

**BABRI-MASJID**  
**RAMJANAMBHOOMI**  
**CONTROVERSY**

**EDITOR**  
**ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER**

## BABRI-MASJID—RAMJANAMBHOOMI CONTROVERSY

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*Editor*  
ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

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## EDITORIAL

The Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy assumed dangerous proportion in recent times and resulted in many bloody riots between Hindus and Muslims which is very unfortunate. It should be our attempt to confine such controversies within the intellectual domain and not allow it to be politicised. However, this controversy got thoroughly politicised and was used for winning elections of Lok Sabha held in November, 1989. It was most unfortunate. Such misuse of history for political purposes must be avoided at any cost in future. It is not only violence which has to be condemned but also distortion of history and intellectual dishonesty.

Here in this volume we have made an attempt to put together different aspects of the matter and also we have tried to do some documentation so as to make it useful for future researchers on the issue. Coming generations will have right to know what was the controversy about and what were its different aspects. We hope this collection of material on Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid issue will prove useful for the future researchers.

Asghar Ali Engineer

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

The Babri Masjid—Ramjanam Bhoomi controversy, one must say, was one of the major controversies which was exploited politically to the hilt in post-independence India. It was, undoubtedly, the biggest controversy after the Shah Bano controversy during 1985-86. This controversy, along with the one on the Shah Bano case, attracted maximum media attention in the mid and the end of eighties of our century. In a way—and to be elaborated little later—both controversies were linked together. Had the controversial Muslim Women's Bill not been passed in early 1986, the Ramjanam Bhoomi controversy would not have arisen.

What was worse was its cynical exploitation for winning the Lok Sabha elections of November 1989 by not only the BJP and the Shiv Sena and other communal outfits but by the most important secular party of India i.e. the Congress (I) which had the proud record of fighting for India's freedom in the past. These are the hazards of parliamentary elections. Every party competes with the other party to capture popular imagination so as to encash it as votes. It can be said without any fear of contradiction that the rise and spread of Hindu

and Muslim fundamentalisms or call it communalism if you wish, in the recent past, specially since the early eighties, was due, not to concern for religion or religious issues but primarily for party or group politics. Religion at best was used as an instrument. Both the controversies i.e. the Shah Bano and the Babri Masjid-Ramjanam Bhoomi, must be seen in this political backdrop.

## II

### History

To be sure, the Ramjanam Bhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy is not of the recent origin. It originated, thanks to the British policy of driving a wedge between Hindus and Muslims, in the nineteenth century and to be more precise, it originated around 1855 i.e. just before the war of independence of 1857. Before we deal with this aspect it would be appropriate if we throw some light on the existence or otherwise of Ramjanamsthan on the site of the Babri Masjid today. This answer whether the Ramjanamsthan was where the mosque is today depends on ancient history and the availability of records to that effect.

It is naturally very controversial subject. Myths and facts have been mixed together. It is very difficult to separate one from the other. First one has to answer the question whether Rama was a historical figure and then the question of his place of birth arises. Even if Rama was an historical figure as believed by many, was he born in Ayodhya? And if at all he was born in Ayodhya, was he born on the site where the Babri Masjid stands? In Ayodhya several temples claim that Lord Rama was born on the sites of these temples. All the priests of these temples make this claim. Not only to a historian but to all those who are in search of truth (not myths based on faith) these questions are most fundamental. It should also be noted that all the research that has gone into the subject fails to answer these fundamental questions convincingly.

## Location of Ayodhya

The first most important question is the location of Ayodhya. Did Ayodhya exist when Rama was supposedly born? When was Lord Rama born, in the first place? We get entangled in myths. Dr. Sukumar Sen in his *Origin and Development of Rama Legend* says that the events of Ramayana in the *Treta Yuga* is said to have taken place 9 lakh years ago. Dr. Shukl holds the time is calculated on the basis of Ikshvaku's genealogy as given in the Puranas. If so, Rama ought to have lived about 4,000 years ago (i.e. 2350-1950 B.C.).<sup>1</sup> If Rama lived 4,000 years ago, did Ayodhya exist then? How could it be established? The best evidence could be provided by Archaeological excavations.

The evidence provided by archaeological excavations is not very encouraging as far as existence of Ayodhya around that period is concerned. The Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, Benaras Hindu University, under Prof. A.K. Narain assisted by Shri T.N. Roy and Dr. Puroshottam Singh, conducted excavation at Ayodhya. According to the results of these excavations "it would seem reasonable to ascribe the first occupation of the Janam Bhumi area to circa seventh century B.C."<sup>2</sup>

Even a noted scholar Prof. Suniti Kumar Chatterji maintained, "The Ramayana is basically a literary creation by some single poet who has been named Valmiki. There is evidently no historical core below the surface. No scholar of Indian history now thinks that Rama, the hero of Ramayana was a historical person who can be relegated to a particular period of time."<sup>3</sup> The eminent historians of JNU, Delhi, have also come to similar conclusion. They write: i). There is no archaeological evidence to show that at this early time the region around present day Ayodhya was inhabited. The earliest possible date for settlements at the site are of about the eight century B.C. The archaeological remains indicate a fairly simple material life, more primitive than what is described in the Valmiki Ramayana. ii) In the Ramayana, there are frequent references to places and buildings on a large scale in an urban setting. Such descriptions of an urban complex are

not sustained by the archaeological evidence of the eighth century B.C. iii) There is also a controversy over the location of Ayodhya. Early Buddhist texts refer to Shravasti and Saketa, not Ayodhya, as the major cities of Koshala. There are very few references to an Ayodhya, but this is said to be located on the Ganges, not on river Saryu which is the site of present day Ayodhya. iv) The town of Saketa was renamed Ayodhya by a Gupta king, Skanda Gupta in the fifth Century A.D., moved his residence to Saketa and called it Ayodhya . . . Thus what may have been the fictional Ayodhya of the epic poem was identified with Saketa quite late. This does not necessarily suggest that the Gupta king was a bhakta of Rama. In bestowing the name of Ayodhya on Saketa he was trying to gain prestige for himself by drawing on the tradition of the Suryavansi kings, a line to which Rama is said to have belonged.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus from the foregoing it is quite clear that no body could be certain about historicity of Rama, existence of Ayodhya in 4,000 B.C., the period to which Lord Rama is supposed to have lived according to the legend and also about the location of Ayodhya and much less about the Janamsthan in Ayodhya. How did the dispute about the Janamsthan then arose ? It seems to have been of much later origin. It would not be wrong to suggest that it actually arose during the British period when coloured history began to be written. Had Babar demolished Ramjanamsthan temple, it would have found mention either in *Tuzk-i-Babri* (i.e. the memoirs of Babar) or in some other contemporary sources. In fact Babar had no reason to fear anyone to mention demolition of Ramjanamsthan temple. If he had ordered it for religious merit he should have felt proud to mention that as he did not hesitate to mention that he did order mutilation of nude Jain idols in Urwah Valley, near Gwalior, since he considered them to be obscene. Of course his order did not extend to those idols which were not nude. When he could boast of mutilating these nude Jain idols why should he have not mentioned demolition of Rama Janamsthan temple ? Secondly even Babar's contemporary sources do not mention anything about it. Even Tulsidas who wrote *Ramcharitra Manas* in Hindi and who was great Bhakta

of Rama did not mention such an event even though he lived just a quarter of a century after Babar. If Babar or any of his court official had demolished the Rama Temple, it could not have gone unnoticed by his contemporary Hindus.

One Ram Gopal Pande's *Ramjanam Bhoomi ka Romanchkari Itihas* mentions that during Babar's period Hindus attacked Babri Masjid four times, during Humayun's period ten times, during Akbar's time 20 times, during Aurangzeb's period three times, during the British period 31 times and during Nawab's of Oudh eight times to recover the site of Rama Temple. However, the author does not mention any reliable contemporary sources to corroborate his claim. Even Aine-Akbari is silent on this issue. So such a claim cannot be taken seriously.

The JNU historians rightly point out that "It is in the nineteenth century that the story circulates and enters official records. These records were then cited by others as valid historical evidence on the issue."<sup>5</sup> We find the story of the destruction of the temple in British records like P. Carnegy's *Historical Sketch of Tehsil Fyzabad, Zillah Fyzabad, Lucknow, 1870* or H.R. Nevill's *Faizabad District Gazetteer, Allahabad, 1905*. The translator of Babar's *Memoirs* Mrs. A.F. Beveridge in a footnote suggests that Babar being a Muslim, and "impressed by the dignity and sanctity of the ancient Hindu shrine" would have displaced "at least in part" the temple to erect the mosque.<sup>6</sup> She bases her inference on the fact that Babar being Muslim must have been intolerant of other faiths and thus demolished the temple which was supposedly in existence there. It is, at best, very generalised inference and forgetting the fact that Babar, in his memoirs advises his son Humayun to be tolerant to Hindus and not to eat beef if he wants to rule over India.

In fact the first major clash between the Hindus and Muslims on the issue of Babri Masjid took place in 1855. It has been reported in Mirza Jan's *Hadiqah al-Shuhada* which was published in 1956. Though his account may be coloured, it chronicles this major clash between the two communities. According to him the Hindus captured Masjid Fidai Khan and demolished it, took over the mosque inside

the fort and also razed to the ground the Hanuman Garhi mosque.<sup>7</sup> The Muslims, according to this source, were greatly disturbed by demolitions of these mosques and waged war against Hindus under the leadership of Shah Ghulam Husain and made Babri Masjid as their base.

According to the writer of *Hadiqah al-Shuhada*, the Hindu Bairagis had the tait support of the British who were using them to intensify hatred between Hindus and Muslims. The Bairagis thus, on seeing the British forces attacked the Muslims in Babri Masjid but the Muslims held their ground and reached Hanumangadhi door fighting the Hindus and a large number of Bairagis were killed. Then, a large number of Bairagis attacked the Babri mosque and killed a large number of Muslims who were resting inside.<sup>8</sup> After this massacre of Muslims the Bairagis entered the mosque and performed Havan, blew the cunch and offered Mohan bhog. They felt that Lord Hanuman has cleared Ayodhya of the *malechhas* (i.e. unholy Muslims). They also dug the Muslim graves and they put an idol there.<sup>9</sup>

Thus it appears to be the first systematic confrontation between Hindus and Muslims in Ayodhya which seems to have taken place at the instance of the British rulers. They succeeded in driving a wedge between Muslims and the Hindus. It did not end there. The Muslims again rose under the leadership of Amir Ali Amethwi to recover the mosque of Hanuman Garhi. The Nawwab of Oudh Wajid Ali Shah was reluctant to help recover the mosque as he knew that the political fall out of such a venture would go against him. The British were looking for excuses to unseat him. He thus wisely kept out of the controversy. Nevertheless, some Muslims, feeling humiliated, could not contain themselves and set out to reconquer the mosque. It proved to be a very costly expedition in terms of Muslim lives. But nevertheless, the Muslims succeeded in getting possession of Babri Masjid, throwing the Beragis out who had occupied it. Then they began due process of law by filing suits. In 1858 the Muslims complained to the district court about construction of a clay chabutra near the pulpit of the mosque and performing puja there.<sup>10</sup> In 1860 the Babri Masjid was properly registered. We also find in the complaint



filed in 1860 that a chabutra has been constructed near the mosque and that Mahant of Hanumangarih wanted to construct a house nearby which was disallowed.

The historicity of Ramjanamsthan seems to be so weak that its proponents resort to faith rather than facts. Thus Prof. Lal says "In religion, it is a matter of faith and not of proof. . . So by faith and faith alone, Christians embrace Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, by faith and faith alone Muslims believe Muhammad to be the Prophet of Allah, *and by faith and faith alone Hindus believe Ramajambhoomi in Ayodhya to be the birth place of Lord Rama.* Beliefs of all religions have to be shown equal deference."<sup>11</sup> (emphasis added).

The other argument by the author (i.e. Prof. Lal) is that since all Muslim conquerors and rulers broke temples and built mosques on their sites as it was their article of faith, Babar must have demolished Ramjanam Bhoomi temple also and constructed a mosque in its place. To say the least both are fragile arguments. Yes, in matters of religion faith is integral but not in matters of history. If history becomes matter of faith, myths and not facts would rule over it. Prof. Lal does not understand the difference between the fact that Muhammad was born and faith that he was a Prophet. It is prophethood which is a matter of faith, not Muhammad's birth. Muhammad's birth is merely a matter of fact. Mere faith cannot prove that a person called Muhammad was born in Mecca in 570 A.D. Similarly it would be certainly a matter of faith that Lord Rama was an awtara of Vishnu but no degree of faith can ever establish that he was born in Ayodhya at a place designated by some believing Hindus. It is historical facts alone which would determine that. And in this case facts are certainly lacking. Even archaeological excavations could not establish existence of Ayodhya as pointed out before. Faith alone cannot fill that void.

Second argument is equally weak. That was the argument which some British historians and officials employed for their own reasons. It is at best bad history. Even if it is true that every Muslim ruler was a zealot and indulged in demolishing temples belonging to Hindus, it would not prove that Babar demolished Ramjanamsthan Mandir and constructed a mosque



unless it is established that there was a temple at the site dedicated to Lord Rama's birth and that it was precisely at the site where Babri Masjid exists. There is no such historical indication, let alone proof. As shown above there was no such controversy between Ramjanamsthan Mandir and Babri Masjid before eighteen fifties i.e. before the British began to consolidate their power in India. If history were to be replaced by faith in order to claim Babri Masjid it may have disastrous consequences for Indian history. We shudder to think of that. Whether Hindus gain or Muslims lose out or vice versa, history should not be trifled with. History should have nothing to do with ones Hinduness or Muslimness.

### III

In fact the controversy about Babri Masjid and Ramjanambhoomi had almost died out after the British engineered events of nineteenth century. The question hardly ever arose until after the partition. The hatred aroused against Muslims on account of partition had its fall out on Babri Masjid too. It was sought to be converted into a Hindu temple. It happened on December 22-23, 1949. According to *Organiser*, of March 29, 1987 "on the historic morning of December 23, 1949 the idols of Sri Ramchandra and Sita Devi miraculously appeared in the Janamasthan. As the Hindu devotees rejoiced over the miracle and thronged in their thousands", the government proclaimed the premises as disputed and locked the gates.<sup>12</sup> However, what *Organiser* says is again a myth. The truth can be sought in the radio message sent by the then district magistrate K.K. Nayar on December 23, 1949 to Chief Minister Govind Ballabh Pant, the chief secretary and home secretary. It read thus : "A few Hindus entered Babri Masjid at night when the Masjid was deserted and installed a diety there. DM and SP and force at spot. Situation under control. Police picket of 15 persons was on duty at night but did not apparently act."<sup>13</sup>

However, Jawaharlal Nehru later intervened and the premises was locked to stop Hindus from worshipping there though the idols could not be got removed in view of the

sensitivity of the issue and reported fear of the disturbances. K.K. Nayar who was DM of Faizabad resisted all attempts to remove the idol. Nehru was furious and was in favour of undoing the wrong and wrote to Govind Ballabh Pant to get the idols removed but Nayar did not yield. He later resigned and became member of the Jana Sangh Party. It speaks volumes about his political proclivity. Neither the Congress party nor the Government could do anything in the matter. Akshay Brahmachari, the secretary of the Faizabad District Congress had rightly pointed out in a memorandum then submitted to Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1950, "I do not view this question as one of saving the mosque or Muslims, I view (it) as saving the great ideals of the Congress and Mahatma for which we have been struggling all these days. *If we do not resist these reactionary ideas with all the forces at our command, the ideals of the Congress will become extinct and reactionary forces will sweep the country.*"<sup>14</sup>

The premises remained locked since then until it was thrown open to the Hindus in February, 1986. If locking was murder of justice and ideals of secularism, its locking was greater injustice and outright slaughter of ideals of secularism. It is a long story. Unfortunately the judiciary has not been above board in dispensing justice. The former Supreme Court judge Shri V.R. Krishna Iyer strongly condemned the role of the judiciary in dealing with this dispute. "The judiciary will be described as the villain of the piece", said he. "This judiciary" has let us down in preventing this madness from building up, said Soli Sorabjee, a senior advocate of the Supreme Court. Both were speaking at a seminar about the Babri Masjid-Ramjanam Bhoomi issue in Delhi in November. Mr. Iyer further pointed out that since 1961 the courts have simply been passing interim orders over the case. It was a pity, he said, that the high court and the supreme court do not have the guts to face the issue. He, however, also pointed out that it was not the judiciary alone to blame but even the government. The latter he said was responsible for allowing the tension to mount. Its throwing up its hand in despair is a confession of guilt, he added.<sup>15</sup>

## IV

It was in fact the Congress Government at the Centre which should be primarily blamed for building up the controversy between the mosque and the temple. We will briefly trace out its history. Mrs. Indira Gandhi began to incline on the Hindu vote in the post-emergency period, specially from 1980 onwards as she perceived that she could no longer rely upon the minority votes. She encouraged the formation and growth of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in a very subtle way after the incident of conversion of few Harijan families in Meenakshipuram in 1981. The emergence of middle castes among the Hindus and their growing political aspirations further inclined Mrs. Gandhi towards encashing the Hindu votes.<sup>16</sup>

The VHP, after it tested popularity, wanted to retain it even though the conversion controversy died down in due course of time. It raised issue after issue, controversy after controversy, for its public existence. One of these controversies related to the Babri Masjid. So far the controversy was confined to the four walls of the courts in Faizabad and Allahabad. The VHP, however, brought it to the roads from 1983 onwards. However, even then it remained in low key. The controversy slowly began to gather momentum thanks to the role of media. It, however, acquired, disturbing proportions during and after the Shah Bano controversy which started after the Supreme Court judgement in her case delivered on 23rd April, 1985.<sup>17</sup>

The Supreme Court judgement in the Shah Bano case raised a storm of protest among the conservative Muslims. There were huge demonstrations by the Muslims throughout India as it was thought to be interference in their personal law by the judiciary. The Muslim leaders seized this opportunity to arouse Muslim sentiments for their own political ends. It was, I would say, the biggest event in post-independence India which created such ferment among the Indian Muslims. They were made to think by their leadership as if their Muslim identity was in great danger if the Supreme Court judgement was not nullified. The Rajiv Gandhi Government felt threatened by the unprecedented agitation and agreed to enact The Muslim

Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill. The same was enacted in May, 1986 by the Parliament.

It must be noted that the Shah Bano agitation had very adverse effect on the Hindu mind. Let alone the members of the Hindu communal organisations, even other Hindus, including those belonging to the secular parties, felt strongly about introduction of the Muslim Women's Bill in the Parliament in February, 1986 as deeply offensive to the values of secular India. Even the Parliament members of the Congress (I) felt strongly about it and they had to be restrained not to voice their opinion on the controversial Bill on 10th April, 1986 and not to link Muslim fundamentalism with it.<sup>18</sup>

As Rajiv Gandhi had sensed the intensity of Muslim anger against the Supreme Court judgement, he also had gauged the degree of resentment over the issue among the Hindus. He, therefore, under advise from some of his colleagues (Arun Nehru's name is mentioned in this connection), decided to get the doors of Babri Masjid opened to Hindus before introducing the controversial Muslim Women's Bill in Parliament. The Bill was introduced in the Parliament on 25 February, 1986 and the doors of the Babri Masjid were thrown open to the Hindus on 1st February, 1986 on the orders of the Faizabad district court. The judgement was delivered by the District Judge, Faizabad Shri K.M. Pandey on 1st February, 1986 on Civil Appeal No. 1/1986. The appellant was Umesh Chand Pandey and the judgement said, "The appeal is allowed. The respondents (the state government and others) are directed to open the locks of the gate O and P forthwith."<sup>19</sup>

The locks were opened the same day and T.V. cameras were ready to televise the whole operation. That itself showed that whole thing was pre-planned. This was done, one can easily infer from the timing of the court order, to please the militant Hindus who were very angry at the impending introduction of the Muslim Women's Bill in the Parliament. Thus on both sides of the divide the politics of manipulation triumphed over the politics based on principles and values. In the process the politics was communalised doing immense harm to the secular ideals. Such manipulations encouraged aggressive assertion from fundamentalists of both the communities. These

fundamentalists became very bold. The Hindu fundamentalists led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra became very strident in the matter.

For quite some time the Babri Masjid Action Committee also remained aggressive in the matter and contributed to communalisation of the situation. Mr. Shahabuddin, convenor of the Committee, was alleged to have given a call for boycott of Republic Day in 1987 which he denied as not his. He said in a press statement that "he had given no call to the Muslim community not to observe the Republic Day celebrations." He explained that the call was given by the All India Babri Masjid Conference, which was jointly convened by three organisations—The Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat and the Babri Masjid Action Committee of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi."<sup>20</sup> Whatever it may be, the call aroused strong passions and had to be withdrawn on January 23.<sup>21</sup> However, such an adventure further communalised the situation. Also, the rally held on the Boat Club Lawns in Delhi by the Babri Action Committee attracted media attention as it was attended by lakhs of Muslims and some provocative speeches were made. This rally in no small measure resulted in communal violence in Meerut from 18 to 23 May, 1987.<sup>22</sup>

Between 1987 and 1989, until the Lok Sabha elections in November 1989, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the BJP and the Shiv Sena lost no opportunity to exacerbate the issue. The Janambhoomi issue, it must be said, greatly exercised the minds of urban middle class Hindus. It had a snowball effect. As the general elections drew nearer, the communalists became more and more aggressive on the issue and tried to make it almost a major electoral plank. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad thought of an ingenious scheme of bringing consecrated bricks from every village in India to Ayodhya for constructing Ramjanamsthan temple beginning on 9th November, 1989. The BJP not only lent it full support but its activists joined processions taking these consecrated bricks to Ayodhya and raised extremely provocative slogans against Muslims. The BJP was out to exploit this issue to the hilt to enhance its electoral appeal as these processions began to be taken out from October and the elections were slated to be held in last week of November.

These processions and the provocative slogans raised resulted in communal holocausts in number of places like Indore, Mhow, Ratlam, Kota, Jaipur, Bhagalpur and many other places. Though all these riots were major ones resulting huge losses to life and property, the Bhagalpur riots were most volatile and took more than a thousand lives besides incalculable loss of properties. It was a national shame. Thus we see there was so much bloodletting on Babri Masjid-Ramjanambhoomi issue.

The foundation stone of Ramjanambhoomi was laid on 9th November, 1989 very close to the Babri Mosque. There is no doubt that this could not have been done without the connivance of the then Government led by Rajiv Gandhi. The Congress (I) too, wanted to reap electoral benefits by manipulating both the communities once again. Buta Singh the then Home Minister certainly tried to play double game by pushing the VHP to go ahead with Shilanyas and assuring the Muslims on the other that the Congress will not allow anyone to temper with the Babri Masjid. Reliable sources indicate that Buta Singh had a meeting on 27 September with general secretary of VHP Shri Ashok Singhal in Lucknow and it was decided that VHP would go ahead with the shilanyas. Even officials were instructed that shilanyas should go unhindered.

The Congress, on the other hand had assured the Muslims that shilanyas would not be allowed on any controversial plot of land. However, it did take place on a plot which is in fact a cemetery plot and is part of the Masjid complex. This place was approved by the DM as per the Sunday Observer report on November 5. The approval was given by the DM on November 3. The Muslims protested but Buta Singh feigned ignorance. This greatly angered the Muslims and they voted against the Congress at least in the north and contributed to the Congress defeat. It clearly shows that politics of manipulation should not be stretched too far. It not only does not pay but it leads to aggravation of communal situation endangering communal peace and national integrity. Had the Congress (I) and the BJP, Shiv Sena, VHP combine not used this issue for electoral purposes, so many innocent lives would not have been lost in communal eruption in the Hindi belt.

## V

**Conclusion**

Every effort should be made to defuse the volatile controversy about Ramjanamsthan and Babri Masjid. This issue cannot be resolved in the street. It would only result in further loss of lives. I am of the opinion that every human life is much more precious than hundred masjids and temples. Life is God's creation whereas mosques and temples are creation of human beings. We should, therefore, do everything possible to resolve this issue through constructive dialogue in the spirit of reconciliation. At this stage even courts cannot help much. The militant Hindu organisations are saying that we will not accept the court judgement if it goes against the Hindus as Ramjanamsthan is non-negotiable and as the Muslims did not accept the Shah Bano judgement earlier.

It is, therefore, highly necessary to arrange a round-table dialogue between the religious and secular leaders of the two communities. The efforts of Sushil Muni are welcome in this direction. But it is only a first step. The dialogue should not start with preconceived ideas or positions. It should be with an open mind and heart. Various alternatives like converting the complex into a national monument, or co-existence of Masjid and Mandir, or shifting of the Babri Masjid or constructing the Ramjanamsthan at some other site could be considered. All these solutions should be debated and some consensus evolved. This is the only sane course. It should no longer be politicised. We must now call a halt to communal madness and earnestly prepare ourselves to face real issues posing serious challenge.

**Notes**

1. P.S. Sridhara Murthy *Rama-Ramayana and Babar* (Bangalore, 1988) pp. 14.
2. *Indian Archeology—A Review 1976-77*.
3. P.S. Sridhara Murthy op. cit. pp. 14.



4. See *The Political Abuse of History—Babri Masjid—Ramjanambhumi Dispute* Issued by Servapalli Gopal, Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra et al and published by Centre for Historical Studies, New Delhi, 1989.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 6
6. *Ibid.*,
7. Quoted in Syed Sabahuddin Abdur Rahman's *Babri Masjid—Tarikhi Pasmanzar aur Peshmanzar ki Roshni men* (Azamgarh, 1986) p. 22.
8. Syed Sabahuddin *Ibid.*, pp. 24.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 25.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 30.
11. Prof. K.S. Lal "Ramjanam Bhoomi—Some issues" *Organiser* Deepavali Ramjanamabhoomi special, October, 1989.
12. Quoted by A.G. Noorani in "The Babri Masjid-Ramjanamabhoomi Question", *Economic Political Weekly*, November, 4-11, 1989 pp. 2461.
13. Quoted by A.G. Noorani *Ibid* pp. 2462.
14. A.G. Noorani *Ibid* pp. 2462.
15. See *Times of India*, Bombay 11-11-89.
16. See for further analysis Asghar Ali Engineer *Communalism and Communal Violence in India—An Analytical Approach to Hindu-Muslim Conflict* Delhi, 1989 pp. 60-87.
17. See Asghar Ali Engineer *The Shah Bano Controversy* (Bombay, 1987).
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 240.
19. See Judgement of District Judge Faizabad as quoted in *Muslim India* ed. by Shahabuddin, March 1986.
20. See *Times of India*, Bombay, 9-1-1987.
21. *Ibid.*, 25-1-87.
22. See Asghar Ali Engineer *Delhi-Meerut Riots* (Delhi, 1987).



## ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF LITIGATION

S.K. TRIPATHI

The communal passions which unlocked with the opening of the main gate of the Ram Janambhoomi Temple in Ayodhya, known as the Babri Mosque, on February 1, 1986 are now cooling down. The curfew which had to be clamped down in several towns of Uttar Pradesh following incidents of communal violence has been lifted and even Meerut and Sambhal towns are limping back to normalcy.

Though the spillover spread not only outside Uttar Pradesh but even to Pakistan, yet the temple town of Ayodhya on the bank of the river Saryu, which has been the centre of controversy between mandir and masjid for centuries, remained by and large unaffected by communal frenzy. Even now, along with its district headquarters in Faizabad, it presents an example of co-existence and harmonious living to religious fanatics.

The Janmasthan-Babri Masjid controversy has legal as well as historical aspects. The historical dispute is so complicated and so confused by fact and fiction that it has defied solution and the legal dispute which started a century ago is still pending in court.

The writ petition filed under Articles 226 and 227 of the Constitution by Mohammed Jashim of Ayodhya before the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court, seeking a directive to quash the order of the district judge of Faizabad for unlocking the disputed premises, is not likely to be taken up so long as the atmosphere remains surcharged with communal passions. Though notices were issued by the court to six parties, including the district judge, Faizabad, and the state of Uttar Pradesh through the collector to show cause why the petition may not be admitted, yet even after six weeks none of them has filed a reply.

With goodwill on both sides, the issue could be resolved out of court. Otherwise, it is likely to drag on for any number of years. However, there is no move as yet, and the main hurdle is the absence of representative organisations of the two contending parties.

### The Legal History

According to the legal history, records of which are available, Raghubar Das, claiming to be the mahant of the Janmasthan, instituted a suit in the court of a sub-judge, Faizabad, Pandit Hari Kishan, seeking permission to construct a temple on a *chabootara* (platform), known as the Janmasthan measuring 17 feet by 21 feet and situated on the outer enclosure of the disputed premises, since he and other priests had no shelter. The suit was filed on January 19, 1885 and it was mentioned that earlier in May 1883 the deputy commissioner of Faizabad had refused permission and prohibited the construction of any temple on the basis of objections raised by some Muslims.

The sub-judge in his order dated February 24, 1885 found that the land on which stands the *chabootara* of the Janmasthan belongs to the plaintiff and the property rests in the plaintiff. However, he refused permission to construct the temple "since it is so close to the existing masjid that it would be contrary to public policy to grant a decree authorising him to build a temple as desired by him".

When the suit was dismissed, Mahant Raghubar Dass filed

an appeal before the District Judge, Faizabad, Colonel J.E.A. Chamber, who, after an inspection of the disputed land on March 17, 1886 dismissed the appeal. He also struck down the words from the judgment of the sub-judge, which conceded that the property rests in the mahant.

Colonel Chamber, after a spot inspection, recorded in his judgment, delivered on March 26, 1886: "I found that the masjid, built by Emperor Babar, stands on the border of the town of Ayodhya, that is to say to the west and south, and it is clear of habitation. It is most unfortunate that a masjid should have been built on the land specially held sacred by the Hindus. But as that occurred 356 years ago, it is too late now to remedy the grievance. All that can be done is to maintain the parties in *status quo*. In such a case as the present one, any innovation would cause more harm and derangement of order than benefit."

The district judge further observed that "The entrance to the enclosure is under a gateway on which appears the superscription of 'Allah'. Immediately on the left is the platform or *chabootara* of masonry occupied by the Hindus. On this is a small superstructure of wood in the form of a tent. This *chabootara* is said to indicate the birthplace of Ram Chander. In front of the gateway is the entry to the masonry platform of the masjid. A wall pierced here and there with a railing, hides the platform of the masjid from the enclosure in which stands the *chabootara*."

The mahant went in appeal before the judicial commissioner of Oudh on May 25, 1886 contending that the district judge was wrong in cancelling the findings of the sub-judge "declaring the right of property to rest in the plaintiff" and that the district judge was wrong in stating that the masjid was built by the Emperor Babar.

The Judicial Commissioner, W. Young, also dismissed the appeal and in his judgment dated November 1, 1886, observed: "This spot is situated within the precinct of the grounds surrounding a mosque erected some 350 years ago owing to the bigotry and tyranny of the emperor who purposely chose this holy spot, according to Hindu legend, as the site of his mosque. The Hindus seem to have got very limited rights of access to

certain spots within the precinct adjoining the mosque and they have for a series of years been persistently trying to increase those rights and to erect buildings on two spots in the enclosure namely (1) *Sita ki rasoi* (kitchen of Sita) and (2) *Ram Chander ki Janmabhoomi* (birth place of Lord Rama). The executive authorities have persistently refused these encroachments and absolutely forbid any alteration of the *status quo*."

The judicial commissioner further observed, "I think this is a very wise and proper procedure on their part and I am further of the opinion that the civil courts have properly dismissed the plaintiffs claim. The pleas on appeals to this court are wholly unsupported by facts in the case or by any argument that appears to be weighty. I see no reason to interfere with the order modifying the wording of the part of the judgment of the court of first instance. There is nothing whatever on the record to show that the plaintiff is in any sense the proprietor of the land in question. This appeal is dismissed with costs of all courts."

With the dismissal of this appeal the first legal battle fought by the Hindus ended. Nothing significant is reported to have occurred between 1886 and 1934.

The Babri Masjid, however, suffered damage during communal riots in 1934 which were triggered off by the slaughter of a cow in the village of Shahjahanpur near Ayodhya on March 27 that year. According to available documents, Hindus demolished part of the walls surrounding the mosque and damaged the domes, one of which had a large hole. However, the mosque was rebuilt and reconditioned at the cost of the government through a Muslim contractor.

An inquiry was conducted in 1936 by the then commissioner of waqfs under the UP Muslims Waqfs Act and it was held that the Babri Masjid was built by Babar who was a Sunni Muslim. The report was published in the official gazette dated February 20, 1944. This was found in the 1945 litigation between the Shia Central Board of Waqf and the Sunni Central Board of Waqf in the court of civil judge, Faizabad. The civil judge S.A. Ahsan, in his judgment dated March 23, 1946 held that the mosque was found by Babar Shah and that evidence

showed that the mosque has been used by members of both sects.

### **The Padlocking**

Then came the crucial night of December 22, 1949 which converted the masjid into a mandir and gave birth to the controversial padlocks. This incident was reported by constable Mata Prasad at the Ayodhya Police Station at 9 a.m. This was followed by a cryptic radio message sent at 10.30 am on December 23, to the chief minister, chief secretary and home secretary by the then district magistrate, K.K.K. Nayar. The radiogram read: "A few Hindus entered Babri Masjid at night when the masjid was deserted and installed a deity there, DM and SP and force at spot. Situation under control, Police picket of 15 persons was on duty at night but did not apparently act."

Nayar, who was under tremendous pressure from Lucknow to remove the idols surreptitiously and restore the *status quo ante*, had been writing a complete diary of the events taking place. Large crowds which had collected there had been forcing their entry into the mosque. Nayar recorded on December 23, 1949: "The crowd made a most determined attempt to force entry. The lock was broken and policemen were rushed off their legs. All of us, officers and men, somehow pushed the crowd back and held the gate. The sadhus recklessly hurled themselves against men and arms and it was with great difficulty that we managed to hold the gate. The gate was secured and locked with a powerful lock brought from outside and the police force was strengthened (5 pm)."

Now this was the lock, which was put on the main gate under instructions from K.K.K. Nayar. The same lock was broken under the orders of the district judge, Faizabad, K.M. Pandey at 5.19 pm on February 1, 1986 to unlock the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple for worship and prayers by Hindus.

When the idols were installed in the Babri Masjid the then Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru, was furious and ordered the then Chief Minister, Govind Ballabh Pant, to undo the harm done. The Chief Secretary, Bhagwan Sahay, and

Inspector General of Police V.N. Lahiri had been sending frantic messages to Faizabad for the removal of the idols. However, Nayar was not prepared to carry out their instructions because of fear of "bloodshed and manslaughter".

Nayar wrote two detailed letters to Chief Secretary Bhagwan Sahay in quick succession. In his letter dated December 27, Nayar, after explaining the pros and cons of removing the idols, concluded: "I could, if the government decided to remove the idols at any cost, request that I be relieved and replaced by an officer who may be able to see in that solution a merit which I cannot discern. For my part I cannot in my discretion, which is the only legal sanction behind my action in this matter, essay to enforce such a solution as I am fully aware of the widespread suffering which it will entail to many innocent lives."

Nayar, who had to ultimately resign, was supported by the Divisional Commissioner, S.S.L. Dar, who in his letter to the chief secretary the same day stated, "I have studied the situation and cautiously sounded public opinion and I am satisfied that in view of the grave risk of riots on a large scale it would not be desirable to attempt the removal of the idols through governmental agency. Action will be taken under section 145 of the PC and the existing pujaris (will be) replaced by one suitable pujari. But it would not be wise to stop the *bhog* and the *arti*. Meanwhile efforts will continue to find a solution, by constitutional means, of the present tangle with the help of influential persons of both the communities willing to help in the preservation of peace. I think that with the lapse of time the present excitement would wear off and it would then be possible to evolve some satisfactory and enduring plan to end this dilemma."

This was also the solution suggested by Nayar as an alternative to the state government's demand that the idols be removed.

Finally, it appears a consensus was evolved for the maintenance of the *status quo* till such time as the courts decided the rights of ownership. Markandey Singh, Magistrate, first class, and Additional City Magistrate, Faizabad-cum-Ayodhya after

being "fully satisfied from information received from police sources and from other credible sources that a dispute between Hindus and Muslims of Ayodhya over the question of rights of proprietorship and worship in the building claimed variously as Babri Masjid and Janmabhoomi Mandir, Mohalla Ram Kot, within the local limits of my jurisdiction, is likely to lead to a breach of the peace," ordered the attachment of the "said buildings" under section 145 Cr PC and appointed Priya Dutt Ram, Chairman, Municipal Board, Faizabad-cum-Ayodhya, as receiver to arrange for the care of the property in dispute on December 29, 1949. The receiver took charge of the disputed property on January 5, 1950 and submitted a scheme as was desired in the additional city magistrate's order.

Then a civil suit number 2 of 1950 was filed on January 16, 1950 by Gopal Singh Visharad in the court of the civil judge, Faizabad, praying for a declaration that he is entitled to worship and visit without obstruction or disturbance Shri Bhagwan Ram Chandra and others installed in the Janmabhoomi and a perpetual injunction restraining the defendants from removing these idols. Amongst eight defendants were five Muslims and the state of Uttar Pradesh, the deputy commissioner and the police superintendent of Faizabad.

The civil judge, N.N. Chadha, granted an interim injunction as prayed for. The district magistrate, Faizabad thereupon instructed the district government counsel to move for modification of the order on the ground that the site in dispute is claimed both by Hindus and Muslims and unrestricted admission of the public has not been allowed and that if the public is freely allowed for *puja* and *darshan*; it would amount to allowing one party the exercise of rights which are in dispute. Accordingly an application was moved and the order dated January 16, 1950 was modified on January 19, 1950 as follows: "The parties are hereby restrained by means of the temporary injunction to refrain from removing the idols in question from the site in dispute and from interfering with the *puja* etc, as at present carried on. The order dated January 16, 1950 stands modified accordingly."

The interim injunction was later confirmed by the civil



judge in his order dated March 3, 1951 with the observation: "The undisputed fact remains that on the date of this suit the idols of Shri Bhagwan Ram Chandra and others did exist on the site and that worship was being performed by the Hindus including the plaintiff, though under some restrictions put by the executive authorities."

In his written statement filed before the civil judge, the Deputy Commissioner of Faizabad, J.N. Ugra, on behalf of the state of Uttar Pradesh on April 24, 1950 said in paragraph 12 that "The property in suit is known as Babri Masjid and it has been for a long period in use as a mosque for the purpose of worship of the Muslims. It has not been in use as a temple of Shri Ram Chandraji."

In paragraph 13 he stated that "On the night of December 12, 1949 the idols of Shri Ram Chandraji were surreptitiously and wrongly put inside it."

In addition to the regular suit number 2 of 1950 of Gopal Singh Visharad, three more suits relating to disputes over receivership and waqfs were filed during the intervening period. The Nirmohi Akhara also staked its claim for ownership of the disputed land. The question of ownership to-date continues to be *sub-judice*.

### Conflicts and Clashes

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad, outside the legal contours, spearheaded a movement for what it called the "liberation" of the Ram Janmabhoomi with the slogan of "Open the lock" which was later replaced by "Break the lock". The Parishad raised funds and launched Rama-Janaka *raths* (motorised chariots carrying idols of Rama and his spouse Sita), which have been going round "awakening Hindus and mobilising them for the liberation war". March 9 was fixed as D-Day in Ayodhya.

The top people of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad including its president, S.N. Katju, B.N. Agrawal, both retired judges of the High Court and S.C. Dixit, retired director general of police, met the District Magistrate of Faizabad, Indu Kumar Pandey, on December 18, 1985 and informed him that they wished to



have *darshan* of Lord Rama at Janmabhoomi next day and contended that there was no legal sanction for padlocking the temple and the lock was illegal and therefore should be removed. They also met the Chief Minister, Vir Bahadur Singh, at Faizabad and submitted a memorandum, a copy of which was also handed over to the district magistrate.

A 28-year-old lawyer of Ayodhya, Umesh Chandra Pandey, quietly moved an application on January 25, 1986 in the court of Sadar Munsif. Hari Shankar Dubey, seeking directions and an order to the respondents restraining them from imposing any sort of restriction or hurdles in the *darshan* and *puja*, etc, offered by him in particular and other members of the Hindu community in general of the idols of Lord Rama and others in the Janmabhoomi. The application was in regular suit No. 2 of 1950 (consolidated with regular suit No 12, 1961 and of 25 of 1950 and 36 of 1954 with the case of 12 of 1961 as the leading case). The munsif in his order dated January 28 refused to pass orders on the ground that the file of the leading case was requisitioned in the High Court, and orders on the application could be passed only in the file of the leading suit.

### The Unlocking

Umesh Chandra Pandey filed an appeal against the munsif's order before the District Judge, Faizabad, K.M. Pandey on January 31. The district judge rejected an application filed on behalf of Mohammed Hashim for being impleaded as a party in the appeal. He recorded statements of the District Magistrate, Indu Kumar Pandey, and the Senior Superintendent of Police, Karma Vir Singh. He passed an order on February 1 at 4.40 pm allowing the appeal and directing the respondents, who were the state of Uttar Pradesh, the district magistrate, the city magistrate and the police superintendent of Faizabad to open the locks forthwith and not to impose any restriction or cause hurdle in the *darshan* and *puja*, etc, of the applicant and other members of the community in general.

The district judge observed after the clinching statement of the SSP, "It is clear that it is not necessary to keep the locks

at the gates for the purpose of maintaining law and order or the safety of the idols. This appears to be an unnecessary irritant to the applicant and other members of the community. There does not appear to be any necessity to create an artificial barrier between the idol and the devotees. It appears that the opposite parties have remained a prisoner of indecision for the last 35 years. Somebody in his wisdom thought fit to put locks at the gates at any point of time and nobody since then has seen whether there is any necessity to retain the locks or not.”

The judge further observed that “after having heard the parties it is clear that the members of the other community, namely, the Muslims, are not going to be affected by any stretch of imagination if the locks of the gates were opened and the idols inside the premises are allowed to be seen and worshipped by the pilgrims and devotees. It is undisputed that the premises are presently in the court’s possession and that for the last 35 years Hindus have had an unrestricted right of worship as a result of the court’s order of 1950 and 1951. If the Hindus are offering prayers and worshipping the idols, though in a restricted way for the last 35 years, then the heavens are not going to fall if the locks of the gates are removed. The district magistrate has stated before me today that the members of the Muslim community are not allowed to offer any prayers at the disputed site. They are not allowed to go there.”

The judge further added, “If this is the state of affairs then there is no occasion for any law and order problem arising as a result of the removal of the locks. It is absolutely an affair inside the premises. There is no justification for retaining locks after the positive statements of the district magistrate and the SSP Faizabad that the law and order situation can be very well kept under control by other means as well and for that end it is not necessary to keep the locks on these gates.”

Within 40 minutes of the delivery of the judgment, the locks of the Ram Janmabhoomi, which is also known as the Babri Masjid, were opened by the city magistrate resulting in much jubilation among the Hindus and at the same time causing a Muslim backlash.

An application for stay of the order of the district judge, Faizabad was moved by Mohamed Hashim on February 3, before the Lucknow Bench of the High Court, contending that the district judge had adopted a manner which is unknown in judicial history. Umesh Chandra Pandey, being no party to the suit, his application was absolutely incompetent, and as the suit itself was not pending, no application could be entertained. The district judge, even if he had disagreed with the munsif, could not pass a final order and after 36 years a mandatory injunction could not be granted altering a situation existing from prior to the suit.

What are described as historical facts are controverted and it is not possible to prove or disprove them. Lord Rama was born in period described as 10 lakh years old. However, Ayodhya has been accepted by Hindus as the place of his birth and the seat of power of his dynasty. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad maintains that a temple at the Janmasthan was built by Chandragupta Vikramaditya in the fourth century AD. This temple was destroyed by Babar and he got a mosque known after him constructed in 1528. This is hotly contested by the Muslims.

However, the fact remains that the locks which were opened were those of a structure known as Babri Masjid, which was constructed in 1528 and was being used as a temple since December 1949. It was not constructed by Babar himself but it was named after him and was built by Baqi Bag Tashkandi known as Mir Baqi, who was appointed governor of Avadh by the Emperor Babar. The inscription on a plaque in the mosque as translated, makes this clear : "By the command of Emperor Babar, whose rule of justice touches the arch of heaven, the good hearted Mir Baqi built this abode of angels. May its goodness last forever, as its year of construction reveals that goodness lasts for ever (935 Hijri)."

At the same time there have been conflicts and clashes between the two communities over its possession which have led to many a death on either side.

According to the *District Gazetteer*, Faizabad, 1905, "It is said that up to this time (1855) both Hindus and Musalmans used to worship in the same building. But since the Mutiny

(1857) an outer enclosure has been put up in front of the mosque and the Hindus forbidden access to the inner yard, make their offerings on a platform (*chabootra*), which they have raised in the outer one.”

*Courtesy : Indian Express*

## THE AYODHYA CONTROVERSY : WHERE LIES THE TRUTH ?

SUSHIL SHRIVASTAVA

The insidious roots of the Ramajanambhoomi/Babri Masjid controversy lie embedded in the widespread belief that, at the time of the Muslim conquest, three important Hindu shrines at Ayodhya were destroyed by Mughal emperors.

The religious significance of these shrines—the Janamsthan Temple, the Swaragdwar and the Treta-ka-Thakurlay in their association with the legendary Lord Rama, regarded by the Hindus as an *avatar* of Vishnu. The Janamsthan Temple (or Shri Ramjanambhoomi, as it is popularly known today) was said to sanctify the spot where Rama was believed to have been born; the Swaragdwar was the gate through which he passed into Paradise; and the Treta-ka-Thakur had importance as the place where he performed a *mahavayna* (great sacrifice), which he commemorated by installing images of himself and his wife Sita at the spot.

According to the prevailing belief, the Janamsthan Temple was destroyed by Emperor Babar in 1528 AD and a mosque (which still bears his name) was built in its place. The Swaragdwar met with a similar fate at the hands of Emperor

Aurangzeb, while on the spot where the Treta-ka-Thakur was located, Aurangzeb or his predecessor constructed another mosque.

