soon split apart. The immediate post-independence communal holocaust only went towards confirming their cherished expectation. It came as a big surprise to them that the country not only did not disintegrate after the trauma of the Partition but also went ahead to consolidate itself economically and politically, carve out a niche for itself in the international community and gain a unique stature and reputation. This became possible among others, because of the wisdom of our political leadership at that time, to make India a secular state. This was the only way a country of India's size, diversity and contradictions could be held together.

The fond hope regarding India's disintegration among the diehards in the West, was revived each time India was struck by a tragedy—the assassination of a Prime Minister, an acute economic crisis, or an insurrection in a State ; and each time the prophets of doom were proved wrong by the resilience of the Indian polity. Secularism has played a key role in this. Now that Hindu communalism has subjected secularism to increasing strains and stresses and brought it almost to a breaking point, disintegration of India need no longer remain the wishful thinking of a few ex-imperialists. It has by now become a distinct possibility. Even otherwise, the Indian leadership is increasingly proving itself incapable of holding the country together. With Hindu communalism in ascendancy, the Indian society is in danger of being engulfed in more intensified social tension, larger scale strife and violence and even civil war. The impending civil war will not remain confined to rival religious communities. With the breakdown of the religious cohesion, it could also assume the form of linguistic and caste and class-based conflicts.

Because of the outside perception of India's instability and ungovernability, India continues to have a lower rating in the world capital markets in spite of its much improved balance of payments position. This will continue to serve as a major constraint to the inflow of foreign private capital and access to world capital markets under reasonable terms.

With the Hindu communalist menace threatening the very future of the country and given the government's demonstrated incapability to counter it effectively, it is very unlikely that any foreign government

would think of striking a deal with India on any major issue having long-term implications. Thus, it may not be possible for us, in the current circumstances, to resolve our boundary problem with China, forge a new pattern of relationship with major developed countries like the USA, Japan and Germany ; establish a special relationship with the EC or NAFTA ; join APEC as a member ; or acquire a permanent seat in the Security Council.

On the other hand, the countries which really matter in the world will become increasingly less sensitive to our major concerns like the Kashmir issue, retention of our nuclear option, access to new and advanced technologies market access for our goods and services, etc. On all these matters, we will come under increasing pressure to surrender our options and yield our positions.

Given the threat that resurgent Hindu communalism poses to India's political future and to democracy and human rights, India will, in the eyes of the major powers, become like any other problem country of the world. No major country would like to do serious business or major horse trading with us. No foreign policy initiative will be possible and the conduct of foreign policy will become a charade.

By virtue of its history, size, population, geostrategic location and the level and sophistication of its industrial and technological base, India is, in a sense, in the vortex of the unfolding of the global reality. It has traditionally influenced global developments and, in turn, has been influenced by them. Therefore, any domestic development which has the effect of limiting or inhibiting India's ability to shape world developments, is of great consequence not only to India but to the world. This is particularly so during the present period of transition in international relations. The old world order has all but vanished and a new world order is struggling to be born and replace the old one.

With the growing evidence of withdrawal of India as a factor in world politics, India will no longer be able to make its unique contribution to the shaping of the new world order. Given our stake in the future world order, we will miss a historic opportunity if this great priority is crowded out by our preoccupation with domestic problems created by Hindu communalism. "The other voice" which India had

come to represent will be heard less and less in world forums and global negotiations. This will indeed be a loss to the world in the long run.

It may be argued that governments are generally very cynical about dealing with each other. In the ultimate analysis, they do not attach much importance to whether the country with whom they are going to strike a bargain, practices democracy or permits the exercise of human rights by all its citizens. They go more by the immediate benefits they are likely to derive from their relations with other countries.

This is true to a very large extent. But it is also true that a country which is in a weak bargaining position due to domestic political instability and uncertainty, will be called upon to pay a much higher price for striking a deal than would be the case otherwise. And in the present global circumstances the price can be as high as increasing surrender of sovereignty or acting as an appendage to a major power.

It may also be argued that a country's weight in the world and its bargaining power depends ultimately on its strength; and it is well known that the BJP's platform envisages the acquisition of nuclear weapons and other pre-requisites of power by India. It also believes in building India's economic strength by opening up the economy and encouraging the full play of free market forces. However this is unlikely to happen in an atmosphere of fascism and in a climate of terror, violence and even civil war that will inevitably follow the BJP's pursuit of the goal of a *Hindu Rashtra*. Our internal ability to bring about the necessary socio-economic restructuring will remain gravely jeopardised. And major powers are unlikely to give any quarter to a Third World country which has publicly announced its intention to acquire a weapon of mass destruction, and which is known to be indulging in mass-scale and persistent violation of the human rights of its minorities.

## **Kashmir**

The Ayodhya incident has greatly weakened our international position on Kashmir. In spite of the alienation of the Kashmiri people from India, our claim to retain Kashmir carries credibility mainly because of our refusal to accept the two nation theory. The *Sangh Parivar's* campaign to usher in a *Hindu Rashtra* in India amounts to

embracing the two-nation theory. This knocks off the real rationale for retaining Kashmir as an integral part of India.

## **Impact on South Asia**

India has a vested interest in the maintenance of communal harmony and preservation of pluralistic societies in all the South Asian countries. For, what happens to pluralism in our neighbouring countries cannot but have repercussions for our own pluralistic society. The vice of communalism transcends geographical borders and poisons the communal atmosphere in the neighbouring country also, and through a process of chain reaction threatens the security of the minorities in both the countries. It is thus a problem which threatens communal harmony and peace of the region as a whole.

## **Pakistan**

Pakistan was created on the basis of the two-nation theory. After General Zia came to power in July 1977, Pakistan has moved rapidly to become a theocratic state. Pakistan is left with a very small population of minority communities who are reduced to the status of second class citizens. However, there are many in Pakistan who regard religion as a personal matter, who believe in showing respect and tolerance for other religions, and who are waging a valiant struggle against the onslaught on human rights through obscurantist religious laws and practices embraced by the state. Their position has definitely been weakened by what happened in Ayodhya.

There is clear evidence that the Government of Pakistan deliberately exploited the Ayodhya incident and its aftermath as a propaganda ploy against India in foreign countries, particularly for bolstering its position on the Kashmir issue. The incident provided Pakistan plenty of ammunition for going to town on the alleged deprivation of human rights to the Muslims in India.

The Hindu communalists have, in a sense, helped Pakistan find the legitimacy it seeks. Pakistani rulers see the BJP as their Indian counterpart believing in the two-nation theory. Pakistan must be rejoicing at the prospect of India being reduced to its own denominator.

## Bangladesh

After liberation, secularism was written into the Bangladesh Constitution as one of the four basic pillars of state policy, the other three being democracy, socialism and nationalism. After President Ziaur Rahman acquired power following the November 7, 1975 coup, the word secularism was deleted from the Constitution through the Fifth Amendment. During the Presidency of General Ershad, by another constitutional amendment, Islam was declared the state religion. However, in spite of these changes and despite the increasing reliance of successive governments in Bangladesh on Islamic fundamentalist forces, for coming to and remaining in power, it will be an unmitigated folly on our part to regard Bangladesh as another Pakistan. There is a sizeable population of religious minorities, approximately 15 million, living in Bangladesh. And a vast number of Bangladeshis belonging to all religions are imbued with the spirit of the Liberation War which made secularism a battle slogan and participation in which was on an entirely secular basis. These Bangladeshis feel betrayed by Ayodhya. Their life-long effort to preserve and strengthen a pluralistic society in Bangladesh has received a severe jolt. They are lying low hoping for the reassertion of secularism in India which alone can give them a shot in the arm. On the other hand, the Islamic fundamentalist forces have gained new strength because of the Ayodhya incident.

The minority communities in Bangladesh suffered a lot because of the backlash of the demolition of the Babri Mosque. This, as well as what happened to the Hindu minorities in Pakistan, the UK and South Africa was the direct consequence of the misdeeds of the *Sangh Parivar* in Ayodhya and elsewhere in the country.

A certain degree of insecurity of the minorities is inherent in the situation prevailing in Bangladesh—the two constitutional amendments, and the temptation of the political parties to play the religious card to serve their electoral and other political ends. But nothing poses a great threat to their security than the prospect, with the rise of Hindu communalism, of persistent and large-scale violations of the human rights of Muslims in India. As a backlash against this, the minority communities in Bangladesh will be subjected to frequent harrassment and will become the targets of direct assault whenever



similar incidents take place against the Muslim minority in India. If Hindu communalism is not contained in India, one of its end results could very well be the mass scale migration into India of all the nearly 12 million Hindus living in Bangladesh.

### **Communalisation of Relationship with Neighbours**

The Hindu chauvinists are out to communalise India's relations with its neighbours. This is evident from the manner in which they had given a communal twist to the issue of Tin Bigha and are now communalising the issue of illegal migration of Bangladeshis into India. In both the cases, they have distorted facts and figures. In the case of illegal migration, they have indulged in exaggerations and threatened the adoption of fascist methods for solving the problem. They have come out with their bizarre communalist theory that Hindu migrants should be treated as refugees and the Muslim ones as illegal infiltrators. On other issues involving Pakistan and Bangladesh both of which have Muslim majority populations, they are advocating deliberately tough policies motivated mainly by considerations of religious chauvinism.

Our relations with neighbouring countries are bound to become highly complicated if they are viewed through the prism of communalism. It will make it difficult to judge bilateral issues on their merits. This will ensure that the relations with our neighbours remain perpetually strained.

### **SAARC**

The rise of Hindu communalism has made our position in the SAARC extremely difficult and embarrassing. The happenings in Ayodhya and the subsequent events obliged us twice to seek the postponement of the SAARC Summit, the first in December 1992 and again in January 1993. And ultimately, when the Indian Prime Minister went to the Summit, all that he did was to complete the formalities. No thought seemed to have been given to taking any initiative at the Summit or imparting to the SAARC any new thrust or impetus. The SAARC has, in fact, lost much of its momentum and at least a part of the blame for it must rest with India which was mainly responsible for the SAARC missing one more Summit in 1992-1993. The preoccupation of the

government with the communal situation in the country was largely responsible for the delay and diffidence on the part of India.

Three out of the seven countries of the SAARC are predominantly Muslim. Due to Ayodhya and its aftermath there has been a deep erosion of the faith of these countries in India. This is not a good augury for the SAARC which can prosper only in a climate of trust and confidence.