Against this backdrop, the crucial question confronting the dispassionate enquirer concerns the authenticity of the historical evidence of which the belief is based. Are there really indisputable grounds to believe that a temple consecrating the spot on which Rama was born was located where the Babri Masjid was erected? For that matter, can it really be said with conviction that the mosque was built at Babar's behest? If not, can any other conclusion be drawn on the basis of the historical evidence available? Let us examine the facts for ourselves . . . .

### A Mosque Built by Babar ?

The belief that disputed place of worship is a mosque which Babar built after destroying a temple consecrating Rama's birthplace originated in the first half of the 16th century. Its origin lies in the British strategy of creating a law-and-order problem by instigating a communal conflict in the area in order to justify the annexation of Avadh (*see British Role*).

To divide the local population, the British popularised the idea that the Mughals had desecrated Hindu places of worship in Ayodhya. By propagating this view, they simultaneously sought to project themselves as "sympathisers" of the Hindu majority, while the Mughals—the immediate predecessors of the British—were made out to be oppressors of the Hindus and enemies of Hindu culture and tradition.

In achieving their objective, the British appear to have found a convenient—even if unwitting—collaborator in John Leyden. In his *Memoirs of Zehir-ed-din Muhammad Babar, Emperor of Hindustan* (a translation of Babar's memoirs, written in Persian), published in 1813, Leyden had contended that Babar passed through Ayodhya in March 1528 during his campaign against the Pathans. (It will be worth noting here that the Pathans themselves were Muslims; so it would be unfair to say that Babar's antagonism was directed only at the Hindus).

This “historical evidence” of the Mughal emperor’s presence in the area was contorted by the British authorities to propagate the belief that the “anti-Hindu” Babar had destroyed the Ram Janambhoomi Temple during his passage through Ayodhya and had got a mosque built on the spot—even though Leyden himself had made no mention of any such event in his account.

What is surprising is that the British appear to have got away with it—till this day, Nobody seems to have taken cognisance of the fact that Muslim influence in the area became established around 1030 AD. Strange, therefore, that the destruction of the temple and construction of a mosque in its place has never been attributed to any other Muslim invader before Babar—who enters into the scene at a time when the area had already seen 500 years of Muslim domination—especially considering that history records several instances of Muslim (Turkish) rulers having demolished Hindu temples and built mosques near the sites : as in Delhi (near the Qutb complex), at Ajmer (the mosque of *Dhai Dtn Ka Jhdpra*), and in Gujarat (the Som Temple).

We have it on the basis of history that the Muslim penetration in Avadh began to grow from 1030 AD. The *Mirat-i-Masudi* (an account of Sayyad Salar Masud’s campaigns) tell us that Salar Masud went from Multan to Avadh in 1030 AD. He took Avadh without a struggle and remained there for some time. Then, in 1080 AD, a fresh expedition of the Turkish forces was sent to Avadh during the reign of Sultan Ibrahim.

The expedition was led by Hajib Taghatagin, who crossed the Ganges and advanced further into Hindustan than any invading army since the time of Salar Masud. Again, in 1194 AD, Muizz-ud-din Muhammad-bin-Sam, commonly known as Shahabud-in-Ghori, conquered Avadh after taking Kannauj. It is believed that either he himself or one of his lieutenants occupied Ayodhya. So, to say that Babar alone could have destroyed the temple sounds a bit too much like stretching a point to suit the argument.

## The Truth

In fact, going by the *Babar Nama*, there is good reason to believe that Babar, though himself a devout Muslim, was extremely tolerant towards all religions. The *Babar Nama*, *Memoirs of Babar* as translated by A.S. Beveridge, 1922, states that the Mughal emperor visited several temples during his campaign and was always full of praise about their architectural beauty. Also, there is no mention in his memoirs of his being driven by any desire to destroy Hindu temples. Nor is there any evidence to establish that he destroyed any temple in Ayodhya. For that matter, there is no evidence of his having actually visited the town of Ayodhya itself.

John Leyden, in his translation of Babar's memoirs, states that the Mughal emperor was in Ayodhya on March 28, 1528. While this is corroborated by the original *Babar Nama* (today in the India Office Library, London), there is some uncertainty about the subsequent train of events, as the pages of the original giving an account of the Mughal emperor's activities between April 2 and September 8, 1528, are missing. In the absence of these pages, Leyden concluded that during this period, too, Babar was in Ayodhya. But was he?

Leyden appears completely ignorant of the geography of the area. For instance, he appears to have misinterpreted the actual location of the place where Babar camped. This spot, according to Babar (and as mentioned by Leyden), was four to six miles north of "Aud". Babar, a keen observer with a mind for details, wrote: "On Saturday the 7th *Rajab* (March 28, 1528) we dismounted 2 or 3 *kurohs* (*kos*) above Aud on the junction of Gagar (Ghagra) and Sird (a)" (*Memoirs of Zehra-ed-din Mohammad Babar*).

Leyden concluded that Babar encamped at the junction of the rivers "Serva" and Ghagra. It appears that he misunderstood the ferry port of Serva on the river Ghagra as the junction of the Ghagra and the "river Serva" (*see map*)—when no river of this name existed. In fact, this port was 16 miles south of Ayodhya, and hence, Leyden was convinced that Babar was encamped very near to Ayodhya.



## References

The geographical discrepancy exists in the accounts of other British historians, too. William Erskine—in *History of India Under The Two First Sovereigns of the House of Taimur, Babar and Humayun*, two volumes, London, 1854—and H.M. Elliot—in *History of India : As Told by its own Historians*, Volume IV, 1873—also observed, like Leyden, that Babar encamped four or five miles above the junction of the Ghagra and ‘Serva’. This mistake was undone by Lady Annette Susanah Beveridge in 1922 in *Babar Nama : Memoirs of Babar*.

Lady Beveridge concluded that Babar encamped four or five miles north of the junction of the Sarda and the Ghagra not at the junction of the “Serva” and the Ghagra. Unlike Leyden, she undertook the translation of the *Babar Nama* after having stayed in Faizabad for some time. She concluded that the river “Sird(a)” was the same as the Kali Sarda-Chauka (or the Sarda), an affluent of the Ghagra located around 70 miles north of Ayodhya.

Her interpretation would seem correct because of three reasons : (a) the Ghagra comes to be called the Sarju (by the locals) when it flows touching Ayodhya (whereas, north of Bahraich, about 100 miles from Ayodhya, the Ghagra has a confluence with another river which, too, is called Sarju by geographers); (b) Babar, in his memoirs, describes the Sird(a) as a shallow river on which fords could be put up, and Lady Beveridge wrote: “To so take it (the Sarda) seems warranted by the context; there could be no need for the fords on the Sarju (in Ayodhya) to be examined, and its position is not suitable (for crossing over); and (c) most of the British historians wrongly thought that Aud and Ayodhya were the same.

The mere reference to Aud in Babar’s memoirs was taken by many Britishers to mean Ayodhya. It seems that most of these historians did not realise that the entire area between the Gomti and the Ghagra was called Aud by all Muslim historians, and Aud did not mean just Ayodhya town itself. As for the confusion about the actual river referred to by Babar, it seems to have come about because of the script. The name of the

river is given as “Sird(a)” where the “dal” (in the Persian script) has been wrongly taken as “wao”.

Thus, going by Lady Beveridge’s conclusion, the junction Babar has referred to is that of the Ghagra and the Sarda situated in Bahraich, 72 miles north of Ayodhya. It is possible, therefore, that Babar was actually nowhere near Ayodhya in March 1528. However, as the pages of the original *Babar Nama*; giving the details of the events between April 2 and September 8, 1528, are missing, it is difficult to confirm the authenticity of Lady Beveridge’s view or whether Babar actually visited Ayodhya. What is certain, though, is that had he either ordered the destruction of the Ramjanambhoomi Temple or destroyed it himself, it would have been recorded in his memoirs, especially considering the detailed manner in which they have been penned.

Logic would also rule out Babar’s having destroyed an important Hindu temple when he was busy fighting a war against the Pathans, or that would have alienated the majority-Hindu populace and weakened his own position in the countryside. However, it must be pointed out that all British writers, including P. Carnegy (*A Historical Sketch of Fyzabad Tahsil, including the former Capitals of Ayodhya and Fyzabad, Allahabad*, 1861), W.C. Benett (*Gazetteer of the Province of Oudh*, 13 volumes, Calcutta, 1877) : A Fuhrer (*Report of the Archaeological Survey of India (Imperial Series). The Monumental Antiquities and Inscriptions in the North Western Provinces and Oudh*, two volumes, 1901); and H.R. Nevil (*District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Fyzabad*, Volume XLIII, Allahabad, 1905) have observed that Babar came to Ayodhya (Aud) in 1528 AD and halted there for a week. And that he destroyed the ancient temple at the birthplace of Rama, and on its site, built a mosque.

### Cunningham’s View

As opposed to British historians, A. Cunningham (*Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, Vol. 1, 1864) who remains one of the few British chroniclers whose accounts have not been disputed to date—while admitting that ancient temples in

Ayodhya were destroyed by “Musalmans”, does not anywhere specify that Babar himself indulged in any such destruction.

He says : “There are several very holy Brahmanical (Hindu) temples about Ajudhya, (Ayodhya) but they are all of modern date, and without any architectural pretensions whatever. But there can be no doubt that most of them occupy the sites of more ancient temples that were destroyed by the *Musalmans*. Thus *Ramkot*, or *Hanuman Garhi*, on the east side of the city, is a small walled-fort surrounding a modern temple on the top of an ancient mound. The name *Ramkot* is certainly old, as it is connected with the traditions of the *Mani Parbat* ... but the temple of Hanuman is not older than the time of Aurangzeb.”

Even so, the contention that the Babri Masjid has been constructed on the site of a temple has received support because of the inscriptions on the mosque and the use of un-Islamic pillars in its construction. The inscriptions, for one, clearly point to the fact that the mosque was completed in 1529 AD. Lady Beveridge is of the opinion that the mosque was constructed on the orders of Babar.

The inscriptions, in fact, would appear to indicate that the mosque was constructed by a noble in the court of Babar-- one Amir Mir Baqi, who was governor of Avadh, appointed by Babar. Lady Beveridge says:

“Presumably the order for building the mosque was given during Babar’s stay in Aud in 934 AH (1528 AD), at which time he would be impressed by dignity and sanctity of the ancient Hindu shrine, it (at least in part) displaced, and like the obedient follower of Muhammad he was in intolerance of another faith, would regard the substitution of a temple by a mosque as dutiful and worthy . . . . The mosque was finished in 935 AH (1529 AD), but no mention of its completion is in *Babar Nama*. The dairy for 935 AH has many lacunae; that of the year 934 AH has lost much matter, breaking off before where the account of Aud might be looked for” *Babar Nama*, translated by A. S. Beveridge, 1922. Appendices (LXXVII). Her presumptions, however, seem to have been influenced by the local beliefs in circulation.

## Surprising

It is surprising that neither the Babar Nama nor the inscriptions in the so-called mosque point to the fact that the Ramjanambhoomi Temple had been destroyed by Babar or his men and the mosque built in its place. However, dealing with the inscriptions, several other doubts are raised. There are three inscriptions : two on the outside of the mosque and one inside, above the pulpit. The inscriptions outside are of six lines and one line and are in the form of couplets. The one of six lines reads as follows :

*Ba-farmuda-i-shah Babar ki adilash Bania,-ist ta hakh-igardum mulaqi*

*Bana kard in muhabit-i-qudsiyan Amir-i-Sa'adat-nishan Mir Baqi*

*Baba Khair baqi : Chu sal-i-banaish*

*Iyan shud ki guftam, Bavad Khair baqi (935)*

The translation would read :

*(By the order of the Emperor Babar whose justice is an edifice reaching up to the very height of the heavens. The goodhearted Mir Baqi built this alighting place of angels;*

*May this goodness last forever Bava Khair baqi). The year of the building was 935 AH (or 1529 AD) (Beveridge's translation of the Babar Nama).*

Lady Beveridge's translation, however, could well be suffering from certain inaccuracies where she interprets "Ba-farmuda-i-shah Babar" to mean "By the order of the Emperor Babar."

It is to be noted that under all conquerors, all land occupied belonged to the ruler. As such, land could only be utilised in the ruler's name, and not otherwise. It is possible, therefore, that Mir Baqi, in his enthusiasm to please the emperor, decided to dedicate the mosque at Ayodhya to Babar. For there is no existing record of any royal "firman" having been issued by Babar for the mosque's construction. (In the case of other

mosques like the Babri Masjid near the Purana Quila in Delhi, *firman*s exist in the records.) Even otherwise, there are some doubts arising from the wording and the style of calligraphy of the inscription on the outside of the mosque.

### Difference

Shamsur Rehman Farooqui, acknowledged Urdu critic and a scholar of Persian, feels that had there been an explicit order from Babar for the construction of the mosque, the inscription would have read : “*Ba-hukm Mohammed Zahir-ed-din Ghazi Babar*” and not “*Ba-farmuda-i-shah Babar*”— which actually means “by the desire of Emperor Babar.” To him, the style of calligraphy appears to be of the 19th century as the earlier style employed finer linework. In contrast, the linework of the existing inscription is relatively thick, indicative of a later period. He also feels that the inscription has been put up by someone ill-versed in Persian.

One possible inference that may be drawn from the absence of a royal *firman* and the doubts about the phrasing and calligraphy of the inscription is that it was put up some time after the temple-mosque controversy erupted in the 19th century, most probably by someone interested in reinforcing the claim that the mosque had been constructed at the behest of Babar.

This inference appears logical when we consider the three-line couplet above the pulpit. The couplet praises God in the first line, in the second, the Prophet Mohammad is glorified, while in the third line, Babar is praised as a powerful emperor. Nowhere does it mention any order by Babar. Besides, none of the two inscriptions speak about the Ramjanambhoomi or any other Hindu temple having been located at the site.

The architectural style of the mosque is also interesting. The so-called Babri Masjid has been constructed in the typical Jaunpuri style of architecture. The Sharqi kings of Jaunpur used Hindu masons for the construction of their buildings and hence, were unable to develop a perfect arch at that stage. Most of the Sharqi monuments have a typical kind of arch, supported by a beam. Again, the domes of the mosque are also typically representative of the Sharqi style of architecture.

In fact, if the mosque is viewed from the back, i.e. the west side, it resembles the Atala masjid in Jaunpur. It would also be pertinent to note that by the 15th century, the Turks in Delhi had improved on the designing of the dome. The construction of the arch had also been perfected. Yet, these improvements are not visible in the mosque. Had the mosque been constructed in the 16th century, during Babar's time, it would definitely have been made use of the expertise in architecture available then.

### Typical Symbol

Again, we have typical symbol on the north gate of the mosque. There are two tigers placed sideways in the jumping position with their tails curled. Between the tigers, is an upright peacock. We find a similar representation of tigers on one of the coins of a Sharqi king.

We have it on the basis of historical records that during the confusion that ensued following the death of Firoz Shah Tughlaq in the latter part of the 14th century, the Afghan nobles endeavoured to establish independent principalities. Around 1394 AD, Khwaja-i-Jahan took possession of Avadh and all the country between Bihar and Kannauj and assumed the royal state in Jaunpur. He further strengthened himself during the civil wars in Delhi and established a separate kingdom.

It is probable that what has come to be known as the Babri Masjid was constructed somewhere around this time i.e. the 14th century. It is also rather peculiar that Babar, who possessed a keen aesthetic sense – as is evident from his descriptions of certain Hindu structures in the *Babar Nama* should have consented to the construction of a mosque that cannot boast of any architectural beauty.

Another point that seems to have been overlooked by the protagonists of the mosque theory relates to the construction of a mosque on the site of a Hindu temple. It has been contended by the British observers that the desecration of the Hindu temple at Ayodhya was undertaken to extend Islam in India. This contention clearly indicates that the destroyers of

the temples were religious fanatics well versed in the dictates of their religion.

However, *The Quran* clearly states that prayers offered at a contentious place will not be accepted. A mosque constructed on the site of a temple would definitely be a contentious place. Thus, the whole purpose of constructing a *masjid* on the site of a *mandir* would be self-defeating—though it may be contended that after destroying a temple, a mosque could have been constructed hereby.

In this context, I would like to advance my view that it is highly unlikely that even the contentious mosques in Varanasi and Mathura are located on the *exact* sites of destroyed temples. *Near* the location of the destroyed temple, possible; on the same spot, not likely. That would be against the very tenets of the religion such places of worship are intended to propagate. Could a devout Muslim like Babar, knowledgeable of the tenets of *The Quran*, have allowed such a faux pas as the construction of a mosque bearing his name at the spot where an important temple had existed . . . .?

### **Janambhoomi Temple ?**

The belief that the Ramjanambhoomi Temple was located at the site of the Babri Masjid appears to be based largely on local myth and folklore. In fact, there is no concrete historical evidence to show that a temple associated with Rama existed at the spot. Nor is there any mention of any such temple in the Hindu scriptures. The main basis for the belief appears to be the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, which mentions Ayodhya as the city where Rama was born.

A.E. Cunningham recods in his *Archaeological Report, 1862-63*: "According to the *Ramayana*, the city of Ayodhya was founded by Manu, the progenitor of all mankind. In the time of Dasratha, the father of Rama, it was fortified with towers and gates, and surrounded by a deep ditch. No traces of these works now remain, nor is it likely, indeed, that any portion of the old city should still exist, as the Ayodhya of Rama is said to have been destroyed after the death of Virhadbala in the great war about BC 1426 after which it lay deserted until



the time of Vikramaditya. According to popular tradition this Vikramaditya was the famous Sakari Prince of Ujjain, but as the Hindus of the present day attribute the acts of all Vikramas to this one only, their opinion on the subject is utterly worthless.

We learn, however, from Hwen Thsang that a powerful Prince of this name was reigning in the neighbouring city of Sravasti, just one hundred years after Kanishka, or close to 78 AD, which was the initial year of the *Saka* era of Salivhana. As this Vikramaditya is represented as hostile to the Buddhists, he must have been a zealous Brahmanist, and to him therefore I would ascribe the re-building of Ayodhya and the restoration of all the holy places referring to the history of Rama.

Tradition says that when Vikramaditya came to Ayodhya, he found it utterly desolate and overgrown with *jungle*, but he was able to discover all the famous spots of Rama's history by measurements made from Lakshman Ghat on the Sarju, according to the statements of ancient records. He is said to have erected 360 temples, on as many different spots, sacred to Rama, and Sita his wife, to his brothers Lakshmana, Bharata, and Satrugna, and to the monkey god Hanumana."

A large number of accounts written by Muslim chroniclers and travellers also carry references to Ayodhya but none of them mention anything about a Ramjanambhoomi temple. These accounts include Sayyad Salar Masud's *Mirat-i-Masudi*, Ibn Batuta's *Rahela* and the *Babar Nama*. And while *Ain-i-Akbari* (memoirs of Akbar by Abul Fazal) does say that Ayodhya is also called Ramjanambhoomi, it does not anywhere mention that any shrine known as Ramjanambhoomi Temple was either located there or destroyed. For that matter, even the *Tarikh-Farahbaksh* (a memoir of Fyzabad upto 1819) of Mohammad Faiz Baksh, which gives a detailed account of the happenings in Fyzabad between 1720 and 1819, nowhere says anything about any claims of a Hindu place of worship having been located at the site of the mosque. Nor does it mention anything about any communal controversy in the area regarding the Shri Ramjanambhoomi Temple/Babri Masjid.

Yet, the use of 14 un-Islamic pillars in the mosque raises a peculiar question. Was the Babri Masjid constructed on the



debris of a Hindu temple or was the material of a destroyed Hindu temple used in the construction of the mosque? It is difficult to answer these questions because there is no written historical evidence on the subject.

According to the local myth, Vikramaditya came to Ayodhya and erected the Ramjanambhoomi Temple on 84 pillars. It is alleged that Babar destroyed this temple and used the pillars in the construction of the mosque. These columns are still in existence and in good preservation. They are of strong close-grained, dark-coloured or black stone, known as *kasauti* (literally, touchstone slate) and carry carvings of different devices. The pillars are from seven to eight feet long, square at the base, centre and capital, and round or octagonal at the intermediate portions.

Two pillars identical to the columns used in the mosque can be found half buried near the grave of a local "saint" called Musa Ashikan (historical records indicate that this saint has his tomb in Varanasi, showing that myth making is not the monopoly of only one community). When photographs of these pillars (we were not allowed to take pictures of the columns in the Babri Masjid) were shown to some authorities on art and architecture of ancient India—Prof M.A. Dhake and Dr Krishna Deo of the American Institute of Indian Studies, Centre of Art and Archaeology, Ramnagar, Varanasi—they were unanimously of the opinion that the pillars were typical of the period between the 9th and 11th centuries AD.

Thus, if the columns of the Babri Masjid can be taken to be of the same origin as those whose photographs have been taken—from all external appearances, they appear to be similar—then it may be inferred that the pillars in the mosque could not have been a part of any temple or building erected by Vikramaditya (in the 8th century or earlier). So, even conceding, for the sake of argument, that he had constructed a temple at Rama's birthplace, these pillars could not have been part of that structure.

### **Piquant Question**

Coming to the piquant question of the location of the spot

where Rama was born, which the Janambhoomi Temple was said to consecrate, a fairly precise idea can be obtained from the earliest known *Ayodhya Mahatmya* (guide to pilgrimage). The *Mahatmya* is in Sanskrit, but its English translation, by Ram Narayan, was published in *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Vol XLIV. Part I, No. I to IV, Calcutta, 1875). Maharaja Man Singh of Ayodhya claimed that this *Mahatmya* was the work of Iksvaku of the solar race. On the other hand, Pandit Umadutt of Ayodhya said that the *Mahatmya* was a mere transcript from the *Skanda* and *Padma Puranas* and not the composition of the Raja of Ayodhya.

Pandit Umadutt's opinion is more reliable because we do know that the tradition of compiling *mahatmyas* became popular only in the 16th century. The first *Mahatmya* was called the *Ganga Mahatmya* of Prayachittwa, compiled before the latter half of the 16th century. The *Ayodhya Mahatmya* seems to have been compiled in a later period. It refers twice to Prayag as Ilahabad. Akbar (16th century) called the city of Prayag Illahabad, and later, Shahjehan (17th century) called it Ilahabad. It is, therefore, probable that the *Ayodhya Mahatmya* was written either during or after the reign of Shahjehan.

We also come across the term "*Musalman*" in the *Mahatmya*. This term came into vogue only after the 8th century. The text says: "The sins of a thousand births are destroyed on entering Svargadvar (at Ayodhya). All men, Hindus and *Musalmans*, animals, birds and insects, that die here, go to the place of Vishnu, become four-armed, lotus-eyed, bear the *Sankha*, *Chakra*, *Gada*, *Padma*, and ride on *Garudas*" (*Ayodhya Mahatmya*, (tr) Ram Narayan, Ch. IV). So, there seem to be enough reasons to doubt that the original *Mahatmya* was written by Iksvaku.

The *Ayodhya Mahatmya*, in fact, appears to have been compiled either during or after the reign of Akbar. This is probable because the significance of Ayodhya rises with the growing popularity of Tulsidasa's *Ramacharitmanas*. The *Ayodhya Mahatmya* refers twice to the location of the birth-place of Rama. And it is quite emphatic in pointing out that the four sons of Dashrath were born in the palaces assigned

to their respective mothers. At one point, it says that the "*Sita rasoi*" is situated north-west of the birthplace.

Forty yards north of the birthplace lies the house of Kaikeyi, where Bharata was born. (It must be remembered that the palace of Kaikeyi came to be known as Kanak Bhawan because she had given away her palace to Sita on the occasion of the latter's *muhdikhayi*). Sixty yards south of it is the dwelling of Sumitra, where Lakshmana and Shatrughana were born. South-east of the birthplace is '*Sita kup*', which is also called "*Jna'na kup*" (Ayodhya Mahatmya, Ch. X). At another point it says: "Afterwards, he (the pilgrim) should go to *Janambhoomi* (birth place of Ramachandra)".

East of Vighneshwar, or north of the residence of Vashishta, or west of that of Bomasa Rishi, is the *Janamsthan*, the giver of salvation, the mere sight of which releases a man from returning to a woman's womb" (Ayodhya Mahatmya Ch. VII). But is the location of Rama's birthplace, as identified today in accordance with the directions, outlined in the *Ayodhya Mahatmya* ?

## Location

According to the *Mahatmya*, the Sita Rasoi should be located north-west of the birthplace—which should also mark the spot of Kaushalya Bhawan, where Rama is said to have been born. However, the *Sita rasoi*, as demarcated today, is located 20-25 yds. north-east of the Babri Masjid--which, the protagonists of the mandir theory claim, is built on the spot where the Janambhoomi Temple was located (see map).

Then again, the palaces of Dashratha's three queens lie in a straight line, running north to south, with Kaikeyi Bhawan at the north-most extremity. As per the Mahatmya, the birthplace should be 40 yds south of Kaikeyi Bhawan, but the contentious mosque is located south-west of Kaikeyi Bhawan. Further, we have from the Mahatmya that Sumitra's dwelling was located 60 yds south of the birthplace. However, Sumitra Bhawan, as delineated today, is south-east of the Babri Masjid.

Going by the declared coordinates of the birthplace vis-a-vis the residence of Vighneshwar, Bomasa Rishi and Vashishta,

we find that the mosque is north-east (instead of directly east) of Vighneshwar's abode as demarcated today, north-west (instead of west) of Bomasa Rishi's hut, and north-west (instead of north) of Vashishta's residence.

In fact, the only specification in the *Mahatmya* with which the location of the masjid is in consonance is that relating to the Sita-kup — which is located directly south-east of the mosque. But since no specific distance is mentioned in the *Mahatmya*, can one, on the basis of just one tallying reference—out of seven cited—say with certainty that the disputed place of worship is located on the site of the birthplace? For, if the *Mahatmya's* specifications are to be believed, the actual spot of Rama's birth should be located somewhat south-east of the *masjid*.

So, there appear to be rather dubious grounds to conclude that the mosque stands on the site once occupied by a temple consecrating Rama's birthplace. Which, however, is not to rule out that there could have been some other ancient structure at the spot prior to the mosque. But what could it have been? Some other Hindu shrine? Or . . . .?

### ...Or A Buddhist Monastery

Between 1862 and 1865, Major-General A.E. Cunningham conducted a large number of archaeological surveys in North India. He tried to trace those places that were visited by the two Chinese pilgrims, Fa Hian and Hwen Thsang. Fa Hian had come to India during 400-410 AD and Hwen Thsang here in 692 AD. Cunningham was convinced that the place which Fa Hian called "*Shachi*" and Hwen Thsang referred to as "*Visakha*" was one and the same and as per the geographical location mentioned by them, was exactly at the position of Saketa or Ayodhya.

In his *Archaeological Report*, 1862-63, Cunningham has stated: "I have now to show that Fa Hian's Sha-chi is the same as Hwen, Thsang's Visakha, and that both are identical with Saketa or Ajudhya. With respect to Sha-chi, Fa Hian relates that, on leaving the town by the southern gate, you find to the east of the road the place where Buddha bit off a

piece of his tooth brush, and planted it in the ground, where it grew to the height of seven feet and never increased or diminished in size.'

Now this is precisely the same legend that is related of Visakha by Hwen Thsang, who says that to the south of the capital, and to the left of the road (that is, to the east as stated by Fa Hian), there was, amongst other holy objects, an extraordinary tree 6 or 7 feet high, which always remained the same, neither growing nor decreasing.

This is the celebrated tooth-brush tree of Buddha, to which I shall have occasion to refer presently. Here I need only notice the very precise agreement in the two descriptions of this famous tree, as to its origin, its height, and its position. The perfect correspondence of these details appears to me to leave no doubt of the identity of Fa Hian's Sha-chi with the Visakha of Hwen Thsang.

"With respect to the identification of Visakha with the Saketa of the Hindus, I rest my proofs chiefly on the following points : 1st, that Visakha, the most celebrated of all females in Buddhist history, was a resident of Saketa before her marriage with Purana Vardhana, son of Mrigara, the rich merchant of Sravasti: and 2nd, that Buddha is recorded by Hwen Thsang to have spent six years at Visakha, while by the Pali annals of Turnour he is stated to have lived 16 years at Saketa."

Cunningham's view is corroborated by that of B.C. Law, recognised as an authority on the geography of ancient India. In his *Indological Studies* (Part III Ch II, Allahabad, 1954), Prof. Law has observed: "Ayodhya or Ayojjha or Ayudha is one of the seven holy places of the Hindus. Fa Hian calls this town as Sha-chi and according to Ptolemy it is known as Sogeda. This town is situated on the banks of the Sarayu river. . . . It is also a sacred place of the Vaishnavas. Sarayu or Sarabhu of Pali literature is the Ghagra or the Gogra in Oudh."

Cunningham was convinced that Gautam Buddha resided in Saketa. According to both Ceylonese and Burmes Buddhist annals. Buddha was 35 years of age when he attained enlightenment. He then led a homeless life for 20 years, preaching in various places in North India. These places are all detailed

in the annals. As Cunningham has stated (*Archaeological Report 1862-63*).

“The other proof which I derive from the years of Buddha’s residence is direct and convincing. According to the Ceylonese annals, Buddha was 35 years of age when he attained Buddhahood; he then led a houseless life for 20 years, preaching in various places in Northern India, all of which are detailed; and of the remaining 25 years of his life he spent 9 in the Jetavana monastery at Sravasti, and 16 in the Pubharamo monastery at Saketapura. Now, in the Burmese annals, these numbers are given as 19 years and 6 years and in the last figure we have the exact number recorded by Hwen Thsang.

“Nothing can be more complete than this proof. There were only two places at which Buddha resided for any length of time, namely, Sravasti, at which he lived either 9 or 19 years, and Saketa, at which he lived either 6 years at Visakha, which is described as being at some distance to the south of Sravasti, it follows of necessity that Visakha and Saketa were one and the same place.”

### ‘Mounds’

One aspect of the landscape of Ayodhya that seems to have occupied Cunningham’s attention is the existence of a number of “mounds” in the town. He has observed (*Archaeological Report, 1862-63*): “The only remains at Ajudhya that appear to be of any antiquity, are three earthen mounds to the south of the city, and about a quarter of a mile distant. These are called Mani-Parbat, Kuber-Parbat, and Sugrib-Parbat.”

What Cunningham does not mention is that there is yet another “mound” that dominates the landscape of Ayodhya. This is the hillock in the heart of the city on which the contentious place of worship stands. The hillock is about 30 feet in the east and more than 50 feet in the west—in fact, from the west, it appears like the many “*parbats*” that are so commonly seen in Ayodhya.

Regarding these *parbats*, Cunningham has elaborated: According to the Brahmans, the Mani-Parbat is one of the hills which the monkeys made use of when assisting Rama. It was

accidentally dropped here by Sugriva, the monkey king of Kishkindhya. . . five hundred feet due south from the large mound stands the second mound called Kuber-Parbat, which is only 628 feet in height. The surface is an irregular heap of brick rubbish with numerous holes made by the people in digging for bricks, which are of large size. 11 inches by 7-1/4 by 2. . . "Still nearer on the south-east there is a large oblong mounds called Sugrib-Parbat, which is not more than 8 or 10 feet above the ground level. . . . Between the Mani and Kuber mound there is a small Muhammadan enclosure, 64 feet long from east to west and 47 feet broad, containing two brick tombs, which are attributed to Sis Paighambar and Ayub Paighambar, or the 'prophets Seth and Job.'"

## Two Tombs

Indeed, it is peculiar of Ayodhya to create myths. Like the Hindus, the Muslims also have their own local stories to relate—as, for instance, in the case of the tombs of Sis Paighambar and Ayub Paighambar. The former, at present, is 21 feet in length and the latter, 12 feet. It is peculiar that these tombs have continued to increase in length through the years.

We have in Abul Fazl's treatise, *Ain-i-Akbari*: "Near this city are two sepulchral monuments, one 7 and the other 6 cubits in length. The vulgar pretend that they are the tombs of Seth and Job, and they relate wonderful stories of them."

Cunningham, in 1863, found the tombs to be 17 feet and 12 feet in length, respectively. This clearly shows that the length of the tomb of the so-called Sis Paighambar has continued to increase from 10.5 feet in Abul Fazl's time to 17 feet in 1863 and eventually to 21 feet in 1987.

Cunningham was of the opinion that the tombs of the two paighambars were actually the graves of Muslim soldiers who came with the earliest Turkish expeditions. He substantiates this by writing that the Islamic practice had always been to bury their dead along the road. He argued further that the bricks used in the enclosure of the tombs were of very ancient origin.



He was, therefore, convinced that it was at this place where Buddha had planted the legendary tooth-brush tree. As he has observed (Archaeological Report, 1862-63): "According to Fa Hian the place where Buddha planted the holy trees was to the east of the road, on issuing from the town by the southern gate. Hwen Thsang's account agrees with this exactly in placing the 'extraordinary tree' to the south of the capital and to the left of the route.

This tree was the celebrated 'tooth-brush,' or twig used in cleaning the teeth, which having been cast away by Buddha, took root and grew to between 6 and 7 feet in height. Now, it will be observed that the ruined mounds that still exist, as well as the tombs of Seth and Job, are to the south of the city and to the east or left of the road. The position, therefore, is unmistakably the same as that described by the Chinese pilgrims, and as the actual state of the ruins agrees well with the details given by Hwen Thsang. I think that there can be no reasonable doubt of their identity."

Cunningham was also convinced that the four graves within the enclosure of the tombs (the other two being of sons of Ayub Paighambar) were actually put up on four platforms where the four previous Buddhas used to sit. He has stated: "Hwen Thsang. . . describes the sites of the tooth-brush tree and of the monument where the four previous Buddhas used to sit and to take exercise, as being close to the great *Stupa*. These places I would identify with the courtyard containing the tombs of Seth and Job, which touches the south side of the Mani-Parbat. The two tombs I take to be the remains of the seats of the four previous Buddhas. . . .

The "*great stupa*" referred to is, in Cunningham's view, a *stupa* of Asoka. The *stupa*, according to the British archaeologist, was 200 feet high and built on the spot where Buddha preached the law during his six years in residence in Saketa. This, in Cunningham's view, was the Mani-Parbat. He has observed:

"This monument I would identify with the Mani-Parbat, which is still 65 feet in height, and which with its masonry facing must once have been at least as high again, and with the usual lofty pinnacle of metal may easily have reached a



height of 200 feet. Hwen Thsang ascribes the erection of this monument to Asoka and I see no reason to question the accuracy of his statement, as the mixed structure of half earth and half masonry must undoubtedly be very ancient. . . .

They are undoubtedly the most ancient monuments of the Indian population, and I firmly believe that even the very latest of them cannot be assigned to a lower date than the fifth century before Christ. I base this belief on the known fact that all the monuments of Asoka's age, whether described by Hwen Thsang, or actually opened by myself near Bhilsa, are either of stone or brick. The certain barrows are therefore of an earlier age; but such as are Buddhist cannot possibly be earlier than the beginning of the fifth century before Christ.

In the case of the Mani-Parbat at Ajudhya I infer that the earthen barrow, or lower portion, may belong to the earlier ages of Buddhism, and that the masonry or upper portion was added by Asoka. At the foot of the mound I picked up a broken brick with the letter *sh*, of the oldest form, stamped upon it; but as this is almost certainly of later date than Asoka, it most probably did not belong to the Mani-Parbat building."

Cunningham succeeded to a very great extent in pinpointing the spots described by Fa Hian and Hwan Thsang. The latter said that Ayodhya had rich traditions of Buddhism and Brahminism. He found more than 20 Buddhist monasteries with 3,000 monks and about 50 Brahmanical temples. Hwen Thsang gave a detailed account of a monastery which was either the Kalakarma or the Purwarama of Saketa. Both have been mentioned in the Ceylonese Mahawansa.

Cunningham has identified this monastery with the Sugrib-Parbat, beside which was the stupa of Asoka. He has said: "The first monument described by Hwen Thsang is a great monastery without name, but as it was the only notable monastery, it was most probably either the Kalakarama of Saketa, or the Purwarama, both of which are mentioned in the Ceylonese Mahawanso. The monks were of the school of the Samatiyas, and their monastery was famous for having produced three of the most eminent Buddhist controversialists."

### **'Sugrib Parbat'**

Identifying this monastery with the Sugrib-Parbat, he has observed: "The great size and rectangular form of this ruin are sufficient to show that it must have been a monastery, but this is placed beyond all doubts by the existence of an interior well and by the remains of cloisted rooms forming the four sides of the enclosure. Its position to the south of the city, and to the east or left of the road, has already been specially noticed as agreeing with the recorded position of monastery."

Cunningham has gone on to say that the last monument described by Hwen Thsang was the stupa where the hair and nails of Buddha were kept. According to him, it was surrounded by a number of smaller monuments which seemed to touch one another. There were several tanks which reflected the sacred buildings in their limpid waters.

The situation of the mound on which stands the controversial place of worship corresponds with this description of the stupa where Buddha's hair and nails were kept. Situated in the heart of the city and surrounded by several monuments, the shape of the mound gives the impression of a stupa. Again, on the west side of the mosque/temple there is an easily discernible trough. It is probable that in the past, either a river flowed there or there was a huge tank which reflected the monastery.

I must assert again that only an extensive archaeological survey of an excavation can lead us to concrete answers. For the time being, all we can assume is that the disputed mosque/temple stands on a clearly discernible mound that, if Cunningham's or Hwen Thsang's observations are to be given credence to, could well conceal the key to the entire controversy.

### **British Role**

There is every reason to conclude that the issues of division between the Hindu and Muslim communities in Avadh began to surface with the advent of the British in the province. Before the annexation of Avadh in 1856, Hindus and Muslims in the area lived in complete harmony and peace.

It was not only peculiar of the Indian subcontinent but particularly of Avadh that in many high caste families, while one brother remained a Hindu, the other voluntarily converted to Islam. It was, therefore, not surprising that a large number of families drawn from the Brahmin, Rajput and Kayastha castes became Muslims. There were also a large number of low-caste Hindus who converted to Islam—but they were neither accepted as *Ashrafs* (the elite class) nor did they adopt Arabic names. It was not peculiar of the area that Hindus continued to dominate as rent-collectors and landlords.

The communal situation in Avadh began to worsen when the issue of the Babri Masjid-Ramjanambhoomi Temple was raised. The first recorded incident of a bloody conflict between Hindus and Muslims occurred during 1853 and 1855. The ugly disturbance arose because of contrary claims of Hindus and Muslims over particular spot of worship in Ayodhya.

The Hindu *mahanta* of the Hanuman Garhi raised the bogey that Rama was born at the place where the Babri Masjid stood (Gazetteer of the Province of Oudh, three volumes, Calcutta, 1877; District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Fyzabad, Vol. XLVIII, edited by H.R. Nevill, Allahabad, 1905, and District Gazetteer of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Bara Banki, Vol. XLIII, edited by H.R. Nevill, Allahabad, 1904).

It would be pertinent to take note of the fact that the communal flare-up of 1853-1855 preceded the completion of the report prepared by Colonel Sleeman, British resident in Lucknow. Col. Sleeman had toured the province between 1853 and 1855 and he pointed out—in *Journey Through the Kingdom of Oude* (two volumes, 1855)—that the law-and-order situation in the province had deteriorated. According to him, the authority of the Nawab of (Avadh) had become virtually non-existent in the countryside and life and property had become insecure. But his report, in its observations, was definitely biased.

John Pembles' *The Raj, The Indian Mutiny, and the Kingdom of Oudh, 1801-1859* (Oxford University Press, 1977) shows that the report of Sleeman was not accurate about the conditions prevailing in the area at the time. And R. Mukerjee's

Awadh in Revolt 1857-1858: A Study of Popular Resistance (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984) establishes that popular resentment against the British had penetrated into the local villages, culminating in the uprisings of 1857-58. Yet, the British authorities, anxious to justify the annexation of Avadh, exploited the conflict arising out of the controversy over the Babri Masjid/Ramjanambhoomi Temple for advantage.

They reported: "Shortly before annexation, an incident occurred in this district which may well (b) recorded as illustrative of the state of anarchy that then prevailed, unless the utter weakness of the government be borne in mind, such occurrences would appear impossible" (*Gazetteer of District Fyzabad*) edited by H.R. Nevill.

### Boas Description

A detailed and vivid description of the bloody conflict over the Babri Masjid/Ramjanambhoomi Temple is given by H.J. Boas (this narrative has been confirmed by Rai Mahadeo Bali, *talūqadar* of Rampur in Pargana Daryabad, district Bara Banki. The event occurred in 1853, and the cause was the recurrent disputes that had begun to arise from time to time between the Hindu *mahants* and the Musalmans of Ayodhya over the ground on which the Babri Masjid stood.

The Hindu priest contended that the Janambhoomi Temple had been destroyed by Babar, who then had a mosque constructed in its place. It was also pointed out that Aurangzeb had destroyed other temples in the area (Swargadwar, Tretaka-Thakur) and converted them into mosques. As the constructions of Aurangzeb had fallen into decay, the mahants did not consider them worthy of waging a war of possession for. However, the ground on which the Babri Masjid stood was considered particularly sacred by the Hindus—and it was seized by the Bairagis (disciples of Vishnu) and others. The situation grew worse when one of the *mahants*, who had been expelled *mahant* by his brethren, proceeded to Lucknow and embraced Islam. The expelled spread the rumour that the Hindus had destroyed the Babri Masjid.

## Moulvi Amir Ali

In some quarters, passion began to rise. The *mahant* who had embraced Islam came in close contact with one Moulvi Amir Ali, who was stationed in Lucknow at the time. Both, for their personal interests, swore to liberate the Babri Masjid from the control of the Hindus. The *ex-mahant* wanted to avenge the humiliation he had suffered in Ayodhya. Moulvi Amir Ali, on his part, saw this as an opportunity to assert his popularity and power.

Moulvi Amir Ali was a descendant of Sheikh Bandagi Mian of Amethi, a well known Sufi saint and a contemporary of Akbar. Akbar had visited Sheikh Bandagi Mian and had bestowed a rent-free grant on him. Moulvi Amir Ali, in fact, had gone to Lucknow to safeguard and extend his interests in the land grant. He thought that the Nawab would be impressed by his efforts to liberate the Babri Masjid and hence, would treat his petition favourably. But that did not happen.

The Moulvi was a popular figure in Amethi. As soon as he returned from Lucknow, he declared a *jihad* for the liberation of the Babri Masjid. He was able to collect a well armed force of Muslims and low caste Hindus for the war against the Bairagis in Ayodhya. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was disturbed by the turn of events. He immediately ordered that a report on the events in Fyzabad be sent to him. But no report reached him. It would appear that the growing influence of the British resident in Fyzabad, Sir James Outram, had undermined the authority of the Nawab.

The Nawab remained concerned with the turn of events, and he deputed Badri-ud-daulah of Amethi to summon Moulvi Amir Ali to Lucknow. The Nawab was aware of the dangers of a bloody communal conflict and, therefore, declared that no violence be perpetuated in Ayodhya. He also ordered that the mosque in question must be restored to the *iman* who had been looking after it before it was served by the Bairagis. But Moulvi Amir Ali was not satisfied with the assurances of the Nawab. He congregated his force in Amethi and marched to Bansa, a village about three miles to the north of Sardarganj

in Bara Banki district. In Bansa, more men joined his force, and his popularity continued to increase.

Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was disturbed to hear about the progress of the Moulvi's forces. He requested the British resident to stop Amir Ali by any means. In the meantime, the Nawab despatched a large force to Bansa, but the Moulvi remained obdurate and agreed to withdraw only on the condition that the mosque would be restored immediately to the Muslims. During these developments, the British resident requested the governor's council to issue directions in the matter of the Babri Masjid. He was advised not to take any initiative in the matter and to force the Nawab to make the move.

The Nawab, tied down by the terms of the treaty of subsidiary alliance concluded with the British by Shuja-ud-daulah in 1765, following the battle of Buxar, had little initiative left to himself. As a result, a status quo in the situation in Ayodhya continued for almost a month. Eventually, the Moulvi became impatient, and he marched his force to Daryabad and remained there for 20 days.

The Nawab was perplexed to find the British unconcerned. He ordered that four *muftis* be sent to preach obedience to the Moulvi. The arrival of the Nawab's forces aroused fear among the Moulvi's people. His contingent was immediately reduced by half. The remainder stood by their leader and persisted in their intention of marching to Ayodhya and destroying the Hanuman Garhi, the main centre of the Bairagis.

Colonel Barlow (called Captain Boileau by Benett), who commanded the first regiment of the Oudh Irregular Infantry, was ordered to arrest the progress of the Moulvi and his forces. Colonel Barlow, assisted by Rai Abhairam Bali of Rampur, met the forces of the Moulvi at Shujaganj, a large market on the high road. The encounter was a desperate one and continued for three hours. Moulvi Amir Ali was killed by Barlow, and his head was sent to Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. However, the popularity of Amir Ali was so immense that, even till some years after the annexation, his memory was preserved by holding an annual fair in his honour at Rahimgunj in Rudouli.

The fair was attended by both Hindus and Muslims. (By 1905, however, this fair dwindled into extinction).

## 1855

In 1855, fighting between Hindus and Muslims again flared up in Ayodhya over the possession of the contentious place. The Muslims reoccupied the Babri Masjid in force and then made a desperate assault on the Hanuman Garhi, but were driven back with considerable loss. The Hindus then made a counter-attack and stormed the Babri Masjid. Thereafter, a compromise was worked out by the elders of the two communities through the intervention of the British government. It was decided that members of the two communities would be allowed to worship at the same place. But after the suppression of the "great uprisings in 1857", the British introduced a change in the compromise.

When the "mutiny" broke out in Fyzabad, the local landlords adopted a kind of neutrality but the *mahants* came out in support of the British. They went as far as to provide shelter and provisions to the British troops. After the suppression of the uprisings, the British decided to reward those who had helped them. The *mahants* were also rewarded. They were granted proprietary rights over the *nazul* land in front of the Babri Masjid and were allowed to raise a platform in front of the mosque to mark the birthplace of Rama. A fence was put up to separate the Babri Masjid and the platform.