If the Hindu communalist forces prevail, our bilateral relations with the Muslim countries of the SAARC will remain perpetually strained. This will hardly be conducive to promoting regional cooperation under the SAARC.

### **Reaction in Other Islamic Countries**

Almost all the Islamic countries expressed their shock and sorrow over the demolition of the Babri Mosque. This included some of the liberal Islamic countries like Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Algeria and Tunisia. Their reaction in part was warranted by the grave magnitude of the incident; but in part it must have been under the pressure of or as a gesture to the Islamic fundamentalist elements which have recently gained strength in many of these countries. Iran was one of those countries whose protest was most strident.

Some of these protests should be ignored as they were politically motivated. India cannot also concede to any of these countries the right to be the guardians of the interest of Indian Muslims on the ground that they are a part of the Muslim *Ummah*. For, a claim to such a right implies extra-territorial jurisdiction and loyalties which cannot be conducive to international peace and stability and which can be destructive of internal harmony and cohesion. However, there is no doubt that the revulsion and protests of these countries—and for that matter of other countries of the world—against the barbaric act of the Hindu communalists in Ayodhya, was only natural and justified.

It is unlikely that in the short and medium run, our bilateral relations with these countries will suffer very much due to the Ayodhya incident. All the talks about stoppage of oil supplies to India,

restrictions on Indian imports and eviction of Indian nationals resident in some of these countries are exaggerated. Our relations with these countries were not based on charity or special favour to us, but on strict reciprocity of interest. They are interested in Indian equipment and technology which are not only competitive but more suited to their requirement. They would also like to sell their oil to their traditional buyer. And there are old historical and cultural links which cannot be snapped abruptly.

But we will have to forge a new pattern of relationship with these countries if India becomes a *Hindu Rashtra*. If under such regime or in the process of becoming one, the Muslim minority Community becomes a target of communal hatred and violence and more incidents of the type of Ayodhya take place, many of these Islamic countries will start moving away from India and reduce their stake in India to the indispensable minimum. They are also likely to adopt a more rigorous policy towards admitting Indian nationals for taking up jobs in their countries.

### **Rebuilding the Mosque**

Reactions from the Islamic countries put special emphasis on the rebuilding of the mosque at the site. There is no doubt that the rebuilding of the mosque will be the singlemost important concrete action to restore confidence among the Muslim minority in India. It will also be the singlemost important act by which the Islamic countries will judge the secular credentials of the Government of India. It is, therefore, tragic that in spite of the solemn undertaking given by the Prime Minister of India, the prospects for rebuilding the mosque are receding further and further into the horizon.

*Courtesy:* Weekly, 'Mainstream',  
New Delhi,  
September 4, 1993.

# Failure of Three Pillars of Democracy

*Ashok Kumar Pandey*

The collapse of the Babri mosque on December 6 in Ayodhya is not simply the collapse of a disputed religious structure, it is the collapse of the judiciary, the legislature and the executive—three of the four pillars of any democracy. The fourth was beaten up severely by the mob, but fortunately it was not so fragile. Let us elaborate.

Most of the problems of our country are due to the fact that people evade their duties and responsibilities. This led to the decline of the institutions as they are manned by the people. The judiciary was entrusted to deal with a matter it is not competent for. Keeping their eyes always on their potential vote-banks, politicians often refer controversial matters to the judiciary. Furthermore, they refer to courts such matters decisions on which they want to defer. The already obsessed judiciary will not decide anything within months but in years and decades. But justice delayed is justice denied. This was well-exemplified in Ayodhya. The Ayodhya dispute was made not only a pendulum between the lowest and the highest courts, its judgement was deferred, delayed and denied. If the judgement of the Allahabad High Court pertaining to the acquisition of 2.77 acres of land was delivered well before the December 6 episode, the consequences would have been different. Is it not laxity on the part of the judiciary?

Furthermore, why did the judiciary allow an unmanageable crowd for *kar seva* at a disputed site when the religious sentiments ran so high? Any crowd by its very nature is irrational and unmanageable. A person behaves rationally when he is alone or in a small group. But the same person behaves irrationally when he merges into a crowd. This basic fact of psychoanalysis was ignored both by the judiciary and the executive.

The judiciary was also befooled in taking the UP Government's affidavit in toto. All the warnings of the Court against the possible

violation of the court order amounted to the fact that the UP Government would have to go if it failed to fulfil its promises. And that it did. Preventive precautionary measures were not taken by both the judiciary and the Central Government and the crime was allowed to be committed at the cost of punishment.

Moreover, the assurance by the UP Government to the Supreme Court is itself misleading. It says :

The State Government (UP) assures the Court (apex court) that it will ensure that no construction machinery or construction material will move into the acquired land and no construction activity will take place or be carried out as long as the High Court interim orders are in force and the writ petition is pending before it relating to land acquisition.

It did not mention even a single word for preventing destruction activity which was actually held. And lastly, what was the representative of the judiciary doing when the 'detrimental' developments were taking place well before the destruction?

Not only the judiciary, the legislature has also failed. Why does it allow a party to garner votes on religious grounds? Both the Congress and BJP had in their election manifestos references to build the Temple, although at different sites. Is it not a way to manipulate votes on religious grounds? Why did the Election Commission, a constitutional institution, fail to ban such references? Has it not harmed the secular stature of our Constitution? The Rules and the legislations are moulded and applied by the ruling parties in their own favour. Some political parties were involved in the Ayodhya episode but they could not be banned. Some organisations were banned without adequate and proved valid grounds.

The dismissal of the UP Government is understandable. But the dismissal of three other duly elected governments amounted to a gross violation of our Constitution and an act of revenge taken on flimsy grounds. Even if they recruited *kar sevaks*, was it not allowed by the Supreme Court? When the *kar sevaks* from each and every State were allowed to converge at Ayodhya, why were only these three governments punished? Did the other States prevent the *kar sevaks* from going to Ayodhya? Further, what is the proof that the *kar sevaks* of

these three States were engaged in destructive activities at all? Did not the AIADMK Government, with which the ruling Congress has an alliance, send *kar sevaks* to Ayodhya? Moreover, how can the ruling Congress morally ban the BJP, when the former itself had an alliance with a communal party like the Muslim League? All these contradictions and discrepancies in our polity lead to the failure of our legislative system.

The same fate awaited the executive. A long silence may be a good quality of a philosopher or a saint, but never of a statesman, especially of a Prime Minister. He was silent on the question of *rath yatra* to Kashmir. It proved good, as the *yatra* was a flop. But in the case of Ayodhya this tactics cost him dearly. The Central forces were dumb spectators. The case of the State executive is the worst. Both the Central and the State executives evaded their responsibilities by accusing each other, not realising that such accusations undermine their very credentials.

These lapses suggest that if we want to survive and live with dignity and prosperity we have to rethink and redefine all our values, preferences and institutions. Mere eclecticism will be detrimental to our development. We have to make our principles and motives clear and consistent. The Ayodhya episode has proved that you cannot befool the people for long and play with their sentiments. It has exposed the double-speak of even those parties who led the event. The people have given a befitting reply to those who were playing the incite-and-retreat in order to keep political dividends. These elements are stunned today by the action of their own men.

And lastly, one more lesson. For the success and survival of our country, people will have to be vigilant against the divide-and-rule polity of the selfish, power-oriented politicians. But let us note that this policy appears in different languages and forms. Religious divide is only one instance. The same policy is active behind cast-based reservations, linguistic agitations and sex-discriminations. Unless people are aware of these power-games and ready to defeat them, we shall be compelled to encounter one disaster after another.

*Courtesy:* Weekly, 'Mainstream',  
New Delhi,  
January 2, 1993.



*Kar Sevaks rejoicing over the destruction of Babri Mosque, Ayodhya: December 6, 1992.*

## The Day of Ram's Tigers

*Ravi Shankar*

Inside the crumbling mosque, the sadhu wielded his gleaming trident against Babar's walls. His matted hair was uncoiled and serpentine, his lean dark limbs ochred by the raining dust.

"Jai Shri Ram!" he swore hoarsely, as the trident plunged again and again into the mortar.

High above him, the vault of the mosque wept dust. All around, boys and men in saffron bandanas struck at the walls and the floor, and

tore at the sacred pillars with crowbars, pickaxes and uprooted pipes. They upturned bricks and smashed the stones, cheering wildly as outside, great pieces of granite thundered down. They dislodged parts of ancient slabs, pulling chunks out from the disintegrating walls, hastily rushing out with the trophies held high above their heads, screaming the name of Ram. Overhead, through the slogans and the swirling dust, and the caricatures of shadows rising and falling in turmoil, an immense bell tongsined deep with remorseless clangour. For the kar sevaks, like a wordless invocation, the bell tolled for Babar, and in its clamour, was the urging of their god.

“We have come to die for Shri Ram,” a young kar sevak had told me the day before. On his pubescent chest was branded Jai Sri Ram, burned with cigarette ends. “TIGER. JAI SRI RAM”, read another “I am Ram’s tiger,” he said exultantly. “I have come here to destroy the masjid. And if I am fired upon by the police, my corps too will bear the name of Ram.”

There were also skinheads of Ram, whose skulls were shaved except for the name of Ram designed with hair. Among the saffron-banded crowds, effigies of Narasimha Rao and V. P. Singh made Ravanaic guest appearances. It was a medieval mela with a hint of unconscious farce; sanyasis on bicycles, sadhus in saffron gear and tridents, wearing Action shoes.

“The miracle of Ayodhya is the crowds,” said Swami Mandharam Das, “it is god’s *leela*. The temple is just a medium, the end is Ram Rajya.”

Tall and wide in his saffron robes, the Swami had silver on his beard, and careful eyes used to command. But his voice was firm and quiet. He stood loose and easy among the bustle of one of the mass kitchens, where rice was being shovelled and spread on bamboo mats, and *dal* poured from cauldrons with buckets. Mandharam Das was a wrestler in his prime, a Brahmin Templar who also runs an *akhara* in Ayodhya, and on whose land he claims the shilanyas are. He has fought in many a ring, and on the day of the siege of the masjid, he looked like a warrior monk, controlling the crowds who were trying to break into the fortified site, swinging his *lathi* at the screaming number, who were laying siege to the barricades, wrestling intruders into the ground, and



moving with long agile strides among the crowd. Megaphones commanded the assembled kar sevaks to praise the name of Ram. “Louder! If your voice can’t be heard in Ayodhya, how will your slogan reach Delhi?”