From the preceding account, it is clear that the British government deliberately allowed the division between the Hindus and Muslims to appear in the open. After 1859, the Muslims were allowed to enter the precincts of the mosque only from the north gate. In imposing this restriction, the British deliberately overlooked the compromise of 1855—which had worked well and with which both communities appeared happy. Yet, the British divided them by putting up a fence between the Babri Masjid and the platform representing the Ramjanambhoomi.



## British Strategy

The intentions of the British officials become more suspect when we realise that they had complete rights over the land on which the Babri Masjid stood. All the land in front of the mosque was *nazul* land, and the British decided to grant a portion of this to the Hindu *mahants* to construct the platform. Indeed, if anything, historical evidence clearly shows that the British encouraged the Hindu revivalists in the area. Their motive for doing so is clearly discernible.

The experience of the popular rebellions in 1857 made it clear to the British that it was necessary to keep the masses divided. (R. Mukherjee, in *Awadh in Revolt 1857-1858 : A Study of Popular Resistance*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984, tries to show that popular uprisings against the British were clearly seen between 1857 and 1858). As part of this strategy, the British encouraged the Hindus to keep alive their claims regarding the existence of the Ramjanambhoomi at the spot where the Babari Masjid stood. All this also appears to have been a part of the design of the British to undermine the glory of the Mughal empire so as to glorify their own rule.

The makers of the British empire were keen to show that it was the moral obligation of the British to carve an empire in India. The utilitarians and the evangelicals combined together to show that the primary aim of the empire was to civilise the heathen "natives" of India. The hope was expressed that the general condition of the Indians could be ameliorated by educating them in Western sciences and literature and by converting them to Christianity.

A deliberate attempt was made to undermine Indian wisdom, literature, philosophy, institutions and history. Indian poets like Kalidasa, Kabir, Meer Khusrau and Ghalib were ridiculed. They were shown as being inferior to the Western poets. The attempts to undermine everything Indian also included the underplaying of the glory of the Mughal empire. The British considered the Mughal empire a political, social and cultural impediment in the justification of the "*Pax Britannica*".



## THE BABRI MASJID-RAM JANMABHOOMI QUESTION

A. G. NOORANI

It is not a bit surprising that when the prime minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, visited Faizabad near Ayodhya, among other places in UP, on November 3, 1989 to launch his election campaign, he had not a word to say on any of the specific issues concerning the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmaboomi question. Polemics and generalities were all he could deliver. If he could not ban the Ram Shila processions on the ground that the police force was inadequate and greater confrontation would ensue, as he mentioned at Patna on October 26, he could have had the moral courage at least to denounce it in specific terms. He could have put forth his suggestion for a compromise as V.P. Singh boldly did on September 20. V.P. Singh said it was necessary to "dispel the fear among the Muslims that the mosque at the site will be demolished and at the same time satisfy the feelings of the Hindus to have a befitting shrine at Ram Janmaboomi" at Ayodhya. This provides a sound basis for a compromise. But Rajiv Gandhi has no use for it. He created the problem in 1986. He has

yet not dared to contradict Arun Nehru's assertion in an interview with a Delhi-based Urdu weekly *Akhbar-e-nau* which *The Statesman* on August 17, 1989 publicised.

Nehru said, "In early 1986 the Muslim Women's Bill was passed to play the Muslim card; and then came the decision on Ayodhya to play the Hindu card. It was supposed to be a package deal. I knew it was a dangerous thing to do and I did not agree."

Nehru did not stop at this general assertion. He was precise: "When I asked Mr Rajiv Gandhi who is showing the worship in the disputed shrine at Ayodhya on Doordarshan two days after it was unlocked, he did not reply; he merely smiled and observed it was tit for tat for the Muslim Women's Bill. I wrote to Mr Bir Bahadur Singh [then UP chief minister] enquiring who had done this. He wanted me to ask the prime minister." Rajiv Gandhi owes an explanation as to how it happened. He has given none. Neerja Choudhary had reported Rajiv Gandhi's orders as far back as April 20, 1986. It is his orders again which allowed the death dance of October-November 1989 to be enacted. As will be pointed out, on September 27, 1989 at Lucknow, Buta Singh struck a deal with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in which the VHP gained the upper hand. P.K. Roy reported in *Frontline* of October 28, 1989 that "had the VHP agreed to Buta Singh's reported suggestion that *prime minister Rajiv Gandhi be allowed to lay the foundation stone*, perhaps the initiative in this regard would have been pursued" (a *fatwa* from abroad that prayers said in a mosque built on a temple are not meritorious).

V.P. Singh was, therefore, right in saying, "this dispute will not be solved at the desk of Buta Singh. A people's effort involving everyone on both sides and the well wishers of the country can solve the tangle".

This is the one issue which more than any other since independence has poisoned the communal atmosphere, led to considerable loss of human life and property and threatens to get far worse. At stake are nothing less than the genuineness and vitality of our secularism, the strength of our commitment to the rule of law and indeed, respect for basic human decency.

Yet, the question is pre-eminently susceptible to a fair and just compromise.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad's case is based on false history, a perverted course of justice in the courts, and politics based on naked force and intimidation. The appeal issued on November 2, 1989 by over 1,000 students and teachers of the JNU, Delhi University and Jamia Millia Islamia endorsing the suggestion that the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid area "*be demarcated as it was in 1947*, and be declared a national monument" shows that voices of sanity will not be silenced.

The basic principles—the co-existence of a mosque and a shrine within one compound—was adhered to in actual practice till December 22-23, 1949. The Muslims prayed in the mosque, the Hindus worshipped at a *chabutra* within the compound which they believed to be the Janmasthan of Shri Ramachandraji. The *chabutra* is a raised platform 17 ft × 2½ ft about a 100 paces away from the mosque proper. A railing was constructed separating the two.

### **A Problem is Created**

What happened on December 22-23, 1949? The RSS mouthpiece, *Organiser*, of March 29, 1987 will have us believe that "on the historic morning of December 23, 1949 the idols of Shri Ramachandra and Sita Devi miraculously appeared in the Janmasthan. As the Hindu devotees rejoiced over the miracle and thronged in their thousands", the government proclaimed the premises as disputed area and locked the gates.

The truth is altogether different and it was recorded in two incontrovertible and uncontroverted documents— a radio message sent at 10.30 a.m. on December 23, 1949 by the district magistrate K.K. Nayar to chief minister Govind Ballabh Pant, the chief secretary and the home secretary. It read thus : "A few Hindus entered Babri Masjid at night when the Masjid was deserted and installed a deity there. DM and SP and force at spot. Situation under control. Police picket of 15 persons was on duty at night but did not apparently act."

This message was based on police constable Mata Prasad's report to the Ayodhya police station earlier. Here is a translation of the FIR lodged by sub-inspector Ram Dube, police

station Ayodhya, on December 23, 1949, as certified by the office of the city magistrate on February 11, 1986 :

According to Mata Prasad (paper No. 7), when I reached to (sic) Janam Bhumi around 8 O'clock in the morning, I came to know that group of 50-60 persons had entered Babri Mosque after breaking the compound gate lock of the mosque or through jumping across the walls [of the compound] with a stair and established therein, an idol of Shri Bhagwan and painted Sita Ram, etc., on the outer, and inner walls with geru (red-loam). Hans Raj on duty asked them to defer but they did not. These persons have already entered the mosque before the available PAC (Provincial Armed Corps) guards could be commanded. Officials of the district administration came at the site and involved themselves in necessary arrangements. Afterwards, a crowd of 5-6 thousand persons gathered around and while chanting bhajans and raising religious slogans tried to enter the mosque but were deterred and nothing untoward happened thereon because of proper arrangements. Ram Das, Ram Shakti Das and 50-60 unidentified others entered the mosque surreptitiously and spoiled its sanctity. Government servants on duty and several others are witness to it. Therefore it is written and filed.

If to this day the spoiled sanctity has not been rectified, is it not a standing blot on our legal and political system, a mockery of secularism, a contempt for elementary minority right and, indeed, the rule of law ? Is it surprising, then, that Muslims resent that outrage ? A surreptitious, forcible take-over of a mosque and its conversion into a temple ? In *The Statesman* of October 26, 1986 Chandan Mitra quoted a Faizabad official as saying, "obviously the guard had been bribed heavily." It is by such sordid means that a house of worship was taken over.

The 'miracle' was the climax to a 9-day non-stop recitation of *Ramcharit manas* just outside the mosque organised by the Akhil Bharatiya Ramayana Mahasabha founded by Paramahansa Rama Chandra Das in 1946. There was one man who

had the moral courage to speak up against the outrage and continues still to denounce it—Akshay Brahmachari (see his interview in *Sunday Mail*, July 2, 1989). He was then secretary of the Faizabad District Congress. He wrote to Lal Bahadur Shastri and twice went on a hunger strike in 1950. All that Shastri could say, on June 12, 1950, was that “the final decision can be taken only after a judgment from the court”.

But Akshay Brahmachari was realistic to perceive that it was a “time-bomb ticking away.” He had the insight to see what lay beneath the assault and the courage and honesty to denounce it. His memorandum to Shastri is a mini-classic. As early as November 13, 1949 graves of Muslims near the mosque were dug out. A campaign was launched with inflammatory speeches and handbills. He came to know the installation of ‘pocket sized idols’ at 9 am and went with the DM to the mosque at moon. “At that moment the Mosque could have been easily saved and the images removed, but the district magistrate did not think it proper.”

Prime Minister Nehru was furious and asked chief minister Govind Vallabh Pant to undo the wrong. The chief secretary Bhagwan Sahay and the IGP V.N. Lahiri frantically sent messages for the removal of the idols. Nayar successfully stalled pleading “suffering which it will entail to many innocent lives”. He resigned and became Jan Sangh’s candidate.

“There is terror in the heart of the Muslims of Faizabad and Ayodhya and most of them have sent their families away” the memorandum said. Mark these words of Akshayji : “I do not view this question as one of saving the mosque or Muslims. I view [it] as saving the great ideals of the Congress and Mahatma for which we have been struggling all these days. *If we do not resist the reactionary ideas with all the forces at our command, the ideals of the Congress will become extinct and reactionary forces will sweep the country.*” And what is their thinking? “They think that since Hindus form 85 per cent of our population, they can do whatever they like in this regard.” Why are we surprised at the rise of Hindu militant groups forty years later? Their ethos and the decline of secular values was accurately described by Akshay Brahmachari.

On December 29, 1949 a magistrate, acting under S 145 of the Criminal Procedure Code made an order *not* restoring possession of the mosque to the Muslims, but appointing a receiver, to prevent "breach of the peace" and also ordered attachment of "the said buildings." Consider an apt precedent. On February 7, 1972 the sub-divisional magistrate, Parliament Street, New Delhi, A.G. Cutting, ordered restoration of possession of 7, Jantar Mantar Road (Congress House) in New Delhi to Congress (O). Not because it was the 'real' Congress, but because it had been forcibly dispossessed by Congress(I) on November 13, 1971. That order was also made under S 145 of the Criminal Procedure Code. This is the order which should have been made in the Babri Masjid case in 1949 or in 1986. The contrast is glaring. As magistrate Cutting said, Congress(O)'s men "were dispossessed. They are therefore entitled to be put back into possession until they are evicted from the said premises by an order of a component court" (in a regular civil suit on title).

However, *while Muslims were altogether forbidden to pray in the Mosque, Hindus were permitted to offer puja and have darshan of the idols from a side gate and make offerings through 4 pujaris employed by the receiver who was appointed by the magistrate.*

A civil suit was filed on January 16, 1950 by one Gopal Singh Visharad for a declaration of a right of worship. The upshot of this litigation was predictable. The civil judge restrained the removal of the idols and interference with the puja "as at present carried on". The sole issue was restricted or unfettered right to puja. The restoration of the mosque was altogether absent from any one's mind. And why? Because as the civil judge observed in his order of March 3, 1951, "the undisputed fact remains that *on the date of this suit* the idols of Shri Bhagwan Ram Chandra and others did exist. . ."

However, in his written statement filed before the civil judge, the deputy commissioner of Faizabad, J. N. Ugra, *on behalf of the state of Uttar Pradesh*, on April 24, 1950, said in paragraph 12 that "The property in suit is known as Babri Masjid and it has been for a long period in use as a mosque for the purpose of worship of the Muslims. It has not been

in use as a temple of Shri Ram Chandraji.” In paragraph 13 he stated that “on the night of December 22, 1949 the idols of Shri Ram Chandraji were surreptitiously and wrongly put inside it.”

Incidentally, this refutes totally the BJP president L. K. Advani's assertion on September 19, 1989 that no prayers were said in the mosque since 1936. The 93-year old imam of the mosque Abdul Gaffar confirmed to *Sunday Mail* (July 2, 1989) that there were the Muslims inside the mosque, the Hindus at the *chabutra*. In 1936 the mosque was damaged in communal riots. It was repaired at government expense of which accounts are available. So are records of registration under the UP Muslim Waqfs Act (February 20, 1944) and a judgment on March 23, 1946 by, a civil judge on the Shia-Sunni dispute regarding the mosque.

In the wake of the deteriorating communal climate in the country a Ram Janmabhoomi Action Committee came into being on October 7, 1984. It launched a *tala kholo* (open the locks) agitation the same day and a Rath Yatra later. Indira Gandhi's assassination led to its suspension. But it was revived from 25 places on October 23, 1985. The VHP spear-headed the move. March 9 was fixed as D-Day. Its leaders met chief minister Vir Bahadur Singh and the DM, I.K. Pandey. Neerja Chowdhary reported in *The Statesman* (April 20, 1986) the disclosure by “a senior Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader” that “Rajiv Gandhi had indicated in no uncertain terms that the gates” of the edifice “must open to the devotees” before Shivratri on March 8, 1986.

A 28-year old local lawyer filed an application on January 25, 1986 in the court of the munsif seeking removal of the restrictions on the puja. It was an application in the civil cases to which he was not party and he did not implead the Muslims who were parties to the suit either. The munsif declined judiciously enough to pass orders since the file in the main case of 1950 was in the high court and orders could be made only in that suit. An appeal was filed on January 31 and heard on February 1, 1986. An application by Mohammed Hashim who came to know of the proceedings for being impleaded was rejected. K.M. Pandey, the district judge, Faizabad



recorded the statements of the DM and the SP on the issue of law and order and in forty minutes ordered the opening of the locks. He observed, "It is clear that it is not necessary to keep the locks at the gates for the purpose of maintaining law and order or the safety of the idols. This appears to be an unnecessary irritant to the applicant and other members of the community."

Having refused to hear Muslims altogether the judge said "after having heard the parties it is clear that the members of the other community, namely, the Muslims, are not going to be affected by any stretch of imagination if the locks of the gates were opened and the idols inside the premises are allowed to be seen and worshipped by the pilgrims and devotees. It is undisputed that the premises are presently in the court's possession and that for the last 35 years Hindus have had an unrestricted right of worship as a result of the court's order of 1950 and 1951. If the Hindus are offering prayers and worshipping the idols, though in a restricted way for the last 35 years, then the heavens are not going to fall if the locks of the gates are removed. The district magistrate has stated before me today that the members of the Muslim community are not allowed to offer any prayers at the disputed site. They are not allowed to go there."

It was in respect of proceedings like these that L.K. Advani said on March 25, 1986, "If there is an attempt to work up communal passions, anti-Muslim feeling and all that, I would think that is wrong. But if in a normal way things are being corrected anywhere as for example at Ram Janmabhoomi, I do not think we should be apologetic about it."

It is an odd way to correct an ancient and imaginary wrong to inflict by force and fraud a monstrous wrong calculated to play havoc with people's lives and emotions. There is no evidence, historical or archaeological, that the mosque was built on the site of Shri Ramachandrajai's site of birth or that a temple built in his honour was demolished to build the mosque. Indeed, the claim to the mosque is also recent. Originally only the *chabutra* was claimed.

Reporting from Ayodhya Sanjay Suri wrote (*Indian Express*, February 11, 1987) :



the disputed place is not believed even by pandits to be the birth spot of the legendary god Ram.

The pandits, who have not timed the 'birth' within thousands of years, have pin-pointed the "Janam Sthan" as Ram *chabutra*. This Chabootra marked by a platform under a tree, is outside the disputed area. The Janam Sthan is not claimed by Muslims.

## The History

All the evidence that has surfaced recently refutes the VHP's case. Not a tittle of evidence has come to light to support it.

(1) The Archaeological Survey of India embarked on a project "Archaeology of the Ramayan Sites" in 1975. Its former director B.B. Lal initiated it. Experts worked in five cities mentioned in Valmiki's *Ramayan*. Ayodhya was one of them. An 11 metre trench was dug right behind the Babri Masjid. The first volume is ready for publication. The second and concluding volume is being written. The reports of two well informed correspondents, Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay (*Sunday Mail*, November 20, 1988) and Pankaj Pachauri (*India Today*, January 15, 1989) tally—The ASI's findings knock the bottom out of the VHP case that the site in question is the birth place of Shri Ram. The VHP says that Babar's governor at Avadh, Mir Baqi, built the mosque in 1528 by demolishing a temple 'renovated' by Vikramaditya of the Guptas in the fourth century AD. The ASI found that there was no habitation in the area during the Gupta period. The first human settlement there took place as late as in the seventh century BC while there were no human settlements in and around Ayodhya between the 3rd and 11th centuries AD. This debunks the Gupta construction as also the theory of Ayodhya being the seat of Shri Ram. Mukhopadhyay reported, "a senior former ASI officer said that there was no question of deviating from the original findings which underline that modern Ayodhya was not a seat of Rama (if he existed) and that a temple to mark his birth place was not built on the site of the Babri Masjid."

Pachauri reports that "in the 14 sites excavated in Ayodhya no figurines of Ram were found." The result of the excavation at the site is already available in the ASI's *Journal of Indian Archaeology*, 1976-77.

(2) There are problems in placing Ram in a precise period. Some hold he lived nearly a million years ago in *treta yug*. Others like A.K. Majumdar and Govesio place him in the 15-14 centuries BC. R.S. Sharma says, "if the present Ayodhya is considered to be the capital of Ram, there is very grave doubt as to whether he really lived there" (*The Times of India*, April 12, 1987). The eminent archaeologist H.D. Sankalia was asked, "Can you pinpoint the place in Ayodhya where Ram was born?" He replied, "No, I don't think it is possible" (*Sunday*, March 27, 1988). As Mulk Raj Anand wrote to Atal Behari Vajpayee, "there is not a shred of evidence about where this hero was born."

(3) The *Ram Charit Manas* of Sant Tulsidas does not mention either the destruction of a temple or the construction of a mosque on its site. He was over 30 in 1528 when the mosque was built. He lived and wrote his great work in Ayodhya. It is simply unthinkable that this devotee of Shri Ram would have ignored the outrage, if it had been committed.

(4) Some eminent historians in a letter published in *The Times of India* (New Delhi, October 21, 1986; Bombay, October 28, 1986) *apropos* its publication of the mischievous report on 'Krishna's birthplace after Aurangzeb', said :

It creates the kind of confusion such as has been created, probably deliberately, over the question of the birthplace of Rama in the matter of Rama Janmabhoomi. A Persian text of the mid-nineteenth century states that the Babri mosque was adjacent to the Sita-ka-rasoi-ghar and was known as the Rasoi Sita mosque and adjoined the area associated with the birthplace of Rama. It would be worth enquiring whether there is reliable historical evidence of a period prior to the nineteenth century for this association of a precise location for the birthplace of Rama. Furthermore, such disputes as there were between Hindus and Muslims in this area up to the nineteenth century were not

over the Babri mosque but the totally different site at Hanuman-baithak.

It cannot be denied that acts of intolerance have been committed in India by followers of all religions. But these acts have to be understood in their context, it is a debasement of history to distort these events for present day communal propaganda.

The statement in your news report that the site at Mathura is to be 'liberated' and handed over to the 'rightful owners' as the birthplace of Krishna raises the question of the limits to the logic of restoration of religious site (and this includes the demand for the restoration to worshippers of disused mosques now under the care of the Archaeological Survey of India). How far back do we go? Can we push this to the restoration of Buddhist and Jaina monuments destroyed by Hindus? Or of pre-Hindu animist shrines?

The letter was signed by eminent historians and then academics: Romila Thapar, Muzaffar Alam, Bipan Chandra, R. Champaka Lakshmi, S. Bhattacharya, H. Mukhia, Suvira Jaiswal, S. Ratnagar, M.K. Palat, Satish Saberwal S. Gopal and Mridula Mukherjee.

(5) They were absolutely right. The myth is a nineteenth century creation—by the British. In a letter to *The Statesman* (October 22, 1989) Indrajit Dutta and nine others wrote:

The belief that the disputed place of worship in Ayodhya is a mosque built after destroying a temple consecrating Rama's birthplace *originates in the first half of the 19th century*. In 1813 John Leyden, a British historian, published his "Memoirs of Zehir-ed-din, Muhammad Babar, Emperor of Hindustan" (A translation of Babar's memoirs in Persian). In it Leyden had contended that Babar had passed through Ayodhya in March 1528 during his campaign against the Pathans. This "historical evidence" of Babar's presence in the area was destroyed by later British authorities to propagate the belief that the "anti-Hindu" Babar had destroyed the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple and

got a mosque built on the spot—though Leyden's work makes no mention of it. Sushil Srivastava of the Department of Medieval and Modern History, University of Allahabad, has worked extensively on the history of Avadh. He substantiates his findings to show how the British authorities, specifically Colonel Sleeman, then Resident of Lucknow, anxious to justify the annexation of Avadh, exploited this controversy superbly at a time when rumblings of the 1857 mutiny were ominous.

In fact, going by the "Babar Nama", memoirs of Babar, a brilliantly detailed treatise translated by Lady Annette Susnah Beveridge in 1922, there is good reason to believe that Babar, though himself a devout Muslim, was extremely tolerant towards all religions. It states quite clearly that the Mughal emperor visited several temples during his campaign and was full of praise for their architectural beauty. There is no mention of his being driven by any desire to destroy Hindu temples.

The inscriptions outside of the mosque above the pulpit also raise serious doubts. According to noted Urdu critic and Persian scholar, Shamsur Rehman Farooqui, the calligraphy and phrasing of the inscription suggest that they have been put up by someone ill versed in Persian. One inference is that the inscriptions were put up by someone after the temple-mosque controversy began in the 19th century.

There is absolutely no concrete evidence to show that a temple associated with Rama existed at the spot. Fairly precise co-ordinates are obtained from the earliest known Ayodhya Mahatmya (Guide to Pilgrimage) in Sanskrit, the English translation of which appears in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Vol XLIV, Part I, No. I to V Calcutta 1875). According to the Mahatmya the co-ordinates of Rama's birthplace appear to be somewhere south-east of the disputed mosque.

(6) Thus, the single source of mischief has been motivated British writings based admittedly on hearsay *and on no original research*. Sushil Srivastava of the Department of Medieval

and Modern History, University of Allahabad has exposed them thoroughly in a learned report written after months of study (*Probe India*, January 1988). The area was under Muslim influence for five centuries before Babar arrived not to fight Hindus (whose support he needed) but Pathans. British writings were designed to divide Hindus and Muslims before and after the annexation of Oudh in 1856 a year before the mutiny. Prejudice and hearsay are not concealed. The foremost among them lady Annette Beveridge wrote: ‘Presumably the order for building the mosque’ was given during Babar’s stay in Oudh (which is not historically identifiable with Ayodhya as she mistakenly imagines). Next she attributes intolerance to Prophet Muhammad and says that, as his follower, Babar “would regard the substitution of a temple by a mosque as dutiful”. Babar says the direct opposite in his will and the *Babar Nama* itself has no such account. All this is in the translated Beveridge’s notes.

The other British writers reveal the same bias P. Carnegy, officiating commissioner and settlement officer, Faizabad, wrote a detailed history of Ayodhya in his book *A Historical Sketch of Fyzabad Tehsil Including the Former Capital of Ayodhya and Fyzabad* (1861). It is based on what he found was “locally affirmed” and on his own surmises—Ayodhya *must at least have* possessed a fine temple in the Janmasthan . . .” Here is another: “It *seems* that in 1528 Babar visited Ayodhya and under his orders this ancient temple was destroyed. . .”

In 1813 Leyden had asserted Babar’s presence in Ayodhya on slender evidence. In 1861 Carnegy invented the myth of the demolition of the temple though, as Srivastava points out, “Leyden himself had made no mention of any such event in his account.” Incidentally, “Leyden appears completely ignorant of the geography of the area.”

Srivastava writes that “the belief that the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple was located at the site of the Babri Masjid appears to be based largely on local myth and folklore. In fact there is no concrete historical evidence to show that a temple associated with Rama existed at the spot. Nor is there any mention of any such temple in the Hindu scriptures. The main basis for

the belief appears to be the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, which mentions Ayodhya as the city where Rama was born.” He also holds that there is no evidence that Babar “destroyed any temple in Ayodhya.”

In Ayodhya itself *to this day* opinion differs as to the actual birth site, as the famous historian R.S. Sharma found. In a recent interview to *Janashakti* of Patna he said, “there is no proof that there was any *mandir* which was demolished by Babar”. Also “it is very difficult to say Ramji was born where. . . I have been there [Ayodhya]. There are at least 15-16 *mandirs*, the pujaris of which claim that their temple is the real birthplace of Rama” (*New Age*, October 8, 1989).

*Probe India* commissioned another historian, Alok Mitra, who differed with Srivastava on many points. Yet he also concluded, “There is no doubt that the exponents of the theory of the existence of the Ram Janmabhoomi at the disputed place are fabricating history.” He bluntly posed this question: “what right do Hindu fanatics have to trespass into a mosque and instal the image of their deity there?” Here are two historians who disagree on a good few points but agree on the enormity of the outrage of 1949.

Every bit of evidence that comes to light dispels the myths invented to justify it. For instance, the 4th South Asian Regional Seminar on Significant Manuscripts on Medieval Indian History was held at the famous Khuda Baksh OP Library at Patna from March 22-26, 1988. One of the participants was Sher Singh, IAS who has done enormous research on the Babri Masjid. Alas, he was refused permission to publish his monograph. It is published under the name of his better half, Surinder Kaur, and with Tapan Sanyal (*The Secular Emperor Babar*, Lokgeet Prakashan, PB 29 Sirhind, Rs. 35). Sher Singh was invited at the seminar to undertake a field survey of Ayodhya on the basis of the description given in *Ayodhya Mahatmya* to pin-point the Janmasthan of Shri Ram. Accordingly, a field survey was carried on in Ayodhya for three days from April 9-11, 1988 by a research team consisting of Sher Singh, Sushil Srivastava, and his senior student, Indu Dhar Dwivedi. It was based on *Ayodhya Mahatmya*. They found that “seven different places turned out to be the Janmasthans

of Ram, no two of which meet each other and not even one touches the site of Babri Masjid" ("Is Babri Masjid Site the Birthplace of Rama?" by S. Kaur, *Radiance*, August 13, 1989).

Only the 'history' penned by British writers in the last century originated the myth. It found ready acceptance in British Gazetteers and was, in turn, readily swallowed by British judges in the last century. The history of this litigation is recounted in detail by S.K. Tripathi in *Indian Express* of March 30, 1986. Raghubar Das, claiming to be the mahant of the Janmasthan, instituted a suit in the court of a sub-judge, Faizabad, Pandit Hari Kishan, seeking permission to construct a temple on the *chabutra* on January, 19, 1885. The authorities had refused him permission.

The sub-judge held in his favour on February 24, 1885 but declined permission because of proximity to the mosque. His appeal was dismissed by the district judge Faizabad, Col JEA Chamber, who inspected the place on March 17, 1886. In his judgment of March 26, 1886 he remarked, "It is most unfortunate that a masjid should have been built on the land specially held sacred by the Hindus. But as that occurred 356 years ago, it is too late now to remedy the grievance. All that can be done is to maintain the parties in status quo. . . The entrance to the enclosure is under a gateway on which appears the superscription of 'Allah'. Immediately on the left is the platform or *chabutra* of masonry occupied by the Hindus. On this is a small superstructure of wood in the form of a tent. *This chabutra is said to indicate the birthplace of Ram Chander.*"

The mahant went in appeal before the judicial commissioner of Oudh on May 25, 1886. The judicial commissioner, W. Young, also dismissed the appeal and in his judgment dated November 1, 1886 observed: "This spot is situated within the precinct of the grounds surrounding a mosque erected some 350 years ago owing to the bigotry and tyranny of the emperor who purposely chose this holy spot, according to Hindu legend as the site of his mosque. The Hindus seem to have got very limited rights of access to certain spots within the precinct adjoining the mosque and they have for a series of years been persistently trying to increase those rights and to erect buildings



on two spots in the enclosure namely (1) *Sita ki rasoi* (kitchen of Sita) and (2) *Ram Chander ki Janmabhoomi* (birthplace of Lord Rama). . . I am further of the opinion that the civil courts have properly dismissed the plaintiff's claim."

Note, *the proceedings concerned not the mosque but the chabutra*. A century later the bid to 'increase those rights' assumed the form of a claim to the mosque itself. A compromise is surely possible. It has to be reached by the people at large. The VHP has rejected the very principle of adjudication.

At one stage only last year the VHP side did submit its evidence to Buta Singh in the form of 13 'legal/historical documents'. Leyden, Carnegy and Beveridge and a British Gazette of Faizabad significantly constituted the first four of them. Two others were the two judgments of 1886. Not one piece of substantive evidence as to either of the two crucial issues: (a) Shri Ramachandrajī's birthplace, and (b) the demolition of the temple by Babar.

The archaeological report of 1976-77 based on B.B. Lal's work and of others is also cited, oddly enough. It goes against the VHP case, as we have noted. Some other documents lend support to the Muslim grievance of a campaign of harassment since 1948 preceding the take-over of the mosque in December 23, 1949. Here is one such document of December 10, 1948, a report by a wakf inspector, Muhammed Ibrahim: 'Outside the masjid is a Hindu temple and any Muslim going towards the masjid is accosted and called names, etc. . . People there told me that there is a danger to the masjid from the Hindus.' And this is a document relied upon by the VHP in support of its case.

But a more fundamental question arises. If the evidence could be submitted to Buta Singh, why not to a court of law or a committee of experts appointed jointly by both sides? Or is the evidence fit only for the understanding of a Buta Singh?

### **The Solution**

Having created the problem for his own ends, Rajiv Gandhi has naturally made no efforts to contain the Frankenstein he let loose. In a press interview published on March 12,



1986 he said he wanted “to get some sort of answer for this [problem] in the coming months. But we must be sure that the holy places of each religion are respected fully. . . I have asked for a detailed map. . . But I have got a sketch where on the sketch they are different.” He did nothing to promote the obvious compromise.

Instead, escapist and contradictory stands were adopted. On July 24, 1986 Buta Singh told the Lok Sabha “We are about to find an amicable and mutually agreeable solution in the near future”. But on January 7, 1987 the PM said “We are not taking any decision on this. It is for the Uttar Pradesh government to take the decision.”

On January 20, 1987, Buta Singh said, “it will be very difficult for us from the Centre or for the UP government, to get involved in it because it is *sub-judice*”. Yet another line was adopted. It is a local issue for the “people of the area” to resolve, Buta Singh said on April 3, 1987. The Centre is, thus, directly responsible for the aggravation of the problem. It has not made a single constructive move.

In contrast, several formulae has been suggested by persons outside the government. They should weld them into a compromise and foil the government’s plans to exploit their differences. The most remarkable feature of all the solutions proposed is their implicit acceptance of the fundamental principle that the Babri Masjid be declared a national, protected monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 just like those built by other rulers of India. Under S4(1) of the act “where the central government is of the opinion that any ancient monument. . . is of national importance, it may, by notification in the *Official Gazette*, give two months’ notice of its intention to declare such monuments. . . to be of national importance”. Objections are heard and the site is purchased or agreement entered into with the owner. The monument acquires a nationally protected character under the law of the land.

A devout Hindu like Kamlapati Tripathi had no hesitation in proposing, in a letter to the prime minister dated March 24, 1989, that the “Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi complex may be declared a national monument”. This would be a fitting,

tangible expression of the ideal of communal harmony and the co-existence of diverse faiths. Bombay justly boasts of a traffic island which has housed a temple, a church and a mosque. In this spirit the basic principle can be amplified by building on the *chabutra* a magnificent temple in honour of Shri Ramachandraji.

Karan Singh's solution, proposed on January 15, 1987, is on the same lines: "It is not befitting that at this sacred place Sri Ram should be worshipped in an unsuitable setting. What is needed is the construction of a new temple at the Janmabhoomi which would be a really fitting tribute to Lord Rama. There seems to be no controversy regarding the '*chabutra*' where in fact worship has been carried on for many years. I suggest that a National Committee be formed to draw up plans for the construction of a magnificent temple on that site, where really beautiful statues of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshman can be installed and which can become a focus of worship and devotion for the Hindus of the world." Karan Singh offered to make "a token donation of a lakh of rupees on behalf of the Dharmarath Trust".

It speaks for the lack of moral courage on the part of the government of India that it ignored this offer made early in the day. There was and still is every prospect of success if this principle is espoused. In a public appeal to the prime minister on May 10, 1986, S. Shahabuddin, MP, had also proposed a solution "based on the separate existence of the two structures known as Babri Masjid and Ram *Chabutra*, separated by a wall. Ram *Chabutra* marks the Janmasthan of Shri Ramachandraji. He suggested:

First, let the status quo ante be restored in the Babri Masjid as on December 22, 1949. Second, let a magnificent temple dedicated to Shri Ramachandraji be built on Ram *Chabutra*. Thirdly, let the Babri Masjid be notified as a Protected National Monument of Historic Importance and taken under the care of the central government.

Indeed, in 1891 one noted British writer on the monuments and antiquities of region, A Fuhrer, classified the Babri Mosque as a monument in the possession of private persons but which should be protected. A bill broadly on these lines was moved

in the Rajya Sabha last year by MP Dasgupta of the CPI to declare the whole Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi complex a national monument under the act. This was in keeping with the CPI National Council's Resolution of April 1, 1987.

Early this year a large number of public figures issued a call for a settlement on these lines. Among them were Rajni Kothari, Ram Vilas Paswan, and George Fernandes. According to the PTI, the conversion of the complex into a national monument was also suggested at a meeting of the leaders of recognised political parties in parliament with Buta Singh on March 29, 1989. Satya Prakash Malaviya of the Janata Dal endorsed the suggestion on May 27, 1989 and so did the BKU leader Mahendra Singh Tikait on December 12, 1988—restore the mosque, he said, and allow the Hindus to renovate the ancient temple there.

The solitary note of dissent from this truly national consensus is struck by the BJP. Atal Behari Vajpayee's proposal on October 1, 1989 to relocate the mosque is arrogantly preposterous. As Chandrasekhar remarked on November 18, 1987, "there has been a mosque at that place for 500 years. Are you going to revise history?" The same point was made by C Rajeswara Rao recently (May 13, 1989)—a mosque did exist; Muslims did pray within its compound; later some idols were "smuggled" inside the mosque, he said.

In sum, while evidence as to the sordid means of the conversion of a mosque into a temple is irrefutable, there is not a shred of evidence that the site was Shri Ramachandra's birthplace or that Babar demolished a temple to erect a mosque on it. Equally irrefutable are (a) the evidence of the use of the *chabutra* as a place of worship by Hindus and (b) the reverence with which it is held by millions of our countrymen.

Against this background the existence of a consensus in support of a compromise is a priceless asset. It achieves that remarkable feat of reconciliation of morality with expediency and of sentiment with reality. Vajpayee once came a little closer to it. In a speech at Bombay on February 15, 1987 he urged Muslims to give up their claim to the Babri Mosque and hand it over to the Hindus as a gesture of goodwill and respect for their sentiments while the Hindus should reciprocate by

allowing the present structure of the Masjid to stand as it is while constructing a temple adjoining it befitting Ram Janmabhoomi.

He said it represented his personal view. Sadly, his plea of respect for feelings was unevenly balanced. As *The Hindustan Times* pointed out (April 13, 1987), "Mr Vajpayee is silent on whether the mosque should be used for prayers and without this assurance it is difficult to see even enlightened Muslim leaders accepting his proposal." Evidently, the only concession which Vajpayee is prepared to make, with self-conscious magnanimity, is not to demolish a mosque built in 1528 in which Muslims prayed for four centuries. The newspaper cited an apt parallel—the agreement signed on October 8, 1968 by the Shahi Idgah Trust and Shri Krishna Asthar Sewa Sangh on the Mathura temple-mosque controversy. Under it the mosque and the temple co-exist side by side.

That is a measure of the steep deterioration in the quality of national life. The distance which Vajpayee and L.K. Advani have to travel to accept the national consensus is as large or as small as one thinks of it. Under the consensus instead of relinquishing the mosque to Hindus, Muslims will give it to the nation at large under the law of the land as an historic monument worthy of national protection. Such a compromise solution will be a national achievement.

But let alone the BJP, which has reverted to the old Jan Sangh at its worst and with a vengeance, the Congress(I) has also not endorsed the compromise. We owe it to Satyapal Dang, who has staked his life in defence of secularism, for a thorough exposure of the Buta Singh-VHP pact. Quoting a report in the *Nav Bharat Times* of September 29, he said "according to the agreement the government would allow Ram Shila Pooja functions to go on all over the country; the VHP would take to Ayodhya a limited number of Ram Shilas on November 9". The foundation stone of the new temple would be laid at some distance away from the mosque. But "there is no undertaking that the Babri Masjid would not be sought to be demolished subsequently" (*New Age*, October 15, 1989). In fact the foundation stone will be laid right in front of the entrance to the mosque.

Under the VHP's ground plan, as revealed by its secretary-general, Ashok Singhal, "the sanctum sanctorum or the *garbha griha* of the proposed temple will remain at the same place where at present worship is being made of the idol" (*Organiser*, September 27, 1989). *That is, right inside the sanctum sanctorum of the mosque.* What is there to prevent the government from declaring that it has not allotted the adjoining land which is public land for the Shilanyas? Interestingly, while Muslim leaders are banned from entering Ayodhya, the VHP leaders stay there for months.

Be it remembered that the Buta Singh-VHP pact came shortly after the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court passed an order on August 14, 1989 accepting the application by the UP government's standing counsel, R.N. Trivedi, himself a committed human rights activist, to restrain all "parties, groups and persons represented by them from interfering in any manner with the site in dispute, to disturb the *status quo*, and further to organise or extend threats of interference by organising any activity which may bring about confrontation between two major rival communities, which is bound to threaten public peace and public order". The application referred specifically to the Shila puja. Earlier, on July 12, the bench had summoned all the five pending cases relating to the dispute for trial by a full bench of the high court.

After Buta Singh's green signal on September 27, the Shila Puja began three days later. As the Lucknow correspondent of *Indian Express* reported (October 3), the VHP leaders "bluntly told the home minister that the sanctum sanctorum of their temple would be the same place where the idol of Lord Rama is presently placed and worshipped. The size of the proposed temple would be over 34,000 square feet besides appurtenances. It would be 270 feet long, 126 feet wide and 132 feet high. It is so designed as to absorb the disputed structure standing on an area of about 6,000 feet. The foundation for the Singhdwar would be laid about 270 feet away from the *garbha griha* which would be retained as a sanctum sanctorum of the new temple." Buta Singh knew this and yet gave the green signal for the foundation ceremony. The only

concession he got was that the congregation would not be of a size as large as planned earlier.

A few days later Sanjay Suri reported, "with the puja violence, clashes broke out last week in Ratlam, Mhow, Indore, Jaipur and other places." Confrontation built up. "In the face of all this, government orders are that the puja must go on. It has promised full protection to the VHP" (*Indian Express*, October 11, 1989). Swapan Dasgupta remarked, "there is definite evidence that the home ministry has its finger in the VHP pie too. . . This groundwork for this [playing the Hindu card] was prepared in the meeting that Mr. Buta Singh and Mr. N.D. Tiwari had with VHP activists on September 27 in Lucknow" (*The Statesman*, October 21, 1989).

One bit of evidence after another confirms this conclusion. Since the foundation will be laid just 200 feet or so from the mosque, "the demolition of the masjid seems obvious", Jasjit Purewal pointed out (*Indian Express*, October 26, 1989). He added "the barricade skirts only the masjid. Once the Shila Pujan is over, construction will obviously mean the destruction of the masjid." When asked about the exact location of the Shila Pujan, both the district magistrate and the SSP "claimed ignorance. And that with the pujan only two weeks away." Some 4,000 Muslims and more than 26,000 Hindus have lived in amity in Ayodhya.

It is not the VHP alone but the Congress(I) also which is bent on wrecking the peace. Mohan Sahay's report in *The Statesman* (October 26, 1989) removes all doubt:

The home minister, Mr. Buta Singh, is understood to be putting pressure on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to go ahead with the Ram Shila Pujan and a show of strength in Ayodhya on November 9 despite continuing communal violence in different parts of the country. According to reliable sources, the centre's diabolical designs has the tacit or direct support of the prime minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi. This suspicion is bolstered by the fact that there is no express directive from the home minister to the state government to put a stop to the spreading violence and the Pujan programmes.

Highly placed sources claim that the green signal was



given by Mr. Buta Singh to the secretary-general of the VHP, Mr. Ashok Singhal, at a meeting in Lucknow on September 27. The home minister had instructed all the officials concerned to make efforts so that the Ram Shila bricks were transported to and the Shilanyas completed without hindrance. This is acknowledged in the house journal of Shree Ram Shila Pujan Samiti quoting Mr Ashok Singhal.

Informed sources suggest that Mr. Singhal is under pressure from the home ministry to carry on the programmes even though the situation all over the country is explosive. The elder brother of Mr. Singhal is a senior IPS officer of UP cadre who is facing a CBI inquiry in the Czech pistol deal that also involves Mr. Arun Nehru, former minister for internal security. Mr. B.P. Singhal, who was then an additional security (home), was implicated by one of his colleagues in the same department who is a close confidant of Mr. Buta Singh.

No wonder that the BJP's vice-president, S.S. Bhandari, so confidently claimed on November 1 that "whatever is happening at Ayodhya is with the full knowledge and approval—both legal and administrative—of the state government." The Supreme Court could have stopped the march. An October 27 it refused to do so. On November 5 Prabha Jagannathan reported in *Sunday Observer*, that on November 3 the DM had visited the place and "gave his approval for the new site fixed within the complex for the Shilanyas function."

By the time this is printed the "show of strength" on November 9 will have come to pass. The object is not to venerate Shri Ramachandraji. It is to recast the Indian polity. In place of the secular credo of Nehru a diseased outlook is being fostered which Akshay Brahmachari described so well forty years ago. "They think that because Hindus form 85 per cent of our population, they do whatever they like. . ." The VHP has declared openly that it will not be bound by any court's verdict. False history has become an ally of amoral politics. In this both the Congress(I) and the BJP are offenders. So are those who shut their eyes to the ways of either.

*Courtesy* : Economic and Political Weekly

## WHAT HISTORY SAYS ABOUT AYODHYA

SHER SINGH, RETD. I.A.S.

The theory of Skandagupta Vikramaditya moving his residence (Capital) to Saketa (Ayodhya) in the late fifth century A.D. is based on *Paramartha's Life of Vasubandhu* by Takakusu and the *Karamdanda Inscription*.

Vasu'bandhu is said to have been invited by Vikramaditya to Ayodhya during 452-480 A.D. But Takakusu admits (*JRAS 1905*, Jan. issue) that *Paramartha's Life of Vasubandhu* was in existence in China during the time of Kumarajiva in China 383-412 A.D.

### Baseless

Buddhadharma (28th Patriarch) reached China in 520 A.D. Simha (23rd Patriarch) was put to death by Mahirakula, a contemporary of Baladitya. Baladitya is said to be the son of this Vikramaditya.

Cunningham fixed 420 A.D. as the period of Baladitya's reign. Vasubandhu (21st Patriarch) must have lived around 360-390 A.D. (*Buddhist records of Western World Hiuen Tsang*, Trs. by Samuel Beal, Vol. 1, p. 168).



It is pertinent to quote here the rejoinder given by Haraprasad Shastri to Takakusu: "From Tibetan sources we have found that Vasubandhu was contemporary of Tha-Lha-Ri, king of Tibet who ruled upto 371 A.D." Also the title of "Skandagupta is not Vikramaditya, but Kramaditya" (J.R.A.S. 1905, Vol. 1, No. 8, p. 227 and P. 254).

Thus, there is no question of Vasubandhu visiting Ayodhya on the invitation of Skandagupta around 452-480 A.D. Takakusu's statement that Skandagupta removed his capital from Pataliputra to Ayodhya, is based on "*The Chronology of Indian History* by Mabel Duff, (P. 38). But Duff has clearly mentioned, "Baladitya of Magadha".

There is no mention of Baladitya or his father shifting the Capital to Ayodhya.

The Karamdanda inscription has been critically examined by Dr. D.C. Sircar (*Select Inscriptions*, pp. 289-290; Prof. Stena Konow, *Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. X, No. 15, pp. 70-72, and Mahabendhu Bannerjee, *A Study of Important Gupta Inscriptions*, pp. 32-33).

It has nowhere been mentioned in this inscription that Skandagupta shifted his capital to Seketa (Ayodhya), or his commander-in-chief was posted at Ayodhya.

I have not come across any other historical evidence from which it can be inferred that Skandagupta or any other Gupta king had shifted his residence Capital to Ayodhya.

It is not correct to say that Mr. Beveridge was the first person to translate *Babar Nama* in 1905 A.D. The English translation of *Tuzuki-Baburi* by John Leydon and William Erskine was printed in London in 1826 under the title: *Memoirs of Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur*.

The original Persian inscription recorded by A. Fuhrer, director-general, ASI, in 1889 in *The Sharqi Architecture of Jaunpur, etc.* (*ASI-New Series*, Vol. 1, pp. 67-68) has not been considered at all. It is in this inscription that the year of starting of construction of this mosque is written in words as "*Nusad See Buwad Hijrat* (Nine hundred and thirty Hijra)", i.e. the period Ibrahim Lodhi.