As the first dome of the Babri Masjid fell, conches blew and trumpets blared. And the cry of Jai Siya Ram was on thousands of throats. Swamis stood on the branches of trees like Vikramaditic apparitions, and waved flags. Men fell under stone and rubble, from arches and covings, as scaffoldings toppled and walls caved in. A one crusader atop the first gumbad to collapse waved a saffron pennant at the sky only to become an epitaph of dust seconds late. Policemen sat amongst the kar sevaks, watching and grinning, smoking lazily, and occasionally cheering. Sentry boxes were upturned and smashed, barbed wire fences torn down. “It is Hanuman’s *gadha* (mace) at work,” proclaimed Katiyar of the Bajrang Dal. As the central dome of Babar’s monument fell, the saffron dust of four centuries settling into the turbulence of another time, a swami in a white beard pointed at a saffron sun: “The sun sets on Babar at last! The taint has been removed forever!”

On Ayodhya’s horizon, the first columns of smoke were rising upsky from Muslim homes which had just been torched. Temples pealed with bells, priests sang kirtans, and the idols were ready and illumined for darshan. As the debris of four hundred and sixty years of history was being evacuated by the saffron hordes, the landscape of Ayodhya changed forever. And with it the landscape of India.

*Courtesy:* Fortnightly, ‘India Today’,  
New Delhi,  
December 31, 1992.



*A PAC Jawan helps a kar sevak to cross the barricade in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992, : a biased force.*

## A Nation's Shame

*By Dilip Awasthi in Ayodhya*

The scenes will return, like deranged ghosts, to haunt those of us who were at the graveside to witness the burial of a secular dream. The screams of exultation with each blow of a pickaxe, each thrust of a rod, each dome that came crashing down. If there were no implements, the frenzied hordes would have used their bare hands to the same effect, so powerful was the poison that coursed through their veins in those few hours madness.

There were others. The maniacal look in the eyes of the kar sevaks as they triumphantly held aloft Babar's bricks or smashed cameras, attacked journalists and taunted the bovine policemen. The

provocative exhortations over the loudspeakers that rose even above the roar of the crowds. The forest of gleaming trishuls raised high in militant victory. And, the twin plumes that snaked to the skies ; the dust from the demolished structure, and smoke from nearby Muslim houses torched in the orgasmic fever. Religion was their opium and it returned Ayodhya to the medieval ages.

Ultimately, it may have seemed like the pebble that started an avalanche, the lone man who broke through the security cordon, followed by ten others, and then hundreds and finally, thousands. But quite a few warning signs had been there earlier, as the initial trickle of kar sevaks swelled over the past three days, into close to two lakhs. Many of these were docile-looking sadhus and sants, pot-bellied shopkeepers from Delhi, rustics from Punjab and Haryana, excited students from Pune. There were, however, others, their number running into hundreds, who had come with one fanatical obsession—the destruction of the disputed Babri Masjid.

But even at the dawn of that Barbaric Sunday, few among the moderates or even the large media contingent believed that before sundown, and in the space of a few hours, the triple domes that loomed so securely on the horizon would be razed to the ground. The mood among the kar sevaks had been sullen but not overly aggressive and even the occasional outbursts of anger or militant slogans seemed like aberrations against the backdrop of the solemn rituals and the singing of bhajans. Kar sevaks were even frisked and made to pass through metal detectors before entering the temple area.

But the inaction of the past few days as they waited for D-Day, December 6, had made them restive. By December 5, the mood had started to change, the indecision of the leadership on whether to allow construction, had stirred the hornets' hive, Harcharan Singh, 32, a strapping kar sevak from Haryana, echoed an increasingly held view when he flatly stated : “After all this if the leaders do not allow kar seva, they will face our '*maar seva*' (beating).”

The afternoon of December 5 was the turning point. That was when it was finally announced that there would be a symbolic kar seva. Ayodhya simmered with suppressed anger and frustration. Hundreds of kar sevaks stormed the Maniram Chavani where two of the religious leaders—Mahant Ram Chandra Paramhans and Mahant Nrit Gopal

Das—were subjected to a volley of angry questions. In the narrow, serpentine lanes of Ayodhya, the slogans were becoming more menacing, “*Jis Hindu ka khoon na khaula, khoon nahin wo paani hai*” (If a Hindu’s blood doesn’t boil, then it’s water, not blood). In the karsevakpuram area thousands converged to express their wrath against the leadership. The Frankenstein’s monster had been born. And its creators were now its immediate victims.

Ashok Singhal, general secretary of the VHP, pleaded with the mahants to bridge the ominous chasm that had suddenly opened up between the Janki Mahal Trust—the camp headquarters of the leaders—and Karsevakpuram, where angry kar sevaks were clustered in open defiance. The mahants, sensing the ugly mood, stayed put. Only Vinay Katiyar, Bajrang Dal chief and Faizabad MP, dared to cross over to Karsevakpuram, where the hostile mob immediately surrounded him demanding that the leaders reconsider their decision of a symbolic kar seva. Katiyar’s message about the militant mood was passed on to L.K. Advani and company. But by now, the movement had been clearly hijacked by the hotheads. As a worried Paramhans said: “Who except Ram Lalla can know about the kind of kar seva which will be undertaken tomorrow.”

Sunday, December 6. The count down to disaster begins.

6 a.m. The steady stream of kar sevaks and journalists start arriving at the disputed shrine. Straddling the security wall were PAC constables armed with batons and RSS volunteers with armbands. Overnight, additional barricades encircling the 2.77-acres plot had been erected. Most of the mediapersons gather around the platform constructed during the July kar seva, instead of the roof-top of Manas Bhavan, the official press enclosure.

10 a.m. Sadhus, mahants and various leaders including Advani and BJP President Murli Manohar Joshi arrive at the platform to review the arrangements for the ‘symbolic’ kar seva.

10.30 a.m. VHP and BJP leaders move to the dais at the Ram Katha Kunj, 200 yards away from the designated kar seva site, where they are scheduled to address a public meeting. The objective was to

avoid the angry crowd building up at the kar seva site. Within a matter of minutes, small but defiant groups of kar sevaks start pushing at the security cordon surrounding the main entrance to the disputed area. The PAC jawans and RSS volunteers struggle to hold back the crowds.

11 a.m. The first of the kar sevaks break through the cordon. Within seconds, a few more follow as the barricades are breached in three places directly in front of the shrine. Solitary and shrill shouts of "*Mandir yahin banayenga*" (We'll build the temple at this very spot) puncture the atmosphere. The police are standing idle, but the RSS volunteers in charge of security continue to try and stop the kar sevaks, chasing them and even physically removing them from the secured platform area. Among the throng of mediapersons there is nervous laughter at the comical sight.

11.15 a.m. The kar sevaks had breached the barricades in at least half a dozen places but there is still no definite indication of an impending storm. Faizabad Superintendent of Police, D.B. Rai, tells the media contingent: "It is all under control. Go and relax, you are only wasting your time." So it seems.

11.35. The sadhus, headed by Mahant Paramhans and Nrit Gopal Das, are scheduled to start a puja ceremony on the newly-built platform. But elsewhere, the floodgates have opened. Towards the rear of the disputed structure, 50-odd kar sevaks slither across the security wall. As RSS volunteers and PAC personnel try to stop them, a hail of stones thrown by the crowds outside start raining down, providing effective cover to the handful of intruders.

11.40 a.m. A teenager scales the protective steel railing like a circus acrobat and, despite the steep angle, reaches the top of one of the three domes. The brickbattering becomes heavier and the police abandon their posts around the disputed structure. This provides the signal for hundreds of kar sevaks to break the outer cordon and charge towards the structure waving pickaxes, hammers, shovels and iron rods.

11.43 a.m. Three kar sevaks reach the base of the middle dome with a grappling hook attached to a long rope. After a couple of failed attempts, the trio manage to anchor the hook to a protruding iron rod



**BABARI MOSQUE DURING AND AFTER ITS DESTRUCTION,  
DEC. 6, 1992**

atop the dome. As if they were trained mountaineers, they clamber up the rope and arrive at the top of the dome. It is 11.50 a.m. The mania that is to overwhelm them all has begun.

11.55 a.m. Seshadri, RSS general secretary appeals to the defiant kar sevaks in at least four or five different languages to stop the demolition and destruction. No one listens to him. His voice is barely audible over the chants of the crowd. Neither are the subsequent appeals issued by Advani and Singhal. The leaders have become the led.

12.05 p.m. All three domes are submerged under hundreds of kar carrying saffron flags which are victoriously planted on two of the domes. Hundreds more start attacking the base of the structure with pickaxes and iron rods. By now, the crowds have swarmed all over the site of the disputed structure, shouting in triumph and urging on the demolition squads.

Clouds of dust envelop the turmoil below as the sea of saffron spreads all over like a victorious army. Senior officials of the Uttar Pradesh government, magistrates and police officers watch helplessly from the roof of a building on the western side of the disputed shrine. On other roof-tops, women kar sevaks wave saffron flags in encouragement and exultation.

12.15 p.m. Kar sevaks, wielding huge blacksmith's hammers, start the final onslaught on the three domes. Elsewhere, as if by pre-arranged strategy, kar sevaks start targeting journalists and photographers, beating them up and smashing their cameras. The frenzied and deliberate attack is unprecedented, leaving many with blood streaming from deep gashes, women with their clothes ripped and others with their purses snatched. The objective of terrorising mediapersons was clearly to prevent photographs being taken of the frenzied demolition operation.

12.25 p.m. The leaders make a desperate attempt to control the crowds. An announcement over the loudspeaker asks the kar sevaks to come back. It has no effect. A distraught Advani turns to Uma Bharati and asks her to make an appeal: "*Ram bhakton se meri appeal hai ki kar seva ka samay hogaya. Aap apna netrit wa ka palan karein aur wapas*

*aajayen*” (As the time for kar seva has passed, I appeal to the Ram *bhaktis* to listen to their leaders and come back). As expected, the appeal goes unheeded. Instead, there is a clamour of voices, directing the kar sevaks to rush to the dome with chisels, hammers and sickles.

1.55 p.m. The first dome collapses in a cloud of dust along with approximately 25 kar sevaks who are buried in the debris. They are quickly extricated and press vehicles are forcibly commandeered to rush them to the hospital.

3 p.m. Sadhvi Rithambara starts singing and dancing and, as if in a trance, repeats over and over again a mesmeric exhortation: “*Ek dhakka aur do, Babri Masjid tor do*” (Give another shove, and tear down the mosque). a village lad from Kanpur district rushes past with a piece of brick held aloft like a trophy. “These are Babar’s bones,” he shouts in unholy glee.