The whole mischief was started by P. Carnegy in 1870. He

alleged that the columns used by the Muslims in the construction of the Babri Mosque belong to the Janmasthan temple. They are carved with different devices and are called 'Kasauti Stones' by the natives.

The scholars are silent on the enigma of the black pillars used in the mosque. These pillars are the root-cause of the whole confusion. Working on this subject for the last four years under the guidance of Mr. B.N. Pande, I found that what has been mistaken as 'Kasauti' is the sealing-wax layer mixed with Kuruvindum Rayee Stone in 1:2 ratio. Beneath this layer is the middle layer of steel powder mixed with mortar.

The inner-most layer applied on the surface of ordinary stone is the layer of gum, molasses and pulses, which can be seen with the naked eye on the so-called Janmabhoomi pillar standing on Mahatma Gandhi Road, near Faizabad cantonment.

This polish was subjected to the C-14 test, which revealed that it belonged to the "young samples category", which shows that these pillars are not even 500 years old.

Babur has recorded the carving of 26 pillars at Dholpur on December 24, 1528 A.D. As per the ground plan of this mosque, only 26 pillars could be fitted in the corners (*Memoirs of Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur*, Trs. by J. Leyden and W. Erskine, Vol. II, p. 362).

It has been alleged in the *Faizabad Gazetteer*, 1860, that the "Material of the old temple was largely employed in building the mosque. . . the outer beam of the main structure being of sandal wood."

The wood of the so-called sandal-wood beam (which actually is red/sand-stone veneering as per the VHP's own confession) should be tested scientifically by subjecting it to the C-14 test.

This will clear all doubts about the age of the old material used in the mosque. JNU's Centre for Historical Studies should take up the matter with the appropriate authorities and have the sandalwood tested for C-14.

Lala Sita Ram has stated in his book, *Ayodhya Ka Itihas 1932*, ed., p. 154, that *Puranerawti Ke Khambe ab masjid Ki shobha barha rahe hain* (The old pillars of *Rawti* (tent) are now enhancing the beauty of the mosque).

Historians will have to find out whether these *Rawti* pillars are taken from Chobin Rawti tents used by kings in the 16th century A.D. while on tours. These Rawti tents used to be supported by pillars and were transported by elephants.

*Courtsey : Radiance*

# 6

## RAMA AND HIS BIRTHPLACE

Dr. SUNITI KUMAR CHATTERJEE

In a meeting held on Jan. 16, 1976 under the auspices of the Asiatic Society, the national Professor Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee said that the Ramayana was not the historical fact of any particular age; it is from beginning to end a fiction. Valmiki borrowing from the story of Dashratha Jataka of the Buddhist literature composed this epic.

The story of Dashratha Jataka is as follows:

Dashratha, father of Rama, was the king of Baranasi (Banaras), not of Ayodhya as described in the Ramayana. He had two queens—Kaushalya and Kaikeyee. To please his beloved 2nd queen Dashratha exiled his eldest son Rama into the Himalayas. According to the story of Jataka, Sita was the sister of Rama—not wife. Younger sister Sita and brother Lakshmana followed their elder brother in his exile. After the death of his father, Rama returned to Baranasi and reigned for a good number of years. During his reign Sita was his queen. Rama died a natural death. According to the story of Jataka, Rama, unmoved in well and woe, was really a sage and saint,—not a warrior. Rama was not as well the incarnation of Vishnu.

The view of Suniti Kumar: Valmiki in the texture of the basic story had recourse to wide imagination as he liked. He shifted the place of occurrence from Baranasi to Ayodhya; and having regard to contemporary age he drew the place of exile from the Himalayas to the Bindhas in the south.

According to the view of Dr. Suniti Kumar, the chapter on the abduction of Sita of Ramayana was an after-composition under the influence of Iliad and Odyseey of Homer. But in original Valmiki—in his view—the original relation of Ram and Sita was intact. But after ages in the face of strong opposition from changed social system, the relation of brother and sister was obliterated.

Regarding the original relation of brother and sister—to support his own view—Dr. Suniti Rumar says: In ancient India this custom was all along in vogue. Even today, in the Himalayan regions there are tribes who uptill now stick to this custom of marriage between brother and sister to keep their properties intact. In the view of the national professor, the great poet created Sita after the model of Savitri and Damayanti, and Ramchandra in the shadow of Arjuna.

In the view of Suniti Kumar, event and character like abduction of Sita and Ravana etc. are additions of after-ages; and the influence of Greek mythology was responsible for this. These changes began with the Christian century. And then Ramachandra was made to be the incarnation of Vishnu. The national professor says, the original Ramayana was written at least five hundred years before the birth of Christ. By that time, the idea of Vishnuhood was not at all crystallized in the mind of people. At least seven hundred years after the exit of Valmiki from the stage of literature, in the 2nd Christian century the poets of later times ascribed the idea of incarnation to the depicted character of Rama.

Who was the author of the Ramayana? Dr. Suniti Kumar says:—The mythological saint Chyavana, described in the Shatpatha Brahmana and the Mahavaratha, initiated the composition of this epic. Valmiki of this Chyavana group in the after stage imported poetic lustre to his composition of his predecessor. In the view of the national Professor, Valmiki

was the first conscious poet of India, having subtle poetic sense.

Opposing the prevalent story of Valmiki being covered by ant-hills, the national professor says, Chyavana was covered by ant-hills during meditation as was described at least in Shatpatha Brahmana. Unaware, the king Sarzat and his daughter Sukanya picked Chyavana—who was immersed in meditation and covered by ant-hills-with iron rod. They did not know that the saint was under the ant-hills. The enraged saint cursed. To appease the saint the king surrendered his daughter to him. Suniti Kumar thinks that the popularity of Valmiki as a poet helped this story too of the predecessor to be attributed afterwards to the successor.

*Courtesy* : Anandabazar

Patrika, Calcutta

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Rendered into English By Noorul

Islam Khan

## RAMAJANMABHOOMI—SOME ISSUES

PROFESSOR K.S. LAL

A Seminar on “Ramajanmabhoomi and Babri Masjid—Historical Perspective” was held under the auspices of the Historians’ Forum at the Chelmsford Club on March 29, 1987. The meet was open to scholars, interested public and the press. About a dozen papers on the theme were presented and discussed. I presided at the Seminar and also read a paper. It was published in Republic Day Special of the *Organiser*, 1989. Some of its portions were also reprinted in *Muslim India*. Now that the *Organiser* is bringing out a special Ramajanmabhoomi Number, and I have been requested to write again on the problem, I shall discuss only some issues raised on the subject in the recent past.

1. *Where is the evidence that Ramajanmabhoomi is the birthplace of Lord Rama?*

The convenor of the Babari Masjid Movement Committee, and many others of his sort, repeatedly assert that there is no evidence that the site of the Ramajanmabhoomi temple at Ayodhya is the birthplace of Lord Rama (e.g., in his meeting with the Union Home Minister on October 9, 1988). No,

there is no evidence. just as there is no evidence that Jesus was the Son of God or that so-and-so angel came to so-and-so prophet to deliver messages to him from God.

In religion, it is a matter of faith and not of proof. The Victorian poet laureate Alfred Tennyson puts it like this. In the opening lines of his famous poem *In Memoriam* says he:

“Strong Son of God, Immortal Love, We men that have not seen thy face, By faith and faith alone embrace Believing where we cannot prove.”

So, by faith and faith alone Christians embrace Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, by faith and faith alone Muslims believe Muhammad to be the Prophet of Allah, and by faith and faith alone Hindus believe Ramajanmabhoomi in Ayodhya to be the birthplace of Lord Rama. Beliefs of all religions have to be shown equal deference.

2. *Where is the evidence that the Ramajanmabhoomi temple was razed by Babar and a masjid built at its site?*

On Ramajanmabhoomi there was an impressive temple built by Emperor Vikramaditya, of respectable size and architectural excellence. The Mughal invader Babar visited Ayodhya or passed through its vicinity in 1528, and in accordance with the Islamic injunctions and practice of Muslim invaders, ordered its demolition and construction of a mosque at its site. The evidence for this is to be found in two inscriptions in Persian, one inside and the other outside the mosque. The one inside reads: “*By the Command of Emperor Babar (italics mine) the good hearted Mir Baqi (of Tashkent) built this alightingplace of angels. May this goodness last for ever*”.

In the District Gazetteer of Faizabad H.E. Nevill also says that “In 1528 AD Babur came to Ayodhya (*Aud*) and halted a week. He destroyed the ancient temple marking the birthplace of Rama and on its site built a mosque, still known as Babar’s Mosque.”

It is unnecessary to quote from dozens of other scholars of history and architecture, for the evidence of the conversion of temple into mosque is found in the edifice itself. The Archaeological Survey of India Report 1889 states that “The old



temple of Ramachandra at Janmasthanam must have been a very fine one, for many of its columns have been used by the Musalmans in the construction of Babar's masjid. These are of strong, close-grained, dark-coloured or black stone, called... *kasauti* (touch-stone slate), and carved with different devices." These can be seen even now.

In the Doordarshan programme entitled "Aajkal" telecast on August 30, (sic) Shri Vinod Dua interviewed the traditional Shaikh-o-Birahman, i.e., a Muslim Maulvi and a Hindu Pandit of Ayodhya on the subject. Besides many other things the Maulvi Saheb argued that *Babar bahut parha likha tha, wah aisa nahin kar sakta* (Babur was highly educated, he could not have done this. i.e., destroy the temple and build the mosque). The Maulvi Saheb did not know that both Mahmud Ghaznavi and Aurangzeb too were very learned in Islamic theology; Babur has become famous because he wrote his Memoirs.

All Muslim conquerors and rulers broke temples and built mosques on their sites because it was an article of faith and practice of Islam from its very inception. That is how all famous Hindu temples in northern India were turned into mosques, the most important like the ones at Somnath, Varanasi, Mathura and Ayodhya receiving special consideration for utmost vandalism. But such is the determination to "prove" that Babur did not demolish the Ramajanmabhoomi temple that Shri Shahabuddin puts forth the fantastic theory that "there is no temple dedicated to Lord Rama... in the whole country dating back to earlier than the 16th century". (*Express' Magazine*, August 20, 1989). His "ignorance" has been challenged by Gayathri Nair who mentions the names of many places in even far-off Kerala where Rama temples of hoary antiquity exist. (*'Express' Magazine*, September 10, 1989).

3. *Why do Muslims oppose requisition of Ramajanmabhoomi temple by the Hindus?*

For many Muslims, Babari masjid is not just a mosque. It is a symbol of their victory and its continuance reminds them of their glorious past. They consider any structural change in

it to be a deliberate attempt to hurt their sentiments. This feeling is fed on speeches and writings of fundamentalists who can enlist scores of volunteers and pose a threat to peace. On the other hand, there is a large section of Muslims who are opposed to such postures.

As Syed Aijaz Ali, patron of Indian Muslim Front wrote (letter to *Times of India*, September 13, 1989), "I appeal to my countrymen not to judge the entire Muslim community by Shahabuddin's activities". Many others dislike recourse to violence and do not mind the reconstruction of the temple by Hindus.

Shri Mukhtar Abbas Rizvi, leader of the Bharatiya Muslim Yuva Sammelan, has gone as far as to state in Pune that "We are going to demolish the Babari Masjid in Ayodhya. The Muslim fundamentalists have avowed to eliminate us physically. However, we have planned the demolition (on 12-15 November) in the interests of the Muslims themselves and in accordance with the Quranic teachings. . . . We will build a new mosque on a piece of land which has been donated to us by a Hindu". Societies like Muslim for Progress, Delhi, The Muslim Sangharsh Vahini, Madhya Pradesh, the Musalmeen-i-Hind, Kerala, and Dastagor Sangathan of Haryana, have backed Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi. The Shias of Faizabad and Lucknow hold similar views.

The trouble is with the diehards, and the trouble threatened by them is real. They can whip up passions and unleash violence. It is a matter of some satisfaction that there are a large number of secular and nationalist Muslims who realise that further isolating Muslims and involving them in non-issues is detrimental to the Muslims and the nation as a whole. As Iqbal Masud has said, there is a "limit to revivalism set by the very fact of its existence in a multicultural society such as India".

*Why do the Hindus insist on rebuilding the temple?*

Among Hindus there is no communal or collective worship. It is not laid down for them to assemble in a temple on appointed days and fixed hours and pray in congregation.

Hinduism inculcates only one discipline—non-interference with others and toleration of all. There are thousands of people who never go to a temple or keep a fast, and yet no one interferes with them. There are Marxists and “secularists” who openly advocate that there should be no change in the present structures at Ayodhya, but no Hindu issues a decree of death against any of them. On the other hand, there are millions and millions who worship in temples with emotional devotion.

For Hindus Rama is the supreme manifestation of the Divine and his birthplace Ayodhya is the holiest of the holy. The temple of Ramjanabhoomi brings to their minds the horrible memories of a bloodstained conquest by a foreign invader. In the medieval period the Hindus were helpless; they could only lay down their lives in protecting their temples from an intolerant invader or ruler. They made repeated sacrifices for the Ramjanabhoomi and did not give up worshipping there, even when it was desecrated or broken.

Niccolao Manucci in his *Storia do Mogor* says that Aurangzeb destroyed the temples at Mayapur (Haridwar) and Ayodhya, but “all of them are thronged with worshippers, even those that are destroyed are still venerated by the Hindus and visited by the offering of alms”. Similar was the situation under Wajid Ali Shah. During the uprising of 1857, one of the Muslim leaders, Amir Ali, pleaded with the British on behalf of the Hindus for the restoration of the Ramjanabhoomi to them on the ground that it was originally a Hindu shrine. But today, finding that the establishment was harping “only” on “Hindu communalism”, some Muslims have made it an issue.

Meanwhile, some Hindu organisations have made the issue national and even international by inviting bricks (*Ramshilas*), after all ceremonies and fanfare from villages, towns and cities of India, and even from abroad, to build a new and magnificent temple on the site of the old one. It is claimed that consecration of bricks (*shila poojan*) creates a feeling of unity and brotherhood among the people of all communities, particularly in the villages. On the international scene the Ramjanabhoomi issue has thrown focus on Hinduism as a world religion.

It must be recognised that there is emotional involvement on both sides, and it is asked: After all where is the Hindu demand going to end? There are three hundred or so known temples turned into mosques. How many have to be returned to and rebuilt by the Hindus, ask the worried fundamentalists. The Hindus modestly demand return of the sites, only one in a hundred—the Rama temple at Ayodhya, Krishna temple at Mathura and Vishwanath temple at Varanasi. But, first Ayodhya.

*Courtesy : Organiser*

## HOW HINDU RESISTANCE TO BABRI MASJID GOT RECORDED IN 1850

RAJENDRA PRASAD JAIN

Driven out by the Muslims of Farghana, his motherland, Babar came to India as an aggressor, and defeated the joint force of Hindus and Indian Muslims. He was most afraid of Pathans. He writes in his autobiography that Pathans are all over from Kabul to Bengal and Bihar and pose the greatest danger. He was right. It were the Pathans under Sher Shah who drove away the Mughals.

Sher Shah stood for Hindu-Muslim unity. Todarmal, his revenue minister, was the first Hindu to rise to such a high post under a Muslim king. Later on, Hemu became the commander-in-chief of his successor. Babar apprehended the danger and so to cause a rift between the Hindus and Indian Muslims, he demolished the Rama Janma Bhoomi Temple and built a masjid in its place. The miracle worked. Though Babar showed no mercy to the Indian Muslims and raised towers of skulls of both Hindus and Indian Muslims, the latter began to align themselves with the conqueror and it was for Hindus alone to carry on the struggle for the restoration of the Rama Janma Bhoomi Temple.

As more than 300 years have passed since the demolition of the temple and the building of the masjid in its place, some people, including some political parties want that status quo should be kept on the basis of law of limitation. They say that there are High Court judgements to this effect. They held that no doubt it was the temple that was demolished and a masjid raised in its place, but as more than 300 years have passed, they could do nothing under the law of limitation.

Acceptance of such a proposition would mean that Babri Masjid has lost on moral ground and it is only the technical side on which it stands. Morals stand for all the people for all the times. Technicalities differ according to the whims, fancies and requirements of the people, the rulers and the state. But law of limitation is for individual disputes and not for the disputes of national, cultural and historical importance. The Pakistan Government has converted Gurudwara Shahidganj of Lahore into a masjid although the Muslims had lost the case under the law of limitation in undivided India. Late Mrs. Indira Gandhi waived the law of limitation in allowing the Muslims to say their namaz in the fort of Tughlak in Delhi and also to meet their demand to claim the masjids demolished in the 1947 frenzy.

The law of limitation did not come in the way of abolition of Zamindari, princely states and monarchy. It did not come in the way of abolition of slavery and slave trade, though in America the advocates of slavery advanced the plea of law of limitation. It did not come in the way of abolition of child marriage. Strict adherence to law of limitation would mean perpetration of capitalism and colour discrimination in South Africa and all other social evils.

They argue that as Hindus offered no resistance in 1850, it means that they have acquiesced to the Babri Masjid and and that they have no right to demand its demolition and restoration of their temple. Absence of record does not mean absence of events having taken place. The absence of record is also due to the fact that the only recorders were Muslims. Why should they have recorded their nefarious acts? And also given impetus to Hindu resistance? Even today our

Doordarshan, Akashvani and even press do not record every resistance, not to speak of history books.

Moreover, every resistance finds its own time to take shape. Akbar forced the Rajput princes to give their daughters in marriage to the Mughals. The rulers of Jaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner did not offer any resistance for more than 150 years. But in 1714 they took a vow at Pushkar not to do so and the custom was done away with for ever. You cannot say that as scheduled castes never offered any resistance, there should be no attempt to give them their rights.

The mention of Hindu resistance to Babri Masjid in 1850 should have also gone unrecorded but for the fact that a Muslim divine, Amin Ali Shah of Amethi was killed in it and the Muslims wanted to make a martyr of him. And to record his story, the story of resistance had to be given willy nilly.

It is clear from the account as given in *Tarikh-e-Oudh*, *Ulemae Haq Aur Unki Mazloomiat Ki Dastanen* by Intzamullah Shahabi that the resistance has been of long standing. The readers may judge themselvss from the gist of the account as given by them.

“There was a mound in Ayodhya where Ram Chandraji had seated Hanuman, therefore called Hanuman *Baithak*. This was lying desolate, so Alamgir (Aurangzeb) built a masjid there. During the time of Burhanulmulk the Bairagis raised it to the mound. The state rebuilt it. When Wajid Ali Shah ascended the throne Raja Darshan Singh became bold enough to demolish the masjid. The Bairagis rebuilt the temple at Hanumangarh and also went so far as to build a new temple in front of Babri Musjid. On 11 Ziqad 1271 Hijri Muslims went to say their prayers in Babri Masjid. At the instigation of Raja Darshan Singh, thousands of Bairagis fell upon the Muslims killing 130 of them. The Shias watched all this without doing anything. When Amir Ali Shah of Amethi heard it he was much agitated. He came to Lucknow. He warned the government to avenge the massacre lest he should declare Jihad.

After waiting for some time, Amir Ali Shah issued the fatwa for jihad. When Wajid Ali Shah got the news, he appointed a committee of enquiry consisting of Raja Nusrat



Jung, Raja Man Singh, Qasim Jung, Tihaur Ali Khan Risaldar, Faizabad. They all reported that there was never a masjid there . . . on 26 Safar 1272 Hijri the Shah started with his followers to offer prayers. On the other hand, Mufti Sadullah opposed the move. He proclaimed death sentence on Amin Ali and declared that anybody supporting him is doomed to hell. When Amir Ali Shah and his followers were busy in their prayer they were attacked with guns from Tikri killing 625 Muslims including Amir Ali Shah.

The following questions arise :—

Why the Hindus had left such an important place as Hanuman Baithak desolate and not built any temple there in honour of Rama or Hanuman? Why should Aurangzeb build a masjid in a desolate place? The inference is clear that it was the Babri Masjid which the Hindus had demolished and rebuilt the temple of Rama. Aurangzeb again demolished the temple to rebuild the masjid. That had happened in case of so many temples such as Somnath.

Why should Hindus demolish the masjid built by Aurangzeb if it was an original one and not built on the ashes of their temples? Hindus have never demolished any original masjid before the frenzy of 1947. All the Muslim historians bear witness to it. If Muslims have any instance to give they should speak. Hindus have been sore against only those masjids which have been built on the ashes of their temples.

Again, if the dispute was about the Alamgiri Masjid why the Muslims went to say their namaz in Babri Masjid? If there had been no dispute about the Babri Masjid why should Hindus object to Muslims saying their prayer there as usual by killing as many as 130 Muslims. The writer confounds Alamgir Masjid by a masjid other than Babri Masjid. If original dispute was about Alamgiri Masjid how was it shifted to Babri Masjid. The inference is clear that Alamgiri Masjid and the Babri Masjid are one and the same; if they are separate, then Babri Masjid has not been in use since long due to Hindu resistance. According to Muslim theology, it is necessary for a Masjid to be called so to have Azan and Namaz 5 times a day. It is still without Azan and prayer. Is the law of limitation only for the Hindus?



Why should Maulana Amir Ali Shah go to offer prayer at Babri Masjid instead of Alamgir Masjid?

Why should Shias stand aloof and not support the Shah and Babri Masjid claim?

From another religious point of view Islam does not allow demolition of places of worship of any sect. A historical event has been given by Intzamullah Shahabi in his aforesaid book. Some fanatic Muslims approached Sultan Sikandar Lodi requesting him to demolish all the Hindu places of worship in their vicinity as they were a great nuisance. When Maulana Abdullah Thanesaru heard it he came to the Sultan and said, "Islam does not allow demolition of places of worship of any religion or sect." The king said, "You are partial to the Kafirs." The Maulana said, "I favour Truth. Our ancestors have never done so. Then why do you do so?" Sikandar could say nothing and refrained from taking the wrong step. Not only from the point of justice and fair play, from point of a nationalist and for communal harmony but also from the orthodox Islamic point of view the Rama Janma Bhoomi must be restored to the Hindus. It should be left only to the communalists as distinct from the religious to stand in the way to derive political benefit out of it. There are thousands of masjids lying desolate, but it is no concern of anyone, because they cannot give any political benefit to anyone.

*Courtesy : Organiser*

## LORD RAMA AND HIS JANAMBHOOMI

RAM CHANDRA KHATTRI

I am now about seventy years of age. After passing my M.A. in Ancient History of India in the year 1939, I took to teaching profession in High Schools where salaries in those times were low and therefore, I passed LL.B. and took to legal profession in Basti distt. and am now leading a retired life in Jaunpur where my children have settled down.

Unfortunately, at present a bitter and dangerous controversy over the issue of Babri Masjid and Ram Janambhoomi is raging in most of the central and northern parts of India which may take a serious turn by creating a fascist cult of Hitler among peace-loving Hindus of India.

I will quote a paragraph from the Bhagvad Gita :

He who does work for Me

He who looks upon Me as His goal,

He who worships Me free from attachment

He who is free from enmity to all creatures

He comes to Me

And every true Hindu and Sanatan Dharmi must understand that India is the only country of the world from where non-violence and Ahimsa originated. Hindu cult is not fascism. Its cult is non-violence : Ahimsa Paramodharma—its cult is that he should be free from enmity to all creatures.

With all apologies to my Hindu brothers all over the world, I hereby narrate the history of Lord Rama by eminent Hindu historian, and from the Encyclopaedia Britannica which will prove whether Ramayan was a fiction or a fact of history.

If we go through historical records of ancient Indian History, we would never find that there ever existed any state of Ayodhya ruled by Raja Dashrath, father of lord Rama.

In his famous book "Evolution of Indian Culture" read as a text book in several thousand schools and colleges of India during the last forty years, Sri Badri Nath Luniya, Ex-Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Indore in the latest edition of 1983 (first edition was published in 1951) has stated the following facts about lord Rama and Ramayan :

"The Ramayan is believed to be the work of Valmiki and the Mahabharata is ascribed to Vyas. But the epics as we know them do not belong to any one age or to only one author. The present form is the result of additions from time to time in their several recensions, the latest recension of Ramayan in the form in which we find it, was about 200 A.D. However by the second century BC most of the work was complete..."

"Fact, fiction and allegory are undoubtedly closely interwoven in this epic. The origin of great epic lies in the *gathas* or ballads of heroes and of heroic events sung by bards in the courts of Rajas on the occasions of religious sacrifices or great feasts."

Thus, Mr. Luniya has clearly written that there is no evidence of the fact that Rama was a real historical figure.

In his famous book, '*Notes from Hindu Gods and Heroes*' by Lionel D. Barnett (1922), it is written that "The tale of Rama as told in the Valmiki's Ramayan is a clean wholesome story of chivalry, love and adventure. But the Valmiki Ramayan of today is not clearly the work of a single hand. We can trace in it at least two strata. Book II and VI which contain the older stratum, the rest other stratum is the addition of a later

poet or series of poets who have also inserted some padding into the earlier books :

“In the early stratem Rama is simply a hero, miraculous in strength and goodness, but nevertheless wholly human, but in the later stratem Book I and VII and occasionally in other books conditions are changed and Rama appears as a God on earth, a partial incarnation of Vishnu.

The main point to observe is that Rama was originally a local hero of the solar dynasty, a legendary king of Ayodhya. Many have believed that the story of expedition and his army of apes to Lanka represents a movement of Aryan invaders from north to the south. But there is no evidence to show that such an expedition was ever made by the Aryans...The expedition of Rama was obviously frivolous for his army was composed not of Aryans but of apes”.

Corroborating this fact further Prof. A.M. Muzumdar of Santiniketan in his history of Ancient India published in 1973 has stated that the celebrated Grammerien Panini makes allusions to Arjuna and other heroes of Mahabharat but not to Ramayan and particularly to Rama. He is silent about Rama and so is his successor Patanjali. There is no Rama in any inscription prior to the beginning of Christian Era (that is prior to 1989 years from today).”

In the present form according to Prof. Mazumdar, “Ramayana is divided into 7 books with 24000 verses in 500 chapters. It is difficult to judge the number of genuine verses. The consensus of scholars is that in the whole of book VII and in most of book I there are interpolations because it is here that Rama appears as an incarnation of Vishnu.

This is the opinion of renowned Hindu scholars and the last one is a Brahmin of Santiniketan.

It may also be mentioned that *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has clearly laid down that Rama is one of the most widely worshipped Hindu deities, the embodiment of chivalry and virtue who is considered to be incarnation of Lord Vishnu, but after some time according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, it should be remembered that no one worshipped Rama before 11th century A.D. and it was not until the 14th and 15th century A.D. that

distinct sects appeared venerating him as one supreme god.

Encyclopaedia Britannica further says that Rama's popularity increased greatly by the retelling of the Sanskrit epic in the Vernacular such as Rama Charitmanas (Hindi version by Tulsidas) where Rama and Krishna were the two most popular recipients of adoration from the Bhakti (devotional) cults that swept the country during that time.

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica it is noteworthy that temples to Rama faced by his devotee Hanuman are now widespread throughout India but Kingdom of Ayodhya does not find any place in the Ancient History of India or in any ancient book of India.

On the basis of the above fact it has fully been proved that lord Rama as a god was evolved in about one thousand years from 200 AD to 1200 AD and therefore, we will not find any temple of Rama with his brother Laxman, his wife Sita and his devotee Hanuman before 12th Century A.D.

As has recently been stated by an European Scholar, Hindu psyche is naturally groomed to create gods and goddesses. The above-mentioned facts prove that lord Rama is a creation of the Hindu psyche and not one supreme being Brahma of Vedas about whom it has been stated in 'Equo Brahman Do Tue Naste' —Brahma is only one and not two.

*Courtsev : Radiance*

## THE AYODHYA ISSUE NEEDS TO BE SETTLED BY MUTUAL GOODWILL

MADHU LIMAYE

Now that the Republic Day has come and gone we can coolly think over the boycott call to the Muslims issued by the Babari Masjid Committee. Let me say that if the call had not been withdrawn, lakhs of people would not have stayed away from the celebrations in obedience to the call nor did larger numbers participate because the call was withdrawn. The call itself was withdrawn, at the last minute, in mysterious circumstances, by the committee which apparently did not even have a quorum ! Probably, the threat conveyed to the boycotters, quietly, to throw them out of Parliament and disenfranchise them was effective. Had Shahabuddin any political sense he would have responded to his party president's appeal betimes. But he did not. The withdrawal was totally devoid of grace and smacked of rank cowardice.

Frankly speaking, the controversy raised by the stupid call of Shahabuddin, Sulaiman Sait and Co to boycott the Republic Day celebrations this year and the hysterical statement issued by the Prime Minister down, especially the "secular", "patriotic" and "progressive" Muslims left me cold. I shall

briefly set out my reasons why my emotions were not roused by this controversy.

First of all, I feel that even more damaging and harmful than this insulting call for boycott was the effort of Shahabuddin, Sulaiman Sait and others to rouse communal passions on the issue of the judgment of the Supreme Court in the Shah Bano case and browbeat the central government, headed by Rajiv Gandhi, into railroading the Muslim Women's Enslavement Bill through the two Houses of Parliament, with the help of the open threat to bring the Anti-Defection Law into operation. Rajiv Gandhi's bemoaning the boycott call, therefore seemed hypocritical to me. In the name of taking the country into the twenty-first century he pushed back over six per cent of its population into medieval servitude, namely, the Muslim women. Having sown the wind of obscurantism the time came for Rajiv to reap the whirlwind.

I do not deny that many secular-minded and progressive Muslims had condemned the Rajiv-sponsored Bill. But a far larger number of Muslim leaders and intellectuals came forward to condemn Shahabuddin's boycott call. The attitude of these new champions of secularism and national integration was absolutely insincere. They are doing this to curry favour with the powers that be. They are singing this tune only because the Prime Minister has come out against the call.

This controversy should make us think deeply over the way the national festivals like Independence Day, Gandhi Jayanti and Republic Day are being celebrated in our country today. Is there a large scale popular participation in these festivals, barring of course the Delhi Parade? Are voluntary organisations involved in them? Have not these celebrations become entirely official throughout the country? Has not the celebration of these great national days become thoroughly bureaucratised? Have they not become soulless functions from which all fervour has gone out? Is it not time that we worried over the fact that popular participation is nowhere near the scale of the celebration of say, Durga Puja, Ganeshutsav, Deepavali, Id, Christmas or Guru Govind Singh Day?

If the national days do not rouse enthusiasm on a comparable scale, then is it not evidence of some sickness in the body

social and body political of India? The popular indifference was not there always. The state of the nation causes people like me the greatest anguish. Some of us remember the great enthusiasm which celebration of January 26—then called Independence Day—evoked before 1947. The rulers of India and, especially, the officialdom have robbed our national festivals of their mystique and glamour. Of course, there is bound to be a difference between festivals rooted in the religious consciousness of the people and national days which are secular in character. But unless we make these days bright and vibrant and ensure popular participation on a vast scale, we cannot make our nationhood and our equal and common citizen meaningful.

Shahabuddin's boycott appeal was ridiculous because neither Muslims nor Hindus nor Sikhs nor Christians were really participating in these celebrations on any considerable scale. Have honest figures ever been collected about the scale of participation by the people and the communal and class composition of the people who actively associated with these celebrations? If I am not mistaken, it is mostly confined to school children who have no choice in the matter.

The condemnation of Shahabuddin would be equally pointless unless it induced us to take expeditious steps to make these national festivals occasions for enthusiastic public participation, for rejoicing and for dedication to the service of the motherland.

The issue itself which propelled Shahabuddin to issue the call would seem to border on the absurd, were it not so pregnant with tragic implications. The Court order locking the entrance had been in existence for a pretty long time. It was vacated under dubious circumstances. If Muslims feel aggrieved, as they do, why did they not move the appropriate court? Perhaps, there is an appeal pending in the high court? Shahabuddin has written that the court order vacating the stay is a legal "monstrosity." The place technically remains "attached" and the title suit is still "pending." He further says that "the writ petition against the order is yet to be admitted." Who filed the petition, under which Articles of the Constitution, before whom, the Allahabad High Court or the Supreme Court?



Why was it not admitted when hundreds of petitions are being admitted every week ? If it is the Allahabad High Court, why do not some Muslims of Faizabad and other places approach the Supreme Court under Article 32 ? Is the ultimate legal solution deliberately avoided by both Hindus and Muslims because it suits the fanatics on either side, and provides them with a serviceable issue for fanning communal hatred ?

There is provision under Article 139A under which the Supreme Court upon a writ petition being filed by the aggrieved party and an application being made by it, can withdraw the case from the high court and dispose of the case itself. This can and should be done in view of the fact that this is a matter of overmastering importance. We cannot forget that the judicial order at the lower level has so considerably poisoned and is daily poisoning more and more the inter-community relations in Uttar Pradesh.

Why does not the central government, in consultation with the state government, call the leaders of the two communities in Uttar Pradesh and bring about a settlement ? A matter being *subjudice* does not preclude, as the Prime Minister seems to believe, the government from acting. Nor is he right in underestimating the resentments that are accumulating over the issue in Uttar Pradesh.

The pertinent question is are all the places where old temples have been destroyed and mosques or churches erected, after clearing the ruins, centuries ago to be made bones of contentions ? Is history to be put on trial ? Are some fanatic "Dravidians" to start demolishing the great "Arya temples" in the south, although the entire Aryan-Dravidian thing is so much nonsense ? Is the present to be sacrificed in the name of avenging the shameful past ? Is the disgrace, which our ancestors allowed the foreign invaders to heap on themselves, to be wiped out in this way, or to be made the occasion for a fratricidal war ? K. R. Malkani has spoken somewhere of a symbolic gesture. He has not defined it. What should the Muslims do concretely ?

When Mother India's children fight like wild beasts, it appears that she can only weep. There is nobody even to wipe her tears. Must we then give up and resign ourselves to our

fate? Or should we seek a sensible and civilised way out?

If both the communities are inspired by mutual goodwill and want a just and equitable settlement of the problem the ideal solution would be to transform the place into an archaeological spot and a museum. As a token of goodwill let the Muslims contribute all the money for the construction of a Ram mandir on an open site on the bank of the river Sarayu and let the Hindus finance the construction of a mosque in the vicinity of Muslim habitation in the environs of Faizabad. Let the two places of worship be dedicated to the brotherhood of the children of Adam and Manu.

*Courtesy : The Telegraph*

## AYODHYA READY FOR COMPROMISE

KULDIP KUMAR

If the calls given for a Hindu Mahasammelan by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and for a Muslim convention by the Babari Masjid Youth Action Committee on April 5 in Ayodhya are any indication, communal leaders of both the Hindu and Muslim communities are trying their best to shatter the peace that has so far prevailed in this sleepy town. It is remarkable that while the controversy surrounding the Ram-Janmabhoomi-Babari Masjid has aroused religious passions elsewhere, Ayodha and its surrounding areas have not been much affected by it and have been able to maintain communal peace. But if the two rival conventions do take place in Ayodhya barely two days before Ramnavami, one will have to keep one's fingers crossed.

Vishwa Hindu Parishad has decided to observe April 5 as *sankalp divas*, asking lakhs of Hindu devotees who gather in Ayodhya on the occasion of Ramnavami to take a vow on the banks of the river Saryu that they will not allow the removal of Lord Rama's idols placed inside the disputed shrine and will rest only after a new, magnificent temple has come up at the site of the present structure. The Babari Masjid Youth Action Committee will predictably exhort Muslim masses to launch an

uncompromising struggle that will end only after the shrine is restored to them. The seeds for an ugly confrontation have already been sown.

It is significant that all these developments have come close on the heels of a concerted effort made by both the communities to resolve the dispute through mutual talks at the local level. A series of meetings took place in Faizabad in February and March between the leaders of the two communities and succeeded in making some progress. The last meeting that took place on March 27, just two days before the bandh that witnessed some disturbances, was presided over by well-known freedom fighter and an authority on *Ramcharit Manas*, Mukhtar Ahmad Kidwai, and representatives of both Hindus and Muslims expressed their opposition to interference by outsiders who were trying to complicate matters. There was consensus that the Ramjanmabhoomi—Babari Masjid dispute should be resolved locally and outside the court. Most people also agreed that all the suits pending in courts regarding the shrine be withdrawn. Others who attended this meeting included Mahant Nritta Gopaldas, Mahant Sitaram Sharan of Lakshman Kila-dhish, Kaushal Kishore Das of Rajgopal Mandir, Mahant Ramcharan Das, Mahant Narayanacharya, ex-MLA Abdul Hafeez, Akhlaq Ahmad, Mohammad Yunus of Babari Masjid Action Committee and Ashfaq Ahmad. This is the reason that people in both Ayodhya and Faizabad feel that the disturbance that took place during the March 29 bandh called by the Parishad were aimed at jeopardising this process. Communalists from both the communities are being held guilty for this. The general feeling is that the disturbances were planned and not spontaneous. Organised rumour-mongering played its role in instigating trouble both in Faizabad and Ayodhya on March 29 and 30 and both Hindus and Muslims feel that they were duped by unscrupulous communal elements. The administration's casual attitude is also cited as another reason.

There were a number of bomb explosions in various areas of Faizabad on March 29, 30 and 31, some of them simultaneous, giving rise to the suspicion that they were organised. Conversations with both Hindus and Muslims revealed that around 11am on March 29, an altercation developed between

some Hindus and Muslims near Ghosiana, a Muslim locality, and slogan-shouting started. The tempo of BJP leader Sunderlal Rajpal was overturned in the melee and soon brickbatting began. A bomb was also thrown and rumours of all kinds started spreading. A crowd entered the Sabzi Mandi where mostly Muslims own shops. The local authorities declared a curfew, the imposition of which was, strangely enough, later denied by UP Home Secretary Mata Prasad. Next day, a bomb exploded near Tatshah mosque and as the police rushed to that spot, another exploded almost simultaneously near Sabzi Mandi. On March 31 too, one bomb was thrown near Rakab Ganj and another in Chhajapur village of Tanda. All this points towards an organised attempt to foment trouble and create a riot-like situation in Faizabad which is not known for communal disturbances.

These developments had their echoes in Ayodhya too but apart from one or two insignificant incidents, nothing much happened there. As pointed out by both Muslims and Hindus living in Ayodhya, the town has a history of communal harmony. This correspondent was told that when the head Mahant of Hanumangarhi led a procession last year after the lock on the disputed shrine had been removed and pooja started, all the members of the band that played music in front of the procession were Muslims.

However, if the communal propaganda from both Hindu and Muslim organisations goes on unabated, these age-old ties are bound to rupture. The belligerence being shown by militant organisations like Bajrang Dal is adding fuel to the fire—its slogans include *Babar ki santanon, Bharat Chhodo*”, (Babar’s children, quit India), “*Ab bhi jiska khoon na khaula, khoon nahin woh pani hai. Janmabhoomi ke kam na aya, kya woh bhi jawani hai,*” (The blood that does not boil even now is not blood but water. Will you call that youth that is not sacrificed for the cause of the motherland).

Even Lal Das, the priest of Ramjanmabhoomi Mandir, feels that the campaign launched by the Parishad during the past two years has vitiated the atmosphere. “Even Mohammad Hashim Ansari, who is fighting the case of Babari Masjid, wanted the dispute not to be prolonged. There was a proposal

that an alternative site and money to build a mosque be given by Hindus to Muslims in lieu of the disputed shrine and we were quite optimistic about the Muslims of Ayodhya agreeing to this, but the Parishad dealt a severe blow to this process by starting its campaign. Muslim leaders from outside too jumped into the fray and the matter got complicated," he said. He also opposed the Parishad's plan to reclaim hundreds of other mosques which were allegedly built after destroying temples. "This is a dangerous move. It will only create trouble for everybody. I feel that other Muslim shrines should not be touched. Ramjanmabhoomi is a different case altogether because of its special significance for Hindus."

But Mahesh Narayan Singh, Secretary, Shriram Janmabhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti, ruled out the possibility of any compromise on the issue. He admitted that a meeting had taken place on March 10 in Delhi at the invitation of Prince Qadir who had contacted Mahant Avaidyanath of Gorakhpur. But it ended without yielding any results as neither of the two parties was willing to concede anything. Two proposals have so far been floated to resolve the issue and both have been rejected by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. One was the suggestion of Dr. Karan Singh that the idols be shifted from inside the shrine to the *chabutara* outside and a temple be constructed there. Muslims should be given right of passage through the side entrance and allowed to offer prayers. Another suggestion came up at the meeting of Hindu and Muslim representatives at Faizabad that two domes of the shrine be given to Hindus and the third to the Muslims and both the communities be allowed to offer prayers there. Singh categorically rules out acceptance of either of them. To the suggestion that the shrine be declared a national monument and no community be allowed to use it for religious purposes, his telling comment was, "A national monument is a thing of national pride. How can we take pride in a building constructed by Babar, a barbaric foreigner? It is a black spot on our nation." He felt that the demand of constructing a new temple at the site of the present Babari Masjid was perfectly justified.

Here, it may, be mentioned that the Parishad formed a 'Dharmasthan Mukti Yagna Samiti' about three-and-a-half

years ago to “free” all such temples which were converted into mosques by Muslim rulers at different points of time. The Parishad initially drew up a list of 141 such religious shrines with the Babari Masjid topping the list. The mosque at the Vishwanath Temple at Varanasi and the one at the Krishna Janmabhoomi in Mathura come next, and the list goes on. Mahant Avaidyanath of Gorakhpur heads the Samiti. A sub-committee was also formed with the specific aim of getting the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid. The Parishad is demanding that the existing Babari Masjid should be handed over to Jagadguru Ramanandacharya, Shri Shivramacharya of Kashi who heads the Ramjanmabhoomi Trust. The Trust proposes to undertake the construction of an impressive temple with a sum of Rs 25 crores, which is being collected for this purpose. Local priests are not pleased with these plans. They see in it an attempt by the Parishad to oust them and take over the exclusive control of the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid.

The temple’s present priest Lal Das makes this accusation openly, saying that the rules of the Ramjanmabhoomi Trust do not have a provision that the head of the Ramanand cult will always be the head of the trust. “Shri Shivramacharya is over 80 now. He is acceptable to all of us as he is the head of the Ramanand Sampradaya. But what after him? Ramkeval Das, another member from Ayodhya, is only a life member and he too is very old. It means that after these two are gone the trust will be in the exclusive control of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.”

At the moment, a number of suits are pending in the court, laying bare the reality that all the talk of religion only hides the naked material interests of various groups of priests bothered about their share of the cake.

Interestingly, Ayodhya’s Mahants and Babas seem highly politicised. Their affiliations range from Congress (I) to the CPI! While Mahant Ramhridaya Das of Hanumangarhi is a supporter of the Janata Party, Mahant Ramlakhan Das of the same Hanumangarhi is the president of the Ayodhya unit of the Congress (I). Mahant Nritta Gopal Das, general secretary of the Ramjanmabhoomi Trust and head of Mahant Maniram’s *chhavani*, too supports the ruling party. The Communist Party of India has its votaries in Mahant Jagat Narayan Das of

Mandir Ladli Prasad and Pujari Lal Das of Ramjanmabhoomi. In fact, Lal Das has served the CPI as its district committee treasurer and secretary of the Ayodhya unit ! He left the party in 1982. Mahant Avdhesh Das Shastri of Shastri Nagar Mandir, Harishankar Singh of Ram Jharokha Mandir and Paramhansa Ramchandra Das of Digambari Akhara support the BJP. Of them, Paramhansa Ramchandra Das is also the vice-president of the Ramjanmabhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti.

There are Congress (I) leaders on both sides of the communal divide. Daudayal Khanna, general secretary of the Ramjanmabhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti, is a former UP minister and still retains his membership of the ruling party. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad's president Shiv Nath Katju has been a Congress (I) member of the UP Legislative Council and is the son of our first defence minister the late Dr Kailash Nath Katju. He was also a judge of the Allahabad High Court. Maulana Muzaffar Hussain Kachhauchhavi, who gave a patently inflammatory speech at the Boat Club Rally in New Delhi on March 30, is the chairman of the UP Babari Masjid Action Committee and is a former Congress (I) MP. There are scores of other less prominent Congress (I) members active among both the communities.

The involvement of Congress (I) members in both the camps gives rise to suspicion that the ruling party does not want to make any attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of Hindus as well as Muslims. During the past one year, since the unlocking of the Babari Masjid and resumption of Hindu religious practices there, neither the State government nor the Centre has shown any inclination to intervene in the situation to stop the communal virus from spreading further. This has resulted in the increasing communalisation that has afflicted almost every sphere of life in U.P. As succinctly put by Qazi Noorus-Salam, a pro-Congress (I) lawyer of Kanpur, Muslims are more agitated today than they were when the lock was removed from the shrine. "This is because during the past one year, the likes of Syed Shahabuddin and Maulana Muzaffar Hussain Kachhauchhavi, have spread enough communal poison among Muslims. Now, most of the Muslim masses are convinced that they have to get back the Babari Masjid at any cost.



They have come to feel that Islam is repeating its history. Islam has come up under the shadow of swords and so, we have to lay down our lives for the cause of Islam. Syed Shahabuddin, who presents communal arguments in a very sophisticated manner, has become very popular among uneducated Muslim masses during this one year.” Qazi Noorus-Salam poses a question to the leadership of the Babari Masjid Action Committee: Why are they so concerned with only one mosque? There are scores of mosques lying decrepit or under the possession of non-Muslims in Punjab and other parts of the country. But they are building up this issue because they can exploit the name of Babar.”

The Qazi holds the unusual delay in the disposal of the suit concerning Babari Masjid as an important factor in worsening matters. “I am astonished at the slow judicial pace that could not dispose of a single plaint in 37 years. It is a stigma on the bright record of our judiciary. My suspicion is that communal prejudices caused this delay.” In his view, if the government declares the shrine a national monument, Muslims will resent it but ultimately will accept the decision. But the government is not doing so because Hindus are not going to remove the idols of Lord Rama from inside the mosque and the ruling party does not want to lose the Hindu vote. He complimented the district administration for being vigilant in putting down trouble fast but complained that the police were removing only green flags and arresting Muslims for hoisting them, while they did not make any attempt to remove *bhagwa* flags put up by Hindus.