3.30 p.m. The second dome gives way under the ferocity of the onslaught. Only the central dome remains, surviving precariously with the two huge cavities on either side of its base visible clearly from even a mile away.

4 p.m. Further demolition is temporarily halted as local sadhus escort Mahant Paramhans to what remains of the sanctum sanctorum. The Ram Lalla idol placed there earlier is reverentially removed under the haze of dust that hangs in the surcharged air, mingling with the dust are huge columns of smoke from spots where maddened kar sevaks have set fire to a couple of mosques and half-a-dozen Muslim houses in Ayodhya town.

4.15 p.m. Two poles are erected just outside the outer wall of the remaining dome. A huge stone boulder is placed over the spot from where the idols have been removed in order to mark it exactly.

4.49 p.m. Kar sevaks form a human chain and use long wooden poles to repeatedly attack at the base of the middle dome from two sides until it comes crashing down. VHP activists celebrate by taking out a procession.



A red cloud of dust settles on the rubble, all that remains of the Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid shrine. And, all that remains of the myth of Hindu tolerance.

*Courtesy* : Fortnightly, 'India Today',  
New Delhi,  
December 31, 1992.

# STRIDENT SADHUS

## *Contours of a Hindu Rashtra?*

*Manini Chatterjee*

In the bleak post-December 6 landscape of India where communal violence continues in several areas, the ruling party, the Congress(I), remains in a state of coma, and High Courts judgments become virtual advertisements for *Hindutva*. Perhaps the most ominous sign of the times to come is the emergence of a motley group of 'holy men' who have decided to give 'direction' to the country's future polity.

For the past few years, the country has witnessed the rise of a political party which blatantly used religious symbols and sentiments to gain political power. Now here is the beginning of a phenomenon in the reverse—religious priests coming forth to dictate the political agenda. Ever since the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation became a rallying point to generate mass hysteria, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) decided to play a behind-the-scenes role and let an assortment of 'sants', 'sadhus' and 'mahants' 'lead' the agitation. The BJP thus allowed various 'dharm sansads' and 'sant sammelans' to workout the timetable for *kar seva et al* and repeated endlessly that it was not involved in the actual temple-building exercise. The BJP leadership, particularly L. K. Advani, emphasised that his party's involvement on the issue was in the political-ideological plane (a crusade against 'pseudo secularism' and 'minorityism') while the holy men were entrusted with the task of the construction of the temple.

But like numerous other political movements which relied on religion, the most recent example being that of the Akalis in Punjab, the politicians are in danger of being sidelined by the 'sadhus', who are now relishing the prospect of regaining temporal power. The sadhus and sants, in recent months, have received more attention and publicity from the Indian Government as well as the media than ever before. It has

clearly whetted their appetite for more. And so, while the BJP leaders speak in different voices and remain unclear about their future course, it is the sundry 'sadhus' and 'mahants' who have been occupying centre stage and making pronouncements on the 'anti-Hindu' Constitution and how it should be changed. Even a few years ago, their views could have been dismissed as obscurantist rantings of medieval minds which posed no threat to the modern Indian republic. But in the wake of all that has happened in the last few months and the remorseless drive towards fanaticism, the statements made by the 'sadhus' are profoundly serious and dangerous and mark the first tentative contours of what a theocratic Hindu *rashtra* may mean.

Recent press conferences, interviews and booklets given by both the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and non-VHP 'sadhus' reveal two distinct thrusts in their rhetoric. The first is a deep-rooted hatred towards aliens, specifically Muslims, and a desire to obliterate every trace of Muslim presence in India. The second is to destroy the reforms and progress made within Hindu society and re-establish a fundamentalist 'Hindu order' marked by a return to a fluid caste system and Brahminical supremacy.

At a press conference in New Delhi on New Year's Day, 'sadhus' belonging to the VHP laid claim to the Jama Masjid on grounds that it was originally a Vishnu temple. Vamdev Swami, one of the prominent figures in the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation, said the VHP had made a list of 3,000 mosques which were allegedly created after destroying temples, and that unless Muslims surrendered the three most important ones (in Ayodhya, Mathura and Varanasi), the others, one by one, would be 'liberated' by force.

Apart from this outrageous claim on the Jama Masjid, Vamdev announced that the 'sant samiti' at its meeting on October 13-14 had set up a four-member committee to rework the 'anti-Hindu' Constitution to suit the country's needs. The committee, headed by Swami Muktanand, has already prepared a draft of their criticism of the Constitution in a 63-page booklet which was released to the press. The present Constitution, they claim, is based on laws made by the British and does not reflect the ethos of this ancient land. Their main objection is to the 'special rights' given in the Constitution to the minorities,

particularly Muslims and Christians, but they are also against reservations for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The booklet criticises several provisions in the Constitution, including those relating to the preamble, the definition of citizens, the continuing use of the English language, minority rights and the policy of reservations. It also advocates the replacement of the national anthem by Vande Mataram. The booklet, which is only a preliminary draft, does not specify the details of the alternative 'Hindu' Constitution but makes one point clear—that citizenship rights should not be bestowed automatically on those who are born in India of Indian parents but on the basis of 'loyalty and patriotism.' In other words, the minorities will be given rights only if they submerge their identity in a preordained (by whom?) mainstream.

If the booklet brought out by the VHP-affiliated sants is deliberately vague about what the Hindu 'constitution' would mean, individual sadhus have shown no such hesitancy. In an interview to *The Pioneer* (January 3, 1993), Swami Muktanand Saraswati explained that since there was no discrimination in the Hindu ethos, "there should be no reservations on the basis of caste, language or religion. There should be uniform laws for everybody. Also, the state should not interfere in religious and personal matters. There should be no laws regarding marriage. Today, a Hindu can marry only one woman while a Muslim can have five wives. Why should a law be there? If a man wants to have 25 wives, let him." Clearly, then, while there must be 'uniform laws,' the reforms within Hindu society will have to be upturned, which in practical terms means that obnoxious practices such as child marriage, dowry, sati and untouchability should not be outlawed.

The 'holy men,' who are not bound by the RSS viewpoint of building a unified Hindu samaj, have been even more forthright. Swami Niranjandev Tirth, the former Sankaracharya of Puri, recently attacked the RSS from the Right, accusing the organisation of tampering with the *Shastras*. He warned that the RSS would not be allowed to interfere with the Hindu *Shastras* and customs if it came to power in Delhi, and criticised the RSS for not believing in 'varnashram' (caste system).

Another religious leader, Swami Chinmayanada, while fully supporting the demolition of the Babri Masjid, also felt that if the 'majority' wanted the Constitution to be changed, there was nothing

wrong with changing it. Given the plethora of sects in the Hindu religion, the 'sants' have not spoken out in one voice and have yet to formulate a single unified "Hindu alternative," but the underlying thrust of their campaign is clear.

The BJP's response to the sants' rhetoric is significant. The BJP and the RSS have no problems with the anti-Muslim aspect of the campaign, but are acutely uncomfortable about the statement made on intra-Hindu issues—for electoral, tactical and ideological reasons.

This dual response is clear from the statements made by the BJP leadership in the last few days. The party refused to condemn outright Swami Vamdev's preposterous claim on the Jama Masjid. The senior BJP vice-president, Sunder Singh Bhandari, told newsmen that "the party has not given any thought to it." At the same time, he did not foreclose the option of taking up these claims (on the mosques in Mathura and Varanasi and the Jama Masjid) in future.

Similarly, one of the BJP general secretaries, K. N. Govindacharya, described the demand as 'not appropriate' but was non-committal on whether it would be appropriate at a later stage. BJP national executive member Jay Dubashi, in column after column in the RSS mouthpiece *Organiser*, has stridently demanded that all symbols of Muslim rule be obliterated.

The former Jan Sangh president, Balraj Madhok, has gone beyond even Jama Masjid and demanded that a national commission be set up "to determine the age and authorship of controversial structures like the Taj Mahal, Qutab Minar..."

This desire to wipe out or "Hinduise" these historical monuments have little to do with the past. It is intimately related to the deep-rooted anti-Muslim hatred fostered by the RSS in its cadres and sympathisers from the time of its founding in 1925. It is significant that though the RSS was formed when India was still under British rule, the organisation concentrated its venom on Muslims and not the British rulers, who could much more readily be identified as "foreign invaders" destroying Indian culture.

Therefore, while the BJP would readily accept (and even encourage) the anti-Muslim sentiments of the 'sants,' it is much more wary of the rest of the Hindu fundamentalist package. This too is rooted in RSS ideology. Both Veer Savarkar, the founder of the Hindu Mahasabha, and Keshavrao Baliram Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS, saw the caste system as the major cause of disunity in Hindu society. However, instead of making a concerted attack against the caste system and reforming it, they sought to unify Hindus by invoking the enemy—the Muslim.

Savarkar, the premier *Hindutva* ideologue as opposed to a 'Hindu' reformer or revivalist, was not interested in the religious or spiritual aspects of Hinduism but in welding Hindus into a political (or 'national') entity. He, therefore, had little interest in the philosophic treatises or the *shastras* that guided traditional Hindu practice. The RSS was also broadly guided by the *Hindutva* principle (that is, welding the Hindu race into a national/political entity) and not in Hindu doctrine. In its own structure though, the RSS was very much formed on the lines of the traditional Hindu patriarchal system.

The ideological reason apart, it was also tactically and electorally necessary to avoid intra-Hindu conflict. Though the RSS leadership continues to be dominated by Brahmins, and the backbone of the BJP's support base also comes from the 'upper castes, the RSS has for long tried to expand its base to cover larger segments of Hindus. Open advocacy of the return to the Brahminical social order would reduce the party's electoral base substantially. Therefore, Sunder Singh Bhandari, who was non-committal about the claims on the Jama Masjid, disassociated himself from the casteist sentiments of the 'sadhus' with alacrity. The BJP, he declared at a press conference, did not agree with the view that the caste system should be restored. Clearly unnerved by the caste issue, the party's Scheduled Caste Wing suddenly reactivated itself to issue statements against the alleged killing of Harijans in the communal violence in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The party's general secretary belonging to the Scheduled Caste, Suraj Bhan, went to the extent of supporting Lallu Prasad Yadav's proposal to make Harijans temple priests. "We do not have any objection provided the priests have the requisite qualifications. We welcome, it," he said.