The situation in Kanpur had become tense after a number of speakers including Syed Shahabuddin and Lok Dal (B) MLA Azam Khan gave inflammatory speeches at a meeting held by the Babari Masjid Action Committee at Halim Muslim College on the night of March 22. Azam Khan’s statement reportedly describing *Bharatmata* as a *dayan* provoked Hindus and the bandh called by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad on March 29 presented them with an occasion to give vent to their resentment. Azam Khan is reported to have said that Muslims are not going to accept this country as *Bharatmata* because innocent Muslims have shed their blood here in riot after riot. “This mother has quenched its thirst with the blood of Muslims

This is not a Mother but *Dayan*. If Muslims do not get justice, Punjab will break its boundaries and come here. Whosoever confronts places of worship, be it the Golden Temple or the Babari Masjid, will be destroyed.”

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad naturally took advantage of this speech and unleashed a big propaganda campaign among Hindus. Consequently, tension started mounting and on the evening of March 29, the situation became very tense near Chauraha Mool Ganj. The administration promptly controlled it by taking out a flag march of armed police and alerting the army. According to Senior Superintendent of Police, Yashpal Singh, flag marches proved to be very successful in controlling the crowds. Because the Ranganath Misra Commission had criticised the then Kanpur District Magistrate for not calling out the army during the November 1984 riots, this time the army was immediately alerted. Singh, however, denied that the police had discriminated against the Muslims in removing flags.

But the same charge was repeated by Jayaprakash Narayan, UP secretary of Indian People's Front, an umbrella organisation of Naxalites, in Lucknow. He said that the police in Lucknow too displayed a partisan attitude towards Hindus. “The police did nothing to stop volunteers of Bajrang Dal from forcibly making people buy *bhagwa* flags for Rs. 5 but whenever they saw even a single green flag on any of the Muslim shops, it was promptly removed.” He felt that instead of turning the shrine into a national monument, it should be handed over to the Muslims and no attempt should be made to reverse what was done several centuries ago. In his view, the state administration was clearly siding with the Hindus in this dispute. “When the state government employees went on a strike which affected every walk of life and was very successful, the government dubbed it as a flop. But when the March 29 bandh called by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad took place, during which only shops were closed, Home Secretary Mata Prasad went out of his way to describe it as “80 per cent successful. In Lucknow, there has been a tradition of Hindu-Muslim amity, so even Muslims shops were closed on that day”.

Claims and counter-claims notwithstanding, the fact remains that a very volatile situation has come to exist in the country, especially in the North, on the issue of the Ramjanabhoomi-Babari Masjid shrine. The speeches delivered by various Muslim leaders, particularly Shabi Imam Syed Abdullah Bukhari, left no doubt that the communal Muslim leadership can go to any length in order to attain a hold over the Muslim masses and reinforce forces that are eager to tear asunder the secular fabric of our Indian polity. Hindu communalism is in any case on the ascendant. If the present trend persists, large scale clashes cannot be ruled out.

Despite all this, the ruling party is yet to disclose its mind on this vexed issue and is busy blaming everybody but itself. Even though the matter is *sub-judice*, it can only be resolved through political intervention from the government whose basic duty is to preserve communal harmony and law and order in the country. If the State absolves itself of its role of an impartial arbiter, only conflict and chaos lie in store for us.

*Courtesy : Sunday Observer*

## UTTAR PRADESH GOVERNMENT TOOK SIDES IN AYODHYA DISPUTE

SEEMA MUSTAFA

The ugly virus of communalism has almost the entire northern India in its grip. The worst affected states are Jammu and Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh where practically every city with a sizeable minority population has been affected. Delhi too shook with communal tremors which were, however, quickly controlled.

The district authorities in the areas which are under considerable tension if not actual curfew, have no hesitation in admitting that the direct provocation was the Uttar Pradesh government's decision to open the disputed shrine in Ayodhya known as the Ram Janmabhumi temple to Hindus and Babari Masjid to the Muslims. This short-sighted decision had the expected repercussions and within days tension was reported from Lucknow, Agra, Aligarh, Khurja, Bulandshahr, Meerut and even the Prime Minister's constituency, Amethi, which has a sizeable Muslim population.

The first major clashes were reported in Delhi, Meerut and other areas on February 14 when Muslim organisations

observed a 'black day' in protest against the state government. In Delhi it took the form of a Muslim-police clash but in Meerut it was converted with considerable ease into a Hindu-Muslim riot. Subsequent stabbings of both Hindus and Muslims in the narrow *gullies* of the old city led the administration to place Meerut under curfew on February 28 and the two attempts to relax this slightly have only resulted in more stabbings and more deaths.

Numerous communal clashes have taken place over the controversial shrine at Ayodhya and in 1949 the place was sealed for the first time under the orders of a district and sessions judge. In the ensuing 37 years there were efforts on the part of both Hindus and Muslims to get the property reopened, but fortunately, successive state governments resisted such moves.

In 1984, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) decided to elevate the dispute to the national level and decided to take out a rath yatra from Sitamarhi in Bihar, via Ayodhya, to Delhi where they intended to present a memorandum to the then Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi. The chief organiser of this yatra was a Congress(I) leader who was at one time a minister in the Uttar Pradesh government. There was no effort to ban the yatra by either the State or the Union governments and the RSS and VHP activists freely marched through the sensitive states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh making communal speeches and raising provocative slogans.

Provocative VHP wall writings soon started appearing on the walls of even remote villages of Uttar Pradesh for many of which that was the first taste of communalism. In fact, such incendiary slogans are visible even today in bold black letters at Modinagar alongside the highway, just 20 km from the curfew-bound city of Meerut.

The Muslim fundamentalists found their answer in the Babari Mosque Committee which by its posters and speeches incited the people in Muslim dominated areas into some kind of a reaction on an issue which was in no way connected with their daily life.

The stage was set in the coming months. The fundamentalists of both communities had declared war and the Uttar

Pradesh government under chief minister Veer Bahadur Singh precipitated the confrontation. It deliberately stepped into a religious controversy and what was worse it actually took sides. There is concrete evidence that the chief minister visited Ayodhya a few days before the district and sessions judge at Faizabad, Mr K.M. Pandey delivered his judgment. The chief minister also met VHP members, amongst others.

On February 1, shortly before the order by the judge was announced, a crowd, consisting largely of VHP supporters, had collected at the site in Ayodhya. This was seen as an indication by persons living there that they had advance knowledge of the verdict. A Doordarshan team too was present at the site, as if the government, wanted to publicise the entire event. The "victory" celebrations were filmed and telecast on the national network the same evening. It was sufficient proof, if proof was needed, that the government had become not only an active participant in a religious dispute but was relinquishing its impartiality and, taking sides in the matter. There were bound to be repercussions.

Within days the tension became visible in the sensitive cities of northern India—black flags flew in Muslim mohallas and saffron flags in the Hindu neighbourhoods. The Muslim organisations called upon the community to observe a 'black day' in protest. In Delhi over 20 different kinds of posters issued by as many organisations appeared overnight on the walls calling upon the people to rise in protest against the government's decision. These carried photographs of the Babari Masjid along with coloured outlines of its history. Passions were inflamed and on February 14 at the Friday prayers in the Jama Masjid the Imam, Syed Abdullah Bukhari, drew attention to the government's "injustice" and criticised it in no uncertain terms. He made it clear, however, that the fight was not against the Hindus but only against the government.

The congregation moved out of the historic mosque and gave vent to its anger, carefully fanned by the fundamentalists, on buses, shops and the police. Fortunately it did not take a directly communal turn though any violence in the walled city is bound to adversely affect both the communities. Curfew

was clamped down but no further incidents were reported.

In Meerut it was a different story. On February 13 the Hindus used the occasion of Basant Panchmi to fly affron flags from their rooftops and shout slogans in the old city celebrating the state government's decision. The next day the Muslims dispersing from the main mosque, wearing black bands and chanting *Babri Masjid le kar rahenge* (we shall take possession of the Babari mosque), burnt shops and clashed with a group of Hindus. Lathis and stones were used until finally the police intervened and dispersed the mob.

The *gullies* of old Meerut are infested with RSS and Muslim League activists. Fortunately the district administration has arrested most of them and few who have evaded the law have gone into hiding. The Congress (I) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are playing equally communal roles by inciting passions instead of calming down sentiments. Members of the Congress (I) are divided along religious lines and instead of countering the communal offensive are deliberately fuelling it. Mufti Abdul Khalid of the Congress (I) accused the Hindus of starting the violence while according to the Youth Congress (I) leader Rakesh Mishra the Muslims were entirely responsible. Mr Radhe Shyam Rastogi, a BJP activist wanted by the police for inciting trouble was absconding although his brothers were quite eloquent against the Muslims in general while another BJP leader Mohammad Naeem was upset that on every occasion the Hindus "taunt us with Pakistan".

A rather disquieting fact that has emerged from the Meerut riots is that the poison has for the first time seeped down to affect the common men. Even after the 1982 riots, the non-political Hindus and Muslims, took pains to assert that they had nothing against each other, that the riots were a result of political machinations, and even narrated instances of saving each other's lives but today there is no such sentiment. Instead, the common man speaks a communal language and instead of blaming the government, the politicians or vested interests, actually blames his neighbour from the other community.

## COMPETITION IN BIGOTRY

S.K. TRIPATHI

The recent rash of communal clashes in different parts of Uttar Pradesh, particularly in Faizabad, seven kilometres from the holy city of Ayodhya, is a danger signal. The country is being pushed perilously close to a communal holocaust by fundamentalists and revivalists of both the communities more for political objectives than for real religious reasons.

Since the unlocking of the contentious Ayodhya shrine claimed by Muslims as the Babri Masjid and by Hindus as the Ram Janmabhoomi three years ago, communal incidents have taken a toll of 400 lives so far.

Until this controversy came in handy for irresponsible fundamentalists to stoke communal fury, neither the shrine in Ayodhya, nor the temple city itself, nor its district headquarters, Faizabad, had witnessed a communal riot since 1934. The 54-year-long tradition of communal harmony in the district which in fact was worthy of emulation in other strife-prone areas, was shattered on October 21.

### **No Communal Clash**

There was no communal clash either in Ayodhya or Faizabad even on the night of December 22, 1949 when idols



of Lord Rama and Sita were mysteriously installed under the central dome of a ramshackle mosque, known as the Babri Masjid and which for all practical purposes was converted into a temple. This did, however, lead to a legal battle, which is still pending in the court. It did not provoke any street fighting, stoning or stabbing.

Similarly, there was no rioting in Ayodhya or Faizabad when the controversial padlock put on the gate of the shrine for its safe upkeep 39 years ago was broken on February 1, 1986 by district authorities under orders of the District Judge of Faizabad to allow Hindus unrestricted entry into the shrine. However, communal tremors were experienced all over the country. They left behind 65 killed in Uttar Pradesh alone. Religious fanaticism was fuelled further.

Both Faizabad and Ayodhya maintained their poise in spite of turbulence outside. Even on October 21, the Faizabad violence did not spill over to Ayodhya, where the Muslim population is no doubt very small (about 2,000). Of the 6,763 temples in Ayodhya, one—"Sundar Bhawan"—is still managed by a Muslim (Mr. Ansar Hussain) popularly known as Mannu Babu. He has been its manager since 1953.

### **War Hysteria**

The most venerated Hanumangarhi Temple in Ayodhya was built by the Nawabs of Oudh. The head of the temple is still called Gaddi Nashin and Mahant as all rules governing the management of Hanumangarhi are in Persian. The Hindu devotees' march to the Ram Janmabhoomi in the wake of the shrine being unlocked was led by a Muslim band.

On the other hand, passions have been aroused in Faizabad, former capital of the Oudh province which has about 20,000 Muslims, ever since the decision on the Ayodhya march was taken by the Babri Masjid Movement Coordination Committee. Both the mini and the full-fledged march, which were later postponed, were proposed to start from the Shahi Mosque in Faizabad.

Knowing full well that such a march is not possible and would never be allowed by the Government and the local

authorities, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its youth wing Bajrang Dal have been flexing their muscles and whipping up a hysteria of a holy war to prevent "Muslim invasion". The march, if it ever takes place, will trigger considerable violence. The VHP Secretary General, Mr. Ashok Singhal had no hesitation in declaring that he would like the Muslims to march to Ayodhya "so that the issue could be decided once for all".

The Muslim leaders also know the implications of a march and therefore they have been using the threat, to start it, to pressurise the Government to constitute a special bench of the High Court to expedite disposal of all pending suits including the title suit. They appear to be succeeding in this.

They announced postponement of the October 14 March "in view of the Government's readiness to move the Allahabad High Court for expeditious hearing of the title suit soon after the festival season (Divali) if the current negotiations fail to produce an amicable settlement."

The Government of India which has all along taken an ostrich-like posture suddenly woke up last August and initiated a dialogue with the Coordination Committee of Babri Masjid Movement and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad-sponsored Ram Janmabhoomi Mukti Yagya Samiti for resolving the issue through a negotiated settlement. The objective has been political: to woo the Muslim voters who had drifted from the ruling Congress(I) as was clear in the prestigious Allahabad by-election.

The Coordination Committee led by Mr. Syed Shahabuddin was agreeable to allowing construction of a temple on "Ram Chabootra" which is outside the disputed shrine provided that the idols installed inside the central dome of the mosque were removed. In the event of Hindus refusing to accept this proposition, then a special bench of the High Court to decide all pending cases was suggested. Both the proposals are unacceptable to Hindu leaders, who maintain that the Ram Janmabhoomi is not negotiable and the court cannot decide an issue in which the sentiments of millions of Hindus are involved.

Clashes took place in Aligarh, Muzaffarnagar and Khatauli in Uttar Pradesh when the volunteers of the Bajrang Dal and

the Shiv Sena were forcing closure of shops on October 8 to protest against the Muslims' proposed march to Ayodhya on October 14. Most of the 27 persons killed in Muzaffarnagar were those who had nothing to do with the rioting. They just happened to be Muslims or Hindus. Most of them even did not belong to the town. Some of them could not even be identified.

The strong Hindu build-up before the District Judge of Faizabad ordered opening of the lock for allowing Hindus to offer prayers inside the shrine in 1986 and the way the event was projected even by Doordarshan and the national press were primarily responsible for a strong Muslim backlash which was reflected in dharnas, protest demonstrations, rallies and finally the threat to march to Ayodhya.

Muslim politicians, sensing a great potential for consolidating their Muslim vote banks, assumed leadership of the movement for the restoration of Babri Masjid to Muslims.

The fact is that since 1934 no prayer had ever been offered in the Babri Masjid. The riots on March 27, 1934, were sparked off, not by anything connected with the shrine but by a cow slaughter in Shahjahanpur village near Ayodhya. A Hindu mob stormed into the mosque and demolished parts of its walls and damaged its domes—one of which had a large hole. Though the mosque was rebuilt and reconditioned at the cost of the then Government, yet Muslims never visited the masjid to offer prayers.

The masjid was virtually converted into a mandir on December 22, 1949 itself. A regular puja of idols installed under the central dome was performed by a pujari. Hindus had been having "darshan" and offering prayers through the iron grill, some of them managing with the connivance of the priest to go into the "sanctum sanctorum" during the night. Opening of the lock only formalised the worship and the prayers by the Hindus which, even otherwise, have been going on since December 22, 1949.

### **Suit Dismissed**

The existence of Ram Chabootra, believed to be the place of birth of Rama, is not denied and the then District Judge of

Faizabad, Colonel J.E.A. Chambier, dismissing a suit filed by Mahant Raghubar Das, seeking permission to build a temple on the Chabootra, had observed 102 years ago on March 26, 1886: "It is most unfortunate that a masjid should have been built on the land specially held sacred by Hindus. But as that occurred 356 years ago it is too late now to remedy the grievance. All that can be done is to maintain the parties in status quo."

Perhaps Muslims would not have pursued the Babri Masjid issue so doggedly and fanatically had not the Vishwa Hindu Parishad planned to turn its attention next to Shri Krishna Janmasthan, Vishwanath Temple of Varanasi and 141 more shrines which, according to it, were converted into mosques by different Muslim rulers at different points of time.

Mr. Syed Shahabuddin is facing a revolt by hardliners led by Syed Abdullah Bukhari, Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid. His position may be strengthened if a special bench of the High Court is set up to go into the question. This may help the Government to buy peace from Muslims for some time and win back some of Muslim voters in the event of an election.

### **Dispute Over Graves**

However, even the High Court would not be able to resolve the issue and restore the crumbling shrine of discord to Muslims. The dispute over Sunni graves in the Doshipura locality of Varanasi is still remembered.

Justices V.D. Tulzapurkar, D.A. Desai and A.P. Sen of the Supreme Court fixed a deadline of ten weeks on February 2, 1984 to implement their order of September 23, 1983 directing the UP Government to shift the Sunni graves to put an end to the century-old feud over them between Shias and Sunnis. The feud has led to violence between them during almost every religious celebration.

The State Government has been dragging its feet in enforcing the Supreme Court's order because of the fear of further violence. The judges were, however, firm on the implementation of their order at any cost. Mr. Justice Tulzapurkar was so exasperated by the Government's dithering that he remarked

“if the court order could not be implemented by the Government it should resign” and “no judicial system can work if the Government is afraid of taking action fearing aftermath.” But the graves have not been shifted to this date.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has consecrated “the first foundation brick” for the Ram Janmabhoomi temple. This is proposed to be raised where the disputed shrines stand today after the Kumbha Fair, which ends in March. All this has given rise to high expectations among many Hindus. In view of this, will the Government dare restore the status quo ante as existed prior to December 22, 1949 if so decreed by a High Court or by the Supreme Court?

*Courtesy : Indian Express*

## AT PEACE WITH THEMSELVES

D.R. GOYAL

Ayodhya is nowadays on everyone's mind, not because it is the birthplace of Lord Rama but because some politically motivated people have succeeded in blowing up what is basically a dispute over a local shrine into a national issue, thereby communalising the country's atmosphere.

Ironically enough, while the rest of the country is agitated, the atmosphere in Ayodhya itself is neither communal nor volatile. A visit to the temple town gives the impression that the issue would not have assumed the menacing proportions it has if the government had not mishandled it and if the rivalry and infighting among the secular forces had not left the field open for the motivated propaganda of the Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and their various associates.

Most people in Ayodhya and Faizabad, the district headquarters, opined that the Babri Masjid-Ramjanambhoomi dispute is a problem for the rest of India, not for the local populace.

The most outstanding evidence is the near-total absence of communal feelings among the people of Ayodhya and

Faizabad. The pedlars of communal hatred have spared no effort to inflame sentiments here, just as they have done all over the country. But the locals refuse to respond. For they know that the agitation is no more than a gimmick for political parties and a business proposition for some unscrupulous exploiters of religious sentiments.

I asked a local to show me around the various temples in Ayodhya. He told me the familiar story about the shrine—the story which has been popularised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. He, however, had no answers to the questions which arose in my mind on seeing the Dashrath Mahal, the Kaushalya Bhawan and a temple designated Ram Janmasthan Mandir.

The place claimed to be Ramjanambhoomi is some distance away from the Dashrath Mahal and the Kaushalya Bhawan. A place within the complex of the disputed shrine is also marked as the *Kaushalya Rasoi* (Kaushalya's kitchen). Why are Kaushalya's kitchen and the birth place of her son so far away from her abode?

Another question was: If there was a separate labour room or place for childbirth, it would either be common for all the four queens or separate for each. In case it was common, what is called Rama's birthplace should also be the birthplace of Lakshman, Bharat and Shatrughna. Otherwise there should be separate spots, if not buildings, indicating where each one of them was born. Why was it not so?

If the disputed site is the birthplace of Rama, why is there another temple called the Ram Janmasthan Mandir [the place is also called the *Sita Rasoi* (Sita's kitchen)]. This is located a few hundred yards away from the place which is claimed to be the Ramjanambhoomi.

I was putting the questions rather defferentially, having no intention to offend my guide by showing any irreverence. In fact, I made offerings wherever he asked me to. The guide, a typical Ayodhya Brahmin, did not mind the questioning but replied that all these were matters of belief and not of fact.

He also took me to the office, near the Ram Chabootra which is inside the disputed site, where an *Akhand kirtan* is organised. I learnt that the *kirtan* had been started in 1949 at the instance of Shakuntala Nayar, wife of the then collector,

K.K. Nayar. The collector is alleged to have been responsible for instigating the people to create the dispute by surreptitiously installing idols in the mosque in December 1949.

Shankuntala Nayar is said to have asked one Baba Ram Lakhan Sharan to start the *kirtan*, for otherwise there would have been no reason for the idols to remain there, thus becoming liable for removal by the government. The place where the office is situated, the person in charge informed me, was a graveyard. The graveyard is not there now. Instead, there stands a large *dharamshala* with 200 rooms. Following the death of Baba Ram Lakhan Sharan, the office came under the control of Baba Ram Dayal Sharan, who is now running the show.

It was not possible to ascertain the mode and method of succession. The only answer this query elicits is that it is the same here as in other temples. About the income of the Akhand Kirtan Fund, controlled by Baba Ram Dayal Sharan, no official information was forthcoming, though some people estimate that nearly Rs. 50,000 was received everyday from outside by way of money orders. Other similar establishments too have come into existence since the dispute over the shrine started.

From the nonchalant manner in which all these matters were related to me, I realised that even those with a vested interest in the dispute did not talk in communal terms. For example, most people are enthusiastic about a new Ram temple, worthy of the deity, coming up in Ayodhya, but few favour demolition of the mosque.

Interestingly, the biggest and most revered temple in Ayodhya today is the Hanumangarhi temple which was built by Mansoor Ali, a Nawab of Oudh and not by any Hindu. The temple was built around the same period that the Babri Masjid is supposed to have been built. These facts were divulged to me by the temple chief himself, who, incidentally, is called *gaddi nashin* and not mahant. All this is common knowledge in Ayodhya, but little known outside because it does not suit those with communal and vested interests.

That the local population does not approve of the RSS-VHP stance is amply indicated by the fact that they have not been



able to organise any major gathering as part of projecting the issue either in Ayodhya or Faizabad. Nor have they been able to organise people in any considerable number for demonstrations elsewhere. These organisations invariably hold their *sammelans* and conferences only during festivals when people from all over India come to Ayodhya.

Whenever they have attempted to organise something on their own, it has always flopped. Two months ago, for instance, a *deeksha samaroh* was organised in Ayodhya. It was announced that 50,000 Bajrang Dal volunteers would participate in the *samaroh* which consisted of taking a pledge to lay down one's life for the sake of Ram Janambhoomi. Not more than 1,500 turned up. And even among them, most were outsiders, the number of local youth being not more than 20.

In mid-September, the VHP had staged a demonstration in Lucknow in which only 15 persons, including 10 local leaders, from Ayodhya participated. More recently, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad organised a rally against the declaration of Urdu as second language where the policemen outnumbered the demonstrators. The most liberal estimate did not go beyond two digits.

To people outside Ayodhya, hitherto fed on a wholly distorted picture of inflamed passions and clashing swords, all this cannot but come as a revelation.

*Courtesy : Indian Post.*

## A COMMUNAL TIME-BOMB

BHARATI SADASIVAM

The Centre's decision to set up a special three-judge bench of the Allahabad High Court to adjudicate the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case is a welcome though belated effort to defuse tension over an issue which has become dangerously charged over the last three years.

The decision, which was announced by Union Home Minister Buta Singh in the Lok Sabha on May 8, could arguably have been influenced by the forthcoming general elections. However, the complicated nature of the case and the court's administrative difficulties are unlikely to produce a settlement before the polls, which are expected to take place at year-end.

When the Uttar Pradesh advocate-general filed an application in the Allahabad High Court early this month for setting up a special bench, he was told that the court had eight vacancies for judges. The government will have to fill some of these vacancies to enable three judges to devote themselves to the Babri Masjid case from July 10.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), spearheading the Hindus' claims over the disputed site in Ayodhya, has shrugged aside the announcement. But Syed Shahabuddin, dissident Janata MP and convenor of the Babri Masjid Movement

Coordination Committee (BMMCC), one of two groups championing the Muslims' cause, is hopeful that the very announcement of a judicial settlement will help defuse tensions, calm inflamed religious passions and put both parties on the road to a compromise. "One party now refuses to talk at all—that attitude will disappear."

According to Shahabuddin, the government has been guided purely by self-interest in committing this tangle to a special bench. Likewise, he says, the government was behind the order passed by Faizabad District Judge KM Pandey to break the padlocks of Babri Masjid on February 1, 1986, which allowed the Hindus to worship the idols which had earlier been installed there. "The judge said his order must be carried out forthwith, and within 20 minutes, the locksmith, the TV cameras and the police bandobast had arrived. That is why I suspect that it was all done with the connivance of the government."

Many feel that it was politic for the ruling Congress government to appease militant Hindu sentiment then, because the controversial Muslim Women's Act passed in 1985 was seen as a 'special benefit' to the Muslims. Today, electoral compulsions dictate appeasement of the minority community which has demanded a judicial settlement. The demand has been made by the BMMCC, several opposition parties and Muslim intellectuals, and the Congress-I may well have calculated that yielding to it could help in recapturing a sizeable share of the Muslim vote that it has lost in recent years.

This became evident when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had an unscheduled meeting with Shahabuddin and other members of the BMMCC on February 2, and promised to consider their demand. Buta Singh also met the BMMCC leader later the same day.

Gandhi's meeting was an obvious attempt to give a boost to the BMMCC, the moderate group in the movement, at the cost of the hard-line All India Babri Masjid Action Committee (AIBMAC) led by Imam Abdullah Bukhari, which broke away from the BMMCC last November. Two factors appear to have weighed with him: Shahabuddin, who had canvassed the

Muslim vote for VP Singh in the June 1988 Allahabad by-election, has since broken away from the Janata Dal to remain in the 'original' Janata Party; and the apparent tilt of the AIBMAC towards the Opposition.

By opting for a judicial settlement, the Centre may also be able to deflect the main demand of orthodox Hindu groups which it can neither countenance nor condemn without losing votes. These groups have maintained that the spot on which Babri Masjid stands is the birthplace of Ram and should be returned to them, and they have refused discussion of the issue or legal solutions.

At Prayag during the Kumbh Mela this year, the Ram-Janmabhoomi Mukti Sangharsh Samiti called for a campaign which would culminate in a foundation-laying ceremony for a temple at Ayodhya on November 9 this year. The call was repeated in Bombay by Mahant Avidyanath, President of the Samiti, on the same day that Buta Singh announced the setting up of a special bench.

In a recent interview in Bombay, Shahabuddin said that the BMMCC had a '100 per cent solid case'. "The verdict will establish the Muslim right over the Babri Masjid, because what is there to be said on the other side? They have no argument. If they had a case in their favour, would they shout and say we won't accept the law, we won't accept *kachhari*?" he asks. "The fact is," he says categorically, "there is no historical, literary, archaeological or epigraphic evidence of any temples built on the site which is presently occupied by the Babri Masjid."

Whatever the rival claims, noted scholar Badr-ud-din Tyabji has presented facts to show how 'a 450-year-old historic mosque was turned into a Hindu temple in our socialist, secular, democratic republic'. They are as follows:

The Ram Janmabhoomi is a *chabutra* (platform) 17 feet by 21 feet, 100 paces away from which is the mosque built in 1528 by Babar's governor, Mir Baqi.

There is, on the other hand, no historical evidence of the existence of any temple on this site.

The mahant of the *chabutra* was refused permission by the local authorities in 1885 to build a temple on it.

A railing was later constructed separating the *chabutra* from the mosque.

On December 22, 1949, a violent mob broke into the mosque at night and installed two idols inside. Padlocks were then placed on the gate under a stay order and Hindus and Muslims prevented from praying in it.

The Faizabad district judge who heard an appeal against the stay order in 1986 permitted the reopening of the mosque to allow Hindus to worship the idols; he did not give the Muslims a hearing.

Besides these, Shahabuddin cites a ten-year study on Ramayana sites by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) which found no evidence of human habitation there before the seventh century BC. "You know Buddha lived in the sixth century BC and Ram is at least 500 years before him. The study also says there was no structure in Ayodhya between the third century BC and the tenth century BC. So how does the Hindu claim of a magnificent temple built there in the Gupta Age fit in?"

He also says the cult of Ram is a product of the late 15th century, propagated by Tulsidas. "Tulsidas was 55 years old when Babri Masjid was constructed. And he makes no mention in his *Ramayan* or any other writings that it was an act of vandalism in the most blessed spot of the Hindus."

The VHP's defence rests mainly on the sentiment that Ayodhya for the Hindus is Ram's hallowed birthplace, rather than on precise evidence of the existence of a temple at the disputed site. It claims that:

The *Skandapurana* mentions a temple at Ramjanmasthan at Ayodhya;

King Vikramaditya of the Gupta dynasty renovated and beautified the temple;

Although Babar does not mention either the demolition of a temple or the construction of a mosque in his memoirs, *Babar Nama*, H.R. Nevill says in the district gazetteer of

Faizabad in 1904 that Babar ‘destroyed the ancient Temple (marking the birthplace of Ram) and on its site built a Mosque, still known as Babar’s Mosque.’

Excavations at the site close to the Ramjanmabhoomi show that there was a pre-existing foundational plinth base below the mosque’s structure; the style and sculptural workmanship of the polished black stone pillars inside are all of a temple of the 12th century AD;

Hindus fought Muslim rulers incessantly for the recovery of the Ramjanmasthan; and on the historic morning of December 23, 1949, two idols of Ram and Sita ‘miraculously’ appeared inside it.

The immediate question that arises is whether the issue can at all be resolved by the courts. As some eminent historians and academics pointed out in a letter to *The Times of India*, the handing over of such sites to their ‘rightful owners’, “raises the question of the limits to the logic of restoration of religious sites. How far back do we go? Can we push this to the restoration of Buddhist and Jaina monuments destroyed by Hindus? Or pre-Hindu animist shrines?”

VHP leaders have argued that the dispute cannot be decided within the legal framework of the Indian Limitation Act, the Transfer of Property Act or the Code of Civil Procedure. Just as the dispute over Jerusalem cannot be solved by a court of law, the dispute over what is the *sanctum sanctorum* for Hindus cannot be resolved in court. But Muslims counter that the real issue before the court is the incident of December 22, 1949: whose property was trespassed?

With the rival stances and statements over a place of worship having escalated into a keenly emotional conflict, fanned by fundamentalist leaders on both sides, fears are already being expressed that the issue will be used to polarise the electorate along Hindu-Muslim lines.

## A COMMUNAL CAULDRON

KULDIP NAYAR

It is not merely resentment at real or imaginary injustice that is sweeping India's heartland. There is something else too: instinctive fear among both Hindus and Muslims that there may be a conflagration. And this is not confined to Ayodhya alone, where the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute has erupted.

I tasted the dark, hidden tensions and the possible violence when I travelled through UP and Bihar. "This is all because of *shila puja* (brick worship), which began throughout the country a few days ago and which culminates in Ayodhya on November 9 when all bricks reach there for use in the building of a temple", says the harassed N.D. Tiwari, chief minister of UP.

Tiwari is not far wrong because I saw numerous small processions, with bricks displayed on top of vehicles, winding through villages and towns, rousing the religious fervour of the Hindus and provoking insecurity among the Muslims. Many roadside shops selling flowers and coconuts for *puja* have sprung up, and the procession routes are lined with Hindus waiting in reverential attitudes to pay homage to the bricks.



I was told that fear of personal safety and security had caused the migration of quite a few Muslim families from the countryside to nearby towns. This is understandable because some Hindu-Muslim riots have already taken place in the area. Strict official instructions that participants in the *shila p:ijans* should not be allowed to raise communal passions have had no effect. Slogans like *Hindustan mein rahna ho tho, Vandemataram kkehna hoga* (If you want to live in India, you will have to say Vandemataram) could be heard everywhere.

There is no doubt that the organiser—the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, primarily made up of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS),—has never had it so good. It had failed to attract the Hindus' attention in the past, but now they enjoy the spotlight. It would be an oversimplification to say that all this is aimed at winning the Hindu vote for the Parishad in the next elections. True, the Hindu electorate is sought to be influenced, but why should the Hindus be amenable now when it was not in the past?

I think the perception of many Hindus is that the Muslims are again following the path of separatism in the name of identity and that the government is placating them. There is a consequent hardening of attitudes among the Hindus, who are increasingly becoming prejudiced. Many factors have been responsible for this, but the contribution made by the propaganda of the fundamentalists, both Hindu and Muslim, is not a mean one.

The legislation to overturn the judgment allowing maintenance to Shah Bano, whose husband had left her, jolted even liberal Hindus who were taken aback by the fierce and unanimous anger of most of the Muslims against the judgment. Perhaps the Muslims felt, with some justification, that if they did not speak out there would be greater danger to their personal law.

I was among the few non-Muslims who had supported the legislation. But I had told Muslim leaders then that they should on their own agree to what many Islamic countries have done in the field of marriage—make monogamy the law. This would allay the Hindu fear of being outnumbered in India because of the impression that the Muslims, having four



wives, would multiply like rabbits. The Babri Masjid controversy had begun even before the debate on the Shah Bano case, but there not much attention was paid to it at the time. Now, however, the entire focus of both communities has zeroed in on it.

“I cannot stop the bricks reaching Ayodhya”, says Tiwari. But he is hopeful that after his talks with the leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, who have arranged for the mobilisation of bricks from all over India to Ayodhya, there will be less tension. His belief is that most of the bricks will not be carried to Ayodhya but stacked outside UP.

This, however, may prove to be wishful thinking. Each village in the country is sending five bricks, all duly worshipped and garlanded. If they fail to reach Ayodhya, passions already raised to fever-pitch could well be further inflamed.

The state government has acquired in Ayodhya a plot of land, the Ram Katha Park, on which the Parishad has agreed to build a temple. The Parishad has also given an undertaking that it will not in any way harm the Babri Masjid and that it will abide by the verdict of the Allahabad High Court where the dispute is pending.

So far so good. But the danger in such volatile situations is that it requires only a few mischief-makers to start a riot. Suppose they were to violate the undertaking and damage the Babri Masjid, which is only 400 yards away from the Ram Katha Park? The police may prove ineffective in containing the consequent flare-up, because Ayodhya will be having on November 9-10 the annual festival of *parikrama* which attracts three to four lakh people. Sheer numbers could well make the task of the police next to impossible.

To my way of thinking, the risks involved are simply too enormous. Why not persuade the Parishad to make a symbolic ceremony? A procession of 100 people or so could be permitted to lay the foundation of the temple. Both Hindus and Muslims, who have lived together for centuries in Ayodhya in perfect amity, are aghast at the preparations which, they fear, may disturb their peace. Such a compromise could allay their fears of possible violence.

I have talked to many Muslims and suggested that they hand over the Babri Masjid to the Hindus as a peace-keeping gesture. My impression is that it is possible to bring most Muslims around, provided they are given an assurance by the four Shankaracharyas—one of them has already done so—the Parishad, the RSS and the BJP, that no controversy would be raised regarding any other mosque in India after the Babri Masjid is handed over to the Hindus.

The Parishad has 3,000 mosques on its list for reconversion into temples; the Ram Janmabhoomi Action Committee demands that two more mosques, one in Varanasi and the other in Mathura, be handed over to the Hindus. Both lie by the side of Hindu temples. For the Muslims, I believe, the Babri Masjid has become a prestige issue—they believe the community would lose face, and morale, if they were to give in. The younger members of the community have increasingly swung round to the view that there is no other option save confrontation.

The Muslim desperation stems in part from their pitiable economic condition. They have found that whenever they have begun to do well, communal riots have followed. They increasingly believed that they are condemned to being hewers of wood or drawers of water and hence their aggressiveness, something which was lacking for years after the partition because of the feeling that the Hindus had “a justifiable reason” to be unhappy over the division of the subcontinent.

However, a growing tendency among Muslims to act in unison and seek solutions to problems as a community foils the efforts of those who are trying to fight Hindu communalism. Separatism or fundamentalism is not an answer to the problems of Muslims, but unfortunately they continue to be swayed by appeals in the name of religion.

Whether it is the communalism of the Muslims or that of the Hindus that is to blame, the fact remains that the two communities have never been so polarised as they are today. Perhaps the entire approach to the problem has been faulty. And perhaps in the last four decades too many compromises have been made to placate one community or the other, forgetting that India is a secular country which assures equality

before law to every citizen.

What I witnessed in UP and Bihar is the ugly face of communalism. Since the Hindus are in a majority, the onus is on them to set an example of fairness and tolerance. Unfortunately, even liberal Hindus have got contaminated by the plague of communalism. The question they have to ask themselves and, for that matter, every Indian is whether secularism, which we have enshrined in our constitution, is strengthened by what is happening in the Hindi-speaking states.

By adopting Urdu as the second language of Uttar Pradesh a few months before the polls, the Congress(I) has made it clear that it will go to any extent to win votes. Urdu is an Indian language and it should be given all the respect that other Indian languages have. But was this step, sure as it was to add fuel to the fire of communalism, necessary at a time when the entire Hindi-speaking region is in a state of tension over the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute?

Ultimately, the decision whether India is to retain its secular character or not rests on the Hindus, who constitute 80 per cent of the population. They should know that if ever they were to shed secularism, they would not be able to save democracy because Hindu society is riven by caste and sect, facing more danger from within than without. At the same time, the Muslims should realise that communalism among their numbers will ignite similar passions in the midst of their Hindu brethren.

After all, does it really matter if some of us invoke Ishwar and some Allah?

*Courtesy : Indian Post*

## APPEASING HINDU BIGOTRY

BY PRAFUL BIDWAI

1

All those who have given up neither their belief in secularism nor the hope that Indians will one day stop killing one another because they practice different religions should be deeply grateful to Professors S. Gopal, Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra and other historians of Jawaharlal Nehru University. These scholars, among the finest working in this discipline anywhere, have produced a booklet on the Ram Janambhoomi controversy which deserves to be given wider publicity in the media and to be read in every school and college if only because it introduces an element of sobriety which has been completely missing from the debate.

The debate so far has been marked by an astounding level of hysteria. Rank communalist, trumped-up scholars and pure philistines have joined hands to prove that Hindus have every right to demolish the Babri Masjid which stands where a temple to Ram once stood in Ayodhya, his birthplace, and indeed that the laying of the foundation stone of the temple in the town on November 9 is not only an announcement by the Hindus that they will not tolerate discrimination but constitutes a revolutionary act which will rejuvenate the Indian nation.

The government has played no mean role in the growth of the Ram Shila movement. In fact, without the systematic appeasement of the VHP by the Indian state over many months, it is inconceivable that any such ceremony, with its unrestrained exhibition of Hindu bigotry, would have taken place at all. The government has now been caught prevaricating: having claimed in its briefings on November 8 and subsequently “clarified” on November 10 that the site of *Shilanyas* was 100 metres away from the disputed plot (No. 586) covered by the Allahabad high court requiring the maintenance of status quo, the Union Home Ministry has so far failed to substantiate its case on which rests its entire decision to reach a compromise with the VHP. Meanwhile all reports from Ayodhya and Faizabad suggest the claim to be untrue. It is now for the home minister Mr. Buta Singh to prove that he was not misleading the nation.

### **Ram Shila Crisis**

It is futile to expect a man like Mr. Buta Singh to do anything of the kind. But it should be plain that the state has indulged in dissimulation as part of its policy of appeasement of the VHP and that it pretended that the Ram Shila crisis had been successfully “handled” because the ceremony passed off peacefully. The issue, however, was not the peaceful nature of the ceremonies on November 9 and 10 but the violence that the *Shilanyas* would do to Indian secularism and its assault on the sentiments of Muslims who feel threatened that the Babri Masjid would be unfairly demolished—and that they would be helpless in the face of that assault. The larger question was whether the Indian state would be able to stand up to the biggest organised threat posed to it by communalists since 1965 when unruly Sadhus overran New Delhi. The answer must be a resounding no.

The plain truth is that the government, led by a supposedly secular party, capitulated to communalism of a particularly pernicious variety. Three points are noteworthy here. First, it is entirely characteristic that the sudden discovery of Hindu self-respect and self-assertion supposedly involved in the VHP

campaign is based on venomous opposition to “the other” community—a wholly negative factor that seeks self-identity in the destruction of the other shrine. There can be no reappropriation of Ram, no Ram temple without the demolition of the mosque. This self-identity is malevolent. Secondly, as Professors Gopal, Thapar, Chandra et al show, the claim to Ram Janambhoomi is based not on facts, not on history, but on myth, on colonial prejudice (conveniently equated with the truth) and on pure hatred. This is no accident: communalist history must necessarily rely on a tissue of lies. When confronted with the truth, the communalist can always claim that facts are irrelevant; their beliefs alone matter. But, surely, if history is bunk, so is mythology.

### VHP Campaign

Finally, the VHP campaign has drawn on the most base, vile and coarse elements of Hindu society, and represents the ugliest face of the semi-literate middle class Hindu in search of an identity. How else can one explain the preponderance of ash-covered sadhus in the decisions (going back to the Kumbh Mela this year) pertaining to the Ram temple, in particular *Shilanyas*? What is one to make of reports of the central role played by the Deoraha Baba (attested to by VHP’s Mr. S.C. Dikshit and the RSS’s Mr. Balasaheb Deoras himself) in determining the character and timing of the Bhoomi Pooja? Is one to disbelieve this after seeing a picture of Mr. Buta Singh in supplication to the Baba? How is one to understand the large presence at the Ayodhya ceremony of Bajrang Dal volunteers, some of them dressed (if that is the word) like monkeys and unable to rise above the arboreal level of consciousness?

Surely if this is life itself imitating art, the art must be of an appalling variety. It should greatly embarrass all decent Hindus that they are represented by people who want to look and behave like primates and even lower animals. And that it is not a Vivekananda, nor a Chinmayananda nor even a minor local Sanskrit scholar who is the inspiration behind the VHP campaign; it is the familiar Baba patronised by politicians who

forms the link with an increasingly distant past with all its superstition, bigotry and barbarity.

It is almost incredible that the Congress should have stooped so low in self-esteem as to have appeased the VHP with all its disgusting crudity. This appeasement clearly marks an ignominious retreat from the Congress, own variety of secularism however compromised, and a break with its past. It shows the Congress tailing behind the most backward elements in Indian society, not attempting to move it forward.

The appeasement policy along with Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's flirtation with *Ramrajya*, is an indication of the Congress leadership's desperation. It is far worse than Mrs. Indira Gandhi's "limited use" of the "Hindu card" in 1983 in the Delhi and J & K elections, which was mediated by the RSS. It has already probably cost the Congress the bulk of the Mulim vote in the country. And, even in *realpolitik* terms, it has produced few gains. The "Hindu vote," such as it is, is hardly likely to shift to the Congress after the Ram Shila campaign.

### Unsolicited Gain

Going by the electoral campaign, the Congress is already beginning to pay for its sins. It has handed over the secular mantle to the Janata Dal, despite the latter's rather passive role in Ayodhya (where Mr. V. P. Singh turned up well after the ceremony on November 9); the Dal is naturally capitalising on its unsolicited gain among Muslims in the North (16 per cent of the vote) in a big way.

More importantly, the Congress's image has suddenly taken a knock; its credibility as a party of the Indian Union, of Indian society as a whole, all its segments and component parts, is in question. Its vote, never lower than 34.5 per cent, has always depended on this profile. The Congress now stands to lose that very profile.

At any rate, it has lost the historic opportunity to take on the VHP in an aggressive manner and demonstrate, at this stage of the electoral campaign, that its basic national-secular profile remains unchanged and that it will brook no meddling



with the suprareligious character of the Indian state. It could have taken the risk of putting a couple of hundred so-called leaders of the VHP behind bars and facing, as it were, the consequences which, experience suggests, would have been minimal at best.

But the short-term electoral loss is nothing in comparison with the beating the Congress's image has taken in the larger context. The party of the freedom movement is not just another political formation. It is an umbrella under which the core minorities of Indian society—the Harijans, the Muslims and the tribals—have sought protection and representation.

It has experimented with different caste-class combinations at local levels. But it has retained its all-India character and its identity as a party including and articulating the interests of different social groups, not least the weakest ones. It is not an accident that Mrs. Gandhi's comeback trail in 1978 began with Belchi, the Bihar village where Harijans had been massacred. It is hardly impressive that her son's electoral prospects have been blighted by his assertion with the already powerful and strong in Indian society.

*Courtesy : Times of India*



## RISING TIDE OF COMMUNALISM

A.S. ABRAHAM

The Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute is again assuming alarming proportions. In the run-up to and during the elections, passions had given it an ominous aspect. But after the poll, to the outcome of which it contributed not a little, it was expected that the matter would be left to the courts, before which in a way it has been for 40 years.

True, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has all along maintained that it will not abide by any legal verdict since, in its view, something so closely affecting the deepest Hindu sentiment can hardly be determined by a court.

Even so, with the Congress losing the Lok Sabha poll for, among other reasons, trying simultaneously to please both sides, the sting was perceived to have been taken out of the dispute, leaving the courts to play the arbiter's role. The V.P. Singh government, too, left the issue well alone, even if this may have been partly out of necessity, as Punjab, and more so Kashmir, grabbed its attention.

### **New Initiative**

The interlude was rightly seen as an opportune moment for the government to take a new initiative in resolving the dispute.

This took the form of the appointment of a committee, headed by Acharya Sushil Muni, to initiate a dialogue between Hindu and Muslim representatives.

The approaching assembly elections were also regarded, interestingly enough, as a factor inhibiting extremists in both camps. Normally the onset of a poll is the occasion not for reining in but for indulging in sectarian feelings. At such times, contesting parties and candidates are perceived, most often correctly, as being too vulnerable to risk coming out strongly for one side and against the other. Instead, they seek refuge, as the Congress did so conspicuously in the last Lok Sabha poll, in equivocation, in the process giving extremists a longer rope than usual.

This time, however, the calculation until recently, was that both Hindu and Muslim organisations and leaders would not want to embarrass a government which both had helped to elect. The Muslims had voted for the Janata Dal/National Front in a big way because many of them thought the Congress this time had betrayed the secular principles to which it professed to be committed. They would not want the dispute to become an electoral issue again lest the new ruling party should also be forced to equivocate and so incur Muslim displeasure.

As for bodies like the VHP, their links with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), numerically the major supporter of the JD-NF government, were held to ensure that the dispute would not come to the fore in the run-up to the assembly polls, again lest the JD-NF government should suffer if it did.

It would appear, though, as if the VHP is not inhibited by any such mundane considerations. Even as Acharya Sushil Muni had set about his reconciliatory task, even as the electoral contest had begun to pick up momentum, the VHP dropped a bombshell. It announced that the construction of Ram Mandir on the same site on which the Babri Masjid now stands would begin on February 14 and that the Muslims must decide by that date where the masjid is to be located instead.

## Renewed Militancy

Subsequent appeals by Mr. V.P. Singh himself and the BJP to postpone the deadline by at least a few months in view of the developments in Kashmir (and also until the assembly polls are out of the way) have brought the response that a postponement could be allowed only if the government first conceded that the controversial site in Ayodhya belonged to the Hindus. Nor has the Prime Minister's invitation to the VHP to talks on the subject been well received by that body, which has pre-empted any outcome by saying that the date on which the temple's construction is to begin is "unalterable."

Unsurprisingly, the VHP's renewed militancy has provoked Muslim groups to rally together. A delegation of Muslim leaders has already met the Prime Minister. The Babri Masjid Action Committee is planning a series of actions, including special prayers and the filling of jails, to counter the VHP's offensive. Quite clearly, a confrontation is in the making, and at a time when national and international events are developing in such a way as to stoke the fires of tension on this sensitive issue. What is needed is a firm policy by the government, unequivocally stated and unswervingly implemented.

The danger, as far as the government is concerned, is that the BJP, which supports it and on which it is dependent, although not exclusively, will try to pressure it to see the dispute in "civilisational" terms, as part of much wider, global conflict between an aggressive Islamic fundamentalism and a defensive Hindu militancy. The BJP, of course, does not want the VHP and bodies like it to precipitate a crisis when the Kashmir situation is so grim. But it can hardly be averse to the VHP doing so at a more opportune moment. For while it may differ with the VHP tactically, both are pursuing the same strategic objective.

This is to cast Hinduism in a militant mould so as to ensure not only that minorities are not emboldened to try and rupture national unity, but also that hostile neighbours, like Pakistan and its allies in the Muslim world, will be more inhibited about seeking again and again to make India's domestic communal problems a matter affecting the Islamic global community,

and so, an occasion for interference by Islamic states led by Pakistan.

The most effective rebuttal of Pakistan's unwarranted claim to speak for Indian Muslims on any issue affecting them is to shore up their identity as both Indian and Muslims. This is already happening to some extent (though not in Kashmir), but it needs to go further and faster. Such an identity, however, cannot be created and strengthened so long as Muslims here feel as insecure as they do. The reasons for this insecurity are many and complex, having as much to do with social and economic changes as with their self-image and the way they are perceived by others, especially the Hindu majority. But unless these causes are addressed, they will remain insecure.

### **Extremist Feeling**

The government's stand on the VHP's insistence on building the Ram mandir will be, for Indian Muslims, the litmus test of its solicitude for them and of its commitment to secularism. So far, the government has not taken a stand. Appealing to the VHP's patriotism and good sense in the hope that it will at least defer its deadline can only generate the apprehension in Indian Muslim minds that the government, sensitive to Hindu extremist feeling, finds it necessary to plead with its representatives to be accommodating.

What the government is clearly required to do is to tell the VHP that the dispute is before the courts, that it should be ready to accept its verdict, and that any attempt to queer the pitch will provoke the harshest preventive measures. In view of the current tensions on Kashmir, the country at large will no doubt stand behind the government in any action it takes against those who put sectarian before national interests.

But even in normal conditions, whether there is a potential external threat or not, the government must be prepared to act in the same decisive way. Pussyfooting is just not an option, whether it is for electoral or other expedient reasons, or for fear that the gains on one side will be outweighed by

losses on the other. By making it crystal clear that it will not permit any resolution of the dispute through force, coercion or intimidation, the government will not only reassure Indian Muslims, but also isolate extremists of all stripes from their much more numerous and level-headed co-religionists.

*Courtesy : The Times of India, 5-2-1990*

## CONGRESS AGREED TO RAM SHILANYAS

A.G. NOORANI

Nothing is convincing that requires elaborately to be explained, the French wisely say. If Union Home Minister Buta Singh had acted honourably and fairly in the Babari Masjid question, he would not have had to deliver the unusual and elaborate apology on doordarshan in the evening last Sunday (Nov. 12). The record of a sordid pact with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) is far too clear to be obscured by professions of honourable intent.

### **The Fact**

Nothing noble, worthwhile or enduring is ever accomplished by deceit or duress. If a devout Hindu like Kamlapati Tripathi recoiled at the very thought of the demolition of the Babari Masjid, millions will be repelled by the sordidness of the sheer deceit through which Home Minister Buta Singh arrived at the pacts with the VHP at Lucknow on September 27 and November 8, the first, to allow Ram Shila pooja functions to proceed afoot, and the second to let the foundation stone to be laid at the very site selected by the VHP in breach

of the High Court's order of November 7 made at the instance of the State Government itself.

All this while the Government of India gave the entire nation to understand that, as the Minister of State for Home, P. Chidambaram, told the Lok Sabha on October, 12, the Government was determined not to allow any change "in the situation on the ground" in Ayodhya.

A change has, indeed, been brought about not merely with the connivance but, as the evidence shows, with the complicity of the government. The regime which has sought all these months to exploit the name of Jawaharlal Nehru has abandoned one of the most precious aspects of his credo, Secularism, in his centenary year. History will not forgive those who played so monumental a fraud on the nation, so callously exploited the peoples emotions, and perpetrated so sordid a betrayal of the national heritage.

No one will be fooled by the postponement of the construction of the temple on November 11, following the foundation ceremony on November 9, till next year. It was part of the deal. The decision for a kar seva to build a Ram Janmbhoomi temple was announced in the evening on November 10. It was to begin the next morning (Nov. 11) at 9.30 A.M.

### **Reason**

An unsuspecting crowd of thousands was told the next day that it was off. As one correspondent reported, "there seemed to have been an understanding that there would be no serious attempt to begin construction". To repeat, this was part of the deal—lay the foundation stone and earn the "credit" the VHP leaders, from their flock and from those from whom they had collected enormous sums of money; the Congress-I, from the Hindu vote which belonged to the BJP.

All three will come a cropper—the VHP, the BJP and the Congress-I. The credibility of all three involved in the messy affair is battered. Those who are intoxicated with the "success" of November 9 are in for a painful hangover, Nehruism is not buried so easily.

Of course, the VHP has declared that, as its General Secretary, Sadanand Kakeda, said on November 10, "We do not want any obstruction in the construction of the mandir". Not to be left behind, his leader Ashok Singhal claimed "our eyes are now set on 'Krishna Janmbhoomi in Mathura'." He had no hesitation in bragging. "The government was totally in our fist, it had no option but to allow us". Why? Because of the polls, of course.

But if such determined people could be "persuaded not to start any work" by the U.P. Home Secretary S.K. Tripathi, it was not because he is endowed with persuasive powers which Providence has denied to Buta Singh or Chief Minister N.D. Tiwari. It was because, unknown to the VHP's rank and file, its leaders had agreed with the Government to go thus far and no further for the present. True to form, the Government of India rushed in claim credit. An official spokesman said on November 11, that the programme in Ayodhya "concluded" with the local administration "declining" to accede to the request of the organisers to continue digging.

The limits of hypocrisy were crossed with the unctuous claim that "the interests of the majority and minority communities have been successfully harmonised."

No such effort in that direction was ever made by the Government. On the contrary, its endeavour has been to have a piggy-backride on the VHP. So much so that, as P.K. Roy reported in *Frontline* (Oct, 28), Buta Singh was reported even to have suggested that "Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi be allowed to lay the foundation stone".

This report has been confirmed by Yubaraj Ghimre of *The Telegraph* on November 12. The VHP leaders, in fact, did not quite believe him (Buta Singh) when he told them on September 27 that the Prime Minister was willing to go personally to the site and lay the foundation stone on November 9 in Ayodhya.

### **Confirmed**

Now look at the whole record. On August 14 the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court passed an order for the maintenance of the status quo, be it noted on the State Govern-



ment's application which specifically referred to the Shila Puja. On July 12, the Bench had summoned all the five pending civil cases relating to the dispute for trial by a Full Bench of the Court. The matter, thus, became sub-judice before the highest court in the State.

On September 27, Buta Singh, with N.D. Tiwari in tow, met the VHP leaders in Lucknow. They "bluntly told the Home Minister", as a journal reported, "that the sanctum sanctorum of their temple would be the same place where the idol of Lord Rama is presently placed and worshipped." That is, the sanctum sanctorum of the mosque itself.

Nonetheless, Buta Singh gave the green signal to allow the Ram Shila pooja functions and the transport of the bricks to Ayodhya. The only concession he won was that the VHP would limit the size of the gathering. *Nav Bharat Times* of September 29 revealed the details of the pact.

But the site for the foundation ceremony selected by the VHP was *nazul* land on which no construction was permissible save with Government's permission.

On November 7, Congress-I's spokesman the voluble Anand Sharma said that no one would be allowed to disturb the status quo at the disputed site and proudly recalled that the U.P. Government had, only two days earlier, imposed a ban on all processions, religious or other.

### **General Impression**

If words meant anything, these meant that the Congress-I government at the Centre and in the State would not allow the foundation stone to be laid on November 9. The impression was fortified when the State Government itself moved the High Court to clarify its order of August 14 to spell out what it meant by the words "properly in question".

At a special sitting on November 7, a Special Bench of the Allahabad High Court at Lucknow clarified: "The order of August 14, 1989 was in respect of the entire property mentioned in the suit, including plot No. 586, so far included within the boundary described by the letters E.F.G.H. in the site plan". This was an explicit rejection of the VHP's contention that

only the Babari Mosque and the built up portions, and not the open land, were in dispute. But by then the VHP had already selected the site and barricaded it on Plot 586. Nearly, a mere seven yards away, was plot 578 whose lessee Ramkirpal Dass was only too willing to offer the land for building the temple.

The very next day November 8, Buta Singh rushed to Lucknow from his election campaign in Rajasthan to meet the Ram Janmbhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti President, Mahant Avidh Nath, and the VHP leader S.C. Dixit. The VHP decided to go ahead with its plan for laying the foundation stone "at the same spot at the same time" on November 9. It gave to assurances whatsoever. It was Buta Singh and a Home Ministry press release which claimed that the VHP had promised (a) to "comply with the clarificatory directions contained in the clarificatory orders passed by the Allahabad High Court while executing their plan of Shilanyas" and (b) to "extend full cooperation to the authorities."

But how could the VHP comply with the Court's order and yet hold the shilanyas at the same place? The circle was squared by the Advocate-General Shanti Swaroop Bhatnagar's "sudden discovery" that the site of shilanyas was "clearly outside" the site plan before the Court. Buta Singh returned to New Delhi that very evening and reported to the Prime Minister.

Rajiv Gandhi must have been delighted. For, The Hindu had reported (November 8) that he had called on Devra Baba on November 6 "seeking his blessings". The Baba had advised the VHP to take a tough line. "It is stated that the Baba has also advised the Prime Minister not to obstruct the VHP programme in overall interest. Indeed, on November 9, the VHP even issued a press release at Ayodhya which confirmed that the PM and N.D. Tiwari had met the Baba" and the Baba had advised them not to interfere with the shilanyas. Two days after meeting the Baba, the PM instructed Buta Singh to rush to Lucknow on November 8.

The result was the second pact. The price? As Mahant Avidh Nath declared, "Congress-I will get the VHP support wherever there is no BJP candidate."

However, as was rightly pointed out elsewhere "in simple words, it (the Court's Order) meant that the site for shilanyas

chosen by the VHP was on disputed property and thus the Government should ensure that the foundation of the proposed temple was not laid”.

Yet, laid it was as part of a deal and with a lot more than connivance—with active complicity. “It is believed that the ruling party at the Centre struck a last-minute deal with the VHP” reported one daily. Similar reports were carried by others.

But the VHP leader S.C. Dixit spilled the beans the day after he met Buta Singh. He had asked them to shift the site. “But we said nothing doing”. Hence, the subterfuge. His colleague the Mahant claimed that it was the Government which had promised to cooperate “in the performance of the shilanyas”.

But there was more than approval. There was active encouragement. This aspect has not received the attention it deserves. Sample these news reports of different journals at different times :

1. “Government orders are that the puja must go on. It has promised full protection to the VHP ? (Indian Express, October 11, 1989).

2. “The Home Minister, Buta Singh, is understood to be putting pressure on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to go ahead with the Ram Shila Pujan ? (The Statesman, October 26, 1989).

3. “An apparent move to appease the Hindus” (The Telegraph, Nov. 10, 1989).

When things threatened to go far, it was the Government which climbed down, not the VHP. The Government’s backing continued, consistently enough.

## Evidence

There is, thus, formidable evidence to prove not only there deal but also that the Government desired the event of November 9 albeit in a “controlled” form—it would get kudos from the Hindus for the event and from the Muslims for the control. Hence, the foundation ceremony on November 9 and the postponement of the kar seva on November 11.

J.P. Mathur, General Secretary of the BJP, made no bones

of the fact on November 9 that the demolition of the Babari Mosque is the next step. A VHP leader is more ambitious. "The first door to make India a Hindu Rashtra had been opened" on November 9. But the euphoria of bigotry will not last.

For, the heart of the nation is sound. And Nehru's legacy cannot be buried so easily. November 9 has revealed many in their true colours; not least, the power brokers of the Muslim League who have been the long-standing touts of the Congress.

The great divide is not between Hindus and Muslims but between those who believe in the Secular principles of the Constitution crafted by Nehru and the secular ideology which the nation accepted and these forty years and those who do not.

In this struggle, the Muslims cannot stand aside and merely ventilate grievances. They must make a positive contribution to the strengthening of the secular edifice. The Congress has betrayed Nehru. It is no small consolation that V.P. Singh has stepped in to uphold the ideals he propagated by taking a stand on the Babari Masjid.

*Courtesy : Radiance*

## BIRTHPLACE OF TENSION

Paradoxically, the biggest beneficiaries of the court order unlocking the gates of the Ram Janam Bhumi temple at Ajodhya after 35 years may not be the various Hindu organizations which have periodically threatened to "liberate" it, but the ebullient Janata M.P., Mr Syed Shahabuddin, and the many outfits he has set up in recent years. Characteristically he has called upon all Muslims to observe February 14 as a day of mourning to grieve the "loss" of what the community believes is not a temple at all but a mosque built by Babar in 1528. Whatever the merits of the Faizabad district and sessions judge's verdict on February 1, it is unfortunate that hysteria is being built up on a sensitive issue. This is all the more irresponsible because a petition challenging the Faizabad judge's order has been admitted by the Allahabad High Court. In other words, an attempt is being made to bypass the judiciary and take the issue to the streets regardless of potentially dangerous consequences. Mr Shahabuddin's reported remark that the Faizabad verdict has shaken his community's faith in secularism was unduly alarmist and did not reflect much confidence in the judiciary. This however, is not entirely surprising, for the Janata M.P.'s comment was less provocative than those made some time ago by Mr Z A. Ansari, Union Minister of State for Environment, on the floor of Parliament.

At the same time it must be pointed out that groups like

the Vishwa Hindu Parishad have been largely instrumental in reviving a dormant religious controversy purely for sectarian ends. These organizations marched on the temple site in October 1984 threatening to occupy the premises physically in total disregard of the fact that the issue was sub-judice. The situation is now far more explosive with a general alert in force throughout Faizabad district and police reinforcements sent to Ajodhya in anticipation of trouble. The issue is undoubtedly delicate : both communities have advanced what is said to be detailed historical evidence to establish their claim on the building. The disputed shrine at Ajodhya, however, is not the only one of its kind. The Gyanvapi mosque at Varanasi, originally said to have been a Hindu temple, has been a contentious issue for many years. Unfortunately, a healthy coexistence of beliefs and practices has lately been rendered impossible after years of communally motivated propaganda. Consequently, whichever way the final verdict goes in the Ram Janam Bhumi temple case the situation will remain fraught with danger. The jurisdiction of courts to intervene in such disputes may be questioned by the losing side. The Government might do well to examine whether non-judicial arbitration would not be preferable in such matters.

*Courtsey : The Statesman*

## TAKE ACTION

The statements made by Abdullah Bukhari, the Imam of Jama Masjid, at the Babri Mosque rally in the Capital on Monday are clearly culpable under the law, and the Government would be remiss in its basic duty if it fails to take action. The Imam, who has made provocative speeches in the past, poured out the worst kind of communal venom, inciting his community to violence and threatening to issue a call from the hallowed precincts of the Jama Masjid to burn the homes of Muslim Ministers and of policemen. It matters little that Syed Shahabuddin, Janata Party MP, tried to restrain him. In the end, it was not the Babri Masjid issue that marked the occasion but the horrifying, outright treasonable statements that some speakers made at the rally.

That the issue boiled over in this manner should come as no surprise. Tension has been building up and there has been provocation enough from extreme opinion on both sides, Hindu and Muslim. It is astonishing that the issue should have been allowed to assume such proportions. The Government cannot evade the responsibility for having failed these past years to come up with a cogent policy on what to do. Had it acted swiftly to restore the status quo ante, there may have been some immediate reaction, but the country would have been spared the escalating, and potentially disastrous, tension.

There is another reason why the outpouring of communal venom should have been anticipated. Time and again it has been seen that moderate leadership of agitations and movements on religious or communal issues is very quickly usurped by extremists who then set the pace, leaving the moderates running to catch up. This happened in Punjab, where Bhindranwale superseded the Akalis in short order ! And although Syed Shahabuddin can hardly be labelled a moderate, clearly he is being upstaged by people like the Imam in the battle for political and religious leadership of the Muslim community. So, though Syed Shahabuddin may have sought to restrain the Imam, he cannot escape responsibility for what occurred in the Boat Club lawns on Monday.

The time to act is now ! Inaction will merely be another signal that this is an ineffective Government. Worse, it will be a signal to other communities, and the extremists among them—of whom there is no dearth—to give their own calls for their own sectarian interests. If this is allowed to go unchecked, it will spell disaster for the country.

*Courtesy : Indian Express*



## NO DOUBLE STANDARDS, PLEASE

There was a great and very justified uproar when some excitable and some fanatic Muslim leaders made some thoroughly unsavoury speeches at the Boat Club rally to signal their protest against the government inaction over the Babari Masjid controversy. Parliament was concerned enough to debate the problem the next day, and from both sides of the House members expressed legitimate concern over the passions which were being whipped up by this rather irresponsible conglomeration of largely self-appointed leaders. One could understand the worries of at least some of the members of the House, because the fiery and completely and dangerously uninhibited Imam Bukhari of the capital's Jama Masjid threatened to burn the houses of the Muslim ministers and break their legs if they did not protest against what he saw as the central government's inaction on the issue. It must, incidentally, be said here to the former hockey star turned politician Aslam Sher Khan's credit that he challenged the Imam to come and break his legs if he could. One wonders if the Janata MPs like Mr Madhu Dandavate would participate in this arson and leg-breaking exercise in defence of their voluble colleague Syed Shahabuddin's position. Be that as it may, we feel that the concerns expressed in Parliament were legitimate.

But what is disturbing is that no one has reacted similarly to some equally provocative speechifying on the same subject by equally irresponsible Hindu religious leaders, and in the same city, Delhi. The occasion was the birth anniversary of the Lord Rama, and the meeting was held at the famous Ram Lila Maidan under the auspices of the Hindu Parva Samanvaya Samiti. The speeches were full of anti-Muslim venom, and made no secret of their fanatic attitude to the Muslims. Why have all the secular and impartial members of Parliament chosen to keep quiet about this display of communalism which is no less dangerous to the secular fabric of our nation than what transpired at the Boat Club rally? It is when such suspicions of double standards start becoming a conviction that Muslims get doubly angry. And they have every reason and every right to be angry. Secularism is not a one-sided virtue, good and necessary for the Muslims but waivable for the kind of people who addressed the Ram Lila gathering. What was perhaps worst was that some of the speakers threatened that they would throw Muslims out of India. We would like to remind them once again that India is not their private preserve, however much they may want it to be one. This nation was constructed on the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, not Guru Golwalkar.

Finally, the government has once again disappointed by taking the position that the controversy is a court matter and therefore the government has nothing to do with it. The implications of the bitterness that this problem is generating could be enormous, and no government can afford to be indifferent to the problem. We hope that this is only the formal position, and that the government is in fact quietly making genuine efforts to create the kind of consensus which can resolve the problem. That is the only way out.

*Courtesy : Telegraph*

**BY TALKS ALONE**

In a display of commonsense, the Muslim leaders associated with the Babri Masjid co-ordination committee have postponed their proposed march to Ayodhya, originally scheduled for August 12. The leaders have done so after receiving an assurance from the Union home ministry that the government would help find an amicable solution to this vexatious issue. Apparently, the Union government has also agreed to refer the dispute to a high court, should mediation efforts prove unproductive. Though the August 12 trek was to be a prelude to the October 14 march, for which the organisers were hoping to mobilise at least one lakh volunteers, there was no way the government could have allowed the marchers to reach Ayodhya. The already frail communal atmosphere would have been definitely vitiated. Even though the hardliners in the action committee insist that they would go ahead with the march, the very fact that the overwhelming majority of leaders is agreeable to a postponement, makes it easier for the Uttar Pradesh government to pre-empt all possibilities of any kind of mischief.

It is a happy augury that these leaders are prepared to put their trust in the process of negotiations, as well as to repose confidence in the impartiality of the judicial system. After the Supreme Court judgment in the Shah Bano case, some

Muslim leaders felt that somehow, the judicial system was not sufficiently mindful of their susceptibilities. By asking for a pronouncement from the high court, the leaders appear to be conceding that the present position in the dispute is the result of the February 1986 judgment of the Faizabad district judge, and not of bias or malice against the Muslim community. Meanwhile it will be naive for anyone to believe that a quick resolution of the issue is possible. It is too contentious to admit of a quick fix. The authorities have to tread warily. The road ahead is a minefield which could explode in their face.

*Courtesy : Times of India*

## NO ROOM FOR COMPLACENCY

Home Minister Buta Singh stopped chasing a fantasy when he directed the U.P. government to expedite the legal process for resolving the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi dispute. Implicitly, the Home Minister has conceded that he has failed in his attempts to bring about a negotiated settlement between the warring camps. Explicit in the directive is a moral victory for Syed Shahabuddin who has been long maintaining that unless the controversy was adjudicated communal harmony would be difficult to achieve.

But the Centre was chasing a mirage. Its compulsions were basically political. Had the government succeeded in thrashing out a negotiated settlement, it would have projected the success as a victory for the Centre. In fact, the situation has reached such a pass that there appears to be no solution to the problem even after the matter is decided by a special bench of the High Court. Because passions have been allowed to run high for so long it is difficult to visualise an acceptance of the Court's rulings. Quite obviously, there will be appeals and counter-appeals which are likely to vitiate things further.

There have been no shortage of violent incidents after February 1986 when the Faizabad district judge ordered the opening of the premises' lock. Echoes of the imbroglio have been heard in every major riot since then. It would be no

exaggeration to say that the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi dispute is now one of the most emotive for both Hindus and Muslims. By failing to resolve the crisis, the Union Government has wily-nily aided fundamentalist forces of both communities. The time has come for a heart search by all sides.

The Hindu claim to the monument has its foundation more on legends and myths than on historical and archaeological facts. By contrast, the Muslim claim to the site has at least an iota of scientific backing. For more than one and a half decades the Archaeological Survey of India has been excavating the sites mentioned in the Ramayana. But what has emerged so far shows that the epic is more of a myth than history. By suppressing the archaeological findings, the Home Ministry has done great injustice to the cause of rationalism.

By contrast, the protagonists of the Muslim claim to Babri Masjid have been conscious of a hostile administration from the very beginning. In fact, for many who have been anguished since the idols mysteriously appeared in the late forties, it has been a long night without end. Quite naturally, hawks among the Muslim leadership often succeeded in selling the line of a Hindu state out to wrong the minorities in India. It goes to the credit of several (including Shahabuddin) that they have frequently distanced themselves from the rabbit lot. But the irony of the situation is that the authorities have more often than not trained their guns on the "moderates"...

In spite of its inherent bias, the UP government cannot continue to play a partisan role any more. While it is often alleged that the locks were ordered to be opened in 1986 at the open initiative of the then Chief Minister, Bir Bahadur Singh, under direction of the then State Home Minister, Arun Nehru, it cannot be forgotten that the state bureaucracy has often been accused of a communal bias. This bias seeps down to the lowest levels, as is seen in various riots where frequent collaboration of the local administration with majority communal forces is seen.

In spite of the imminent adjudication, there is no room for complacency.

## ON THE COMMUNAL SITUATION

Sparks have already started flying and in no time large parts of the country, even a big state like U.P., may be engulfed by a communal conflagration. . .

The Ramjanmabhoomi Mukti Samiti is intent on spreading communal poison throughout the country to forge sanctions for its November March. It does not care what it will cost the country in human lives and permanent damage to the cause of national unity.

The Congress(I) Government with supreme indifference to national unity, pursues the policy of wait and watch, which only acts as a further provocation to the rabid communal elements to indulge in minority baiting and rousing communal hatred. The lack of sincerity on the part of the Congress(I) Government is seen in the fact that though the Home Minister in the Central Government had assured the people that the Babri Masjid. . . dispute would be referred to the High Court, the U.P. Government has not found the courage to take steps to appoint a special bench of the High Court for this purpose. It is such a cowardly retreat before the challenge of the communalists, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the RSS, who are opposed to a judicial verdict saying that affairs connected with God cannot be settled by human agencies. These people are

afraid that their claims may be disproved after a proper judicial process and they want to settle the issue by rousing the passions of the people. . .

The latest riots in Hazaribagh and Mathura again highlight the danger. They uncover the deliberate provocation indulged in by the communal forces, and the open surrender of the Congress(I) authorities before them. In Mathura. . . forty years of communal amity and feelings of Indian oneness were disturbed by new claims about Krishna Janmabhoomi.

Equally disgraceful and provocative is the tale of riots in Hazaribagh in Bihar. Here there was another deliberate provocation organised by the VHP and Bajrang Dal, with the BJP and RSS in the background. For the last two years the forces of Hindu revivalism and communalism had refused to take out the Ram Navami procession because its traditional route was changed to avoid communal tension and trouble.

An agreement was reached in 1987 between the representatives of the two communities and the administration, stipulating that the processionists would. . . go. . . by another agreed. . . route. This covered both the Ramnavami and the Moharrum processions. But immediately after signing the agreement the VHP and others refused to abide by it. This year they demanded its withdrawal and asserted their right to take the procession by the traditional route. . . The authorities surrendered before this blackmail. . . Another cowardly retreat before the anti-national provocateur. . .

But this is now a familiar pattern. . . This tendency will get intensified in the coming months (as) a part of the election strategy of the Congress(I).

But denunciation and exposure of the Congress(I). . . do not solve the problem, nor do they abate the danger of a communal holocaust. . . The communal problem is no longer a law and order question. It cannot be solved by administrative measures alone. Nor can it be considered as a problem between the ruling party on the one hand, and the communal and fundamentalist elements on the other. It is an assault on the integrity of the country. . .

As the Political Resolution of the Trivandrum Congress of our Party notes: "The communal riots of the present period



are unlike the riots of the earlier period, which generally arose out of some temporary emotional feelings; but now they are a conscious device of internal reactionary and foreign destabilisers to undermine Indian unity.”

Under these circumstances. . . it is necessary to positively intervene and mobilise the (people) against these policies, against the riots, and (against) the failure to protest minorities.

...Riots and murders are the final expression of a poisonous ideological propaganda, and unless a continuous battle is put up against the spread of this ideological virus the situation cannot be remedied.

Except where the CPI(M) and other Left parties are strong there is hardly any answer to this disruptive propaganda. The main bourgeois opposition parties abstain from their responsibility. . .

The offensive of the communal forces. . . has become a serious danger to the unity of the country. . . It should be the endeavour of the Left parties to see that opposition leaders liberate themselves from their narrow outlook and join with (them in) mobilising the country's millions to fight anti-national and disruptive forces and save the country from Congress(I) opportunism.

*Courtesy* : People's Democracy, May 1989

## DEFUSING TIME BOMB—THE AYODHYA DISPUTE

The manner in which communal organisations are building up a confrontationist atmosphere regarding the Ram Janma-bhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute in Ayodhya is laying the basis for a dangerous conflict in about a few months which may have untold consequences. It should, however, be said that the leaders of the Muslim community, under the guidance of Shri S. Shahabuddin, have recently taken a far more reasonable attitude regarding the dispute than those professing to lead the Hindu community. Shri Shahabuddin is taking the line that, regarding all disputed places of worship, the principle should be adopted that the position as it existed at the time of independence should be accepted as non-changeable by all concerned. He is also supporting the idea that all such disputes should be referred to courts of law and the concerned communities should accept verdict in good faith and help to carry it out. These two principles suggested by Shri Shahabuddin are the most practicable under the circumstances, and one does not quite see how one can object to them.

On the other hand, some Hindu leaders are taking the line that they will accept a court verdict only if it goes in favour of what they are advocating! A strange approach indeed. . . Moreover, the call given by. . . VHP to collect bricks con-

secreated by Gangajal from all the villages in the country, and taking them to Ayodhya. . . to uddertake the construction of a temple on the site where the Babri Masjid now stands, is one which cannot but arouse dangerous passions which even the leaders who are giving these calls would later find difficult to control.

Some leaders of the RSS are advocating that the Muslim community should make available the disputed area for the construction of a temple on the site of or near the Babri Mosque as a gesture of goodwill to the Hindu community. Such a suggestion would have been appropriate if a controversy had not already been building up over the last few years, and there was also not the background of a long standing dispute and conflict in this matter between the two communities.

That the Government leaders both in Lucknow and in New Delhi have permitted this dispute to simmer for so long is a reflection of the love for power which prevents them from taking any clear stand on a difficult and disputed matter . . . The recent announcement of the Union Home Minister that the Allahabad High Court would now take up this case and sort it out early is, therefore, very welcome. One hopes that the leaders of both the communities will accept this approach to the matter, and permit the dispute to be settled peacefully over a period of time, gracefully accepting the court verdict.

. . . While as mentioned earlier, it may be generally accepted that the present Babri Masjid was constructed by (or on the command of) Babar on the spot where a temple existed earlier, the question is: can we undo historical wrongs in this manner by trying to go back? How far back in history do we go? After all, there are a large number of such places of worship where it is claimed that there used to be Hindu temples in the past and that Muslim conquerors destroyed the temples and constructed mosques there. Are we going to go back in history and try to rebuild temples which were destroyed three or four centuries back? Is such an attempt to undo what happened in history many centuries back worthwhile? Is it in keeping with our longstanding tradition of religious co-existence? Is it even in keeping with the kind of India we want to build for the future?

If we have to build up a new and modern India on a democratic, rational and scientific basis, should it hark back to age-old historical conflicts and try to resolve those conflicts now, especially in the context of the Hindus constituting a majority in the country? Would this help our developing a secular and rational tradition? Would this not lend to unending disputes between different communities, each of which might be able to claim having suffered from some historical wrong or the other sometime in the past? Would there be any end to such conflicts? Is this not like insisting on settling family vendettas after many generations? . . .

May one even go further and suggest that the two communities and their leaders should accept the challenge of the Ayodhya dispute and settle it in a manner which would lay down a basis for the long-term co-existence of different religions in the country. Let the Babri Masjid, whatever its history, continue undisturbed. Where just outside the Masjid there is already a place of worship, let a Rama temple be constructed. Let the leaders of both communities work out an agreement under which both these places of religious worship are so used as not to create any conflict. Is it impossible for an ideal for mutual religious tolerance and co-existence to be shown in this place, Ayodhya, which is so symbolic of India's glorious age-old past? Is Indian leadership so incapable now of providing a lead in a manner where religious conflict comes to be a thing of the past and the genuinely Indian tradition of tolerance and co-existence comes into real existence? Cannot a call for sanity go forth from Ayodhya and reverberate from the temple tops and mosque towers all over the country?

*Courtesy* : The Janata Weekly 11 June, 1989

## ONLY DELHI MUSLIMS SUPPORT SHAHABUDDIN

Syed Shahabuddin's 'boycott' call has come at a time when Mr. Gandhi's cup of woes are already brimming over. With elections round the corner in Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala and Bengal, states where the Muslim vote has a decisive say, one false step in dealing with the Babri Masjid dispute could send the fortunes of the Congress(I) plummeting to oblivion at the hustings. Thus far Rajiv Gandhi has refrained from muddying his hands with the Babri Masjid imbroglio, and relied on a division of opinion within the camp of senior Muslim leaders. However, with 26 January drawing progressively nearer, the Republic awaits Mr Gandhi's response and ability to preserve communal harmony.

To gauge the popular pulse on the Republic Day boycott call, The Sunday Observer commissioned Marketing and Research Group (MARG), the largest independent market research organisation in the country, to conduct a poll in the four largest metros— Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras.

The poll was conducted on January 15, 1987 and a total of 421 adult (18 + years) Muslim males were interviewed in the four cities. In each city, MARG investigators fanned out to 5 or 6 predominantly Muslim localities and carried out street corner interviews. While these cities do not necessarily

represent the opinion of Indian Muslims as a whole, they do provide an indication of the mood of the Muslim community.

### 1. *Why was the call issued?*

All respondents were queried about what is the reason for the non-participation call.

The findings of the MARG poll provide clear cut evidence to suggest that Muslims in each of the cities see a definite nexus between the Babri Masjid dispute and the call. The identification with the Babri Masjid dispute was strongest in Delhi, which is as expected given that the city is the hub of activity on this issue. Surprisingly, a sixth of the respondents in Bombay associated the call with 'other' reasons and more than a third in Madras were not aware of the reason for the drum-beating.

Bombay    Delhi    Calcutta    Madras

Dely in settlement of Babri Masjid dispute	68	91	76	65
Other reasons	17	2	11	—
Don't know	15	7	13	35

### 2. *Is the call justified?*

Respondents in the MARG poll were asked whether or not they felt the non-participation call was justified.

More than two-thirds of the respondents in Bombay and Madras were opposed to the call while the situation was exactly reversed in Delhi with two out of every three Muslims supporting Syed Shahabuddin's cause. In Calcutta opinion on whether the call was justified was evenly divided with those opposing the boycott enjoying a seven to five edge.

To sum up, support for the boycott is evenly divided and perhaps reflects the spilt among the 'callers' themselves.

	Bombay	Delhi	Calcutta	Madras
Yes, justified	26	67	35	19
No, not justified	67	28	49	67
Don't know	7	5	16	14

### *3. Reasons for lack of justification*

Respondents who felt the call was not justified were further queried about the rationale for their convictions.

The reasons mentioned by respondents for opposing the call varied widely across cities. While respondents in Madras (51%) felt the call was not justified since it was unpatriotic the basic opposition to the call in Delhi and Calcutta stemmed from the fact that it was perceived to be 'anti-secular'. Respondents in Bombay who felt the call was unjustified primarily attributed their belief to 'other' reasons.

	Bombay	Delhi	Calcutta	Madras
Anti-secular	3	39	36	6
Unpatriotic	10	29	30	51
Should protest in other ways	23	3	22	29
Babri Masjid issue trivial	17	11	12	3
Other reasons	48	18	6	6
Don't know/ Can't say	—	—	—	6

### *4. Is the non-participation call politically motivated?*

All respondents were asked whether they felt the call for non-participation was politically motivated.

In each city the proportion of respondents who felt the boycott call was politically motivated outnumbered those opposing this view. However, respondents in Bombay and Madras ascribing a political motive to the call outgunned their opponents by a far wider margin than was the case in Delhi and Calcutta. It is worth noting that more than half the respondents in Madras reserved their comments on this score.

	Bombay	Delhi	Calcutta	Madras
Yes	52	45	41	35
No	33	40	37	13
Don't know	14	15	22	52

#### 5. *Is Rajiv more pro-Muslim vis-a-vis Mrs Gandhi?*

Respondents were asked how sympathetic they felt the Rajiv Gandhi administration was towards Muslims in comparison with Mrs Gandhi's Government.

Although between a third to half the respondents in each city felt that Rajiv was as much a champion of the Muslim cause as his mother, the only city where Muslims who believed he was more sympathetic, outnumbered those holding a converse view was Madras. In each of the other cities particularly Delhi, Mrs Gandhi was seen to be more pro-Muslim than her son.

	Bombay	Delhi	Calcutta	Madras
More sympathetic	17	18	19	39
Less sympathetic	25	42	24	13
As sympathetic	48	33	50	44
Don't know	10	7	7	4



To sum up, opinion among the Muslims is divided regarding the justification of this boycott call which is clearly linked to the Babri Masjid dispute. However, Mr Gandhi's stalling tactics on this issue have not yet affected his support base among most Muslims.

*Courtesy* : Sunday Observer, 18 January 1987

## BABRI DISPUTE NOT A MAJOR ISSUE

Awareness of the Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi dispute and heightened sentiments over it follow a definite pattern in the cities and villages covered in 16 states, Southern states, including Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, as well as states like West Bengal, Assam and Jammu and Kashmir, have barely been scarred by the controversy.

However, in UP, Gujarat and parts of Maharashtra, the issue evokes strong sentiments, has led to considerable polarisation among the two major communities and is likely to be an important electoral factor.

Even in those states, however, it is more of an issue in the towns and cities rather than in the villages. Within the cities, it is the more educated, newspaper reading public, who is more informed and more agitated.

There is also a distinct divide in perceiving how widespread and deeply-felt the controversy is between religious and political leaders and the common man and woman. The former, all over India, perceive it to be far more prevalent than it seems from the response of the average person.

In an all-Muslim village in North Arcot district, Tamil Nadu, villagers were totally unaware of the dispute. In Bangalore and the villages of the Gulbarga, Hassan and Dakhsin Kannada districts of Karnataka, the dispute is a non-issue.

D.G. Sagar, the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti convener of Gulbarga division admitted that the average person was unconcerned about the dispute. His views were endorsed by G. Suresh Prabhu (33) mandal panchayat member in Gurpur village, Dakshin Kannada district.

But the divisional organiser of the RSS in Gulbarga, Mr Manjunathaswamy, insisted that people were widely aware of the controversy and will react when the time comes.

In preparation for the time, he said, the RSS has toured 2,600 villages in 20 taluks of Gulbarga, Bijapur and Bidar, covering people in 1,500 villages.

In Bhopal, the VHP working president, Mr Amarchand Ajmera, a 65 year old retired businessman feels passionately about the Ayodhya issue. But his views were not reflected in the capital and drew a complete blank in the villages of Madhya Pradesh.

In the villages of Prahlad Nagar and Andhanne in Bihar's Noor Sarai block of Nalanda district. most inhabitants were not aware of the controversy and showed little interest in it. Those who had heard about it, like Brijnandan Singh, a graduate farmer who heads the Noor Sarai block committee on the 20-point programme, had either read about it in the papers or heard of it through neighbours or acquaintances who had visited Ayodhya.

In Kashmir, few villagers are aware of the details of the dispute. As Dr. Riyaz Punjabi of Kashmir University remarked, only educated people know about it. It has had a marginal impact on the psyche of the common man in urban areas alone.

The Amir of the Jamaat-e-Islami in Jammu and Kashmir, however, maintains that there is widespread awareness and that it has had a lasting impact on the minds of the people.

Again, in Maharashtra, religious leaders like Bhaskar Rao Rabade from Pune are most vociferous about the issue. The VHP campaign, beginning September, to ceremoniously take one brick from every part of the country to Ayodhya to raise the Ram Janambhoomi temple, they point out, will coincide with rising electoral tempo.

They explain that since the Shiv Sena may not raise the Ram Janambhoomi issue in its election campaign, following the adverse Bombay high court judgment in the Vile Parle assembly byelection on charges of communal propaganda, the VHP would embark on its programme of mobilising Hindus.

In Gujarat, preparing for the forthcoming elections, the BJP's "Shakti Rath" with idols of gods and goddesses engraved on it, has toured the state, covering more than 11,000 villages in 19 districts with the message that the party will fight for the rights of the Hindus.

Publicity on the controversy will also be stepped up in the state. Dr. Pramod Tagodia, cancer specialist and general secretary of the VHP state unit pointed out that a Ram Janambhoomi Shila pooja will be launched in 2000 places in Gujarat from September 9.

### **Hindu Awareness**

Hindu awareness has definitely increased, said BJP leader, Mr A.B. Vajpayee, while K.L. Sharma, general secretary, BJP, maintained that being against a particular faith is communal. But saying vote for us because we are Hindus is secular.

In the union capital, communalism has two faces. One revolves around the Punjab problem, the other around the Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi issue.

According to a researcher on the subject, the two aspects of communalism are linked by the 1984 riots, which acted as a catalyst to good Hindu aggression. The '84 riots aimed at the Sikhs, gave legitimacy to Hindu aggression in the middle class which snowballed into the rising—though limited—popularity of the VHP.

The walled city, always a hotbed of communalism, is once again agitated over the Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi issue. In resettlement colonies like Trilokpuri the Muslims feel intensely about it, spurred on by the Shahi Imam and Syed Shahabuddin.

According to Syed Mehboob Shah Quadri, a reformist from the Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal in Pune, it almost seems as though there is a competition between Syed Shahabuddin,

being politicised” said Sharda Bax Singh, pradhan of Bisundaspur village in Gonda district.

“The communal harmony of the village is intact and will remain intact.” His views are reiterated by Shamoan Ahmed, pradhan of Chitra village as well as the pradhan of Shapur village.

Shakuntala Verma, wife of the Hindi laureate, Bhagwati Charan Verma, who lives in Gonda, said that there is no communal polarisation in Gonda, despite the fact that members of both communities would like the shrine to be declared as their place of worship.

Her opinion is echoed by Firoz Khan and Ajay Srivastava, members of the Gonda municipality, as well as by a social worker and school teacher, Nuzhat Jahan. A police officer of Sultanpur said that there is emotional polarisation over the issue, but it does not have a violent and destructive posture.

These views were, however, contradicted by religious leaders of both communities. Mohammad Yunus Siddique, chairman of the Faizabad unit of the Babri Masjid action committee believed that the controversy had become a national issue.

“The issue has increased communal polarisation”, said Mr Bhattacharya of Sultanpur and divisional organising secretary of the Hindu Jagran March

In Ballia district, the perceptions of those actively interested in the dispute are even more extreme. The shrine issue will be the only deciding electoral issue in central, eastern and south eastern districts of U.P., declared Sudhir Kumar, an RSS activist.

Will be forthcoming elections see communal issues playing a larger role than they have in earlier elections? And will they be a response to national, regional or local factors?

Again, as in the case of awareness of the Babri, perceptions of inhabitants in rural and urban areas also varied widely, with villagers in most states not viewing communalism as an electoral factor.

## **In Gujarat**

In the Banda, Ballia and Azamgarh districts of UP, as

being politicised” said Sharda Bax Singh, pradhan of Bisundaspur village in Gonda district.

“The communal harmony of the village is intact and will remain intact.” His views are reiterated by Shamoan Ahmed, pradhan of Chitra village as well as the pradhan of Shapur village.

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## **In Gujarat**

In the Banda, Ballia and Azamgarh districts of UP, as

well as in Bahraich and Barabanki districts, communal issues are expected to play a greater role in the forthcoming elections. But in the towns of Faizabad, Gonda and Sultanpur, opinion is divided, with leaders of religious groups and communal parties insisting they would, while other respondents disagreed. In the surrounding villages, however, rural inhabitants didn't believe communal issues will play a significant part.

Similarly, in the villages of Nalanda district, Bihar, apprehension of communal sentiment being provoked at election time was much less than in the urban areas. This was partly explained by the activities of the Indian People's Front in the areas surveyed.

In Gujarat, as the Ahmedabad municipal elections proved, communal issues, especially the Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute, will definitely be drummed up, not only in urban centres like Baroda, Rajkot and Surat, but also in rural areas.

The Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy was used by the BJP as an electoral issue in the Ahmedabad city municipal elections and in the recent by-election in the Hindu-dominated Navrangpura civil ward.

The BJP won with a large margin, on the basis of its high-pitched campaign. Cassettes containing inflammable speeches of a local preacher, Morari Bapu, were distributed, and the campaign was focussed on preserving the Ram Janambhoomi temple at all costs and saving the Hindus from "further humiliation". The BJP emerged as the single largest party in the civil elections and also got a two-thirds majority.

### **In Maharashtra**

The VHP clarion call to preserve Hindutva at any cost "as Vadibhai Bhaichand Patel, a member of the Gandhinagar district panchayat and Bachubhai Lallubhai Patel, sarpanch of Sardhan village, pointed out, has touched a chord.

Religion will be an important election factor in Maharashtra also since Hindu organisations have openly come out on the subject, say leaders of political parties and religious activists. Kaka Wadke, the Shiv Sena's Pune president said that the

crux of their election propaganda would be to unite Hindus to end the "discrimination" against them.

Taheer Poonawala, a Bohra reformist in Pune, said that with Hindus feeling that minorities were being given preferential treatment, the elections were bound to be given a communal colour. Concurred Asgar Ali Engineer, well known Bohra reformist: communal issues will come to the fore during elections in a naked manner.

Sarosh Abdulla Bhure, from Mahapol village, Thane district, Maharashtra, said that the open and intense communal stance of the Shiv Sena, Agri Sena and Muslim League was a new trend. "Those who never talk about religion are now doing so after the dispute over the shrine", agreed Ahilya Rangnekar of the CPM.

In both urban and rural areas of Madhya Pradesh, however, people stated that there has been no spurt in communal activity since the last election. Nor do they expect the forthcoming one to witness an increase.