The BJP is thus getting increasingly uncomfortable about the fundamentalism and the frenzy it has spawned, but cannot now get out of the trap of its own making. Ever since its national executive meeting in Palampur in 1989 when it adopted the resolution officially supporting the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation, it has been treading this dangerous path. Abandoning altogether the path of caution, moderation and normal political discourse, it has gone on invoking religious passions and hatred. In the process, it has acquired two bands of supporters—the hordes of Bajrang Dal activists on the one hand and the saffron-clad religio-political sadhus on the other. Both groups have been instrumental in making a ‘success’ of the Ram Janmabhoomi issue and thus helping the BJP politically. But both will demand a price the BJP will find hard to give—and even harder to refuse. The Bajrang Dal ‘kar sevaks’ displayed their enormous destructive capacity on December 6. The ‘sants’ will now reveal their equally strong desire for power. Having had a taste of politics after being sidelined for centuries, the ‘sants’ and ‘sadhus’ are unlikely to go back to their ‘akharas’ and ‘ashrams.’

The BJP has only itself (and the RSS) to blame. Disregarding the innumerable problems facing the country, it decided to play the dangerous game of mixing religion with politics, converting faith into hatred. The most tragic fallout of the Sangh *parivar*'s sustained hate campaign has been the retreat of reason. Thus, the controversial judgment of H. N. Tilhar and A. N. Gupta of the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court can pronounce that Lord Ram is a “constitutional entity and admittedly a reality of our national culture and fabric and not a myth,” because his sketch supposedly figures in the original copy of the Constitution. This same retreat of reason is also discernible in a Rajasthan history professor, Dr. R. Nath's claim that a Hindu temple complex was built at the disputed site in Ayodhya by Sawai Raja Jaisingh (A.D. 1694-1743) and the ownership title of this temple was vested with the deity (Ramlala) in accordance with the Hindu dharmashastras. He concludes, “The deity is now the legal owner of this land and he cannot be dispossessed of it except again by barbarous and unconstitutional means. A mosque cannot be lawfully built on this site again for the simple reason that the land is owned by a Hindu deity who holds it in perpetuity and who, being a perpetual minor, cannot transfer the title by any means to anybody.”

These are not examples of innocuous idiosyncracies. They are beginning to form a disquieting pattern of thought where faith and religious doctrine play a greater role than the laws of man and reason. As such they, along with the utterances of the 'sants,' have begun to create the climate of a theocratic state.

It has now become commonplace to say that India cannot be a theocratic state and the Hindu religious leaders cannot dictate secular polity because Hindus are a people without a Prophet or a Book. This reasoning can be dangerously facile. True, Hinduism has been marked by an eclectic and syncretic ethos ranging from the abstruse philosophy of the Upanishads to the myriad forms of worship that abound. But between the Great and Little traditions, one aspect of Hinduism has also been an exploitative and inequitable social order which still operates in large parts of the country. It is hardly surprising that the politicised sadhus of the VHP ilk, instead of focussing on the positive traditions of the world's oldest living religion, want a return to all that is abhorrent in it. They are inspired not by the Upanishads or the Bhakti tradition but by the Manusmriti and its patriarchal, hierarchical and Brahminical social order.

The BJP by its own admission was unable to check the 'kar sevaks' from breaking the mosque. Its leaders will prove far less able (even if willing) to withstand the onslaught of religious sants determined to interfere in the ruling of the state. In the present climate of communal polarisation, fanaticism and retreat of reason, the secular forces must therefore guard against not only the fascist hatred directed against the minorities but also the obscurantism that spells a great danger for the majority of Hindus living in this country.

*Courtesy* : Fortnightly, 'Frontline',  
Madras,  
January 29, 1993.



# The Saffron Hold

*S. K. Pande*

The line dividing religion and politics in India, blurred for so long, has now wholly ceased to exist. The two have become inextricably linked, and sadhus and sants and imams and mullahs, who were only peripheral prompters providing their cues to the primary performers, have overrun the political stage. From there they pontificate—not on matters spiritual, but affairs rather more worldly. They hold forth on any subject—be it the Constitution or the laws of economics—and, what is more worrisome, at times spew searing words that reflect sentiments rapidly communal.

Religious leaders have become part and parcel of avowedly fanatical groups and are adding fuel to the already explosive situation. Organisations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) are virtually setting the political agenda for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

And just as the sadhus and the sants are wooed by politicians of all hues, the mullahs and the moulvis are placated in a number of ways. The high-voltage publicity they have received in the last few years in the official and the print media and the importance that has been given to their views have led to the present dangerous state of affairs.

And, inevitably, organisations with the same combine seek to outdo one another in their radical posturing. For instance, with the VHP now in full cry, the Bharat Sadhu Samaj (BSS) has felt it necessary to get into action. Recently its executive met in Delhi to discuss the situation regarding “Ayodhya temple reconstruction” and the “undue interference by political parties in religious affairs.” It welcomed the Centre’s acquisition of the “Ram Janmabhoomi,” called for the establishment of a national trust to construct a temple at the “birthplace,” and appealed for a “spirit of tolerance.”

Within the BJP-RSS-VHP combine, the VHP acts as the hawkish wing which is seemingly difficult to tame, while the other two have been

moderates.” But the fact is that they are all different teams working with a unity of purpose. In addition, there are such outfits as the Durga Vahini and the Bajrang Dal, working in tandem with Shiv Sena volunteers. The hold of sants and sanyasins on the combine is so firm that some sadhvis even hold positions in the BJP Sadhvi Rithambara which has her own lobby; Uma Bharati, who took up sanyas not long ago is an MP with sympathisers in the top rungs of the party.

Consider the recent statements of some leaders closely associated with the BJP. Swami Vamdev Maharaj and Swami Muktanand, also top VHP leaders, say they reject the Constitution, which they dub “anti-Hindu.” What the VHP does openly, the BJP does subtly. L. K. Advani says: “Ayodhya has enabled our viewpoint to become a formidable challenge.” He and BJP president Murli Manohar Joshi, in fact, sent another signal to the VHP before December 6, 1992, when they launched their yatras to Ayodhya from Mathura and Varanasi. Now there are statements such as “Ram is our national leader.”

To understand all this, one has only to see the inter-play of politics and religion within the different organisations. The BSS, considered relatively moderate, has adopted a middle course on the Ayodhya issue, somewhat akin to the Congress stand, but not far from the BJP’s either.

On the eve of its executive meeting, its general secretary, Swami Harinarayananand, who claimed the capital would see the largest congregation of sadhus, went hammer and tongs against Bihar Chief Minister Lallu Prasad Yadav, who had reportedly said he would ensure that persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes became mahants of temples and maths. This, the Swami said, amounted to politicising a religious issue. In the same breath he voiced his opposition to some instances of the VHP’s politicisation of religion.

Earlier, in a statement, he strongly criticised Swami Vamdev’s claim that the Jama Masjid in Delhi was a Hindu temple. This, he said, was not only ridiculous, but went against the “spirit of our religious teachings and is contrary to the wishes of the Hindu community.” Muslims should take no notice of it, he said. Referring to the assault on the members of the family of the then Union Minister for Civil Aviation,

Madhavrao Scindia, allegedly by BJP activists, he said it is against the decorum of democracy.

He also condemned the move to stage a “long march” from Bangladesh to Ayodhya to rebuild the Babri Masjid as a direct interference in India’s internal affairs. He appreciated the steps taken by the Centre to prevent such interference and urged it to expel all Bangladeshi infiltrators immediately. The Swami accused the Janata Dal and the Left parties of trying to divide the “Hindu samaj.” He was particularly critical of Lallu Prasad Yadav who, he said, was trying to create tension and dissension in the “Hindu order.”

*Courtesy:* Fortnightly, ‘Frontline’,  
Madras,  
January 29, 1993.

# How Did Rao Blunder?

*By*  
*Zafar Agha*

On December 6 Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. The man who had seemed in unruffled control of the Ayodhya situation, the man who had silenced his critics and painted the BJP into a legal corner following some of the fanciest constitutional footwork ever witnessed in New Delhi, was suddenly, like Caesar betrayed, howling treachery. His entreaties of “utter perfidy”, the words he used to describe the BJP’s participation in the destruction of the Babri Masjid, found few takers.

Instead, the knives of erstwhile allies were being sharpened relentlessly. V.P. Singh, who had given Rao’s strategy approval when the Opposition had endorsed a *carte blanche* for action at the NIC meeting of only a few days earlier, was now screaming that Rao should “resign for failing to protect the Constitution”. What bitter irony that the very Constitution Rao had so desperately tried to protect by not dismissing the Kalyan Singh government until December 6, until well after the demolition, was now becoming a noose around his neck.

How did this happen? Had Rao no inkling of the Sangh brotherhood’s ruthlessly orchestrated masterplan to erase once and for all the “blot of Babar”? Did nobody warn him of the VHP’s intentions? Were his intelligence agencies sleeping? the answers are may be, yes, and no. The shattering denouement occurred because in the end it amounted to a judgement call in which he was left playing by the rules of an indoor game while the Sangh took to the battlefield. Rao, while grandmastering his constitutional strategy had left his flank—the Ayodhya battlefield-wide open. And he continued with this strategic blunder by believing the assurances of a party which has a history of dissembling.

Until November 30—Round One—Rao looked like a winner. The BJP was politically and legally isolated. It dithered on whether to accept

a single point reference on the status of the shrine to the Supreme Court. And its Hindutva constituency and cadres had begun to wonder whether it was really serious about building the temple. Its assurances to protect the Babri Masjid were an insult to those who have chanted “*mandir wahin banayenge*” (We will build the mandir on that very spot) for five years of brinkmanship and bluff and bluster.

Round Two. After Rao, perhaps with his fingers crossed, accepted the solemn assurances given to the Supreme Court by the Uttar Pradesh Government on November 27 that it would prevent the kar sevaks from violating the court order and only undertake the singing of hymns, the BJP began putting its alternative strategy together.

But Rao failed to evolve his own plans to counter the BJP’s strategy even though from intelligence agencies and cabinet colleagues to dismiss the Uttar Pradesh Government. In two Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) meetings held on November 19 and 22, the Intelligence Bureau (IB) reported that the Sangh intended to demolish the structure and the Kalyan Singh should be dismissed. The IB suggested two dates of November 22 and 24 for action before any buildup of kar sevaks could mount to unmanageable numbers. Any harsh measures after these dates, the IB said, would entail “a higher scale of attrition”. And the Government was seriously considering dismissal a day after the NIC meeting on November 24.

Arjun Singh was also pressing the Government not to pursue the legal option alone. On November 21, he submitted a detailed note to the cabinet secretary suggesting that the Central Government’s stand in the Supreme Court on the issue of the legality of the proposed kar seva, should be such as not to limit its opposition to the BJP’s stand on legal grounds alone. It should keep its political options open in dealing with the issue. Singh strongly opposed the delinking of the kar seva on the 2.77 acres from the issue of the protection of the disputed structure. He warned that the delinking could be a temporary reprieve, and a ruse to keep the option in their hand to spring a surprise on the nation at a time of their choice which could include demolishing the mosque.

But Rao kept up the legal angle and did not even consider the loopholes left for him by the Supreme Court to pursue any alternative

strategy. For example, when on November 25, the Uttar Pradesh government counsel K. Venugopal asked for a week's time to "negotiate with and persuade" religious leaders to postpone kar seva, the Supreme Court rejected the plea stating that the "Union Government is at liberty to make its own assessment of the matter and take such action as would be proper and permissible to it under the Constitution".

In the next two days the Sangh combine devised its own legal countermove to stall what looked like certain dismissal. On November 27, the Kalyan Singh Government submitted two sets of assurances. The first was that as long as the 2.77-acre land acquisition dispute remained unsettled, "either temporary or permanent kar seva for building the Ram temple will not take place". Second, it assured the Court that the state government was fully committed to "safeguard and protect the disputed structure in Ayodhya". During the course of these arguments, Attorney General Milon K. Banerjee cautioned that already about 15,000 kar sevaks had assembled in Ayodhya and they were likely to defy the orders of the court.

Despite these fears Rao's government went along with the BJP's legal assurances of a "symbolic kar seva" which was accepted by the Supreme Court. Ironically, the Supreme Court order now became the BJP's legal shield. Once Rao had acquiesced in this he could scarcely be in a position to dismiss the state Government because that, technically, would be an act of illegality. And Rao was further boxed into inaction by the court's appointment of Justice Tej Shanker as its observer in Ayodhya charged with reporting whether as its observer in Ayodhya charged with reporting whether any violations were likely to occur. Until December 5 the observer continued to report there were no violations.

It was like a guerrilla action, depending on doublespeak and sneak attacks to confuse the enemy. Elements of the Sangh brotherhood had already planned to demolish the mosque. And a swift demolition action was possible only under its own administration. Therefore, its priority was to keep the Kalyan Singh Government in the saddle till this end was achieved.

Kalyan Singh adopted a tone of resigned moderation and began

to send signals from December 3 onwards that his party was willing to cooperate fully with Rao provided he did not succumbed to internal party pressures from secular hardliners such as Arjum Singh and the Left parties. The gameplan was to turn the tables on Rao. Just as he had isolated the BJP, the Sangh brotherhood was fooling Rao into complacency by taking a conciliatory line in order to insulate him from the advice of those who simply did not trust the BJP and wanted pre-emptive action to stop the brotherhood from achieving its demolition goal.

Kalyan Singh cooed almost pathetically on December 3: “It is not yet too late to solve the dispute if the Prime Minister can muster courage to ignore pressures from Congressmen led by Arjun Singh and opposition leaders like V.P. Singh and the communists. “The doublespeak multiplied with the BJP saying one thing to the courts and Rao, and another to its cadres. Distancing itself from any negotiations with the Government, the BJP plunged into public mobilisation on the temple issue. Its priority was to stem any erosion in its Hindu vote bank. On November 30 L.K. Advani himself set the tone of confrontation by announcing his resolve to go on a yatra to Ayodhya along with his party President Murli Manohar Joshi. He told the press in New Delhi: “Out faith in the bona fides of the Narasimha Rao Government has been shaken.” While in Delhi the pot was calling the kettle black, in Varanasi, the pot was showing its true colours. Advani thundered in Varanasi, from where he started his final yatra: “We are prepared to face any eventuality arising out of the Kar seva and are ready to make any sacrifice for it.” In Azamgarh on December 2, he assured the kar sevaks that kar seva would be “physical, with bricks and shovels” and would not be limited only to the singing of bhajans and kirtans.

It was evident that the BJP had moved from the court to political mobilisation on the ground to re-invigorate its Hindu constituency.

Now, Rao seemed to be fiddling while the heat was being turned on by the BJP all over the country. Neither he nor his party had any strategy to deal with the BJP’s political challenge on the ground. Within the PMO, there was increasing nervousness about the swelling of the ranks of kar sevaks. To keep a tab on the Prime Minister’s pulse and lull him into a false sense of security, the top leadership of the RSS asked its leading hawk, Professor Rajendra Singh alias Rajju Bhaiyya, to keep in

touch with Rao. The brotherhood was continuing to keep up the farce of negotiations to eliminate any chances that the Prime Minister may have had for a change of heart and to go for the hard option before the kar seva.

On the night of December 2, Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhairon Singh Shekhawat was summoned from Jaipur by the PMO. The next day, hectic behind-the-scene parleys started between Rao and Shekhawat. A minister confirmed that three rounds of meetings took place between them on December 3. Finally, Rajendra Singh met Union Minister Rangarajan Kumaramangalam and later Rao, and another three-point formula emerged. First, the RSS gave an assurance that the kar seva would not violate the law if the Centre gave a commitment to hastening the Allahabad High Court's decision on the acquisition of the 2.77 acres of land. Apart from that, the temple construction would begin only after the Allahabad High Court's judgement on December 11. Third, the RSS leadership pledged to accept the Central Government's proposal to refer the status of the disputed shrine as a single point reference to the Supreme Court for an advisory opinion under section 143 of the constitution.

Rao, against all other advice, was convinced at this late stage of negotiations that the RSS was sincere and that his legal strategy was paying dividends. Persistent advice to the contrary from cabinet colleagues and the intelligence agencies was ignored. In fact, intelligence then had even correctly identified VHP leaders Vinay Katiyar and Acharya Giri Raj Kishore as open advocates of demolition.

On the morning of December 2, Defence Minister Sharad Pawar, who has close contacts with the RSS leadership in Nagpur, and who functioned as one of Rao's key negotiators with the RSS, expressed grave doubts about the Sangh's intentions during a CCPA meeting. Later in the day, Pawar asked Subodh Kant Sahay, another member of Rao's informal Ayodhya negotiations team, to persuade Rao not to bank on what the RSS was telling him. Sahay recalls: "I warned the Prime Minister that both Mulayam Singh and Kalyan Singh had failed to prevent the kar sevaks from attacking the Babri Masjid earlier." Sahay specifically mentioned that huge congregation of kar sevaks could not controlled even by its own leaders on December 6. But Rao



appeared unconvinced. A disheartened and demoralised Sahay told INDIA TODAY on December 4: “We seem to be losing ground fast.”

In ignoring the advice for pre-emptive dismissal or even to evolve other strategies of action instead of pursuing only the legal route, and trusting a party with a history of deceit. Particularly on its Ayodhya plank, Rao blundered in judgement.

On December 6, the demolition done, Kalyan Singh sent in his resignation to the Governor, pre-empting the dismissal of his government by the Centre.

The Rao Government was in a sorry plight even after the last dome of the Babri Masjid fell, a dejected minister involved in the negotiations was talking about his faith in the RSS’S assurances: “But an RSS general secretary told me on December 5 that they would control the kar sevaks.”

All that a bewildered Rao could do was explain to his colleagues that he and the nation had been betrayed. That how could he not have trusted the solemn assurances given by a state government—a creature of the Constitution—to the highest court in the land. His response bordered on political naivete: “The Constitution is the mother of the Central and the state governments. The state Government’s act on December 6 is like the child stabbing the mother.”

The tragedy is, that was the way Rao played the game, and not his adversary which carefully disarmed him, played upon his obsession for avoiding confrontation, and used the law and the Constitution in an endeavour that suited its strategy the most: painting Kalyan Singh as a soft-liner and giving him the legal leeway to keep control of the administrative and law enforcement machinery so that the RSS could accomplish its devilish mission without hindrance.

*Courtesy: Fortnightly, 'India Today',  
New Delhi,  
December 31, 1992.*

# Kalyan Singh : Tissue of Lies

*Dilip Awasthi*

It was Adolf Hitler who said that the great massess of people were more likely to fall victim to a great lie than to a small one. Working on this theory, former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh made sure that the lies he told the Centre got more outrageous during the fortnight before disaster struck at Ayodhya. In order of size.

**Lie One:** At the two National Integration Council meetings which were held in Delhi before the final one on November 23, Singh gave written reassurances that the structure would be protected.

**Lie Two:** Addressing the Vidhan Sabha on November 24, he told MLAs: “The Centre is out to create a civil war-like condition in the state by sending in Central forces without our consent. Do they want a clash between the Central and state forces?” In fact, the forces sent by the Centre were sitting quietly in Cantonments in Faizabad.

**Lie Three:** In another speech to the Vidhan Sabha the following day. Singh said: “I am hopeful of a settlement in the next 10 days, though I am making all provisons for the security of the disputed structure.” This was a total red herring since there were no negotiations on at the time. Carried away by the sheer creativity of his own mendacity, he offered a package solution in which the Centre would allow kar seva while, in return, the BJP government would ensure the “complete safety” of the structure.

**Lie Four:** During the same session, he came out with an astounding statement saying that at a meeting with Union ministers, he had been ‘guaranteed’ a favourable court verdict if the BJP-VHP agreed to a single point reference to the Supreme Court. “Prime Minister Rao and Defence Minister Sharad Pawar are my witnesses. Let them deny

this.” Pawar denied it point-blank the very next day and decision on the acquisition of the 2.77 acres of land. A part from that, the temple construction would begin only after the Allahabad High Court’s judgement on December 11. Third, the RSS leadership pledged to accept the Central Government’s proposal to refer the status of the disputed shrine as a single point ference. For the next couple of days. Singh kept saying that a solution was still possible if only Rao would start more negotiation. Then, on November 28, came.

**Lie Five:** This was a whopper. Singh’s government submitted a four-point affidavit to the Supreme Cout in which it promised that only a symbolic Kar Seka would be allowed on December 6, that no court orders would be violated, on construction activity permitted and the structure secured.