Similarly, in Tamil Nadu neither the Babri Masjid issue nor the communal situation in the rest of the country has made any deep impact on the state's Muslims who constitute over five per cent of the population. Ejaz Ahmad Aslam, president of the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind attributes this to the fact that state's Muslims have wide business interests (hardware, retail cloth and leather) giving them a higher economic status higher than in other states. In addition he said, "The Muslims share a moderate outlook with other sections of the people of Tamil Nadu. I would go to the extent of saying that even the RSS here is moderate", he commented.

Agreeing with him, the president of the Tamil Nadu Brahmins Associations, S. Balasubramanian, points out that because of their relative affluence, the Muslims have an equal interest in maintaining communal amity. Since community leaders in the state were generally from the business class, he said, they can't take issue nearer the electorate.

West Bengal, Assam and Goa are also states where communal issues are not expected to play a large role in the elections. In each area, local rather than national issues are more significant electoral factors.



“While political parties in West Bengal usually put up Hindu or Muslim candidates according to the demographic features of a particular constituency”, said Nemaï Sudhan Bose, vice-chancellor of Visva Bharati University. “the communal factor plays a less important role here.”

Arun Mukherjee, principal of Sriniketan, pointed out that the communal factor in West Bengal is subdued because of the political consciousness of the people. Even A. K. M. Hassanuzaman, the only Indian Union Muslim League member of the state legislative assembly, reiterated that the Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy had not increased communal polarisation in the state and communal issues would not be a factor in the parliamentary elections in West Bengal.

### Foreigners Issue

In Assam, the primary issue remains the foreign national one and if communal issues come to the fore in the elections they will be a response to purely local, not national, factors. While the Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi dispute has no relevance to Assam, communal tension in the state surfaces only in respect of immigrant Muslims on issues like revision of electoral rolls. There is total harmony between the non-immigrant Assamese Muslims and Assamese Hindus.

As in the election before the Assam accord was signed, the forthcoming election may acquire a communal overtone in Assam due to the possible non-inclusion of the names of lakhs of immigrant Muslims in the revised electoral rolls.

In Goa, the major issue is the influx of non-Goans and the growing regionalism is not directed towards a conflict between the Hindus and Christians but is manifested in hostility towards outsiders. Susrat Martins, a member of a group called “protectors” formed to safeguard Goa’s unity, said none of the national communal parties had a base in Goa. But the vacuum was filled by the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party, the Shiv Sena—which has made a recent emergence on the political canvas of the state—and the Marathi Rajya Bhasha Prasthapan Samity (MRBPS).

## **Kashmir Factors**

In Kashmir, a combination of regional, national and international factors will result in communal issues playing a large role in the forthcoming elections, said Dr. Sultan Bhat of the University of Kashmir. He identified the formation and heightened activities of the Jamaat-e-Islami-led Muslim United Front from 1987 and the Shiv Sena as regional forces. The Panthers' Party led by Bhim Singh in Jammu and Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq's Awami action committee are also viewed as regional communal parties.

Barring a handful of political parties—including the communist parties, particularly the CPI, in Punjab, the left front in West Bengal and the Indian people's movement in parts of Bihar—all of them play the communal card: this was the unanimous opinion in the states surveyed. While political parties like the Shiv Sena, BJP, Muslim League and Akali Dal are viewed as blatantly communal, there is widespread cynicism that no political party today desists from playing communal politics.

“Communal elements pervade all political parties”, maintained Ram Kumar Bharvava, an advocate from Kanpur, “Everyone talks of secularism but gives different election speeches at different places depending on the electorate.”

The border districts of Punjab, like Amritsar and Gurdaspur, which have witnessed serious and irrevocable demographic changes, are a case apart. According to Jugnu Ramaswamy, TV producer who did a film on Punjab last year, from January to June 1988, 7,060 families, i.e. approximately 35,000 people moved from villages to towns. These were official figures according to informal district administration sources, Jugnu said. Ninety per cent of the Hindu population in the border areas had left for towns.

In addition, these areas have witnessed the phenomenon of “swapping”, with Sikh families who had lived in U.P. for over 25 years moving to Punjab and Hindu families moving to places including Dudhia and Puranpur. “These major demographic changes are irrevocably changing the complexion of relationships between the two communities, says Ramaswamy.

For the Hindus, who once lived in Gurdaspur district, the Shiv Sena slogan *garve se kaho hum Hindu hai* (say with pride, we are Hindu) is an empty one.

Compiled by Ayesha Kagal, Delhi, with reports from Askari Zaidi (Srinagar), G.V. Krishnan (Madras), C. Lokeswara Rao (Hyderabad), Aditi Kapoor (Delhi), Abhay Vaidya (Pune), Asraf Syed, Lester Coutinho (Ahmedabad), Gabriel Vaz, T. Bopana, Naheed Ataulla, B.S. Arun (Bangalore), Anil Sharma (Bhopal), Uday Shankar (Patna), Pushpa Iyengar (Panaji), M.G. Gupta (Faizabad), Yogesh Vajpeyi (Kanpur), Arvind Singh Bisht (Barabanki), Ashwini Bhatnagar (Ballia), V.K. Dethé, M.L. Paor (Chandigarh), V.R. Mani (Trivandrum), Rajiv Wagh (Bombay), Shikha Bose, Sudhin Dey (Calcutta), Prasun Sonwalker (Guwahati) and Najmul Hasan (Shimla).

*Courtesy* : Times of India 8-8-1989

## MUSLIM MPs' MEMORANDUM TO THE PRIME MINISTER MARCH 3, 1986

The recent Judgment by the District Judge, Faizabad in respect of Babri Mosque, Ayodhya has caused deep anguish to the Muslim Community and has created a grave situation in the country which, if not tackled carefully can cause a national catastrophe beyond any cure.

We, the Muslim Members of Parliament, therefore, desire to place facts before you and request you kindly to intervene in the matter urgently and restore confidence among the Muslim Community that they would enjoy religious freedom as equal members of a secular state in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Constitution of India.

At the very out-set we assure you that the narration of the following facts is based on an overwhelming and irrefutable evidence in respect of the Babri Mosque's history and its legal position.

1. That, the Mosque was built during the regime of Moghal Emperor Babar by one of his Governors, namely, Mir Baqui on a vacant plot of land in the year 1528.

2. That, an internationally renowned Historian A.S. Beveridge who has translated Tuzuk-e-Babri into English and given comprehensive footnotes, has in his book, *Memoirs of Babar* (Vol. II London, 1924, page 679-80) mentioned Babar's passing

through Awadh. Beveridge has dealt with the subject with minute details but there is no mention of Babar having entered Ayodhya. After dealing with Shaikh Bayazid the rebel, who was Governor of Awadh, Babar appointed Baqui Beg Tashkandi (Mir Baquo) as Governor of Awadh and left. This fact is further proved by the report of District Commissioner of Waqfs Faizabad, on 16th September 1938 submitted to the Chief Commissioner of Waqfs (U.P.) It is furthermore proved by the inscriptions on the walls of the mosque as acknowledged by the Historian A.S. Beveridge and also by Pandit Hari Kishan the Sub Judge Faizabad in Suit No. 61/280 of 1885, vide his judgement dated 24-12-1885. A copy of the judgment by Pt. Hari Kishan, forms Annexure 'A' of this memorandum.

3. That from the above mentioned report of District Waqf Commissioner, it is evident that two villages namely Bharaiapur and Sholeypur were also granted as Revenue free land in the year 1864 for maintenance of the Mosque in lieu of the cash grant of Rs. 60/- per year originally sanctioned by Emperor Babar and subsequently enhanced by the king of Awadh to a sum of Rs. 302/3/6.

4. That, in the year 1885 one Mahant Raghubar Dass had filed one suit in the court of Sub Judge Faizabad (Suit No. 61280 of 1885) and had alleged that the Chabutra of Ram Janamsthan was without roof and building and the priests had to face great hardships on account of weather effects like excessive heat, cold or rain and as such, he prayed for permission to construct a Temple over the said Chabutra of 21×17 ft. This suit was filed on 19-1-1885 and it was also contended in para 4 of the plaint that in April 1883 the Deputy Commissioner of Faizabad had refused the permission for construction of the said temple for the reasons of communal harmony.

5. That, the Sub Judge Faizabad Pandit Hari Kishan dismissed the said suit No. 61/280 of 1885 by his order dated 24-12-1885. On the basis of the site plan prepared by the Court's Amin one Mr. Gopal Sahai, the Court observed that "in between the Mosque and 'Chabutra' there is a wall and it is clear that there are separate boundaries between the Mosque and Chabutra and this fact is also supported by the fact that there is boundary line built by the Government before the

recent dispute.” The Court further observed that “Around it there is the well of the mosque and the word ‘Allah’ is inscribed on it and if permission is given to Hindus for construction of temple then one day or the other a criminal case will be started and thousands of people will be killed.” And that “awarding permission to construct a temple at this juncture is to lay the foundation of riots and murders, hence the relief claimed should not be granted.”

6. That, against the aforesaid judgement dated 24-12-1885 an Appeal was filed (Civil Appeal No. 27 of 1886) Mahant Raghubar Dass Vs. Secretary of Stage and others) in the Court of District Judge, Faizabad who ultimately dismissed it by his order dated 26-3-1886.

7. That, the Mosque was damaged in the communal riots of 1934 and the then U.P. Government got it repaired.

8. In the ‘Misl band’ Registrar of 1860 the said Mosque is recorded as Masjid Babri.

9. That, in the report of the Commissioner of Waqfs published in the Government Gazette dated 26-2-1944 this Mosque is mentioned to be a Sunni Waqf.

10. That, on the basis of the aforesaid facts the U.P. Sunni Central Board of Waqfs registered the said Mosque as a Waqf. namely, Waqf No. 26 of Faizabad under the U.P. Muslim Waqf Act, 1960.

11. That, upto 22-12-1949 regular prayers used to be offered by the Muslims in the said Mosque and it was in the night of 22/23-12-1949 that a violent mob of anti-Muslim fanatics forcibly occupied the Mosque with the connivance of the then District Magistrate Mr. K.K. Nayyar who had to resign for his role in this sordid episode. And the idols of Sri Ram Chandraji were surreptitiously installed in the Mosque. The very F.I.R. lodged at Ayodhya Police Station by Constable Shri Mata Prasad posted at the site on 23-12-1949 corroborates the fact that idols were surreptitiously placed inside the mosque on the night of 22/23-December, 1949. A copy of the said F.I.R. forms Annexure-B to this memorandum.

12. That, on 23-12-1949 orders under Section 144 Cr. P.C. were imposed in Faizabad and Ayodhya and the Mosque was attached under Section 145 Cr. P.C.

13. That, on 16-1-1950 one Mr. Gopal Singh Visharad filed a suit No. 2 of 1950 in the Court of Munsif Sadar, Faizabad. It is relevant to mention here that the fact in the Court of Civil Judge, Faizabad that idols of Shri Ram Chandraji were mischievously put inside the mosque, has been admitted in the written statement dated 24-4-1950 filed by the Deputy Commissioner, Faizabad, Sri J.N. Ugra in suit No. 2 of 1950 as well as in the written statement of the State Government in R.S. No. 25 of 1950. Copy of the Written Statements filed by Sri J.N. Ugra, Deputy Commissioner, Faizabad forms Annexure C and D whereas the Written Statement of S.P. Faizabad in Suit No. 2/1950 is Annexure E to this Memorandum. Likewise another suit was filed by Nirmohi Akhara and ultimately a fourth suit was filed by the U.P. Sunni Central Board of Waqfs, Lucknow, in the court of Civil Judge, Faizabad i.e. Reg. Suit No. 12 of 1961. All these four suits were consolidated and the Reg. Suit No. 12 of 1961 filed by Waqfs Board was made the leading case.

From all the aforesaid written statements filed by the State Government it is fully established that the State Government had all along been treating the said building as Babri Mosque and not as a temple of Shri Ram Chandraji.

14. In a matter relating to the receivership of the Mosque the file of the aforesaid leading case i.e. Suit No. 12 of 1961 was retained by the Allahabad High Court and it is still lying in the same court (at Lucknow Bench).

15. That, all of a sudden, on 25-1-1986 one Mr. Umesh Chandar Pandey, an Advocate of Faizabad, moved an application in Reg. Suit No. 2 of 1950 in the Court of Munsif, to the effect that D.M. and S.P. Faizabad be directed to remove the lock from the premises so that he and other members of Hindu community may worship there. On 28-1-1986 the learned Munsif passed an order for putting up the application on the date fixed as the file of the case was before the High Court.

16. However, against the aforesaid order of Munsif, an appeal was filed before the District Judge on 30-1-1986 which was heard on 1-2-1986. On this date some Muslims came to know about these proceedings and moved application for being impleaded as party to the appeal, as Mr. Umesh Chander

Pandey had not impleaded any of the Muslim parties of the suits, the Muslims who were already parties in the original suits moved for impleadment but all these prayers were unjustifiably rejected by the District Judge and he irrelevantly examined the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police, who also seemed to have connived with the miscreants, and on the basis of their irrational and undemocratic statement that no law and order problem would be created if the lock of the mosque were opened, the District Judge allowed the appeal directing the D.M. and S.P. to remove the lock from the premises in dispute, and the lock was broken the same day at about 5.15 p.m.

17. That, it would be relevant to point out that the order, which has been obtained through conspiracy and at the back of the Muslims, manifestly suffers from following defects:—

(i) The applicant who has moved the application in question is not a party to any of the aforesaid suits and as such he has no locus-standi;

(ii) That, the Muslims who are parties in aforesaid original suits and who also applied for impleadment in appeal, were not impleaded;

(iii) That the statements are never recorded in appeals as done by the erring District Judge;

(iv) The order passed by Munsif was not appealable as he had not yet decided the case;

(v) The appeal was heard by District Judge and one sided orders were passed and implemented the same day;

(vi) And above all, no such order could have been passed when the record of the original suit is lying in the Allahabad High Court (Lucknow bench).

18. That, the order of the District Judge has resulted in the present situation—riots, imposition of curfew in many parts of the Country, mass arrests. The order has caused a situation in which confidence and faith of Muslims in the Judicial system is shaken.

19. That, we feel constrained to charge that the National Television Network chose to be a party in the dispute by televising the entry of Hindu devotees into the Mosque and



described the premises as 'Ram Janam Bhoomi'. All India Radio also adopted the same attitude.

20. That, even the peaceful and democratic protest on the part of Muslim community was resented by the majority community with the active support of the law and order machinery.

21. What pains us most is the fact, that the values that could sustain and enrich a truly democratic and secular way of life in India are fast deteriorating and something needs to be done urgently if India has to remain strong and united. In this connection we like to bring to the notice of the Hon'ble Prime Minister the full throated lament of Shri Akshay Pandit, a freedom-fighter and a senior Congress leader of Faizabad, who had drawn the attention of Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, the then Home Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1950, the high handedness and vandalism of some Hindu miscreants who wanted forcible conversion of Babri Mosque into a Temple. Shri Akshay Pandit's lament, titled "Rah-e-Farz Par" in Urdu forms Annexure-F to this memorandum.

Against this background we, the Muslim Members of Parliament, request you kindly to take the appropriate measures to meet the following demands:—

A. That you may kindly intervene in the matter immediately and take urgent measures to get the Babri Mosque restored to the Muslim community.

B. That, a writ petition be filed by the Government of U.P. in the High Court against the order dated 1-2-1986 passed by District Judge, Faizabad.

C. That as the District Judge himself has observed in his order dated 1-2-1986 that Authorities can independently take measures to maintain law and order, therefore, the status quo ante as existed on 31-1-1986 should be restored in respect of Babri Mosque.

D. That all the pending suits relating to the premises in question be got disposed of within a period of six months.

E. That, a delegation of M.Ps. representing various political parties be sent to Ayodhya to visit Babri Mosque and the same delegation be provided facilities to prepare a map of the premises as also to take photographs of the Mosque so as to bring on record actual existing position of the Mosque.

F. That the official media be directed not to describe the premises as Ram Janam Bhoomi.

(Names of 41 signatories shall appear in April '86 issue)

**Members of Parliament, Signatories to Memorandum of 3 March 1986**

LOK SABHA

1. Kazi Jaleel Abbasi
2. Akbar Jahan Begum
3. Sarfaraz Ahmed
4. Abida Ahmed
5. Akhtar Hasan
6. Abdul Hannan Ansari
7. Ebrahim Sulaiman Sait
8. Gulam Mahmood Banatwalla
9. Basheer, T.
10. Hussain Dalwai
11. Abdul Rasheed Kabuli
12. Aslam Sher Khan
13. Mohammad Ayoob Khan
14. Mahfooz Ali Khan
15. Chowdhury Rahim Khan
16. Zulfqar Ali Khan
17. Syed Shahabuddin
18. Salahuddin Owaisi
19. Fakeer Mohamed, ESM
20. Ahmad Patel
21. Aziz Qureshi
22. Salahuddin
23. P.M. Sayeed
24. Hafiz Mohd. Siddique
25. Saifuddin Soz

26. Tariq Anwar
27. Golam Yazdani
28. Zainul Bashar

## RAJYA SABHA

29. Syed Hashim Raza Abidi
30. Hayatullah Ansari
31. Asrarul Haque
32. F.M. Khan
33. Mohd. Hashim Kidwai
34. B.V. Abdulla Koya
35. Asad Madni
36. Gulam Rasool Matoo
37. Mirza Irshad Baig
38. Rafique Alam
39. Gulam Mohiuddin Shawl
40. Shamim Ahmad Siddiqui
41. Raw of Valiullah

*Courtesy : Muslim India, March 1986*

**U.P. MUSLIM MLAs' MEMORANDUM  
TO THE CHIEF MINISTER, DATED  
FEBRUARY 6, 1986**

We, the following members of the State Legislature wish to draw your attention towards the following facts regarding Babri Masjid, Ayodha, Distt. Faizabad, which is being described as Ram Janam Bhoomi or Janam Asthan even by the official media these days, and urge upon you to take immediate remedial steps to restore the confidence of Muslims and other minorities in the secular and democratic fabric of the nation.

1. That from the authentic Books of History including Tuzake-Babri or Memoirs of Babar it is fully established that Babar had never demolished any temple at Ayodhya and that the Mosque in question namely, Babri Mosque was built by the command of Babar on a vacant piece of land and as such it has been known as Babri Mosque for more than 450 years. There is no mention of any temple having been demolished in Ayodhya and any mosque having been built on the ruins thereof, even in Ain-e-Akbari and Alamgirnama.

2. That in 1885 one Mahant Raghubar Dass, claiming himself to be the Mahant of Janam Asthan had filed a suit in the court of Sub-Judge Faizabad (suit number 61/280 of 1885) and in the plaint of that suit he had alleged that Chabutra of Janam Asthan was 21 feet towards East and West and 17 feet

towards North and South and as there was no building over it, he and other priests had to face great hardships on account of excessive heat in summer and excessive cold in winter and from rain in rainy season and as such permission be accorded to construct a temple over the said Chabutra of 21 × 17 feet. In this very plaint dated 19-1-1885 it was also asserted in para-4 that in March or April 1883 the Deputy Commissioner of Faizabad prohibited the construction of the said temple on account of the objection raised by some Muslims.

3. That the said suit number 61/280 of 1885 was however, dismissed on 24-12-1885 by the Sub-Judge Faizabad and while dealing with issue number 6 the Court had observed by relying upon the site plan prepared by Gopal Sahai, Amin, that “in between the mosque and Chabutra, there is a wall. . . and it is clear that there are separate boundaries between the mosque and Chabutra and this fact is also supported by the fact that there is boundary line built by the Government before the rent dispute”. In this very judgement it was further observed that around it there is the wall of the mosque and the word Allah is inscribed on it. If temple is constructed on the Chabutra at such a place, then there will be sound of bells of the temple and Sankh, when both Hindus and Muslims passed from the same way and if permission is given to Hindus for constructing temple then one day or the other a criminal case will be started and thousands of people will be killed” and that “awarding permission to construct the temple at this juncture is to lay the foundation of riot and murder, hence. . . in view of policy and also in view of justice the reliefs claimed should not be granted”. The said Sub-Judge Faizabad was no one else than a Hindu Pandit namely Pandit Hari Kishan.

4. That the appeal filed against the aforesaid judgement and decree dated 24-12-1885 was also dismissed on 26-3-1886 by the District Judge, Faizabad (Civil Appeal No. 27 of 1886—Mahant Raghubar Dass Vs. Secretary of State and others).

5. That some portions of the said Babri Mosque were damaged in the communal riots in 1934 but the same were rebuilt and reconditioned at the cost of Government.

6. That in his report published in Government Gazette

dated 26.12.1944 the Commissioner of Waqf had also held it to be a Sunni Waqf.

7. That in the Sil Band Register of 1860 also the said mosque stands recorded as masjid Babri.

8. That on the basis of the aforementioned documents the said mosque and its appurtenant land were recorded as Waqf (Waqf No. 26 Faizabad) in the U.P. Sunni Central Board of Waqfs under the U.P. Muslim Act, 1936.

9. That in the said mosque prayers used to be offered without any restriction, upto 21.12.1949 and it was in the night of 22/23rd December 1949 that the idols of Sri Ram Chandraji were surreptitiously and wrongly put inside the mosque. This fact is evident even from the written statement dated 24.4.1950 filed by the Deputy Commissioner, Faizabad (Shri J.N. Ugra) on behalf of the State of U.P. in the Court of Civil Judge, Faizabad in suit number 2 of 1950 (Gopal Singh Visharad Vs. Zahoor Ahmad and others). Similar stand was taken by the State Government in Regular suit number 25 of 1950 (Shri Param Hans Ram Chandra Dass Vs. Zahoor Ahmad and others) in which case also written statement was filed by the Deputy Commissioner of Faizabad on behalf of the State Government in January, 1951. It is thus fully established that the State Government had all along been treating the said building as Babri Mosque and not as a temple of Sri Ram Chandraji but all of a sudden on 1.2.1986 the District Magistrate and S.S.P. of Faizabad appear to have taken a contradictory stand before the District Judge, Faizabad in Misc. Civil Appeal No. 8 of 1986 (Umesh Chandra Pandey Vs. State of U.P. and 3 others) filed against the order of Munsif Sadar Faizabad dated 28.1.1986 passed on an application of Sri Umesh Chandra Pandey dated 25.1.1986 moved in Regular Suit number 2 of 1950. It is note-worthy that the said Sri Umesh Chandra Pandey is neither a party in that suit nor he was made a party in suit number 2 of 1950.

10. That it is also relevant to mention here that Gopal Singh Visharad, plaintiff of Regular Suit No. 2 of 1950 had died years ago and no substitution had been made in his place and as such that suit had automatically abated and legally speaking it was not at all pending in court on 25.1.1986 or on

1.2.1986. As such no order could be passed in that suit for opening the locks of the mosque or for not imposing restrictions on the Darshan or Pooja but strangely enough, neither the State Counsel nor the District Magistrate and S.S.P. present in court and nor the District Judge himself adverted to this aspect of the matter and it appears that in a pre-planned manner the order dated 1.2.1986 was obtained by the District Administration to please the agitating group of the majority community and we cannot swallow that all this could be done without obtaining prior sanction from the State Government or the Central Government and without consultation and connivance of the top officials and persons at the helm of affairs.

11. That the manner in which the said order dated 1.2.1986 was obtained behind the back of Muslims and without imp-leading any Muslim as a party to the said appeal and rather by rejecting the application for impleadment of some Muslims who had reached the Court of District Judge, Faizabad on 1.2.1986 after hearing the rumour of that matter, the Muslims all over the country have been taken aback and their confidence in the Government as well as in the judiciary has been badly shaken. It is all the more surprising that even the U.P. Sunni Central Board of Wakf, Lucknow and other plaintiffs of Regular Suit Number 12 of 1961 who had filed suit for declaration and possession in respect of this very mosque in the court of Civil Judge Faizabad and which case is still pending, were neither made party to this Appeal of 1986 and nor were given any notice about this matter and order dated 1.2.1986 was passed behind their back although Suit No. 12 of 1961 is the leading cause with which the other three suits of this property including suit number 2 of 1950 have been consolidated.

12. That as a result of the opening of lock of the mosque and throwing it open for Puja etc. the Muslims all over the country are greatly agitated and we also are extremely shocked and dismayed and as such we urge upon you to take immediate remedial measures not only for preservation and protection of the sanctity of the mosque but also for restoration of

confidence of the Muslims in the legal system and secular and democratic fabric of the nation.

We, therefore, demand that the following steps be taken by the State Government without further delay:

1. Babri Masjid with all its appurtenant Waqf properties be protected and preserved in the form in which it existed on 22.12.1949 and its walls etc. be repaired and be kept intact.

2. Provocative slogans and speeches of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal etc. be taken note of and immediate action be taken to stop the same and to punish the guilty persons.

3. Performance of Puja and installation of idols inside the mosque or within its precincts be immediately stopped.

4. Muslims be allowed to offer prayers in the said Babri Mosque without any restriction and to manage the affairs of the same.

5. Possession of the mosque be restored to Muslims either by legislation or by getting the cases decided expeditiously.

1. Mohd. Masud Khan, MLA
2. Qazi Kalccmurrayman, MLA
3. Shafiqurrahman Barq, MLA
4. Mohd. Azam Khan, MLA
5. Qazi Mohiuddin, MLA
6. Abdul Waheed Qureshi, MLA
7. Amir Alam Khan, MLA
8. Khursheed Ahmad, MLA
9. Abdul Wadood, MLA
10. Buniyad Husain Ansari, MLA
11. Fareed Mahfooz Qidwai, MLA
12. Fazlul Bari, MLA
13. Fasibhurrahman Alias Munan Khan, MLA
14. Haji Mohd. Hayat, MLA
15. M. Rizwanul Haq, MLA
16. Mohd. Aqil, MLA
17. Mustamad Ali Khan, MLA



**Resolution Adopted by the Students of the Aligarh Muslim University on February 7, 1986**

The students of the Muslim University take the conversion of the Babri Masjid into a temple, after the recent writ petition against the Holy Quran in the Calcutta High Court and the attack on the Muslim Personal Law in the Shah Bano Case as a direct challenge to their self-respect and demand from the Government of India that these situations should be corrected immediately so that the Muslim youth is not forced to adopt means which may prove disastrous for the country. We demand that in the Babri Masjid case the status quo ante should be restored.

We also demand that the doors of interference in the Muslim Personal Law should be closed forever by deleting Article 44 of the Constitution.

*Courtesy : Muslim India, March 1986*

## EVENT OF FEBRUARY 1986— SEIZURE OF BABRI MASJID

### February 1

Babri Masjid unlocked and opened to the Hindu community for regular Pooja under order of District Judge, Faizabad, on application from a private individual.

Hindus throng the mosque and celebrate event with delirious joy.

### February 2

Uneasy calm in Ayodhya—Faizabad; Section 144 imposed; PAC patrolling through streets; Muslims observe 'bandh' and in a state of fear.

Hashim Ansari, President Babri Masjid Action Committee, protests to President and Prime Minister.

All India Muslim Personal Law Board condemns the de facto conversion of the Mosque into a temple and demands restoration (see text).

All India Muslim Youth Convention calls for legal and political pressure to regain the mosque.

### February 4

Hashim Ansari files writ petition in Lucknow Bench of

Allahabad High Court; Court issues notice and directs that the disputed property should not be interfered with.

Hindu organisations in various places celebrate Victory Day.

Communal incidents reported in Barabanki and other places near Faizabad.

Syed Shahabuddin, Acting President, All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat calls for observance of February 14 as Day of Mourning and Prayers with black flags, black badges, prayers and resolutions in all mosques and submission of Memorandum to local administration, (see text)

### **February 5**

Vishwa Hindu Parishad President Mr. S.N. Katju demands custody of the Mosque to be entrusted to a Trust.

Ayodhya wears festive look and receives thousands of Hindu pilgrims for Darshan and Pooja.

### **February 6**

Syed Shahabuddin writes to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister requesting state intervention in the writ petition, (see text)

### **February 7**

Aligarh Muslim University Students observe Protest Day & pass resolution (see text). Muslims demonstration in Allahabad and other cities.

### **February 8**

Vishwa Hindu Parishad criticises Muslim objection to the judicial order on the Babri Masjid.

### **February 9**

Uttar Pradesh Kisan Sangram Samiti General Secretary Onkar Nath Pandey criticises unilateral action which has hurt religious sentiments of the Muslim minority.

### **February 10**

Maulana Muzaffar Husain, ex-MP and President, U.P. Babri Masjid Action Committee calls for U.P. Bandh.

Aligarh Muslim University closed for 6 days.

U.P. Chief Minister Veer Bahadur Singh turns down the request of Muslim Legislators to intervene in the writ petition or appeal against the order of 1-2-1986.

U.P. B.J.P. President Kalyan Singh calls upon Government to take action against elements who have refused to accept judicial order.

### **February 12**

5 Muslim MLA's (all belonging to the opposition) walk out of U.P. Assembly on being disallowed to raise the issue in the Assembly.

### **February 14**

Day of Mourning and Protest observed all over the country specially in North India.

Mushawarat submits Memorandum to the Prime Minister. (see text)

Killing of one Muslim youth and serious injury to another (who later died) by the police in Hauz Quazi, Delhi. Several others injured. Indefinite curfew in Delhi.

### **February 18**

Government of Uttar Pradesh bans religious processions, rallies and public meetings relating to Babri Masjid all over the State; Rath Yatras also restrained.

Home Ministry asks Chief Ministers to be vigilant against communal forces.

### **February 19**

Vishwa Hindu Parishad seeks land in Ayodhya to rebuild temple and cultural complex.

University Students meeting in Delhi demand declaration of disputed premises as historic monument.

Leading Muslim citizens of Calcutta call for peace and

harmony while condemning take-over of Babri Masjid by the Hindu community.

### **February 20**

Hindu Organisation stage a black flag demonstration against Muslim MP's meeting at the call of the Mushawarat; MP's decide to submit joint memorandum to the Prime Minister, organise legal assistance and contact with opinion-makers and journalists.

Jagatguru Shankaracharya of Puri demands that the Government should not return Masjid to the Muslims.

Union Wakf Minister Dr. Rajindra Kumari Bijpai advises Muslims to take recourse to law and not to create disturbance.

Indian Union Muslim League President Ebrahim Sulaiman Sait boycotts President's address as protest against non-intervention by the Government in Babri Masjid case.

U.P. CPI State Council Secretary Sarju Pandey alleges prior consent of high authorities in Lucknow to unlocking of Babri mosque.

### **February 21**

CPI (M) Polit Bureau holds Congress (I) responsible for explosive situation following opening of the Babri mosque.

## **JANMABHOOMI AREA FIRST OCCUPIED IN 7th CENTURY B.C.: NO SIGNIFICANT INDICATIONS OF GUPTA PERIOD**

### **RESULT OF EXCAVATION AT AYODHYA**

#### **1969-1970 Report**

The Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, Banaras Hindu University, under Professor A.K. Narain, assisted by Shri T.N. Roy and Dr. Purushottam Singh, conducted an excavation at Ayodhya. The ancient site is quite extensive in area. The northern portion of the site, overlooking the Saryu, presents an impressive section showing the depth of the occupation-strata.

The main objective of this season's work was to ascertain the cultural sequence at the site. To realize this aim, three small cuttings were made, one near the Jain Ghat, the second on the Lakshman Tekri and the third on the Nal Tila.

In the first two cuttings, called Ayodhya-1 and Ayodhya-2, the excavation revealed a sequence of three cultural periods, of which the earlier two were continuous, while the last one followed after a desertion of the site. In Ayodhya-3 which was at a comparatively lower level than the remaining two cuttings, the deposits of only the earliest cultural period were

encountered. It was marked by the presence of the N.B.P. coarse grey and the associated red wares. Amongst other finds of the period, mention may be made of terracotta discs, balls and wheels, bone points and beads of copper, crystal, glass and terracotta. In the upper levels of this deposit, six terracotta human figurines and several animal figurines, grey in colour and two Ayodhya coins were found. Some iron objects were also recovered.

In addition to the above work, the Kuber-Tila, indentified by Cunningham as the site containing the relics of the Buddha, was also explored. A massive brick (size:  $39 \times 23 \times 6$  cms) structure, having several phases of construction, was exposed.

### 1976-77 Report

In continuation of last year's work which was taken under the project called 'Archaeology of the Ramayana Sites' excavation was resumed under Professor B.B. Lal of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla and Shri K.V. Soundara Rajan of the Survey, assisted by Sarvashri B. Narasimhaiah, Rambabu M.S. Mani, R.K. Sehgal, J.C. De and A.K. Mishra of the Survey and Surya Kant Srivastava and R.N. Kaw of the Institute. The work was concentrated on two important sectors in the ancient part of the city, namely Ram Jamna Bhumi monnd and the open area to the west of Hanuman-garhi, besides a few trenches at Sita-ki-Rasoi.

The excavation revealed a fairly compact and working sequence for the antiquity of the place from its first settlement over the natural soil. This began with the use of the well-known Northern Black Polished Ware, in all its shades. At the lowest levels, alongside the Northern Black Polished Ware, were also found a few shreds of grey ware, painted with fugitive bands in black pigment along the rim or obliquely on the exterior. This is taken, on a consideration of the position of this ware at Sravasti, Piprahwa, Kausambi, etc., as the very late and degenerate phase of the well-known Painted Grey Ware found at Hastinapura, Mathura, Achichatra, etc. On the basis of the date available from other sites like Mathura, Sravasti, Kausambi, etc., it would seem reasonable to ascribe

the first occupation of the Janma Bhumi area to circa seventh century B.C.

With this inception, the occupational phases of the mound appears to have continued up to circa third century A.D., represented by several structural phases. In the earlier stages, the houses were of wattle-and-daub or mud, followed by those of baked bricks. In the Janma Bhumi area, a massive wall of bricks was observed across the sector obliquely, which may perhaps be identified as a fortification-wall (pl. XLIX). Immediately below this massive wall were found mud-brick structures. In the upper levels of this phase, which may perhaps be called the post-rampart phase, extending from circa third century B.C. to the first century A.D., terracotta ring-wells were noted. The fortification-wall appears to have had a fairly deep ditch, almost like a moat, just on its exterior, which was partly cut into the natural clay overlying the fluvial sand bed. The other site, near Hanumangarhi, yielded a good number of structures of the Northern Black Polished Ware and later periods ring-wells of more than one type, including the typical wells using wedge-shaped bricks (pl. L.A.), well-known during the later part of the Northern Black Polished Ware period.

The excavation yielded a rich crop of antiquities, among which about half a dozen seals, about seventy coins and over a hundred terracotta figurines deserve special mention. The most noteworthy among them are a terracotta sealing (pl. L.B.) of king Vasudeva (noted already by his coin-issues of Ayodhya) of the second century B.C., a coin of Muladeva of the same period and a grey terracotta figurine of a person (Jaina Kevalin ?) with bald head, distended ear lobes and in kayotsarga pose (pl. L.C.). The last mentioned object came from levels ascribable to circa fourth century B.C. and is perhaps the earliest Jaina figure of this kind so far found in India. The other terracotta cult figurines of occasionally massive proportions, found particularly profusely from Hanumangarhi site of circa first-second century A.D., are comparable to the so-called exotic types noticed by Shri V.S. Agrawala from Ahichchhatra excavation and also met with in good number from other sites like Kausambi, Piprahwa, Vaishali etc.



One of the most significant discoveries, pertaining to the early historic stage, was the occurrence of shreds of the Rouletted Ware (pl. L.D.) in levels assignable to the first-second century A.D. This phenomenon may well be regarded as signifying large-scale trade and commerce at Ayodhya in the early centuries of the Christian era. This trade must have been along the arterial riverine routes of the Saryu (on the banks on which Ayodhya is located) and through it of the Ganga, after their confluence at Chapra, linking sites in eastern India like Tamralipti (Tamluk). The Saryu and the Ganga have been, till recent times, carrying on a large volume of water-borne trade with eastern India using *bajaras* (large boats). This is perhaps the most in-land context in which the rouletted Ware has occurred in northern India. In peninsular India, it is occurring sometimes in hinterland also as at Brahmagiri, Sengamedu, etc.

It is rather remarkable that the Gupta period is not significantly indicated at this site—a fact also noticed in the first season's dig in 1975.

After the early historic deposits, there is a break in occupation, with considerable debris and pit formations before the site was again occupied around the eleventh century A.D. Several later medieval brick-and-kankar lime-floors have been met with, but the entire late period was devoid of any special interest.

Excavations were also undertaken at and around Nandigram, about 16 km south of Ayodhya on the bank of the Tamsa, which, according to Valmiki Ramayana, was the seat of government of Bharata, ruling by proxy during Rama's exile. The result of the limited digging revealed a coeval antiquity, by and large, with Ayodhya. The site yielding such an evidence was especially the mound at Rahet, on the south bank of the Tamsa, while the present day Nandigram is located on the northern bank.

The antiquity of Ayodhya, thus, on the basis of these excavations, is ascribable to the early seventh century B.C.

**ORDER OF CIVIL JUDGE, FAIZABAD  
DATED 3.3.51, SUIT NO. 2 OF 1950**

Sri Gopal Singh Visharad  
(Appellant)  
vs  
Zahur Ahmad & others  
(Respondents)

**Order**

The plff Gopal Singh Visharad filed the present suit on 16.1.50 on the following allegations:

He is a Sanatanist Hindu resident of Ayodhya. He has always worshipped, visited the idol of Shri Ram Chandraji installed at Janma Bhoomi, Ayodhya. On 14.1.50 he was prevented from entering Janma Bhoomi and worshipping the idol aforesaid by the officers of deft No. 6 at the baseless instance and unfounded instigation to worship a Janma Bhoomi. The defts 7 to 9 who are the local officers of the deft No. 6 are exercising undue pressure on the local Hindu public, inducing them to refrain from visiting Janma Bhoomi. They are being actively helped in this direction by the defts 1 to 5 who are in collusion with defts 7 to 9. Neither the deft No. 6 has nor defts 7 to 9 have, any right to interfere in religious

matters or obstruct the plff's right to worship at Janma Bhoomi

The reliefs sought by him are:

(1) A declaration to the effect that he is entitled to ownership and visit without obstruction or disturbance Shri Bhagwan Ram Chandra and others installed at Asthana Janma Bhoomi, and (b) A perpetual injunction restraining the defts from removing the idols of Shri Bhagwan Ram Chandra and others installed at Asthana Janma Bhoomi aforesaid.

He prayed per separate application supported by an affidavit for and interim injunction against the deft a pending the decision of the suit. Notices were issued to the defts and an interim injunction was granted in the meanwhile on 16.1.50. Notices were served on defts 7 to 9 moved on 19.1.50 seeking clarification or modification of the ex-parte order of injunction issued by me on 16.1.50.

“The parties are hereby restrained by means of a temporary injunction to refrain from removing the idols in question from the site in dispute and from interfering with Pooja etc. as at present carried on. The order dated 16.1.50 stands notified accordingly”.

Defts 1 to 5 (1. Zahur Ahmad, 2. Haji Pheku 3. Mohammed Faliq, 4. Mohammed Sami, 5. Mohammad, Achchan Miyan) filed objection against the interim injunction on 13.2.57 challenging it on the grounds that the disputed site was (1) part of the Babri mosque which was built by Emperor Babar that it has been; (2) in the use of the Muslims as a mosque ever since; (3) that the Hindus never worshipped or performed any Pooja then, and (4) that the idols at present on the site were recently planted. They also pleaded that; (5) the suit was defective for want of notice u/s 80 C.P.C. No further objections were filed by the defts 6 to 9 (6 Uttar Pradesh State, 7. Deputy Commissioner Faizabad 8. City Magistrate, Faizabad, 9. Superintendent of police, Faizabad) by 25.3.50. The objections dt. 13.2.50 and Sir Iqbal Ahmad on behalf of came up for hearing on 2.3.50, deft 1 to 5 in his able arguments referred to various features of the building and its surroundings to support his contentions, which were controverted on behalf

of the plaintiff. This necessitated the issue on a commission to prepare map of the building in question. On the date of the appointment of the commission, defts 1 to 5 applied for the taking of a photograph of the building, which was granted. Maps and photographs were accordingly prepared and now form part of the record.

The case came up for hearing again on 17.2.51 when the District Government counsel representing defts 6 to 9 adopted the contentions of defts 1 to 5 and further pleaded that the suit was bad for want of notice u/s 80 C.P.C. He also pressed his objection dated 25.4.50. Suffice it to say, the plea of section 80 C.P.C. is not open to defts 1 to 5. 1942 Bombay 339 is a case by defts 6 to 9 who place reliance on the well-known case of Bhagchand versus Secretary of State reported in 1927 p.c. 176. On behalf of the plff it is strenuously urged that Bhag Chand's case has no application to the facts of the present case. He bases his argument on Krishna Swari versus Syed Ahmad, reported in 136 I.C. 777 (1932) and other earlier cases. The decision on the point are without doubt conflicting. It will, therefore, be premature to decide at this stage as to whether the suit is liable to be thrown out for want of notice under section 80 C.P.C.

For the purpose of these proceedings, it has to be seen whether the plff has a fair question to raise as to the existence of the right alleged, whether he is in danger of losing that right, and whether irreparable injury or inconvenience is likely to result to him, in case the injunction order is withdrawn. It is conceded on all hands that the idols in question were on the disputed site before the filing of the suit. It further appears from the copies of a number of affidavits of certain Muslim residents of Ayodhya that at least from 1936 onwards the Muslims have neither used the site as a mosque nor offered prayers there and that the Hindus have been performing their Pooja etc. on the disputed site. Nothing has been pointed to discredit these affidavits which along with the existence of the idols on the disputed site, clearly show that the plff has got a fair case to go to the trial. The defts 1 to 5 rely on the number of documents to show that the building in dispute has always been a mosque. It is not possible at this stage to anticipate

any decision on this point, because it will have to be decided after considering all the oral and documentary evidence that may be adduced by the parties in this case. The undisputed fact remains that on the date of this suit the idols of Sri Bhagwan Ram Chandra and others did exist on the site and that worship was being performed by the Hindus including the plff, though under some restrictions put by the executive authorities. This coupled with the affidavits referred to above does make out a prima facie case of the plaintiff.

As to the balance of convenience, it is obvious that the effect of vacating the interim injunction at this stage is likely to deprive the plff of the right claimed by him in this suit. Moreover, it is a matter of admission between the parties that there are several other mosques in the mohalla in question. The local Muslims will not, therefore, be put to much inconvenience, if the interim injunction remains in force during the pendency of the case.

For these reasons, I hold that the status quo should be maintained.

#### **Order**

The interim injunction order dated 16.1.50 as modified on 19.1.50 shall remain in force until the suit is disposed of.

*Source : Muslim India*

**JUDGEMENT OF DISTRICT JUDGE,  
FAIZABAD, SHRI K.M. PANDEY  
1 FEBRUARY, 1986**

**Civil Appeal No. 6/1986: Umesh Chand Pandey, Appellant, vs. State of U.P. and 30 Others—Respondents**

This is an appeal against the order dated 28.1.86 passed by Shri Hari Shankar Dubey, Munsif, Sadar, Faizabad in regular suit No. 2/50.

The brief facts of the case are that in suit 2a/5 the appellant filed an application (422/c) to the effect that the defendants 6 to 9 should be directed not to impose any restriction or hurdle in the Darshan and Puja etc. offered by the applicant and other members of the Hindu community in general of the Idol of Bhagwan Sri Ram Chandraji and others in the premises in question by closing the entrance gate of the said place or by putting locks thereon. Defendants No. 6 to 9 who are State of U.P., Deputy Commissioner, Faizabad, S.P. Faizabad and City Magistrate filed an objection alleging that they have no intention to interfere in the Puja of the Idols in question as directed by the court's order on 3.3.51. They only resisted the petition on the ground that they have the power vested under them to adopt such measures as are necessary to maintain law and order and this right cannot be curbed in any

manner. The learned Munsif did not give any relief to the petitioner on the application and even did not pass any order in this case because the record of the leading suit No. 12 of 1961 were pending in the Hon'ble High Court and consequently he found himself unable to dispose of this application. The main ground is that any order passed in this case will be passed in the file of the leading suit and that since the record of the leading suits are not available, he did not pass any order. It amounted to a refusal of the prayer and consequently this appeal has been preferred. The appellant has only arrayed defendants 6 to 9 of suit No. 2 of 1950 as party in the appeal. He says that he has no grievances against other defendants and consequently he has not arrayed them as party.

The last order passed on the point of interim injunction in this suit is dated 3.5.51. By this order the Civil judge has said that the injunction order dated 16.1.50 as modified on 19.1.50 shall remain in force. On 19.1.50 the learned court passed an injunction order to the effect that the opposite parties are hereby restrained by means of a temporary injunction to refrain from removing the idol in question from the site in dispute and from interfering with Puja etc. as at present carried on. This order passed by the learned trial court stands even today and the appeal against the injunction order issued by the trial court in suit No. 2 of 1950 stands confirmed by the Hon'ble High Court.

The only point for consideration in this appeal is as to whether the respondents should be directed to remove the lock which is said to be the main hurdle in offering prayer and in the free flow of pilgrims and devotees inside the premises.

I issued notices to the District Magistrate and the S.S.P. Faizabad, in this case. Both of them have been examined by me in court. The District Magistrate has very clearly stated that the idol installed in the disputed premises is visible from outside. The outer gate has no doors. Inside the main gate there is an enclosure made of grills and two doors have been in the inner enclosure. They are P & O shown in the site plan paper No. 136/5 of suit No. 2 of 1950. In both the gates locks have been placed. He does not know as to when these locks were placed and who passed orders for that. No records

are available on this point as to who had taken a decision to put locks at the gates O and P. The priest is allowed to go inside through the gate O for performing Puja and Bhog. The lock of the gate P is not opened. There are other idols inside the temple besides the idols as shown in the map. Most of these idols are visible from outside when the Puja is performed there. Besides the priest other persons are allowed to enter the premises with the permission of the City Magistrate.