In the period between December 5, he kept assuring Chavan that fool-proof security arrangements had been made for the structure. Then, on December 8, once the Babri Masjid had been razed, he finally agreed to meet reporters only to claim that he had been under pressure from the centre not to use force against the Kar Sevaks: “It was like a badly inflated balloon which brust. All the other political parties and particularly the centre are to be blamed for the frustration of the Kar Sevaks which forced them to act desperately. They should arrest me at the soonest because, after all is I who fulfilled one of the major objections of our party”.

These are the brazen words of a Chief Minister committed by oath to upholding the constitution. It might have had something to do with Singh’s belief that he and his party would ultimately be victors. And it is the privilege of victors, as Hitler also said, that they are never asked whether they told the truth,

*Courtesy:* Fortnightly, ‘India Today’,  
New Delhi,  
December 31, 1992.

# Wrong Man, Wrong Place

*by*

*Harinder Baweja*

The last thing the country's most important political minister did before going home on December 5 was to wink and tell one of his senior officials that nothing would happen at Ayodhya the following day. "We will make the BJP sing bhajans," he is reported to have gloated.

But soon it was time for him to count his beads instead. The next day as the mosque was being razed to the ground, S.B. Chavan was ensconced in his puja room. Senior police and Home Ministry officials kept waiting for the call that never came. It was 36 hours before the 190 paramilitary companies posted in and around Faizabad moved to evacuate the kar sevaks. Only a few days earlier Chavan had boasted that the Rapid Action Force could reach the spot within eight cracking minutes.

"It was a total breach of faith. We were betrayed by the BJP-VHP-RSS combine," Chavan said the next day. But in fact, it was he who had betrayed the intelligence agencies. In all their reports they had stated that the kar sevaks, in a "restive and belligerent mood", could damage the mosque and that they were rehearsing pulling down concrete structures. Chavan however kept parroting the state Government's assurances to the Supreme Court. The gaffe-a-day Home Minister proved, right through the handling of the Ayodhya crisis, that he was the wrong man at the wrong place. It was criminal for him to have ignored the intelligence reports, though for this too he seems to have an alibi. He says now that the reports did not predict the demolition. "But he wasn't even willing to take action on reports that predicted damage," says a Home Ministry official. Chavan, despite telling the Lok Sabha that the Government could invoke Article 355 of the Constitution to directly use the paramilitary forces without the consent of the Chief Minister, developed cold feet when the need arose. Instead, when opposition leaders asked him how he was sure the undertaking to the

Supreme Court would not be violated, his reply was: "The matter is very delicate. It should be left to the Government to be dealt with appropriately."

Chavan, like the Prime Minister, was throughout looking for excuses on why not to use the forces. When MPs told Chavan in the Rajya Sabha that L.K. Advani was calling for a 'bricks and shovels' kar seva, all he said was: "I have checked that Advani and he has said he was misquoted by the press." Further, he stressed: "I don't want to take any action based on attributed versions, for we would then be crossing our limits as a responsible government."

The only step the 'responsible' Minister took was to send a flurry of letters and faxes to Kalyan Singh. Ironically, the only time Chavan took the intelligence reports seriously was when he used them to get tough with Kalyan Singh. His last letter, highlighted by Doordarshan, revealed that he had enough information about possible damage to the mosque. It pressed Kalyan Singh to personally supervise security arrangements since many kar sevaks were buying trishuls which could be used for offensive purposes, and also because crowd pressure around the shrine had already damaged the barricades.

"The dangers, unfortunately, were pointed out only to score points and be oneup on Kalyan Singh," rued a senior official. The ministry was further bewildered by Chavan telling MPs that no temples had been damaged in Pakistan when pictures in newspapers showed the opposite. An embarrassed Chavan refused to meet the media and nonchalantly ignored the opposition's demand for his resignation. The only persistent queries from Chavan, ministry officials revealed, related to the death toll in his home state, Maharashtra. He wasn't bothered that the PMO banned some communal organisations without consulting him.

Yet, Chavan sits smug, comfortable in the knowledge that even Rao cannot ask him to resign. For if he did so, he would only be admitting his own failures. And that, to Chavan, is the only thing that matters.

*Courtesy: Fortnightly, 'India Today',  
New Delhi,  
December 31, 1992.*

# Masters of Deception

*Inderjit Badhwar with Yubaraj Ghimire*

Atal Behari Vajpayee, the senior BJP leader, may today well describe his party's Ayodhya adventure as "its worst miscalculation", a "misadventure" and wax poetically on the existential dilemma of "what should we do? Where are we headed?" Perhaps a year ago these penitent outpourings would have carried a degree of credibility and reinforced Vajpayee's image as the party's resident moderate philosopher. But now, with the party stripped naked and its real intentions revealed, Vajpayee's sack cloth and ashes routine smacks of yet another public relations, damage control gimmick aimed, perhaps, at winning back support from Hindu moderates and intellectuals who view the demolition with intractable abhorrence.

It is one more example of the BJP's politics of deception. Consider for instance Vajpayee's attitude on December 8 when he said in an interview: "Elections are inevitable now and the BJP is prepared." This was not just an off-the-cuff remark but the upshot of the crude electoral arithmetic that the party was engaged in, as a welcome political result of the outrage. For only a day before, on December 7, the party high command had held a meeting at which Vajpayee was present and gleefully projected that the BJP would now get 300 seats in the Lok Sabha.

The many faces of the BJP—the moderates versus the radicals, the party versus the VHP, the VHP versus the Bajrang Dal versus the sadhus—was a game of political charades to keep opponents guessing. There were differences, certainly. But they were concerning timing and strategy—when to push the mandir issue, which national face to project. And of control: how much leeway to give the Bajrang Dal, when to let the VHP call the shots, how much influence the Chief Ministers of the BJP-ruled states should be allowed to exercise. Whenever the Sangh seemed on the verge of a division, the RSS would play the balancing act.

Flashback: the image of Uma Bharati hugging an ecstatic BJP president Murli Manohar Joshi at 4:50 p.m. on December 6, the moment the third dome of the mosque was collapsing. There could be no better historical evidence of the party's intentions and goals than this moment that was photographed for all to see. In fact, BJP leaders including L.K. Advani were given the best seats for this show. It becomes suddenly clear that their five-year-old refrain of "we will build the mandir" was a cloak for the unstated but truer goal: raze the mosque. For building the mandir hardly carried any real political benefit for a party that calculates its votes on the basis of its one-point stand. Building a mandir would be the outcome of a legalistic compromise with secular forces. Hardly a vote-pulling act. Razing the mosque, on the other hand, would create the polarisation so essential to the Hindutva movement's political success.

Today, the words uttered by BJP leaders on the day of the demolition—"I was kept in the dark" (Kalyan Singh); "I am unhappy" (Advani)—ring hollow and expose them as the grandmasters of calumny. For when it came to the crunch. Kalyan Singh's priority—an undertaking he gave on December 5 and 6 to Vinay Katiyar, the leader of the 40,000—strong Bajrang Dal storm troopers, and VHP leader Ashok Singhal—was to provide state protection to the kar sevaks demolishing the mosque rather than his own undertakings before the Supreme Court as well as the NIC. Advani assured crowds on December 4 and 5, during his final yatra to Ayodhya that the kar seva would be performed no matter which way the impending court judgement went.

Even after Kalyan Singh submitted his pledge of compliance to the Supreme Court on November 27, Singhal scoffed at it: "Who is Kalyan Singh?" And VHP leaders immediately warned RSS bosses H.V. Seshadri, Rajendra Singh and K.C. Sudershan that accepting the symbolic kar seva would be a severe setback to the temple movement. The bosses did not demur.

After the November 27 pledge, even as RSS leaders such as Rajendra Singh were assuring the Prime Minister that a negotiated settlement was still possible, Joshi was telling crowds from December 1

to 5 during his own yatra to Ayodhya, that Muslims should not bother about a thousand bricks of a dilapidated structure as the Hindus had given them a whole country—Pakistan. The Big Lie may have served a strategic end but it also led to unmasking the true face fo the BJP.

*Courtesy:* Fortnightly, 'India Today',  
New Delhi,  
December 31, 1992.



# Orchestrated Onslaught

*Dilip Awasthi and Uday Mahurkar*

Viewed objectively, the all-important question of whether or not the destruction of the disputed structure was a pre-planned operation does not throw up any easy answers. That Kalyan Singh, the then Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, deliberately lied to provide a smoke-screen for the actual events of December 6 is now well established. So is the fact that the hawks in the RSS-VHP-Bajrang Dal combine—and a large number of the kar sevaks arrived in Ayodhya with the obsessive purpose of ensuring that the disputed mosque was reduced to rubble. Finally, the clinical precision and incredible speed with which the solid-looking structure was demolished clearly indicated planning and specialised training.

But the key question is whether the more moderate leaders in the BJP such as L.K. Advani and A.B. Vajpayee or even Murli Manohar Joshi were party to a conspiracy. During his yatra through Uttar Pradesh, Advani clearly stated before the 10,000-strong crowd at his December 1 public meeting in Varanasi that the kar seva in Ayodhya would be performed with “bricks and shovels”. A statement he and the BJP later denied in Parliament. During his parallel yatra, Joshi’s speeches incited Hindus to go to Ayodhya. He spoke about so much of the country having been given away to Pakistan “so what is the problem with some bricks from an old monument”, and repeatedly pledged “the temple will be built”.

At Ayodhya, however, Advani and Joshi appeared shell-shocked when the kar sevaks swarmed over the structure. But to anyone present there on that Black Sunday, there were abundant indications that the mosque was destined for demolition, indications that Advani or any other political or religious leader present could hardly have missed. Even on December 2, it was fairly obvious to observers that a majority of the 60,000 kar sevaks present were there for the express purpose of raising the structure to the ground. *India Today* correspondents were

present at a December 2 meeting between Swami Vamdeo, one of the moving forces behind the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation, and a group of kar sevaks from Thane. The kar sevaks told him: “Swamiji, we have come to Ayodhya for the last time and we can assure you that we will not come again. We are determined to pull down the structure.”

Similar sentiments were being expressed in the *math* of Mahant Ram Chandra Paramhans, acting president of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, Kar Sevaks from Haryana, Rajasthan and Punjab clapped vigorously as Paramhans repeatedly promised that the kar seva on December 6 would be nothing short of constructing the platform for the new temple.

In one of the tents in Karsevakpuram, middle level group leaders of 45 *jathas* (groups) from Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Punjab huddled together over a handdrawn map of the disputed shrine area. The map displayed police and PAC positions around the shrine, marked with red dots. Green dots represented the positions of RSS volunteers in the security cordon. According to an insider present at this meeting, the group leaders were convinced that the moderates in the Sangh brotherhood had prevailed over the more radical elements like Ashok Singhal and Vinay Katiyar, and the trend had to be reversed.

By the evening of December 4, all the VHP leaders present in Ayodhya had a fair idea of the eventual outcome and, more important, that it was being orchestrated according to an action plan with key elements.

- \* Pressurising—and sidelining—moderates in the Sangh brotherhood through a show of strength by the kar sevaks.
- \* Carefully planned diversionary tactics, which included the simultaneous breaching of the security cordon by specific groups of kar sevaks while the main assault came from the rear of the structure. The ease with which this was achieved suggests the connivance of the PAC jawans.
- \* The huge and impressive assortment of tools and equipment needed for demolition, including graphnel hooks for

climbing to the top of the domes, blacksmith's hammers, pickaxes, crowbars and iron rods.

- \* An orchestrated and simultaneous attack on journalists and photographers from all directions, seemingly as part of a pre-arranged plan.
- \* The effective roadblocks and barricades at all possible entry points into Ayodhya to prevent access to the site by Central security forces.

There were other, more specific indications of the advance planning and training aspect of Operation Ayodhya. *India Today's* investigations reveal that for over a year, the VHP had kept its cadres in a state of "preparedness" for the final assault on Ayodhya. It had organised a four-week-long, national-level physical and arms training camp for some activists—selected from 20 states—at Sarkhej village on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. The camp, which ended on October 6, 1991, was for selected activists chosen mainly from the Bajrang Dal and the Durgavahini and numbered nearly a 100. After the training, the activists returned to their respective states to impart similar training to the lower cadres.

The camp was organised at a specially-developed, two-acre plot with facilities for imparting commandostyle training: rope-climbing, hurdles and 'valley-crossing' in which the recruits walked along thin wooden frames high above the ground. A black belt judoka taught them judo and karate. According to VHP sources, the cadets were also taught how to break through security cordons and police barricades. The arms training was confined to air guns.

When an *India today* team visited the training site last fortnight, a VHP activist involved in the training course, unwittingly remarked: "Do you think what happened in Ayodhya on December 6 could have been possible without adequate training?" However, Navinbhai Shukla, a prakhand mantri and a treasurer of the local VHP unit in Ahmedabad, denied the camp was part of a larger plan to demolish the Babri mosque: "It was routine training. After this, too much is being seen into it."

But the training imparted and the importance the VHP gave the course indicated it was not the routine, civil-defence-type of course conducted on occasions. The leaders who visited the camp were a who's who of the Hindu brigade: Singhal, Katiyar, Moropant Pingle, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, among others. In spite of such luminaries visiting the course, the VHP kept it remarkably low-key.

More significant were the people who imparted the training. The man in charge of the training was a retired brigadier, a Mahavir Chakra holder, from the Indian army. The closing ceremony was attended by Major General (Retd.) Mahipatsinhji, who lives in Ahmedabad. When contacted, Mahipatsinhji admitted he had attended the last day's function: "I don't know about the motive behind the camp."

Interestingly, the camp site isn't on the main road but in the middle of Sarkhej village, hence camouflaged from public view. At the entrance is a board that reads: India Welfare Research Foundation, Gallant Youth Training Centres, Security Talim Kendra. The last line in Hindi reads: entry without prior permission prohibited. The India Welfare Research Foundation is a VHP-connected outfit. A smaller board has the name of the state VHP President, K. K. Shastri and a trust he runs, Amrut Mahotsav Trust.

There are apparently other Sarkhej-type training camps elsewhere. One day after the demolition, Shiv Sena MP Moreshwar Save boasted on his return from Ayodhya, that Operation Ayodhya was executed by 500 Shiv Sena kar sevaks who were given special training in a camp in the Chambal.

Whatever the truth, it is clear that the demolition was not just a sudden surge of religious fervour by a section of the kar sevaks. When District Magistrate Srivastava informed Lucknow on December 6 at 1.15 p.m. that he had requisitioned the RAF batallions and was about to instruct them to clear the area, Kalyan Singh ordered him to immediately send them back to Faizabad. By then Kalyan Singh knew the demolition had started and was clearly providing protective cover for the kar sevaks to complete the operation. The last dome collapsed at 4.49 p.m. Kalyan Singh tendered his resignation at 5.45 p.m. By then, the mission had been accomplished.

The more moderate elements in the Sangh, like Advani and Vajpayee, were used to confuse the Government while the radicals took over. Whether it was done with Advani's knowledge and connivance is a question for history—and his own conscience—to judge.

*Courtesy:* Fortnightly, 'India Today',  
New Delhi,  
December 31, 1992

# Spineless Spectators

*W. P. S. Sidhu and Dilip Awasthi*

For the Indian law enforcers, tormented by the ghosts of the November 1984 riots and other communal conflagrations where they earned the dubious distinction of being sectarian and downright unlawful. Ayodhya provided the perfect opportunity to redeem themselves as secular protectors of the law. But even as India's secular bona fides were being ground to dust, any pretensions that the police and paramilitary forces may have had of being non-partisan defenders of the law, were buried as well.

Nearly 25,000 Central paramilitary personnel from the CRPF, the CISF, the ITBP, the RPF, the Rapid Action Force and even the elite NSG, hid behind the thin veneer of constitutional technicalities, while a group of not more than 5,000 kar sevaks wilfully broke the law as they tore down the centuries-old monument. The law enforcers—equipped with an array of 'soft' weapons like stun grenades, rubber pellets and rubber bullets—did not raise of finger.

Had the Central forces intervened on the fateful day the casualties, according to official estimates, would be less than 50—in 1990 when Mulayam Singh Yadav's government forcibly cleared the area of kar savaks, without using soft weapons, the death toll was 26—insignificant compared to the bloodbath the country has witnessed. Not to mention the colossal economic and diplomatic backlash the nation has suffered in the international arena. Yet, officials said they were reluctant as it would have “led to a bloodbath”.

What made the Centre and its forces, which maintain the charade of rule of law in Punjab, Kashmir and Assam through the barrel of the gun, suddenly so abhor the use of force? Was it political connivance, confusion or sheer ineptitude? Investigations revealed that it was a suicidal combination of all three factors.

For instance, even before the kar seva began, Kalyan Singh had categorically stated that he was against the use of force on unarmed kar sevaks. This was repeatedly proved on December 6. Barely an hour after kar sevaks first climbed onto the domes—Faizabad District Magistrate R. N. Srivastava (now suspended) called in the RAF. But, according to Home Ministry sources, when he informed Kalyan Singh of the development, the Chief Minister reiterated that force was not to be used under any circumstances and ordered Srivastava to stop the RAF.

Meanwhile, four RAF battalions led by DIG P.N. Ramakrishnan and escorted by SDM Sudhakar Adeb had reached Saket Degree College, just 2 km short of the site. Here they found insignificant barricades of burning tyres and stones placed on the road and asked Adeb for permission to forcibly clear them. Adeb called Srivastava who now said the force was not required. He ordered his deputy to escort the RAF to a safer location. An incredulous Ramakrishnan expressed his surprise and asked Adeb to give the order in writing. Adeb complied and at 2 p.m. minutes after the first dome fell—the 3,500 men retreated.

If the state administration was guilty of conniving with the kar sevaks, the Centre too failed in its duty to protect the mosque. The reason was partly political: the Centre, which had believed the state government's assurances all along, now wanted to put the entire blame on the BJP. Moreover, it did not want to have the blood of Hindu sevaks on its hands. Hence, it put up the fig leaf of constitutional injunctions.

While the Government, Prime Minister downwards, insists that everything was done according to the Constitution, some experts disagree. Ram Jethmalani argues that the Central forces could have been sent, over-riding the local administration under Article 355, even before the imposition of President's rule under Article 356, Jurists compare the situation in Ayodhya on December 6 with that of state whose police force is found to be inadequate for quelling an internal disturbance or a police force which has revolted. In both these cases, it is not only the right but the duty of the Centre to step in and restore law and order. But instead, the Centre began the long-drawn procedure

of imposing President's rule under Article 356. Says Ved Marwah, former director-general of the NSG. "The decision not to use even minimum force to maintain law and order is illegal."

The official rationale for not considering Article 355 is untenable: "The Article has never been used since the Constitution was adopted." Says a top Home Ministry official. Adds R.K. Wadhwa, DG, ITBP, and overall commander of the Central forces in Ayodhya: "It is not possible to implement Article 355 in reality. It is an exercise valid only for examination papers." This appears to be an after-thought.

To top it all, there was some confusion in the chain of command too. Senior police officials blame inadequate intelligence for the fiasco. Says a top official: "Our intelligence did not give details of groups who demolished the structure." Confusion over getting the go-ahead from Delhi was also responsible for the delay in flushing out the kar sevaks still camping at the disputed site. Says Marwah: "If they had only to pray and hope, then why send the forces."

And when they did finally act on December 8—nearly two days after the mosque had been demolished—it was with the utmost caution. The "operation with minimum damage," as a senior RAF official put it, started at 3 a.m. when four battalions of the RAF—99, 103, 104 and 108—left their base camp in Faizabad to take control of the core area, including the disputed site. Five other CRPF companies also fanned out around the five major kar sevak camps in Ayodhya. Their objective: to clear Ayodhya of sevaks.

At 3.35 a.m. the four RAF battalions started their march towards the demolition site (*see diagram*). The 108 and 99 battalions entered the complex from the direction of Dorahikuan. At 4.15 a.m. sevaks retaliated with brickbattling from three directions—Manas Bhavan, Sheshavatar temple and the Pandal area. The 99 battalion cleared all the three spots of sevaks while 108 battalion completely secured the temple area by 4.45 a.m. after firing some rounds in the air, bursting tear-gas shells and resorting to a lathi charge against the 300-odd kar sevaks who offered resistance. Meanwhile, the other CRPF companies stormed the Karsevakpuram, the Ayodhya bus station and the railway station.



The zero-risk operation was bound to be successful since the kar sevaks had already achieved their objective of breaking the structure and building a new platform and a boundary wall. In fact, there was no reason for the kar sevaks to remain. The result : a textbook clockwork operation in which not a single kar sevak was killed, let alone seriously injured. But the damage to the Indian polity and the reputation of the law enforcers was irreparable.

*Courtesy:* Fortnightly, 'India Today',  
New Delhi,  
December 31, 1992.