For the last 35 or 36 years no member of the other community has offered any Namaz prayer. They are not allowed to enter this place. There are idols outside the line 'H.J.' and inside the outer wall offerings are made and Puja is performed there. Since 1951 no riot or no law and order problem has arisen at this place. The gates O and P have been locked only to see that the idols are not removed from inside the premises and the locks are also kept to honour the Court's injunction order. The District Magistrate further says that there are other ways to protect idols and maintain law and order besides closing the gates O and P. He clearly admits that if the locks at the gates O and P are opened even then there are other ways to maintain peace and to protect the idols kept inside the premises.

The SSP, Faizabad, Shri Param Veer Singh was also examined by me. He has said that police force is retained at the disputed premises. He keeps police in other temples of Ayodhya also for maintaining law and order particularly on the occasion of festivals. He has stated that whether the locks of the gates O and P are kept close or not the law and order situation can be kept under control with success. The security and the law and order of that place is not maintained on account of the locks of the gate O and P. The following statement of the District Magistrate is very relevant:

“O and P gate par tala band karne ke alava aur bhi tarike se moortiyoon ki suraksha ki vyavastha ki ja sakti hai aur shanti vyavastha kayam rakkhi ja sakti hai” likewise the following statement of the SSP Faizabad clinches the whole matter:—“O ya P taley rahen ya na rahen main vahan ki suraksha vyavastha safalta purbak kar sakta hun. Vahan ki



suraksha O ya P gate ke talon se hi nahin hai. Mujhe avashy-kata parne par vahan suraksha kayam karne ka adhikar rahina chahiye.” Thus it is clear that it is not necessary to keep the locks at the gates O and P for the purposes of maintaining law and order or for the safety of the idols. This appears to be an unnecessary irritant to the applicant and other members of the community. There does not appear any necessity to create an artificial barrier in between the idols and the devotees.

It appears that opposite parties have remained a prisoner of indecision for the last thirty-five years.

Some body in his wisdom thought it fit to put locks at the gates O and P at any point of time and no body cared since then to see as to whether there is any necessity to retain the locks or not.

After having heard the parties it is clear that the members of the other community, namely, Muslims are not going to be affected by any stretch of imagination if the locks of the gates O and P are opened and the idols inside the premises are allowed to be seen and worshipped by pilgrims and devotees. It is undisputed that the premises is presently in court's possession and for the last 35 years Hindus have an unrestricted right of worship as a result of the Court orders of 135 and 1951 (19.1.50 and 3.3.51). If the Hindus are offering prayers and worshipping the idols, though in a restricted way, for the last 35 years, then Heavens are not going to fall if the locks of the gates O and P are removed. The District Magistrate has stated before me today that the members of Muslim community are not allowed to offer any prayer at the disputed site. They are not allowed to go there. If this is the state of affairs, then there is no occasion for law and order problem arising as a result of the removal of locks. It is absolutely an affair inside the premises.

The present appeal is against an order on an application which purports to be under Order 39 as well as under Section 115(s) C.P.C. There is no justification retaining locks after the positive statements of the District Magistrate and the SSP Faizabad that the law and order situation can be very well kept under control by other means as well and for that thing

it is not necessary to keep the locks on these gates. Consequently there is force in the appeal.

The appeal is allowed. The respondents are directed to open the locks of the gates O and P forthwith. They shall not impose any restriction or hurdle in the darshan and puja etc. of the applicant and other members of the community in general. However, the respondents are free to take independent decision to control any law and order problem according to the needs of the situation and to regulate the entry of the pilgrims. Costs of the appeal shall abide the results of the suits.

*Source : Muslim India*

**BABRI MASJID MOVEMENT COORDINATION  
COMMITTEE'S COMMENTS ON THE  
DOCUMENTS PRESENTED BY V.H.P.  
TO THE GOVERNMENT OF  
INDIA ON 6 OCT., 1989**

...Before giving a detailed response, let me say at the outset that none of the documents contain an iota of evidence on the two basic issues in the dispute seen in a larger perspective:

- (i) Whether the Babri Masjid stands on the birth site of Sri Ramchanderji? If so, what is the religious status of Ram Janmasthan Mandir which stands close to Babri Masjid and of Ram Chabutara which is located within the outer compound of the Babri Masjid?
- (ii) Whether a pre-existing temple on the site was demolished to construct Babri Masjid?

Coming to the documents I have divided them into six categories and I shall comment on them accordingly.

**I. Babars Memoirs (S. No. 1 & 4)**

None of the two editions (Leyden and Erskin or Beveridge indicate that Babar ever touched Ayodhya. In her comments

Mrs. Beveridge only quotes Nevill. D.C. Faizabad and does not refer to any original source or evidence. Her own prejudice against Islam is apparent from her footnote on page Lxxviii (Appendices). In her approach, therefore, she reflects the well-known bias and prejudice of British writers in the post 1857 period.

## **II. Extracts From Government Publications (Items 2 & 3)**

The Gazetteers and other compilations of earlier British administration are largely based on local hearsay and provide no documentary evidence in support of statements on history. Subsequent Gazetteers also do not add anything but follow almost verbatim the earlier publications—in this case the Historical Sketch of Carnegy in 1870.

What is more important is to realise that Gazetteers, just like histories written by British historians, had a political purpose; to promote the policy of divide and rule. For this they manufacture facts, accept local myths and legends as historical facts without due scrutiny and present them selectively. The purpose was to widen the gap between the Hindus and the Muslims.

However, Carnegy's Historical Sketch, read with the Gazetteer, establishes that from 1855 to 1870, Muslims performed Namaz in Babri Masjid, while Hindus performed their rites on Ram Chabutra. There are other records to establish that this continued right upto 1949. One can legitimately ask why this position cannot be restored?

Regarding some pillars of Hindu-Buddhist origin, all that can be said is that construction material were salvaged from the debris of ancient ruins and re-used, as commonly happens even today. Also, if only 14 pillars were so used, what happened to the rest of them?

## **III. Other Publications (S. No. 3 (2nd Pt.) and 6)**

It is natural that subsequent European writers on Avodhya have merely followed the Gazetteers and earlier books. Mr. Bakker does not cite any original source.

The case of Michael Fisher is indeed pathetic. He confuses the mosque in Hanuman Garhi with Babri Masjid. In 1855, it was the former and not the latter which was the bone of contention and the place in dispute. This shows the superficial level of his research.

#### IV. Legal Documents (S. Nos. 11 & 12)

These documents relate to the Ram Chabutra case of 1983-85. The perusal of the records establishes that at no point was any claim made on the Babri Masjid itself.

#### V. Revenue Records (Items 7, 8 and 13)

These clearly establish not only that Babri Masjid existed but that it was in the possession of, and managed by the Muslim community through a Mutawalli and that it was supported by endowments which were recognised and given effect to by the Revenue authorities.

It may be noted that mosques are generally identified by reference to their locale. Thus Babri Masjid in various 19th century documents is referred to as Ayodhya Jama Masjid, Masjid Janmasthan, Masjid Sita Rasoi, Masjid Janmabhoomi, since, after the upsurge of the Ram cult in Oudh in the 16th century, Ayodhya was identified as the city of Ram Chandraji and Ramkot where the Babri Masjid stands, as the Fort of Dasaratha. This, however, does not prove either that the site of the Babri Masjid is the birth-site (Janamsthan) of Shri Ram Chandraji nor that it was constructed after demolishing a pre-existing temple on the site.

#### V. Wakf Records (Items 9 and 10)

These are not very legible but appear to refer to the situation in Ayodhya in 1949 when the Muslims of the place were being subjected to harassment and prevented from performing Namaz in Babri Masjid. Reports also appear to describe how the Babri Masjid was illegally occupied on 22-23 December, 1949. But these documents also establish that Namaz was being performed in this mosque right upto December, 1949 and that it was being managed by the U.P. Sunni Wakf Board. On

this point, we have the police record, the records of litigation and, above all, the Memorandum of Shri Akshay Brahmachari.

## VI. Archaeological Records (S. No. 5)

The Indian Archaeology Annual 1976-77 gives the following findings:—

- (i) The first human habitation in Ayodhya, and more particularly in Ramkot is ascribed to Circa 7th century B.C.
- (ii) There are subsequent occupational phases which continue upto 3rd century A.D.
- (iii) One of these phases called postrampart phase extends from 3rd century B.C. to 1st century A.D.
- (iv) There is a gap in occupation between 3rd century A.D. and 11th century A.D. in terms of permanent structures.
- (v) The Gupta period is not indicated at the site.

Since the age of Ram Chandraji is ascribed to a much earlier era Archaeological Report casts doubt on the identification of Ayodhya as the city of Dasaratha. Secondly, Vikramaditya is said to have built the Ram Janambhoomi Mandir in Ayodhya. If he belongs to the Gupta dynasty, this claim is completely negated by the archaeological record. The question, therefore, remains unanswered as to whether a notable temple of classic proportions ever stood in Ayodhya or who built it and when it was built. Thus the Archaeological Report puts into question the basic premises of the Ram Janambhoomi Mukti Yagya Samiti.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

I would like to add that after the Gupta age Ayodhya was part of the Empire of Kanauj whose most eminent ruler was Harsha (606-636 A.D.). Subsequently the Paratiharas came to

rule Kanauj from the 7th to 9th century. In 1194, the Pathans defeated the Kingdom of Kanauj and took Ayodhya and ruled for over 300 years from 1194 to 1526 when Babar appeared on the scene. The Chinese travellers including Huan Chwang or Fahied who have left detailed report of all the cities, have not recorded the existence of any notable temple in Ayodhya. In fact, Huan Chwang has described Ayodhya as a Buddhist centre. No available record of the Kanauj Empire or of the Pratiharas records the construction of any such temple in Ayodhya. It is interesting to note that even Carnegy has described the Kasauti pillars as reflecting Buddhist art.

There is no record of the existence or demolition of any such temple during the Pathan period. The question arises that if the Ram Janambhoomi Mandir existed in Ramkot, assuming that such a temple was constructed by the Guptas or by the Pratiharas, why it was not demolished for over 300 years or how it survived the ravages of time when no other notable monument did. It is, therefore, doubtful that any such temple existed, to survive the Gupta age, the Kanauj era, the Pratihara period or the Pathan period, to be demolished by Babar!

Nor there is any literary evidence. Tulsidas was over 30 in 1528 when Babri Masjid was constructed. He lived and wrote the Ramayana in Ayodhya. But he does not drop the slightest hint of the existence or demolition of a temple dedicated to Shri Ram Chandraji in his Janmabhoomi (in the most restricted sense) or marking his Janmasthan.

No historian from Abul Fazal whose *Ain-e-Akbari* mentions the importance of Ayodhya as a place of Hindu pilgrimage right down to Panikkar mentions that a temple was demolished to construct Babri Masjid.

The question of reconstruction of the demolished(?) temple was not raised during Akbar's time (only a generation later and therefore, presumably fresh in people's mind), nor by any prominent, religious or political leader until December, 1949. Babar's own Memoirs well testify to his appreciation of Hindu architecture and of his tolerance of other religious. In fact, he specifically instructed his son not to touch a place of Hindu worship if he wished to retain his dominion.

Another interesting question has arisen. No other temple consecrated exclusively to Shri Ram Chandrajī and dating back to earlier than the 16 century exists anywhere in India. It cannot be said that they were all demolished by Babar or other Muslim rulers. In fact, it is generally accepted by all historians that the Cult of Rama made its appearance and acquired a mass following as a result of the popular appeal to Tulsidas's Ramayana written in the local dialect.

These documents, therefore, contain nothing of relevance to the basic issues mentioned at the beginning of this letter and do not take us any further. The onus still lies on the claimant.

#### LIST OF LEGAL/HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

1. Leyden's Memoir of Babar;
2. Babar's Memoir by Mrs. Beveridge (Above documents contain some references of inscriptions found in Babri Mosque).
3. Copy of Register of Rent Free Grant (June 1860) first settlement—Urdu copy (2 sheets).
4. Historical Sketch of Tehsil of Faizabad by P. Carnegy.
5. Order of Settlement Officer's Court, Faizabad dated 3-1-1870.
6. Letter dated 25-8-1863 from Secretary Chief Commissioner, Oudh to the Commissioner, Faizabad Division.
7. Judgement dated 18/26-3-1886 of District Judge, Faizabad.
8. Judgement of Judicial Commissioner Oudh dated 1-11-1886.
9. Faizabad Gazetteer of 1928.
10. Report of Mohd. Ibrahim, Wakfs Inspector of Lucknow dated 10-12-1940.
11. Do dated 23-12-1941.



12. Indian Archaeology 1976-77—
13. Ayodhya by Hans Baker. (This also includes extract from Martin 1838, Vol. II/336).
14. Article by Michael Fisher

*Source* : Muslim India July 1989

## “AYODHYA MAHATMYA” GIVES SEVEN DIFFERENT SITES FOR RAM JANMASTHAN

On a careful perusal of the translation of Ayodhya Mahatmya by Ram Narayan of Bareilly College, Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal. . .Ayodhya Mahatmya or ‘Pilgrimage to Ayodhya’ (appear to be) a dialogue between Parvati and Mahadeva, two mythological figures in the Hindu pantheon.

According to Maharaja Man Singh, the Ayodhya Mahatmya professes to be the work of the Ikshvaku of the solar race. But...not...a single line in Ayodhya Mahatmya...suggests that it was written or composed by (them)...

Ram Narayan has quoted Umadat Pandit (as) saying, “The Ayodhya Mahatmya is a mere transcript from Skanda and Padma Puranas and is not the composition of a Raja of Oudh.

Ayodhya is stated to have been given to Manu by Vishnu, who sent ‘Visvakarma with an order that the latter was to build a city as the former might desire.’ But the ground was found unfit for such a purpose. Anyhow, various kinds of shrines, palaces, roads and markets etc. were created by him.

So it the supernatural power of Visvakarma who creates, not builds, various shrines and palaces. No human agency, not to talk of (Kind) Vikramaditya...was involved in it.

### **Court of Sarayu**

As per Valmiki Ramayana, Ayodhya was situated on the Southern bank of Sarayu river flowing westwards.

But in the Ayodhya Mahatmya, we find Sarayu “flowing from the west northwards and then to east”...

### **Janmasthan & Janmabhoomi**

Janmasthan has been mentioned ten times, and the persons visiting it are “released from the sins of killing a cow and Brahmin, or cohabiting with the wife of a spiritual guide and from many others of the same kind and thus obtains salvation.”

This shows that (while) Janmasthan...has been mentioned time and again, there is no mention of Janmabhoomi temple and the boon it bestows. The word ‘Janmabhoomi’ has been used for the land of Janmasthan and not any temple.

Ayodhya Mahatmya claims: West of the Tilodaki and the Sarayu is Asoka Batika, the garden of Sri Raghunatha, in which various trees are planted such as the sandal...

The author...is...unaware of the fact that sandal tree grows in only drier parts of Mysore, Coimbatore, and Salem districts. This belt is extended south of Madurai and maximum north to Kolhapur...

...In Ayodhya Mahatmya, there is mention of 37 ponds, called Kund: “By bathing in which and giving alms one obtains all sorts of joys”. The number of such ponds, as given by Gudun Sharm in Ayodhya Ka Sampuran Itihas (p. 80-81) has gone up to 50 in 1987 A.D....

### **Location of Janmasthan**

The exact location of Rama Janmasthan is given in Chapter VII (Verse 36-38) and Chapter X (Verse 33-36) of Ayodhya Mahatmya. Its distance from different temples is given in Dhanush (bow), with proper direction as North, East, West or South.

A field survey of Ayodhya was done on the basis of

Ayodhya Mahatmya, with the help of compass and Dhana to pin-point the (Ram) Janmasthan...on 9-11 April 1988 by (a) research team. Seven different places turned out to be the Janmasthans ...no two of which meet each other, and none of them touch the site of 'Babri Masjid'. One Janmasthan turned out to be approximately 3 kms. away from Babri Masjid towards 70°-80°...East.

*Courtesy: Radiance, 21-27 May, 1989*

## VISHWA HINDU PARISHAD'S LIBERATION AGITATION

In order to resume the old struggle and not to rest until the Janma Bhoomi is fully liberated, Sri Rama Janma Bhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti came into existence in recent times fulfilling the aspiration of six hundred million Hindus. The Samiti is fortunate enough to receive wide support of almost all the sects of Hinduism whose Acharyas are represented at the Dharma Sansad which has assumed the role of a friend, philosopher and guide of the whole Hindu Samaj. The Samiti has been leading a peaceful agitation to achieve the final goal.

The Samiti. . . demands that all the major Hindu Shrines ravaged by the invading hordes in the past should be restored to the Hindus now. It will heal the wounds of the Hindu society suffered during the course of history and also bring about true emotional integration in the country. It will strengthen the bonds of Hindu-Muslim unity.

### **The Mukti Yagna**

1. May 1983—A memorandum demanding restoration of holy shrines of Kashi, Mathura and Ayodhya was sent to the Prime Minister by the Dharmasthan Mukti Yagna Samiti.

2. 5th July, 1983—Reply received from the Home Ministry, Government of India, stated that since the demand concerned

the places situated in U.P. the Samiti's Memorandum was returned to the U.P. Government for suitable action.

3. 27th July, 1984- Sri Ram Janma Bhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti, was formed with sole aim of liberating the Janmasthan. Mahant A vaidyanathji of Gorakhpeeth was chosen its President.

4. 7th October, 1984—Lakhs of devotees assembled on the bank of the Sarayu river in Ayodhya and took a pledge to liberate the locked Shrine.

5. 8th October, 1984—A 130 kilometre long march to Lucknow started from Ayodhya. This unprecedented historic March (participated) surging crowds of people who attended its Dharma Sabhas and repeated the pledge administered to them.

6. 14th October, 1984—The Yatra reached Lucknow and passed by the city roads chanting Rama Dhun.

In the afternoon the Yatra arrived at the Begum Hazarat Mahal Park where it was received. . . by lakhs of people already assembled for a mammoth public meeting. The people with raised hands and loud chanting of OM Mantra resolved to get the Janmabhoomi freed. It was the first religious demonstration of its type. . . ever held. . . in the history of Lucknow.

Just after the public meeting a delegation of the Samiti called on the Chief Minister and urged him to fulfil the long outstanding demand of the Hindus.

7. 15th October—Sri Rama Janaki Ratha resumed its tour of the main U.P. towns in order to mobilise public opinion and administer Janmasthan Mukti Pledge to the general public.

8. 31st October, 1984—The Ratha reached Delhi to inspire the people at the Hindu Convention scheduled to be held there on November 2. But the programme had to be abandoned following gruesome murder of Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister.

9. Then came the General election. The agitation therefore, was suspended. In the meantime 5000 telegrams, 65000 signatures and 31176 letters were sent to the U.P. Government in order to press the public demand.

10. Seeing no tangible result coming out, the Samiti then

gave a deadline to the Government resolving that if the Temple locks were not removed by Shivaratri falling on 6.3.1986, then “Open the Lock Agitation” will turn into “Break the Lock Agitation.”

Sri Dau Dayal Khanna, the General Secretary of the Samiti, personally met the Chief Minister to apprise him of this decision.

The Samiti wants that the possession of Janmabhoomi should be handed over to Swami Shivaramacharya, the present pontiff of Jagadguru Ramanandacharya, the present pontiff of Jagadguru Ramanandacharya Peeth, for proper management and development of this ancient religious site.

The (second) Dharma Sansad held at Udupi, Karnataka. At this Convention (was) constituted a Working Committee of Dharmacharyas whose task will be to enlist active support of all the sects in the future course of agitation and also see that the Movement is led in disciplined manner.

*Bजारंग डाल* : In order to lend active support to the Movement, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (raised) a Volunteer Corps named Bजारंग डाल (with the) ideal of Hanuman: ‘Rest not before Rama’s work is done’ (in) every town and village of U.P.

11. 23.10.1985—On the Vijaya Dashami day, 7 Rathas move (d) out from Ayodhya to cover the whole of U.P. and North Bihar (for propagation of the Message of the Samiti).

*Source* : A Vishwa Hindu Parishad U.P. (East) Publication, October, 1985.

## THE POLITICAL ABUSE OF HISTORY

Behind the present Babrimasjid-Rama janma-bhumi controversy lie issues of faith, power and politics. Each individual has a right to his or her belief and faith. But when beliefs claim the legitimacy of history, then the historian has to attempt a demarcation between the limits of belief and historical evidence. When communal forces make claims to "historical evidence" for the purposes of communal politics, then the historian has to intervene.

Historical evidence is presented here not as a polemic or as a solution to the Rama janmabhumi-Babri masjid conflict, for this conflict is not a matter of historical records alone. The conflict emerges from the widespread communalization of Indian politics. Nevertheless it is necessary to review the historical evidence to the extent it is brought into play in the communalization of society.

### I

Is Ayodhya the birth place of Rama ? This question raises a related one : Is present day Ayodhya the Ayodhya of Ramayana ?

The events of the story of Rama, originally told in the Rama-Katha which is no longer available to us, were rewritten



in the form of a long epic poem, the Ramayana, by Valmiki. Since this is a poem and much of it could have been fictional, including characters and places, historians cannot accept the personalities, the events or the locations as historically authentic unless there is other supporting evidence from sources regarded as more reliable by historians. Very often historical evidence contradicts popular beliefs.

According to Valmiki Ramayana, Rama, the King of Ayodhya, was born in the Treta Yuga, that is thousands of years before the Kali Yuga which is supposed to begin in 3102 BC.

(i) There is no archaeological evidence to show that at this early time the region around present day Ayodhya was inhabited. The earliest possible date for settlements at the site are of about the eighth century BC. The archaeological remains indicate a fairly simple material life, more primitive than what is described in the Valmiki Ramayana.

(ii) In the Ramayana, there are frequent references to palaces and buildings on a large scale in an urban setting. Such descriptions of an urban complex are not sustained by the archaeological evidence of the eighth century BC.

(iii) There is also a controversy over the location of Ayodhya. Early Buddhist texts refer to Shravasti and Saketa, not Ayodhya, as the major cities of Koshala. Jaina texts also refer to Saketa as the capital of Koshala. There are very few references to an Ayodhya, but this is said to be located on the Ganges, not on river Saryu which is the site of present day Ayodhya.

(iv) The town of Saketa was renamed Ayodhya by a Gupta king. Skanda Gupta in the late fifth century A.D. moved his residence to Saketa and called it Ayodhya. He assumed the title Vikramaditya, which he used on his gold coins. Thus what may have been the fictional Ayodhya of the epic poem was identified with Saketa quite late. This does not necessarily suggest that the Gupta king was a bhakta of Rama. In bestowing the name of Ayodhya on Saket he was trying to gain prestige for himself by drawing on the tradition of the Suryavamsi kings, a line to which Rama is said to have belonged.

(v) After the seventh century, textual references to Ayodhya

are categorical. The Puranas, dating to the first millennium A D and the early second millennium A.D. follow the Ramayana and refer to Ayodhya as the capital of Koshala. (Visnudharmottara Mahapurana, 1.240.2)

(vi) In a way, the local tradition of Ayodhya recognizes the ambiguous history of its origin. The story is that Ayodhya was lost after the Treta yuga and was rediscovered by Vikramaditya. While searching for the lost Ayodhya, Vikramaditya met Prayaga, the king of tirthas, who knew about Ayodhya and showed him where it was. Vikramaditya marked the place but could not find it later. Then he met a yogi who told him that he should let a cow and a calf roam. When the calf came across the janmabhumi milk would flow from its udder. The king followed the yogi's advice. When at a certain point the calf's udders began to flow, the king decided that this was the site of the ancient Ayodhya.

This myth of "re-discovery" of Ayodhya, this claim to an ancient sacred lineage, is an effort to impart to a city a specific religious sanctity which it lacked. But even in the myths the process of identification of the sites appears uncertain and arbitrary.

If present day Ayodhya was known as Saket before the fifth century, then the Ayodhya of Valmiki's Ramayana was fictional. If so, the identification of Rama janmabhumi in Ayodhya today becomes a matter of faith, not of historical evidence.

The historical uncertainty regarding the possible location of the Rama-janmabhumi contrasts with the historical certainty of the birthplace of the Buddha. Two centuries after the death of the Buddha, Asoka Maurya put up an inscription at the village of Lumbini to commemorate it as the Buddha's birthplace. However, even in this case, the inscription merely refers to the village near which he was born and does not even attempt to indicate the precise birthplace.

## II

Ayodhya has been a sacred centre of many religions, not of

the Rama cult alone. Its rise as a major centre of Rama worship is, in fact, relatively recent.

(i) Inscriptions from the fifth to the eighth centuries A.D. and even later refer to people from Ayodhya but none of them refer to its being a place associated with the worship of Rama. (Epigraphica Indica, 10. p. 72; 15. p. 143; 1. p. 14)

(ii) Hsuan Tsang writes of Ayodhya as a major centre of Buddhism with many monasteries and stupas and few non-Buddhists. For Buddhists Ayodhya is a sacred place where Buddha is believed to have stayed for some time.

(iii) Ayodhya has been an important centre of Jain pilgrimage. To the Jains it is the birthplace of the first and fourth Jaina Tirthankaras. An interesting archaeological find of the 4th—3rd century B.C. is a Jaina figure in grey terracotta, being amongst the earliest Jaina figures found so far.

(iv) The texts of the eleventh century A.D. refer to the Gopataru tirtha at Ayodhya, but not to any links with the janmabhumi of Rama.

(v) The cult of Rama seems to have become popular from the thirteenth century. It gains ground with the gradual rise of the Ramanandi sect and the composition of the Rama story in Hindi.

Even in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Ramanandis had not settled in Ayodhya on a significant scale. Shaivism was more important than the cult of Rama. Only from the eighteenth century do we find the Ramanandi sadhus settling on a large scale. It was in the subsequent centuries that they built most of their temples in Ayodhya.

### III

So far no historical evidence has been unearthed to support the claim that the Babri mosque has been constructed on the land that had been earlier occupied by a temple.

(i) Except for the verses in Persian inscribed on the two sides of the mosque door, there is no other primary evidence to suggest that a mosque had been erected there on Babur's behalf. Mrs Beveridge, who was the first to translate *Babur Nama*, gives the text and the translation of these above verses

in an appendix to the memoirs. The crucial passage reads as follows: "By the command of the Emperor Babur, whose justice is an edifice reaching up to the very height of the heavens, the good hearted Mir Baqi built the alighting place of angels. *Bawad [Buwad] khair baqi* (may this goodness last for ever)". *Babur Nama*, translated by A.F. Beveridge, 1922, II, pp. LXXFII ff).

The inscription only claims that one Mir Baqi, a noble of Babur, had erected the mosque. Nowhere does either of the inscriptions mention that the mosque had been erected on the site of a temple. Nor is there any reference in Babur's memoirs to the destruction of any temple in Ayodhya.

(ii) The *Ain-i-Akbari* refers to Ayodhya as "the residence of Ramachandra who in the Treta age combined in his own person both spiritual supremacy and kingly office". But nowhere is there any mention of the erection of the mosque by the grandfather of the author's patron on the site of the temple of Rama.

(iii) It is interesting that Tulsidas, the great devotee of Rama, a contemporary of Akbar and an inhabitant of the region, is upset at the rise of the mlechha but makes no mention of the demolition of a temple at the site of Rama janmabhumi.

(iv) It is in the nineteenth century that the story circulates and enters official records. These records were then cited by others as valid historical evidence on the issue.

This story of the destruction of the temple is narrated, without any investigation into its historical veracity, in British records of the region. (See P. Carnegy, *Historical Sketch of Tehsil Fyzabad, Zillah Fyzabad, Lucknow*, 1870; H.R. Nevill, *Faizabad District Gazetteer, Allahabad*, 1905).

Mrs Beveridge in a footnote to the translated passage quoted above affirms her faith in the story. She suggests that Babar being a Muslim, and "impressed by the dignity and sanctity of the ancient Hindu shrine" would have displaced "at least in part" the temple to erect the mosque. Her logic is simple "like the obedient follower of Muhammad he was in intolerance of another Faith, (thus he) would regard the substitution of a temple by a mosque as dutiful and worthy". This is a very questionable inference deduced from a generalized presumption

about the nature and inevitable behaviour of a person professing a particular faith. Mrs Beveridge produces no historical evidence to support her assertion that the mosque was built at the site of a temple. Indeed the general tenor of Babur's state policy towards places of worship of other religions hardly justifies Mrs Beveridge's inference.

To British officials who saw India as a land of mutually hostile religious communities, such stories may appear self-validating. Historians, however, have to carefully consider the authenticity of each historical statement and the records on which they are based.

While there is no evidence about the Babri mosque having been built on the site of a temple, the mosque according to the medieval sources, was not of much religious and cultural significance for the Muslims.

The assumption that Muslim rulers were invariably and naturally opposed to the sacred places of Hindus is not always borne out by historical evidence.

(i) The patronage of the Muslim Nawabs was crucial for the expansion of Ayodhya as a Hindu pilgrimage centre. Recent researches have shown that Nawabi rule depended on the collaboration of Kayasthas and their military force was dominated by Shivaite Nagas. Gifts to temples and patronage of Hindu sacred centres was an integral part of the Nawabi mode of exercise of power. The dewan of Nawab Safdarjung built and repaired several temples in Ayodhya. Safdarjung gave land to the Nirwana Akhara to build a temple on Hanuman hill in Ayodhya. Asaf-ud-Daulah's dewan contributed to the building of the temple fortress in Hanuman hill in the city. Panda records show that Muslim officials of the nawabi court gave several gifts for rituals performed by Hindu priests.

(ii) In moments of conflict between Hindus and Muslims, the Muslim rulers did not invariably support Muslims. When a dispute between the Sunni Muslims and the Naga Sadhus over a Hanumangarhi temple in Ayodhya broke out in 1855, Wajid Ali Shah took firm and decisive action. He appointed a tripartite investigative committee consisting of the district official Agha Ali Khan, the leading Hindu land-holder, Raja

Mansingh, and the British officers in charge of the Company's forces. When the negotiated settlement failed to control the build-up of communal forces, Wajid Ali Shah mobilized the support of Muslim leaders to bring the situation under control, confiscated the property of Maulavi Amir Ali, the leader of the Muslim communal forces, and finally called upon the army to crush the Sunni Muslim group led by Amir Ali. An estimated three to four hundred Muslims were killed.

This is not to suggest that there were no conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, but in neither case were they homogeneous communities. There was hostility between factions and groups within a community, as there was amity across communities.

The above review of historical evidence suggests that the claims made by Hindu and Muslim communal groups can find no sanction from history. As a sacred centre the character of Ayodhya has been changing over the centuries. It has been linked to the history of many religions. Different communities have vested it with their own sacred meaning. The city cannot be claimed by any one community as its exclusive sacred preserve.

The appropriation of history is a continual process in any society. But in a multi-religious society like ours, appropriations which draw exclusively on communal identities engender endless communal conflicts. And attempts to undo the past can only have dangerous consequences.

It is appropriate, therefore, that a political solution is urgently found: "Rama janmabhumi-Babri Masjid" area be demarcated and declared a national monument.

*Courtesy* : Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-67.

## ‘HAVE WE NOT LEARNT ENOUGH LESSONS FROM MEERUT, AHMEDABAD, ALIGARH ?’

HIREN MUKHERJEE

My dear Atal,

You will be surprised to get this letter. I would not normally intrude on you, but I fear I must.

For quite some time now, our country is going through abnormal crises. There is aggravation of forces endangering not only the stability but also the very moral-political entity of our India. Our people’s patriotism must not prove bankrupt.

In political life, you and I differ on many basic issues. Even so, during long years together in Parliament, there has grown between us much mutual regard and yes, also affection. This is why I ask you, with all the fervour of which I am capable, to help in overcoming the perilous Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid and allied problems.

You at least will not think of this as a political stratagem on my part. I am incapable, if I may say so, of trickeries. I am not so naive as to imagine I can drive a wedge between you and your colleagues. The thought of writing to you came in a ‘flash’ lately when I remembered that twenty years or ago, I had told you in Parliament lobby that I “envied” your slogan of *Bharatiyatva* (Indianness) which I could also use for my own, communist cause. I had then drawn you to a

corner and read out some extracts from a book of mine in Bengali on the theme.

There were serious snags, to my mind, in your then concept of *Bharatiyatva*, but you have come down to that of *Hindutva* (also voiced earlier), forgetful of bruising and breaking the crystalline “unity in diversity”, basic to our history which, in spite of our failings, lends it a lustre that is unique.

I felt terribly hurt—believe me—when I saw Press reports that instead of an honourable settlement of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue you support the idea of a massive new temple on the site, with consecrated bricks on the basis of an all-India pan-Hindu campaign. I would not mind if a beautiful temple is built anywhere by the devout, but this campaign, signalled by the Vishva Hindu Parishad and now the common cause of the BJP, RSS, Shiv Sena, etc., seems a disastrous step towards disintegration. Some Congressmen, typically, have joined in and the Press glibly features pictures of sensational doings like bricks blessed by sadhus being carried reverentially to the pious construction. Inevitably, Muslim communal chauvinists flex their muscles and India’s enemies everywhere gloat over the scene. Please, dear Atal, how can you connive at or acquiesce in a course which, in its likely consequences, is so grievous to our future?

It was difficult to trust my eyes as I read reports that your own *Bharat ki khoj* (quest for India) had convinced you that India can survive only as a “Hindu rashtra”, that courts cannot decide the issue of Ram Janmabhoomi, and that the mosque on the site should be demolished to make room for a temple on the spot. Almost as a corollary, there is talk about Mathura and Varanasi being similarly cleansed—communal trouble lately in Mathura, so long impressively free of such malignity, was a terrible warning. Are old and forgotten animosities to be revived and avenged in this lurid fashion? Can you be a party to shameful abuse of a slogan which, in normal circumstances, could have been innocent of evil. *Garv se kaho—hum Hindu hai* (Say it with pride: I am a Hindu).

Like you, Atalbai, I have been born and brought up in a



Hindu home. Like you, I am proud—why not ?—of my Hindu heritage. But I am far prouder—let me shout from the housetops—of my Indian heritage, the legacy of a civilisation where Hindu and Muslim together have reached an enchanting synthesis, in spite of many dreadful wounds inflicted by history. This is why we can hold our head high in a world where, on a power scale, we do not count. It was with this pride that in un-free India, Rabindranath Tagore set up Visvabharati (1921) where he invited the world, invoking the Veda, “as if it were a single nest” *Yatra vishvam bhavatyeka needam*). It was this pride which made Gandhi exclaim in 1917 that India was “a country of nonsense” with nauseating communal and caste separatisms but nevertheless a country that could unite and rise and astonish the world. We have been subjected to conquest, to spoliation, to arrogance, but where else than from India can the world learn tolerance and gentleness of the nature mind, the quiet content of the unacquisitive soul, the calm dignity of the understanding spirit and a unifying, pacifying love for all living things ?

Isn't the present unholy furore over Ayodhya, something to be settled peacefully, perhaps by a court decision or by government declaration of the site as a national monument, rather than by confrontations and challenges likely to ignite communal passion ? Have we not learnt enough lessons from the series of cataclysms in Meerut, Ahmedabad, Aligarh, Moradabad, Jamshedpur, Bhiwandi, why resurrect, in entirely changed conditions, the Savarkar thesis of 1939 when that fabulous freedom fighter was found speaking of India as “the abode of the Hindu nation”, where Muslims could be only “territorially Indians” ? That odious outfit, the Shiv Sena, and even some of your colleagues mouth such stuff proudly. But it is totally out of harmony with our history if memories of the past provoke vengeful fratricide today.

No country on earth can match India's record of tolerance and the co-existence (rather co-creativity) of different religions. Europe, with its religious wars lasting for centuries, is a pitiful contrast. Our country has absorbed foreign elements—Greeks like Menander nearly two thousand years ago turning Buddhists and Heliodoros, a Vaishnava who put

up at Besnagar the famous Garuda column (not to speak of Scythians and Sakas and Pahlavas and Huns sheltered in india's bosom). Long before Muslim invaders came, we had contact with traders and pious men from Arabia whose tombs near Madurai and Tiruchirapalli and elsewhere pre-date that of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, laid to rest near Ajmer where Muslims and Hindus have been paying homage for seven centuries. During the six hundred years or so when Muslim rule gradually spread over large parts of India, there were, of course, many instances of religious barbarity by the invaders but they were perhaps due, as research indicates, to reasons of state (lure of plunder, frightening people into submission, etc.) rather than to real religious fervour. Even ancient India, with an incomparable record of tolerance, saw Ajatashatru (5th century BC) in Magadha and Shashanka (7th century AD) in Bengal persecuting Buddhists. There were conflicts later between Saura, Sakta, Ganapatya, Shaiva and other sects, even Ramanujacharya in 1096 AD having to flee Srirangam on account of his faith. This is not to extenuate Muslim or Christian or other oppressions but to assist a historical balance of judgement, Maratha raiders (18th century AD) holding aloft saffron flags played havoc in Bengal and Orissa, but that was never remembered when our struggle for freedom got under way.

While Islam had a triumphal march from Spain to the Pacific in a few startling decades, it took six centuries before Muslim rule could be set up over large parts of India. Unlike the British later, who were birds of passage and of prey, seeking nothing so much as to drain off India's resources, the Muslim invaders settled down, learning to live together with the infidel. When Timur attacked the Muslim kingdom of Delhi, he offered a religious justification that association with Hindus had corrupted the faithful, what the late Kshitimohan Sen, celebrated for his study of our medieval saints, has called "the joint *sadhana* of Hindus and Muslims" had begun on our soil

You must be excited, as I continue to be, if you recall "the colossal monk" Swami Vivekananda's positive appraisal of the Muslim in Indian history and his call for a combination

of “Islamic body” and “Vedantic brain”—a tribute to this entrant in our land and a creatively co-existent element. Didn't Amir Khusrau, “Indian Turk” as he called himself, in love with the Indian earth, speak over six centuries ago of the ‘ache in man's heart’: “Every pearl in the royal crown is but the crystallised drop of blood fallen from the tearful eyes of the poor peasant”? Appropriately, he was a disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya, a great name in the galaxy of our saints, Hindus as well as Muslims, men as well as women, cobbler and weaver as well as prince and priest, a glorious apostolate from all over India, about whom I must not speak for I would be swamped off the track of this already long letter. Besides, who can speak adequately about “Baba Nanak, Sant Faqir, Hindu-ka guru, Musalman-ka Pir,” about Mahatma Kabir and his Bharat Panth, about Baba Farid and Shah Latif, about Chaitanya and his Yavan disciple Haridas, about Dara Shikoh's presentation of the Upanishadas—“a moment” wrote K.M. Panikkar “in universal history”? How does one forget Akbar setting the Persian translation of the *Mahabharata* decorated with illustrations by the greatest painters of the time? How can we ever forget the grand story of the creation jointly by Muslims and Hindus of a lovely language like Urdu, the contribution towards the development of Hindi by such as Amir Khusrau and Malik Muhammad Jayasi and so many others), the evolution of Indo-Muslim architecture, music, painting, philosophic thought and ways of life into a luminous quality distinct from what can be seen wherever else the Muslim has travelled?

This is no thesis and I must stop. Atal, you must not see only Muslim intransigency in our history and ignore the other side of the medal. In the pantheon of Indian patriotism, are not there grand Muslims whose names sound like a symphony? You know very well that, coming down to recent times, if Muhammad Ali did sometimes have qualms about “belonging to two circles which are not concentric, one in India and the other in the Muslim world” this was no problem to others like Abul Kalam Azad and Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Zakir Hussain. This was no problem even for Iqbal who could hail our motherland in lovely verse and sing also of “a new

temple" (*Naya shibala*) in this, our country, where, he mourned, "the heart's habitations were turning empty". Poetry apart, dear Atal, have you not often known how for tangible socio-economic objectives, Hindus, Muslims all can combine and act together and in harmony ?

Whatever might be your BJP's general line, I am deeply concerned over the cruel and contiguous communal frenzy being worked up over the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue which can and must be solved peaceably and by mutual agreement. If the courts decide and all accept it, well and good. If we agree that the site be taken over and solemnly preserved as a national monument, it is even better. Let us in any case have (an) atmosphere conducive to a happy way out of a needlessly engineered and aggravated crisis.

Forgive me for harking back to my student days when the likes of us were roused into patriotism by Gandhiji's non-cooperation movement and India resounded to cries of "Hindu Mussalman *ki jai*" ! I can easily recall the thrill when in 1940, taking part in a debate on the then new-fangled concept of Pakistan, Abdur Rahaman Siddiqui, a stalwart once in the Congress and then in the League, said that when a Hindu dies his body is burnt and the ashes thrown into the river to be carried by the current god knows where, while a Muslim needs six feet by three of the Indian earth for he belongs here in life as well as in death. You and I, Atal, have known a Delhi journalist, Subhan, whose own brother Muhammad Usman was free India's first recipient of the Maha Vir Chakra as he gave his life in the 1948 war with Pakistan. You and I were in Parliament when, during the 1965 war, Havildar Abdul Hamid Khan won posthumously the Param Vir Chakra. You and I know that Agni was launched the other day by a team led by a distinguished Indian Muslim scientist (Pakistan's Nobel laureate, Abdus Salam, gracefully hailed the "great achievement").

If you and I were born in a Muslim or an "untouchable" family, we would perhaps have known more intensely the agonies of belonging to 'disadvantaged' segments of society (I exclude the affluent). But do we not place ourselves, anyhow, alongside all those to whom (in Keats's words) "misery of the

world is misery and will not let them rest.”

I must stop, for this endless reflection must be a bore to both of us. Only, I repeat, for heaven's sake, do all you can to prevent the disaster that threatens India over the Ayodhya crisis. Political life these days is deeply distressing. Degeneracy and deviations from principle abound and appear to be applauded. I do not yield to pessimism, however, though it needs an effort of will to avoid it. A great teacher of mine in Presidency College, Calcutta, a “Syrian Christian” from Kerala, Kuruvila Zachariah, told me long ago that life had excruciating trials but “one must always see the rainbow in the rain.” In his last message to his people, Rabindranath in 1941 affirmed that it was a terrible “sin” to lose faith in mankind. Please, Atal, help, if you can, to defeat the overpowering pessimisms of today.

I assume you will not mind if having such a lengthy discourse with you, I feel I should release it for publication as an “open letter” to you.

All good wishes.

Yours sincerely,  
*Hiren Mukherjee*

Sri Atal Behari Vajpayee, MP, New Delhi.

## AN APPEAL

V.R. KRISHNA IYER

Who lives if India dies ! This is the summons to us all from our dear motherland, whose integrity, stability and national unity are in peril more than ever before of terrible enemies within. Since independence there has never been a time when pathological communalism, with blood-shot eyes and bleeding bodies, has threatened the break-up of the country so brazenly. Next, but not far behind, is the pervasive menace of corrosive corruption from the summit, with mafia appetites, infiltrating into public life and the power process extensively.

The national elections, when people should pronounce their verdict by a calm exercise of their political will, are being perverted into whipping up communal passions, fundamentalist flare-ups and brother and sister being butchered in the name of *Ishwara* and *Allah* and other hostile Gods. The crisis of today cannot be left to the politicians or party echelons alone to be solved. Nor, indeed, can the government at the Central level command, what with its oblique speech and dubious deeds, the confidence of the people in the transformation of India into a society free from the cancer of communalism and corruption for reasons best left to be guessed. Political parties and

communal leaders have played roles in pretending to eradicate the two-major maladies. On the contrary, using double-think and double-speak, double-deal and wheeler-dealer newspeak, the powers-that be and even some of the Opposition forces have aggravated the violence and neurosis, although massacres are the immediate and uncontrollable consequence.

Therefore, an independent initiative is now necessitous, not based on party alignments but rooted in the larger humanism of non-communal politics and corruption-free public life. Even secular parties, using indignant language, obsessively provoke slumbering communalism and unwittingly, surely well meaningly; but over-emphasise one brand of communalism as against another and even ambiguously equate fascistic with communalist trends. Communalism and casteism, whether of the majority or the minorities, likewise fundamentalism of one religion or the other, are viruses which interact and inhibit human solidarity so vital to our country now as oxygen is to life. The politics of national survival, I plead with you, must drive us to take prompt action so that we may catalyse a new atmosphere where politics, polemics and provocative acrobatics may not set the country in flames. The desideratum is to isolate communal forces, overt or covert, and insist that the political parties shall not use any communal card with blatancy or sophistry.

Let me put it sharply. The Ram Janmabhoomi Babri Masjid issue has, by a pathological escalation of events, become a volcanic portent with communal forces 'red in tooth and claw' map erupt violently and tear up our secularity and human homogeneity. We must defuse the mounting tension lest, with climaxing election combats, explosive frenzy and thousands dead may be the sequel. Our values will vanish unless we contain communal bombshell by pre-emptive measures. The summit power is playing hide and seek and religious passions wash the 'hallowed' bricks now in frenetic locomotion. Should we not, for the nation's sake, halt the catastrophic process ?

May I beseech you to consider this idea as an urgent agenda for Action Immediate. Initially, we may have to meet and discuss the current situation in the country from the angle

stated above, diagnose the depth of the malady and propose therapeutic measures powerful enough to make strong impact on the political parties and people generally. A secular India removing communal carcinoma from the body politic and a republic ready to use people's power to wipe out corruption in high places must be the strategy to be worked out. Our voice may be feeble but if the people listen to us it will gather momentum.

Here is a caveat of history. The cold war of communal politics, where parties with vested interests fish in troubled waters, is hotting up with elections approaching and 'hot war' in unexpected innocent spots are already erupting with seismic portents ahead. We want a United Opposition against Communal Politics, masked and unmasked; against corruption, inscrutably secret and brazenly naked against mafia politics and economics, even if wrapped in impregnable official attire or abetted by high office. We want Swaraj, social, economic and political for all Indians, including Dalits, not merely for India in the abstract. That is the call; let us respond.

Let us, public-spirited individuals, not controlled by parties or by vested interests, gather and deliberate on the parlous state of the nation and the measures to be taken. Today, not tomorrow, is the urgency of the crisis. Otherwise, it may be too late. A meeting of minds, a creative coalition of nationalist noetics, and then a joint appeal may be an activist beginning. Our commitment is to the country and we will fail in our duty, if we do not act right now.

*Courtesy : Mainstream*